

**STREAMS OF HISTORY**  
**THE RENAISSANCE AND**  
**REFORMATION**



**STREAMS OF HISTORY  
THE RENAISSANCE  
AND REFORMATION**

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# **HOW THE TEUTONIC SEED OF SELF-GOVERNMENT PASSED FROM THE GERMAN WOODS INTO ENGLAND AND WAS FINALLY PLANTED IN AMERICA**

THE stream of history is something like a river. The river rises often as a mere rivulet, but as it flows along, one tributary after another falling into it, first from one side, then from the other, it becomes wider and deeper, its current stronger, and its course continually more difficult to change.

We have now seen something of the early part of the stream and of the great men, cities and nations which grew up along its course. First arose great cities like Memphis and Babylon in the valleys of the Nile and the Tigro-Euphrates. Here man lived very simply. He was just working out an alphabet and the art of writing, and was making his first steps in literature, art, language, religion and government. Then as the stream flowed on westward, circling around the Mediterranean, the Phœnicians adopted the alphabet and the other useful things which the Old East had worked

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out, and through their trade scattered them around the Mediterranean coast as a farmer scatters seed on his fields. These things brought from the early nesting-places of civilization in the Orient furnished a foundation for the civilization of Greece, which thus by catching up the best ideas of the past, and adding to them her great ideas of literature, art and philosophy, made Athens the mistress of the Mediterranean. The stream then flowed on westward to the Italian peninsula. Here Rome, starting like a spider in the center of Italy, industriously spun its web out farther and farther till it caught and drew to its center all of the peoples living in the Mediterranean basin. From these people, and especially from the Greeks, Rome learned the lessons of art and literature and philosophy, but in turn taught them lessons of government, teaching them, however, not so much how to rule themselves, as how to be ruled by Rome. The imperial city became the center of the world, toward which every man, city and province looked as the giver of peace and order, and as the regulator of every detail of life. Thus Rome added to the great stream of human history *the idea of a strong central government*, giving out rules and laws to a vast empire, having a population, at its greatest, of perhaps one hundred and twenty million people.

But when the rude Teutons came through the passes of the Alps and gradually took possession of Rome, it looked for a time as if the stream of history was to be choked up and to flow no farther. It seemed as if the wealth and learning which had come down from the East, the art of Greece and the law of Rome, were all to be lost by the rude shocks of the uncivilized

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barbarian who at first seemed to care nothing for any of them. But slowly, and almost so noiselessly as not to be heard (except in time of intense persecution), the Christian missionary was opening up the channels through the Alps, so that the historical stream might flow northward from the Mediterranean into western and northwestern Europe.

Thus gradually through the monastery and the castle, and by the great movement of the Crusades and the Renaissance, were the channels opened so that all the great thoughts and ideas of the past might become the inheritance of the rude, uncultured children now ruling Europe. But these Teutons, who had spread as hunters, herders and fishers through the northern woods and valleys were not merely to have their lives enriched by coming to understand the great ideas of the past; they themselves, notwithstanding they were rude and barbarous at first, had also ideas which were greatly to advance the modern history of man.

The most important of these ideas was their strong love of individual freedom. When we were studying the early Germans in the previous volume of this series, we saw how intense was their love of liberty. Every man liked to rule himself, or at least to have an equal share with everybody else in electing the chief who was to rule him. He insisted on having an equal share in the public land, in the spoils gained in war, and when he built his villages he placed the huts so far apart that every one could have plenty of elbow room.

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If the Teuton's love of individual liberty and local government as it was worked out in his "moot-court," could be preserved and added to Rome's great idea of a strong central government, then the modern European nations could build their foundations upon both ideas,—that is, they could have in the first place a strong central government to hold the people together and keep them in order, and keep off foreign enemies, and protect their commerce, and coin just one kind of money and the like; and yet, in the second place, they could have an active local government, which would allow the people to have their little meetings and assemblies near home where all could attend and take part in thinking out and making laws regulating their home affairs, such as dividing the land, pasturing the stock, building roads and the like. If both these ideas of government could be wisely united, a stronger and better kind of government than even Rome had developed, could be built up in the modern states.

Now there were many nations which finally sprang up, more or less, out of the Teutonic tribes. Spain, France, Germany, Italy and England were all growing to be strong nations, at the close of the fifteenth century,—that is, at the time Columbus discovered America. But among all these, there was but one single nation at this time that had, through many hard struggles and through hundreds of years, held firmly and constantly to the Teutonic idea of individual liberty, and the right of a man to rule himself, either directly or indirectly, by electing those who were to rule him.

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This one nation was England. All the other great nations in Europe were slowly crushing the Teutonic spirit from their midst. This came about largely because the southern nations had sprung up on soil where the roots of the old Roman ideas of government were planted very deep and were therefore strong, and because these nations, living not so very far away from Rome, frequently thought of the great empire, and tried to build their governments upon the model worked out by Rome,—that is, upon the idea of a strong central government ruled arbitrarily by one man. Spain and France in particular had crushed out all thought of the Teutonic idea of local self-government, and in neither country at the time of the discovery of America were there regular assemblies or a parliament for making laws to which the people could go themselves or send their representatives.

But in England things grew very differently. Beginning in the fifth century (about 450) and continuing for six hundred years (1066, when William the Conqueror landed), swarm after swarm of Teutons invaded and settled in England. At first they went from northern Germany,—Angles, Saxons and Jutes,—and settling down in small groups, cleared a little land and divided it up just as they had done in the old German woods hundreds of years before. A few of the families living close together formed a township, and regulated their affairs in an assembly attended by all the freemen. Several of these townships, enough to furnish a hundred or so of warriors, formed what was called “The Hundred,” which also had an assembly composed of representatives sent from the townships composing it.

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Then as time went on and there came to be but one king in England, the little kingdoms of former days, such as those of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, became shires, or, as we would say, counties. The county also, like the township and "The Hundred," had an assembly for attending to its affairs.

As already said, many companies of Teutonic people went to the rich and beautiful island. It was a little like an island of corn in a vast stream covered with river-fowl,—flock after flock would light, feed, build their nests and hatch their broods upon it. So the rich soil and mild climate of England invited settlers. After the first of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes had gone to England, almost continuous groups of the same people followed through the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, each helping to plant more firmly Teutonic customs and institutions. Then in the eighth and ninth centuries the Danes came in, and in the eleventh century came the brave, free seamen who had learned on the waves of the Northern waters the lessons of courage, independence and self-reliance. These were called the Northmen, or Normans.

Before going into England, however, they had settled for a little time in northern France, and thus became acquainted with the language and culture of Rome, which, largely by means of the monastery and castle, had gradually spread itself through southern and central Europe.

These Normans, as they were now called, crossed the channel, under the leadership of William the Conqueror, and in 1066 conquered the island. But

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they did not destroy or root up the Teutonic ideas of self-government which had been growing there for five or six hundred years before William's invasion of the island. But as soon as he had conquered the country, William did one thing which has been greatly to the advantage of England ever since,—he gave it a strong central government. He did not destroy the local governments which the Teutons so much liked, as the French and Spanish kings did in the centuries following this time, but he built up a strong central government in the midst of them, to keep them in balance and to protect them against both internal strife and foreign enemies. Thus England adopted both ideas—Roman and Teuton—as the foundation stones upon which to build her institutions. And the great difference between English history and the history of all other nations in Europe from the eleventh century down to the present time is, that England has been much of the time as fierce and as watchful as a tiger of its young, that no one should destroy either of these great principles of government; while other European nations have been content in the main to hold on to the idea of government as held by Rome.

But we must not think this Teutonic principle of self-government grew in England without great struggle. Time and time again, kings arose in England who would have been delighted to crush it out,—kings who would levy taxes without consent of the people, and spend the money on expensive wars or to keep up an expensive court.

One of the most arbitrary of these kings in early times, and one who cared least for the rights of the

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people, was King John. He was always needing money for one expensive thing after another, and always trying to get it by wringing it from the people in all kinds of oppressive ways. Finally the people, and especially the barons or lords, growing tired of this, armed themselves and went against John. The king tried to defend himself with an army, but nearly everybody deserted him, and he was compelled, in 1215 A.D., to sign an agreement with his people never to tax them again without their consent, never to imprison them without just cause, and to allow them to be tried by a jury when they were accused of wrong. This agreement is the most important document in English history, and is called *Magna Charta*, or the Great Charter. It is written on parchment, consists of sixty-three short chapters or articles, and is most carefully preserved in the British Museum in London.

The English people have never written a constitution all at one time and adopted it as their frame of government, as the United States did in 1787–1789; but from time to time they have written important documents and had their rulers assent to them, and these they regard as the foundation stones of their government and of their liberties. In English history there have been three of these very important documents:—

1. *Magna Charta*, secured in 1215.
2. The Petition of Right, passed by Parliament in 1628.
3. The Bill of Rights, passed by Parliament in 1689.

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Among several other things, all these great documents declare the following great principles of liberty:—

1. No tax shall be levied upon any English subject without his consent.
2. No one shall be imprisoned without cause being shown.
3. When one is accused he shall have right of trial by jury.

Now, to work out these principles and to get them firmly established in the minds of the English people took a full thousand years or more—that is, from the first settlements of the Angles and Saxons and Jutes on the English coast, about 450 A.D., when they were planted in mere germ, down to 1689, when the English people brought them to much fuller fruitage by driving a very tyrannical king (James II) from the English throne and crowning William and Mary as king and queen on the condition that they would agree to the following principles:—

1. Not to dispense with any laws without consent of Parliament.
2. Not to raise any money except by consent of Parliament.
3. Not to keep a standing army without consent of Parliament.
4. To allow the people to bear arms without consent of Parliament.
5. To allow the people to petition the king.

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6. To allow the freedom of debate in Parliament.

7. To allow frequent meetings of Parliament.

You see, from what the king and queen had to promise, they could do nothing except what they were allowed to do by the English people, expressing themselves through the great representative assembly called Parliament. And since the English Parliament has always been the greatest means by which the people have gained their rights and held on to their liberties, you must learn something about it.

Parliament comes from a French word, “parler,” which means “to speak,” and it was so called because the English people came together in this body to speak, or debate, about the best ways of carrying on the affairs of the nation. In Magna Charta, to which as you remember King John agreed in 1215, there was a provision that a council should be called to levy taxes whenever taxes were needed. The first council or parliament which was ever called of this kind in England was in 1265. It was called, not by the King himself, but by one of his subjects, Simon de Montfort, for the purpose of curbing the King’s tyranny. To this parliament were summoned the few nobles who were in sympathy with De Montfort, representatives of the large landowners and representatives of the people living in the large towns. Thirty years after this time, in 1295, when a great English King, Edward I, was needing money to carry on war against the Welsh and the Scotch he assembled a Parliament, in which all of the

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classes of English people were represented, to ask them to vote him money.

In the first place there were summoned to this Parliament both the great nobles, such as dukes, earls and counts, and the great churchmen, such as bishops and archbishops. Then, since there were too many small landowners to come in person, there were two representatives chosen from each county to represent the general body. Next, from each city there were two representatives chosen. Next, from each burgh, or borough, or large town, two representatives were chosen. The representatives from the cities and towns represented the merchants and mechanics. Thus all classes of the English people were represented in the Parliament. It was the first time that this had occurred in England, or in the history of the world, and so important was it, in working out the liberties and greatness of England, that the great historian of the English people, John Richard Green, has called its assembling "the most important event in English history."

From this time forward Parliament grew step by step, sometimes having hard struggles when a king or queen sat on the throne who was disposed to rule without regard to the people's rights. But as the people grew in knowledge and self-reliance, their representatives in Parliament grew in courage, in love of liberty, and in willingness to risk their lives if necessary to keep those great Teutonic principles guaranteed by Magna Charta from being destroyed.

Now all of this long growth of liberty from the German forests up to England, and for ten centuries in

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England, is of the greatest importance to us who live in the United States; for the germs and roots of the political liberties which we enjoy, as we have already seen, are buried deep in the history of our ancestors in England and our still older ancestors in the German forests.

When the New World was discovered, three great nations stood on the western coast of Europe and launched their ships toward the west,—Spain, France and England. The one which most fully represented all of the best and greatest principles of education, religion, government, industry and social freedom worked out by the world up to that time, would in all probability win the race in the struggle for the New World.

As already said, one of these nations only had been able to plant, nourish and develop in its political life the idea that every man should have the right to rule himself. England, by working out township and “hundred” and county assemblies, and by developing that greatest agent of liberty of the last five hundred years—the Parliament,—had given herself many centuries of schooling in self-government. This schooling had strengthened her people for the great undertakings in gaining wealth, culture, art, literature and free political life, which make England today as great as any nation on the earth. Hence when the English crossed the Atlantic in the seventeenth century and began to plant townships in New England, counties in Virginia, and legislatures in all of the colonies, she was sowing in the new soil ideas which had been ripening through many centuries in the old. And then later, when, at the time

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of our Revolutionary War, an arbitrary English king, George III, tried to stamp out this Teutonic love of self-government, it was the voice of Burke and Pitt in the English Parliament and of Samuel Adams and Otis and Patrick Henry in the legislative hall of the colonies and in the Stamp Act Congress (both the natural outgrowth of free Teutonic institutions) which did such great service in saving the principle of self-government for the whole English race—for England as well as America. Thus we see how old are the germs of the free institutions of our own country, and how impossible it would be for us to have them had it not been for our brave Teutonic-English ancestors who struggled to save and develop these liberties, hundreds of years before our country was discovered.