

During 1175 and 1176 Richard was concerned with the affairs of Aquitaine, almost constantly in the saddle, fighting one rebellious vassal after another and honing his military skills to a fine edge. When, the following year, Richard moved up to join his father in Normandy, the question was again raised as to when Richard's marriage to Alice, daughter of Louis VII, should take place. Richard had been betrothed to Alice since 1169, when he had been twelve and she just nine. The girl had been living at Henry's court in England since he sacked Poitiers, and the English king was not apparently eager to see his second son tied down by this alliance. As a result the marriage question was allowed to lapse once again, adding fuel to the rumors that Henry had already taken the by now sixteen-year-old French princess as his mistress. Rumors spread that Henry planned to disinherit his three elder sons in favor of John, who would then be married to Alice. Some even spoke of Henry fathering a "secret" child on the French princess that was to be the first in a new progeny. So alarming were the stories that Louis, worried for his daughter, appealed to the pope to insist that the marriage between Alice and Richard should take place immediately.

Richard's military reputation received a great boost from his siege and capture of the powerful castle of Taillebourg, on the river Charente, near Cognac in 1179. The castle was renowned as impregnable, perched up high on a craggy rock and unapproachable from three sides. The castle was protected by three inner walls and the garrison was well equipped with supplies and with water. It was the sort of target that normally would resist everything but a royal army, equipped with the sort of siege equipment that only a king could afford. Instead of siege equipment Richard brought himself. As it turned out, he proved to be more terrible than any siege weapon: a leader of ruthlessness and unequalled willpower. Although the twelfth century was not short of such men, Henry II being one of them, it is doubtful whether there was any other general of the time who had more effect on the outcome of battle than did Richard. Saladin was neither the first nor the last enemy to learn this.

Faced by the cloud-tipped battlements of Taillebourg, Richard refused to be deterred. He began his siege by giving defenders pause to think about the consequences for them if he should take the castle: his men torched the surrounding villages and farms, killing any peasants who had remained in their homes, slaughtering all their animals and destroying their harvest. Morale within the castle slumped as the villagers who had fled for safety to the castle watched as their livelihoods were destroyed, aware all the time that even if they saved their lives they had nothing to return to. Richard had camped unusually close to Taillebourg's walls in the hope that the garrison might make a sortie to take him by surprise, and that is exactly what they tried to do. Rushing into the fray, Richard led his men into the outer bailey of the castle as the garrison retreated into the citadel. For the next two days the garrison, now hopelessly trapped, had to watch as Richard's men burned and plundered everything but the stone walls of Taillebourg. Eventually, with nothing left to defend, the garrison surrendered. Richard now showed just how ruthless he could be. With victory in their hands, most commanders would have been content to withdraw and leave the clearing up to their subordinates. Instead, Richard stayed and supervised the annihilation of the castle stone by stone, even lending a hand now and then to speed the operation. Before withdrawing, he had to have the "cloud-tipped" castle leveled to the ground. It was worth the effort, for word spread of how terrible an opponent was this Richard of Aquitaine. A neighboring rebel immediately surrendered rather than risk another such siege.

The next time Richard visited his father in England he found the atmosphere different. Henry had heard the full story of what had happened at Taillebourg and recognized in Richard a worthy son and an even more worthy adversary. He rewarded Richard with a free hand in the county of Poitou.

The death of Louis VII in 1180 and the accession of the fifteen-year-old Philip Augustus was to change the political equilibrium in Western Europe, previously dominated by Henry II of England and the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa of Germany. It was to be Philip's achievement to ensure that the House of Capet prevailed over those of Anjou and Hohenstaufen, but all this was still in the future. At Philip's coronation at Rheims Cathedral, which took place in November 1179 while Louis VII was still alive, the House of Anjou was so well represented that it looked

as if they were the royal family visiting a provincial relation. Henry the "Young King" carried the royal crown and was accompanied by a dazzling retinue of lords and knights bearing in their hands and on their persons every outward manifestation of the wealth of the Anjous. Richard came as Count of Poitou and Geoffrey as Count of Brittany. With their father, still de facto Duke of Aquitaine and Normandy, the Angevins ruled far more of France than the boy king and the splendor of their entourage completely overshadowed that of their overlord, Philip "Dieu Donné." Certainly the adolescent eye of the new king cannot fail to have been impressed by the sight of the mighty Count of Poitou, towering over his companions and splendid in his rich apparel. Yet what may have begun as adolescent hero-worship was eventually to turn to rivalry and bitter jealousy as he learned the measure of the man who had a far greater right to the cognomen "Dieu Donné."

At Christmas 1182 an Angevin family reunion took place at Caen, in Normandy, where the "Young King's" jealousy of Richard brought on a severe family crisis. Reputedly a crowd of a thousand guests gathered at court to celebrate with King Henry, including nobles from throughout France and parts of Germany. No sooner had the younger Henry arrived than he began complaining to his father that Richard had intruded on his territory by building a castle there. The king showed little concern, whereupon his heir flew into a fury of "black bile," claiming he would surrender all his empty titles and take up the cross and go to Jerusalem, there to serve his life in a noble cause. The king had been brooding for some while on the likely outcome if on his own death his powerful son Richard should refuse allegiance to his weaker elder son. The result would be the breakup of the Angevin empire that he had spent all his life building up. As a result he ordered Richard to pay homage to the "Young King." Richard at first refused on the grounds that he held his title from his mother not his father and, moreover, had done homage for it to his legal overlord, Louis of France. Once started, Richard found it difficult to stop, raising the bitter subject of his mother's imprisonment and defying his older brother, saying that if he wanted land let him fight for it, rather than ask his father to give it to him. Richard left court in a fury, while his father, no less angry at the topic of Eleanor having been raised, incited his eldest son to "curb Richard's pride" by helping the Aquitanian rebels against him. Richard took the threat literally and hurried back to Aquitaine to prepare his defenses against his brother. King Henry,



however, alarmed at what he might have started, had ridden to Limoges, to persuade the "Young King" that he had not meant that he should fight his brother and that he had spoken in haste. But the young Henry was not listening and the king was met with a hail of arrows, one of which penetrated his cloak. The "Young King" and Geoffrey now set about trying to undermine Richard, by besieging the fortified church at Gorre. But his brothers were "playing" at war and Richard descended on them like a thunderbolt, overwhelming their army and massacring the prisoners he took. As an example to all rebels in his lands, Richard drowned some of his captives, blinded others, and cut the throats of the remainder. Had Sultan Saladin known his enemy better in 1191 he would not have delayed paying the ransom for the Acre garrison as he did. The shock of the disaster at Gorre caused the collapse of his brothers' conspiracy against Richard in Aquitaine.

The younger Henry and Geoffrey had never been a match for Richard, perhaps the most able military commander alive, and the humiliation of defeat seemed to damage young Henry's mind. Accompanied by the young William Marshal and a band of desperate mercenaries, he began spreading terror throughout central and southern France for no discernible reason other than to punish his father. Among his deliberate outrages was to raid the shrine of Rocamadour, in the Dordogne, looting precious items from the altar and riding off with church treasures. To the very superstitious people of the time God's hand was seen in what happened next. In the midsummer heat Henry complained of feeling ill and was taken to a house in the village of Martel, where he developed a fever followed by dysentery. The dying prince had himself laid naked on a bed of ashes on the floor and passed away before his father could reach him. When King Henry heard of his son's death he "threw himself upon the ground and greatly bewailed his son."

The death of his eldest son seemed to concentrate King Henry's mind. He found in Richard, now his eldest son and presumed heir, too much of his own pride and ambition to make relations between them easy. He therefore decided to impose himself on Richard as he had on the late "Young King." If Richard was to have England he must give up Aquitaine and Poitou and these would pass to his younger brother, John. If Richard was to become a king he must now learn the art that his father had tried but failed to teach the "Young King." But this idea was not what Richard was planning for himself. He was already looking for an



independent role and intended to use his lands in southern France to allow him to pursue this aim. Both Eleanor and Richard himself completely misinterpreted the king's motives, which were dynastic rather than personal and did not at this stage indicate that he intended to disinherit Richard in favor of John. Richard's emotional nature was hurt at the thought of losing Aquitaine, and he was not prepared to see his father appropriate the beloved lands of his childhood.

The death of the "Young King" also presented Henry II with the problem of his widowed daughter-in-law's dowry, which included the Vexin. In December 1183 Henry met Philip Augustus and agreed to something that his pride had previously made impossible. He agreed to do formal homage for his French lands to Philip, emphasizing the new king's suzerainty over him. Henry made this concession in order to hold on to Margaret's dowry, thereby retaining control of Gisors and the Norman Vexin, which otherwise would have returned to French control on the death of his eldest son. Philip reasonably pressed for the marriage of his sister Alice to Richard to take place at last. After all, they had been engaged for fourteen years and he wanted to see his sister settled. The fact that Henry was evasive on this issue indicates that there may have been truth in the rumors mentioned above, namely that Alice was the king's mistress and indeed had borne him a child. Henry tried to play down the marriage, even suggesting that Alice should marry his youngest son, John, perhaps a more willing accomplice. Richard, on the other hand, had no feelings for the lady and was not prepared to pick up a cast-off mistress of his father's. The dispute over the future of Princess Alice continued to sour relations between Richard and Philip Augustus for years to come.

Content with his French negotiations, Henry II now tried to resolve his differences with his heir. He suggested to Richard that he should take control of Normandy and Anjou, under his father's supervision, while surrendering Aquitaine to John. But Richard saw the king's plan, reasonable no doubt in his own eyes, as nothing more than an attempt to hobble him to the old man's plans. The quarrelsome and tempestuous Angevins were soon at it again. Tempers flared, and Richard walked out of the meeting with his father boiling with rage and shouting threats after him. In his rage Henry made another of his unfortunate outbursts: he told John that if Richard would not give him Aquitaine willingly, then John should invade Aquitaine and take it by force. Assisted by his bastard

half brother Geoffrey (who later became Archbishop of York), John took his father at his word and raised troops. As soon as Henry crossed into England in June 1184, John and Geoffrey invaded Aquitaine, pillaging and plundering as they went. They were saved the consequences of their actions because before Richard could descend on them and, no doubt, annihilate their armies, envoys arrived from England demanding that the brothers should put down their arms.

Henry now tried a new angle of approach to wrest the southern French lands away from Richard. In 1184 he temporarily released Eleanor from Salisbury so that he could demand, in her name, that Richard should release her lands in Poitou. Should he refuse, an army raised in his mother's name would invade the region and take it from him by force. Surprisingly, Richard surrendered Poitou to envoys bearing his mother's seal and, showing an unprecedented sense of family responsibility, he returned to his father's court in Normandy and for a while played the dutiful son, no doubt relying on his mother to prevent the king from handing his duchy over to John. But there had been no metamorphosis of Richard the warrior to Richard the diplomat; it seems that these were but two sides of the same coin. Those who classified Richard as no more than a bull-headed knight failed to recognize the quiet diplomacy that went on. Both Richard and his mother realized that they were walking a tightrope with Henry and for the moment a cautious approach was undoubtedly the correct policy.

While Henry and Philip continued in March 1186 to negotiate over the lengthy and precarious betrothal of Richard and Alice, Richard himself was beginning the tentative but eventually successful negotiations with Sancho of Navarre, one of the most strategically important of Aquitaine's neighbors, for a marriage between Richard and Sancho's daughter Berengaria. Unaware of this, the kings of England and France seemed content with their own agreement that the wedding to Alice should go ahead. Henry, apparently reconciled to Richard by his son's recent behavior, now sent him back to Aquitaine to subdue the rebels who had flourished in his absence. Freed of the need to repress his natural love of war, Richard returned to Aquitaine with a vengeance. His main target was Count Raymond of Toulouse, who had seized part of Richard's duchy and expected Philip Augustus to come to his aid if the Angevins proved too much for him to handle. Richard soon turned the tide of the war against Count Raymond, and it was not long before



Philip was forced to intervene to save his ally from complete defeat. Briefly all the Angevins were on the same side, with Henry enjoying the experience of having Richard, John, and their half brother Geoffrey all with his army in France at the same time. But the intervention of the Papal Legate prevented a general war between England and France from breaking out at a time when the unity of Christendom was deemed essential. He organized a two-year truce, during which the merry-go-round of relationships within the Angevin world saw several turns.

The friendship between Philip Augustus, mentally adept but physically adolescent, and the powerfully built and handsome Richard has often been seen as homosexual, but the evidence for this is minimal, based mostly on a record of doubtful provenance that the two men shared a bed. This need not carry any sexual connotations at all. Henry was alarmed at the developing friendship between his son and the King of France, which he presumed presaged a political relationship that might be harmful to him. He summoned Richard to return to Normandy, but before he could do so, an event occurred that changed everything. In early November 1187 Richard was in Tours when word of the Christian disaster at Hattin three months before and the Muslim capture of Jerusalem arrived. It fell like a thunderbolt upon everyone, from high to low, clerical and secular. The fall of the holy city of Jerusalem was felt as greatly as if the sun had fallen from the sky. Richard's response was typical of the man whose profound religious belief went hand in hand with a boyish sense of adventure. In an instant he decided that he must take the cross and reconquer the Holy Land for his faith. The word "crusade" was now on everyone's lips, with social divisions temporarily suspended in the shared affliction of the moment.

Henry was in Normandy when the news of the fall of Jerusalem reached him, accompanied by the even less palatable news that his son and heir had taken the cross. The double shock was hard for him to bear. In terms of both cost and Richard's time absent, a crusade would threaten the survival of the Angevin empire. If Richard was away for years in the Holy Land, who would defend Aquitaine from rapacious neighbors like Raymond of Toulouse or from overmighty subjects like Geoffrey of Lusignan? Besides Henry, another to regret Richard's decision was Philip Augustus, whose friendship might have been close but was not entirely altruistic. He expected something in return, and if Richard preferred to indulge in the worthy if ultimately unprofitable



hobby of crusading he demanded compensation. Angrily, Philip demanded that either Richard marry Alice straightaway or else his father must return Gisors. If the Angevins refused then he would make war on them, devastating Normandy and supporting any rebels in Aquitaine.

Henry had to take this threat seriously. He hurried to Normandy and arranged a meeting with Philip at Gisors where, either by chance or by design (probably the latter), the Archbishop of Tyre happened to be preaching the crusade. It was the high point of the cleric's agenda, trapping the kings of both England and France in the same small town, and he was determined not to let them go without extorting the sort of commitment that could not be mistaken. The archbishop was a great orator, and on this vital occasion his words moved the masses of nobles and knights who had accompanied their kings to Gisors. Henry and Philip, their differences temporarily diminished, both agreed to take the cross. And they were joined by hundreds of the most important people present. It is reported that after the archbishop's service a cross appeared in the sky and was seen by all. Whether the vision was a product of the chroniclers' poetic license or the congregation's hysteria is irrelevant. All that mattered was that for a moment individual members of a massive crowd in a small French town forgot their petty differences and were joined as one in the idea of a crusade.

The Archbishop of Tyre had surpassed himself, inspiring with his words two notably reluctant crusaders in the kings of England and France. Swept up in the emotion of the moment, the two unlikely allies agreed to lead a crusade from France in a year's time, making the necessary preparations meanwhile. Even so, they and Philip, Count of Flanders, who took the cross at the same time maintained their national differences by using crosses of contrasting colors: red for the French, white for the Angevins, and green for the Flemings. While Richard needed nothing to persuade him to commit himself to fight for his faith, he benefited from the planning that his more earthbound father brought to bear, notably in financial terms. Henry devised an entirely novel scheme to raise what was known as the Saladin tithe, a direct tax of a tenth on both income and movable property for all subjects in the Angevin lands, including churchmen. The tithe was a great success, raising close to £60,000 for the crusade. The penalty for nonpayment was a severe one, being nothing less than excommunication. Self-assessment was the system used, which, in view of the fact that the tax was paid in

God's service, was not as unworkable as may have been the case in a more cynical age. Those who took the cross were exempt from the Saladin tithe, so those who were undecided about personal participation in the crusade had some incentive to be involved in a different way.

The initial passion for the crusade produced remarkable displays of self-sacrifice, some of which have a modern flavor to them, like the report that Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury ordered his followers to dismount and lead their horses up steep slopes in Wales to condition them for the arduous journey ahead. At first Henry proposed to take the traditional land route to the Holy Land, through Hungary and the Byzantine lands. An Angevin agent, one Richard Barre, was even sent to the Balkans to negotiate with the rulers there for the safe passage of the Anglo-French forces and favorable rates at the markets. However, once it became clear that Frederick Barbarossa would be following the land route with an enormous army, Henry opted for the sea route instead, much to the scorn of the Germans, who referred to it as a short voyage "ideal for the lazy."

Richard's well-publicized decision to take the cross only served to encourage his rebellious vassals in the south to rise against him. Soon perennial troublemakers like Aimar of Angoulême and Geoffrey of Lusignan made common cause with Raymond of Toulouse in attacking Richard's lands. He retaliated with the sort of ruthless display characteristic of him, capturing one of Count Raymond's household and treating him so harshly that the count complained to Philip Augustus. The problem was that for men like Raymond and Geoffrey of Lusignan war seemed almost a sport. However, Richard took it very much more seriously and was not prepared to indulge in the kind of fighting in which only peasants and footsoldiers suffered. Frustrated at the way Count Raymond had plagued him in recent years, Richard decided to put an end to the frontier raids by annihilating his enemy. He invaded Toulouse, captured seventeen of the count's castles, and was preparing to assault Raymond's capital city when news reached him that Philip had done a volte-face and was preparing to attack Angevin lands in the north. In company with his kinsman, Philip, Bishop of Beauvais, the French king attacked Normandy, Touraine, and Berry, capturing Chateauroux in the process. This triggered off a general war between the three crusaders, who were supposed to have sunk their differences for the greater cause of regaining the Holy Land from Saladin. While the French ravaged

Normandy, Henry II with English and Welsh troops invaded Philip Augustus's lands, burning towns and villages as he cut his way south, while Richard, abandoning his struggle with the Count of Toulouse, turned on the King of France and advanced northward, threatening to catch Philip Augustus in the middle. Clearly seeing that he was overmatched, Philip called a halt, asking his Angevin foes to meet him at Gisors to settle their dispute. Traditionally disputes between the kings of France and the dukes of Normandy were settled by meetings under an ancient elm tree at Gisors, which had a trunk so vast that four men with arms outstretched could not encompass it and which was said to have roots both in France and Normandy. On this occasion—in August 1188—Henry II arrived first and sat under the shade of the tree while Philip Augustus was forced to sit in the heat of the sun. Henry unwisely told Philip that he would not give way to his overlord while the old tree stood. In a fit of pique Philip took him literally and ordered the tree cut down. And the fighting restarted, but not for long. The major nobles of France, most of whom had taken the cross, simply refused to support either side in the conflict. The war was brought to an end when Henry and Philip met at Bonmoulins, with Richard in attendance.

Richard's patience with his father, never very strong at the best of times, had run out. He constantly found himself wondering what his father had in mind for him and suspected that Henry intended replacing him as his heir with his brother John. The meeting at Bonmoulins took a dramatic turn when Richard confronted his father and asked to be confirmed as his heir. If Henry considered ending the charade, the moment was soon past. Richard publicly bent the knee to Philip and swore fealty to him for all the Angevin lands in France. Henry's policy was shattered; he had never believed that his son would betray him in this way and side with France against him, but he had driven Richard too far and this was the outcome. The Old King now bitterly proposed a new agreement with Philip, transferring all Richard's right to lands in France to John, but the French king refused and hostilities followed. At a time when the nobility of Western Europe was preparing for a crusade, the devil and his brood could not find time to subdue their family quarrels.

Richard and Philip Augustus now attacked Le Mans, Henry's birthplace, and drove the Old King out of his native city like King Lear onto the blasted heath. It was here that one of the most famous incidents of



Richard's life before he became king occurred. It involved William Marshal, the greatest and most famous knight of the age, a man whose loyalty and sense of duty personified all that was good and noble in the Age of Chivalry. Richard had played no part personally in the siege of his father's city, but when he heard that it was taken and that the Old King was in flight, he leaped on his horse, dressed only in doublet and wearing an iron helm, and led the chase. Unarmed and unarmored, he was, as so often in his career, risking his life among the heavily armored knights around him. It seems unlikely that he was pursuing his father in earnest, particularly as he knew the knights he was chasing and had been friends with many. However, several of his own men caught up the rearguard of Henry's army and began a skirmish. Just as Richard rode up, one of the king's knights unhorsed one of his, whereupon he called out, "William! you waste your time in folly; ride on!" Hearing and recognizing Richard's voice, another William suddenly entered the fray. It was William Marshal, and he charged straight at Richard with his lance set. Richard must have seen death approaching at the gallop and, showing the enormous physical strength he had, he managed to grasp William's lance and force it wide of its mark. He called out, "By God's Feet, Marshal, slay me not! It were an ill deed for I am totally unarmed." William had not been aiming at Richard. Having pulled his lance free from his grip, he drove it into Richard's horse, killing the beast and toppling Richard in the dust. As he did so William retorted, "Nay! May the devil slay you, for so will not I." With that he galloped off as Richard's knights rushed up and grouped around their shaken leader, who reproved them for seeking battle with the king's rearguard as they were fleeing. Richard petulantly stamped off, remarking, "You have spoiled everything; you are a set of distracted fools." In fact, Richard had looked deep within the abyss and he had not liked the sight. Many men would have learned from the lesson William Marshal administered, but Richard did not. As Saladin was later to remark, it was one of the Lionheart's gravest weaknesses, that he often seemed to risk his life where there was no need.

The Old King escaped on this occasion, but there was to be no escape from his declining health. Aware that he was dying, perhaps, Henry headed for Chinon, the castle of his ancestors. His enemies now ravaged his lands and he was helpless to intervene. With his loss of the city of Tours Henry called a halt to the fighting, painfully mounted a horse, and rode to meet Richard and Philip at Ballon, where he surrendered, pay-

ing the French king 20,000 marks and relinquishing Princess Alice to a guardian, so that Richard would marry her on his return from the crusade. It was agreed that all Henry's subjects, French and English, must swear allegiance to Richard as heir to his father's lands. Henry was required to give his son the kiss of peace but, as the chroniclers love to record, he pretended to kiss his son and instead whispered, "God grant that I may not die until I have had my revenge on you." On that note the parties separated and Richard never saw his father alive again. Henry's last hours were made even more bitter, so it is recorded, when he was told that even his favorite son, John, had abandoned him and joined forces with Richard and Philip. On July 6, 1189, Henry II of England died and his monarchy passed to his son, until then Richard, Count of Poitou, but soon to be throned as Richard I.