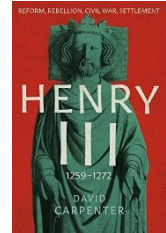


Henry III: Reform, Rebellion, Civil War, Settlement

by David Carpenter

Review by Darren Baker | 19 June 2023, updated 4 February 2024



Volume 1 of David Carpenter's biography of Henry III for the Yale English Monarchs Series ended on a cliffhanger. Despite all the peace and prosperity England has enjoyed under Henry's rule, the barons think they can do a better job and take control of the government. The king is shuffled off into a corner while their revolutionary regime enacts reforms that will end his favouritism to foreigners and bring justice to the people. It will also terminate his madcap scheme to make his youngest son the king of Sicily, which Carpenter calls the most ridiculous agreement ever made by an English monarch. But he's not surprised, as Henry has always been a woeful king. Lazy, naïve and easily manipulated, it was only a matter of time before far superior individuals intervened. They would put the affairs of the kingdom in order, help him be a king. This being England, it gets messy and the whole thing descends into war and chaos. Lucky for Henry, he's the simple fool that he is, because that's the only thing that saves him and his dynasty in the end. It's a revolution born and died of an idiot.

Such is the theme of volume 2, covering the period between 1258 and Henry's death in 1272. The question naturally arises whether these fourteen years are really worth a book of 650 pages, roughly the same size as volume 1, which covers Henry's first 42 years on the throne. *Henry III: The Rise to Power and Personal Rule* has been well received because it makes good on its claim to bring the reader closer to Henry than to any other medieval English monarch. Not that it makes Henry look impressive, but it is a stunning achievement. Surely, we can expect much the same in volume 2 with its subtitle *Reform, Rebellion, Civil War, Settlement*. The war and misery that had been missing from Henry's reign will dominate now. To medieval enthusiasts addicted to bloodletting and gallows politics, the response can only be, 'Thank God!'

The cover art offers an excellent start. The first volume shows Henry's effigy in red against a green background. Coming up with a similarly minimalist matching cover for volume 2 was solved by David Mackinlay of the monarch series website. Reverse the colours, he suggested. The green background, reflecting Henry's favourite colour, is now red, symbolic of the 'red juice about to be squeezed out' of a few bodies (from *The Song of Lewes*). The Preface promises as much with Henry's son Edward and brother-in-law Simon de Montfort taking centre stage. Both men, always ready to resort to war and violence, evoke more praise and admiration than criticism, as do Henry's queen Eleanor of Provence, his brother Richard of Cornwall, and other brother-in-law Louis IX of

France. Lesser figures like Peter of Savoy, John Mansel, Hugh Bigod, Philip Basset, even Gilbert de Clare, also get glowing marks from Carpenter. Henry is the only one who disappoints consistently and thoroughly, not just chapter after chapter, but page after page. Where in volume 1 Carpenter urges the young, fresh-faced king to man up to the role given to him by destiny, in volume 2 he's given up. The old king deserves to have his bearded face slapped time and again and Carpenter readily obliges.

The first chapter picks up the revolution unleashed in 1258. Most scholars agree that these events were indeed a revolution. The reforms known as the Provisions of Oxford turned England into a constitutional monarchy, a radical idea for that time. What isn't agreed is where Henry stood on it. According to the official record, he was very much a part of it, but Carpenter insists otherwise. Henry is 'frightened' by a baronial cabal into 'bowing down' before them. All the work of reform is done by the barons, not the 'emasculated' king. Carpenter concludes the chapter by offering contemporary justification for the revolution. The word 'misrule' is used here for the first of many times throughout this volume. Although not a tyrant in the mould of his father King John, Henry is nevertheless *rex inutilis* – a useless king – because he has reduced England to an 'imbecilic' state. He would not be deposed, rather placed under guardianship like the boy-king he was all those years ago.

It's at this point that Carpenter has to address the fact that the barons themselves later claimed that the official record of cooperation is correct, that their ruling council was very much under the king's lordship. He hints at it himself later in the story. 'At the very least, Henry hoped to make the reforms work as he felt they always should have worked with himself as the respected head of the council.' Carpenter tries to get around it by suggesting the official record belied what was really happening so as to keep everyone calm and not provoke outside interference. His argument for a 'secret' revolution in an era ripe with rumour and propaganda even in the calmest of times is not very convincing, however. He also assumes that the famous speech made before the pope explaining these events was written by a baronial committee, when in fact the language, not to mention the request for a papal legate, is all Henry.

Not until the second chapter do we learn that the revolution is not just about the king. It seems he's no more an oppressor of the people than his barons are. They too have to reform their ways. This is where Simon de Montfort crashes the party. Like most historians, Carpenter sees him inspired by material and political concerns on the one hand, idealism and piety on the other. He does not suggest as I do in my *The Two Eleanors of Henry III* that Simon is equally motivated by revenge against the king. His vengeful nature is well documented and Henry had ousted him from court on two occasions. Even twenty years later Simon recalls the first occasion with extreme bitterness. Henry suspects early on that his brother-in-law will make it personal when

the two famously meet on the banks of the Thames just after the reform movement begins, but the closest Carpenter leans that way is Simon's assumption of Winchester castle, Henry's birthplace, in October 1258.

At this point Henry is supposed to sail to France to ratify a peace treaty with Louis, but the council, packed with Simon's allies, grounds the king. They send a delegation in his place led by Simon, who no doubt has engineered the whole thing to enhance his authority and status and to humiliate Henry. He's also very much interested in the money Louis is supposed to pay Henry as compensation for confiscated English territories. Carpenter is right to say that Simon insinuated a clause into the treaty requiring Henry to get the consent of the council before spending any of the money, but he doesn't add what is obvious. Simon is seeking a huge sum of money to compensate his wife Eleanor (Henry's sister) for claims going all the way back to her first marriage. Since the treaty money is roughly the same amount, the Montforts are determined to get their hands on it as the price of Eleanor renouncing her claims to the lost territories, therefore allowing ratification to go forward. Here Carpenter agrees with the verdict of history, that Simon blackmailed the king and council, but he never goes so far as to call his conduct treacherous. Readers might think otherwise had he informed them that Simon, one of Henry's negotiators of the treaty, is best of friends with the chief negotiator for the other side and that he regularly swaps favours with him.

Simon's brinkmanship fails in the end. Carpenter lauds Henry for stealing the show in Paris and exhibiting conduct very much becoming a head of state, but he calls Louis the true winner of the peace treaty despite the land and money he concedes. The French king catches flak from his own council over it, but Carpenter, in a clear dig at Henry, stresses that Louis doesn't need their approval. His presence in this volume is as uncomfortable as it is in the first one, because Louis is Carpenter's gold standard of kingship. Any comparison between the two kings only leaves Henry looking diminished and pathetic. But not everything stacks up as it appears. Carpenter insists that Louis undertook reforms under his own free will, but that was clearly not the case. Louis returned from his failed crusade a broken and dispirited king. He was determined to try again but knew he had to get his house in order first. The complaints levelled against his officials, which he learned about *before* he departed on crusade, revealed a kingdom reeling from injustices going all the way back to the French conquest of Normandy half a century earlier.

Meanwhile, the judicial system in England is humming along. Carpenter writes that 'under Henry, more than ever before, the common law was dealing fairly and expeditiously for the most part with the concerns of ordinary people, reducing the likelihood of a resort to violence and helping to maintain the peace'. But corruption abounds among royal and baronial officials and the reformers try to tackle it through

querelae, a procedure that allows anybody, regardless of status, to seek redress without going through the machinery of the courts. It's a great success and Carpenter dedicates a whole chapter to the people who came forward during it, whose voices would never have been heard had it not been for the reform period.

It's in this aspect of reform that we see the good side of Simon. He clearly wants to do right by the poor and low-born of society (as does Henry) and browbeats slackers to get with the programme. But he alienates them with his hypocrisy and self-righteousness ('Don't I deserve justice too?' he would say) and he encourages Edward, another disgruntled idealist, to stir up trouble while his parents are in France for the treaty celebrations. Civil war looms for the first time and Henry doesn't return until Louis shames him into doing so. He had to be taught the duties of kingship by the master, says Carpenter. Only as an afterthought does he add that Henry was waiting for Louis to pay him some of the treaty money so he could hire an army of mercenaries to deal with Simon and his undutiful son. Carpenter also says nothing about Louis's shameful hypocrisy, how he hid himself away in the Holy Land rather than go back and face all the troubles France had to endure after his imprisonment in Egypt. Henry was away for four months, Louis for four years!

Also missing from this episode are three incidents that reveal much about the character of Simon de Montfort. The first is his penchant for big talk. Simon boasts that if Henry lands with an army of mercenaries, he will give them a warm welcome like no other, but here's the king and his mercenaries marching on London and Simon is nowhere in sight. Unlike the other barons, whose fealty to Henry is always in play, Simon can take it or leave it because of his unique status. Born and raised in France as the son of a famous crusader, his strong connections to his ancestral homeland and to the French royal family always provided him with a safe haven when things got rough with Henry. When he was ousted from court the first time, he and his wife fled to France so fast that they left their newborn son behind. It was after he was restored to favour that Simon began freely insulting the king, even threatening him, because he was safe in the knowledge that England wasn't his only option.

The second incident involves the murder of three Italian clerks, who were chased down by a mob outside of St. Paul's in broad daylight. It happened after Simon, Edward and their men arrived in London to hold parliament in defiance of Henry's orders to wait for his return. The murders highlighted the anger whipped up against foreign clergy installed in England by the pope. It was said that these churchmen were only in it for the money, that they had no physical connection to the spiritual offices that supported them. That was true, but English churchmen did it as well, in particular two of Simon's strongest backers, Walter and Thomas Cantilupe, not to mention his son Amaury, who benefited mightily from religious largesse during his father's ascendancy. The thinking

was, corruption is okay if we do it, but not them. Important here is that Simon was present in London when a dispute involving foreigners resulted in a flash of deadly violence.

The third incident involves the Lusignans. These four half-brothers of Henry had been blamed for all the ills of the realm and expelled at the start of the reform movement. Given the abuses ascribed to them, it's surprising how little they figure in the *querelae*. The real reason for their ouster was the queen's fear of their influence over her wayward son and Simon's envy of their good fortune. During this crisis of 1260, Simon tries to sneak the Lusignans into England as an armed force, which would be a political disaster for the king. Henry writes to his brother Richard that 'we want you to be absolutely clear that you cannot offend us worse than by admitting them, coming in this fashion, into the realm' (quote taken from my biography of Richard of Cornwall). It's a measure of how low Simon has sunk that he consorts with his bitterest enemies simply to discredit Henry.

Henry's delay wins the day, but Carpenter observes that had he been a king like his uncle Richard I, he would have 'hurried to England with or without an army and scattered his enemies'. (Clearly not the same King Richard in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, who sneaks back disguised as a pilgrim.) Simon and Edward remain defiant and even conspire to water down reform legislation in return for tightening the screws on the king. From this point on, Simon is all about gutting the monarchy, and incredibly he has found a willing tool in the heir to the throne, although Carpenter fails to call either man to account over their unholy alliance. Henry is moved to gut the council in response, which he achieves over the course of the year.

The king's full resumption of power is a triumph, but Carpenter credits it to the queen, to his brother Richard, and to royal advisers. They have the skill and intelligence that Henry lacks to pull off anything masterful, unless it's food or architecture, but his 'passive' nature is ideal for the scheme they have cooked up, essentially locking him up in the Tower of London and daring the barons to go to war. Simon is naturally for it, but Edward caves and the others fall into line one by one. Simon makes a speech about being the only person in England who respects truth and justice and leaves for France.

Carpenter is unimpressed with the king's victory. 'Henry never once toured the country with the aim of reasserting his authority and taking on his critics.' Instead he goes to France to destroy Montfort politically, but an epidemic sweeps through the court and Simon seizes the opportunity to go back to England and foment trouble. Henry refuses to dance to his tune and embarks on a pilgrimage to Reims, which Carpenter calls 'a decision of outstanding irresponsibility'. War in Wales brings him home, but not Edward. To Henry's dismay, he lingers abroad, gallivanting around, but Carpenter

excuses the young man's irresponsibility by suggesting he has been busy trying to mollify Simon, as indeed everyone seems to be, but there's absolutely no proof of it. When Edward does arrive, he has foreign troops with him to deal with the Welsh. It's a huge mistake. The year before, Edward had abandoned his retinue at the instigation of the king and queen. Now these former friends of his want revenge, just as Simon does. They will have it by exploiting the murderous rage against foreigners they had witnessed in London.

Make no doubt about it, the war that plunges England into its most miserable state in all of Henry's 56 years on the throne is Simon's work. While the reform movement had promised far more than it could deliver, it was ultimately successful. The people were heard, redresses were made, legislation was passed, and Henry incorporated these changes into his regime. From now on king and parliament would rule in tandem. The coming disaster has nothing to do with reform, rather Simon's obsession with subjugating Henry. He's out to get him and has the support of a large group of nobles and churchmen with their own beef with the royal family. Rallying the masses with 'England for the English', they set out to seize control of the kingdom.

Here Carpenter explains that there was 'nothing illegitimate' about the war they unleashed 'in some eyes'. Their oath to the Provisions of Oxford empowered them to attack anyone who violated that oath, a clause surely inserted by Simon himself. Anyone not with them is fair game. That includes Henry, but Simon, ever the strategist, exempts the king so as to claim he and his men are spearheading a loyalist movement. Or at least that's Carpenter's reading on it. 'As the oath to accept the Provisions said, they were made "for the honour of God, *in the faith of the king*, and for the utility of the realm".' In other words, let the king understand that this war against him is for his own benefit.

This section is notable for the spin Carpenter puts on the actions of three members of Henry's family. The first is his brother Richard of Cornwall. A year before the reform movement began, Richard went to Germany in the hope of receiving the imperial crown. Henry, whose dream was to restore Plantagenet hegemony and prestige on the continent, was fully supportive. Now, in 1263, Richard arrives in England around the same time as Edward, and also with foreign troops. Henry has been ill for some time and there are rumours that Richard hopes to succeed him if he dies, which the annalist at Tewkesbury Abbey, the only one to claim that the barons carried out a coup d'état in 1258, says actually happened during these months (yielding a very fine obituary for Henry).

As Simon's offensive closes in on London, Richard is with Henry in the Tower. He tells him he will seek out Simon to talk to him, but in the meantime, Henry should prevent Edward from taking military action. Carpenter can never refrain from a good dig

at Henry and writes, 'there was no reference to any (military action) being made by the king!' Simon rebuffs Richard, which Carpenter calls an extraordinary moment. 'Nothing shows better the clearness of conscience, clarity of purpose and confidence in the conclusion with which Montfort drove forward the events of 1263. Others would now have paused, thought they had done enough and settled down to negotiate some kind of compromise. Not Montfort. He had a plan of campaign and would stick to it.'

The above is true about Simon, but not Richard. He has clearly thrown in his lot with the rebels, although Carpenter tries his best to skirt the issue. For one, he names all the people who attended Simon's war council, including Richard's son Henry of Almain. The only person missing is Richard himself. Carpenter also notes a letter from the pope blasting Richard for 'failing to act against the rebellion and reported rumours that he actually condoned it'. In fact, the pope didn't accuse Richard of passively condoning it, but actively stirring it up. A huge difference. Another missive from the pope indicates that Richard's men were fighting alongside Simon's. (One wonders if these German mercenaries are also shouting at foreigners to get out – *Ausländer raus!*) Richard is anxious for Edward not to attack because Simon's whole strategy depends on not making war on the royal family. If that happens, then Provisions are no Provisions, the Montfortians face disinheritance. Finally, there's another piece of evidence left out of the book. After marching into London, Simon's army bivouacs at Richard's Isleworth estate.

Next up is the queen. Carpenter has always maintained that Eleanor of Provence was a much tougher individual than her husband. He quotes from a newsletter in Provence that brags about the power of hometown girl Eleanor as opposed to her straitjacketed husband. Carpenter assumes a rift develops between them after she plots to have his half-brothers expelled in 1258, but the only member of the family disenchanted with the rest is Edward. Indeed, almost every problem that Henry and Eleanor encounter during these years can be traced back to him. Like many historians, Carpenter indulges in a wishful reversal of birth order in the case of Henry and Richard, but the same might be said of Edward and his far more congenial brother Edmund.

With Simon's army closing in, Henry accepts terms on 10 July 1263. Carpenter writes that Eleanor 'opposed submission with all her might. Nothing, however, could stir her wilting husband into resistance'. She gets on a boat to join Edward at Windsor, which he has garrisoned with his foreign troops, but she is forced to turn back when a crowd on London Bridge, calling their queen a whore, starts pelting her with whatever objects they have at hand. 'She found Henry unwilling to let her in, either from anger at her desertion or from fear of admitting the mob. In the end Eleanor had to be rescued by the mayor and taken to the house of the bishop.'

Just when we think Henry can't look any worse. The one reputation that has always been solid with him was his love of family, but here it looks like he's throwing his wife to the wolves out of pique. Carpenter should have questioned this interpretation, however, when he wrote that Eleanor left on 13 July. Are we really supposed to believe that she and her husband are arguing for three days while London grows ever more anarchic? Rioters have specifically targeted royalists and foreigners, and Eleanor is both. The more probable scenario is that she left for her own safety, which certainly would have been Henry's priority. Seeing the mayor of London and his militia intervening, Henry thinks it's wiser to leave the queen in his care rather than risk, as Carpenter says, the mob rushing into the Tower and doing them all in. In any event, nothing in the future suggests Henry and Eleanor's relationship had reached a tipping point during those fearful days of July.

Naturally we find Edward as one of the principal causes of the unrest. He already infuriated the Londoners by bringing in his foreign troops, now on 29 June, two weeks before his mother's attempted flight, he and his men plunder the New Temple of cash and valuables to the tune of £730,000 in today's money. Carpenter doesn't call it a robbery or heist, surely the first big one in English history, only part of the 'decisive action' he takes as opposed to his inactive father. Instead of confronting Simon's army, however, Edward makes a lightning dash for Bristol, where the people would have taken him prisoner had he not begged Walter Cantilupe, one of Simon's bishops, to rescue him. Once free, he breaks his promise to seek peace and rides off. Still avoiding Simon, he holes up in Windsor waiting for the next move. Edward comes off very poorly in all the accounts of this episode, but the reader wouldn't know it from the scant mention it gets here (the details of Bristol are revealed 120 pages later). Carpenter rather provides a longer, divergent passage about the help Edward gets from his Irish lordships.

As for Henry, 'one feels for him', says Carpenter, 'yet he could surely have done more on his own behalf'. He draws up a should-have-done list before admitting the situation is much more difficult now, starting with the political revolution in London. Just as significant is the support Simon has received from the bishops, who are powerful magnates in their own right. The peace deal they bring to Henry at the Tower on Simon's behalf is an absolute disgrace, not just because the imposition of control over the king is not conducive to his honour, as they maintain, but it includes a clause calling for the expulsion of all foreigners. Rather than convey outrage, Carpenter merely admits that their action is puzzling. 'It is astonishing that bishops should have anything to do with it?' Is it really? The English clergy has fought long and hard with the king and pope over who gets to ride on the gravy train of church preferment. If it's true that foreign clergy are enjoying upwards of £40,000 of hard-earned English money every year, more than

twice the royal income, then bishops like Cantilupe stand to make a killing once the foreigners are sent packing.

Simon's one-party regime lasts only a few months. The end appears when they all go to France to ask Louis for his opinion. Apparently he agrees with Simon that he has no jurisdiction in the matter, nor does he see anything wrong with a nation wanting to be ruled by its own people and not foreigners, something Carpenter calls 'wishful thinking'. On the surface, it's a victory for Simon, but his momentum is gone. The queen and Edmund remain abroad, not so much out of safety concerns as Carpenter believes, rather to work on Louis and break the hold Simon has over him. Back home, things move quickly, and Carpenter gives all the credit to Edward. 'Left to himself, Henry might well have meandered on, hoping Montfort's regime would just gradually disintegrate.'

When the move to retake Dover is devised in coordination with the queen, Carpenter writes, 'How pleasurable for her to be working hand in glove with her eldest son'. Henry is also at Dover, but he's ignored because, as far as Carpenter is concerned, Edward is calling the shots. But if he is indeed in command, he has a damn good lieutenant in his father, who is everywhere, doing everything, issuing proclamations, goading Simon into war, and is ready to bag him just outside of London. After making another of his fine speeches, Simon readies his men for battle, but when an escape into London opens up, he quickly takes it. 'He would fight certainly in his righteous cause but on his own terms', insists Carpenter.

Both sides again seek out Louis for arbitration, but he only agrees after they swear an oath to abide by whatever he decides. Henry and Edward cross over in a storm so terrifying that Edward panics and pours forth prayer after prayer, a detail omitted by Carpenter. Simon is not there because he has broken his leg, but he has an able advocate in Cantilupe's nephew Thomas, another notorious pluralist. Carpenter is impressed with the case that he makes, 'one of the great political manifestos of the thirteenth century', certainly more 'coherent and compelling' than Henry's case. He says it was made with 'great ingenuity and some fairness', but in his classic biography *Simon de Montfort*, John Maddicott finds Cantilupe's argument that the Provisions of Oxford are indelibly linked to Magna Carta to be 'a shade disingenuous', as Magna Carta had never figured in Montfortian propaganda before. They are clearly desperate to bind Louis's hands as much as possible.

In the end, Louis sees through the ruse and quashes the Provisions. Simon and his cohorts swore an oath to accept his judgement, now they disregard it completely. Rather than call them perjurers, as Simon is wont to do with people who disagree with him, Carpenter defends their action. 'Just as Montfort's belief in the righteousness of the

Provisions had led him to trust in Louis's judgement in the first place, so now it justified the rejection of a verdict so obviously unrighteous.' Not very convincing but on we go.

Henry, of course, is not up to the turmoil that ensues. 'Control of events was passing to the men of war,' meaning to Edward and Simon. Edward jumps into the fray that breaks out along the Severn without proper planning or preparation. He nearly gets himself captured in Gloucester, which would be a disaster for the royalist camp, but fortunately he finds two fools in Walter Cantilupe and his cousin Henry de Montfort, who agree to withdraw their forces under the cover of a truce. Edward breaks his promise, punishes the town, and rides out to join his father at Oxford. Carpenter doesn't condone Edward's duplicity, but admires his drive and determination.

A good comparison between father and son can be seen at Oxford, where Henry defies a superstition that had scared off kings from entering the city. When Edward is king, he trembles and refuses to enter. In this instance, Carpenter says Henry was made of sterner stuff 'when it came to the spiritual things'. As for the war itself, Henry's strategy, if we can call it his strategy, is brilliant, the king ruthless in a way that might finally earn him some respect. He overruns Northampton, Simon's own Leicester, he forces the port cities to submit, and when guerrillas kill his favourite cook, he has several hundred of them executed. But Carpenter feels the rough treatment has 'stained' his cause, whereas Simon's own brutality in Rochester goes unmentioned.

What nobody can ignore is the massacre of 500 Jews that takes place in London by Montfortian partisans. At the minimum Simon is complicit in it, although Carpenter reminds us that 'Henry too had stoked the fires of hostility' towards the Jews and he blames him as much as Edward for their eventual explosion in 1290. The only person explicitly named in the killings by a contemporary is John fitzJohn, the son of one of the conspirators against Henry and the Lusignans in 1258. He was mourned by King Edward when he died, information Carpenter would have done better to leave out of the book.

Simon is bottled up in London, the war virtually lost. We should not be surprised who gets the credit. 'Edward had out-generalled him completely.' It all comes down to the battle of Lewes on 14 May 1264. Henry is reported to have had two horses killed under him and was much beaten about with swords and maces. Carpenter's response to that: 'The chronicler does not say that Henry did any beating back!' Apparently the king's men put him on a horse, he does nothing but get whacked, the horse goes down, his men put him on another horse, he does nothing but get whacked, the other horse goes down. Sounds like a Monty Python movie. If it's not simply implied that the king is fighting too, at least he is at the front leading his troops, whereas Simon is not. Edward is also not at the front. He takes off to slaughter the lightly armed militiamen of London, perhaps the ones who had insulted his mother. Simon sees it and throws in his reserves

against Henry's line. He gains the upper hand thanks to the blunder of the one who supposedly out-generalled him.

Henry manages to retreat to his headquarters at the priory and sets up a defensive perimeter. The battle is far from lost, especially with the castle still under his control. All Edward has to do is replenish his forces from nearby royalist garrisons and resume the attack the next day. Incredibly, he blunders again by choosing to fight his way into the priory to join his 'battered and bruised father'. Now both he and Henry are trapped. Before the battle, Edward boasted he would string up the lot of Montfortians. Carpenter does not make him eat his words, nor does he comment on whether Edward has cost his father the victory and his kingdom. But he always has time for Henry. Even after the king has wrung as many concessions as possible from Simon, Carpenter says he surrendered because he 'had had enough'. He then imagines him and Richard, a turncoat in Simon's book, being paraded before the citizens of London.

We are now halfway through the book. The section that covers Simon's regime until his downfall fifteen months later is a daunting 140 pages. The picture section unfolds here and just so there's no doubt whose story it is now, the first image shows Simon's armorial shield. He has appropriated Henry's biography as much as he has his kingdom. We should not be surprised by the glimpses we catch of the captive king here. His 'emasculatation emerges', he's kept in a 'diminished and degraded state', he is 'made to cooperate', he is completely 'subservient' to the man who made him. The former boy-king is never far from Carpenter's personal estimation of Henry, as when he writes that he 'stamped his feet' in one show of defiance. He even ratchets up the case for his predicament by turning 'Henry's misrule' into 'the evils of Henry's rule'.

Simon, on the other hand, is a wonder to behold. Having amassed an army to repel an invasion by the queen, we are invited to imagine him 'riding through the ranks, the very sight of him riveting and inspiring, urging the troops to defend themselves, their families and their land from this invasion by brutal and pitiless foreigners'. Eleanor is unable to pull it off, in part because of Simon's stalling tactics in negotiations (some might say bad faith), but her actions earned her praise from her contemporaries, who are quoted as saying 'she sweated so valiantly, strenuously and vigorously, like a most powerful virago'. How ironic it would have been had it come to battle, with one side led by a man born and bred in France, the other by a woman born and bred in France, both of them fighting for the soul of the English nation.

Simon is now at the height of his popularity. 'There was at all levels a belief that Montfort and his men were fighting for the good of the country.' Indeed, his men had 'the honour of following a lord of gigantic prestige and supreme ability'. In the Preface, Carpenter calls himself an academic rather than popular historian, but he is clearly

moved by this new dawn. 'As Montfortians awoke in the morning, as they passed through the day, they felt the balm of these miraculous events, rather as, flying in from a cold England, one feels at once on landing in the wonderful heat of a Mediterranean summer.'

Carpenter next considers the historical arguments for the deposition of one king and election of another, as had been the case, oddly enough, of Simon and Henry's fathers in 1212. Henry was spared the ordeal because, 'incompetent and profligate' that he was, he was still a 'good and pious man who brought many years of peace to the country'. Ultimately, it was Henry's reputation as *rex Christianissimus*, a most Christian king, as opposed to *rex inutilis*, a useless king, that saved him in the end. 'In the last analysis, it was better to have King Henry and King Edward than King Simon', says Carpenter, but he believes that it would have come to that had Simon won another war. His cronies among the bishops would have willingly crowned him or his son Henry de Montfort.

Of course, he lost the war. He and his son were butchered at Evesham in what was a turning point in English history. Carpenter doesn't speculate why Simon forced Henry to accompany him to his doom, but it's obvious. He was all he had left. His cause was lost if he lost the king. That shows how isolated his regime had become. In assessing 'the great earl' over five pages, Carpenter is very much aware of his faults and self-interest. 'If Montfort did much to create the Provisions, he also did much to destroy them.' And what if he had taken that fateful step and made himself king? 'I suspect he would have embarked on a reform of the realm, much like the one later driven forward by Edward I.'

It's 1265 and we've reached the halfway point of these years. Henry disinherits the Montfortians, who 'just as after Lewes, they had bathed in the balm of victory, so now they drowned in the blood of defeat'. For Carpenter, this policy was a disaster, but that's taking the short view of it. What disinheritance ultimately did was stamp out Montfortianism for good. Simon's followers were rehabilitated and the cult honouring his memory disappeared within a decade. Such was the restoration of royal authority that Edward took his time coming home to be crowned. He knew the monarchy was secure.

For Carpenter, Edward is the real boss in these final years of Henry's reign. But again, if he's the one giving the orders, he's fortunate the king is executing them for him. Henry spends the greater part of the War of the Disinherited in the field. He's in a belligerent, warlike mood, but Carpenter is indifferent. Perhaps he feels it's too little, too late. During the siege of London in 1267, Henry rides out to Hounslow to accept a challenge to battle, but his opponents are nowhere to be seen. (Apparently Simon wasn't the only big talker Henry must have found tiresome.) This incident isn't cited in the book, because Henry as a warrior king is simply too ridiculous for Carpenter to imagine.

He may have been in two pitched battles, on the front line no less, but it's unreasonable to expect heroics from a man who preferred family and home decorating to hunting and tournaments. Carpenter writes that at Evesham Simon and his men 'advanced manfully' to meet their enemies. And Henry? He doubts if he even carried a sword with him.

In these years Edward glides where Henry plods along, but Carpenter doesn't put it down to age in Henry's case. He was born to plod along. Meanwhile, two sons are born to the heir to the throne. The first is named after King John and not after John of Brittany as Carpenter suggests (all of Edward's sons were named after kings). If Henry and Edward have any kind of rivalry, it's over their crusade vows. Both are desperate to fulfil them, Henry for his soul, Edward for his legend. Reality wins out and Edward departs. Upon learning of his father's death, Edward is distraught. He knows he owes everything to him, something Simon could never bring himself to admit. Edward honours his father's memory, builds an elaborate tomb for him, but declines to promote sainthood for him the way they are doing it for Louis in France. There can only be one sainted king from their era and the French are in control of the papacy.

On 16 November 1272, Henry died in his bed at Westminster Palace. His grandfather, uncle and father had all died far from home, in agony of mind and body, as did his son, grandson, and both brothers-in-law Simon and Louis. He considered peace to be his greatest legacy. Carpenter points out that in respect of Wales, Scotland and France, it did not survive the century, but doesn't identify Edward as the culprit behind its demise. He thanks god that Henry was nothing like his son or other more famous kings who inflicted untold suffering and sacrifice with their 'mighty wars'. The obituaries are mixed, praising Henry for his peace and piety, condemning him for his foreigners and tribulations. The only laudatory obituary is the one written while he was very much alive. Henry, who loved a good joke, would have laughed.

Although concerned about his place in history, Henry did not actively seek publicity for himself the way Simon and Edward did. He put all his effort into promoting Edward the Confessor, for him the ideal ruler and the patron saint his people needed to get on with their lives in peace and harmony. To their misfortune, they chose war under the banner of St George instead. Henry might have hoped to keep his memory alive in Westminster Abbey, today the centrepiece of English national heritage, but the abbey's website says he was 'recklessly extravagant' in the money he spent building it. It sounds like they got their lesson in gratitude from Simon de Montfort.

Having bashed Henry for the better part of six hundred pages, Carpenter's assessment seems a foregone conclusion, but he follows up a long introductory list of failures with the admission that the circumstances of Henry's reign made it difficult for him or anyone to rule. All things considered, he did pretty well. So how to reconcile

seemingly endless failure with ultimate success? It's a matter of perspective. Take a magnifying glass to the canvas of Henry's long life and imperfections abound. But step back and take it all in and it's another story entirely. It's appropriate that Carpenter concludes both volumes of his biography by mentioning Westminster Abbey, which 'breathes Henry's spirit', but here too he cannot resist the tug of failure (the Holy Blood, Edward the Confessor). Although the last sentence swings back to Henry's favour, the insipid and unemotional 'The Abbey remains his greatest achievement' would have left the king crestfallen. How about a little glamour there, Dave?

My own assessment of this work is one of sadness and disappointment. All of the research on Henry that has come out in the past fifty years, much of it led by Carpenter himself, and yet the king portrayed here is the same fool foisted on us by historians going back to the Victorian age. For them, Henry is forever the boy-king who never reached maturity, a fumbling loser who should have stuck to architecture and left the rule of men to real men. Their heroes are Simon and Edward (with Louis buzzing around on the periphery). Of course, both have taken a beating of late for their vicious attitude towards the Jews, which Louis has somehow escaped, but even here Carpenter holds Henry just as responsible for their treatment and fate, almost trumpeting it as if to take some of the heat off Edward at least. No Henry, no expulsion of the Jews.

Having read this biography in its entirety, I am reminded of two similar works. The first is *The Magnificent Century*, a wonderful retelling of Henry's reign but whose author Thomas Costain, steeped in Victorian judgements, also glorifies Simon, Edward and Louis at Henry's expense. Then there's Robert Caro's multi-volume biography of Lyndon Johnson. After a brilliant start, where the young Johnson was given a fair shake, Caro turned against him with a vengeance and reserved all his admiration for his opponents. But there are moments when the fascination that brought him to his subject reappear and it's the same case here. Despite the endless criticism, even mockery, that Carpenter heaps on Henry, he cannot deny that the values espoused by the king—peace and family, to name but two—have withstood the test of time just as much as his building works.

In the end, Carpenter sums up Henry III as a man of contradictions, but through it all he remains a simple guy to the end. This brings us back to the question posed at the beginning, whether his biography requires two volumes. The reign of Edward III was only six years shorter and arguably more action-packed, yet Mark Ormrod got it all in a single, excellent book of six hundred pages. Since Simon de Montfort is the real star of the volume here, with Edward coming in a close second, it could well be Yale's way of insinuating Montfort into the English Monarchs Series. After all, he was the de facto king of England for a time. Perhaps what we have in these pages is a dry run for Oliver Cromwell appearing in the series someday.

Nothing like that is hinted here, and for sure, Carpenter's thematic chapters in both volumes give us the rich tapestry of Henry and his people that would otherwise go missing. He shares with us his 'greater appreciation of how Henry's story opens a window onto the wider culture of the age'. As for the man himself, his biographer leaves him 'in his various guises as though dappled in different colours through a stained-glass window'. He still lies in Westminster Abbey untouched after all these centuries. The only attempt to invade his tomb was eventually abandoned. 'Had I been there', says Carpenter, 'I hope I would have raised my voice in favour of allowing Henry to rest in peace'. Amen to that.

Darren Baker is the author of *Henry III: The Great King England Never Knew It Had*