

who knew the facts. This was not quite like our trial by jury; but you see that the people had a share in judging one another.

Sometimes the kings wanted to change their old laws, or to make new ones. But the free people said it was not right or fair to make laws for them without telling them first what they were to be. So when the king wanted to make a new law, he called together his Aldermen and Bishops and Thaners to hear what the new law was to be, and if they liked it they said so, and it was made into a law, and then everybody obeyed it, and the judges punished those who did not; but if they did not like what the king wished, they all said so, and then it was not made into a law. And, besides the Noblemen and Bishops, the people of the towns were called by the king, to hear what the new law was to be.

But it would have been very troublesome for all the men to go to the king every time he wanted to make a new law, or to change an old one, so the men in one town said, It will be better to send three or four of the cleverest of our neighbours to the king, and they can let us know about the new law, and we will tell them what to say for us, and we will stay at home, and plough the fields, and mind our shops; and so they did, and the men that were sent by their neighbours went to the king; but they had no share in making the laws.

And when the king, and the nobles and bishops, and the men who were sent by their neighbours, met all together in one place to talk about the laws, they called it a Witena-gemot, which means, in the old English of those times, a Meeting of Wise Men. It was something like what we call a Parliament,