Any picture of Capetian policy towards the great fiefs which represents it as one of continuous pressure — as a war of attrition almost — is somewhat misleading. No positive intention of consolidation lay behind the royal acquisitions and annexations, and no consistent plan of campaign produced the advances which we have described. Chance opportunities often precipitated actions of which the consequences were far from clearly envisaged. There is no evidence of any sort to suggest that the Capetians had any clear idea of the course that they were following, beyond a general conviction that no occasion of possible aggrandisement should be neglected.

This lack of consequence emerges in full clarity from a study in detail of their actual acquisitions. At the same time as the dynasty was solving its political problems by a policy directed, however intermittently, against the great fiefs, it was also missing no opportunity of laying its hands on lands and jurisdictions of any and every sort, without any geographical preconceptions or any reservations as to the methods used.

These acquisitions cannot now be listed completely. A prior necessity — a feudal geography of France — is still wanting, and is likely long to remain so. Given such a work, it would be possible to examine individual fiefs in detail (as far as the evidence allows), which in its turn would make it easy to put precise dates on all royal gains. But this last task is far from easy. As we have seen, the fourteenth-century royal officials themselves had no very exact idea of the nature and extent of the royal rights. It is unfortunate that only fragments survive of the enquiries which they carried out to remedy their ignorance. These, in any case, do not always provide satisfactory answers for our purposes; whilst
they determine the extent of royal lands and rights, they do so by reference to documents which are not necessarily always those recording the original cessions to the crown.

Greater precision is possible in some of the more important cases. Longnon, in his lectures on *La formation de l'unité française*, set out the principal additions to the royal domain reign by reign. But he was limited by the fact that he was speaking to an audience, rather than writing a book, and he therefore forbore to enter into great detail in cases of minor importance. As a result, the reader of his work might be tempted to imagine that the Capetians built up their domain in a series of large-scale operations; he might even find it somewhat difficult to discover why these took place at all. It would be not easy for him to see that often the purchase of a small estate or of petty rights of jurisdiction was the first step on the road to an acquisition of much greater importance.

The methods used bore a considerable similarity to those employed in dealing with the great fiefs. The Capetians rarely used force. Where possible they preferred to secure a complete or partial renunciation from the previous holder, and to have it recorded in properly legal manner, free from any conditions or restrictions which might leave the royal title open to challenge in the future. But even a cautious policy of this sort owed much to the crown's strength, however discreetly it might be employed. The stronger the kings became, the more they were able to increase their domain, and the less reluctantly possessors of lands and rights turned towards them, sought their suzerainty, and fell in with their search for fresh acquisitions.

Although the magnitude of this piecemeal process increased sharply from the reign of Philip Augustus onwards, it had begun at a much earlier date. The comparatively brief catalogue of earlier gains is merely a reflection of the scarcity of all written evidence for the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

It is hardly surprising that the earliest recorded instances involved the churches of the realm, and in particular those situated in the great fiefs of central and southern France. Surrounded by covetous enemies, these churches were ready and eager to turn to their natural protector, the King of France, and to remind him of