

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**HAROLD : THE LAST
OF THE SAXON
KINGS — COMPLETE**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

**Harold : the Last of the
Saxon Kings — Complete**

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton Harold : the Last of the Saxon Kings — Complete

DEDICATORY EPISTLE

TO THE RIGHT HON. C. T. D'EYNCOURT, M.P

I dedicate to you, my dear friend, a work, principally composed under your hospitable roof; and to the materials of which your library, rich in the authorities I most needed, largely contributed.

The idea of founding an historical romance on an event so important and so national as the Norman Invasion, I had long entertained, and the chronicles of that time had long been familiar to me. But it is an old habit of mine, to linger over the plan and subject of a work, for years, perhaps, before the work has, in truth, advanced a sentence; “busying myself,” as old Burton saith, “with this playing labour—otiosaque diligentia ut vitarem torpore feriendi.”

The main consideration which long withheld me from the task, was in my sense of the unfamiliarity of the ordinary reader with the characters, events, and, so to speak, with the very physiognomy of a period ante Agamemnona; before the brilliant age of matured chivalry, which has given to song and romance the deeds of the later knighthood, and the glorious frenzy of the Crusades. The Norman Conquest was our Trojan War; an epoch beyond which our learning seldom induces our imagination to ascend.

In venturing on ground so new to fiction, I saw before me the option of apparent pedantry, in the obtrusion of such research as might carry the reader along with the Author, fairly and truly into the real records of the time; or of throwing aside pretensions to accuracy altogether;—and so rest contented to turn history into flagrant romance, rather than pursue my own conception of extracting its natural romance from the actual history. Finally, not without some encouragement from you, (whereof take your due share of blame!) I decided to hazard the attempt, and to adopt that mode of treatment which, if making larger demand on the attention of the reader, seemed the more complimentary to his judgment.

The age itself, once duly examined, is full of those elements which should awaken interest, and appeal to the imagination. Not untruly has Sismondi said, that the “Eleventh Century has a right to be considered a great age. It was a period of life and of creation; all that there was of noble, heroic, and vigorous in the Middle Ages commenced at that epoch.” 1 But to us Englishmen in especial, besides the more animated interest in that spirit of adventure, enterprise, and improvement, of which the Norman chivalry was the noblest type, there is an interest more touching and deep in those last glimpses of the old Saxon monarchy, which open upon us in the mournful pages of our chroniclers.

I have sought in this work, less to portray mere manners, which modern researches have rendered familiar to ordinary students in our history, than to bring forward the great characters, so carelessly dismissed in the long and loose record of centuries; to show more clearly the motives and policy of the agents in an event the most memorable in Europe; and to convey a definite, if general, notion of the human beings, whose brains schemed, and whose hearts beat, in that realm of shadows which lies behind the Norman Conquest;

“Spes hominum caecos, morbos, votumque, labores,
Et passim toto volitantes aethere curas.” 2

I have thus been faithful to the leading historical incidents in the grand tragedy of Harold, and as careful as contradictory evidences will permit, both as to accuracy in the delineation of character, and correctness in that chronological chain of dates without which there can be no historical philosophy; that is, no tangible link between the cause and the effect. The fictitious part of my narrative is, as in “Rienzi,” and the “Last of the Barons,” confined chiefly to the private life, with its domain of incident and passion, which is the legitimate appanage of novelist or poet. The love story of Harold and Edith is told differently from the well-known legend, which implies a less pure connection. But the whole legend respecting the Edeva faira (Edith the fair) whose name meets us in the “Domesday” roll, rests upon very slight authority considering its popular acceptance [3](#); and the reasons for my alterations will be sufficiently obvious in a work intended not only for general perusal, but which on many accounts, I hope, may be entrusted fearlessly to the young; while those alterations are in strict accordance with the spirit of the time, and tend to illustrate one of its most marked peculiarities.

More apology is perhaps due for the liberal use to which I have applied the superstitions of the age. But with the age itself those superstitions are so interwoven—they meet us so constantly, whether in the pages of our own chroniclers, or the records of the kindred Scandinavians—they are so intruded into the very laws, so blended with the very life, of our Saxon forefathers, that without employing them, in somewhat of the same credulous spirit with which they were originally conceived, no vivid impression of the People they influenced can be conveyed. Not without truth has an Italian writer remarked, “that he who would depict philosophically an unphilosophical age, should remember that, to be familiar with children, one must sometimes think and feel as a child.”

Yet it has not been my main endeavour to make these ghostly agencies conducive to the ordinary poetical purposes of terror, and if that effect be at all created by them, it will be, I apprehend, rather subsidiary to the more historical sources of interest than, in itself, a leading or popular characteristic of the work. My object, indeed, in the introduction of the Danish Vala especially, has been perhaps as much addressed to the reason as to the fancy, in showing what large, if dim, remains of the ancient “heathenese” still kept their ground on the Saxon soil, contending with and contrasting the monkish superstitions, by which they were ultimately replaced. Hilda is not in history; but without the romantic impersonation of that which Hilda represents, the history of the time would be imperfectly understood.

In the character of Harold—while I have carefully examined and weighed the scanty evidences of its distinguishing attributes which are yet preserved to us—and, in spite of no unnatural partiality, have not concealed what appear to me its deficiencies, and still less the great error of the life it illustrates,—I have attempted, somewhat and slightly, to shadow out the ideal of the pure Saxon character, such as it was then, with its large qualities undeveloped, but marked already by patient endurance, love of justice, and freedom—the manly sense of duty rather than the chivalric sentiment of honour—and that indestructible element of practical purpose and courageous will, which, defying all conquest, and steadfast in all peril, was ordained to achieve so vast an influence over the destinies of the world.

To the Norman Duke, I believe, I have been as lenient as justice will permit, though it is as impossible to deny his craft as to dispute his genius; and so far as the scope of my work would allow, I trust that I have indicated fairly the grand characteristics of his countrymen, more truly chivalric than their lord. It has happened, unfortunately for that illustrious race of men, that they have seemed to us, in England, represented by the Anglo-Norman kings. The fierce and plotting William, the vain and worthless Rufus, the cold-blooded and relentless Henry, are no adequate representatives of the far nobler Norman vavasours, whom even the English Chronicler admits to have been “kind masters,” and to whom, in spite of their kings, the after liberties of England were so largely indebted. But this work closes on the Field of Hastings; and in that noble struggle for national independence, the

sympathies of every true son of the land, even if tracing his lineage back to the Norman victor, must be on the side of the patriot Harold.

In the notes, which I have thought necessary aids to the better comprehension of these volumes, my only wish has been to convey to the general reader such illustrative information as may familiarise him more easily with the subject-matter of the book, or refresh his memory on incidental details not without a national interest. In the mere references to authorities I do not pretend to arrogate to a fiction the proper character of a history; the references are chiefly used either where wishing pointedly to distinguish from invention what was borrowed from a chronicle, or when differing from some popular historian to whom the reader might be likely to refer, it seemed well to state the authority upon which the difference was founded. [4](#)

In fact, my main object has been one that compelled me to admit graver matter than is common in romance, but which I would fain hope may be saved from the charge of dulness by some national sympathy between author and reader; my object is attained, and attained only, if, in closing the last page of this work, the reader shall find that, in spite of the fictitious materials admitted, he has formed a clearer and more intimate acquaintance with a time, heroic though remote, and characters which ought to have a household interest to Englishmen, than the succinct accounts of the mere historian could possibly afford him.

Thus, my dear D'Eyncourt, under cover of an address to yourself, have I made to the Public those explanations which authors in general (and I not the least so) are often overanxious to render.

This task done, my thoughts naturally fly back to the associations I connected with your name when I placed it at the head of this epistle. Again I seem to find myself under your friendly roof; again to greet my provident host entering that gothic chamber in which I had been permitted to establish my unsocial study, heralding the advent of majestic folios, and heaping libraries round the unworthy work. Again, pausing from my labour, I look through that castle casement, and beyond that feudal moat, over the broad landscapes which, if I err not, took their name from the proud brother of the Conqueror himself; or when, in those winter nights, the grim old tapestry waved in the dim recesses, I hear again the Saxon thegn winding his horn at the turret door, and demanding admittance to the halls from which the prelate of Bayeux had so unrighteously expelled him [5](#)—what marvel, that I lived in the times of which I wrote, Saxon with the Saxon, Norman with the Norman—that I entered into no gossip less venerable than that current at the Court of the Confessor, or startled my fellow-guests (when I deigned to meet them) with the last news which Harold's spies had brought over from the Camp at St. Valery? With all those folios, giants of the gone world, rising around me daily, more and more, higher and higher—Ossa upon Pelion—on chair and table, hearth and floor; invasive as Normans, indomitable as Saxons, and tall as the tallest Danes (ruthless host, I behold them still!)—with all those disburied spectres rampant in the chamber, all the armour rusting in thy galleries, all those mutilated statues of early English kings (including St. Edward himself)—niched into thy grey, ivied walls—say in thy conscience, O host, (if indeed that conscience be not wholly callous!) shall I ever return to the nineteenth century again?

But far beyond these recent associations of a single winter (for which heaven assoil thee!) goes the memory of a friendship of many winters, and proof to the storms of all. Often have I come for advice to your wisdom, and sympathy to your heart, bearing back with me, in all such seasons, new increase to that pleasurable gratitude which is, perhaps, the rarest, nor the least happy sentiment, that experience leaves to man. Some differences, it may be,—whether on those public questions which we see, every day, alienating friendships that should have been beyond the reach of laws and kings;—or on the more scholastic controversies which as keenly interest the minds of educated men,—may at times deny to us the *idem velle, atque idem nolle*; but the *firma amicitia* needs not those common links; the sunshine does not leave the wave for the slight ripple which the casual stone brings a moment to the surface.

Accept, in this dedication of a work which has lain so long on my mind, and been endeared to me from many causes, the token of an affection for you and yours, strong as the ties of kindred, and lasting as the belief in truth.

E. B. L.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

The author of an able and learned article on MABILLON 6 in the “Edinburgh Review,” has accurately described my aim in this work; although, with that generous courtesy which characterises the true scholar, in referring to the labours of a contemporary, he has overrated my success. It was indeed my aim “to solve the problem how to produce the greatest amount of dramatic effect at the least expense of historical truth”—I borrow the words of the Reviewer, since none other could so tersely express my design, or so clearly account for the leading characteristics in its conduct and completion.

There are two ways of employing the materials of History in the service of Romance: the one consists in lending to ideal personages, and to an imaginary fable, the additional interest to be derived from historical groupings: the other, in extracting the main interest of romantic narrative from History itself. Those who adopt the former mode are at liberty to exclude all that does not contribute to theatrical effect or picturesque composition; their fidelity to the period they select is towards the manners and costume, not towards the precise order of events, the moral causes from which the events proceeded, and the physical agencies by which they were influenced and controlled. The plan thus adopted is unquestionably the more popular and attractive, and, being favoured by the most illustrious writers of historical romance, there is presumptive reason for supposing it to be also that which is the more agreeable to the art of fiction.

But he who wishes to avoid the ground pre-occupied by others, and claim in the world of literature some spot, however humble, which he may “plough with his own heifer,” will seek to establish himself not where the land is the most fertile, but where it is the least enclosed. So, when I first turned my attention to Historical Romance, my main aim was to avoid as much as possible those fairer portions of the soil that had been appropriated by the first discoverers. The great author of *Ivanhoe*, and those amongst whom, abroad and at home, his mantle was divided, had employed History to aid Romance; I contented myself with the humbler task to employ Romance in the aid of History,—to extract from authentic but neglected chronicles, and the unfrequented storehouse of Archaeology, the incidents and details that enliven the dry narrative of facts to which the general historian is confined,—construct my plot from the actual events themselves, and place the staple of such interest as I could create in reciting the struggles, and delineating the characters, of those who had been the living actors in the real drama. For the main materials of the three Historical Romances I have composed, I consulted the original authorities of the time with a care as scrupulous, as if intending to write, not a fiction but a history. And having formed the best judgment I could of the events and characters of the age, I adhered faithfully to what, as an Historian, I should have held to be the true course and true causes of the great political events, and the essential attributes of the principal agents. Solely in that inward life which, not only as apart from the more public and historical, but which, as almost wholly unknown, becomes the fair domain of the poet, did I claim the legitimate privileges of fiction, and even here I employed the agency of the passions only so far as they served to illustrate what I believed to be the genuine natures of the beings who had actually lived, and to restore the warmth of the human heart to the images recalled from the grave.

Thus, even had I the gifts of my most illustrious predecessors, I should be precluded the use of many of the more brilliant. I shut myself out from the wider scope permitted to their fancy, and denied myself the license to choose or select materials, alter dates, vary causes and effects according to the convenience of that more imperial fiction which invents the Probable where it discards the Real. The mode I have adopted has perhaps only this merit, that it is my own—mine by discovery and mine by labour. And if I can raise not the spirits that obeyed the great master of romance, nor gain the key to the fairyland that opened to his spell,—at least I have not rifled the tomb of the wizard to steal my art from the book that lies clasped on his breast.

In treating of an age with which the general reader is so unfamiliar as that preceding the Norman Conquest, it is impossible to avoid (especially in the earlier portions of my tale) those explanations of the very character of the time which would have been unnecessary if I had only sought in History the picturesque accompaniments to Romance. I have to do more than present an amusing picture of national manners—detail the dress, and describe the banquet. According to the plan I adopt, I have to make the reader acquainted with the imperfect fusion of races in Saxon England, familiarise him with the contests of parties and the ambition of chiefs, show him the strength and the weakness of a kindly but ignorant church; of a brave but turbulent aristocracy; of a people partially free, and naturally energetic, but disunited by successive immigrations, and having lost much of the proud jealousies of national liberty by submission to the preceding conquests of the Dane; acquiescent in the sway of foreign kings, and with that bulwark against invasion which an hereditary order of aristocracy usually erects, loosened to its very foundations by the copious admixture of foreign nobles. I have to present to the reader, here, the imbecile priestcraft of the illiterate monk, there, the dark superstition that still consulted the deities of the North by runes on the elm bark and adjurations of the dead. And in contrast to those pictures of a decrepit monarchy and a fated race, I have to bring forcibly before the reader the vigorous attributes of the coming conquerors,—the stern will and deep guile of the Norman chief—the comparative knowledge of the rising Norman Church—the nascent spirit of chivalry in the Norman vavasours; a spirit destined to emancipate the very people it contributed to enslave, associated, as it imperfectly was, with the sense of freedom: disdainful, it is true, of the villein, but proudly curbing, though into feudal limits, the domination of the liege. In a word, I must place fully before the reader, if I would be faithful to the plan of my work, the political and moral features of the age, as well as its lighter and livelier attributes, and so lead him to perceive, when he has closed the book, why England was conquered, and how England survived the Conquest.

In accomplishing this task, I inevitably incur the objections which the task itself raises up,—objections to the labour it has cost; to the information which the labour was undertaken in order to bestow; objections to passages which seem to interrupt the narrative, but which in reality prepare for the incidents it embraces, or explain the position of the persons whose characters it illustrates, —whose fate it involves; objections to the reference to authorities, where a fact might be disputed, or mistaken for fiction; objections to the use of Saxon words, for which no accurate synonyms could be exchanged; objections, in short, to the colouring, conduct, and composition of the whole work; objections to all that separate it from the common crowd of Romances, and stamp on it, for good or for bad, a character peculiarly its own. Objections of this kind I cannot remove, though I have carefully weighed them all. And with regard to the objection most important to story-teller and novel reader—viz., the dryness of some of the earlier portions, though I have thrice gone over those passages, with the stern determination to inflict summary justice upon every unnecessary line, I must own to my regret that I have found but little which it was possible to omit without rendering the after narrative obscure, and without injuring whatever of more stirring interest the story, as it opens, may afford to the general reader of Romance.

As to the Saxon words used, an explanation of all those that can be presumed unintelligible to a person of ordinary education, is given either in the text or a foot-note. Such archaisms are much less numerous than certain critics would fain represent them to be: and they have rarely indeed been admitted where other words could have been employed without a glaring anachronism, or a tedious periphrase. Would it indeed be possible, for instance, to convey a notion of the customs and manners of our Saxon forefathers without employing words so mixed up with their daily usages and modes of thinking as “weregeld” and “niddering”? Would any words from the modern vocabulary suggest the same idea, or embody the same meaning?

One critic good-humouredly exclaims, “We have a full attendance of thegns and cnehts, but we should have liked much better our old friends and approved good masters thanes and knights.” Nothing could be more apposite for my justification than the instances here quoted in censure; nothing

could more plainly vindicate the necessity of employing the Saxon words. For I should sadly indeed have misled the reader if I had used the word knight in an age when knights were wholly unknown to the Anglo-Saxon and *cneht* no more means what we understand by knight, than a *templar* in modern phrase means a man in chain mail vowed to celibacy, and the redemption of the Holy Sepulchre from the hands of the Mussulman. While, since *thegn* and *thane* are both archaisms, I prefer the former; not only for the same reason that induces Sir Francis Palgrave to prefer it, *viz.*, because it is the more etymologically correct; but because we take from our neighbours the Scotch, not only the word *thane*, but the sense in which we apply it; and that sense is not the same that we ought to attach to the various and complicated notions of nobility which the Anglo-Saxon comprehended in the title of *thegn*. It has been peremptorily said by more than one writer in periodicals, that I have overrated the erudition of William, in permitting him to know Latin; nay, to have read the *Comments of Caesar* at the age of eight.—Where these gentlemen find the authorities to confute my statement I know not; all I know is, that in the statement I have followed the original authorities usually deemed the best. And I content myself with referring the disputants to a work not so difficult to procure as (and certainly more pleasant to read than) the old *Chronicles*. In Miss Strickland's "*Lives of the Queens of England*," (*Matilda of Flanders*,) the same statement is made, and no doubt upon the same authorities.

More surprised should I be (if modern criticism had not taught me in all matters of assumption the *nil admirari*), to find it alleged that I have overstated not only the learning of the Norman duke, but that which flourished in Normandy under his reign; for I should have thought that the fact of the learning which sprung up in the most thriving period of that principality; the rapidity of its growth; the benefits it derived from Lanfranc; the encouragement it received from William, had been phenomena too remarkable in the annals of the age, and in the history of literature, to have met with an incredulity which the most moderate amount of information would have sufficed to dispel. Not to refer such sceptics to graver authorities, historical and ecclesiastical, in order to justify my representations of that learning which, under William the Bastard, made the schools of Normandy the popular academies of Europe, a page or two in a book so accessible as *Villemain's "Tableau du Moyen Age*," will perhaps suffice to convince them of the hastiness of their censure, and the error of their impressions.

It is stated in the *Athenaeum*, and, I believe, by a writer whose authority on the merits of opera singers I am far from contesting but of whose competence to instruct the world in any other department of human industry or knowledge I am less persuaded, "that I am much mistaken when I represent not merely the clergy but the young soldiers and courtiers of the reign of the Confessor, as well acquainted with the literature of Greece and Rome."

The remark, to say the least of it, is disingenuous. I have done no such thing. This general animadversion is only justified by a reference to the pedantry of the Norman Mallet de Graville—and it is expressly stated in the text that Mallet de Graville was originally intended for the Church, and that it was the peculiarity of his literary information, rare in a soldier (but for which his earlier studies for the ecclesiastical calling readily account, at a time when the Norman convent of Bec was already so famous for the erudition of its teachers, and the number of its scholars,) that attracted towards him the notice of Lanfranc, and founded his fortunes. Pedantry is made one of his characteristics (as it generally was the characteristic of any man with some pretensions to scholarship, in the earlier ages;) and if he indulges in a classical allusion, whether in taunting a courtier or conversing with a "Saxon from the wealds of Kent," it is no more out of keeping with the pedantry ascribed to him, than it is unnatural in *Dominie Sampson* to rail at *Meg Merrilies* in Latin, or *James the First* to examine a young courtier in the same unfamiliar language. Nor should the critic in question, when inviting his readers to condemn me for making Mallet de Graville quote *Horace*, have omitted to state that de Graville expressly laments that he had never read, nor could even procure, a copy of the Roman poet—judging only of the merits of *Horace* by an extract in some monkish author, who was equally likely to have picked up his quotation second-hand.

So, when a reference is made either by Graville, or by any one else in the romance, to Homeric fables and personages, a critic who had gone through the ordinary education of an English gentleman would never thereby have assumed that the person so referring had read the poems of Homer themselves—he would have known that Homeric fables, or personages, though not the Homeric poems, were made familiar, by quaint travesties [7](#), even to the most illiterate audience of the gothic age. It was scarcely more necessary to know Homer then than now, in order to have heard of Ulysses. The writer in the Athenaeum is acquainted with Homeric personages, but who on earth would ever presume to assert that he is acquainted with Homer?

Some doubt has been thrown upon my accuracy in ascribing to the Anglo-Saxon the enjoyments of certain luxuries (gold and silver plate—the use of glass, etc.), which were extremely rare in an age much more recent. There is no ground for that doubt; nor is there a single article of such luxury named in the text, for the mention of which I have not ample authority.

I have indeed devoted to this work a degree of research which, if unusual to romance, I cannot consider superfluous when illustrating an age so remote, and events unparalleled in their influence over the destinies of England. Nor am I without the hope, that what the romance-reader at first regards as a defect, he may ultimately acknowledge as a merit;—forgiving me that strain on his attention by which alone I could leave distinct in his memory the action and the actors in that solemn tragedy which closed on the field of Hastings, over the corpse of the Last Saxon King.

HAROLD, THE LAST OF THE SAXON KINGS

BOOK I. THE NORMAN VISITOR, THE SAXON KING, AND THE DANISH PROPHETESS

CHAPTER I

Merry was the month of May in the year of our Lord 1052. Few were the boys, and few the lasses, who overslept themselves on the first of that buxom month. Long ere the dawn, the crowds had sought mead and woodland, to cut poles and wreath flowers. Many a mead then lay fair and green beyond the village of Charing, and behind the isle of Thorney, (amidst the brakes and briars of which were then rising fast and fair the Hall and Abbey of Westminster;) many a wood lay dark in the starlight, along the higher ground that sloped from the dank Strand, with its numerous canals or dykes;—and on either side of the great road into Kent:—flutes and horns sounded far and near through the green places, and laughter and song, and the crash of breaking boughs.

As the dawn came grey up the east, arch and blooming faces bowed down to bathe in the May dew. Patient oxen stood dozing by the hedge-rows, all fragrant with blossoms, till the gay spoilers of the May came forth from the woods with lusty poles, followed by girls with laps full of flowers, which they had caught asleep. The poles were pranked with nose-gays, and a chaplet was hung round the horns of every ox. Then towards daybreak, the processions streamed back into the city, through all its gates; boys with their May-gads (peeled willow wands twined with cowslips) going before; and clear through the lively din of the horns and flutes, and amidst the moving grove of branches, choral voices, singing some early Saxon stave, precursor of the later song—

“We have brought the summer home.”

Often in the good old days before the Monk-king reigned, kings and ealdermen had thus gone forth a-maying; but these merriments, savouring of heathenness, that good prince disliked: nevertheless the song was as blithe, and the boughs were as green, as if king and ealderman had walked in the train.

On the great Kent road, the fairest meads for the cowslip, and the greenest woods for the bough, surrounded a large building that once had belonged to some voluptuous Roman, now all defaced and despoiled; but the boys and the lasses shunned those demesnes; and even in their mirth, as they passed homeward along the road, and saw near the ruined walls, and timbered outbuildings, grey Druid stones (that spoke of an age before either Saxon or Roman invader) gleaming through the dawn—the song was hushed—the very youngest crossed themselves; and the elder, in solemn whispers, suggested the precaution of changing the song into a psalm. For in that old building dwelt Hilda, of famous and dark repute; Hilda, who, despite all law and canon, was still believed to practise the dismal arts of the Wicca and Morthwyrtha (the witch and worshipper of the dead). But once out of sight of those fearful precincts, the psalm was forgotten, and again broke, loud, clear, and silvery, the joyous chorus.

So, entering London about sunrise, doors and windows were duly wreathed with garlands; and every village in the suburbs had its May-pole, which stood in its place all the year. On that happy day

labour rested; ceorl and theowe had alike a holiday to dance, and tumble round the May-pole; and thus, on the first of May—Youth, and Mirth, and Music, “brought the summer home.”

The next day you might still see where the buxom bands had been; you might track their way by fallen flowers, and green leaves, and the deep ruts made by oxen (yoked often in teams from twenty to forty, in the wains that carried home the poles); and fair and frequent throughout the land, from any eminence, you might behold the hamlet swards still crowned with the May trees, and air still seemed fragrant with their garlands.

It is on that second day of May, 1052, that my story opens, at the House of Hilda, the reputed Morthwyrtha. It stood upon a gentle and verdant height; and, even through all the barbarous mutilation it had undergone from barbarian hands, enough was left strikingly to contrast the ordinary abodes of the Saxon.

The remains of Roman art were indeed still numerous throughout England, but it happened rarely that the Saxon had chosen his home amidst the villas of those noble and primal conquerors. Our first forefathers were more inclined to destroy than to adapt.

By what chance this building became an exception to the ordinary rule, it is now impossible to conjecture, but from a very remote period it had sheltered successive races of Teuton lords.

The changes wrought in the edifice were mournful and grotesque. What was now the Hall, had evidently been the atrium; the round shield, with its pointed boss, the spear, sword, and small curved saex of the early Teuton, were suspended from the columns on which once had been wreathed the flowers; in the centre of the floor, where fragments of the old mosaic still glistened from the hard-pressed paving of clay and lime, what now was the fire-place had been the impluvium, and the smoke went sullenly through the aperture in the roof, made of old to receive the rains of heaven. Around the Hall were still left the old cubicula or dormitories, (small, high, and lighted but from the doors,) which now served for the sleeping-rooms of the humbler guest or the household servant; while at the farther end of the Hall, the wide space between the columns, which had once given ample vista from graceful awnings into tablinum and viridarium, was filled up with rude rubble and Roman bricks, leaving but a low, round, arched door, that still led into the tablinum. But that tablinum, formerly the gayest state-room of the Roman lord, was now filled with various lumber, piles of faggots, and farming utensils. On either side of this desecrated apartment, stretched, to the right, the old lararium, stripped of its ancient images of ancestor and god; to the left, what had been the gynoeceum (women’s apartment).

One side of the ancient peristyle, which was of vast extent, was now converted into stabling, sties for swine, and stalls for oxen. On the other side was constructed a Christian chapel, made of rough oak planks, fastened by plates at the top, and with a roof of thatched reeds. The columns and wall at the extreme end of the peristyle were a mass of ruins, through the gigantic rents of which loomed a grassy hillock, its sides partially covered with clumps of furze. On this hillock were the mutilated remains of an ancient Druidical crommel, in the centre of which (near a funeral mound, or barrow, with the bautastean, or gravestone, of some early Saxon chief at one end) had been sacrilegiously placed an altar to Thor, as was apparent both from the shape, from a rude, half-obliterated, sculptured relief of the god, with his lifted hammer, and a few Runic letters. Amidst the temple of the Briton the Saxon had reared the shrine of his triumphant war-god.

Now still, amidst the ruins of that extreme side of the peristyle which opened to this hillock were left, first, an ancient Roman fountain, that now served to water the swine, and next, a small sacellum, or fane to Bacchus (as relief and frieze, yet spared, betokened): thus the eye, at one survey, beheld the shrines of four creeds: the Druid, mystical and symbolical; the Roman, sensual, but humane; the Teutonic, ruthless and destroying; and, latest riser and surviving all, though as yet with but little of its gentler influence over the deeds of men, the edifice of the Faith of Peace.

Across the peristyle, theowes and swineherds passed to and fro:—in the atrium, men of a higher class, half-armed, were, some drinking, some at dice, some playing with huge hounds, or caressing the hawks that stood grave and solemn on their perches.

The lararium was deserted; the gynoeceum was still, as in the Roman time, the favoured apartment of the female portion of the household, and indeed bore the same name [8](#), and with the group there assembled we have now to do.

The appliances of the chamber showed the rank and wealth of the owner. At that period the domestic luxury of the rich was infinitely greater than has been generally supposed. The industry of the women decorated wall and furniture with needlework and hangings: and as a thegn forfeited his rank if he lost his lands, so the higher orders of an aristocracy rather of wealth than birth had, usually, a certain portion of superfluous riches, which served to flow towards the bazaars of the East and the nearer markets of Flanders and Saracenic Spain.

In this room the walls were draped with silken hangings richly embroidered. The single window was glazed with a dull grey glass [9](#). On a beaufet were ranged horns tipped with silver, and a few vessels of pure gold. A small circular table in the centre was supported by symbolical monsters quaintly carved. At one side of the wall, on a long settle, some half-a-dozen handmaids were employed in spinning; remote from them, and near the window, sat a woman advanced in years, and of a mien and aspect singularly majestic. Upon a small tripod before her was a Runic manuscript, and an inkstand of elegant form, with a silver graphium, or pen. At her feet reclined a girl somewhat about the age of sixteen, her long hair parted across her forehead and falling far down her shoulders. Her dress was a linen under-tunic, with long sleeves, rising high to the throat, and without one of the modern artificial restraints of the shape, the simple belt sufficed to show the slender proportions and delicate outline of the wearer. The colour of the dress was of the purest white, but its hems, or borders, were richly embroidered. This girl's beauty was something marvellous. In a land proverbial for fair women, it had already obtained her the name of "the fair." In that beauty were blended, not as yet without a struggle for mastery, the two expressions seldom united in one countenance, the soft and the noble; indeed in the whole aspect there was the evidence of some internal struggle; the intelligence was not yet complete; the soul and heart were not yet united: and Edith the Christian maid dwelt in the home of Hilda the heathen prophetess. The girl's blue eyes, rendered dark by the shade of their long lashes, were fixed intently upon the stern and troubled countenance which was bent upon her own, but bent with that abstract gaze which shows that the soul is absent from the sight. So sate Hilda, and so reclined her grandchild Edith.

"Grandam," said the girl in a low voice and after a long pause; and the sound of her voice so startled the handmaids, that every spindle stopped for a moment and then plied with renewed activity; "Grandam, what troubles you—are you not thinking of the great Earl and his fair sons, now outlawed far over the wide seas?"

As the girl spoke, Hilda started slightly, like one awakened from a dream; and when Edith had concluded her question, she rose slowly to the height of a statue, unbowed by her years, and far towering above even the ordinary standard of men; and turning from the child, her eye fell upon the row of silent maids, each at her rapid, noiseless, stealthy work. "Ho!" said she; her cold and haughty eye gleaming as she spoke; "yesterday they brought home the summer—to-day, ye aid to bring home the winter. Weave well—heed well warf and woof; Skulda [10](#) is amongst ye, and her pale fingers guide the web!"

The maidens lifted not their eyes, though in every cheek the colour paled at the words of the mistress. The spindles revolved, the thread shot, and again there was silence more freezing than before.

"Askest thou," said Hilda at length, passing to the child, as if the question so long addressed to her ear had only just reached her mind; "askest thou if I thought of the Earl and his fair sons?—yea, I heard the smith welding arms on the anvil, and the hammer of the shipwright shaping strong ribs for the horses of the sea. Ere the reaper has bound his sheaves, Earl Godwin will scare the Normans in the halls of the Monk-king, as the hawk scares the brood in the dovecot. Weave well, heed well warf and woof, nimble maidens—strong be the texture, for biting is the worm."

“What weave they, then, good grandmother?” asked the girl, with wonder and awe in her soft mild eyes.

“The winding-sheet of the great!”

Hilda’s lips closed, but her eyes, yet brighter than before, gazed upon space, and her pale hand seemed tracing letters, like runes, in the air.

Then slowly she turned, and looked forth through the dull window. “Give me my coverchief and my staff,” said she quickly.

Every one of the handmaids, blithe for excuse to quit a task which seemed recently commenced, and was certainly not endeared to them by the knowledge of its purpose communicated to them by the lady, rose to obey.

Unheeding the hands that vied with each other, Hilda took the hood, and drew it partially over her brow. Leaning lightly on a long staff, the head of which formed a raven, carved from some wood stained black, she passed into the hall, and thence through the desecrated tablinum, into the mighty court formed by the shattered peristyle; there she stopped, mused a moment, and called on Edith. The girl was soon by her side.

“Come with me.—There is a face you shall see but twice in life;—this day,”—and Hilda paused, and the rigid and almost colossal beauty of her countenance softened.

“And when again, my grandmother?”

“Child, put thy warm hand in mine. So! the vision darkens from me.—when again, saidst thou, Edith?—alas, I know not.”

While thus speaking, Hilda passed slowly by the Roman fountain and the heathen fane, and ascended the little hillock. There on the opposite side of the summit, backed by the Druid crommel and the Teuton altar, she seated herself deliberately on the sward.

A few daisies, primroses, and cowslips, grew around; these Edith began to pluck. Singing, as she wove, a simple song, that, not more by the dialect than the sentiment, betrayed its origin in the ballad of the Norse [11](#), which had, in its more careless composition, a character quite distinct from the artificial poetry of the Saxons. The song may be thus imperfectly rendered:

“Merrily the throstle sings
Amid the merry May;
The throstle signs but to my ear;
My heart is far away!

Blithely bloometh mead and bank;
And blithely buds the tree;
And hark!—they bring the Summer home;
It has no home with me!

They have outlawed him—my Summer!
An outlaw far away!
The birds may sing, the flowers may bloom,
O, give me back my May!”

As she came to the last line, her soft low voice seemed to awaken a chorus of sprightly horns and trumpets, and certain other wind instruments peculiar to the music of that day. The hillock bordered the high road to London—which then wound through wastes of forest land—and now emerging from the trees to the left appeared a goodly company. First came two riders abreast, each holding a banner.

On the one was depicted the cross and five martlets, the device of Edward, afterwards surnamed the Confessor: on the other, a plain broad cross with a deep border round it, and the streamer shaped into sharp points.

The first was familiar to Edith, who dropped her garland to gaze on the approaching pageant; the last was strange to her. She had been accustomed to see the banner of the great Earl Godwin by the side of the Saxon king; and she said, almost indignantly,—

“Who dares, sweet grandam, to place banner or pennon where Earl Godwin’s ought to float?”

“Peace,” said Hilda, “peace and look.”

Immediately behind the standard-bearers came two figures—strangely dissimilar indeed in mien, in years, in bearing: each bore on his left wrist a hawk. The one was mounted on a milk-white palfrey, with housings inlaid with gold and uncut jewels. Though not really old—for he was much on this side of sixty—both his countenance and carriage evinced age. His complexion, indeed, was extremely fair, and his cheeks ruddy; but the visage was long and deeply furrowed, and from beneath a bonnet not dissimilar to those in use among the Scotch, streamed hair long and white as snow, mingling with a large and forked beard. White seemed his chosen colour. White was the upper tunic clasped on his shoulder with a broad ouche or brooch; white the woollen leggings fitted to somewhat emaciated limbs; and white the mantle, though broidered with a broad hem of gold and purple. The fashion of his dress was that which well became a noble person, but it suited ill the somewhat frail and graceless figure of the rider. Nevertheless, as Edith saw him, she rose, with an expression of deep reverence on her countenance, and saying, “it is our lord the King,” advanced some steps down the hillock, and there stood, her arms folded on her breast, and quite forgetful, in her innocence and youth, that she had left the house without the cloak and coverchief which were deemed indispensable to the fitting appearance of maid and matron when they were seen abroad.

“Fair sir, and brother mine,” said the deep voice of the younger rider, in the Romance or Norman tongue, “I have heard that the small people of whom my neighbours, the Breton tell us much, abound greatly in this fair land of yours; and if I were not by the side of one whom no creature unassoiled and unbaptised dare approach, by sweet St. Valery I should say—yonder stands one of those same gentilles fees!”

King Edward’s eye followed the direction of his companion’s outstretched hand, and his quiet brow slightly contracted as he beheld the young form of Edith standing motionless a few yards before him, with the warm May wind lifting and playing with her long golden locks. He checked his palfrey, and murmured some Latin words which the knight beside him recognised as a prayer, and to which, doffing his cap, he added an Amen, in a tone of such unctuous gravity, that the royal saint rewarded him with a faint approving smile, and an affectionate “Bene vene, Piosissime.”

Then inclining his palfrey’s head towards the knoll, he motioned to the girl to approach him. Edith, with a heightened colour, obeyed, and came to the roadside. The standard-bearers halted, as did the king and his comrade—the procession behind halted—thirty knights, two bishops, eight abbots, all on fiery steeds and in Norman garb—squires and attendants on foot—a long and pompous retinue—they halted all. Only a stray hound or two broke from the rest, and wandered into the forest land with heads trailing.

“Edith, my child,” said Edward, still in Norman-French, for he spoke his own language with hesitation, and the Romance tongue, which had long been familiar to the higher classes in England, had, since his accession, become the only language in use at court, and as such every one of ‘Eorl-kind’ was supposed to speak it;—“Edith, my child, thou hast not forgotten my lessons, I trow; thou singest the hymns I gave thee, and neglectest not to wear the relic round thy neck.”

The girl hung her head, and spoke not.

“How comes it, then,” continued the King, with a voice to which he in vain endeavoured to impart an accent of severity, “how comes it, O little one, that thou, whose thoughts should be lifted

already above this carnal world, and eager for the service of Mary the chaste and blessed, standest thus hoodless and alone on the waysides, a mark for the eyes of men? go to, it is naught.”

Thus reproved, and in presence of so large and brilliant a company, the girl’s colour went and came, her breast heaved high, but with an effort beyond her age she checked her tears, and said meekly, “My grandmother, Hilda, bade me come with her, and I came.”

“Hilda!” said the King, backing his palfrey with apparent perturbation, “but Hilda is not with thee; I see her not.”

As he spoke, Hilda rose, and so suddenly did her tall form appear on the brow of the hill, that it seemed as if she had emerged from the earth. With a light and rapid stride she gained the side of her grandchild; and after a slight and haughty reverence, said, “Hilda is here; what wants Edward the King with his servant Hilda?”

“Nought, nought,” said the King, hastily; and something like fear passed over his placid countenance; “save, indeed,” he added, with a reluctant tone, as that of a man who obeys his conscience against his inclination, “that I would pray thee to keep this child pure to threshold and altar, as is meet for one whom our Lady, the Virgin, in due time, will elect to her service.”

“Not so, son of Etheldred, son of Woden, the last descendant of Penda should live, not to glide a ghost amidst cloisters, but to rock children for war in their father’s shield. Few men are there yet like the men of old; and while the foot of the foreigner is on the Saxon soil no branch of the stem of Woden should be nipped in the leaf.”

“Per la resplendar De [12](#), bold dame,” cried the knight by the side of Edward, while a lurid flush passed over his cheek of bronze; “but thou art too glib of tongue for a subject, and pratest overmuch of Woden, the Paynim, for the lips of a Christian matron.”

Hilda met the flashing eye of the knight with a brow of lofty scorn, on which still a certain terror was visible. “Child,” she said, putting her hand upon Edith’s fair locks; “this is the man thou shalt see but twice in thy life;—look up, and mark well!”

Edith instinctively raised her eyes, and, once fixed upon the knight, they seemed chained as by a spell. His vest, of a cramoisay so dark, that it seemed black beside the snowy garb of the Confessor, was edged by a deep band of embroidered gold; leaving perfectly bare his firm, full throat—firm and full as a column of granite,—a short jacket or manteline of fur, pendant from the shoulders, left developed in all its breadth a breast, that seemed meet to stay the march of an army; and on the left arm, curved to support the falcon, the vast muscles rose, round and gnarled, through the close sleeve.

In height, he was really but little above the stature of many of those present; nevertheless, so did his port [13](#), his air, the nobility of his large proportions, fill the eye, that he seemed to tower immeasurably above the rest.

His countenance was yet more remarkable than his form; still in the prime of youth, he seemed at the first glance younger, at the second older, than he was. At the first glance younger; for his face was perfectly shaven, without even the moustache which the Saxon courtier, in imitating the Norman, still declined to surrender; and the smooth visage and bare throat sufficed in themselves to give the air of youth to that dominant and imperious presence. His small skull-cap left unconcealed his forehead, shaded with short thick hair, uncurled, but black and glossy as the wings of a raven. It was on that forehead that time had set its trace; it was knit into a frown over the eyebrows; lines deep as furrows crossed its broad, but not elevated expanse. That frown spoke of hasty ire and the habit of stern command; those furrows spoke of deep thought and plotting scheme; the one betrayed but temper and circumstance; the other, more noble, spoke of the character and the intellect. The face was square, and the regard lion-like; the mouth—small, and even beautiful in outline—had a sinister expression in its exceeding firmness; and the jaw—vast, solid, as if bound in iron—showed obstinate, ruthless, determined will; such a jaw as belongs to the tiger amongst beasts, and the conqueror amongst men; such as it is seen in the effigies of Caesar, of Cortes, of Napoleon.

That presence was well calculated to command the admiration of women, not less than the awe of men. But no admiration mingled with the terror that seized the girl as she gazed long and wistful upon the knight. The fascination of the serpent on the bird held her mute and frozen. Never was that face forgotten; often in after-life it haunted her in the noon-day, it frowned upon her dreams.

“Fair child,” said the knight, fatigued at length by the obstinacy of the gaze, while that smile peculiar to those who have commanded men relaxed his brow, and restored the native beauty to his lip, “fair child, learn not from thy peevish grandam so uncourteous a lesson as hate of the foreigner. As thou growest into womanhood, know that Norman knight is sworn slave to lady fair;” and, doffing his cap, he took from it an uncut jewel, set in Byzantine filigree work. “Hold out thy lap, my child; and when thou nearest the foreigner scoffed, set this bauble in thy locks, and think kindly of William, Count of the Normans.” [14](#)

He dropped the jewel on the ground as he spoke; for Edith, shrinking and unsoftened towards him, held no lap to receive it; and Hilda, to whom Edward had been speaking in a low voice, advanced to the spot and struck the jewel with her staff under the hoofs of the king’s palfrey.

“Son of Emma, the Norman woman, who sent thy youth into exile, trample on the gifts of thy Norman kinsman. And if, as men say, thou art of such gifted holiness that Heaven grants thy hand the power to heal, and thy voice the power to curse, heal thy country, and curse the stranger!”

She extended her right arm to William as she spoke, and such was the dignity of her passion, and such its force, that an awe fell upon all. Then dropping her hood over her face, she slowly turned away, regained the summit of the knoll, and stood erect beside the altar of the Northern god, her face invisible through the hood drawn completely over it, and her form motionless as a statue.

“Ride on,” said Edward, crossing himself.

“Now by the bones of St. Valery,” said William, after a pause, in which his dark keen eye noted the gloom upon the King’s gentle face, “it moves much my simple wonder how even presence so saintly can hear without wrath words so unfeeling and foul. Gramercy, an the proudest dame in Normandy (and I take her to be wife to my stoutest baron, William Fitzosborne) had spoken thus to me—”

“Thou wouldst have done as I, my brother,” interrupted Edward; “prayed to our Lord to pardon her, and rode on pitying.”

William’s lip quivered with ire, yet he curbed the reply that sprang to it, and he looked with affection genuinely more akin to admiration than scorn, upon his fellow-prince. For, fierce and relentless as the Duke’s deeds were, his faith was notably sincere; and while this made, indeed, the prince’s chief attraction to the pious Edward, so, on the other hand, this bowed the Duke in a kind of involuntary and superstitious homage to the man who sought to square deeds to faith. It is ever the case with stern and stormy spirits, that the meek ones which contrast them steal strangely into their affections. This principle of human nature can alone account for the enthusiastic devotion which the mild sufferings of the Saviour awoke in the fiercest exterminators of the North. In proportion, often, to the warrior’s ferocity, was his love to that Divine model, at whose sufferings he wept, to whose tomb he wandered barefoot, and whose example of compassionate forgiveness he would have thought himself the basest of men to follow!

“Now, by my halidame, I honour and love thee, Edward,” cried the Duke, with a heartiness more frank than was usual to him: “and were I thy subject, woe to man or woman that wagged tongue to wound thee by a breath. But who and what is this same Hilda? one of thy kith and kin?—surely not less than kingly blood runs so bold?”

“William, bien aime,” [15](#) said the King, “it is true that Hilda, whom the saints assoil, is of kingly blood, though not of our kingly line. It is feared,” added Edward, in a timid whisper, as he cast a hurried glance around him, “that this unhappy woman has ever been more addicted to the rites of her pagan ancestors than to those of Holy Church; and men do say that she hath thus acquired from fiend or charm secrets devoutly to be eschewed by the righteous. Nathless, let us rather hope that her mind is somewhat distraught with her misfortunes.”

The King sighed, and the Duke sighed too, but the Duke's sigh spoke impatience. He swept behind him a stern and withering look towards the proud figure of Hilda, still seen through the glades, and said in a sinister voice: "Of kingly blood; but this witch of Woden hath no sons or kinsmen, I trust, who pretend to the throne of the Saxon:"

"She is sibbe to Githa, wife of Godwin," answered the King, "and that is her most perilous connection; for the banished Earl, as thou knowest, did not pretend to fill the throne, but he was content with nought less than governing our people."

The King then proceeded to sketch an outline of the history of Hilda, but his narrative was so deformed both by his superstitions and prejudices, and his imperfect information in all the leading events and characters in his own kingdom, that we will venture to take upon ourselves his task; and while the train ride on through glade and mead, we will briefly narrate, from our own special sources of knowledge, the chronicle of Hilda, the Scandinavian Vala.

CHAPTER II

A magnificent race of men were those war sons of the old North, whom our popular histories, so superficial in their accounts of this age, include in the common name of the "Danes." They replunged into barbarism the nations over which they swept; but from that barbarism they reproduced the noblest elements of civilisation. Swede, Norwegian, and Dane, differing in some minor points, when closely examined, had yet one common character viewed at a distance. They had the same prodigious energy, the same passion for freedom, individual and civil, the same splendid errors in the thirst for fame and the "point of honour;" and above all, as a main cause of civilisation, they were wonderfully pliant and malleable in their admixtures with the peoples they overran. This is their true distinction from the stubborn Celt, who refuses to mingle, and disdains to improve.

Frankes, the archbishop, baptised Rolf-ganger [16](#): and within a little more than a century afterwards, the descendants of those terrible heathens who had spared neither priest nor altar, were the most redoubtable defenders of the Christian Church; their old language forgotten (save by a few in the town of Bayeux), their ancestral names [17](#) (save among a few of the noblest) changed into French titles, and little else but the indomitable valour of the Scandinavian remained unaltered amongst the arts and manners of the Frankish-Norman.

In like manner their kindred tribes, who had poured into Saxon England to ravage and lay desolate, had no sooner obtained from Alfred the Great permanent homes, than they became perhaps the most powerful, and in a short time not the least patriotic, part of the Anglo-Saxon population [18](#). At the time our story opens, these Northmen, under the common name of Danes, were peaceably settled in no less than fifteen [19](#) counties in England; their nobles abounded in towns and cities beyond the boundaries of those counties which bore the distinct appellation of Danelagh. They were numerous in London: in the precincts of which they had their own burial-place, to the chief municipal court of which they gave their own appellation—the Hustings [20](#). Their power in the national assembly of the Witan had decided the choice of kings. Thus, with some differences of law and dialect, these once turbulent invaders had amalgamated amicably with the native race [21](#). And to this day, the gentry, traders, and farmers of more than one-third of England, and in those counties most confessed to be in the van of improvement, descend from Saxon mothers indeed, but from Viking fathers. There was in reality little difference in race between the Norman knight of the time of Henry I. and the Saxon franklin of Norfolk and York. Both on the mother's side would most probably have been Saxon, both on the father's would have traced to the Scandinavian.

But though this character of adaptability was general, exceptions in some points were necessarily found, and these were obstinate in proportion to the adherence to the old pagan faith, or the sincere conversion to Christianity. The Norwegian chronicles, and passages in our own history, show how false and hollow was the assumed Christianity of many of these fierce Odin-worshippers.

They willingly enough accepted the outward sign of baptism, but the holy water changed little of the inner man. Even Harold, the son of Canute, scarce seventeen years before the date we have now entered, being unable to obtain from the Archbishop of Canterbury—who had espoused the cause of his brother Hardicanute—the consecrating benediction, lived and reigned as one who had abjured Christianity. [22](#)

The priests, especially on the Scandinavian continent, were often forced to compound with their grim converts, by indulgence to certain habits, such as indiscriminate polygamy. To eat horse-flesh in honour of Odin, and to marry wives *ad libitum*, were the main stipulations of the neophytes. And the puzzled monks, often driven to a choice, yielded the point of the wives, but stood firm on the graver article of the horse-flesh.

With their new religion, very imperfectly understood, even when genuinely received, they retained all that host of heathen superstition which knits itself with the most obstinate instincts in the human breast. Not many years before the reign of the Confessor, the laws of the great Canute against witchcraft and charms, the worship of stones, fountains, runes by ash and elm, and the incantations that do homage to the dead, were obviously rather intended to apply to the recent Danish converts, than to the Anglo-Saxons, already subjugated for centuries, body and soul, to the domination of the Christian monks.

Hilda, a daughter of the royalty of Denmark, and cousin to Githa (niece to Canute, whom that king had bestowed in second spousals upon Godwin), had come over to England with a fierce Jarl, her husband, a year after Canute's accession to the throne—both converted nominally, both secret believers in Thor and Odin.

Hilda's husband had fallen in one of the actions in the Northern seas, between Canute and St. Olave, King of Norway (that saint himself, by the bye, a most ruthless persecutor of his forefathers' faith, and a most unqualified assertor of his heathen privilege to extend his domestic affections beyond the severe pale which should have confined them to a single wife. His natural son Magnus then sat on the Danish throne). The Jarl died as he had wished to die, the last man on board his ship, with the soothing conviction that the Valkyrs would bear him to Valhalla.

Hilda was left with an only daughter, whom Canute bestowed on Ethelwolf, a Saxon Earl of large domains, and tracing his descent from Penda, that old King of Mercia who refused to be converted, but said so discreetly, that he had no objection to his neighbours being Christians, if they would practise that peace and forgiveness which the monks told him were the elements of the faith.

Ethelwolf fell under the displeasure of Hardicanute, perhaps because he was more Saxon than Danish; and though that savage king did not dare openly to arraign him before the Witan, he gave secret orders by which he was butchered on his own hearthstone, in the arms of his wife, who died shortly afterwards of grief and terror. The only orphan of this unhappy pair, Edith, was thus consigned to the charge of Hilda.

It was a necessary and invaluable characteristic of that "adaptability" which distinguished the Danes, that they transferred to the land in which they settled all the love they had borne to that of their ancestors; and so far as attachment to soil was concerned, Hilda had grown no less in heart an Englishwoman than if she had been born and reared amidst the glades and knolls from which the smoke of her hearth rose through the old Roman compluvium.

But in all else she was a Dane. Dane in her creed and her habits—Dane in her intense and brooding imagination—in the poetry that filled her soul, peopled the air with spectres, and covered the leaves of the trees with charms. Living in austere seclusion after the death of her lord, to whom she had borne a Scandinavian woman's devoted but heroic love,—sorrowing, indeed, for his death, but rejoicing that he fell amidst the feast of ravens,—her mind settled more and more year by year, and day by day, upon those visions of the unknown world, which in every faith conjure up the companions of solitude and grief.

Witchcraft in the Scandinavian North assumed many forms, and was connected by many degrees. There was the old and withered hag, on whom, in our later mediaeval ages the character was mainly bestowed; there was the terrific witch-wife, or wolf-witch, who seems wholly apart from human birth and attributes, like the weird sisters of Macbeth—creatures who entered the house at night and seized warriors to devour them, who might be seen gliding over the sea, with the carcass of the wolf dripping blood from their giant jaws; and there was the more serene, classical, and awful vala, or sibyl, who, honoured by chiefs and revered by nations, foretold the future, and advised the deeds of heroes. Of these last, the Norse chronicles tell us much. They were often of rank and wealth, they were accompanied by trains of handmaids and servants—kings led them (when their counsel was sought) to the place of honour in the hall, and their heads were sacred, as those of ministers to the gods.

This last state in the grisly realm of the Wig-laer (wizard-lore) was the one naturally appertaining to the high rank, and the soul, lofty though blind and perverted, of the daughter of warrior-kings. All practice of the art to which now for long years she had devoted herself, that touched upon the humble destinies of the vulgar, the child of Odin [23](#) haughtily disdained. Her reveries were upon the fate of kings and kingdoms; she aspired to save or to rear the dynasties which should rule the races yet unborn. In youth proud and ambitious,—common faults with her countrywomen,—on her entrance into the darker world, she carried with her the prejudices and passions that she had known in that coloured by the external sun.

All her human affections were centred in her grandchild Edith, the last of a race royal on either side. Her researches into the future had assured her, that the life and death of this fair child were entwined with the fates of a king, and the same oracles had intimated a mysterious and inseparable connection between her own shattered house and the flourishing one of Earl Godwin, the spouse of her kinswoman Githa: so that with this great family she was as intimately bound by the links of superstition as by the ties of blood. The eldest born of Godwin, Sweyn, had been at first especially her care and her favourite; and he, of more poetic temperament than his brothers, had willingly submitted to her influence. But of all the brethren, as will be seen hereafter, the career of Sweyn had been most noxious and ill-omened; and at that moment, while the rest of the house carried with it into exile the deep and indignant sympathy of England, no man said of Sweyn, “God bless him!”

But as the second son, Harold, had grown from childhood into youth, Hilda had singled him out with a preference even more marked than that she had bestowed upon Sweyn. The stars and the runes assured her of his future greatness, and the qualities and talents of the young Earl had, at the very onset of his career, confirmed the accuracy of their predictions. Her interest in Harold became the more intense, partly because whenever she consulted the future for the lot of her grandchild Edith, she invariably found it associated with the fate of Harold—partly because all her arts had failed to penetrate beyond a certain point in their joint destinies, and left her mind agitated and perplexed between hope and terror. As yet, however, she had wholly failed in gaining any ascendancy over the young Earl’s vigorous and healthful mind: and though, before his exile, he came more often than any of Godwin’s sons to the old Roman house, he had smiled with proud incredulity at her vague prophecies, and rejected all her offers of aid from invisible agencies with the calm reply—“The brave man wants no charms to encourage him to his duty, and the good man scorns all warnings that would deter him from fulfilling it.”

Indeed, though Hilda’s magic was not of the malevolent kind, and sought the source of its oracles not in fiends but gods, (at least the gods in whom she believed,) it was noticeable that all over whom her influence had prevailed had come to miserable and untimely ends;—not alone her husband and her son-in-law, (both of whom had been as wax to her counsel,) but such other chiefs as rank or ambition permitted to appeal to her lore. Nevertheless, such was the ascendancy she had gained over the popular mind, that it would have been dangerous in the highest degree to put into execution against her the laws condemnatory of witch craft. In her, all the more powerful Danish

families revered, and would have protected, the blood of their ancient kings, and the widow of one of their most renowned heroes.

Hospitable, liberal, and beneficent to the poor; and an easy mistress over numerous ceorls, while the vulgar dreaded, they would yet have defended her. Proofs of her art it would have been hard to establish; hosts of compurgators to attest her innocence would have sprung up. Even if subjected to the ordeal, her gold could easily have bribed the priests with whom the power of evading its dangers rested. And with that worldly wisdom which persons of genius in their wildest chimeras rarely lack, she had already freed herself from the chance of active persecution from the Church, by ample donations to all the neighbouring monasteries.

Hilda, in fine, was a woman of sublime desires and extraordinary gifts; terrible, indeed, but as the passive agent of the Fates she invoked, and rather commanding for herself a certain troubled admiration and mysterious pity; no fiend-hag, beyond humanity in malice and in power, but essentially human, even when aspiring most to the secrets of a god. Assuming, for the moment, that by the aid of intense imagination, persons of a peculiar idiosyncrasy of nerves and temperament might attain to such dim affinities with a world beyond our ordinary senses, as forbid entire rejection of the magnetism and magic of old times—it was on no foul and mephitic pool, overhung with the poisonous nightshade, and excluded from the beams of heaven, but on the living stream on which the star trembled, and beside whose banks the green herbage waved, that the demon shadows fell dark and dread.

Thus safe and thus awful, lived Hilda; and under her care, a rose beneath the funeral cedar, bloomed her grandchild Edith, goddaughter of the Lady of England.

It was the anxious wish, both of Edward and his virgin wife, pious as himself, to save this orphan from the contamination of a house more than suspected of heathen faith, and give to her youth the refuge of the convent. But this, without her guardian's consent or her own expressed will, could not be legally done; and Edith as yet had expressed no desire to disobey her grandmother, who treated the idea of the convent with lofty scorn.

This beautiful child grew up under the influence, as it were, of two contending creeds; all her notions on both were necessarily confused and vague. But her heart was so genuinely mild, simple, tender, and devoted,—there was in her so much of the inborn excellence of the sex, that in every impulse of that heart struggled for clearer light and for purer air the unquiet soul. In manner, in thought, and in person as yet almost an infant, deep in her heart lay yet one woman's secret, known scarcely to herself, but which taught her, more powerfully than Hilda's proud and scoffing tongue, to shudder at the thought of the barren cloister and the eternal vow.

CHAPTER III

While King Edward was narrating to the Norman Duke all that he knew, and all that he knew not, of Hilda's history and secret arts, the road wound through lands as wild and wold-like as if the metropolis of England lay a hundred miles distant. Even to this day patches of such land, in the neighbourhood of Norwood, may betray what the country was in the old time:—when a mighty forest, “abounding with wild beasts”—“the bull and the boar”—skirted the suburbs of London, and afforded pastime to king and thegn. For the Norman kings have been maligned by the popular notion that assigns to them all the odium of the forest laws. Harsh and severe were those laws in the reign of the Anglo-Saxon; as harsh and severe, perhaps, against the ceorl and the poor man, as in the days of Rufus, though more mild unquestionably to the nobles. To all beneath the rank of abbot and thegn, the king's woods were made, even by the mild Confessor, as sacred as the groves of the Druids: and no less penalty than that of life was incurred by the lowborn huntsman who violated their recesses. [24](#)

Edward's only mundane passion was the chase; and a day rarely passed, but what after mass he went forth with hawk or hound. So that, though the regular season for hawking did not commence till

October, he had ever on his wrist some young falcon to essay, or some old favourite to exercise. And now, just as William was beginning to grow weary of his good cousin's prolix recitals, the hounds suddenly gave tongue, and from a sedge-grown pool by the way-side, with solemn wing and harsh boom, rose a bittern.

"Holy St. Peter!" exclaimed the Saint-king, spurring his palfrey, and loosing his famous Peregrine falcon [25](#). William was not slow in following that animated example, and the whole company rode at half speed across the rough forest-land, straining their eyes upon the soaring quarry, and the large wheels of the falcons. Riding thus, with his eyes in the air, Edward was nearly pitched over his palfrey's head, as the animal stopped suddenly, checked by a high gate, set deep in a half embattled wall of brick and rubble. Upon this gate sate, quite unmoved and apathetic, a tall ceorl, or labourer, while behind it was a gazing curious group of men of the same rank, clad in those blue tunics of which our peasant's smock is the successor, and leaning on scythes and flails. Sour and ominous were the looks they bent upon that Norman cavalcade. The men were at least as well clad as those of the same condition are now; and their robust limbs and ruddy cheeks showed no lack of the fare that supports labour. Indeed, the working man of that day, if not one of the absolute theowes or slaves, was, physically speaking, better off, perhaps, than he has ever since been in England, more especially if he appertained to some wealthy thegn of pure Saxon lineage, whose very title of lord came to him in his quality of dispenser of bread [26](#); and these men had been ceorls under Harold, son of Godwin, now banished from the land.

"Open the gate, open quick, my merry men," said the gentle Edward (speaking in Saxon, though with a strong foreign accent), after he had recovered his seat, murmured a benediction, and crossed himself three times. The men stirred not.

"No horse tramps the seeds we have sown for Harold the Earl to reap;" said the ceorl, doggedly, still seated on the gate. And the group behind him gave a shout of applause.

Moved more than ever he had been known to be before, Edward spurred his steed up to the boor, and lifted his hand. At that signal twenty swords flashed in the air behind, as the Norman nobles spurred to the place. Putting back with one hand his fierce attendants, Edward shook the other at the Saxon. "Knave, knave," he cried, "I would hurt you, if I could!"

There was something in these words, fated to drift down into history, at once ludicrous and touching. The Normans saw them only in the former light, and turned aside to conceal their laughter; the Saxon felt them in the latter and truer sense, and stood rebuked. That great king, whom he now recognised, with all those drawn swords at his back, could not do him hurt; that king had not the heart to hurt him. The ceorl sprang from the gate, and opened it, bending low.

"Ride first, Count William, my cousin," said the King, calmly.

The Saxon ceorl's eyes glared as he heard the Norman's name uttered in the Norman tongue, but he kept open the gate, and the train passed through, Edward lingering last. Then said the King, in a low voice,—

"Bold man, thou spekest of Harold the Earl and his harvests; knowest thou not that his lands have passed from him, and that he is outlawed, and that his harvests are not for the scythes of his ceorls to reap?"

"May it please you, dread Lord and King," replied the Saxon simply, "these lands that were Harold the Earl's, are now Clapa's, the sixhaendman's."

"How is that?" quoth Edward, hastily; "we gave them neither to sixhaendman nor to Saxon. All the lands of Harold hereabout were divided amongst sacred abbots and noble chevaliers—Normans all."

"Fulke the Norman had these fair fields, yon orchards and tynen; Fulke sold them to Clapa, the Earl's sixhaendman, and what in mancusses and pence Clapa lacked of the price, we, the ceorls of the Earl, made up from our own earnings in the Earl's noble service. And this very day, in token thereof, have we quaffed the bedden-ale [27](#). Wherefore, please God and our Lady, we hold these

lands part and parcel with Clapa; and when Earl Harold comes again, as come he will, here at least he will have his own.”

Edward, who, despite a singular simplicity of character, which at times seemed to border on imbecility, was by no means wanting in penetration when his attention was fairly roused, changed countenance at this proof of rough and homely affection on the part of these men to his banished earl and brother-in-law. He mused a little while in grave thought, and then said, kindly—

“Well, man, I think not the worse of you for loyal love to your thegn, but there are those who would do so, and I advise you, brotherlike, that ears and nose are in peril if thou talkest thus indiscreetly.”

“Steel to steel, and hand to hand,” said the Saxon, bluntly, touching the long knife in his leathern belt, “and he who sets gripe on Sexwolf son of Elfhelm, shall pay his weregeld twice over.”

“Forewarned, foolish man, thou are forewarned. Peace,” said the King; and, shaking his head, he rode on to join the Normans, who now, in a broad field, where the corn sprang green, and which they seemed to delight in wantonly trampling, as they curvetted their steeds to and fro, watched the movements of the bittern and the pursuit of the two falcons.

“A wager, Lord King!” said a prelate, whose strong family likeness to William proclaimed him to be the Duke’s bold and haughty brother, Odo [28](#), Bishop of Bayeux;—“a wager. My steed to your palfrey that the Duke’s falcon first fixes the bittern.”

“Holy father,” answered Edward, in that slight change of voice which alone showed his displeasure, “these wagers all savour of heathenesse, and our canons forbid them to mone [29](#) and priest. Go to, it is naught.”

The bishop, who brooked no rebuke, even from his terrible brother, knit his brows, and was about to make no gentle rejoinder, when William, whose profound craft or sagacity was always at watch, lest his followers should displease the King, interposed, and taking the word out of the prelate’s mouth, said:

“Thou reprovest us well, Sir and King; we Normans are too inclined to such levities. And see, your falcon is first in pride of place. By the bones of St. Valery, how nobly he towers! See him cover the bittern!—see him rest on the wing!—Down he swoops! Gallant bird!”

“With his heart split in two on the bittern’s bill,” said the bishop; and down, rolling one over the other, fell bittern and hawk, while William’s Norway falcon, smaller of size than the King’s, descended rapidly, and hovered over the two. Both were dead.

“I accept the omen,” muttered the gazing Duke; “let the natives destroy each other!” He placed his whistle to his lips, and his falcon flew back to his wrist.

“Now home,” said King Edward.

CHAPTER IV

The royal party entered London by the great bridge which divided Southwark from the capital; and we must pause to gaze a moment on the animated scene which the immemorial thoroughfare presented.

The whole suburb before entering Southwark was rich in orchards and gardens, lying round the detached houses of the wealthier merchants and citizens. Approaching the river-side, to the left, the eye might see the two circular spaces set apart, the one for bear, the other for bull-baiting. To the right, upon a green mound of waste, within sight of the populous bridge, the gleemen were exercising their art. Here one dexterous juggler threw three balls and three knives alternately in the air, catching them one by one as they fell [30](#). There, another was gravely leading a great bear to dance on its hind legs, while his coadjutor kept time with a sort of flute or flageolet. The lazy bystanders, in great concourse, stared and laughed; but the laugh was hushed at the tramp of the Norman steeds; and the

famous Count by the King's side, as, with a smiling lip, but observant eye, he rode along, drew all attention from the bear.

On now approaching that bridge which, not many years before, had been the scene of terrible contest between the invading Danes and Ethelred's ally, Olave of Norway [31](#), you might still see, though neglected and already in decay, the double fortifications that had wisely guarded that vista into the city. On both sides of the bridge, which was of wood, were forts, partly of timber, partly of stone, and breastworks, and by the forts a little chapel. The bridge, broad enough to admit two vehicles abreast [32](#), was crowded with passengers, and lively with stalls and booths. Here was the favourite spot of the popular ballad-singer [33](#). Here, too, might be seen the swarthy Saracen, with wares from Spain and Afric [34](#). Here, the German merchant from the Steel-yard swept along on his way to his suburban home. Here, on some holy office, went quick the muffled monk. Here, the city gallant paused to laugh with the country girl, her basket full of May-boughs and cowslips. In short, all bespoke that activity, whether in business or pastime, which was destined to render that city the mart of the world, and which had already knit the trade of the Anglo-Saxon to the remoter corners of commercial Europe. The deep dark eye of William dwelt admiringly on the bustling groups, on the broad river, and the forest of masts which rose by the indented marge near Belin's gate [35](#). And he to whom, whatever his faults, or rather crimes, to the unfortunate people he not only oppressed but deceived—London at least may yet be grateful, not only for chartered franchise [36](#), but for advancing, in one short vigorous reign, her commerce and wealth, beyond what centuries of Anglo-Saxon domination, with its inherent feebleness, had effected, exclaimed aloud:

“By rood and mass, O dear king, thy lot hath fallen on a goodly heritage.”

“Hem!” said Edward, lazily; “thou knowest not how troublesome these Saxons are. And while thou speakest, lo, in yon shattered walls, built first, they say, by Alfred of holy memory, are the evidences of the Danes. Bethink thee how often they have sailed up this river. How know I but what the next year the raven flag may stream over these waters? Magnus of Denmark hath already claimed my crown as heir to the royalties of Canute, and” (here Edward hesitated), “Godwin and Harold, whom alone of my thegns Dane and Northman fear, are far away.”

“Miss not them, Edward, my cousin,” cried the Duke, in haste. “Send for me if danger threat thee. Ships enow await thy best in my new port of Cherbourg. And I tell thee this for thy comfort, that were I king of the English, and lord of this river, the citizens of London might sleep from vespers to prime, without fear of the Dane. Never again should the raven flag be seen by this bridge! Never, I swear, by the Splendour Divine.”

Not without purpose spoke William thus stoutly; and he turned on the King those glittering eyes (*micantes oculos*), which the chroniclers have praised and noted. For it was his hope and his aim in this visit, that his cousin Edward should formally promise him that goodly heritage of England. But the King made no rejoinder, and they now neared the end of the bridge.

“What old ruin looms yonder?” [37](#) asked William, hiding his disappointment at Edward's silence; “it seemeth the remains of some stately keape, which, by its fashion, I should pronounce Roman.”

“Ay!” said Edward, “and it is said to have been built by the Romans; and one of the old Lombard freemasons employed on my new palace of Westminster, giveth that, and some others in my domain, the name of the Juillet Tower.”

“Those Romans were our masters in all things gallant and wise,” said William; “and I predict that, some day or other, on that site, a King of England will re-erect palace and tower. And yon castle towards the west?”

“Is the Tower Palatine, where our predecessors have lodged, and ourself sometimes; but the sweet loneliness of Thorney Isle pleaseth me more now.”

Thus talking, they entered London, a rude, dark city, built mainly of timbered houses; streets narrow and winding; windows rarely glazed, but protected chiefly by linen blinds; vistas opening,

however, at times into broad spaces, round the various convents, where green trees grew up behind low palisades. Tall roods, and holy images, to which we owe the names of existing thoroughfares (Rood-lane and Lady-lane 38), where the ways crossed, attracted the curious and detained the pious. Spires there were not then, but blunt, cone-headed turrets, pyramidal, denoting the Houses of God, rose often from the low, thatched, and reeded roofs. But every now and then, a scholar's, if not an ordinary, eye could behold the relics of Roman splendour, traces of that elder city which now lies buried under our thoroughfares, and of which, year by year, are dug up the stately skeletons.

Along the Thames still rose, though much mutilated, the wall of Constantine 39. Round the humble and barbarous Church of St. Paul's (wherein lay the dust of Sebba, that king of the East Saxons who quitted his throne for the sake of Christ, and of Edward's feeble and luckless father, Ethelred) might be seen, still gigantic in decay, the ruins of the vast temple of Diana 40. Many a church, and many a convent, pierced their mingled brick and timber work with Roman capital and shaft. Still by the tower, to which was afterwards given the Saracen name of Barbican, were the wrecks of the Roman station, where cohorts watched night and day, in case of fire within or foe without. 41

In a niche, near the Aldersgate, stood the headless statue of Fortitude, which monks and pilgrims deemed some unknown saint in the old time, and halted to honour. And in the midst of Bishopsgate-street, sate on his desecrated throne a mangled Jupiter, his eagle at his feet. Many a half-converted Dane there lingered, and mistook the Thunderer and the bird for Odin and his hawk. By Leod-gate (the People's gate 42) still too were seen the arches of one of those mighty aqueducts which the Roman learned from the Etrurian. And close by the Still-yard, occupied by "the Emperor's cheap men" (the German merchants), stood, almost entire, the Roman temple, extant in the time of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Without the walls, the old Roman vineyards 43 still put forth their green leaves and crude clusters, in the plains of East Smithfield, in the fields of St. Giles's, and on the site where now stands Hatton Garden. Still massere 44 and cheapmen chattered and bargained, at booth and stall, in Mart-lane, where the Romans had bartered before them. With every encroachment on new soil, within the walls and without, urn, vase, weapon, human bones, were shovelled out, and lay disregarded amidst heaps of rubbish.

Not on such evidences of the past civilisation looked the practical eye of the Norman Count; not on things, but on men, looked he; and as silently he rode on from street to street, out of those men, stalwart and tall, busy, active, toiling, the Man-Ruler saw the Civilisation that was to come.

So, gravely through the small city, and over the bridge that spanned the little river of the Fleet, rode the train along the Strand; to the left, smooth sands; to the right, fair pastures below green holts, thinly studded with houses; over numerous cuts and inlets running into the river, rode they on. The hour and the season were those in which youth enjoyed its holiday, and gay groups resorted to the then 45 fashionable haunts of the Fountain of Holywell, "streaming forth among glistening pebbles."

So they gained at length the village of Charing, which Edward had lately bestowed on his Abbey of Westminster, and which was now filled with workmen, native and foreign, employed on that edifice and the contiguous palace. Here they loitered awhile at the Mews 46 (where the hawks were kept), passed by the rude palace of stone and rubble, appropriated to the tributary kings of Scotland 47—a gift from Edgar to Kenneth—and finally, reaching the inlet of the river, which, winding round the Isle of Thorney (now Westminster), separated the rising church, abbey, and palace of the Saint-king from the main-land, dismounted—and were ferried across 48 the narrow stream to the broad space round the royal residence.

CHAPTER V

The new palace of Edward the Confessor, the palace of Westminster, opened its gates, to receive the Saxon King and the Norman Duke, remounting on the margin of the isle, and now riding side by side. And as the Duke glanced, from brows habitually knit, first over the pile, stately, though

not yet completed, with its long rows of round arched windows, cased by indented fringes and fraet (or tooth) work, its sweep of solid columns with circling cloisters, and its ponderous towers of simple grandeur; then over the groups of courtiers, with close vests, and short mantles, and beardless cheeks, that filled up the wide space, to gaze in homage on the renowned guest, his heart swelled within him, and, checking his rein, he drew near to his brother of Bayeux, and whispered,—

“Is not this already the court of the Norman? Behold yon nobles and earls, how they mimic our garb! behold the very stones in yon gate, how they range themselves, as if carved by the hand of the Norman mason! Verily and indeed, brother, the shadow of the rising sun rests already on these halls.”

“Had England no people,” said the bishop, “England were yours already. But saw you not, as we rode along, the lowering brows? and heard you not the angry murmurs? The villeins are many, and their hate is strong.”

“Strong is the roan I bestride,” said the Duke; “but a bold rider curbs it with the steel of the bit, and guides it with the goad of the heel.”

And now, as they neared the gate, a band of minstrels in the pay of the Norman touched their instruments, and woke their song—the household song of the Norman—the battle hymn of Roland, the Paladin of Charles the Great. At the first word of the song, the Norman knights and youths profusely scattered amongst the Normanised Saxons caught up the lay, and with sparkling eyes, and choral voices, they welcomed the mighty Duke into the palace of the last meek successor of Woden.

By the porch of the inner court the Duke flung himself from his saddle, and held the stirrup for Edward to dismount. The King placed his hand gently on his guest’s broad shoulder, and, having somewhat slowly reached the ground, embraced and kissed him in the sight of the gorgeous assemblage; then led him by the hand towards the fair chamber which was set apart for the Duke, and so left him to his attendants.

William, lost in thought, suffered himself to be disrobed in silence; but when Fitzosborne, his favourite confidant and haughtiest baron, who yet deemed himself but honoured by personal attendance on his chief, conducted him towards the bath, which adjoined the chamber, he drew back, and wrapping round him more closely the gown of fur that had been thrown over his shoulders, he muttered low,—“Nay, if there be on me yet one speck of English dust, let it rest there!—seizin, Fitzosborne, seizin, of the English land.” Then, waving his hand, he dismissed all his attendants except Fitzosborne, and Rolf, Earl of Hereford [49](#), nephew to Edward, but French on the father’s side, and thoroughly in the Duke’s councils. Twice the Duke paced the chamber without vouchsafing a word to either, then paused by the round window that overlooked the Thames. The scene was fair; the sun, towards its decline, glittered on numerous small pleasure-boats, which shot to and fro between Westminster and London or towards the opposite shores of Lambeth. His eye sought eagerly, along the curves of the river, the grey remains of the fabled Tower of Julius, and the walls, gates, and turrets, that rose by the stream, or above the dense mass of silent roofs; then it strained hard to descry the tops of the more distant masts of the infant navy, fostered under Alfred, the far-seeing, for the future civilisation of wastes unknown, and the empire of seas untracked.

The Duke breathed hard, and opened and closed the hand which he stretched forth into space as if to grasp the city he beheld. “Rolf,” said he, abruptly, “thou knowest, no doubt, the wealth of the London traders, one and all; for, foi de Gaillaume, my gentil chevalier, thou art a true Norman, and scentest the smell of gold as a hound the boar!”

Rolf smiled, as if pleased with a compliment which simpler men might have deemed, at the best, equivocal, and replied:

“It is true, my liege; and gramercy, the air of England sharpens the scent; for in this villein and motley country, made up of all races,—Saxon and Fin, Dane and Fleming, Pict and Walloon,—it is not as with us, where the brave man and the pure descent are held chief in honour: here, gold and land are, in truth, name and lordship; even their popular name for their national assembly of the Witan is, ‘The Wealthy.’ [50](#) He who is but a ceorl to-day, let him be rich, and he may be earl to-morrow, marry

in king's blood, and rule armies under a gonfanon statelier than a king's; while he whose fathers were ealdermen and princes, if, by force or by fraud, by waste or by largess, he become poor, falls at once into contempt, and out of his state,—sinks into a class they call 'six-hundred men,' in their barbarous tongue, and his children will probably sink still lower, into ceorls. Wherefore gold is the thing here most coveted; and by St. Michael, the sin is infectious."

William listened to the speech with close attention. "Good," said he, rubbing slowly the palm of his right hand over the back of the left; "a land all compact with the power of one race, a race of conquering men, as our fathers were, whom nought but cowardice or treason can degrade,—such a land, O Rolf of Hereford, it were hard indeed to subjugate, or decoy, or tame—"

"So has my lord the Duke found the Bretons; and so also do I find the Welch upon my marches of Hereford."

"But," continued William, not heeding the interruption, "where wealth is more than blood and race, chiefs may be bribed or menaced; and the multitude—by'r Lady, the multitude are the same in all lands, mighty under valiant and faithful leaders, powerless as sheep without them. But to my question, my gentle Rolf; this London must be rich?" [51](#)

"Rich enow," answered Rolf, "to coin into armed men, that should stretch from Rouen to Flanders on the one hand, and Paris on the other."

"In the veins of Matilda, whom thou woest for wife," said Fitzosborne, abruptly, "flows the blood of Charlemagne. God grant his empire to the children she shall bear thee!"

The Duke bowed his head, and kissed a relic suspended from his throat. Farther sign of approval of his counsellor's words he gave not, but after a pause, he said:

"When I depart, Rolf, thou wendest back to thy marches. These Welch are brave and fierce, and shape work enow for thy hands."

"Ay, by my halidame! poor sleep by the side of the beehive you have stricken down."

"Marry, then," said William, "let the Welch prey on Saxon, Saxon on Welch; let neither win too easily. Remember our omens to-day, Welch hawk and Saxon bittern, and over their corpses, Duke William's Norway falcon! Now dress we for the complin [52](#) and the banquet."

BOOK II. LANFRANC THE SCHOLAR

CHAPTER I

Four meals a day, nor those sparing, were not deemed too extravagant an interpretation of the daily bread for which the Saxon prayed. Four meals a day, from earl to ceorl! “Happy times!” may sigh the descendant of the last, if he read these pages; partly so they were for the ceorl, but not in all things, for never sweet is the food, and never gladdening is the drink, of servitude. Inebriety, the vice of the warlike nations of the North, had not, perhaps, been the pre-eminent excess of the earlier Saxons, while yet the active and fiery Britons, and the subsequent petty wars between the kings of the Heptarchy, enforced on hardy warriors the safety of temperance; but the example of the Danes had been fatal. Those giants of the sea, like all who pass from great vicissitudes of toil and repose, from the tempest to the haven, snatched with full hands every pleasure in their reach. With much that tended permanently to elevate the character of the Saxon, they imparted much for a time to degrade it. The Anglian learned to feast to repletion, and drink to delirium. But such were not the vices of the court of the Confessor. Brought up from his youth in the cloister-camp of the Normans, what he loved in their manners was the abstemious sobriety, and the ceremonial religion, which distinguished those sons of the Scandinavian from all other kindred tribes.

The Norman position in France, indeed, in much resembled that of the Spartan in Greece. He had forced a settlement with scanty numbers in the midst of a subjugated and sullen population, surrounded by jealous and formidable foes. Hence sobriety was a condition of his being, and the policy of the chief lent a willing ear to the lessons of the preacher. Like the Spartan, every Norman of pure race was free and noble; and this consciousness inspired not only that remarkable dignity of mien which Spartan and Norman alike possessed, but also that fastidious self-respect which would have revolted from exhibiting a spectacle of debasement to inferiors. And, lastly, as the paucity of their original numbers, the perils that beset, and the good fortune that attended them, served to render the Spartans the most religious of all the Greeks in their dependence on the Divine aid; so, perhaps, to the same causes may be traced the proverbial piety of the ceremonial Normans; they carried into their new creed something of feudal loyalty to their spiritual protectors; did homage to the Virgin for the lands that she vouchsafed to bestow, and recognised in St. Michael the chief who conducted their armies.

After hearing the complin vespers in the temporary chapel fitted up in that unfinished abbey of Westminster, which occupied the site of the temple of Apollo [53](#), the King and his guests repaired to their evening meal in the great hall of the palace. Below the dais were ranged three long tables for the knights in William’s train, and that flower of the Saxon nobility who, fond, like all youth, of change and imitation, thronged the court of their Normanised saint, and scorned the rude patriotism of their fathers. But hearts truly English were not there. Yea, many of Godwin’s noblest foes sighed for the English-hearted Earl, banished by Norman guile on behalf of English law.

At the oval table on the dais the guests were select and chosen. At the right hand of the King sat William; at the left Odo of Bayeux. Over these three stretched a canopy of cloth of gold; the chairs on which each sate were of metal, richly gilded over, and the arms carved in elaborate arabesques. At this table too was the King’s nephew, the Earl of Hereford, and, in right of kinsmanship to the Duke, the Norman’s beloved baron and grand seneschal, William Fitzosborne, who, though in Normandy even he sate not at the Duke’s table, was, as related to his lord, invited by Edward to his own. No other guests were admitted to this board, so that, save Edward, all were Norman. The dishes were of gold and silver, the cups inlaid with jewels. Before each guest was a knife, with hilt adorned by precious

stones, and a napkin fringed with silver. The meats were not placed on the table, but served upon small spits, and between every course a basin of perfumed water was borne round by high-born pages. No dame graced the festival; for she who should have presided—she, matchless for beauty without pride, piety without asceticism, and learning without pedantry—she, the pale rose of England, loved daughter of Godwin, and loathed wife of Edward, had shared in the fall of her kindred, and had been sent by the meek King, or his fierce counsellors, to an abbey in Hampshire, with the taunt “that it was not meet that the child and sister should enjoy state and pomp, while the sire and brethren ate the bread of the stranger in banishment and disgrace.”

But, hungry as were the guests, it was not the custom of that holy court to fall to without due religious ceremonial. The rage for psalm-singing was then at its height in England; psalmody had excluded almost every other description of vocal music; and it is even said that great festivals on certain occasions were preluded by no less an effort of lungs and memory than the entire songs bequeathed to us by King David! This day, however, Hugoline, Edward’s Norman chamberlain, had been pleased to abridge the length of the prolix grace, and the company were let off; to Edward’s surprise and displeasure, with the curt and unseemly preparation of only nine psalms and one special hymn in honour of some obscure saint to whom the day was dedicated. This performed, the guests resumed their seats, Edward murmuring an apology to William for the strange omission of his chamberlain, and saying thrice to himself, “Naught, naught—very naught.”

The mirth languished at the royal table, despite some gay efforts from Rolf, and some hollow attempts at light-hearted cheerfulness from the great Duke, whose eyes, wandering down the table, were endeavouring to distinguish Saxon from Norman, and count how many of the first might already be reckoned in the train of his friends. But at the long tables below, as the feast thickened, and ale, mead, pigment, morat, and wine circled round, the tongue of the Saxon was loosed, and the Norman knight lost somewhat of his superb gravity. It was just as what a Danish poet called the “sun of the night,” (in other words, the fierce warmth of the wine,) had attained its meridian glow, that some slight disturbance at the doors of the hall, without which waited a dense crowd of the poor on whom the fragments of the feast were afterwards to be bestowed, was followed by the entrance of two strangers, for whom the officers appointed to marshal the entertainment made room at the foot of one of the tables. Both these new-comers were clad with extreme plainness; one in a dress, though not quite monastic, that of an ecclesiastic of low degree; the other in a long grey mantle and loose gonna, the train of which last was tucked into a broad leathern belt, leaving bare the leggings, which showed limbs of great bulk and sinew, and which were stained by the dust and mire of travel. The first mentioned was slight and small of person; the last was of the height and port of the sons of Anak. The countenance of neither could be perceived, for both had let fall the hood, worn by civilians as by priests out of doors, more than half way over their faces.

A murmur of great surprise, disdain, and resentment, at the intrusion of strangers so attired circulated round the neighbourhood in which they had been placed, checked for a moment by a certain air of respect which the officer had shown towards both, but especially the taller; but breaking out with greater vivacity from the faint restraint, as the tall man unceremoniously stretched across the board, drew towards himself an immense flagon, which (agreeably to the custom of arranging the feast in “messes” of four) had been specially appropriated to Ulf the Dane, Godrith the Saxon, and two young Norman knights akin to the puissant Lord of Grantmesnil,—and having offered it to his comrade, who shook his head, drained it with a gusto that seemed to bespeak him at least no Norman, and wiped his lips boorishly with the sleeve of his huge arm.

“Dainty sir,” said one of those Norman knights, William Mallet, of the house of Mallet de Graville [54](#), as he moved as far from the gigantic intruder as the space on the settle would permit, “forgive the observation that you have damaged my mantle, you have grazed my foot, and you have drunk my wine. And vouchsafe, if it so please you, the face of the man who hath done this triple wrong to William Mallet de Graville.”

A kind of laugh—for laugh absolute it was not—rattled under the cowl of the tall stranger, as he drew it still closer over his face, with a hand that might have spanned the breast of his interrogator, and he made a gesture as if he did not understand the question addressed to him.

Therewith the Norman knight, bending with demure courtesy across the board to Godrith the Saxon, said:

“Pardex [55](#), but this fair guest and seigneur seemeth to me, noble Godree (whose name I fear my lips do but rudely enounce) of Saxon line and language; our Romance tongue he knoweth not. Pray you, is it the Saxon custom to enter a king’s hall so garbed, and drink a knight’s wine so mutely?”

Godrith, a young Saxon of considerable rank, but one of the most sedulous of the imitators of the foreign fashions, coloured high at the irony in the knight’s speech, and turning rudely to the huge guest, who was now causing immense fragments of pasty to vanish under the cavernous cowl, he said in his native tongue, though with a lisp as if unfamiliar to him—

“If thou beest Saxon, shame us not with thy ceorlish manners; crave pardon of this Norman thegn, who will doubtless yield it to thee in pity. Uncover thy face—and—”

Here the Saxon’s rebuke was interrupted; for one of the servitors just then approaching Godrith’s side with a spit, elegantly caparisoned with some score of plump larks, the unmannerly giant stretched out his arm within an inch of the Saxon’s startled nose, and possessed himself of larks, broche, and all. He drew off two, which he placed on his friend’s platter, despite all dissuasive gesticulations, and deposited the rest upon his own. The young banqueters gazed upon the spectacle in wrath too full for words.

At last spoke Mallet de Graville, with an envious eye upon the larks—for though a Norman was not gluttonous, he was epicurean—“Certes, and foi de chevalier! a man must go into strange parts if he wish to see monsters; but we are fortunate people,” (and he turned to his Norman friend, Aymer, Quen [56](#) or Count, D’Evreux,) “that we have discovered Polyphemus without going so far as Ulysses;” and pointing to the hooded giant, he quoted, appropriately enough,

“Monstrum, horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum.”

The giant continued to devour his larks, as complacently as the ogre to whom he was likened might have devoured the Greeks in his cave. But his fellow intruder seemed agitated by the sound of the Latin; he lifted up his head suddenly, and showed lips glistening with white even teeth, and curved into an approving smile, while he said: “Bene, me fili! bene, lepidissime, poetae verba, in militis ore, non indecora sonant.” [57](#)

The young Norman stared at the speaker, and replied, in the same tone of grave affectation: “Courteous sir! the approbation of an ecclesiastic so eminent as I take you to be, from the modesty with which you conceal your greatness, cannot fail to draw upon me the envy of my English friends; who are accustomed to swear in verba magistri, only for verba they learnedly substitute vina.”

“You are pleasant, Sire Mallet,” said Godrith, reddening; “but I know well that Latin is only fit for monks and shavelings; and little enow even they have to boast of.”

The Norman’s lip curled in disdain. “Latin!—O, Godree, bien aime!—Latin is the tongue of Caesars and senators, fortes conquerors and preux chevaliers. Knowest thou not that Duke William the dauntless at eight years old had the Comments of Julius Caesar by heart?—and that it is his saying, that ‘a king without letters is a crowned ass?’ [58](#) When the king is an ass, asinine are his subjects. Wherefore go to school, speak respectfully of thy betters, the monks and shavelings, who with us are often brave captains and sage councillors,—and learn that a full head makes a weighty hand.”

“Thy name, young knight?” said the ecclesiastic, in Norman French, though with a slight foreign accent.

“I can give it thee,” said the giant, speaking aloud for the first time, in the same language, and in a rough voice, which a quick ear might have detected as disguised,—“I can describe to thee

name, birth, and quality. By name, this youth is Guillaume Mallet, sometimes styled De Graville, because our Norman gentilhommes, forsooth, must always now have a 'de' tacked to their names; nevertheless he hath no other right to the seigneurie of Graville, which appertains to the head of his house, than may be conferred by an old tower on one corner of the demesnes so designated, with lands that would feed one horse and two villeins—if they were not in pawn to a Jew for moneys to buy velvet mantelins and a chain of gold. By birth, he comes from Mallet [59](#), a bold Norwegian in the fleet of Rou the Sea-king; his mother was a Frank woman, from whom he inherits his best possessions—videlicet, a shrewd wit, and a railing tongue. His qualities are abstinence, for he eateth nowhere save at the cost of another—some Latin, for he was meant for a monk, because he seemed too slight of frame for a warrior—some courage, for in spite of his frame he slew three Burgundians with his own hand; and Duke William, among their foolish acts, spoilt a friar sans tache, by making a knight sans terre; and for the rest—”

“And for the rest,” interrupted the Sire de Graville, turning white with wrath, but speaking in a low repressed voice, “were it not that Duke William sate yonder, thou shouldst have six inches of cold steel in thy huge carcase to digest thy stolen dinner, and silence thy unmannerly tongue.—”

“For the rest,” continued the giant indifferently, and as if he had not heard the interruption; “for the rest, he only resembles Achilles, in being impiger iracundus. Big men can quote Latin as well as little ones, Messire Mallet the beau cleric!”

Mallet's hand was on his dagger; and his eye dilated like that of the panther before he springs; but fortunately, at that moment, the deep sonorous voice of William, accustomed to send its sounds down the ranks of an army, rolled clear through the assemblage, though pitched little above its ordinary key:—

“Fair is your feast, and bright your wine, Sir King and brother mine! But I miss here what king and knight hold as the salt of the feast and the perfume to the wine: the lay of the minstrel. Beshrew me, but both Saxon and Norman are of kindred stock, and love to hear in hall and bower the deeds of their northern fathers. Crave I therefore from your gleemen, or harpers, some song of the olden time!”

A murmur of applause went through the Norman part of the assembly; the Saxons looked up; and some of the more practised courtiers sighed wearily, for they knew well what ditties alone were in favour with the saintly Edward.

The low voice of the King in reply was not heard, but those habituated to read his countenance in its very faint varieties of expression, might have seen that it conveyed reproof; and its purport soon became practically known, when a lugubrious prelude was heard from a quarter of the hall, in which sate certain ghost-like musicians in white robes—white as winding-sheets; and forthwith a dolorous and dirgelike voice chaunted a long and most tedious recital of the miracles and martyrdom of some early saint. So monotonous was the chaunt, that its effect soon became visible in a general drowsiness. And when Edward, who alone listened with attentive delight, turned towards the close to gather sympathising admiration from his distinguished guests, he saw his nephew yawning as if his jaw were dislocated—the Bishop of Bayeux, with his well-ringed fingers interlaced and resting on his stomach, fast asleep—Fitzosborne's half-shaven head balancing to and fro with many an uneasy start—and, William, wide awake indeed, but with eyes fixed on vacant space, and his soul far away from the gridiron to which (all other saints be praised!) the saint of the ballad had at last happily arrived.

“A comforting and salutary recital, Count William,” said the King.

The Duke started from his reverie, and bowed his head: then said, rather abruptly, “Is not yon blazon that of King Alfred?”

“Yea. Wherefore?”

“Hem! Matilda of Flanders is in direct descent from Alfred: it is a name and a line the Saxons yet honour!”

“Surely, yes; Alfred was a great man, and reformed the Psalmster,” replied Edward.

The dirge ceased, but so benumbing had been its effect, that the torpor it created did not subside with the cause. There was a dead and funereal silence throughout the spacious hall, when suddenly, loudly, mightily, as the blast of the trumpet upon the hush of the grave, rose a single voice. All started—all turned—all looked to one direction; and they saw that the great voice pealed from the farthest end of the hall. From under his gown the gigantic stranger had drawn a small three-stringed instrument—somewhat resembling the modern lute—and thus he sang,—

THE BALLAD OF ROU. [60](#)

I

From Blois to Senlis, wave by wave, roll'd on the Norman flood,
And Frank on Frank went drifting down the weltering tide of blood;
There was not left in all the land a castle wall to fire,
And not a wife but wailed a lord, a child but mourned a sire.
To Charles the king, the mitred monks, the mailed barons flew,
While, shaking earth, behind them strode the thunder march of Rou.

II

“O King,” then cried those barons bold, “in vain are mace and mail,
We fall before the Norman axe, as corn before the hail.”
“And vainly,” cried the pious monks, “by Mary’s shrine we kneel,
For prayers, like arrows, glance aside, against the Norman teal.”
The barons groaned, the shavelings wept, while near and nearer drew,
As death-birds round their scented feast, the raven flags of Rou.

III

Then said King Charles, “Where thousands fail, what king can stand
alone,
The strength of kings is in the men that gather round the throne.
When war dismays my barons bold, ‘tis time for war to cease;
When Heaven forsakes my pious monks, the will of Heaven is peace.
Go forth, my monks, with mass and rood the Norman camp unto,
And to the fold, with shepherd crook, entice this grisly Rou.”

IV

“I’ll give him all the ocean coast, from Michael Mount to Eure,

And Gille, my child, shall be his bride, to bind him fast and sure:
Let him but kiss the Christian cross, and sheathe the heathen sword,
And hold the lands I cannot keep, a fief from Charles his lord.”
Forth went the pastors of the Church, the Shepherd’s work to do,
And wrap the golden fleece around the tiger loins of Rou.

V

Psalm-chanting came the shaven monks, within the camp of dread;
Amidst his warriors, Norman Rou stood taller by the head.
Out spoke the Frank Archbishop then, a priest devout and sage,
“When peace and plenty wait thy word, what need of war and rage?
Why waste a land as fair as aught beneath the arch of blue,
Which might be thine to sow and reap?”—Thus saith the King to Rou.

VI

“I’ll give thee all the ocean coast, from Michael Mount to Eure,
And Gille, my fairest child, as bride, to bind thee fast and sure;
If then but kneel to Christ our God, and sheathe thy paynim sword,
And hold thy land, the Church’s son, a fief from Charles thy lord.”
The Norman on his warriors looked—to counsel they withdrew;
The saints took pity on the Franks, and moved the soul of Rou.

VII

So back he strode and thus he spoke, to that Archbishop meek:
“I take the land thy king bestows from Eure to Michael-peak,
I take the maid, or foul or fair, a bargain with the toast,
And for thy creed, a sea-king’s gods are those that give the most.
So hie thee back, and tell thy chief to make his proffer true,
And he shall find a docile son, and ye a saint in Rou.”

VIII

So o’er the border stream of Epte came Rou the Norman, where,
Begirt with barons, sat the King, enthroned at green St. Clair;
He placed his hand in Charles’s hand,—loud shouted all the throng,
But tears were in King Charles’s eyes—the grip of Rou was strong.
“Now kiss the foot,” the Bishop said, “that homage still is due;”

Then dark the frown and stern the smile of that grim convert, Rou.

IX

He takes the foot, as if the foot to slavish lips to bring;
The Normans scowl; he tilts the throne, and backwards falls the
King.
Loud laugh the joyous Norman men—pale stare the Franks aghast;
And Rou lifts up his head as from the wind springs up the mast;
“I said I would adore a God, but not a mortal too;
The foot that fled before a foe let cowards kiss!” said Rou.

No words can express the excitement which this rough minstrelsy—marred as it is by our poor translation from the Romance-tongue in which it was chanted—produced amongst the Norman guests; less perhaps, indeed, the song itself, than the recognition of the minstrel; and as he closed, from more than a hundred voices came the loud murmur, only subdued from a shout by the royal presence, “Taillefer, our Norman Taillefer!”

“By our joint saint, Peter, my cousin the King,” exclaimed William, after a frank cordial laugh; “Well I wot, no tongue less free than my warrior minstrel’s could have so shocked our ears. Excuse his bold theme, for the sake of his bold heart, I pray thee; and since I know well” (here the Duke’s face grew grave and anxious) “that nought save urgent and weighty news from my stormy realm could have brought over this rhyming petrel, permit the officer behind me to lead hither a bird, I fear, of omen as well as of song.”

“Whatever pleases thee, pleases me,” said Edward, drily; and he gave the order to the attendant. In a few moments, up the space in the hall, between either table, came the large stride of the famous minstrel, preceded by the officer and followed by the ecclesiastic. The hoods of both were now thrown back, and discovered countenances in strange contrast, but each equally worthy of the attention it provoked. The face of the minstrel was open and sunny as the day; and that of the priest, dark and close as night. Thick curls of deep auburn (the most common colour for the locks of the Norman) wreathed in careless disorder round Taillefer’s massive unwrinkled brow. His eye, of light hazel, was bold and joyous; mirth, though sarcastic and sly, mantled round his lips. His whole presence was at once engaging and heroic.

On the other hand, the priest’s cheek was dark and sallow; his features singularly delicate and refined; his forehead high, but somewhat narrow, and crossed with lines of thought; his mien composed, modest, but not without calm self-confidence. Amongst that assembly of soldiers, noiseless, self-collected, and conscious of his surpassing power over swords and mail, moved the SCHOLAR.

William’s keen eye rested on the priest with some surprise, not unmixed with pride and ire; but first addressing Taillefer, who now gained the foot of the dais, he said, with a familiarity almost fond:

“Now, by’re Lady, if thou bringest not ill news, thy gay face, man, is pleasanter to mine eyes than thy rough song to my ears. Kneel, Taillefer, kneel to King Edward, and with more address, rogue, than our unlucky countryman to King Charles.”

But Edward, as ill-liking the form of the giant as the subject of his lay, said, pushing back his seat as far as he could:

“Nay, nay, we excuse thee, we excuse thee, tall man.” Nevertheless, the minstrel still knelt, and so, with a look of profound humility, did the priest. Then both slowly rose, and at a sign from the Duke, passed to the other side of the table, standing behind Fitzosborne’s chair.

“Clerk,” said William, eying deliberately the sallow face of the ecclesiastic; “I know thee of old; and if the Church have sent me an envoy, per la resplendar De, it should have sent me at least an abbot.”

“Hein, hein!” said Taillefer, bluntly, “vex not my bon camarade, Count of the Normans. Gramercy, thou wilt welcome him, peradventure, better than me; for the singer tells but of discord, and the sage may restore the harmony.”

“Ha!” said the Duke, and the frown fell so dark over his eyes that the last seemed only visible by two sparks of fire. “I guess, my proud Vavasours are mutinous. Retire, thou and thy comrade. Await me in my chamber. The feast shall not flag in London because the wind blows a gale in Rouen.”

The two envoys, since so they seemed, bowed in silence and withdrew.

“Nought of ill-tidings, I trust,” said Edward, who had not listened to the whispered communications that had passed between the Duke and his subjects. “No schism in thy Church? The clerk seemed a peaceful man, and a humble.”

“An there were schism in my Church,” said the fiery Duke, “my brother of Bayeux would settle it by arguments as close as the gap between cord and throttle.”

“Ah! thou art, doubtless, well read in the canons, holy Odo!” said the King, turning to the bishop with more respect than he had yet evinced towards that gentle prelate.

“Canons, yes, Seigneur, I draw them up myself for my flock conformably with such interpretations of the Roman Church as suit best with the Norman realm: and woe to deacon, monk, or abbot, who chooses to misconstrue them.” [61](#)

The bishop looked so truculent and menacing, while his fancy thus conjured up the possibility of heretical dissent, that Edward shrank from him as he had done from Taillefer; and in a few minutes after, on exchange of signals between himself and the Duke, who, impatient to escape, was too stately to testify that desire, the retirement of the royal party broke up the banquet; save, indeed, that a few of the elder Saxons, and more incorrigible Danes, still steadily kept their seats, and were finally dislodged from their later settlements on the stone floors, to find themselves, at dawn, carefully propped in a row against the outer walls of the palace, with their patient attendants, holding links, and gazing on their masters with stolid envy, if not of the repose at least of the drugs that had caused it.

CHAPTER II

“And now,” said William, reclining on a long and narrow couch, with raised carved work all round it like a box (the approved fashion of a bed in those days), “now, Sire Taillefer—thy news.”

There were then in the Duke’s chamber, the Count Fitzosborne, Lord of Breteuil, surnamed “the Proud Spirit”—who, with great dignity, was holding before the brazier the ample tunic of linen (called dormitorium in the Latin of that time, and night-rail in the Saxon tongue) in which his lord was to robe his formidable limbs for repose [62](#),—Taillefer, who stood erect before the Duke as a Roman sentry at his post,—and the ecclesiastic, a little apart, with arms gathered under his gown, and his bright dark eyes fixed on the ground.

“High and puissant, my liege,” then said Taillefer, gravely, and with a shade of sympathy on his large face, “my news is such as is best told briefly: Bunaz, Count d’Eu and descendant of Richard Sanspeur, hath raised the standard of revolt.”

“Go on,” said the Duke, clenching his hand.

“Henry, King of the French, is treating with the rebel, and stirring up mutiny in thy realm, and pretenders to thy throne.”

“Ha!” said the Duke, and his lip quivered; “this is not all.”

“No, my liege! and the worst is to come. Thy uncle Mauger, knowing that thy heart is bent on thy speedy nuptials with the high and noble damsel, Matilda of Flanders, has broken out again in thine absence—is preaching against thee in hall and from pulpit. He declares that such espousals

are incestuous, both as within the forbidden degrees, and inasmuch as Adele, the lady's mother, was betrothed to thine uncle Richard; and Mauger menaces excommunication if my liege pursues his suit! [63](#) So troubled is the realm, that I, waiting not for debate in council, and fearing sinister ambassage if I did so, took ship from thy port of Cherbourg, and have not flagged rein, and scarce broken bread, till I could say to the heir of Rolf the Founder—Save thy realm from the men of mail, and thy bride from the knaves in serge.”

“Ho, ho!” cried William; then bursting forth in full wrath, as he sprang from the couch. “Hearest thou this, Lord Seneschal? Seven years, the probation of the patriarch, have I wooed and waited; and lo, in the seventh, does a proud priest say to me, ‘Wrench the love from thy heart-strings!’—Excommunicate me—ME—William, the son of Robert the Devil! Ha, by God's splendour, Mauger shall live to wish the father stood, in the foul fiend's true likeness, by his side, rather than brave the bent brow of the son!”

“Dread my lord,” said Fitzosborne, desisting from his employ, and rising to his feet; “thou knowest that I am thy true friend and leal knight; thou knowest how I have aided thee in this marriage with the lady of Flanders, and how gravely I think that what pleases thy fancy will guard thy realm; but rather than brave the order of the Church, and the ban of the Pope, I would see thee wed to the poorest virgin in Normandy.”

William, who had been pacing the room like an enraged lion in his den, halted in amaze at this bold speech.

“This from thee, William Fitzosborne!—from thee! I tell thee, that if all the priests in Christendom, and all the barons in France, stood between me and my bride, I would hew my way through the midst. Foes invade my realm—let them; princes conspire against me—I smile in scorn; subjects mutiny—this strong hand can punish, or this large heart can forgive. All these are the dangers which he who governs men should prepare to meet; but man has a right to his love, as the stag to his hind. And he who wrongs me here, is foe and traitor to me, not as Norman Duke but as human being. Look to it—thou and thy proud barons, look to it!”

“Proud may thy barons be,” said Fitzosborne, reddening, and with a brow that quailed not before his lord's; “for they are the sons of those who carved out the realm of the Norman, and owned in Rou but the feudal chief of free warriors; vassals are not villeins. And that which we hold our duty—whether to Church or chief—that, Duke William, thy proud barons will doubtless do; nor less, believe me, for threats which, braved in discharge of duty and defence of freedom, we hold as air.”

The Duke gazed on his haughty subject with an eye in which a meaner spirit might have seen its doom. The veins in his broad temples swelled like cords, and a light foam gathered round his quivering lips. But fiery and fearless as William was, not less was he sagacious and profound. In that one man he saw the representative of that superb and matchless chivalry—that race of races—those men of men, in whom the brave acknowledge the highest example of valiant deeds, and the free the manliest assertion of noble thoughts [64](#), since the day when the last Athenian covered his head with his mantle, and mutely died: and far from being the most stubborn against his will, it was to Fitzosborne's paramount influence with the council, that he had often owed their submission to his wishes, and their contributions to his wars. In the very tempest of his wrath, he felt that the blow belonged to strike on that bold head would shiver his ducal throne to the dust. He felt too, that awful indeed was that power of the Church which could thus turn against him the heart of his truest knight: and he began (for with all his outward frankness his temper was suspicious) to wrong the great-souled noble by the thought that he might already be won over by the enemies whom Mauger had arrayed against his nuptials. Therefore, with one of those rare and mighty efforts of that dissimulation which debased his character, but achieved his fortunes, he cleared his brow of its dark cloud, and said in a low voice, that was not without its pathos:

“Had an angel from heaven forewarned me that William Fitzosborne would speak thus to his kinsman and brother in arms, in the hour of need and the agony of passion, I would have disbelieved him. Let it pass——”

But ere the last word was out of his lips, Fitzosborne had fallen on his knees before the Duke, and, clasping his hand, exclaimed, while the tears rolled down his swarthy cheek, “Pardon, pardon, my liege! when thou speakest thus my heart melts. What thou willest, that will I! Church or Pope, no matter. Send me to Flanders; I will bring back thy bride.”

The slight smile that curved William’s lip, showed that he was scarce worthy of that sublime weakness in his friend. But he cordially pressed the hand that grasped his own, and said, “Rise; thus should brother speak to brother.” Then—for his wrath was only concealed, not stifled, and yearned for its vent—his eye fell upon the delicate and thoughtful face of the priest, who had watched this short and stormy conference in profound silence, despite Taillefer’s whispers to him to interrupt the dispute. “So, priest,” he said, “I remember me that when Mauger before let loose his rebellious tongue thou didst lend thy pedant learning to eke out his brainless treason. Methought that I then banished thee my realm?”

“Not so, Count and Seigneur,” answered the ecclesiastic, with a grave but arch smile on his lip; “let me remind thee, that to speed me back to my native land thou didst graciously send me a horse, halting on three legs, and all lame on the fourth. Thus mounted, I met thee on my road. I saluted thee; so did the beast, for his head well nigh touched the ground. Whereon I did ask thee, in a Latin play of words, to give me at least a quadruped, not a tripod, for my journey. [65](#) Gracious, even in ire, and with relenting laugh, was thine answer. My liege, thy words implied banishment—thy laughter pardon. So I stayed.”

Despite his wrath, William could scarce repress a smile; but recollecting himself, he replied, more gravely, “Peace with this levity, priest. Doubtless thou art the envoy from this scrupulous Mauger, or some other of my gentle clergy; and thou comest, as doubtless, with soft words and whining homilies. It is in vain. I hold the Church in holy reverence; the pontiff knows it. But Matilda of Flanders I have wooed; and Matilda of Flanders shall sit by my side in the halls of Rouen, or on the deck of my war-ship, till it anchors on a land worthy to yield a new domain to the son of the Sea-king.”

“In the halls of Rouen—and it may be on the throne of England—shall Matilda reign by the side of William,” said the priest in a clear, low, and emphatic voice; “and it was to tell my lord the Duke that I repent me of my first unconsidered obeisance to Mauger as my spiritual superior; that since then I have myself examined canon and precedent; and though the letter of the law be against thy spousals, it comes precisely under the category of those alliances to which the fathers of the Church accord dispensation:—it is to tell thee this, that I, plain Doctor of Laws and priest of Pavia, have crossed the seas.”

“Ha Rou!—Ha Rou!” cried Taillefer, with his usual bluntness, and laughing with great glee, “why wouldst thou not listen to me, monseigneur?”

“If thou deceivest me not,” said William, in surprise, “and thou canst make good thy words, no prelate in Neustria, save Odo of Bayeux, shall lift his head high as thine.” And here William, deeply versed in the science of men, bent his eyes keenly upon the unchanging and earnest face of the speaker. “Ah,” he burst out, as if satisfied with the survey, “and my mind tells me that thou speakest not thus boldly and calmly without ground sufficient. Man, I like thee. Thy name? I forget it.”

“Lanfranc of Pavia, please you my lord; called some times ‘Lanfranc the Scholar’ in thy cloister of Bec. Nor misdeem me, that I, humble, unmitred priest, should be thus bold. In birth I am noble, and my kindred stand near to the grace of our ghostly pontiff; to the pontiff I myself am not unknown. Did I desire honours, in Italy I might seek them; it is not so. I crave no guerdon for the service I proffer; none but this—leisure and books in the Convent of Bec.”

“Sit down—nay, sit, man,” said William, greatly interested, but still suspicious. “One riddle only I ask thee to solve, before I give thee all my trust, and place my very heart in thy hands. Why, if

thou desirest not rewards, shouldst thou thus care to serve me—thou, a foreigner?” A light, brilliant and calm, shone in the eyes of the scholar, and a blush spread over his pale cheeks.

“My Lord Prince, I will answer in plain words. But first permit me to be the questioner.”

The priest turned towards Fitzosborne, who had seated himself on a stool at William’s feet, and, leaning his chin on his hand, listened to the ecclesiastic, not more with devotion to his calling, than wonder at the influence one so obscure was irresistibly gaining over his own martial spirit, and William’s iron craft.

“Lovest thou not, William Lord of Breteuil, lovest thou not fame for the sake of fame?”

“Sur mon ame—yes!” said the Baron.

“And thou, Taillefer the minstrel, lovest thou not song for the sake of song?”

“For song alone,” replied the mighty minstrel. “More gold in one ringing rhyme than in all the coffers of Christendom.”

“And marvellest thou, reader of men’s hearts,” said the scholar, turning once more to William, “that the student loves knowledge for the sake of knowledge? Born of high race, poor in purse, and slight of thews, betimes I found wealth in books, and drew strength from lore. I heard of the Count of Rouen and the Normans, as a prince of small domain, with a measureless spirit, a lover of letters, and a captain in war. I came to thy duchy, I noted its subjects and its prince, and the words of Themistocles rang in my ear: ‘I cannot play the lute, but I can make a small state great.’ I felt an interest in thy strenuous and troubled career. I believe that knowledge, to spread amongst the nations, must first find a nursery in the brain of kings; and I saw in the deed-doer, the agent of the thinker. In those espousals, on which with untiring obstinacy thy heart is set, I might sympathise with thee; perchance”—(here a melancholy smile flitted over the student’s pale lips), “perchance even as a lover: priest though I be now, and dead to human love, once I loved, and I know what it is to strive in hope, and to waste in despair. But my sympathy, I own, was more given to the prince than to the lover. It was natural that I, priest and foreigner, should obey at first the orders of Mauger, archprelate and spiritual chief, and the more so as the law was with him; but when I resolved to stay despite thy sentence which banished me, I resolved to aid thee; for if with Mauger was the dead law, with thee was the living cause of man. Duke William, on thy nuptials with Matilda of Flanders rests thy duchy—rest, perchance, the mightier sceptres that are yet to come. Thy title disputed, thy principality new and unestablished, thou, above all men, must link thy new race with the ancient line of kings and kaisars. Matilda is the descendant of Charlemagne and Alfred. Thy realm is insecure as long as France undermines it with plots, and threatens it with arms. Marry the daughter of Baldwin—and thy wife is the niece of Henry of France—thine enemy becomes thy kinsman, and must, perforce, be thine ally. This is not all; it were strange, looking round this disordered royalty of England—a childless king, who loves thee better than his own blood; a divided nobility, already adopting the fashions of the stranger, and accustomed to shift their faith from Saxon to Dane, and Dane to Saxon; a people that has respect indeed for brave chiefs, but, seeing new men rise daily from new houses, has no reverence for ancient lines and hereditary names; with a vast mass of villeins or slaves that have no interest in the land or its rulers; strange, seeing all this, if thy day-dreams have not also beheld a Norman sovereign on the throne of Saxon England. And thy marriage with the descendant of the best and most beloved prince that ever ruled these realms, if it does not give thee a title to the land, may help to conciliate its affections, and to fix thy posterity in the halls of their mother’s kin. Have I said eno’ to prove why, for the sake of nations, it were wise for the pontiff to stretch the harsh girths of the law? why I might be enabled to prove to the Court of Rome the policy of conciliating the love, and strengthening the hands, of the Norman Count, who may so become the main prop of Christendom? Yea, have I said eno’ to prove that the humble clerk can look on mundane matters with the eye of a man who can make small states great?”

William remained speechless—his hot blood thrilled with a half superstitious awe; so thoroughly had this obscure Lombard divined, detailed all the intricate meshes of that policy with

which he himself had interwoven his pertinacious affection for the Flemish princess, that it seemed to him as if he listened to the echo of his own heart, or heard from a soothsayer the voice of his most secret thoughts.

The priest continued

“Wherefore, thus considering, I said to myself, Now has the time come, Lanfranc the Lombard, to prove to thee whether thy self-boastings have been a vain deceit, or whether, in this age of iron and amidst this lust of gold, thou, the penniless and the feeble, canst make knowledge and wit of more avail to the destinies of kings than armed men and filled treasuries. I believe in that power. I am ready for the test. Pause, judge from what the Lord of Breteuil hath said to thee, what will be the defection of thy lords if the Pope confirm the threatened excommunication of thine uncle? Thine armies will rot from thee; thy treasures will be like dry leaves in thy coffers; the Duke of Bretagne will claim thy duchy as the legitimate heir of thy forefathers; the Duke of Burgundy will league with the King of France, and march on thy faithless legions under the banner of the Church. The handwriting is on the walls, and thy sceptre and thy crown will pass away.” William set his teeth firmly, and breathed hard.

“But send me to Rome, thy delegate, and the thunder of Mauger shall fall powerless. Marry Matilda, bring her to thy halls, place her on thy throne, laugh to scorn the interdict of thy traitor uncle, and rest assured that the Pope shall send thee his dispensation to thy spousals, and his benison on thy marriage-bed. And when this be done, Duke William, give me not abbacies and prelacies; multiply books, and stablish schools, and bid thy servant found the royalty of knowledge, as thou shalt found the sovereignty of war.”

The Duke, transported from himself, leaped up and embraced the priest with his vast arms; he kissed his cheeks, he kissed his forehead, as, in those days, king kissed king with “the kiss of peace.”

“Lanfranc of Pavia,” he cried, “whether thou succeed or fail, thou hast my love and gratitude evermore. As thou speakest, would I have spoken, had I been born, framed, and reared as thou. And, verily, when I hear thee, I blush for the boasts of my barbarous pride, that no man can wield my mace, or bend my bow. Poor is the strength of body—a web of law can entangle it, and a word from a priest’s mouth can palsy. But thou!—let me look at thee.”

William gazed on the pale face: from head to foot he scanned the delicate, slender form, and then, turning away, he said to Fitzosborne:

“Thou, whose mailed hand hath fell’d a war-steed, art thou not ashamed of thyself? The day is coming, I see it afar, when these slight men shall set their feet upon our corslets.”

He paused as if in thought, again paced the room, and stopped before the crucifix, and image of the Virgin, which stood in a niche near the bed-head.

“Right, noble prince,” said the priest’s low voice, “pause there for a solution to all enigmas; there view the symbol of all-enduring power; there, learn its ends below—comprehend the account it must yield above. To your thoughts and your prayers we leave you.”

He took the stalwart arm of Taillefer, as he spoke, and, with a grave obeisance to Fitzosborne, left the chamber.

CHAPTER III

The next morning William was long closeted alone with Lanfranc,—that man, among the most remarkable of his age, of whom it was said, that “to comprehend the extent of his talents, one must be Herodian in grammar, Aristotle in dialectics, Cicero in rhetoric, Augustine and Jerome in Scriptural lore,” [66](#)—and ere the noon the Duke’s gallant and princely train were ordered to be in readiness for return home.

The crowd in the broad space, and the citizens from their boats in the river, gazed on the knights and steeds of that gorgeous company, already drawn up and awaiting without the open gates the sound of the trumpets that should announce the Duke’s departure. Before the hall-door in the inner court

were his own men. The snow-white steed of Odo; the alezan of Fitzosborne; and, to the marvel of all, a small palfrey plainly caparisoned. What did that palfrey amid those steeds?—the steeds themselves seemed to chafe at the companionship; the Duke's charger pricked up his ears and snorted; the Lord of Breteuil's alezan kicked out, as the poor nag humbly drew near to make acquaintance; and the prelate's white barb, with red vicious eye, and ears laid down, ran fiercely at the low-bred intruder, with difficulty reined in by the squires, who shared the beast's amaze and resentment.

Meanwhile the Duke thoughtfully took his way to Edward's apartments. In the anteroom were many monks and many knights; but conspicuous amongst them all was a tall and stately veteran, leaning on a great two-handed sword, and whose dress and fashion of beard were those of the last generation, the men who had fought with Canute the Great or Edmund Ironsides. So grand was the old man's aspect, and so did he contrast in appearance the narrow garb and shaven chins of those around, that the Duke was roused from his reverie at the sight, and marvelling why one, evidently a chief of high rank, had neither graced the banquet in his honour, nor been presented to his notice, he turned to the Earl of Hereford, who approached him with gay salutation, and inquired the name and title of the bearded man in the loose flowing robe.

"Know you not, in truth?" said the lively Earl, in some wonder. "In him you see the great rival of Godwin. He is the hero of the Danes, as Godwin is of the Saxons, a true son of Odin, Siward, Earl of the Northumbrians." [67](#)

"Norse Dame be my aid,—his fame hath oft filled my ears, and I should have lost the most welcome sight in merrie England had I not now beheld him."

Therewith, the Duke approached courteously, and, doffing the cap he had hitherto retained, he greeted the old hero with those compliments which the Norman had already learned in the courts of the Frank.

The stout Earl received them coldly, and replying in Danish to William's Romance-tongue, he said:

"Pardon, Count of the Normans, if these old lips cling to their old words. Both of us, methinks, date our lineage from the lands of the Norse. Suffer Siward to speak the language the sea-kings spoke. The old oak is not to be transplanted, and the old man keeps the ground where his youth took root."

The Duke, who with some difficulty comprehended the general meaning of Siward's speech, bit his lip, but replied courteously:

"The youths of all nations may learn from renowned age. Much doth it shame me that I cannot commune with thee in the ancestral tongue; but the angels at least know the language of the Norman Christian, and I pray them and the saints for a calm end to thy brave career."

"Pray not to angel or saint for Siward son of Beorn," said the old man hastily; "let me not have a cow's death, but a warrior's; die in my mail of proof, axe in hand, and helm on head. And such may be my death, if Edward the King reads my rede and grants my prayer."

"I have influence with the King," said William; "name thy wish, that I may back it."

"The fiend forfend," said the grim Earl, "that a foreign prince should sway England's King, or that thegn and earl should ask other backing than leal service and just cause. If Edward be the saint men call him, he will loose me on the hell-wolf, without other cry than his own conscience."

The Duke turned inquiringly to Rolf; who, thus appealed to, said:

"Siward urges my uncle to espouse the cause of Malcolm of Cumbria against the bloody tyrant Macbeth; and but for the disputes with the traitor Godwin, the King had long since turned his arms to Scotland."

"Call not traitors, young man," said the Earl, in high disdain, "those who, with all their faults and crimes, have placed thy kinsman on the throne of Canute."

"Hush, Rolf," said the Duke, observing the fierce young Norman about to reply hastily. "But methought, though my knowledge of English troubles is but scant, that Siward was the sworn foe to Godwin?"

“Foe to him in his power, friend to him in his wrongs,” answered Siward. “And if England needs defenders when I and Godwin are in our shrouds, there is but one man worthy of the days of old, and his name is Harold, the outlaw.”

William’s face changed remarkably, despite all his dissimulation; and, with a slight inclination of his head, he strode on moody and irritated.

“This Harold! this Harold!” he muttered to himself, “all brave men speak to me of this Harold! Even my Norman knights name him with reluctant reverence, and even his foes do him honour;—verily his shadow is cast from exile over all the land.”

Thus murmuring, he passed the throng with less than his wonted affable grace, and pushing back the officers who wished to precede him, entered, without ceremony, Edward’s private chamber.

The King was alone, but talking loudly to himself, gesticulating vehemently, and altogether so changed from his ordinary placid apathy of mien, that William drew back in alarm and awe. Often had he heard indirectly, that of late years Edward was said to see visions, and be rapt from himself into the world of spirit and shadow; and such, he now doubted not, was the strange paroxysm of which he was made the witness. Edward’s eyes were fixed on him, but evidently without recognising his presence; the King’s hands were outstretched, and he cried aloud in a voice of sharp anguish:

“Sanguelac, Sanguelac!—the Lake of Blood!—the waves spread, the waves redden! Mother of mercy—where is the ark?—where the Ararat?—Fly—fly—this way—this—” and he caught convulsive hold of William’s arm. “No! there the corpses are piled—high and higher—there the horse of the Apocalypse tramples the dead in their gore.”

In great horror, William took the King, now gasping on his breast, in his arms, and laid him on his bed, beneath its canopy of state, all blazoned with the martlets and cross of his insignia. Slowly Edward came to himself, with heavy sighs; and when at length he sate up and looked round, it was with evident unconsciousness of what had passed across his haggard and wandering spirit, for he said, with his usual drowsy calmness:

“Thanks, Guillaume, bien aime, for rousing me from unseasoned sleep. How fares it with thee?”

“Nay, how with thee, dear friend and king? thy dreams have been troubled.”

“Not so; I slept so heavily, methinks I could not have dreamed at all. But thou art clad as for a journey—spur on thy heel, staff in thy hand!”

“Long since, O dear host, I sent Odo to tell thee of the ill news from Normandy that compelled me to depart.”

“I remember—I remember me now,” said Edward, passing his pale womanly fingers over his forehead. “The heathen rage against thee. Ah! my poor brother, a crown is an awful head-gear. While yet time, why not both seek some quiet convent, and put away these earthly cares?”

William smiled and shook his head. “Nay, holy Edward, from all I have seen of convents, it is a dream to think that the monk’s serge hides a calmer breast than the warrior’s mail, or the king’s ermine. Now give me thy benison, for I go.”

He knelt as he spoke, and Edward bent his hands over his head, and blessed him. Then, taking from his own neck a collar of zimmes (jewels and uncut gems), of great price, the King threw it over the broad throat bent before him, and rising, clapped his hands. A small door opened, giving a glimpse of the oratory within, and a monk appeared.

“Father, have my behests been fulfilled?—hath Hugoline, my treasurer, dispensed the gifts that I spoke of?”

“Verily yes; vault, coffer, and garde-robe—stall and meuse.—are well nigh drained,” answered the monk, with a sour look at the Norman, whose native avarice gleamed in his dark eyes as he heard the answer.

“Thy train go not hence empty-handed,” said Edward fondly. “Thy father’s halls sheltered the exile, and the exile forgets not the sole pleasure of a king—the power to requite. We may never meet again, William,—age creeps over me, and who will succeed to my thorny throne?” William longed

to answer,—to tell the hope that consumed him,—to remind his cousin of the vague promise in their youth, that the Norman Count should succeed to that “thorny throne:” but the presence of the Saxon monk repelled him, nor was there in Edward’s uneasy look much to allure him on.

“But peace,” continued the King, “be between thine and mine, as between thee and me!”

“Amen,” said the Duke, “and I leave thee at least free from the proud rebels who so long disturbed thy reign. This House of Godwin, thou wilt not again let it tower above thy palace?”

“Nay, the future is with God and his saints;” answered Edward, feebly. “But Godwin is old—older than I, and bowed by many storms.”

“Ay, his sons are more to be dreaded and kept aloof—mostly Harold!”

“Harold,—he was ever obedient, he alone of his kith; truly my soul mourns for Harold,” said the King, sighing.

“The serpent’s egg hatches but the serpent. Keep thy heel on it,” said William, sternly.

“Thou speakest well,” said the irresolute prince, who never seemed three days or three minutes together in the same mind. “Harold is in Ireland—there let him rest: better for all.”

“For all,” said the Duke; “so the saints keep thee, O royal saint!”

He kissed the King’s hand, and strode away to the hall where Odo, Fitzosborne, and the priest Lanfranc awaited him. And so that day, halfway towards the fair town of Dover, rode Duke William, and by the side of his roan barb ambled the priest’s palfrey.

Behind came his gallant train, and with tumbrils and sumpter-mules laden with baggage, and enriched by Edward’s gifts; while Welch hawks, and steeds of great price from the pastures of Surrey and the plains of Cambridge and York, attested no less acceptably than zimme, and golden chain, and embroidered robe, the munificence of the grateful King. [68](#)

As they journeyed on, and the fame of the Duke’s coming was sent abroad by the bodes or messengers, despatched to prepare the towns through which he was to pass for an arrival sooner than expected, the more highborn youths of England, especially those of the party counter to that of the banished Godwin, came round the ways to gaze upon that famous chief, who, from the age of fifteen, had wielded the most redoubtable sword of Christendom. And those youths wore the Norman garb: and in the towns, Norman counts held his stirrup to dismount, and Norman hosts spread the fastidious board; and when, at the eve of the next day, William saw the pennon of one of his own favourite chiefs waving in the van of armed men, that sallied forth from the towers of Dover (the key of the coast) he turned to the Lombard, still by his side, and said:

“Is not England part of Normandy already?”

And the Lombard answered:

“The fruit is well nigh ripe, and the first breeze will shake it to thy feet. Put not out thy hand too soon. Let the wind do its work.”

And the Duke made reply:

“As thou thinkest, so think I. And there is but one wind in the halls of heaven that can waft the fruit to the feet of another.”

“And that?” asked the Lombard.

“Is the wind that blows from the shores of Ireland, when it fills the sails of Harold, son of Godwin.”

“Thou fearest that man, and why?” asked the Lombard with interest.

And the Duke answered:

“Because in the breast of Harold beats the heart of England.”

BOOK III. THE HOUSE OF GODWIN

CHAPTER I

And all went to the desire of Duke William the Norman. With one hand he curbed his proud vassals, and drove back his fierce foes. With the other, he led to the altar Matilda, the maid of Flanders; and all happened as Lanfranc had foretold. William's most formidable enemy, the King of France, ceased to conspire against his new kinsman; and the neighbouring princes said, "The Bastard hath become one of us since he placed by his side the descendant of Charlemagne." And Mauger, Archbishop of Rouen, excommunicated the Duke and his bride, and the ban fell idle; for Lanfranc sent from Rome the Pope's dispensation and blessing [69](#), conditionally only that bride and bridegroom founded each a church. And Mauger was summoned before the synod, and accused of unclerical crimes; and they deposed him from his state, and took from him abbacies and sees. And England every day waxed more and more Norman; and Edward grew more feeble and infirm, and there seemed not a barrier between the Norman Duke and the English throne, when suddenly the wind blew in the halls of heaven, and filled the sails of Harold the Earl.

And his ships came to the mouth of the Severn. And the people of Somerset and Devon, a mixed and mainly a Celtic race, who bore small love to the Saxons, drew together against him, and he put them to flight. [70](#)

Meanwhile, Godwin and his sons Sweyn, Tostig, and Gurth, who had taken refuge in that very Flanders from which William the Duke had won his bride,—(for Tostig had wed, previously, the sister of Matilda, the rose of Flanders; and Count Baldwin had, for his sons-in-law, both Tostig and William,)—meanwhile, I say, these, not holpen by the Count Baldwin, but helping themselves, lay at Bruges, ready to join Harold the Earl. And Edward, advised of this from the anxious Norman, caused forty ships [71](#) to be equipped, and put them under command of Rolf, Earl of Hereford. The ships lay at Sandwich in wait for Godwin. But the old Earl got from them, and landed quietly on the southern coast. And the fort of Hastings opened to his coming with a shout from its armed men.

All the boatmen, all the mariners, far and near, thronged to him, with sail and with shield, with sword and with oar. All Kent (the foster-mother of the Saxons) sent forth the cry, "Life or death with Earl Godwin." [72](#) Fast over the length and breadth of the land, went the bodes [73](#) and riders of the Earl; and hosts, with one voice, answered the cry of the children of Horsa, "Life or death with Earl Godwin." And the ships of King Edward, in dismay, turned flag and prow to London, and the fleet of Harold sailed on. So the old Earl met his young son on the deck of a war-ship, that had once borne the Raven of the Dane.

Swelled and gathering sailed the armament of the English men. Slow up the Thames it sailed, and on either shore marched tumultuous the swarming multitudes. And King Edward sent after more help, but it came up very late. So the fleet of the Earl nearly faced the Julliet Keape of London, and abode at Southwark till the flood-tide came up. When he had mustered his host, then came the flood tide. [74](#)

CHAPTER II

King Edward sate, not on his throne, but on a chair of state, in the presence-chamber of his palace of Westminster. His diadem, with the three zimmes shaped into a triple trefoil [75](#) on his brow, his sceptre in his right hand. His royal robe, tight to the throat, with a broad band of gold, flowed to his feet; and at the fold gathered round the left knee, where now the kings of England wear the badge

of St. George, was embroidered a simple cross [76](#). In that chamber met the thegns and proceres of his realm; but not they alone. No national Witan there assembled, but a council of war, composed at least one third part of Normans—counts, knights, prelates, and abbots of high degree.

And King Edward looked a king! The habitual lethargic meekness had vanished from his face, and the large crown threw a shadow, like a frown, over his brow. His spirit seemed to have risen from the weight it took from the sluggish blood of his father, Ethelred the Unready, and to have remounted to the brighter and earlier sources of ancestral heroes. Worthy in that hour he seemed to boast the blood and wield the sceptre of Athelstan and Alfred. [77](#)

Thus spoke the King:

“Right worthy and beloved, my ealdermen, earls, and thegns of England; noble and familiar, my friends and guests, counts and chevaliers of Normandy, my mother’s land; and you, our spiritual chiefs, above all ties of birth and country, Christendom your common appanage, and from Heaven your seignories and fiefs,—hear the words of Edward, the King of England under grace of the Most High. The rebels are in our river; open yonder lattice, and you will see the piled shields glittering from their barks, and hear the hum of their hosts. Not a bow has yet been drawn, not a sword left its sheath; yet on the opposite side of the river are our fleets of forty sail—along the strand, between our palace and the gates of London, are arrayed our armies. And this pause because Godwin the traitor hath demanded truce and his nuncius waits without. Are ye willing that we should hear the message? or would ye rather that we dismiss the messenger unheard, and pass at once, to rank and to sail, the war-cry of a Christian king, ‘Holy Crosse and our Lady!’”

The King ceased, his left hand grasping firm the leopard head carved on his throne, and his sceptre untrembling in his lifted hand.

A murmur of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, the war-cry of the Normans, was heard amongst the stranger-knights of the audience; but haughty and arrogant as those strangers were, no one presumed to take precedence, in England’s danger, of men English born.

Slowly then rose Alred, Bishop of Winchester, the worthiest prelate in all the land. [78](#)

“Kingly son,” said the bishop, “evil is the strife between men of the same blood and lineage, nor justified but by extremes, which have not yet been made clear to us. And ill would it sound throughout England were it said that the King’s council gave, perchance, his city of London to sword and fire, and rent his land in twain, when a word in season might have disbanded yon armies, and given to your throne a submissive subject, where now you are menaced by a formidable rebel. Wherefore, I say, admit the nuncius.”

Scarcely had Alred resumed his seat, before Robert the Norman prelate of Canterbury started up,—a man, it was said, of worldly learning—and exclaimed:

“To admit the messenger is to approve the treason. I do beseech the King to consult only his own royal heart and royal honour. Reflect—each moment of delay swells the rebel hosts, strengthens their cause; of each moment they avail themselves to allure to their side the misguided citizens. Delay but proves our own weakness; a king’s name is a tower of strength, but only when fortified by a king’s authority. Give the signal for—war I call it not—no—for chastisement and justice.”

“As speaks my brother of Canterbury, speak I,” said William, Bishop of London, another Norman.

But then there rose up a form at whose rising all murmurs were hushed.

Grey and vast, as some image of a gone and mightier age towered over all, Siward, the son of Beorn, the great Earl of Northumbria.

“We have naught to do with the Normans. Were they on the river, and our countrymen, Dane or Saxon, alone in this hall, small doubt of the King’s choice, and nidding were the man who spoke of peace; but when Norman advises the dwellers of England to go forth and slay each other, no sword of mine shall be drawn at his hest. Who shall say that Siward of the Strong Arm, the grandson of the Berserker, ever turned from a foe? The foe, son of Ethelred, sits in these halls; I fight thy battles

when I say Nay to the Norman! Brothers-in-arms of the kindred race and common tongue, Dane and Saxon long intermingled, proud alike of Canute the glorious and Alfred the wise, ye will hear the man whom Godwin, our countryman, sends to us; he at least will speak our tongue, and he knows our laws. If the demand he delivers be just, such as a king should grant, and our Witan should hear, woe to him who refuses; if unjust be the demand, shame to him who accedes. Warrior sends to warrior, countryman to countryman; hear we as countrymen, and judge as warriors. I have said.”

The utmost excitement and agitation followed the speech of Siward,—unanimous applause from the Saxons, even those who in times of peace were most under the Norman contagion; but no words can paint the wrath and scorn of the Normans. They spoke loud and many at a time; the greatest disorder prevailed. But the majority being English, there could be no doubt as to the decision; and Edward, to whom the emergence gave both a dignity and presence of mind rare to him, resolved to terminate the dispute at once. He stretched forth his sceptre, and motioning to his chamberlain, bade him introduce the nuncius. [79](#)

A blank disappointment, not unmixed with apprehensive terror, succeeded the turbulent excitement of the Normans; for well they knew that the consequences, if not condition, of negotiations, would be their own downfall and banishment at the least;—happy, it might be, to escape massacre at the hands of the exasperated multitude.

The door at the end of the room opened, and the nuncius appeared. He was a sturdy, broad-shouldered man, of middle age, and in the long loose garb originally national with the Saxon, though then little in vogue; his beard thick and fair, his eyes grey and calm—a chief of Kent, where all the prejudices of his race were strongest, and whose yeomanry claimed in war the hereditary right to be placed in the front of battle.

He made his manly but deferential salutation to the august council as he approached; and, pausing midway between the throne and door, he fell on his knees without thought of shame, for the King to whom he knelt was the descendant of Woden, and the heir of Hengist. At a sign and a brief word from the King, still on his knees, Vebba, the Kentman, spoke.

“To Edward, son of Ethelred, his most gracious king and lord, Godwin, son of Wolnoth, sends faithful and humble greeting, by Vebba, the thegn-born. He prays the King to hear him in kindness, and judge of him with mercy. Not against the King comes he hither with ships and arms; but against those only who would stand between the King’s heart and the subject’s: those who have divided a house against itself, and parted son and father, man and wife.”

At those last words Edward’s sceptre trembled in this hand, and his face grew almost stern.

“Of the King, Godwin but prays with all submiss and earnest prayer, to reverse the unrighteous outlawry against him and his; to restore him and his sons their just possessions and well-won honours; and, more than all, to replace them where they have sought by loving service not unworthily to stand, in the grace of their born lord and in the van of those who would uphold the laws and liberties of England. This done—the ships sail back to their haven; the thegn seeks his homestead and the ceorl returns to the plough; for with Godwin are no strangers; and his force is but the love of his countrymen.”

“Hast thou said?” quoth the King.

“I have said.”

“Retire, and await our answer.”

The Thegn of Kent was then led back into an ante-room, in which, armed from head to heel in ring-mail, were several Normans whose youth or station did not admit them into the council, but still of no mean interest in the discussion, from the lands and possessions they had already contrived to gripe out of the demesnes of the exiles;—burning for battle and eager for the word. Amongst these was Mallet de Graville.

The Norman valour of this young knight was, as we have seen, guided by Norman intelligence; and he had not disdained, since William’s departure, to study the tongue of the country in which he

hoped to exchange his mortgaged tower on the Seine, for some fair barony on the Humber or the Thames.

While the rest of his proud countrymen stood aloof, with eyes of silent scorn, from the homely nuncius, Mallet approached him with courteous bearing, and said in Saxon:

“May I crave to know the issue of thy message from the reb—that is from the doughty Earl?”

“I wait to learn it,” said Vebba, bluffly.

“They heard thee throughout, then?”

“Throughout.”

“Friendly Sir,” said the Sire de Graville, seeking to subdue the tone of irony habitual to him, and acquired, perhaps, from his maternal ancestry, the Franks. “Friendly and peace-making Sir, dare I so far venture to intrude on the secrets of thy mission as to ask if Godwin demands, among other reasonable items, the head of thy humble servant—not by name indeed, for my name is as yet unknown to him—but as one of the unhappy class called Normans?”

“Had Earl Godwin,” returned the nuncius, “thought fit to treat for peace by asking vengeance, he would have chosen another spokesman. The Earl asks but his own; and thy head is not, I trow, a part of his goods and chattels.”

“That is comforting,” said Mallet. “Marry, I thank thee, Sir Saxon; and thou speakest like a brave man and an honest. And if we fall to blows, as I suspect we shall, I should deem it a favour of our Lady the Virgin if she send thee across my way. Next to a fair friend I love a bold foe.”

Vebba smiled, for he liked the sentiment, and the tone and air of the young knight pleased his rough mind, despite his prejudices against the stranger.

Encouraged by the smile, Mallet seated himself on the corner of the long table that skirted the room, and with a debonnair gesture invited Vebba to do the same; then looking at him gravely, he resumed:

“So frank and courteous thou art, Sir Envoy, that I yet intrude on thee my ignorant and curious questions.”

“Speak out, Norman.”

“How comes it, then, that you English so love this Earl Godwin?—Still more, why think you it right and proper that King Edward should love him too? It is a question I have often asked, and to which I am not likely in these halls to get answer satisfactory. If I know aught of your troublous history, this same Earl has changed sides oft eno’; first for the Saxon, then for Canute the Dane—Canute dies, and your friend takes up arms for the Saxon again. He yields to the advice of your Witan, and sides with Hardicanute and Harold, the Danes—a letter, nathless, is written as from Emma, the mother to the young Saxon princes, Edward and Alfred, inviting them over to England, and promising aid; the saints protect Edward, who continues to say aves in Normandy—Alfred comes over, Earl Godwin meets him, and, unless belied, does him homage, and swears to him faith. Nay, listen yet. This Godwin, whom ye love so, then leads Alfred and his train into the ville of Guildford, I think ye call it,—fair quarters enow. At the dead of the night rush in King Harold’s men, seize prince and follower, six hundred men in all; and next morning, saving only every tenth man, they are tortured and put to death. The prince is born off to London, and shortly afterwards his eyes are torn out in the Islet of Ely, and he dies of the anguish! That ye should love Earl Godwin withal may be strange, but yet possible. But is it possible, cher Envoy, for the King to love the man who thus betrayed his brother to the shambles?”

“All this is a Norman fable,” said the Thegn of Kent, with a disturbed visage; “and Godwin cleared himself on oath of all share in the foul murder of Alfred.”

“The oath, I have heard, was backed,” said the knight drily, “by a present to Hardicanute, who after the death of King Harold resolved to avenge the black butchery; a present, I say, of a gilt ship, manned by fourscore warriors with gold-hilted swords, and gilt helms.—But let this pass.”

“Let it pass,” echoed Vebba with a sigh. “Bloody were those times, and unholy their secrets.”

“Yet answer me still, why love you Earl Godwin? He hath changed sides from party to party, and in each change won lordships and lands. He is ambitious and grasping, ye all allow; for the ballads sung in your streets liken him to the thorn and the bramble, at which the sheep leaves his wool. He is haughty and overbearing. Tell me, O Saxon, frank Saxon, why you love Godwin the Earl? Fain would I know; for, please the saints (and you and your Earl so permitting), I mean to live and die in this merrie England; and it would be pleasant to learn that I have but to do as Earl Godwin, in order to win love from the English.”

The stout Vebba looked perplexed; but after stroking his beard thoughtfully, he answered thus:

“Though of Kent, and therefore in his earldom, I am not one of Godwin’s especial party; for that reason was I chosen his bode. Those who are under him doubtless love a chief liberal to give and strong to protect. The old age of a great leader gathers reverence, as an oak gathers moss. But to me, and those like me, living peaceful at home, shunning courts, and tempting not broils, Godwin the man is not dear—it is Godwin the thing.”

“Though I do my best to know your language,” said the knight, “ye have phrases that might puzzle King Solomon. What meanest thou by ‘Godwin the thing’?”

“That which to us Godwin only seems to uphold. We love justice; whatever his offences, Godwin was banished unjustly. We love our laws; Godwin was dishonoured by maintaining them. We love England, and are devoured by strangers; Godwin’s cause is England’s, and—stranger, forgive me for not concluding.”

Then examining the young Norman with a look of rough compassion, he laid his large hand upon the knight’s shoulder and whispered:

“Take my advice—and fly.”

“Fly!” said De Graville, reddening. “Is it to fly, think you, that I have put on my mail, and girded my sword?”

“Vain—vain! Wasps are fierce, but the swarm is doomed when the straw is kindled. I tell you this—fly in time, and you are safe; but let the King be so misguided as to count on arms, and strive against yon multitude, and verily before nightfall not one Norman will be found alive within ten miles of the city. Look to it, youth! Perhaps thou hast a mother—let her not mourn a son!”

Before the Norman could shape into Saxon sufficiently polite and courtly his profound and indignant disdain of the counsel, his sense of the impertinence with which his shoulder had been profaned, and his mother’s son had been warned, the nuncius was again summoned into the presence-chamber. Nor did he return into the ante-room, but conducted forthwith from the council—his brief answer received—to the stairs of the palace, he reached the boat in which he had come, and was rowed back to the ship that held the Earl and his sons.

Now this was the manoeuvre of Godwin’s array. His vessels having passed London Bridge, had rested awhile on the banks of the Southward suburb (Suth-weorde)—since called Southwark—and the King’s ships lay to the north; but the fleet of the Earl’s, after a brief halt, veered majestically round, and coming close to the palace of Westminster, inclined northward, as if to hem the King’s ships. Meanwhile the land forces drew up close to the Strand, almost within bow-shot of the King’s troops, that kept the ground inland; thus Vebba saw before him, so near as scarcely to be distinguished from each other, on the river the rival fleets, on the shore the rival armaments.

High above all the vessels towered the majestic bark, or aescas, that had borne Harold from the Irish shores. Its fashion was that of the ancient sea-kings, to one of whom it had belonged. Its curved and mighty prow, richly gilded, stood out far above the waves: the prow, the head of the sea-snake; the stern its spire; head and spire alike glittering in the sun.

The boat drew up to the lofty side of the vessel, a ladder was lowered, the nuncius ascended lightly and stood on deck. At the farther end grouped the sailors, few in number, and at respectful distance from the Earl and his sons.

Godwin himself was but half armed. His head was bare, nor had he other weapon of offence than the gilt battle-axe of the Danes—weapon as much of office as of war; but his broad breast was covered with the ring mail of the time. His stature was lower than that of any of his sons; nor did his form exhibit greater physical strength than that of a man, well shaped, robust, and deep of chest, who still preserved in age the pith and sinew of mature manhood. Neither, indeed, did legend or fame ascribe to that eminent personage those romantic achievements, those feats of purely animal prowess, which distinguished his rival, Siward. Brave he was, but brave as a leader; those faculties in which he appears to have excelled all his contemporaries, were more analogous to the requisites of success in civilised times, than those which won renown of old. And perhaps England was the only country then in Europe which could have given to those faculties their fitting career. He possessed essentially the arts of party; he knew how to deal with vast masses of mankind; he could carry along with his interests the fervid heart of the multitude; he had in the highest degree that gift, useless in most other lands—in all lands where popular assemblies do not exist—the gift of popular eloquence. Ages elapsed, after the Norman conquest, ere eloquence again became a power in England. [80](#)

But like all men renowned for eloquence, he went with the popular feeling of his times; he embodied its passions, its prejudices—but also that keen sense of self-interest, which is the invariable characteristic of a multitude. He was the sense of the commonalty carried to its highest degree. Whatever the faults, it may be the crimes, of a career singularly prosperous and splendid, amidst events the darkest and most terrible,—shining with a steady light across the thunder-clouds,—he was never accused of cruelty or outrage to the mass of the people. English, emphatically, the English deemed him; and this not the less that in his youth he had sided with Canute, and owed his fortunes to that king; for so intermixed were Danes and Saxons in England, that the agreement which had given to Canute one half the kingdom had been received with general applause; and the earlier severities of that great prince had been so redeemed in his later years by wisdom and mildness—so, even in the worst period of his reign, relieved by extraordinary personal affability, and so lost now in men's memories by pride in his power and fame,—that Canute had left behind him a beloved and honoured name [81](#), and Godwin was the more esteemed as the chosen counsellor of that popular prince. At his death, Godwin was known to have wished, and even armed, for the restoration of the Saxon line; and only yielded to the determination of the Witan, no doubt acted upon by the popular opinion. Of one dark crime he was suspected, and, despite his oath to the contrary, and the formal acquittal of the national council, doubt of his guilt rested then, as it rests still, upon his name; viz., the perfidious surrender of Alfred, Edward's murdered brother.

But time had passed over the dismal tragedy; and there was an instinctive and prophetic feeling throughout the English nation, that with the House of Godwin was identified the cause of the English people. Everything in this man's aspect served to plead in his favour. His ample brows were calm with benignity and thought; his large dark blue eyes were serene and mild, though their expression, when examined, was close and inscrutable. His mien was singularly noble, but wholly without formality or affected state; and though haughtiness and arrogance were largely attributed to him, they could be found only in his deeds, not manner—plain, familiar, kindly to all men, his heart seemed as open to the service of his countrymen as his hospitable door to their wants.

Behind him stood the stateliest group of sons that ever filled with pride a father's eye. Each strikingly distinguished from the other, all remarkable for beauty of countenance and strength of frame.

Sweyn, the eldest [82](#), had the dark hues of his mother the Dane: a wild and mournful majesty sat upon features aquiline and regular, but wasted by grief or passion; raven locks, glossy even in neglect, fell half over eyes hollow in their sockets, but bright, though with troubled fire. Over his shoulder he bore his mighty axe. His form, spare, but of immense power, was sheathed in mail, and he leant on his great pointed Danish shield. At his feet sate his young son Haco, a boy with a countenance preternaturally thoughtful for his years, which were yet those of childhood.

Next to him stood the most dreaded and ruthless of the sons of Godwin—he, fated to become to the Saxon what Julian was to the Goth. With his arms folded on his breast stood Tostig; his face was beautiful as a Greek's, in all save the forehead, which was low and lowering. Sleek and trim were his bright chestnut locks; and his arms were damascened with silver, for he was one who loved the pomp and luxury of war.

Wolnoth, the mother's favourite, seemed yet in the first flower of youth, but he alone of all the sons had something irresolute and effeminate in his aspect and bearing; his form, though tall, had not yet come to its full height and strength; and, as if the weight of mail were unusual to him, he leant with both hands upon the wood of his long spear. Leofwine, who stood next to Wolnoth, contrasted him notably; his sunny locks wreathed carelessly over a white unclouded brow, and the silken hair on the upper lip quivered over arch lips, smiling, even in that serious hour.

At Godwin's right hand, but not immediately near him, stood the last of the group, Gurth and Harold. Gurth had passed his arm over the shoulder of his brother, and, not watching the nuncius while he spoke, watched only the effect his words produced on the face of Harold. For Gurth loved Harold as Jonathan loved David. And Harold was the only one of the group not armed; and had a veteran skilled in war been asked who of that group was born to lead armed men, he would have pointed to the man unarmed.

“So what says the King?” asked Earl Godwin.

“This; he refuses to restore thee and thy sons, or to hear thee, till thou hast disbanded thine army, dismissed thy ships, and consented to clear thyself and thy house before the Witanagemot.”

A fierce laugh broke from Tostig; Sweyn's mournful brow grew darker; Leofwine placed his right hand on his ateghar; Wolnoth rose erect; Gurth kept his eyes on Harold, and Harold's face was unmoved.

“The King received thee in his council of war,” said Godwin, thoughtfully, “and doubtless the Normans were there. Who were the Englishmen most of mark?”

“Siward of Northumbria, thy foe.”

“My sons,” said the Earl, turning to his children, and breathing loud as if a load were off his heart; “there will be no need of axe or armour to-day. Harold alone was wise,” and he pointed to the linen tunic of the son thus cited.

“What mean you, Sir Father?” said Tostig, imperiously. “Think you to——”

“Peace, son, peace;” said Godwin, without asperity, but with conscious command. “Return, brave and dear friend,” he said to Vebba, “find out Siward the Earl; tell him that I, Godwin, his foe in the old time, place honour and life in his hands, and what he counsels that will we do.—Go.”

The Kent man nodded, and regained his boat. Then spoke Harold.

“Father, yonder are the forces of Edward; as yet without leaders, since the chiefs must still be in the halls of the King. Some fiery Norman amongst them may provoke an encounter; and this city of London is not won, as it behoves us to win it, if one drop of English blood dye the sword of one English man. Wherefore, with your leave, I will take boat, and land. And unless I have lost in my absence all right here in the hearts of our countrymen, at the first shout from our troops which proclaims that Harold, son of Godwin, is on the soil of our fathers, half yon array of spears and helms pass at once to our side.”

“And if not, my vain brother?” said Tostig, gnawing his lip with envy.

“And if not, I will ride alone into the midst of them, and ask what Englishmen are there who will aim shaft or spear at this breast, never mailed against England!”

Godwin placed his hand on Harold's head, and the tears came to those close cold eyes.

“Thou knowest by nature what I have learned by art. Go, and prosper. Be it as thou wilt.”

“He takes thy post, Sweyn—thou art the elder,” said Tostig, to the wild form by his side.

“There is guilt on my soul, and woe in my heart,” answered Sweyn, moodily. “Shall Esau lose his birthright, and Cain retain it?” So saying, he withdrew, and, reclining against the stern of the vessel, leant his face upon the edge of his shield.

Harold watched him with deep compassion in his eyes, passed to his side with a quick step, pressed his hand, and whispered, “Peace to the past, O my brother!”

The boy Haco, who had noiselessly followed his father, lifted his sombre, serious looks to Harold as he thus spoke; and when Harold turned away, he said to Sweyn, timidly, “He, at least, is ever good to thee and to me.”

“And thou, when I am no more, shalt cling to him as thy father, Haco,” answered Sweyn, tenderly smoothing back the child’s dark locks.

The boy shivered; and, bending his head, murmured to himself, “When thou art no more! No more? Has the Vala doomed him, too? Father and son, both?”

Meanwhile, Harold had entered the boat lowered from the sides of the aescas to receive him; and Gurth, looking appealingly to his father, and seeing no sign of dissent, sprang down after the young Earl, and seated himself by his side. Godwin followed the boat with musing eyes.

“Small need,” said he, aloud, but to himself, “to believe in soothsayers, or to credit Hilda the saga, when she prophesied, ere we left our shores, that Harold—” He stopped short, for Tostig’s wrathful exclamation broke on his reverie.

“Father, father! My blood surges in my ears, and boils in my heart, when I hear thee name the prophecies of Hilda in favour of thy darling. Dissension and strife in our house have they wrought already; and if the feuds between Harold and me have sown grey in thy locks, thank thyself when, flushed with vain soothsayings for thy favoured Harold, thou saidst, in the hour of our first childish broil, ‘Strive not with Harold; for his brothers will be his men.’”

“Falsify the prediction,” said Godwin, calmly; “wise men may always make their own future, and seize their own fates. Prudence, patience, labour, valour; these are the stars that rule the career of mortals.”

Tostig made no answer; for the splash of oars was near, and two ships, containing the principal chiefs that had joined Godwin’s cause, came alongside the Runic aescas to hear the result of the message sent to the King. Tostig sprang to the vessel’s side, and exclaimed, “The King, girt by his false counsellors, will hear us not, and arms must decide between us.”

“Hold, hold! malignant, unhappy boy!” cried Godwin, between his grinded teeth, as a shout of indignant, yet joyous ferocity broke from the crowded ships thus hailed. “The curse of all time be on him who draws the first native blood in sight of the altars and hearths of London! Hear me, thou with the vulture’s blood-lust, and the peacock’s vain joy in the gaudy plume! Hear me, Tostig, and tremble. If but by one word thou widen the breach between me and the King, outlaw thou enterest England, outlaw shalt thou depart—for earldom and broad lands; choose the bread of the stranger, and the weregeld of the wolf!”

The young Saxon, haughty as he was, quailed at his father’s thrilling voice, bowed his head, and retreated sullenly. Godwin sprang on the deck of the nearest vessel, and all the passions that Tostig had aroused, he exerted his eloquence to appease.

In the midst of his arguments, there rose from the ranks on the strand, the shout of “Harold! Harold the Earl! Harold and Holy Crosse!” And Godwin, turning his eye to the King’s ranks, saw them agitated, swayed, and moving; till suddenly, from the very heart of the hostile array, came, as by irresistible impulse, the cry, “Harold, our Harold! All hail, the good Earl!”

While this chanced without,—within the palace, Edward had quitted the presence-chamber, and was closeted with Stigand, the bishop. This prelate had the more influence with Edward, inasmuch as though Saxon, he was held to be no enemy to the Normans, and had, indeed, on a former occasion, been deposed from his bishopric on the charge of too great an attachment to the Norman queen-mother Emma [83](#). Never in his whole life had Edward been so stubborn as on this occasion. For

here, more than his realm was concerned, he was threatened in the peace of his household, and the comfort of his tepid friendships. With the recall of his powerful father-in-law, he foresaw the necessary reintrusion of his wife upon the charm of his chaste solitude. His favourite Normans would be banished, he should be surrounded with faces he abhorred. All the representations of Stigand fell upon a stern and unyielding spirit, when Siward entered the King's closet.

"Sir, my King," said the great son of Beorn, "I yielded to your kingly will in the council, that, before we listened to Godwin, he should disband his men, and submit to the judgment of the Witan. The Earl hath sent to me to say, that he will put honour and life in my keeping, and abide by my counsel. And I have answered as became the man who will never snare a foe, or betray a trust."

"How hast thou answered?" asked the King.

"That he abide by the laws of England; as Dane and Saxon agreed to abide in the days of Canute; that he and his sons shall make no claim for land or lordship, but submit all to the Witan."

"Good," said the King; "and the Witan will condemn him now, as it would have condemned when he shunned to meet it."

"And the Witan now," returned the Earl emphatically, "will be free, and fair, and just."

"And meanwhile, the troops——"

"Will wait on either side; and if reason fail, then the sword," said Siward.

"This I will not hear," exclaimed Edward; when the tramp of many feet thundered along the passage; the door was flung open, and several captains (Norman as well as Saxon) of the King's troops rushed in, wild, rude, and tumultuous.

"The troops desert! half the ranks have thrown down their arms at the very name of Harold!" exclaimed the Earl of Hereford. "Curses on the knaves!"

"And the lithsmen of London," cried a Saxon thegn, "are all on his side, and marching already through the gates."

"Pause yet," whispered Stigand; "and who shall say, this hour to-morrow, if Edward or Godwin reign on the throne of Alfred?"

His stern heart moved by the distress of his King, and not the less for the unwonted firmness which Edward displayed, Siward here approached, knelt, and took the King's hand.

"Siward can give no niddering counsel to his King; to save the blood of his subjects is never a king's disgrace. Yield thou to mercy, Godwin to the law!"

"Oh for the cowl and cell!" exclaimed the Prince, wringing his hands. "Oh Norman home, why did I leave thee?" He took the cross from his breast, contemplated it fixedly, prayed silently but with fervour, and his face again became tranquil.

"Go," he said, flinging himself on his seat in the exhaustion that follows passion, "go, Siward, go, Stigand, deal with things mundane as ye will."

The bishop, satisfied with this reluctant acquiescence, seized Siward by the arm and withdrew him from the closet. The captains remained a few moments behind, the Saxons silently gazing on the King, the Normans whispering each other, in great doubt and trouble, and darting looks of the bitterest scorn at their feeble benefactor. Then, as with one accord, these last rushed along the corridor, gained the hall where their countrymen yet assembled, and exclaimed, "A toute bride! Franc etrier!—All is lost but life!—God for the first man,—knife and cord for the last!"

Then, as the cry of fire, or as the first crash of an earthquake, dissolves all union, and reduces all emotion into one thought of self-saving, the whole conclave, crowding pell-mell on each other, bustled, jostled, clamoured to the door—happy he who could find horse, palfrey,—even monk's mule! This way, that way, fled those lordly Normans, those martial abbots, those mitred bishops—some singly, some in pairs; some by tens, and some by scores; but all prudently shunning association with those chiefs whom they had most courted the day before, and who, they now knew, would be the main mark for revenge; save only two, who yet, from that awe of the spiritual power which characterised the Norman, who was already half monk, half soldier (Crusader and Templar before Crusades were

yet preached, or the Templars yet dreamed of),—even in that hour of selfish panic rallied round them the prowtest chivalry of their countrymen, viz., the Bishop of London and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Both these dignitaries, armed cap-a-pie, and spear in hand, headed the flight; and good service that day, both as guide and champion, did Mallet de Graville. He led them in a circuit behind both armies, but being intercepted by a new body, coming from the pastures of Hertfordshire to the help of Godwin, he was compelled to take the bold and desperate resort of entering the city gates. These were wide open; whether to admit the Saxon Earls, or vomit forth their allies, the Londoners. Through these, up the narrow streets, riding three abreast, dashed the slaughtering fugitives; worthy in flight of their national renown, they trampled down every obstacle. Bodies of men drew up against them at every angle, with the Saxon cry of “Out—Out!” “Down with the outland men!” Through each, spear pierced, and sword clove, the way. Red with gore was the spear of the prelate of London; broken to the hilt was the sword militant in the terrible hand of the Archbishop of Canterbury. So on thy rode, so on they slaughtered—gained the Eastern Gate, and passed with but two of their number lost.

The fields once gained, for better precaution they separated. Some few, not quite ignorant of the Saxon tongue, doffed their mail, and crept through forest and fell towards the sea-shore; others retained steed and arms, but shunned equally the high roads. The two prelates were among the last; they gained, in safety, Ness, in Essex, threw themselves into an open, crazy, fishing-boat, committed themselves to the waves, and, half drowned and half famished, drifted over the Channel to the French shores. Of the rest of the courtly foreigners, some took refuge in the forts yet held by their countrymen; some lay concealed in creeks and caves till they could find or steal boats for their passage. And thus, in the year of our Lord 1052, occurred the notable dispersion and ignominious flight of the counts and vavasours of great William the Duke!

CHAPTER III

The Witana-gemot was assembled in the great hall of Westminster in all its imperial pomp.

It was on his throne that the King sate now—and it was the sword that was in his right hand. Some seated below, and some standing beside, the throne, were the officers of the Basileus [84](#) of Britain. There were to be seen camararius and pincerna, chamberlain and cupbearer; disc thegn and hors thegn [85](#); the thegn of the dishes, and the thegn of the stud; with many more, whose state offices may not impossibly have been borrowed from the ceremonial pomp of the Byzantine court; for Edgar, King of England, had in the old time styled himself the Heir of Constantine. Next to these sat the clerks of the chapel, with the King’s confessor at their head. Officers were they of higher note than their name bespeaks, and wielders, in the trust of the Great Seal, of a power unknown of old, and now obnoxious to the Saxon. For tedious is the suit which lingers for the king’s writ and the king’s seal; and from those clerks shall arise hereafter a thing of torture and of might, which shall grind out the hearts of men, and be called CHANCERY! [86](#)

Below the scribes, a space was left on the floor, and farther down sat the chiefs of the Witan. Of these, first in order, both from their spiritual rank and their vast temporal possessions, sat the lords of the Church; the chairs of the prelates of London and Canterbury were void. But still goodly was the array of Saxon mitres, with the harsh, hungry, but intelligent face of Stigand,—Stigand the stout and the covetous; and the benign but firm features of Alred, true priest and true patriot, distinguished amidst all. Around each prelate, as stars round a sun, were his own special priestly retainers, selected from his diocese. Farther still down the hall are the great civil lords and viceking vassals of the “Lord-Paramount.” Vacant the chair of the King of the Scots, for Siward hath not yet had his wish; Macbeth is in his fastnesses, or listening to the weird sisters in the wold; and Malcolm is a fugitive in the halls of the Northumbrian earl. Vacant the chair of the hero Gryffyth, son of Llewelyn, the dread of the marches, Prince of Gwyned, whose arms had subjugated all Cymry. But there are the lesser sub-kings of Wales, true to the immemorial schisms amongst themselves, which destroyed the realm of

Ambrosius, and rendered vain the arm of Arthur. With their torques of gold, and wild eyes, and hair cut round ears and brow [87](#), they stare on the scene.

On the same bench with these sub-kings, distinguished from them by height of stature, and calm collectedness of mien, no less than by their caps of maintenance and furred robes, are those props of strong thrones and terrors of weak—the earls to whom shires and counties fall, as hyde and carricate to the lesser thegns. But three of these were then present, and all three the foes of Godwin, —Siward, Earl of Northumbria; Leofric of Mercia (that Leofric whose wife Godiva yet lives in ballad and song); and Rolf, Earl of Hereford and Worcestershire, who, strong in his claim of “king’s blood,” left not the court with his Norman friends. And on the same benches, though a little apart, are the lesser earls, and that higher order of thegns, called king’s thegns.

Not far from these sat the chosen citizens from the free burgh of London, already of great weight in the senate [88](#),—sufficing often to turn its counsels; all friends were they of the English Earl and his house. In the same division of the hall were found the bulk and true popular part of the meeting—popular indeed—as representing not the people, but the things the people most prized—valour and wealth; the thegn landowners, called in the old deeds the “Ministers:” they sate with swords by their side, all of varying birth, fortune, and connection, whether with king, earl, or ceorl. For in the different districts of the old Heptarchy, the qualification varied; high in East Anglia, low in Wessex; so that what was wealth in the one shire was poverty in the other. There sate, half a yeoman, the Saxon thegn of Berkshire or Dorset, proud of his five hydcs of land; there, half an ealderman, the Danish thegn of Norfolk or Ely, discontented with his forty; some were there in right of smaller offices under the crown; some traders, and sons of traders, for having crossed the high seas three times at their own risk; some could boast the blood of Offa and Egbert; and some traced but three generations back to neatherd and ploughman; and some were Saxons and some were Danes: and some from the western shires were by origin Britons, though little cognisant of their race. Farther down still, at the extreme end of the hall, crowding by the open doors, filling up the space without, were the ceorls themselves, a vast and not powerless body; in these high courts (distinct from the shire gemots, or local senates)—never called upon to vote or to speak or to act, or even to sign names to the doom, but only to shout “Yea, yea,” when the proceres pronounced their sentence. Yet not powerless were they, but rather to the Witan what public opinion is to the Witan’s successor, our modern parliament: they were opinion! And according to their numbers and their sentiments, easily known and boldly murmured, often and often must that august court of basileus and prelate, vassal-king and mighty earl, have shaped the council and adjudged the doom.

And the forms of the meeting had been duly said and done; and the King had spoken words no doubt wary and peaceful, gracious and exhortatory; but those words—for his voice that day was weak—travelled not beyond the small circle of his clerks and his officers; and a murmur buzzed through the hall, when Earl Godwin stood on the floor with his six sons at his back; and you might have heard the hum of the gnat that vexed the smooth cheek of Earl Rolf, or the click of the spider from the web on the vaulted roof, the moment before Earl Godwin spoke.

“If,” said he, with the modest look and downcast eye of practised eloquence, “If I rejoice once more to breathe the air of England, in whose service, often perhaps with faulty deeds, but at all times with honest thoughts, I have, both in war and council, devoted so much of my life that little now remains—but (should you, my king, and you, prelates, proceres, and ministers so vouchsafe) to look round and select that spot of my native soil which shall receive my bones;—if I rejoice to stand once more in that assembly which has often listened to my voice when our common country was in peril, who here will blame that joy? Who among my foes, if foes now I have, will not respect the old man’s gladness? Who amongst you, earls and thegns, would not grieve, if his duty bade him say to the grey-haired exile, ‘In this English air you shall not breathe your last sigh—on this English soil you shall not find a grave!’ Who amongst you would not grieve to say it?” (Suddenly he drew up his head and faced his audience.) “Who amongst you hath the courage and the heart to say it? Yes, I rejoice that

I am at last in an assembly fit to judge my cause, and pronounce my innocence. For what offence was I outlawed? For what offence were I, and the six sons I have given to my land, to bear the wolf's penalty, and be chased and slain as the wild beasts? Hear me, and answer!"

"Eustace, Count of Boulogne, returning to his domains from a visit to our lord the King, entered the town of Dover in mail and on his war steed; his train did the same. Unknowing our laws and customs (for I desire to press light upon all old grievances, and will impute ill designs to none) these foreigners invade by force the private dwellings of citizens, and there select their quarters. Ye all know that this was the strongest violation of Saxon right; ye know that the meanest ceorl hath the proverb on his lip, 'Every man's house is his castle.' One of the townsmen acting on this belief,—which I have yet to learn was a false one,—expelled from his threshold a retainer of the French Earl's. The stranger drew his sword and wounded him; blows followed—the stranger fell by the arm he had provoked. The news arrives to Earl Eustace; he and his kinsmen spur to the spot; they murder the Englishman on his hearth-stone.—"

Here a groan, half-stifled and wrathful, broke from the ceorls at the end of the hall. Godwin held up his hand in rebuke of the interruption, and resumed.

"This deed done, the outlanders rode through the streets with their drawn swords; they butchered those who came in their way; they trampled even children under their horses' feet. The burghers armed. I thank the Divine Father, who gave me for my countrymen those gallant burghers! They fought, as we English know how to fight; they slew some nineteen or score of these mailed intruders; they chased them from the town. Earl Eustace fled fast. Earl Eustace, we know, is a wise man: small rest took he, little bread broke he, till he pulled rein at the gate of Gloucester, where my lord the King then held court. He made his complaint. My lord the King, naturally hearing but one side, thought the burghers in the wrong; and, scandalised that such high persons of his own kith should be so aggrieved, he sent for me, in whose government the burgh of Dover is, and bade me chastise, by military execution, those who had attacked the foreign Count. I appeal to the great Earls whom I see before me—to you, illustrious Leofric; to you, renowned Siward—what value would ye set on your earldoms, if ye had not the heart and the power to see right done to the dwellers therein?"

"What was the course I proposed? Instead of martial execution, which would involve the whole burgh in one sentence, I submitted that the reeve and gerefas of the burgh should be cited to appear before the King, and account for the broil. My lord, though ever most clement and loving to his good people, either unhappily moved against me, or overruled by the foreigners, was counselled to reject this mode of doing justice, which our laws, as settled under Edgar and Canute, enjoin. And because I would not,—and I say in the presence of all, because I, Godwin, son of Wolnoth, durst not, if I would, have entered the free burgh of Dover with mail on my back and the doomsman at my right hand, these outlanders induced my lord the King to summon me to attend in person (as for a sin of my own) the council of the Witan, convened at Gloucester, then filled with the foreigners, not, as I humbly opined, to do justice to me and my folk of Dover, but to secure to this Count of Boulogne a triumph over English liberties, and sanction his scorn for the value of English lives."

"I hesitated, and was menaced with outlawry; I armed in self-defence, and in defence of the laws of England; I armed, that men might not be murdered on their hearth-stones, nor children trampled under the hoofs of a stranger's war-steed. My lord the King gathered his troops round 'the cross and the martlets.' Yon noble earls, Siward and Leofric, came to that standard, as (knowing not then my cause) was their duty to the Basileus of Britain. But when they knew my cause, and saw with me the dwellers of the land, against me the outland aliens, they righteously interposed. An armistice was concluded; I agreed to refer all matters to a Witan held where it is held this day. My troops were disbanded; but the foreigners induced my lord not only to retain his own, but to issue his Herrbann for the gathering of hosts far and near, even allies beyond the seas. When I looked to London for the peaceful Witan, what saw I? The largest armament that had been collected in this reign—that armament headed by Norman knights. Was this the meeting where justice could be done mine

and me? Nevertheless, what was my offer? That I and my six sons would attend, provided the usual sureties, agreeable to our laws, from which only thieves [89](#) are excluded, were given that we should come and go life-free and safe. Twice this offer was made, twice refused; and so I and my sons were banished. We went;—we have returned!”

“And in arms,” murmured Earl Rolf, son-in-law to that Count Eustace of Boulogne, whose violence had been temperately and truly narrated. [90](#)

“And in arms,” repeated Godwin: “true; in arms against the foreigners who had thus poisoned the ear of our gracious King; in arms, Earl Rolf; and at the first clash of those arms, Franks and foreigners have fled. We have no need of arms now. We are amongst our countrymen, and no Frenchman interposes between us and the ever gentle; ever generous nature of our born King.”

“Peers and proceres, chiefs of this Witan, perhaps the largest ever yet assembled in man’s memory, it is for you to decide whether I and mine, or the foreign fugitives, caused the dissensions in these realms; whether our banishment was just or not; whether in our return we have abused the power we possessed. Ministers, on those swords by your sides there is not one drop of blood! At all events, in submitting to you our fate, we submit to our own laws and our own race. I am here to clear myself, on my oath, of deed and thought of treason. There are amongst my peers as king’s thegns, those who will attest the same on my behalf, and prove the facts I have stated, if they are not sufficiently notorious. As for my sons, no crime can be alleged against them, unless it be a crime to have in their veins that blood which flows in mine—blood which they have learned from me to shed in defence of that beloved land to which they now ask to be recalled.”

The Earl ceased and receded behind his children, having artfully, by his very abstinence from the more heated eloquence imputed to him often as a fault and a wile, produced a powerful effect upon an audience already prepared for his acquittal.

But now as, from the sons, Sweyn the eldest stepped forth; with a wandering eye and uncertain foot, there was a movement like a shudder amongst the large majority of the audience, and a murmur of hate or of horror.

The young Earl marked the sensation his presence produced, and stopped short. His breath came thick; he raised his right hand, but spoke not. His voice died on his lips; his eyes roved wildly round with a haggard stare more imploring than defying. Then rose, in his episcopal stole, Alred the bishop, and his clear sweet voice trembled as he spoke.

“Comes Sweyn, son of Godwin, here to prove his innocence of treason against the King?—if so, let him hold his peace; for if the Witan acquit Godwin, son of Wolnoth, of that charge, the acquittal includes his House. But in the name of the holy Church here represented by its fathers, will Sweyn say, and fasten his word by oath, that he is guiltless of treason to the King of Kings—guiltless of sacrilege that my lips shrink to name? Alas, that the duty falls on me,—for I loved thee once, and love thy kindred now. But I am God’s servant before all things”—the prelate paused, and gathering up new energy, added in unfaltering accents, “I charge thee here, Sweyn the outlaw, that, moved by the fiend, thou didst bear off from God’s house and violate a daughter of the Church—Algive, Abbess of Leominster!”

“And I,” cried Siward, rising to the full height of his stature, “I, in the presence of these proceres, whose proudest title is milites or warriors—I charge Sweyn, son of Godwin, that, not in open field and hand to hand, but by felony and guile, he wrought the foul and abhorrent murder of his cousin, Beorn the Earl!”

At these two charges from men so eminent, the effect upon the audience was startling. While those not influenced by Godwin raised their eyes, sparkling with wrath and scorn, upon the wasted, yet still noble face of the eldest born, even those most zealous on behalf of that popular House evinced no sympathy for its heir. Some looked down abashed and mournful—some regarded the accused with a cold, un pitying gaze. Only perhaps among the ceorls, at the end of the hall, might be seen some compassion on anxious faces; for before those deeds of crime had been bruited abroad, none

among the sons of Godwin more blithe of mien and bold of hand, more honoured and beloved, than Sweyn the outlaw. But the hush that succeeded the charges was appalling in its depth. Godwin himself shaded his face with his mantle, and only those close by could see that his breast heaved and his limbs trembled. The brothers had shrunk from the side of the accused, outlawed even amongst his kin—all save Harold, who, strong in his blameless name and beloved repute, advanced three strides, amidst the silence, and, standing by his brother's side, lifted his commanding brow above the seated judges, but he did not speak.

Then said Sweyn the Earl, strengthened by such solitary companionship in that hostile assemblage,—“I might answer that for these charges in the past, for deeds alleged as done eight long years ago, I have the King's grace, and the inlaw's right; and that in the Witans over which I as earl presided, no man was twice judged for the same offence. That I hold to be the law, in the great councils as the small.”

“It is! it is!” exclaimed Godwin: his paternal feelings conquering his prudence and his decorous dignity. “Hold to it, my son!”

“I hold to it not,” resumed the young earl, casting a haughty glance over the somewhat blank and disappointed faces of his foes, “for my law is here”—and he smote his heart—“and that condemns me not once alone, but evermore! Alred, O holy father, at whose knees I once confessed my every sin,—I blame thee not that thou first, in the Witan, liftest thy voice against me, though thou knowest that I loved Algive from youth upward; she, with her heart yet mine, was given in the last year of Hardicanute, when might was right, to the Church. I met her again, flushed with my victories over the Walloon kings, with power in my hand and passion in my veins. Deadly was my sin!—But what asked I? that vows compelled should be annulled; that the love of my youth might yet be the wife of my manhood. Pardon, that I knew not then how eternal are the bonds ye of the Church have woven round those of whom, if ye fail of saints, ye may at least make martyrs!”

He paused, and his lip curled, and his eye shot wild fire; for in that moment his mother's blood was high within him, and he looked and thought, perhaps, as some heathen Dane, but the flash of the firmer man was momentary, and humbly smiting his breast, he murmured,—“Avaunt, Satan!—yea, deadly was my sin! And the sin was mine alone; Algive, if stained, was blameless; she escaped—and—and died!”

“The King was wroth; and first to strive against my pardon was Harold my brother, who now alone in my penitence stands by my side: he strove manfully and openly; I blamed him not: but Beorn, my cousin, desired my earldom; and he strove against me, wilily and in secret,—to my face kind, behind my back spiteful. I detected his falsehood, and meant to detain, but not to slay him. He lay bound in my ship; he reviled and he taunted me in the hour of my gloom; and when the blood of the sea-kings flowed in fire through my veins. And I lifted my axe in ire; and my men lifted theirs, and so,—and so!—Again I say—Deadly was my sin! Think not that I seek now to make less my guilt, as I sought when I deemed that life was yet long, and power was yet sweet. Since then I have known worldly evil, and worldly good,—the storm and the shine of life; I have swept the seas, a sea-king; I have battled with the Dane in his native land; I have almost grasped in my right hand, as I grasped in my dreams, the crown of my kinsman, Canute;—again, I have been a fugitive and an exile;—again, I have been inlawed, and Earl of all the lands from Isis to the Wye [91](#). And whether in state or in penury,—whether in war or in peace, I have seen the pale face of the nun betrayed, and the gory wounds of the murdered man. Wherefore I come not here to plead for a pardon, which would console me not, but formally to dis sever my kinsmen's cause from mine, which alone sullies and degrades it;—I come here to say, that, coveting not your acquittal, fearing not your judgment, I pronounce mine own doom. Cap of noble, and axe of warrior, I lay aside for ever; barefooted, and alone, I go hence to the Holy Sepulchre; there to assoil my soul, and implore that grace which cannot come from man! Harold, step forth in the place of Sweyn the first-born! And ye prelates and peers, milites and ministers, proceed to adjudge the living! To you, and to England, he who now quits you is the dead!”

He gathered his robe of state over his breast as a monk his gown, and looking neither to right nor to left, passed slowly down the hall, through the crowd, which made way for him in awe and silence; and it seemed to the assembly as if a cloud had gone from the face of day.

And Godwin still stood with his face covered by his robe.

And Harold anxiously watched the faces of the assembly, and saw no relenting.

And Gurth crept to Harold's side.

And the gay Leofwine looked sad.

And the young Wolnoth turned pale and trembled.

And the fierce Tostig played with his golden chain.

And one low sob was heard, and it came from the breast of Alred the meek accuser,—God's firm but gentle priest.

CHAPTER IV

This memorable trial ended, as the reader will have forseen, in the formal renewal of Sweyn's outlawry, and the formal restitution of the Earl Godwin and his other sons to their lands and honours, with declarations imputing all the blame of the late dissensions to the foreign favourites, and sentences of banishment against them, except only, by way of a bitter mockery, some varlets of low degree, such as Humphrey Cock's-foot, and Richard son of Scrob. [92](#)

The return to power of this able and vigorous family was attended with an instantaneous effect upon the long-relaxed strings of the imperial government. Macbeth heard, and trembled in his moors; Gryffyth of Wales lit the fire-beacon on moel and craig. Earl Rolf was banished, but merely as a nominal concession to public opinion; his kinship to Edward sufficed to restore him soon, not only to England, but to the lordship of the Marches, and thither was he sent, with adequate force, against the Welch, who had half-repossessed themselves of the borders they harried. Saxon prelates and abbots replaced the Norman fugitives; and all were contented with the revolution, save the King, for the King lost his Norman friends, and regained his English wife.

In conformity with the usages of the times, hostages of the loyalty and faith of Godwin were required and conceded. They were selected from his own family; and the choice fell on Wolnoth, his son, and Haco, the son of Sweyn. As, when nearly all England may be said to have repassed to the hands of Godwin, it would have been an idle precaution to consign these hostages to the keeping of Edward, it was settled, after some discussion, that they should be placed in the Court of the Norman Duke until such time as the King, satisfied with the good faith of the family, should authorise their recall:—Fatal hostage, fatal ward and host!

It was some days after this national crisis, and order and peace were again established in city and land, forest and shire, when, at the setting of the sun, Hilda stood alone by the altar-stone of Thor.

The orb was sinking red and lurid, amidst long cloud-wracks of vermeil and purple, and not one human form was seen in the landscape, save that tall and majestic figure by the Runic shrine and the Druid crommell. She was leaning both hands on her wand, or seid-staff, as it was called in the language of Scandinavian superstition, and bending slightly forward as in the attitude of listening or expectation. Long before any form appeared on the road below she seemed to be aware of coming footsteps, and probably her habits of life had sharpened her senses; for she smiled, muttered to herself, "Ere it sets!" and changing her posture, leant her arm on the altar, and rested her face upon her hand.

At length, two figures came up the road; they neared the hill; they saw her, and slowly ascended the knoll. The one was dressed in the serge of a pilgrim, and his cowl thrown back, showed the face where human beauty and human power lay ravaged and ruined by human passions. He upon whom the pilgrim lightly leaned was attired simply, without the brooch or bracelet common to thegns of high degree, yet his port was that of majesty, and his brow that of mild command. A greater contrast could not be conceived than that between these two men, yet united by a family likeness. For the

countenance of the last described was, though sorrowful at that moment, and indeed habitually not without a certain melancholy, wonderfully imposing from its calm and sweetness. There, no devouring passions had left the cloud or ploughed the line; but all the smooth loveliness of youth took dignity from the conscious resolve of men. The long hair, of a fair brown, with a slight tinge of gold, as the last sunbeams shot through its luxuriance, was parted from the temples, and fell in large waves half way to the shoulder. The eyebrows, darker in hue, arched and finely traced; the straight features, not less manly than the Norman, but less strongly marked: the cheek, hardy with exercise and exposure, yet still retaining somewhat of youthful bloom under the pale bronze of its sunburnt surface: the form tall, not gigantic, and vigorous rather from perfect proportion and athletic habits than from breadth and bulk—were all singularly characteristic of the Saxon beauty in its highest and purest type. But what chiefly distinguished this personage, was that peculiar dignity, so simple, so sedate, which no pomp seems to dazzle, no danger to disturb; and which perhaps arises from a strong sense of self-dependence, and is connected with self-respect—a dignity common to the Indian and the Arab, and rare except in that state of society in which each man is a power in himself. The Latin tragic poet touches close upon that sentiment in the fine lines—

“Rex est qui metuit nihil;
Hoc regnum sibi quisque dat.” [93](#)

So stood the brothers, Sweyn the outlaw and Harold the Earl, before the reputed prophetess. She looked on both with a steady eye, which gradually softened almost into tenderness, as it finally rested upon the pilgrim.

“And is it thus,” she said at last, “that I see the first-born of Godwin the fortunate, for whom so often I have tasked the thunder, and watched the setting sun? for whom my runes have been graven on the bark of the elm, and the Scin-laeca [94](#) been called in pale splendour from the graves of the dead?”

“Hilda,” said Sweyn, “not now will I accuse thee of the seeds thou hast sown: the harvest is gathered and the sickle is broken. Abjure thy dark Galdra [95](#), and turn as I to the sole light in the future, which shines from the tomb of the Son Divine.”

The Prophetess bowed her head and replied:

“Belief cometh as the wind. Can the tree say to the wind, ‘Rest thou on my boughs,’ or Man to Belief, ‘Fold thy wings on my heart’? Go where thy soul can find comfort, for thy life hath passed from its use on earth. And when I would read thy fate, the runes are as blanks, and the wave sleeps unstirred on the fountain. Go where the Fylgia [96](#), whom Alfader gives to each at his birth, leads thee. Thou didst desire love that seemed shut from thee, and I predicted that thy love should awake from the charnel in which the creed that succeeds to the faith of our sires inters life in its bloom. And thou didst covet the fame of the Jarl and the Viking, and I blessed thine axe to thy hand, and wove the sail for thy masts. So long as man knows desire, can Hilda have power over his doom. But when the heart lies in ashes, I raise but a corpse, that at the hush of the charm falls again into its grave. Yet, come to me nearer, O Sweyn, whose cradle I rocked to the chaunt of my rhyme.”

The outlaw turned aside his face, and obeyed.

She sighed as she took his passive hand in her own, and examined the lines on the palm. Then, as if by an involuntary impulse of fondness and pity, she put aside his cowl and kissed his brow.

“Thy skein is spun, and happier than the many who scorn, and the few who lament thee, thou shalt win where they lose. The steel shall not smite thee, the storm shall forbear thee, the goal that thou yearnest for thy steps shall attain. Night hallows the ruin,—and peace to the shattered wrecks of the brave!”

The outlaw heard as if unmoved. But when he turned to Harold, who covered his face with his hand; but could not restrain the tears that flowed through the clasped fingers, a moisture came

into his own wild, bright eyes, and he said, “Now, my brother, farewell, for no farther step shalt thou wend with me.”

Harold started, opened his arms, and the outlaw fell upon his breast.

No sound was heard save a single sob, and so close was breast to breast, that you could not say from whose heart it came. Then the outlaw wrenched himself from the embrace, and murmured, “And Haco—my son—motherless, fatherless—hostage in the land of the stranger! Thou wilt remember—thou wilt shield him; thou be to him mother, father in the days to come! So may the saints bless thee!” With these words he sprang down the hillock.

Harold bounded after him; but Sweyn, halting, said, mournfully, “Is this thy promise? Am I so lost that faith should be broken even with thy father’s son?”

At that touching rebuke, Harold paused, and the outlaw passed his way alone. As the last glimpse of his figure vanished at the turn of the road, whence, on the second of May, the Norman Duke and the Saxon King had emerged side by side, the short twilight closed abruptly, and up from the far forestland rose the moon.

Harold stood rooted to the spot, and still gazing on the space, when the Vala laid her hand on his arm.

“Behold, as the moon rises on the troubled gloaming, so rises the fate of Harold, as yon brief, human shadow, halting between light and darkness, passes away to night. Thou art now the first-born of a House that unites the hopes of the Saxon with the fortunes of the Dane.”

“Thinkest thou,” said Harold, with a stern composure, “that I can have joy and triumph in a brother’s exile and woe?”

“Not now, and not yet, will the voice of thy true nature be heard; but the warmth of the sun brings the thunder, and the glory of fortune wakes the storm of the soul.”

“Kinswoman,” said Harold, with a slight curl of his lip, “by me at least have thy prophecies ever passed as the sigh of the air; neither in horror nor with faith do I think of thy incantations and charms; and I smile alike at the exorcism of the shaveling and the spells of the Saga. I have asked thee not to bless mine axe, nor weave my sail. No runic rhyme is on the sword-blade of Harold. I leave my fortunes to the chance of mine own cool brain and strong arm. Vala, between thee and me there is no bond.”

The Prophetess smiled loftily.

“And what thinkest thou, O self-dependent! what thinkest thou is the fate which thy brain and thine arm shall will?”

“The fate they have won already. I see no Beyond. The fate of a man sworn to guard his country, love justice, and do right.”

The moon shone full on the heroic face of the young Earl as he spoke; and on its surface there seemed nought to belie the noble words. Yet, the Prophetess, gazing earnestly on that fair countenance, said, in a whisper, that, despite a reason singularly sceptical for the age in which it had been cultured, thrilled to the Saxon’s heart, “Under that calm eye sleeps the soul of thy sire, and beneath that brow, so haught and so pure, works the genius that crowned the kings of the north in the lineage of thy mother the Dane.”

“Peace!” said Harold, almost fiercely; then, as if ashamed of the weakness of his momentary irritation, he added, with a faint smile, “Let us not talk of these matters while my heart is still sad and away from the thoughts of the world, with my brother the lonely outlaw. Night is on us, and the ways are yet unsafe; for the king’s troops, disbanded in haste, were made up of many who turn to robbers in peace. Alone, and unarmed, save my ateghar, I would crave a night’s rest under thy roof; and”—he hesitated, and as light blush came over his cheek—“and I would fain see if your grandchild is as fair as when I last looked on her blue eyes, that then wept for Harold ere he went into exile.”

“Her tears are not at her command, nor her smiles,” said the Vala, solemnly; “her tears flow from the fount of thy sorrows, and her smiles are the beams from thy joys. For know, O Harold! that

Edith is thine earthly Fylgia; thy fate and her fate are as one. And vainly as man would escape from his shadow, would soul wrench itself from the soul that Skulda hath linked to his doom.”

Harold made no reply; but his step, habitually slow, grew more quick and light, and this time his reason found no fault with the oracles of the Vala.

CHAPTER V

As Hilda entered the hall, the various idlers accustomed to feed at her cost were about retiring, some to their homes in the vicinity, some, appertaining to the household, to the dormitories in the old Roman villa.

It was not the habit of the Saxon noble, as it was of the Norman, to put hospitality to profit, by regarding his guests in the light of armed retainers. Liberal as the Briton, the cheer of the board and the shelter of the roof were afforded with a hand equally unselfish and indiscriminate; and the doors of the more wealthy and munificent might be almost literally said to stand open from morn to eve.

As Harold followed the Vala across the vast atrium, his face was recognised, and a shout of enthusiastic welcome greeted the popular Earl. The only voices that did not swell that cry, were those of three monks from a neighbouring convent, who choose to wink at the supposed practices of the Morthwyrtha [97](#), from the affection they bore to her ale and mead, and the gratitude they felt for her ample gifts to their convent.

“One of the wicked House, brother,” whispered the monk.

“Yea; mockers and scorners are Godwin and his lewd sons,” answered the monk.

And all three sighed and scowled, as the door closed on the hostess and her stately guest.

Two tall and not ungraceful lamps lighted the same chamber in which Hilda was first presented to the reader. The handmaids were still at their spindles, and the white web nimbly shot as the mistress entered. She paused, and her brow knit, as she eyed the work.

“But three parts done?” she said, “weave fast, and weave strong.”

Harold, not heeding the maids or their task, gazed inquiringly round, and from a nook near the window, Edith sprang forward with a joyous cry, and a face all glowing with delight—sprang forward, as if to the arms of a brother; but, within a step or so of that noble guest, she stopped short, and her eyes fell to the ground.

Harold held his breath in admiring silence. The child he had loved from her cradle stood before him as a woman. Even since we last saw her, in the interval between the spring and the autumn, the year had ripened the youth of the maiden, as it had mellowed the fruits of the earth; and her cheek was rosy with the celestial blush, and her form rounded to the nameless grace, which say that infancy is no more.

He advanced and took her hand, but for the first time in his life in their greetings, he neither gave nor received the kiss.

“You are no child now, Edith,” said he, involuntarily; “but still set apart, I pray you, some remains of the old childish love for Harold.”

Edith’s charming lips smiled softly; she raised her eyes to his, and their innocent fondness spoke through happy tears.

But few words passed in the short interval between Harold’s entrance and his retirement to the chamber prepared for him in haste. Hilda herself led him to a rude ladder which admitted to a room above, evidently added, by some Saxon lord, to the old Roman pile. The ladder showed the precaution of one accustomed to sleep in the midst of peril, for, by a kind of windlass in the room, it could be drawn up at the inmate’s will, and, so drawn, left below a dark and deep chasm, delving down to the foundations of the house; nevertheless the room itself had all the luxury of the time; the bedstead was quaintly carved, and of some rare wood; a trophy of arms—though very ancient, sedulously polished—hung on the wall. There were the small round shield and spear of the earlier

Saxon, with his vizorless helm, and the short curved knife or saex [98](#), from which some antiquarians deem that the Saxish men take their renowned name.

Edith, following Hilda, proffered to the guest, on a salver of gold, spiced wines and confections; while Hilda, silently and unperceived, waved her seid-staff over the bed, and rested her pale hand on the pillow.

“Nay, sweet cousin,” said Harold, smiling, “this is not one of the fashions of old, but rather, methinks, borrowed from the Frankish manners in the court of King Edward.”

“Not so, Harold,” answered Hilda, quickly turning; such was ever the ceremony due to Saxon king, when he slept in a subject’s house, ere our kinsmen the Danes introduced that unroyal wassail, which left subject and king unable to hold or to quaff cup, when the board was left for the bed.”

“Thou rebukest, O Hilda, too tauntingly, the pride of Godwin’s house, when thou givest to his homely son the ceremonial of a king. But, so served, I envy not kings, fair Edith.”

He took the cup, raised it to his lips, and when he placed it on the small table by his side the women had left the chamber, and he was alone. He stood for some minutes absorbed in reverie, and his soliloquy ran somewhat thus:

“Why said the Vala that Edith’s fate was inwoven with mine? And why did I believe and bless the Vala, when she so said? Can Edith ever be my wife? The monk-king designs her for the cloister—Woe, and well-a-day! Sweyn, Sweyn, let thy doom forewarn me! And if I stand up in my place and say, ‘Give age and grief to the cloister—youth and delight to man’s hearth,’ what will answer the monks? ‘Edith cannot be thy wife, son of Godwin, for faint and scarce traced though your affinity of blood, ye are within the banned degrees of the Church. Edith may be wife to another, if thou wilt,—barren spouse of the Church or mother of children who lisp not Harold’s name as their father.’ Out on these priests with their mummeries, and out on their war upon human hearts!”

His fair brow grew stern and fierce as the Norman Duke’s in his ire; and had you seen him at the moment you would have seen the true brother of Sweyn. He broke from his thoughts with the strong effort of a man habituated to self-control, and advanced to the narrow window, opened the lattice, and looked out.

The moon was in all her splendour. The long deep shadows of the breathless forest chequered the silvery whiteness of open sward and intervening glade. Ghostly arose on the knoll before him the grey columns of the mystic Druid,—dark and indistinct the bloody altar of the Warrior god. But there his eye was arrested; for whatever is least distinct and defined in a landscape has the charm that is the strongest; and, while he gazed, he thought that a pale phosphoric light broke from the mound with the bautastein, that rose by the Teuton altar. He thought, for he was not sure that it was not some cheat of the fancy. Gazing still, in the centre of that light there appeared to gleam forth, for one moment, a form of superhuman height. It was the form of a man, that seemed clad in arms like those on the wall, leaning on a spear, whose point was lost behind the shafts of the crommell. And the face grew in that moment distinct from the light which shimmered around it, a face large as some early god’s, but stamped with unutterable and solemn woe. He drew back a step, passed his hand over his eyes, and looked again. Light and figure alike had vanished; nought was seen save the grey columns and dim fane. The Earl’s lip curved in derision of his weakness. He closed the lattice, undressed, knelt for a moment or so by the bedside, and his prayer was brief and simple, nor accompanied with the crossings and signs customary in his age. He rose, extinguished the lamp, and threw himself on the bed.

The moon, thus relieved of the lamp-light, came clear and bright through the room, shone on the trophied arms, and fell upon Harold’s face, casting its brightness on the pillow on which the Vala had breathed her charm. And Harold slept—slept long—his face calm, his breathing regular: but ere the moon sunk and the dawn rose the features were dark and troubled, the breath came by gasps, the brow was knit, and the teeth clenched.

BOOK IV. THE HEATHEN ALTAR AND THE SAXON CHURCH

CHAPTER I

While Harold sleeps, let us here pause to survey for the first time the greatness of that House to which Sweyn's exile had left him the heir. The fortunes of Godwin had been those which no man not eminently versed in the science of his kind can achieve. Though the fable which some modern historians of great name have repeated and detailed, as to his early condition as the son of a cowherd, is utterly groundless [99](#), and he belonged to a house all-powerful at the time of his youth, he was unquestionably the builder of his own greatness. That he should rise so high in the early part of his career was less remarkable than that he should have so long continued the possessor of a power and state in reality more than regal.

But, as has been before implied, Godwin's civil capacities were more prominent than his warlike. And this it is which invests him with that peculiar interest which attracts us to those who knit our modern intelligence with the past. In that dim world before the Norman deluge, we are startled to recognise the gifts that ordinarily distinguish a man of peace in a civilised age.

His father, Wolnoth, had been "Childe" [100](#) of the South Saxons, or thegn of Sussex, a nephew of Edric Streone, Earl of Mercia, the unprincipled but able minister of Ethelred, who betrayed his master to Canute, by whom, according to most authorities, he was righteously, though not very legally, slain as a reward for the treason.

"I promised," said the Dane king, "to set thy head higher than other men's, and I keep my word." The trunkless head was set on the gates of London.

Wolnoth had quarrelled with his uncle Brightric, Edric's brother, and before the arrival of Canute, had betaken himself to the piracy of a sea chief, seduced twenty of the king's ships, plundered the southern coasts, burnt the royal navy, and then his history disappears from the chronicles; but immediately afterwards the great Danish army, called Thurkell's Host, invaded the coast, and kept their chief station on the Thames. Their victorious arms soon placed the country almost at their command. The traitor Edric joined them with a power of more than 10,000 men; and it is probable enough that the ships of Wolnoth had before this time melted amicably into the armament of the Danes. If this, which seems the most likely conjecture, be received, Godwin, then a mere youth, would naturally have commenced his career in the cause of Canute; and as the son of a formidable chief of thegn's rank, and even as kinsman to Edric, who, whatever his crimes, must have retained a party it was wise to conciliate, Godwin's favour with Canute, whose policy would lead him to show marked distinction to any able Saxon follower, ceases to be surprising.

The son of Wolnoth accompanied Canute in his military expedition to the Scandinavian continent, and here a signal victory, planned by Godwin and executed solely by himself and the Saxon band under his command, without aid from Canute's Danes, made the most memorable military exploit of his life, and confirmed his rising fortunes.

Edric, though he is said to have been low born, had married the sister of King Ethelred; and as Godwin advanced in fame, Canute did not disdain to bestow his own sister in marriage on the eloquent favourite, who probably kept no small portion of the Saxon population to their allegiance. On the death of this, his first wife, who bore him but one son [101](#) (who died by accident), he found a second spouse in the same royal house; and the mother of his six living sons and two daughters was the niece of his king, and sister of Sweyn, who subsequently filled the throne of Denmark. After the death of Canute, the Saxon's predilections in favour of the Saxon line became apparent; but it was either his policy or his principles always to defer to the popular will as expressed in the national

council; and on the preference given by the Witan to Harold the son of Canute over the heirs of Ethelred, he yielded his own inclinations. The great power of the Danes, and the amicable fusion of their race with the Saxon which had now taken place, are apparent in this decision; for not only did Earl Leofric, of Mercia, though himself a Saxon (as well as the Earl of Northumbria, with the thegns north of the Thames), declare for Harold the Dane, but the citizens of London were of the same party; and Godwin represented little more than the feeling of his own principality of Wessex.

From that time, Godwin, however, became identified with the English cause; and even many who believed him guilty of some share in the murder, or at least the betrayal, of Alfred [102](#), Edward's brother, sought excuses in the disgust with which Godwin had regarded the foreign retinue that Alfred had brought with him, as if to owe his throne to Norman swords, rather than to English hearts. Hardicanute, who succeeded Harold, whose memory he abhorred, whose corpse he disinterred and flung into a fen [103](#), had been chosen by the unanimous council both of English and Danish thegns; and despite Hardicanute's first vehement accusations of Godwin, the Earl still remained throughout that reign as powerful as in the two preceding it. When Hardicanute dropped down dead at a marriage banquet, it was Godwin who placed Edward upon the throne; and that great Earl must either have been conscious of his innocence of the murder of Edward's brother, or assured of his own irresponsible power, when he said to the prince who knelt at his feet, and, fearful of the difficulties in his way, implored the Earl to aid his abdication of the throne and return to Normandy.

"You are the son of Ethelred, grandson of Edgar. Reign, it is your duty; better to live in glory than die in exile. You are of mature years, and having known sorrow and need, can better feel for your people. Rely on me, and there will be none of the difficulties you dread; whom I favour, England favours."

And shortly afterwards, in the national assembly, Godwin won Edward his throne. "Powerful in speech, powerful in bringing over people to what he desired, some yielded to his words, some to bribes." [104](#) Verily, Godwin was a man to have risen as high, had he lived later!

So Edward reigned, and agreeably, it is said, with previous stipulations, married the daughter of his king-maker. Beautiful as Edith the Queen was in mind and in person, Edward apparently loved her not. She dwelt in his palace, his wife only in name.

Tostig (as we have seen) had married the daughter of Baldwin, Count of Flanders, sister to Matilda, wife to the Norman Duke: and thus the House of Godwin was triply allied to princely lineage—the Danish, the Saxon, the Flemish. And Tostig might have said, as in his heart William the Norman said, "My children shall descend from Charlemagne and Alfred."

Godwin's life, though thus outwardly brilliant, was too incessantly passed in public affairs and politic schemes to allow the worldly man much leisure to watch over the nurture and rearing of the bold spirits of his sons. Githa his wife, the Dane, a woman with a haughty but noble spirit, imperfect education, and some of the wild and lawless blood derived from her race of heathen sea-kings, was more fitted to stir their ambition and inflame their fancies, than curb their tempers and mould their hearts.

We have seen the career of Sweyn; but Sweyn was an angel of light compared to his brother Tostig. He who can be penitent has ever something lofty in his original nature; but Tostig was remorseless as the tiger, as treacherous and as fierce. With less intellectual capacities than any of his brothers, he had more personal ambition than all put together. A kind of effeminate vanity, not uncommon with daring natures (for the bravest races and the bravest soldiers are usually the vainest; the desire to shine is as visible in the fop as in the hero), made him restless both for command and notoriety. "May I ever be in the mouths of men," was his favourite prayer. Like his maternal ancestry, the Danes, he curled his long hair, and went as a bridegroom to the feast of the ravens.

Two only of that house had studied the Humane Letters, which were no longer disregarded by the princes of the Continent; they were the sweet sister, the eldest of the family, fading fast in her loveless home, and Harold.

But Harold's mind,—in which what we call common sense was carried to genius,—a mind singularly practical and sagacious, like his father's, cared little for theological learning and priestly legend—for all that poesy of religion in which the Woman was wafted from the sorrows of earth.

Godwin himself was no favourite of the Church, and had seen too much of the abuses of the Saxon priesthood, (perhaps, with few exceptions, the most corrupt and illiterate in all Europe, which is saying much,) to instil into his children that reverence for the spiritual authority which existed abroad; and the enlightenment, which in him was experience in life, was in Harold, betimes, the result of study and reflection. The few books of the classical world then within reach of the student opened to the young Saxon views of human duties and human responsibilities utterly distinct from the unmeaning ceremonials and fleshly mortifications in which even the higher theology of that day placed the elements of virtue. He smiled in scorn when some Dane, whose life had been passed in the alternate drunkenness of wine and of blood, thought he had opened the gates of heaven by bequeathing lands gained by a robber's sword, to pamper the lazy sloth of some fifty monks. If those monks had presumed to question his own actions, his disdain would have been mixed with simple wonder that men so besotted in ignorance, and who could not construe the Latin of the very prayers they pattered, should presume to be the judges of educated men. It is possible—for his nature was earnest—that a pure and enlightened clergy, that even a clergy, though defective in life, zealous in duty and cultivated in mind,—such a clergy as Alfred sought to found, and as Lanfranc endeavoured (not without some success) to teach—would have bowed his strong sense to that grand and subtle truth which dwells in spiritual authority. But as it was, he stood aloof from the rude superstition of his age, and early in life made himself the arbiter of his own conscience. Reducing his religion to the simplest elements of our creed, he found rather in the books of Heathen authors than in the lives of the saints, his notions of the larger morality which relates to the citizen and the man. The love of country; the sense of justice; fortitude in adverse and temperance in prosperous fortune, became portions of his very mind. Unlike his father, he played no actor's part in those qualities which had won him the popular heart. He was gentle and affable; above all, he was fair-dealing and just, not because it was politic to seem, but his nature to be, so.

Nevertheless, Harold's character, beautiful and sublime in many respects as it was, had its strong leaven of human imperfection in that very self-dependence which was born of his reason and his pride. In resting so solely on man's perceptions of the right, he lost one attribute of the true hero—faith. We do not mean that word in the religious sense alone, but in the more comprehensive. He did not rely on the Celestial Something pervading all nature, never seen, only felt when duly courted, stronger and lovelier than what eye could behold and mere reason could embrace. Believing, it is true, in God, he lost those fine links that unite God to man's secret heart, and which are woven alike from the simplicity of the child and the wisdom of the poet. To use a modern illustration, his large mind was a “cupola lighted from below.”

His bravery, though inflexible as the fiercest sea-king's, when need arose for its exercise, was not his prominent characteristic. He despised the brute valour of Tostig,—his bravery was a necessary part of a firm and balanced manhood—the bravery of Hector, not Achilles. Constitutionally averse to bloodshed, he could seem timid where daring only gratified a wanton vanity, or aimed at a selfish object. On the other hand, if duty demanded daring, no danger could deter, no policy warp him;—he could seem rash; he could even seem merciless. In the what ought to be, he understood a must be.

And it was natural to this peculiar, yet thoroughly English temperament, to be, in action, rather steadfast and patient than quick and ready. Placed in perils familiar to him, nothing could exceed his vigour and address; but if taken unawares, and before his judgment could come to his aid, he was liable to be surprised into error. Large minds are rarely quick, unless they have been corrupted into unnatural vigilance by the necessities of suspicion. But a nature more thoroughly unsuspecting, more frank, trustful, and genuinely loyal than that young Earl's, it was impossible to conceive. All these

attributes considered, we have the key to much of Harold's character and conduct in the later events of his fated and tragic life.

But with this temperament, so manly and simple, we are not to suppose that Harold, while rejecting the superstitions of one class, was so far beyond his time as to reject those of another. No son of fortune, no man placing himself and the world in antagonism, can ever escape from some belief in the Invisible. Caesar could ridicule and profane the mystic rites of Roman mythology, but he must still believe in his fortune, as in a god. And Harold, in his very studies, seeing the freest and boldest minds of antiquity subjected to influences akin to those of his Saxon forefathers, felt less shame in yielding to them, vain as they might be, than in monkish impostures so easily detected. Though hitherto he had rejected all direct appeal to the magic devices of Hilda, the sound of her dark sayings, heard in childhood, still vibrated on his soul as man. Belief in omens, in days lucky or unlucky, in the stars, was universal in every class of the Saxon. Harold had his own fortunate day, the day of his nativity, the 14th of October. All enterprises undertaken on that day had hitherto been successful. He believed in the virtue of that day, as Cromwell believed in his 3d of September. For the rest, we have described him as he was in that part of his career in which he is now presented. Whether altered by fate and circumstances, time will show. As yet, no selfish ambition leagued with the natural desire of youth and intellect for their fair share of fame and power. His patriotism, fed by the example of Greek and Roman worthies, was genuine, pure, and ardent; he could have stood in the pass with Leonidas, or leaped into the gulf with Curtius.

CHAPTER II

At dawn, Harold woke from uneasy and broken slumbers, and his eyes fell upon the face of Hilda, large, and fair, and unutterably calm, as the face of Egyptian sphinx.

"Have thy dreams been prophetic, son of Godwin?" said the Vala.

"Our Lord forfend," replied the Earl, with unusual devoutness.

"Tell them, and let me read the rede; sense dwells in the voices of the night."

Harold mused, and after a short pause, he said:

"Methinks, Hilda, I can myself explain how those dreams came to haunt me."

Then raising himself on his elbow, he continued, while he fixed his clear penetrating eyes upon his hostess:

"Tell me frankly, Hilda, didst thou not cause some light to shine on yonder knoll, by the mound and stone, within the temple of the Druids?"

But if Harold had suspected himself to be the dupe of some imposture, the thought vanished when he saw the look of keen interest, even of awe, which Hilda's face instantly assumed.

"Didst thou see a light, son of Godwin, by the altar of Thor, and over the bautastein of the mighty dead? a flame, lambent and livid, like moonbeams collected over snow?"

"So seemed to me the light."

"No human hand ever kindled that flame, which announces the presence of the Dead," said Hilda, with a tremulous voice; "though seldom, uncompelled by the seid and the rune, does the spectre itself warn the eyes of the living."

"What shape, or what shadow of shape, does that spectre assume?"

"It rises in the midst of the flame, pale as the mist on the mountain, and vast as the giants of old; with the saex, and the spear, and the shield, of the sons of Woden.—Thou hast seen the Scin-laeca," continued Hilda, looking full on the face of the Earl.

"If thou deceivest me not," began Harold, doubting still.

"Deceive thee! not to save the crown of the Saxon dare I mock the might of the dead. Knowest thou not—or hath thy vain lore stood in place of the lore of thy fathers—that where a hero of old is buried, his treasures lie in his grave; that over that grave is at times seen at night the flame that thou

sawest, and the dead in his image of air? Oft seen in the days that are gone, when the dead and the living had one faith—were one race; now never marked, but for portent, and prophecy, and doom:—glory or woe to the eyes that see! On yon knoll, Aesc (the first-born of Cerdic, that Father-King of the Saxons,) has his grave where the mound rises green, and the stone gleams wan by the altar of Thor. He smote the Britons in their temple, and he fell smiting. They buried him in his arms, and with the treasures his right hand had won. Fate hangs on the house of Cerdic, or the realm of the Saxon, when Woden calls the laeca of his son from the grave.”

Hilda, much troubled bent her face over her clasped hands, and, rocking to and fro, muttered some runes unintelligible to the ear of her listener. Then she turned to him, commandingly, and said:

“Thy dreams now, indeed, are oracles, more true than living Vala could charm with the wand and the rune: Unfold them.”

Thus adjured, Harold resumed:

“Methought, then, that I was on a broad, level plain, in the noon of day; all was clear to my eye, and glad to my heart. I was alone and went on my way rejoicing. Suddenly the earth opened under my feet, and I fell deep, fathom-deep;—deep, as if to that central pit, which our heathen sires called Niffelheim—the Home of Vapour—the hell of the dead who die without glory. Stunned by the fall, I lay long, locked as in a dream in the midst of a dream. When I opened my eyes, behold, I was girt round with dead men’s bones; and the bones moved round me, undulating, as the dry leaves that wirble round in the winds of the winter. And from midst of them peered a trunkless skull, and on the skull was a mitre, and from the yawning jaws a voice came hissing, as a serpent’s hiss, ‘Harold, the scorner, thou art ours!’ Then, as from the buzz of an army, came voices multitudinous, ‘Thou art ours!’ I sought to rise, and behold my limbs were bound, and the gyves were fine and frail, as the web of the gossamer, and they weighed on me like chains of iron. And I felt an anguish of soul that no words can speak—an anguish both of horror and shame; and my manhood seemed to ooze from me, and I was weak as a child new born. Then suddenly there rushed forth a freezing wind, as from an air of ice, and the bones from their whirl stood still, and the buzz ceased, and the mitred skull grinned on me still and voiceless; and serpents darted their arrowy tongues from the eyeless sockets. And, lo, before me stood (O Hilda, I see it now!) the form of the spectre that had risen from yonder knoll. With his spear, and saex, and his shield, he stood before me; and his face, though pale as that of one long dead, was stern as the face of a warrior in the van of armed men; he stretched his hand, and he smote his saex on his shield, and the clang sounded hollow; the gyves broke at the clash—I sprang to my feet, and I stood side by side with the phantom, dauntless. Then, suddenly, the mitre on the skull changed to a helm; and where the skull had grinned, trunkless and harmless, stood a shape like War, made incarnate;—a Thing above giants, with its crest to the stars and its form an eclipse between the sun and the day. The earth changed to ocean, and the ocean was blood, and the ocean seemed deep as the seas where the whales sport in the North, but the surge rose not to the knee of that measureless image. And the ravens came round it from all parts of the heaven, and the vultures with the dead eyes and dull scream. And all the bones, before scattered and shapeless, sprung to life and to form, some monks and some warriors; and there was a hoot, and a hiss, and a roar, and the storm of arms. And a broad pennon rose out of the sea of blood, and from the clouds came a pale hand, and it wrote on the pennon, ‘Harold, the Accursed!’ Then said the stern shape by my side, ‘Harold, fearest thou the dead men’s bones?’ and its voice was as a trumpet that gives strength to the craven, and I answering, ‘Niddering, indeed, were Harold, to fear the bones of the dead!’”

“As I spoke, as if hell had burst loose, came a gibber of scorn, and all vanished at once, save the ocean of blood. Slowly came from the north, over the sea, a bird like a raven, save that it was blood-red, like the ocean; and there came from the south, swimming towards me, a lion. And I looked to the spectre; and the pride of war had gone from its face, which was so sad that methought I forgot raven and lion, and wept to see it. Then the spectre took me in its vast arms, and its breath froze my veins, and it kissed my brow and my lips, and said, gently and fondly, as my mother in some childish

sickness, 'Harold, my best beloved, mourn not. Thou hast all which the sons of Woden dreamed in their dreams of Valhalla!' Thus saying, the form receded slowly, slowly, still gazing on me with its sad eyes. I stretched forth my hand to detain it, and in my grasp was a shadowy sceptre. And, lo! round me, as if from the earth, sprang up thegns and chiefs, in their armour; and a board was spread, and a wassail was blithe around me. So my heart felt cheered and light, and in my hand was still the sceptre. And we feasted long and merrily; but over the feast flapped the wings of the blood-red raven, and over the blood-red sea beyond, swam the lion, near and near. And in the heavens there were two stars, one pale and steadfast, the other rushing and luminous; and a shadowy hand pointed from the cloud to the pale star, and a voice said, 'Lo, Harold! the star that shone on thy birth.' And another hand pointed to the luminous star, and another voice said, 'Lo, the star that shone on the birth of the victor.' Then, lo! the bright star grew fiercer and larger; and, rolling on with a hissing sound, as when iron is dipped into water, it rushed over the disc of the mournful planet, and the whole heavens seemed on fire. So methought the dream faded away, and in fading, I heard a full swell of music, as the swell of an anthem in an aisle; a music like that which but once in my life I heard; when I stood on the train of Edward, in the halls of Winchester, the day they crowned him king."

Harold ceased, and the Vala slowly lifted her head from her bosom, and surveyed him in profound silence, and with a gaze that seemed vacant and meaningless.

"Why dost thou look on me thus, and why art thou so silent?" asked the Earl.

"The cloud is on my sight, and the burthen is on my soul, and I cannot read thy rede," murmured the Vala. "But morn, the ghost-chaser, that waketh life, the action, charms into slumber life, the thought. As the stars pale at the rising of the sun, so fade the lights of the soul when the buds revive in the dews, and the lark sings to the day. In thy dream lies thy future, as the wing of the moth in the web of the changing worm; but, whether for weal or for woe, thou shalt burst through thy mesh, and spread thy plumes in the air. Of myself I know nought. Await the hour when Skulda shall pass into the soul of her servant, and thy fate shall rush from my lips as the rush of the waters from the heart of the cave."

"I am content to abide," said Harold, with his wonted smile, so calm and so lofty; "but I cannot promise thee that I shall heed thy rede, or obey thy warning, when my reason hath awoken, as while I speak it awakens, from the fumes of the fancy and the mists of the night."

CHAPTER III

Githa, Earl Godwin's wife, sate in her chamber, and her heart was sad. In the room was one of her sons, the one dearer to her than all, Wolnoth, her darling. For the rest of her sons were stalwart and strong of frame, and in their infancy she had known not a mother's fears. But Wolnoth had come into the world before his time, and sharp had been the travail of the mother, and long between life and death the struggle of the newborn babe. And his cradle had been rocked with a trembling knee, and his pillow been bathed with hot tears. Frail had been his childhood—a thing that hung on her care; and now, as the boy grew, blooming and strong, into youth, the mother felt that she had given life twice to her child. Therefore was he more dear to her than the rest; and, therefore, as she gazed upon him now, fair and smiling, and hopeful, she mourned for him more than for Sweyn, the outcast and criminal, on his pilgrimage of woe, to the waters of Jordan, and the tomb of our Lord. For Wolnoth, selected as the hostage for the faith of his house, was to be sent from her arms to the Court of William the Norman. And the youth smiled and was gay, choosing vestment and mantle, and ateghars of gold, that he might be flaunting and brave in the halls of knighthood and the beauty,—the school of the proudest chivalry of the Christian world. Too young, and too thoughtless, to share the wise hate of his elders for the manners and forms of the foreigners, their gaiety and splendour, as his boyhood had seen them, relieving the gloom of the cloister court, and contrasting the spleen and the rudeness of the Saxon temperament, had dazzled his fancy and half Normanised his mind. A proud and happy

boy was he, to go as hostage for the faith, and representative of the rank, of his mighty kinsmen; and step into manhood in the eyes of the dames of Rouen.

By Wolnoth's side stood his young sister, Thyra, a mere infant; and her innocent sympathy with her brother's pleasure in gaud and toy saddened Githa yet more.

"O my son!" said the troubled mother, "why, of all my children, have they chosen thee? Harold is wise against danger, and Tostig is fierce against foes, and Gurth is too loving to awake hate in the sternest, and from the mirth of sunny Leofwine sorrow glints aside, as the shaft from the sheen of a shield. But thou, thou, O beloved!—cursed be the king that chose thee, and cruel was the father that forgot the light of the mother's eyes!"

"Tut, mother the dearest," said Wolnoth, pausing from the contemplation of a silk robe, all covered with brodered peacocks, which had been sent him as a gift from his sister the Queen, and wrought with her own fair hands; for a notable needle-woman, despite her sage lere, was the wife of the Saint King, as sorrowful women mostly are,—“Tut! the bird must leave the nest when the wings are fledged. Harold the eagle, Tostig the kite, Gurth the ring-dove, and Leofwine the stare. See, my wings are the richest of all, mother, and bright is the sun in which thy peacock shall spread his pranked plumes.”

Then, observing that his liveliness provoked no smile from his mother, he approached and said more seriously:

"Bethink thee, mother mine. No other choice was left to king or to father. Harold, and Tostig, and Leofwine, have their lordships and offices. Their posts are fixed, and they stand as the columns of our house. And Gurth is so young, and so Saxish and so the shadow of Harold, that his hate to the Norman is a by-word already among our youths; for hate is the more marked in a temper of love, as the blue of this border seems black against the white of the woof. But I;—the good King knows that I shall be welcome, for the Norman knights love Wolnoth, and I have spent hours by the knees of Montgommeri and Grantmesnil, listening to the feats of Rolf-ganger, and playing with their gold chains of knighthood. And the stout Count himself shall knight me, and I shall come back with the spurs of gold which thy ancestors, the brave Kings of Norway and Daneland, wore ere knighthood was known. Come, kiss me, my mother, and come see the brave falcons Harold has sent me:—true Welch!"

Githa rested her face on her son's shoulder, and her tears blinded her. The door opened gently, and Harold entered; and with the Earl, a pale dark-haired boy, Haco; the son of Sweyn.

But Githa, absorbed in her darling Wolnoth, scarce saw the grandchild reared afar from her knees, and hurried at once to Harold. In his presence she felt comfort and safety; for Wolnoth leant on her heart, and her heart leant on Harold.

"O son, son!" she cried, "firmest of hand, surest of faith, and wisest of brain, in the house of Godwin, tell me that he yonder, he thy young brother, risks no danger in the halls of the Normans!"

"Not more than in these, mother," answered Harold, soothing her, with caressing lip and gentle tone. "Fierce and ruthless, men say, is William the Duke against foes with their swords in their hands, but debonnair and mild to the gentle [105](#), frank host and kind lord. And these Normans have a code of their own, more grave than all morals, more binding than even their fanatic religion. Thou knowest it well, mother, for it comes from thy race of the North, and this code of honour, they call it, makes Wolnoth's head as sacred as the relics of a saint set in zimmes. Ask only, my brother, when thou comest in sight of the Norman Duke, ask only 'the kiss of peace,' and, that kiss on thy brow, thou wilt sleep more safe than if all the banners of England waved over thy couch." [106](#)

"But how long shall the exile be?" asked Githa, comforted. Harold's brow fell.

"Mother, not even to cheer thee will I deceive. The time of the hostageship rests with the King and the Duke. As long as the one affects fear from the race of Godwin, as long as the other feigns care for such priests or such knights as were not banished from the realm, being not courtiers, but

scattered wide and far in convent and homestead, so long will Wolnoth and Haco be guests in the Norman halls.”

Githa wrung her hands.

“But comfort, my mother; Wolnoth is young, his eye is keen, and his spirit prompt and quick. He will mark these Norman captains, he will learn their strength and their weakness, their manner of war, and he will come back, not as Edward the King came, a lover of things un-Saxon, but able to warn and to guide us against the plots of the camp-court, which threatens more, year by year, the peace of the world. And he will see there arts we may worthily borrow: not the cut of a tunic, and the fold of a gonna, but the arts of men who found states and build nations. William the Duke is splendid and wise; merchants tell us how crafts thrive under his iron hand, and war-men say that his forts are constructed with skill and his battle-schemes planned as the mason plans key-stone and arch, with weight portioned out to the prop, and the force of the hand made tenfold by the science of the brain. So that the boy will return to us a man round and complete, a teacher of greybeards, and the sage of his kin; fit for earldom and rule, fit for glory and England. Grieve not, daughter of the Dane kings, that thy son, the best loved, hath nobler school and wider field than his brothers.”

This appeal touched the proud heart of the niece of Canute the Great, and she almost forgot the grief of her love in the hope of her ambition.

She dried her tears and smiled upon Wolnoth, and already, in the dreams of a mother’s vanity, saw him great as Godwin in council, and prosperous as Harold in the field. Nor, half Norman as he was, did the young man seem insensible of the manly and elevated patriotism of his brother’s hinted lessons, though he felt they implied reproof. He came to the Earl, whose arm was round his mother, and said with a frank heartiness not usual to a nature somewhat frivolous and irresolute:

“Harold, thy tongue could kindle stones into men, and warm those men into Saxons. Thy Wolnoth shall not hang his head with shame when he comes back to our merrie land with shaven locks and spurs of gold. For if thou doubtest his race from his look, thou shalt put thy right hand on his heart, and feel England beat there in every pulse.”

“Brave words, and well spoken,” cried the Earl, and he placed his hand on the boy’s head as in benison.

Till then, Haco had stood apart, conversing with the infant Thyra, whom his dark, mournful face awed and yet touched, for she nestled close to him, and put her little hand in his; but now, inspired no less than his cousin by Harold’s noble speech, he came proudly forward by Wolnoth’s side, and said:

“I, too, am English, and I have the name of Englishman to redeem.”

Ere Harold could reply, Githa exclaimed:

“Leave there thy right hand on my child’s head, and say, simply: ‘By my troth and my plight, if the Duke detain Wolnoth, son of Githa, against just plea, and King’s assent to his return, I, Harold, will, failing letter and nuncius, cross the seas, to restore the child to the mother.’” [107](#) Harold hesitated.

A sharp cry of reproach that went to his heart broke from Githa’s lips.

“Ah! cold and self-heeding, wilt thou send him to bear a peril from which thou shrinkest thyself?”

“By my troth and my plight, then,” said the Earl, “if, fair time elapsed, peace in England, without plea of justice, and against my king’s fiat, Duke William of Normandy detain the hostages;—thy son and this dear boy, more sacred and more dear to me for his father’s woes,—I will cross the seas, to restore the child to the mother, the fatherless to his fatherland. So help me, all-seeing One, Amen and Amen!”

CHAPTER IV

We have seen, in an earlier part of this record, that Harold possessed, amongst his numerous and more stately possessions, a house, not far from the old Roman dwelling-place of Hilda. And in

this residence he now (save when with the King) made his chief abode. He gave as the reasons for his selection, the charm it took, in his eyes, from that signal mark of affection which his ceorls had rendered him, in purchasing the house and tilling the ground in his absence; and more especially the convenience of its vicinity to the new palace at Westminster; for, by Edward's special desire, while the other brothers repaired to their different domains, Harold remained near his royal person. To use the words of the great Norwegian chronicler, "Harold was always with the Court itself, and nearest to the King in all service."

"The King loved him very much, and kept him as his own son, for he had no children." This attendance on Edward was naturally most close at the restoration to power of the Earl's family. For Harold, mild and conciliating, was, like Alred, a great peacemaker, and Edward had never cause to complain of him, as he believed he had of the rest of that haughty house. But the true spell which made dear to Harold the rude building of timber, with its doors open all day to his lithsmen, when with a light heart he escaped from the halls of Westminster, was the fair face of Edith his neighbour. The impression which this young girl had made upon Harold seemed to partake of the strength of a fatality. For Harold had loved her before the marvellous beauty of her womanhood began; and, occupied from his earliest youth in grave and earnest affairs, his heart had never been frittered away on the mean and frivolous affections of the idle. Now, in that comparative leisure of his stormy life, he was naturally most open to the influence of a charm more potent than all the glamour of Hilda.

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