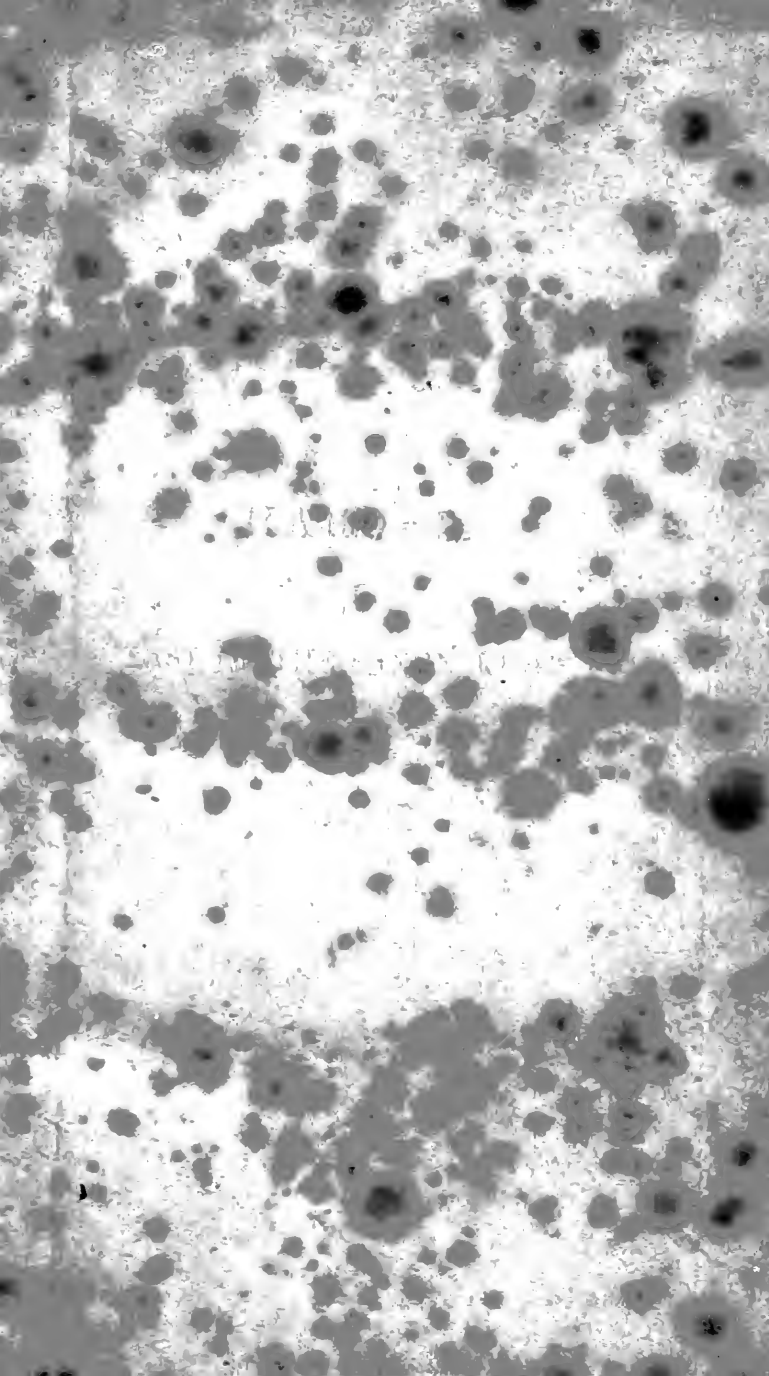
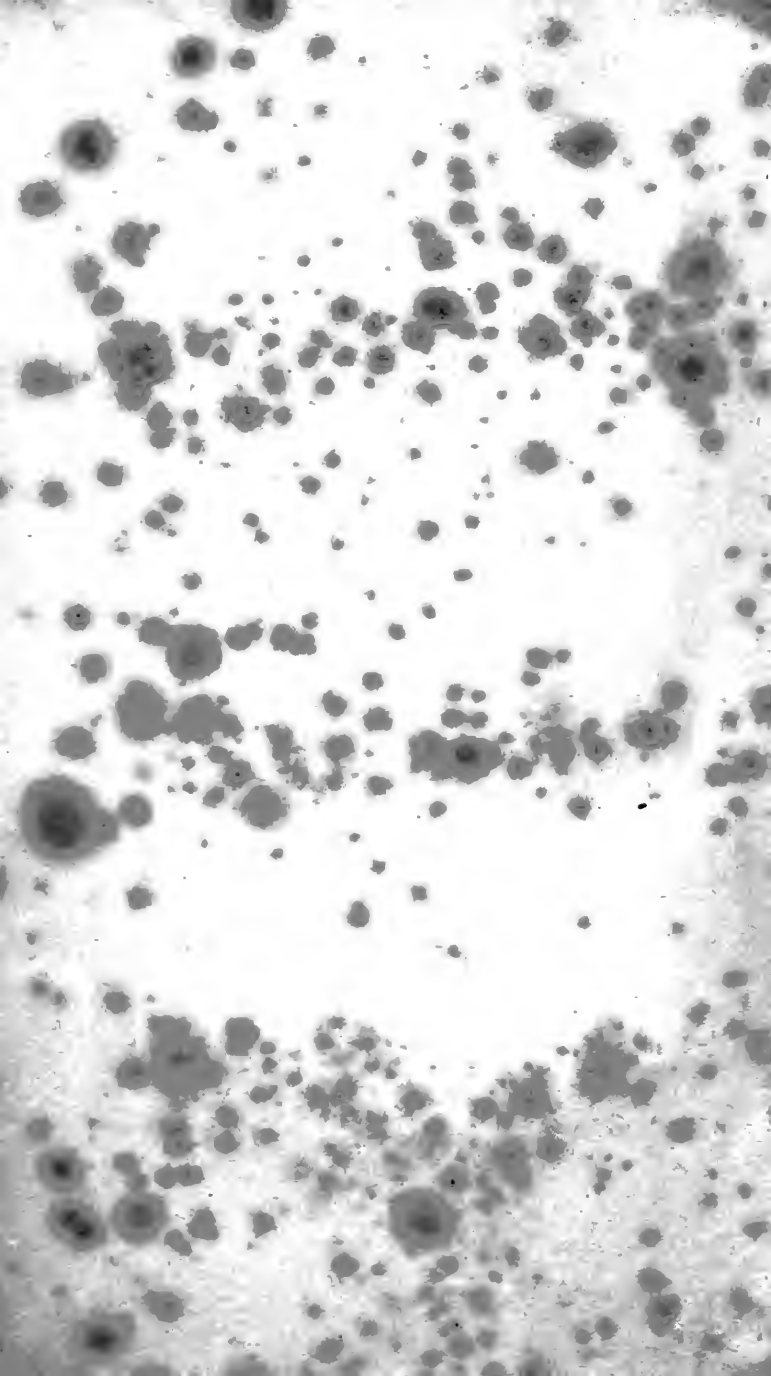




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HAROLD,
THE
LAST OF THE SAXON KINGS.

VOL. II.

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H A R O L D,

THE

LAST OF THE SAXON KINGS;

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“RIENZI;” “THE LAST OF THE BARONS;”

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BOOK V.



DEATH AND LOVE.

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HAROLD,

THE

LAST OF THE SAXON KINGS.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

HAROLD, without waiting once more to see Edith, nor even taking leave of his father, repaired to Dunwich,* the capital of his earldom. In his absence, the King wholly forgot Algar and his suit; and in the meanwhile the only lordships at his disposal, Stigand, the grasping Bishop, got from him without an effort. In much wrath, Earl Algar, on the fourth day, assembling all the loose men-at-arms he could find around the

* Dunwich, now swallowed up by the sea.—Hostile element to the house of Godwin!

metropolis, and at the head of a numerous disorderly band, took his way into Wales, with his young daughter Aldyth, to whom the crown of a Welch king was perhaps some comfort for the loss of the fair Earl; though the rumour ran that she had long since lost her heart to her father's foe.

Edith, after a long homily from the King, returned to Hilda; nor did her godmother renew the subject of the convent. All she said on parting was, "Even in youth the silver cord may be loosened, and the golden bowl may be broken; and rather perhaps in youth than in age when the heart has grown hard, wilt thou recal with a sigh my counsels."

Godwin had departed to Wales; all his sons were at their several lordships; Edward was left alone to his monks and relie-venders. And so months passed.

Now it was the custom with the old kings of England to hold state and wear their crowns thrice a-year, at Christmas, at Easter, and at Whitsuntide; and in those times their nobles came round them, and there was much feasting and great pomp.

So, in the Easter of the year of our Lord 1053,

King Edward kept his court at Windshore,* and Earl Godwin and his sons, and many others of high degree, left their homes to do honour to the King. And Earl Godwin came first to his house in London—near the Tower Palatine, in what is now called the Fleet—and Harold the Earl, and Tostig, and Leofwine, and Gurth, were to meet him there, and go thence, with the full state of their sub-thegns, and cnechts, and house-carles, their falcons, and their hounds, as became men of such rank, to the court of King Edward.

Earl Godwin sate with his wife, Githa, in a room out of the Hall, which looked on the Thames, — awaiting Harold, who was expected to arrive ere night-fall. Gurth had ridden forth to meet his brother, and Leofwine and Tostig had gone over to Southwark, to try their band-dogs on the great bear, which had been brought from the North a few days before, and was said to have hugged many good hounds to death, and a large train of thegns and house-carles had gone with them to see the sport ; so that the old Earl and his lady the Dane sate alone. And there was a cloud upon Earl Godwin's large forehead, and he

* Windsor.

sate by the fire, spreading his hands before it, and looking thoughtfully on the flame, as it broke through the smoke which burst out into the *cover*, or hole in the roof. And in that large house, there were no less than three 'covers,' or rooms, wherein fires could be lit in the centre of the floor; and the rafters above were blackened with the smoke; and in those good old days, ere chimneys, if existing, were much in use, "poses, and rheumatisms, and catarrhs," were unknown,—so wholesome and healthful was the smoke. Earl Godwin's favourite hound, old, like himself, lay at his feet, dreaming, for he whined and was restless. And the Earl's old hawk, with its feathers all stiff and sparse, perched on the dossel of the Earl's chair; and the floor was pranked with rushes and sweet herbs—the first of the spring; and Githa's feet were on her stool, and she leaned her proud face on the small hand which proved her descent from the Dane, and rocked herself to and fro, and thought of her son Wolnoth, in the court of the Norman.

"Githa," at last said the Earl, "thou hast been to me a good wife and a true, and thou hast borne me tall and bold sons, some of whom have caused

us sorrow, and some joy; and in sorrow and in joy we but have drawn closer to each other. Yet when we wed thou wert in thy first youth, and the best part of my years was fled; and thou wert a Dane and I a Saxon; and thou a king's niece, and now a king's sister, and I but tracing two descents to thegn's rank."

Moved and marvelling at this touch of sentiment in the calm Earl, in whom indeed such sentiment was rare, Githa roused herself from her musings, and said, simply and anxiously,—

"I fear my lord is not well, that he speaks thus to Githa!"

The Earl smiled faintly.

"Thou art right with thy woman's wit, wife. And for the last few weeks, though I said it not to alarm thee, I have had strange noises in my ears, and a surge, as of blood, to the temples."

"O Godwin! dear spouse," said Githa, tenderly, "and I was blind to the cause, but wondered why there was some change in thy manner! But I will go to Hilda to-morrow; she hath charms against all disease."

"Leave Hilda in peace, to give her charms to the young; age defies Wigh and Wicca. Now

hearken to me. I feel that my thread is nigh spent, and, as Hilda would say, my Fylgia forewarns me that we are about to part. Silence, I say, and hear me. I have done proud things in my day; I have made kings and built thrones, and I stand higher in England than ever thegn or earl stood before. I would not, Githa, that the tree of my house, planted in the storm, and watered with lavish blood, should wither away."

The old Earl paused, and Githa said, loftily,—

"Fear not that thy name will pass from the earth, or thy race from power. For fame has been wrought by thy hands, and sons have been born to thy embrace; and the boughs of the tree thou hast planted shall live in the sunlight when we, its roots, O my husband, are buried in the earth."

"Githa," replied the Earl, "thou speakest as the daughter of kings and the mother of men; but listen to me, for my soul is heavy. Of these our sons, our first-born, alas! is a wanderer and outcast,—Sweyn, once the beautiful and brave; and Wolnoth, thy darling, is a guest in the court of the Norman, our foe. Of the rest, Gurth is so mild and so calm, that I predict without fear that he will be a warrior of fame, for the mildest in hall

are ever the boldest in field. But Gurth hath not the deep wit for these tangled times; and Leofwine is too light, and Tostig too fierce. So, wife mine, of these our six sons, Harold alone, dauntless as Tostig, mild as Gurth, hath his father's thoughtful brain. And, if the King remains as aloof as now from his royal kinsman, Edward the Atheling, who"—the Earl hesitated and looked round—"who so near to the throne when I am no more, as Harold, the joy of the ceorls, and the pride of the thegns?—he whose tongue never falters in the Witan, and whose arm never yet hath known defeat in the field?"

Githa's heart swelled, and her cheek grew flushed.

"But what I fear the most," resumed the Earl, "is, not the enemy without, but the jealousy within. By the side of Harold stands Tostig, rapacious to grasp, but impotent to hold—able to ruin, strengthless to save."

"Nay, Godwin, my lord, thou wrongest our handsome son."

"Wife, wife," said the Earl, stamping his foot "hear me and obey me; for my words on earth may be few, and while thou gainsayest me the

blood mounts to my brain, and my eyes see through a cloud."

"Forgive me, sweet lord," said Githa, humbly.

"Mickle and sore it repents me that in their youth I spared not the time from my worldly ambition to watch over the hearts of my sons; and thou wert too proud of the surface without, to look well to the workings within, and what was once soft to the touch is now hard to the hammer. In the battle of life, the arrows we neglect to pick up, Fate, our foe, will store in her quivers; we have armed her ourselves with the shafts,—the more need to beware with the shield. Wherefore, if thou survivest me, and if, as I forebode, dissension break out between Harold and Tostig, I charge thee by memory of our love, and reverence for my grave, to deem wise and just all that Harold deems just and wise. For when Godwin is in the dust, his House lives alone in Harold. Heed me now, and heed ever. And so, while the day yet lasts, I will go forth into the marts and the guilds, and talk with the burgesses, and smile on their wives, and be, to the last, Godwin the smooth and the strong."

So saying, the old Earl arose, and walked forth

with a firm step; and his old hound sprang up, pricked his ears, and followed him; the blinded falcon turned his ear towards the clapping door, but did not stir from the dossel.

Then Githa again leant her cheek on her hand, and again rocked herself to and fro, gazing into the red flame of the fire,—red and fitful through the blue smoke—and thought over her lord's words. It might be the third part of an hour after Godwin had left the house, when the door opened, and Githa, expecting the return of her sons, looked up eagerly, but it was Hilda, who stooped her head under the vault of the door; and behind Hilda came two of her maidens, bearing a small cyst, or chest. The Vala motioned to her attendants to lay the cyst at the feet of Githa, and, that done, with lowly salutation they left the room.

The superstitions of the Danes were strong in Githa; and she felt an indescribable awe when the Vala stood before her, the red light playing on her stern marble face, and contrasting robes of funereal black. But, with all her awe, Githa, who, not educated like her daughter Edith, had few feminine resources, loved the visits of her mysterious kinswoman. She loved to live her youth over

again in discourse on the wild customs and dark rites of the Dane; and even her awe itself had the charm the ghost tale has to the child;—for the illiterate are ever children. So, recovering her surprise, and her first pause, she rose to welcome the Vala, and said :—

“Hail, Hilda, and thrice hail! The day has been warm and the way long; and, ere thou takest food and wine, let me prepare for thee the bath for thy form, or the bath for thy feet. For as sleep to the young, is the bath to the old.”

Hilda shook her head.

“Bringer of sleep am I, and the baths I prepare are in the halls of Valhalla. Offer not to the Vala the bath for mortal weariness, and the wine and the food meet for human guests. Sit thee down, daughter of the Dane, and thank thy new gods for the past that hath been thine. Not ours is the present, and the future escapes from our dreams; but the past is ours ever, and all eternity cannot revoke a single joy that the moment hath known.”

Then seating herself in Godwin’s large chair, she leant over her seid-staff, and was silent, as if absorbed in her thoughts.

“Githa,” she said at last, “where is thy lord?”

I came to touch his hands and to look on his brow."

"He hath gone forth into the mart, and my sons are from home; and Harold comes hither, ere night, from his earldom."

A faint smile, as of triumph, broke over the lips of the Vala, and then as suddenly yielded to an expression of great sadness.

"Githa," she said, slowly, "doubtless thou rememberest in thy young days to have seen or heard of the terrible hell-maid Belsta?"

"Ay, ay," answered Githa, shuddering; "I saw her once in gloomy weather, driving before her herds of dark grey cattle. Ay, ay; and my father beheld her ere his death, riding the air on a wolf, with a snake for a bridle. Why askest thou?"

"Is it not strange," said Hilda, evading the question, "that Belsta, and Heidr, and Hulla of old, the wolf-riders, the men-devourers, could win to the uttermost secrets of galdra, though applied only to purposes the direst and fellest to man, and that I, though ever in the future,—I, though tasking the Nornas not to afflict a foe, but to shape the careers of those I love,—I find, indeed, my

predictions fulfilled; but how often, alas! only in horror and doom!”

“How so, kinswoman, how so?” said Githa, awed, yet charmed in the awe, and drawing her chair nearer to the mournful sorceress. “Didst thou not foretell our return in triumph from the unjust outlawry, and, lo, it hath come to pass? and hast thou not” (here Githa’s proud face flushed) “foretold also that my stately Harold shall wear the diadem of a king?”

“Truly, the first came to pass,” said Hilda; “but—” she paused, and her eye fell on the cyst; then breaking off she continued, speaking to herself rather than to Githa—“And Harold’s dream, what did that portend? the runes fail me, and the dead give no voice. And beyond one dim day, in which his betrothed shall clasp him with the arms of a bride, all is dark to my vision—dark—dark. Speak not to me, Githa; for a burthen, heavy as the stone on a grave, rests on a weary heart!”

A dead silence succeeded, till, pointing with her staff to the fire, the Vala said, “Lo, where the smoke and the flame contend!—the smoke rises in

dark gyres to the air, and escapes, to join the wrack of the clouds. From the first to the last we trace its birth and its fall; from the heart of the fire to the descent in the rain, so is it with human reason, which is not the light but the smoke; it struggles but to darken us; it soars but to melt in the vapour and dew. Yet lo, the flame burns in our hearth till the fuel fails, and goes, at last, none know whither. But it lives in the air though we see it not; it lurks in the stone and waits the flash of the steel; it coils round the dry leaves and sere stalks, and a touch re-illumes it; it plays in the marsh—it collects in the heavens—it appals us in the lightning—it gives warmth to the air—life of our life, and element of all elements. O Githa, the flame is the light of the soul, the element everlasting; and it liveth still, when it escapes from our view; it burneth in the shapes to which it passes; it vanishes, but is never extinct.”

So saying, the Vala's lips again closed; and again both the women sate silent by the great fire, as it flared and flickered over the deep lines and high features of Githa, the Earl's wife, and the calm, unwrinkled, solemn face of the melancholy Vala.

CHAPTER II.

WHILE these conferences took place in the house of Godwin, Harold, on his way to London, dismissed his train to precede him to his father's roof, and, striking across the country, rode fast and alone towards the old Roman abode of Hilda. Months had elapsed since he had seen or heard of Edith. News at that time, I need not say, was rare and scarce, and limited to public events, either transmitted by special nuncius, or passing pilgrim, or borne from lip to lip by the talk of the scattered multitude. But even in his busy and anxious duties, Harold had in vain sought to banish from his heart the image of that young girl, whose life he needed no Vala to predict to him was interwoven with the fibres of his own. The obstacles which, while he yielded to, he held unjust and tyrannical, obstacles allowed by his reluctant rea-

son and his secret ambition—not sanctified by conscience—only inflamed the deep strength of the solitary passion his life had known ; a passion that, dating from the very childhood of Edith, had, often unknown to himself, animated his desire of fame, and mingled with his visions of power. Nor, though hope was far and dim, was it extinct. The legitimate heir of Edward the Confessor was a prince living in the Court of the Emperor, of fair repute, and himself wedded : and Edward's health, always precarious, seemed to forbid any very prolonged existence to the reigning king. Therefore, he thought, that through the successor, whose throne would rest its safety upon Harold's support, he might easily obtain that dispensation from the Pope which he knew the present king would never ask—a dispensation rarely indeed, if ever, accorded to any subject, and which, therefore, needed all a king's power to back it.

So in that hope, and fearful lest it should be quenched for ever by Edith's adoption of the veil and the irrevocable vow, with a beating, disturbed, but joyful heart, he rode over field and through forest to the old Roman house.

He emerged at length to the rear of the villa, and the sun, fast hastening to its decline, shone full upon the rude columns of the Druid temple. And there, as he had seen her before, when he had first spoken of love and its barriers, he beheld the young maiden.

He sprang from his horse, and leaving the well-trained animal loose to browse on the waste land, he ascended the knoll. He stole noiselessly behind Edith, and his foot stumbled against the grave-stone of the dead Titan-Saxon of old. But the apparition, whether real or fancied, and the dream that had followed, had long passed from his memory, and no superstition was in the heart springing to the lips, that cried "Edith," once again.

The girl started, looked round, and fell upon his breast.

It was some moments before she recovered consciousness, and then, withdrawing herself gently from his arms, she leant for support against the Teuton altar.

She was much changed since Harold had seen her last: her cheek had grown pale and thin, and her rounded form seemed wasted; and sharp

grief, as he gazed, shot through the soul of Harold.

“Thou hast pined, thou hast suffered,” said he mournfully: “and I, who would shed my life’s blood to take one from thy sorrows, or add to one of thy joys, have been afar, unable to comfort, perhaps only a cause of thy woe.”

“No, Harold,” said Edith, faintly, “never of woe; always of comfort, even in absence. I have been ill, and Hilda hath tried rune and charm all in vain. But I am better, now that Spring hath come tardily forth, and I look on the fresh flowers, and hear the song of the birds.”

But tears were in the sound of her voice, while she spoke.

“And they have not tormented thee again with the thoughts of the convent?”

“They? no;—but my soul, yes. O Harold, release me from my promise; for the time already hath come that thy sister foretold to me; the silver cord is loosened, and the golden bowl is broken, and I would fain take the wings of the dove, and be at peace.”

“ Is it so?—Is there peace in the home where the thought of Harold becomes a sin ?”

“ Not sin then and there, Harold, not sin. Thy sister hailed the convent when she thought of prayer for those she loved.”

“ Prate not to me of my sister !” said Harold, through his set teeth. “ It is but a mockery to talk of prayer for the heart that thou thyself rendest in twain. Where is Hilda? I would see her.”

“ She hath gone to thy father’s house with a gift; and it was to watch for her return that I sate on the green knoll.”

Then the Earl drew near and took her hand, and sate by her side, and they conversed long. But Harold saw with a fierce pang that Edith’s heart was set upon the convent, and that even in his presence, and despite his soothing words, she was broken-spirited and despondent. It seemed as if her youth and life had gone from her, and the day had come in which she said, ‘ There is no pleasure.’

Never had he seen her thus; and, deeply moved as well as keenly stung, he rose at length to

depart ; her hand lay passive in his parting clasp, and a slight shiver went over her frame.

“ Farewell, Edith ; when I return from Windshore, I shall be at my old home yonder, and we shall meet again.”

Edith’s lips murmured inaudibly, and she bent her eyes to the ground.

Slowly Harold regained his steed, and as he rode on, he looked behind and waved oft his hand. But Edith sate motionless, her eyes still on the ground, and he saw not the tears that fell from them fast and burning ; nor heard he the low voice that groaned amidst the heathen ruins, “ Mary, sweet mother, shelter me from my own heart !”

The sun had set before Harold gained the long and spacious abode of his father. All around it lay the roofs and huts of the great Earl’s special tradesmen, for even his goldsmith was but his freed ceorl. The house itself stretched far from the Thames inland, with several low courts built only of timber, rugged and shapeless, but filled with bold men, then the great furniture of a noble’s halls.

Amidst the shouts of hundreds, eager to hold

his stirrup, the Earl dismounted, passed the swarming hall, and entered the room, in which he found Hilda, and Githa,—and Godwin, who had preceded his entry but a few minutes.

In the beautiful reverence of son to father, which made one of the loveliest features of the Saxon character* (as the frequent want of it makes the most hateful of the Norman vices), the all-powerful Harold bowed his knee to the old Earl, who placed his hand on his head in benediction, and then kissed him on the cheek and brow.

“Thy kiss, too, dear mother,” said the younger Earl; and Githa’s embrace if more cordial than her lord’s, was not, perhaps, more fond.

“Greet Hilda, my son,” said Godwin, “she hath brought me a gift, and she hath tarried to place it under thy special care. Thou alone must heed the treasure, and open the casket. But when and where, my kinswoman?”

“On the sixth day after thy coming to the King’s hall,” answered Hilda, not returning the

* The chronicler, however, laments that the household ties, formerly so strong with the Anglo-Saxon, had been much weakened in the age prior to the Conquest.

smile with which Godwin spoke,—“on the sixth day, Harold, open the chest, and take out the robe which hath been spun in the house of Hilda for Godwin the Earl. And now, Godwin, I have clasped thine hand, and I have looked on thy brow, and my mission is done; and I must wend homeward.”

“That shalt thou not, Hilda,” said the hospitable Earl, “the meanest wayfarer hath a right to bed and board in this house for a night and a day, and thou wilt not disgrace us by leaving our threshold, the bread unbroken, and the couch unpressed. Old friend, we were young together, and thy face is welcome to me as the memory of former days.”

Hilda shook her head, and one of those rare, and for that reason most touching, expressions of tenderness of which the calm and rigid character of her features, when in repose, seemed scarcely susceptible, softened her eye, and relaxed the firm lines of her lips.

“Son of Wolnoth,” said she gently, “not under thy roof-tree should lodge the raven of bode. Bread have I not broken since yestere’en, and sleep will be far from my eyes to night. Fear

not, for my people without are stout and armed, and for the rest there lives not the man whose arm can have power over Hilda."

She took Harold's hand as she spoke, and leading him forth, whispered in his ear, "I would have a word with thee ere we part." Then, reaching the threshold, she waved her wand thrice over the floor, and muttered in the Danish tongue a rude verse, which, translated, ran somewhat thus:—

“ All free from the knot
Glide the thread of the skein,
And rest to the labour,
And peace to the pain !”

“ It is a death-dirge,” said Githa, with whitening lips, but she spoke inly, and neither husband nor son heard her words.

Hilda and Harold passed in silence through the hall, and the Vala's attendants, with spears and torches, rose from the settles, and went before to the outer court, where snorted impatiently her black palfrey.

Halting in the midst of the court, she said to Harold in a low voice—

“ At sunset we part—at sunset we shall meet again. And behold, the star rises on the sunset; and the star, broader and brighter, shall rise on the sunset then! When thy hand draws the robe from the chest, think on Hilda, and know that at that hour, she stands by the grave of the Saxon warrior, and that from the grave dawns the future. Farewell to thee!”

Harold longed to speak to her of Edith, but a strange awe at his heart chained his lips; so he stood silent by the great wooden gates of the rude house. The torches flamed round him, and Hilda's face seemed lurid in the glare. There he stood musing long after torch and ceorl had passed away, nor did he wake from his reverie till Gurth, springing from his panting horse, passed his arm round the Earl's shoulder, and cried—

“ How did I miss thee, my brother? and why didst thou forsake thy train?”

“ I will tell thee anon. Gurth, has my father ailed? There is that in his face which I like not.”

“ He hath not complained of misease,” said Gurth, startled; “but now thou speakest of it, his mood hath altered of late, and he hath wan-

dered much alone, or only with the old hound and the old falcon."

Then Harold turned back, and his heart was full; and, when he reached the house, his father was sitting in the hall on his chair of state; and Githa sate at his right hand, and a little below her sate Tostig and Leofwine, who had come in from the bear-hunt by the river-gate, and were talking loud and merrily; and thegns and cnechts sate all around, and there was wassail as Harold entered. But the Earl looked only to his father, and he saw that his eyes were absent from the glee, and that he was bending his head over the old falcon, which sate on his wrist.

CHAPTER III.

No subject of England, since the race of Cerdic sate on the throne, ever entered the court-yard of Windshore with such train and such state as Earl Godwin.—Proud of that first occasion, since his return, to do homage to him with whose cause that of England against the stranger was bound, all truly English at heart amongst the thegns of the land swelled his retinue. Whether Saxon or Dane, those who alike loved the laws and the soil, came from north and from south to the peaceful banner of the old Earl. But most of these were of the past generation, for the rising race were still dazzled by the pomp of the Norman; and the fashion of English manners, and the pride in English deeds, had gone out of date with the long locks and bearded chins. Nor there, were

the bishops and abbots and the lords of the Church,—for dear to them already the fame of the Norman piety, and they shared the distaste of their holy King to the strong sense and homely religion of Godwin, who founded no convents, and rode to war with no relics round his neck. But they with Godwin were the stout and the frank and the free, in whom rested the pith and marrow of English manhood; and they who were against him were the blind and willing and fated fathers of slaves unborn.

Not then the stately castle we now behold, which is of the masonry of a prouder race, nor in the same site, but two miles distant on the winding of the river shore, (whence it took its name,) a rude building partly of timber and partly of Roman brick, adjoining a large monastery and surrounded by a small hamlet, constituted the palace of the saint-king.

So rode the Earl and his four fair sons, all abreast, into the court-yard of Windshore.* Now when

* Some authorities state Winchester as the scene of these memorable festivities. Old Windsor Castle is supposed by Mr. Lysons to have occupied the site of a farm of Mr. Isherwood's, surrounded by a moat, about two miles distant from new Windsor.

King Edward heard the tramp of the steeds and the hum of the multitudes, as he sate in his closet with his abbots and priests, all in still contemplation of the thumb of St. Jude, the king asked,—

“What army, in the day of peace, and the time of Easter, enters the gates of our palace?”

Then an abbot rose and looked out of the narrow window, and said with a groan,—

“Army thou may'st well call it, O King!—and foes to us and to thee head the legions.—”

“*Inprinis*,” quoth our abbot the scholar; “thou speakest, I trow, of the wicked Earl and his sons.”

The King's face changed. “Come they,” said he, “with so large a train? This smells more of vaunt than of loyalty: naught—very naught.”

“Alack!” said one of the conclave, “I fear me that the men of Belial will work us harm; the heathen are mighty, and ——”

“Fear not,” said Edward, with benign loftiness, observing that his guests grew pale, and himself, though often weak to childishness, and morally

He conjectures that it was still occasionally inhabited by the Norman kings till 1110. The ville surrounding it only contained ninety-five houses, paying gabel tax, in the Norman survey.

wavering and irresolute,—still so far king and gentleman, that he knew no craven fear of the body. “Fear not for me, my fathers; humble as I am, I am strong in the faith of heaven and its angels.”

The Churchmen looked at each other, sly yet abashed; it was not precisely for the King that they feared.

Then spoke Alred, the good prelate and constant peace-maker—fair column and lone one of the fast-crumbling Saxon Church. “It is ill in you, brethren, to arraign the truth and good meaning of those who honour your King; and in these days that lord should ever be the most welcome who brings to the halls of his king the largest number of hearts, stout and leal.”

“By your leave, brother Alred,” said Stigand, who, though from motives of policy he had aided those who besought the King not to peril his crown by resisting the return of Godwin, benefited too largely by the abuses of the Church to be sincerely espoused to the cause of the strong-minded Earl; “By your leave, brother Alred, to every leal heart is a ravenous mouth;

and the treasures of the King are wellnigh drained in feeding these hungry and welcomeless visitors. Durst I counsel my lord, I would pray him, as a matter of policy, to baffle this astute and proud Earl. He would fain have the King feast in public, that he might daunt him and the Church with the array of his friends."

"I conceive thee, my father," said Edward, with more quickness than habitual, and with the cunning, sharp though guileless, that belongs to minds undeveloped, "I conceive thee; it is good and most politic. This our orgulous Earl shall not have his triumph, and, so fresh from his exile, brave his King with the mundane parade of his power. Our health is our excuse for our absence from the banquet, and, sooth to say, we marvel much why Easter should be held a fitting time for feasting and mirth. Wherefore, Hugoline, my chamberlain, advise the Earl, that to-day we keep fast till the sunset, when temperately, with eggs, bread, and fish, we will sustain Adam's nature. Pray him and his sons to attend us—they alone be our guests." And with a sound that seemed a laugh, or the ghost

of a laugh, low and chuckling—for Edward had at moments an innocent humour which his monkish biographer disdained not to note,*—he flung himself back in his chair. The priests took the cue, and shook their sides heartily, as Hugoline left the room, not ill pleased, by the way, to escape an invitation to the eggs, bread, and fish.

Alred sighed; and said, “For the Earl and his sons, this is honour; but the other earls, and the thegns, will miss at the banquet him whom they design but to honour, and —”

“I have said,” interrupted Edward, drily, and with a look of fatigue.

“And,” observed another Churchman, with malice, “at least the young Earls will be humbled, for they will not sit with the King and their father, as they would in the Hall, and must serve my lord with napkin and wine.”

“*Inprinis*,” quoth our scholar the abbot, “that will be rare! I would I were by to see. But this Godwin is a man of treachery and wile, and my lord should beware of the fate of murdered Alfred, his brother!”

* AILRED, *de Vit. Edward. Confess.*

The King started, and pressed his hands to his eyes.

“How darest thou, Abbot of Fatchere,” cried Alred, indignantly; “How darest thou revive grief without remedy, and slander without proof?”

“Without proof?” echoed Edward, in a hollow voice. “He who could murder, could well stoop to forswear! Without proof before man; but did he try the ordeals of God?—did his feet pass the ploughshare?—did his hand grasp the seething iron? Verily, verily, thou didst wrong to name to me Alfred my brother! I shall see his sightless and gore-dropping sockets in the face of Godwin, this day, at my board.”

The King rose in great disorder; and after pacing the room some moments, disregarding of the silent and scared looks of his Churchmen, waived his hand, in sign to them to depart. All took the hint at once save Alred; but he, lingering the last, approached the King with dignity in his step and compassion in his eyes.

“Banish from thy breast, O King and son, thoughts unmeet, and of doubtful charity! All that man could know of Godwin’s innocence or

guilt—the suspicion of the vulgar—the acquittal of his peers,—was known to thee before thou didst seek his aid for thy throne, and didst take his child for thy wife. Too late is it now to suspect; leave thy doubts to the solemn day, which draws nigh to the old man, thy wife's father!"

“Ha!” said the King, seeming not to heed, or wilfully to misunderstand the prelate, “Ha, leave him to God;—I will!”

He turned away impatiently; and the prelate reluctantly departed.

CHAPTER IV.

TOSTIG chafed mightily at the King's message ; and, on Harold's attempt to pacify him, grew so violent that nothing short of the cold stern command of his father, who carried with him that weight of authority never known but to those in whom wrath is still and passion noiseless, imposed sullen peace on his son's rugged nature. But the taunts heaped by Tostig upon Harold disquieted the old Earl, and his brow was yet sad with prophetic care when he entered the royal apartments. He had been introduced into the King's presence but a moment before Hugoline led the way to the chamber of repast, and the greeting between King and Earl had been brief and formal.

Under the canopy of state were placed but two

chairs, for the King and the Queen's father; and the four sons, Harold, Tostig, Leofwine, and Gurth, stood behind. Such was the primitive custom of antient Teutonic kings; and the feudal Norman monarchs only enforced, though with more pomp and more rigour, the ceremonial of the forest patriarchs—youth to wait on age, and the ministers of the realm on those whom their policy had made chiefs in council and war.

The Earl's mind, already embittered by the scene with his sons, was chafed yet more by the King's unloving coldness; for it is natural to man, however worldly, to feel affection for those he has served, and Godwin had won Edward his crown; nor, despite his warlike though bloodless return, could even monk or Norman, in counting up the old Earl's crimes, say that he had ever failed in personal respect to the King he had made; nor, over-great for subject, as the Earl's power must be confessed, will historian now be found to say that it had not been well for Saxon England, if Godwin had found more favour with his King, and monk and Norman less.*

* "Is it astonishing," asked the people, (referring to Edward's preference of the Normans,) "that the author and support of

So the old Earl's stout heart was stung; and he looked from those deep, impenetrable eyes, mournfully upon Edward's chilling brow.

And Harold, with whom all household ties were strong, but to whom his great father was especially dear, watched his face and saw that it was very flushed. But the practised courtier sought to rally his spirits, and to smile and jest.

From smile and jest, the King turned and asked for wine. Harold, starting, advanced with the goblet; as he did so, he stumbled with one foot, but lightly recovered himself with the other; and Tostig laughed scornfully at Harold's awkwardness.

The old Earl observed both stumble and laugh, and willing to suggest a lesson to both his sons, said—laughing pleasantly—“Lo, Harold, how the left foot saves the right!—so one brother, thou seest, helps the other!”*

Edward's reign should be indignant at seeing new men from a foreign nation raised above him, and yet never does he utter one harsh word to the man whom he himself created king.”—HAZLITT'S *Thierry*, vol. i. p. 126.

This is the English account (*versus* the Norman). There can be little doubt that it is the true one.

* HENRY OF HUNTINGDON, &c.

King Edward looked up suddenly.

“And so, Godwin, also, had my brother Alfred helped me, hadst thou permitted.”

The old Earl, galled to the quick, gazed a moment on the King, and his cheek was purple, and his eyes seemed bloodshot.

“O Edward!” he exclaimed, “thou speakest to me hardly and unkindly of thy brother Alfred, and often hast thou thus more than hinted that I caused his death.”

The King made no answer.

“May this crumb of bread choke me,” said the Earl, in great emotion, “if I am guilty of thy brother’s blood!”*

But scarcely had the bread touched his lips, when his eyes fixed, the long warning symptoms were fulfilled. And he fell to the ground, under the table, sudden and heavy, under the stroke of apoplexy.

Harold and Gurth sprang forward, they drew their father from the ground. His face, still deep-red with streaks of purple, rested on Harold’s

* HENRY OF HUNTINGDON; BROMT. CHRON., etc.

breast ; and the son, kneeling, called in anguish on his father : the ear was deaf.

Then said the King, rising,—

“ It is the hand of God : remove him !” and he swept from the room, exulting.

CHAPTER V.

FOR five days and five nights did Godwin lie speechless.* And Harold watched over him night and day. And the leaches† would not bleed him, because the season was against it, in the increase of the moon and the tides, but they bathed his temples with wheat flour boiled in milk, according to a prescription which an angel in a dream‡ had advised to another patient; and they placed a plate of lead on his breast, marked with five crosses, saying a paternoster over each cross; together with other medical specifics in great esteem.§ But, nevertheless, five days and five nights did Godwin

* HOVEDEN.

† The origin of the word leach (physician) which has puzzled some inquirers, is from *lich*, or *leac*, a body. *Leich* is the old Saxon word for surgeon.

‡ SHARON TURNER, vol. i. p. 472.

§ FOSBROOKE.

lie speechless; and the leaches then feared that human skill was in vain.

The effect produced on the court, not more by the Earl's death-stroke than the circumstances preceding it, was such as defies description. With Godwin's old comrades in arms it was simple and honest grief; but with all those under the influence of the priests, the event was regarded as a direct punishment from Heaven. The previous words of the King, repeated by Edward to his monks, circulated from lip to lip, with sundry exaggerations as it travelled; and the superstition of the day had the more excuse, inasmuch as the speech of Godwin touched near upon the defiance of one of the most popular ordeals of the accused,—viz. that called the "corsned," in which a piece of bread was given to the supposed criminal; if he swallowed it with ease he was innocent; if it stuck in his throat, or choked him, nay, if he shook and turned pale, he was guilty. Godwin's words had appeared to invite the ordeal, God had heard and stricken down the presumptuous perjurer!

Unconscious, happily, of these attempts to blacken the name of his dying father, Harold,

towards the grey dawn succeeding the fifth night, thought that he heard Godwin stir in his bed. So he put aside the curtain, and bent over him. The old Earl's eyes were wide open, and the red colour had gone from his cheeks, so that he was pale as death.

“How fares it, dear father?” asked Harold.

Godwin smiled fondly, and tried to speak, but his voice died in a convulsive rattle. Lifting himself up, however, with an effort, he pressed tenderly the hand that clasped his own, leant his head on Harold's breast, and so gave up the ghost.

When Harold was at last aware that the struggle was over, he laid the grey head gently on the pillow; he closed the eyes, and kissed the lips, and knelt down and prayed. Then, seating himself at a little distance, he covered his face with his mantle.

At this time his brother Gurth, who had chiefly shared watch with Harold,—for Tostig, foreseeing his father's death, was busy soliciting thegn and earl to support his own claims to the earldom about to be vacant; and Leofwine had gone

to London on the previous day to summon Githa who was hourly expected—Gurth, I say, entered the room on tiptoe, and seeing his brother's attitude, guessed that all was over. He passed on to the table, took up the lamp, and looked long on his father's face. That strange smile of the dead, common alike to innocent and guilty, had already settled on the serene lips; and that no less strange transformation from age to youth, when the wrinkles vanish, and the features come out clear and sharp from the hollows of care and years, had already begun. And the old man seemed sleeping in his prime.

So Gurth kissed the dead, as Harold had done before him, and came up and sate himself by his brother's feet, and rested his head on Harold's knee; nor would he speak till, appalled by the long silence of the Earl, he drew away the mantle from his brother's face with a gentle hand, and the large tears were rolling down Harold's cheeks.

“Be soothed, my brother,” said Gurth; “our father has lived for glory, his age was prosperous, and his years more than those which the

Psalmist allots to man. Come and look on his face, Harold; its calm will comfort thee."

Harold obeyed the hand that led him like a child; in passing towards the bed, his eye fell upon the cyst which Hilda had given to the old Earl, and a chill shot through his veins.

"Gurth," said he, "is not this the morning of the sixth day in which we have been at the King's Court?"

"It is the morning of the sixth day."

Then Harold took forth the key which Hilda had given him, and unlocked the cyst, and there, lay the white winding-sheet of the dead, and a scroll. Harold took the scroll, and bent over it, reading by the mingled light of the lamp and the dawn:—

"All hail, Harold, heir of Godwin the great, and Githa the king-born! Thou hast obeyed Hilda, and thou knowest now that Hilda's eyes read the future, and her lips speak the dark words of truth. Bow thy heart to the Vala, and mistrust the wisdom that sees only the things of the daylight. As the valour of the warrior and the song of the scald, so is the lore of the prophetess. It is not of

the body, it is soul within soul; it marshals events and men, like the valour—it moulds the air into substance, like the song. Bow thy heart to the Vala. Flowers bloom over the grave of the dead. And the young plant soars high, when the king of the woodland lies low!”

CHAPTER VI.

THE sun rose, and the stairs and passages without were filled with the crowds that pressed to hear news of the Earl's health. The doors stood open, and Gurth led in the multitude to look their last on the hero of council and camp, who had restored with strong hand and wise brain the race of Cerdic to the Saxon throne. Harold stood by the bedhead silent, and tears were shed and sobs were heard. And many a thegn who had before half believed in the guilt of Godwin as the murderer of Alfred, whispered in gasps to his neighbour,—

“There is no weregeld for manslaying on the head of him, who smiles so in death on his old comrades in life!”

Last of all lingered Leofric, the great Earl of

Mercia; and when the rest had departed, he took the pale hand, that lay heavy on the coverlid, in his own, and said—

“Old foe, often stood we in Witan and field against each other; but few are the friends for whom Leofric would mourn as he mourns for thee. Peace to thy soul! Whatever its sins, England should judge thee mildly, for England beat in each pulse of thy heart, and with thy greatness was her own!”

Then Harold stole round the bed, and put his arms round Leofric’s neck, and embraced him. The good old Earl was touched, and he laid his tremulous hands on Harold’s brown locks and blessed him.

“Harold,” he said, “thou succeedest to thy father’s power: let thy father’s foes be thy friends. Wake from thy grief, for thy country now demands thee,—the honour of thy House, and the memory of the dead. Many even now plot against thee and thine. Seek the King, demand as thy right thy father’s earldom, and Leofric will back thy claim in the Witan.”

Harold pressed Leofric’s hand, and raising it to

his lips replied—"Be our houses at peace henceforth and for ever!"

Tostig's vanity indeed misled him, when he dreamed that any combination of Godwin's party could meditate supporting his claims against the popular Harold—nor less did the monks deceive themselves, when they supposed, that with Godwin's death, the power of his family would fall.

There was more than even the unanimity of the chiefs of the Witan, in favour of Harold; there was that universal noiseless impression throughout all England, Danish and Saxon, that Harold was now the sole man on whom rested the state—which, whenever it so favours one individual, is irresistible. Nor was Edward himself hostile to Harold, whom alone of that House, as we have before said, he esteemed and loved.

Harold was at once named Earl of Wessex; and relinquishing the earldom he held before, he did not hesitate as to the successor to be recommended in his place. Conquering all jealousy and dislike for Algar, he united the strength of his party in favour of the son of Leofric, and the election fell upon him. With all his hot errors, the

claims of no other Earl, whether from his own capacities or his father's services, were so strong; and his election probably saved the state from a great danger, in the results of that angry mood and that irritated ambition with which he had thrown himself into the arms of England's most valiant aggressor, Gryffyth, King of North Wales.

To outward appearance, by this election, the House of Leofric—uniting in father and son the two mighty districts of Mercia and the East Anglians—became more powerful than that of Godwin; for, in that last House, Harold was now the only possessor of one of the great earldoms, and Tostig and the other brothers had no other provision beyond the comparatively insignificant lordships they held before. But if Harold had ruled no earldom at all, he had still been immeasurably the first man in England—so great was the confidence reposed in his valour and wisdom. He was of that height in himself, that he needed no pedestal to stand on.

The successor of the first great founder of a House succeeded to more than his predecessor's power,

if he but know how to wield and maintain it. For who makes his way to greatness without raising foes at every step? and who ever rose to power supreme, without grave cause for blame? But Harold stood free from the enmities his father had provoked, and pure from the stains that slander or repute cast on his father's name. The sun of the yesterday had shone through cloud; the sun of the day rose in a clear firmament. Even Tostig felt at once the superiority of his brother; and after a strong struggle between baffled rage and covetous ambition, yielded to him, as to a father. He felt that all Godwin's house was centered in Harold alone; and that only from his brother, (despite his own daring valour, and despite his alliance with the blood of Charlemagne and Alfred, through the sister of Matilda, the Norman duchess,) could his avarice of power be gratified.

“Depart to thy home, my brother,” said Earl Harold to Tostig, “and grieve not that Algar is preferred to thee. For, even had his claim been less urgent, ill would it have beseeemed us to arrogate the lordships of all England as our dues. Rule thy lordship with wisdom: gain the

love of thy lithsmen. High claims hast thou in our father's name, and moderation now will but strengthen thee in the season to come. Trust on Harold somewhat, on thyself more. Thou hast but to add temper and judgment to valour and zeal, to be worthy mate of the first earl in England. Over my father's corpse I embraced my father's foe. Between brother and brother shall there not be love, as the best bequest of the dead?"

"It shall not be my fault, if there be not," answered Tostig, humbled though chafed. And he summoned his men and returned to his domains.

CHAPTER VII.

FAIR, broad, and calm set the sun over the western woodlands. And Hilda stood on the mound, and looked with undazzled eyes on the sinking orb. Beside her, Edith reclined on the sward, and seemed with idle hand tracing characters in the air. The girl had grown paler still, since Harold last parted from her on the same spot, and the same listless and despondent apathy stamped her smileless lips and her bended head.

“See, child of my heart,” said Hilda, addressing Edith, while she still gazed on the western luminary, “see, the sun goes down to the far deeps, where Rana and Ægir* watch over the worlds of

* *Ægir*, the Scandinavian god of the ocean. Not one of the Aser, or Asas, (the celestial race,) but sprung from the giants. *Ran*, or *Rana*, his wife, a more malignant character, who caused shipwrecks, and drew to herself, by a net, all that fell into the sea. The offspring of this marriage were nine daughters, who became the Billows, the Currents, and the Storms.

the sea; but with morning he comes from the halls of the Asas—the golden gates of the East—and joy comes in his train. And yet thou thinkest, sad child, whose years scarce have passed into woman, that the sun, once set, never comes back to life! But even while we speak, thy morning draws near, and the dunness of cloud takes the hues of the rose!”

Edith's hand paused from its vague employment, and fell droopingly on her knee;—she turned with an unquiet and anxious eye to Hilda, and after looking some moments wistfully at the Vala, the colour rose to her cheek, and she said in a voice that had an accent half of anger—

“Hilda, thou art cruel!”

“So is Fate!” answered the Vala. “But men call not Fate cruel when it smiles on their desires. Why callest thou Hilda cruel, when she reads in the setting sun the runes of thy coming joy?”

“There is no joy for me,” returned Edith plaintively; “and I have that on my heart,” she added, with a sudden and almost fierce change of tone, “which at last I will dare to speak.

I reproach thee, Hilda, that thou hast marred all my life; that thou hast duped me with dreams, and left me alone in despair."

"Speak on," said Hilda, calmly, as a nurse to a froward child.

"Hast thou not told me, from the first dawn of my wondering reason, that my life and lot were inwoven with—with (the word, mad and daring, must out) with those of Harold the peerless? But for that, which my infancy took from thy lips as a law, I had never been so vain and so frantic; I had never watched each play of his face, and treasured each word from his lips; I had never made my life but a part of his life—all my soul but the shadow of his sun. But for that, I had hailed the calm of the cloister—but for that, I had glided in peace to my grave. And now—*now*, O Hilda—" Edith paused, and that break had more eloquence than any words she could command. "And," she resumed quickly, "thou knowest that these hopes were but dreams—that the law ever stood between him and me—and that it was guilt to love him."

"I knew the law," answered Hilda, "but the law

of fools is to the wise as the cobweb swung over the brake to the wing of the bird. Ye are sibbe to each other, some five times removed; and therefore an old man at Rome saith that ye ought not to wed. When the shavelings obey the old man at Rome, and put aside their own wives and frillas,* and abstain from the wine cup, and the chase, and the brawl, I will stoop to hear of their laws,—with disrelish it may be, but without scorn.† It is no sin to love Harold; and no monk and no law shall prevent your union on the day appointed to bring ye together, form and heart.”

“Hilda! Hilda! madden me not with joy,” cried Edith, starting up in rapturous emotion, her young face dyed with blushes, and all her renovated beauty so celestial that Hilda herself was almost awed, as if by the vision of Freya, the

* *Frilla*, the Danish word for a lady who, often with the wife's consent, was added to the domestic circle by the husband. The word is here used by Hilda in a general sense of reproach. Both marriage and concubinage were common amongst the Anglo-Saxon priesthood, despite the unheeded canons; and so, indeed, they were with the French clergy.

† Hilda, not only as a heathen, but as a Dane, would be no favourer of monks. They were unknown in Denmark at that time, and the Danes held them in odium.—ORD. VITAL. lib. vii.

northern Venus, charmed by a spell from the halls of Asgard.

“But that day is distant,” renewed the Vala.

“What matters! what matters!” cried the pure child of Nature; “I ask but hope. Enough,—oh! enough, if we are but wedded on the borders of the grave!”

“Lo, then,” said Hilda, “behold, the sun of thy life dawns again!”

As she spoke, the Vala stretched her arm, and, through the intersticed columns of the fane, Edith saw the large shadow of a man cast over the still sward. Presently into the space of the circle came Harold, her beloved. His face was pale with grief yet recent; but, perhaps more than ever, dignity was in his step and command on his brow, for he felt that now alone with him rested the might of Saxon England. And what royal robe so invests with imperial majesty the form of man as the grave sense of power responsible in an earnest soul?

“Thou comest,” said Hilda, “in the hour I predicted; at the setting of the sun and the rising of the star.”

“Vala,” said Harold, gloomily, “I will not oppose my sense to thy prophecies; for who shall judge of that power of which he knows not the elements? or despise the marvel of which he cannot detect the imposture? But leave me, I pray thee, to walk in the broad light of the common day. These hands are made to grapple with things palpable, and these eyes to measure the forms that front my way. In my youth, I turned in despair or disgust from the subtleties of the schoolmen, which split upon hairs the brains of Lombard and Frank; in my busy and stirring manhood entangle me not in the meshes which confuse all my reason, and sicken my waking thoughts into dreams of awe. Mine be the straight path and the plain goal!”

The Vala gazed on him with an earnest look, that partook of admiration, and yet more of gloom; but she spoke not, and Harold resumed,—

“Let the dead rest, Hilda—proud names with glory on earth, and shadows escaped from our ken, submissive to mercy in heaven. A vast chasm have my steps overleapt since we met, O Hilda—sweet Edith;—a vast chasm, but a narrow

grave." His voice faltered a moment, and again he renewed,—“Thou weepst, Edith; ah, how thy tears console me! Hilda, hear me! I love thy grandchild—loved her by irresistible instinct since her blue eyes first smiled on mine. I loved her in her childhood, as in her youth—in the blossom as in the flower. And thy grandchild loves me. The laws of the Church proscribe our marriage, and therefore we parted; but I feel, and thine Edith feels, that the love remains as strong in absence: no other will be her wedded lord, no other my wedded wife. Therefore, with a heart made soft by sorrow, and, in my father's death, sole lord of my fate, I return, and say to thee in her presence, ‘Suffer us to hope still!’ The day may come when under some king less enthralled than Edward by formal Church laws, we may obtain from the Pope absolution for our nuptials,—a day, perhaps, far off; but we are both young, and love is strong and patient: we can wait.”

“O Harold,” exclaimed Edith, “we can wait!”

“Have I not told thee, son of Godwin,” said the Vala, solemnly, “that Edith's skein of life was

enwoven with thine? Dost thou deem that my charms have not explored the destiny of the last of my race? Know that it is in the decrees of the fates that ye are to be united, never more to be divided. Know that there shall come a day, though I can see not its morrow, and it lies dim and afar, which shall be the most glorious of thy life, and on which Edith and fame shall be thine, —the day of thy nativity, on which hitherto all things have prospered with thee. In vain against the stars preach the mone and the priest: what shall be, shall be. Wherefore, take hope and joy, O Children of Time! And now, as I join your hands, I betroth your souls.”

Rapture unalloyed and unprophetic, born of love deep and pure, shone in the eyes of Harold, as he clasped the hand of his promised bride. But an involuntary and mysterious shudder passed over Edith's frame, and she leant close, close, for support upon Harold's breast. And, as if by a vision, there rose distinct in her memory, a stern brow, a form of power and terror—the brow and the form of him who but once again in her waking life the Prophetess had told her she should behold.

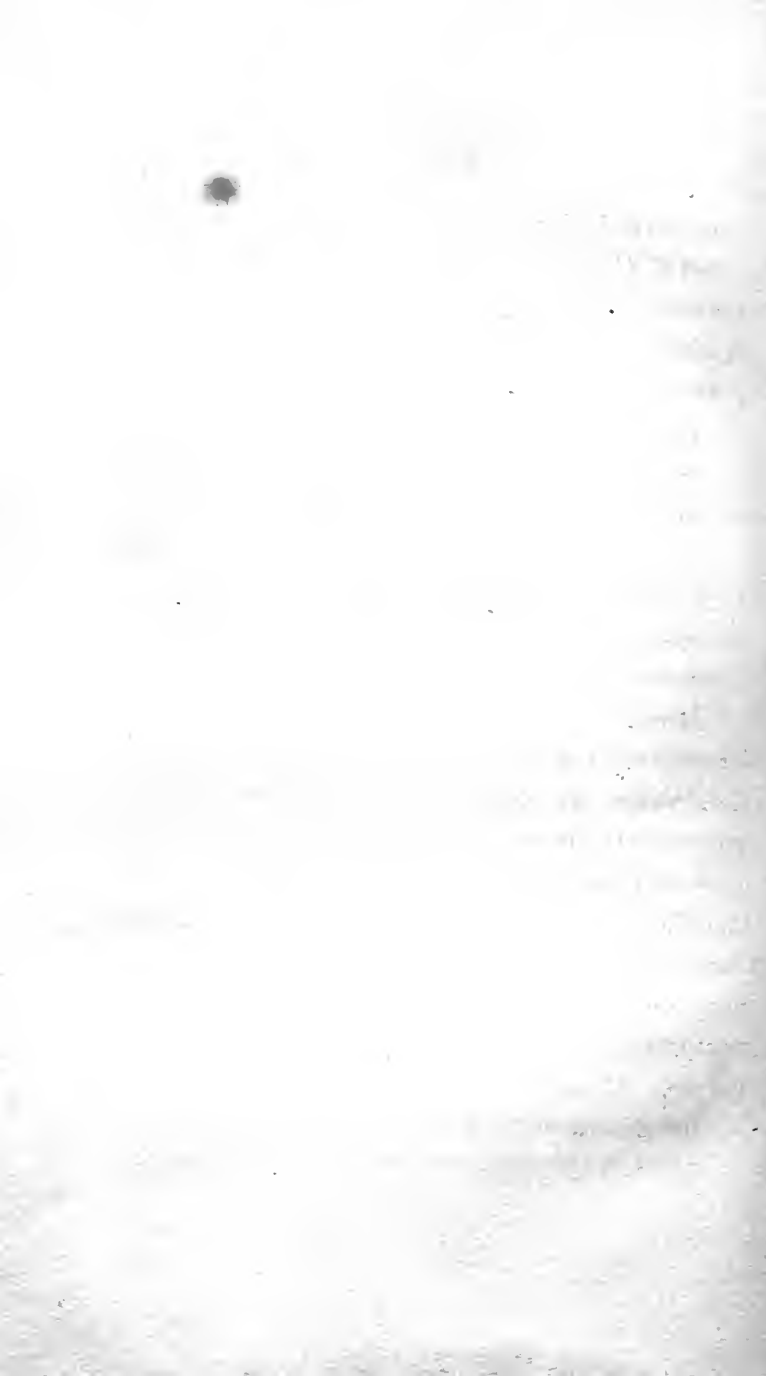
The vision passed away in the warm clasp of those protecting arms ; and looking up into Harold's face, she there beheld the mighty and deep delight that transfused itself at once into her own soul.

Then Hilda, placing one hand over their heads, and raising the other towards heaven, all radiant with bursting stars, said in her deep and thrilling tones,—

“Attest the betrothal of these young hearts, O ye Powers that draw nature to nature by spells which no galdra can trace, and have wrought in the secrets of creation no mystery so perfect as love,—Attest it, thou temple, thou altar !—attest it, O sun and O air ! While the forms are divided, may the souls cling together—sorrow with sorrow, and joy with joy. And when, at length, bride and bridegroom are one,—O stars, may the trouble with which ye are charged have exhausted its burthen ; may no danger molest, and no malice disturb, but, over the marriage bed, shine in peace, O ye stars !”

Up rose the moon. May's nightingale called its mate from the breathless boughs ; and so Edith

and Harold were betrothed by the grave of the son of Cerdic. And from the line of Cerdic had come, since Ethelbert, all the Saxon kings who with sword and with sceptre had reigned over Saxon England.



BOOK VI.

AMBITION.



BOOK VI.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was great rejoicing in England. King Edward had been induced to send Alred the prelate* to the court of the German Emperor, for his kinsman and namesake, Edward Atheling, the son of the great Ironsides. In his childhood, this Prince, with his brother Edmund, had been committed by Canute to the charge of his vassal, the King of Sweden; and it has been said (though without sufficient authority), that Canute's design was, that they should be secretly made away with. The King of Sweden, however, forwarded the children to the court of Hungary; they were there honourably reared and received. Edmund

* CHRON. KNYGHTON.

died young, without issue. Edward married a daughter of the German Emperor, and during the commotions in England, and the successive reigns of Harold Harefoot, Hardicanute, and the Confessor, had remained forgotten in his exile, until now suddenly recalled to England as the heir presumptive of his childless namesake. He arrived with Agatha his wife, one infant son Edgar, and two daughters, Margaret and Christina.

Great were the rejoicings. The vast crowd that had followed the royal visitors in their procession to the old London palace (not far from St. Paul's), in which they were lodged, yet swarmed through the streets, when two thegns who had personally accompanied the Atheling from Dover, and had just taken leave of him, now emerged from the palace, and with some difficulty made their way through the crowded streets.

The one in the dress and short hair imitated from the Norman, was our old friend Godrith, whom the reader may remember as the rebuker of Taillefer, and the friend of Mallet de Graville; the other, in a plain linen Saxon tunic, and the gonna worn on state occasions, to which he seemed

unfamiliar, but with heavy gold bracelets on his arms, long haired and bearded, was Vebba, the Kentish thegn, who had served as nuncius from Godwin to Edward.

“Troth and faith!” said Vebba, wiping his brow, “this crowd is enow to make a plain man stark wode. I would not live in London for all the gauds in the goldsmiths’ shops, or all the treasures in King Edward’s vaults. My tongue is as parched as a hayfield in the weyd-month.* Holy Mother be blessed! I see a *Cumen-hus* † open; let us in and refresh ourselves with a horn of ale.”

“Nay, friend,” quoth Godrith, with a slight disdain, “such are not the resorts of men of our rank. Tarry yet awhile, till we arrive near the bridge by the river side; there, indeed, you will find worthy company and dainty cheer.”

“Well, well, I am at your hest, Godrith,” said the Kent man, sighing; “my wife and my sons will be sure to ask me what sights I have seen, and I may as well know from thee the last tricks and ways of this hurly-burly town.”

* *Weyd-month*, Meadow month, June. † *Cumen-hus*. Tavern

Godrith, who was master of all the fashions in the reign of our lord King Edward, smiled graciously, and the two proceeded in silence, only broken by the sturdy Kent man's exclamations; now of anger when rudely jostled, now of wonder and delight when, amidst the throng, he caught sight of a gleeman, with his bear or monkey, who took advantage of some space near convent garden, or Roman ruin, to exhibit his craft; till they gained a long low row of booths, most pleasantly situated to the left of this side London bridge, and which was appropriated to the celebrated cook-shops, that even to the time of Fitzstephen retained their fame and their fashion.

Between the shops and the river, was a space of grass worn brown and bare by the feet of the customers, with a few clipped trees with vines trained from one to the other in arcades, under cover of which were set tables and settles. The place was thickly crowded, and but for Godrith's popularity amongst the attendants, they might have found it difficult to obtain accommodation. However, a new table was soon brought forth, placed close by the cool margin of the water, and covered in a trice with

tankards of hippocras, pigment, ale, and some Gascon, as well as British wines; varieties of the delicious cake-bread for which England was then renowned; while viands strange to the honest eye and taste of the wealthy Kent man, were served on spits.

“What bird is this?” said he, grumbling.

“Oh enviable man, it is a Phrygian attagen* that thou art about to taste for the first time; and when thou hast recovered that delight, I commend to thee a Moorish compound, made of eggs and roes of carp from the old Southweorc stewponds, which the cooks here dress notably.”

“Moorish!—Holy Virgin!” cried Vebba, with his mouth full of the Phrygian attagen, “how came anything Moorish in our Christian island?”

Godrith laughed outright.

“Why, our cook here is Moorish; the best singers in London are Moors. Look yonder! see those grave comely Saracens!”

“Comely, quotha, burnt and black as a charred pine-pole! grunted Vebba; “well, who are they?”

* FITZSTEPHEN.

“ Wealthy traders ; thanks to whom, our pretty maids have risen high in the market.” *

“ More the shame,” said the Kent man ; “ that selling of English youth to foreign masters, whether male or female, is a blot on the Saxon name.”

“ So saith Harold our Earl, and so preach the monks,” returned Godrith. “ But thou, my good friend, who art fond of all things that our ancestors did, and hast sneered more than once at my Norman robe and cropped hair, *thou* shouldst not be the one to find fault with what our fathers have done since the days of Cerdic.”

“ Hem,” said the Kent man, a little perplexed, “ certainly old manners are the best, and I suppose there is some good reason for this practice, which I, who never trouble myself about matters that concern me not, do not see.”

“ Well, Vebba, and how likest thou the Atheling? he is of the old line,” said Godrith.

Again the Kent man looked perplexed, and had

* William of Malmesbury speaks with just indignation of the Anglo-Saxon custom of selling female servants, either to public prostitution, or foreign slavery.

recourse to the ale, which he preferred to all more delicate liquor, before he replied—

“Why, he speaks English worse than King Edward! and as for his boy Edgar, the child can scarce speak English at all. And then their German carles and cnechts!—An I had known what manner of folk they were, I had not spent my *mancuses* in running from my homestead to give them the welcome. But they told me that Harold the good Earl had made the King send for them; and whatever the Earl counselled, must I thought be wise, and to the weal of sweet England.”

“That is true,” said Godrith with earnest emphasis, for, with all his affectation of Norman manners, he was thoroughly English at heart, and was now among the staunchest supporters of Harold, who had become no less the pattern and pride of the young nobles than the darling of the humbler population,—“that is true—and Harold showed us his noble English heart, when he so urged the King to his own loss.”

As Godrith thus spoke, nay, from the first mention of Harold's name, two men richly clad, but with their bonnets drawn far over their brows, and

their long gonnas so worn as to hide their forms, who were seated at a table behind Godrith and had thus escaped his attention, had paused from their wine-cups, and they now listened with much earnestness to the conversation that followed.

“How to the Earl’s loss?” asked Vebba.

“Why, simple thegn,” answered Godrith, “why, suppose that Edward had refused to acknowledge the Atheling as his heir, suppose the Atheling had remained in the German court, and our good King died suddenly,—who, thinkest thou, could succeed to the English throne?”

“Marry, I have never thought of that at all,” said the Kent man, scratching his head.

“No, nor have the English generally; yet whom could we choose, but Harold?”

A sudden start from one of the listeners was checked by the warning finger of the other; and the Kent man exclaimed—

“Body o’ me! But we have never chosen king (save the Danes,) out of the line of Cerdic. These be new cranks, with a vengeance; we shall be choosing German, or Saracen, or Norman next!”

“Out of the line of Cerdic! but that line is gone, root and branch, save the Atheling, and he thou seest is more German than English. Again I say, failing the Atheling, whom could we choose but Harold, brother-in-law to the King; descended through Githa from the royalties of the Norse, the head of all armies under the Herr-ban, the chief who has never fought without victory, yet who has always preferred conciliation to conquest—the first counsellor in the Witan—the first man in the realm—who but Harold? answer me, staring Vebba?”

“I take in thy words slowly,” said the Kent man, shaking his head, “and after all, it matters little who is king, so he be a good one. Yes, I see now that the Earl was a just and generous man when he made the King send for the Atheling. Drink-hæl! long life to them both!”

“Was-hæl,” answered Godrith, draining his hippocras to Vebba’s more potent ale. “Long life to them both! may Edward the Atheling reign, but Harold the Earl rule! Ah, then, indeed, we may sleep without fear of fierce Algar and still fiercer Gryffyth the Walloon—who now, it is true, are

stilled for the moment, thanks to Harold—but not more still than the smooth waters in Gwyned, that lie just above the rush of a torrent.”

“So little news hear I,” said Vebba, “and in Kent so little are we plagued with the troubles elsewhere, (for there Harold governs us, and the hawks come not where the eagles hold eyrie!)—that I will thank thee to tell me something about our old Earl for a year,* Algar the restless, and this Gryffyth the Welch King, so that I may seem a wise man when I go back to my homestead.”

“Why, thou knowest at least that Algar and Harold were ever opposed in the Witan, and hot words thou hast heard pass between them?”

“Marry, yes! But Algar was as little match for Earl Harold in speech as in sword play.”

Now again one of the listeners started, (but it was not the same as the one before,) and muttered an angry exclamation.

“Yet is he a troublesome foe,” said Godrith, who did not hear the sound Vebba had provoked, “and a thorn in the side both of the Earl and of

* It will be remembered that Algar governed Wessex, which principality included Kent, during the year of Godwin's outlawry.

England; and sorrowful for both England and Earl was it, that Harold refused to marry Aldyth, as it is said his father, wise Godwin, counselled and wished."

"Ah, but I have heard scops and harpers sing pretty songs that Harold loves Edith the Fair, a wondrous proper maiden, they say!"

"It is true; and for the sake of his love, he played ill for his ambition."

"I like him the better for that," said the honest Kent man: "why does he not marry the girl at once? she hath broad lands, I know, for they run from the Sussex shore into Kent."

"But they are cousins five times removed, and the Church forbids the marriage; nevertheless Harold lives only for Edith; they have exchanged the true-lofa,* and it is whispered that Harold hopes the Atheling, when he comes to be King, will get him the Pope's dispensation. But to

* *Trulofa*, from which comes our popular corruption "true lover's knot;" à *veteri Danico trulofa*, i. e. *fidem do*, to pledge faith.—HICKES' *Thesaur.*

"A knot, among the ancient northern nations, seems to have been the emblem of love, faith, and friendship."—BRAND'S *Pop. Antiq.*

return to Algar; in a day most unlucky he gave his daughter to Gryffyth, the most turbulent subking the land ever knew, who, it is said, will not be content till he has won all Wales for himself without homage or service, and the Marches to boot. Some letters between him and Earl Algar, to whom Harold had secured the earldom of the East Angles, were discovered, and in a Witan at Winchester thou wilt doubtless have heard, (for thou didst not, I know, leave thy lands to attend it,) that Algar* was outlawed.

“Oh, yes, these are stale tidings; I heard thus much from a palmer—and then Algar got ships

* The *Saxon Chronicle* contradicts itself as to Algar's outlawry, stating in one passage that he was outlawed without any kind of guilt, and in another that he was outlawed as *swike*, or traitor, and that he made a confession of it before all the men there gathered. His treason, however, seems naturally occasioned by his close connexion with Gryffyth, and proved by his share in that king's rebellion. Some of our historians have unfairly assumed that his outlawry was at Harold's instigation. Of this there is not only no proof, but one of the best authorities among the chroniclers says just the contrary,—“that Harold did all he could to intercede for him;” and it is certain that he was fairly tried and condemned by the Witan, and afterwards restored by the concurrent articles of agreement between Harold and Leofric. Harold's policy with his own countrymen stands out very markedly prominent in the annals of the time; it was invariably that of conciliation.

from the Irish, sailed to North Wales, and beat Rolf, the Norman Earl, at Hereford. Oh yes, I heard that, and," added the Kent man laughing, "I was not sorry to hear that my old Earl Algar, since he is a good and true Saxon, beat the cowardly Norman,—more shame to the King for giving a Norman the ward of the Marches!"

"It was a sore defeat to the King and to England," said Godrith gravely. "The great Minster of Hereford built by King Athelstan was burned and sacked by the Welch; and the crown itself was in danger, when Harold came up at the head of the Fyrd. Hard is it to tell the distress and the marching and the camping, and the travail, and destruction of men, and also of horses, which the English endured* till Harold came; and then luckily came also the good old Leofric, and Bishop Alred the peacemaker, and so strife was patched up—Gryffyth swore oaths of faith to King Edward, and Algar was inlawed; and there for the nonce rests the matter now. But well I ween that Gryffyth will never keep troth with the English, and that no hand less strong than

* SAXON CHRON., verbatim.

Harold's can keep in check a spirit as fiery as Algar's: therefore did I wish that Harold might be King."

"Well," quoth the honest Kent man, "I hope, nevertheless, that Algar will sow his wild oats, and leave the Walloons to grow the hemp for their own halters; for, though he is not of the height of our Harold, he is a true Saxon, and we liked him well enow when he ruled us. And how is our Earl's brother Tostig esteemed by the Northmen? It must be hard to please those who had Siward of the strong arm for their Earl before."

"Why, at first, when (at Siward's death in the wars for young Malcolm) Harold secured to Tostig the Northumbrian earldom, Tostig went by his brother's counsel, and ruled well and won favour. Of late I hear that the Northmen murmur. Tostig is a man indeed dour and haughty."

After a few more questions and answers on the news of the day, Vebba rose and said,—

"Thanks for thy good fellowship; it is time for me now to be jogging homeward. I left my ceorls and horses on the other side the river,

and must go after them. And now forgive me my bluntness, fellow thegn, but ye young courtiers have plenty of need for your *manuces*, and when a plain countryman like me comes sight-seeing, he ought to stand payment; wherefore," here he took from his belt a great leathern purse, "wherefore, as these outlandish birds and heathenish puddings must be dear fare—"

"How!" said Godrith, reddening, "thinkest thou so meanly of us thegns of Middlesex as to deem we cannot entertain thus humbly a friend from a distance? Ye Kent men I know are rich. But keep your pennies to buy stuffs for your wife, my friend."

The Kent man, seeing he had displeased his companion, did not press his liberal offer,—put up his purse, and suffered Godrith to pay the reckoning. Then, as the two thegns shook hands, he said,—

"But I should like to have said a kind word or so to Earl Harold—for he was too busy and too great for me to come across him in the old palace yonder. I have a mind to go back and look for him at his own house."

“You will not find him there,” said Godrith, “for I know that as soon as he hath finished his conference with the Atheling, he will leave the city; and I shall be at his own favourite manse over the water at sunset, to take orders for repairing the forts and dykes on the Marches. You can tarry awhile and meet us; you know his old lodge in the forest land?”

“Nay, I must be back and at home ere night, for all things go wrong when the master is away. Yet, indeed, my good wife will scold me for not having shaken hands with the handsome Earl.”

“Thou shalt not come under that sad infliction,” said the good-natured Godrith, who was pleased with the thegn’s devotion to Harold, and who, knowing the great weight which Vebba (homely as he seemed) carried in his important county, was politically anxious that the Earl should humour so sturdy a friend,—“Thou shalt not sour thy wife’s kiss, man. For look you, as you ride back you will pass by a large old house, with broken columns at the back.”

“I have marked it well,” said the thegn, “when I have gone that way, with a heap of queer

stones, on a little hillock, which they say the witches or the Britons heaped together."

"The same. When Harold leaves London, I trow well towards that house will his road wend; for there lives Edith the swan's-neck, with her awful grandam the Wicca. If thou art there a little after noon, depend on it thou wilt see Harold riding that way."

"Thank thee heartily, friend Godrith," said Vebba, taking his leave, "and forgive my bluntness if I laughed at thy cropped head, for I see thou art as good a Saxon as ere a frankling of Kent—and so the saints keep thee."

Vebba then strode briskly over the bridge; and Godrith, animated by the wine he had drunk, turned gaily on his heel to look amongst the crowded tables for some chance friend with whom to while away an hour or so at the games of hazard then in vogue.

Scarce had he turned, when the two listeners, who, having paid their reckoning, had moved under shade of one of the arcades, dropped into a boat which they had summoned to the margin by a noiseless signal, and were rowed over the water.

They preserved a silence which seemed thoughtful and gloomy until they reached the opposite shore ; then one of them, pushing back his bonnet, shewed the sharp and haughty features of Algar.

“ Well, friend of Gryffyth,” said he, with a bitter accent, “ Thou hearest that Earl Harold counts so little on the oaths of thy king, that he intends to fortify the Marches against him ; and thou hearest also, that nought save a life, as fragile as the reed which thy feet are trampling, stands between the throne of England and the only Englishman who could ever have humbled my son-in-law to swear oath of service to Edward.”

“ Shame upon that hour,” said the other, whose speech, as well as the gold collar round his neck, and the peculiar fashion of his hair, betokened him to be Welch. “ Little did I think that the great son of Llewellyn, whom our bards had set above Roderic Mawr, would ever have acknowledged the sovereignty of the Saxon over the hills of Cymry.”

“ Tut, Meredydd,” answered Algar, “ thou knowest well that no Cymrian ever deems himself dishonoured by breaking faith with the Saxon ;

and we shall yet see the lions of Gryffyth scaring the sheepfolds of Hereford."

"So be it," said Meredydd, fiercely. "And Harold shall give to his Atheling the Saxon land, shorn at least of the Cymrian kingdom."

"Meredydd," said Algar, with a seriousness that seemed almost solemn, "no Atheling will live to rule these realms! Thou knowest that I was one of the first to hail the news of his coming—I hastened to Dover to meet him. Methought I saw death writ on his countenance, and I bribed the German leach who attends him to answer my questions; the Atheling knows it not, but he bears within him the seeds of a mortal complaint. Thou wottest well what cause I have to hate Earl Harold; and were I the only man to oppose his way to the throne, he should not ascend it but over my corpse. But when Godrith, his creature, spoke, I felt that he spoke the truth; and, the Atheling dead, on no head but Harold's can fall the crown of Edward."

"Ha!" said the Cymrian chief, gloomily; "thinkest thou so indeed?"

"I think it not; I know it. And for that

reason, Meredydd, we must wait not till he wields against us all the royalty of England. As yet, while Edward lives, there is hope. For the King loves to spend wealth on relics and priests, and is slow when the *mancuses* are wanted for fighting men. The King too, poor man! is not so ill pleased at my outbursts as he would fain have it thought; he thinks, by pitting earl against earl, that he himself is the stronger.* While Edward lives, therefore, Harold's arm is half crippled; wherefore, Meredydd, ride thou, with good speed, back to King Gryffyth, and tell him all I have told thee. Tell him that our time to strike the blow and renew the war will be amidst the dismay and confusion that the Atheling's death will occasion. Tell him, that if we can entangle Harold himself in the Welch defiles, it will go hard but what we shall find some arrow or dagger to pierce the heart of the invader. And were Harold but slain—who then would be king in England? The line of Cerdic gone—the house of Godwin lost in Earl Harold, (for Tostig is hated in his own domain, Leofwine is too light, and Gurth is too saintly for

* Hume.

such ambition)—who then, I say, can be king in England but Algar, the heir of the great Leofric? And I, as King of England, will set all Cymry free, and restore to the realm of Gryffyth the shires of Hereford and Worcester. Ride fast, O Meredydd, and heed well all I have said.”

“Dost thou promise and swear, that wert thou King of England, Cymry should be free from all service?”

“Free as air, free as under Arthur and Uther: I swear it. And remember well how Harold addressed the Cymrian chiefs, when he accepted Gryffyth's oaths of service.”

“Remember it—ay,” cried Meredydd, his face lighting up with intense ire and revenge; “the stern Saxon said, ‘Heed well, ye chiefs of Cymry, and thou Gryffyth the King, that if again ye force, by ravage and rapine, by sacrilege and murder, the majesty of England to enter your borders, duty must be done: God grant that your Cymrian lion may leave us in peace—if not, it is mercy to human life that bids us cut the talons and draw the fangs.’”

“Harold, like all calm and mild men, ever says

less than he means," returned Algar; "and were Harold king, small pretext would he need for cutting the talons, and drawing the fangs."

"It is well," said Meredydd, with a fierce smile. "I will now go to my men who are lodged yonder; and it is better that thou shouldst not be seen with me."

"Right; so St. David be with you—and forget not a word of my message to Gryffyth my son-in-law."

"Not a word," returned Meredydd, as with a waive of his hand he moved towards an hostelry, to which, as kept by one of their own countrymen, the Welch habitually resorted in the visits to the capital which the various intrigues and dissensions in their unhappy land made frequent.

The chief's train, which consisted of ten men, all of high birth, were not drinking in the tavern—for sorry customers to mine host were the abstemious Welch. Stretched on the grass under the trees of an orchard that backed the hostelry, and utterly indifferent to all the rejoicings that animated the population of Southwark and London, they were listening to a wild song of the old hero-

days from one of their number ; and round them grazed the rough shagged ponies which they had used for their journey. Meredydd, approaching, gazed round, and seeing no stranger was present, raised his hand to hush the song, and then addressed his countrymen briefly in Welch,—briefly, but with a passion that was evident in his flashing eyes and vehement gestures. The passion was contagious ; they all sprang to their feet with a low but fierce cry, and in a few moments they had caught and saddled their diminutive palfreys, while one of the band, who seemed singled out by Meredydd, sallied forth alone from the orchard, and took his way, on foot, to the bridge. He did not tarry there long ; at the sight of a single horseman, whom a shout of welcome, on that swarming thoroughfare, proclaimed to be Earl Harold, the Welchman turned, and with a fleet foot regained his companions.

Meanwhile Harold, smilingly, returned the greetings he received, cleared the bridge, passed the suburbs, and soon gained the wild forest land that lay along the great Kentish road. He rode somewhat slowly, for he was evidently in deep thought ; and he had arrived about half-way towards Hilda's

house when he heard behind quick pattering sounds, as of small unshod hoofs: he turned, and saw the Welchmen at the distance of some fifty yards. But at that moment there passed, along the road in front, several persons bustling into London to share in the festivities of the day. This seemed to disconcert the Welch in the rear, and, after a few whispered words, they left the high road and entered the forest land. Various groups from time to time continued to pass along the thoroughfare. But still, ever through the glades, Harold caught glimpses of the riders; now distant, now near. Sometimes he heard the snort of their small horses, and saw a fierce eye glaring through the bushes; then, as at the sight or sound of approaching passengers, the riders wheeled, and shot off through the brakes.

The Earl's suspicions were aroused; for (though he knew of no enemy to apprehend, and the extreme severity of the laws against robbers, made the high roads much safer in the latter days of the Saxon domination than they were for centuries under that of the subsequent dynasty, when Saxon thegns themselves had turned kings of the green-

wood,) the various insurrections in Edward's reign, had necessarily thrown upon society many turbulent disbanded mercenaries.

Harold was unarmed, save the spear which, even on occasions of state, the Saxon noble rarely laid aside, and the ateghar in his belt ; and, seeing now that the road had become deserted, he set spurs to his horse, and was just in sight of the Druid Temple, when a javelin whizzed close by his breast, and another transfixed his horse, which fell head foremost to the ground.

The Earl gained his feet in an instant, and that haste was needed to save his life ; for as he rose ten swords flashed around him. The Welchmen had sprung from their palfreys as Harold's horse fell. Fortunately for him, only two of the party bore javelins, (a weapon which the Welch wielded with deadly skill) and, those already wasted, they drew their short swords, which were probably imitated from the Romans, and rushed upon him in simultaneous onset. Versed in all the weapons of the time, with his right hand seeking by his spear to keep off the rush, with the ateghar in his left parrying the strokes aimed at him, the brave Earl transfixed the first assailant, and sore

wounded the next; but his tunic was dyed red with three gashes, and his sole chance of life was in the power yet left him to force his way through the ring. Dropping his spear, shifting his ateghar into the right hand, wrapping round his left arm his gonna as a shield, he sprang fiercely on the onslaught, and on the flashing swords. Pierced to the heart fell one of his foes—dashed to the earth another—from the hand of a third (dropping his own ateghar) he wrenched the sword. Loud rose Harold's cry for aid, and swiftly he strode towards the hillock, turning back, and striking as he turned; and again fell a foe, and again new blood oozed through his own garb. At that moment his cry was echoed by a shriek so sharp and so piercing that it startled the assailants, it arrested the assault; and, ere the unequal strife could be resumed, a woman was in the midst of the fray;—a woman stood dauntless between the Earl and his foes.

“Back! Edith. Oh, God! Back, back!” cried the Earl, recovering all his strength in the sole fear which that strife had yet stricken into his bold heart; and drawing Edith aside with his strong arm, he again confronted the assailants.

“Die!” cried, in the Cymrian tongue, the fiercest of the foes, whose sword had already twice drawn the Earl’s blood; “Die, that Cymry may be free!”

Meredydd sprang, with him sprang the survivors of his band; and, by a sudden movement, Edith had thrown herself on Harold’s breast, leaving his right arm free, but sheltering his form with her own.

At that sight every sword rested still in air. These Cymrians, hesitating not at the murder of the man whose death seemed to their false virtue a sacrifice due to their hopes of freedom, were still the descendants of Heroes, and the children of noble Song, and their swords were harmless against a woman. The same pause which saved the life of Harold, saved that of Meredydd; for his lifted sword had left his breast defenceless, and Harold, despite his wrath, and his fears for Edith, touched by that sudden forbearance, forbore himself the blow.

“Why seek ye my life?” said he. “Whom in broad England hath Harold wronged?”

That speech broke the charm, revived the sus-

pense of vengeance. With a sudden aim, Meredydd smote at the head which Edith's embrace left unprotected. The sword shivered on the steel of that which parried the stroke, and the next moment, pierced to the heart, Meredydd fell to the earth, bathed in his gore. Even as he fell, aid was at hand. The ceorls in the Roman house had caught the alarm, and were hurrying down the knoll, with arms snatched in haste, while a loud whoop broke from the forest land hard by; and a troop of horse, headed by Vebba, rushed through the bushes and brakes. Those of the Welch still surviving, no longer animated by their fiery chief, turned on the instant, and fled with that wonderful speed of foot which characterized their active race; calling, as they fled, to their Welch pigmy steeds, which, snorting loud, and lashing out, came at once to the call. Seizing the nearest at hand, the fugitives sprang to selle, while the animals unchosen, paused by the corpses of their former riders, neighing piteously, and shaking their long manes. And then, after wheeling round and round the coming horsemen, with many a plunge, and lash, and savage cry, they

darted after their companions, and disappeared amongst the bushwood. Some of the Kentish men gave chase to the fugitives, but in vain; for the nature of the ground favoured flight. Vebba, and the rest, now joined by Hilda's lithsmen, gained the spot where Harold, bleeding fast, yet strove to keep his footing, and, forgetful of his own wounds, was joyfully assuring himself of Edith's safety. Vebba dismounted, and recognising the Earl, exclaimed:—

“Saints in heaven! are we in time? You bleed—you faint!—Speak, Lord Harold. How fares it?”

“Blood enow yet left here for our merrie England!” said Harold, with a smile. But as he spoke, his head drooped, and he was borne senseless into the house of Hilda.

CHAPTER II.

THE Vala met them at the threshold, and testified so little surprise at the sight of the bleeding and unconscious Earl, that Vebba, who had heard strange tales of Hilda's unlawful arts, half suspected that those wild looking foes, with their uncanny diminutive horses, were imps conjured by her to punish a wooer to her grandchild—who had been perhaps too successful in the wooing. And fears so reasonable were not a little increased when Hilda, after leading the way up the steep ladder to the chamber in which Harold had dreamed his fearful dream, bade them all depart, and leave the wounded man to her care.

“Not so,” said Vebba, bluffly. “A life like this is not to be left in the hands of woman, or wicca. I shall go back to the great town, and summon

the Earl's own leach. And I beg thee to heed, meanwhile, that every head in this house shall answer for Harold's."

The great Vala, and highborn Hleafdian, little accustomed to be accosted thus, turned round abruptly, with so stern an eye and so imperious a mien, that even the stout Kent man felt abashed. She pointed to the door opening on the ladder, and said, briefly:—

"Depart! Thy lord's life hath been saved already, and by woman. Depart!"

"Depart, and fear not for the Earl, brave and true friend in need," said Edith, looking up from Harold's pale lips, over which she bent; and her sweet voice so touched the good thegn, that, murmuring a blessing on her fair face, he turned and departed.

Hilda then proceeded, with a light and skilful hand, to examine the wounds of her patient. She opened the tunic, and washed away the blood from four gaping orifices on the breast and shoulders. And as she did so, Edith uttered a faint cry, and, falling on her knees, bowed her head over the drooping hand, and kissed it with stifling emotions,

of which perhaps grateful joy was the strongest ; for over the heart of Harold was punctured, after the fashion of the Saxons, a device—and that device was the knot of betrothal, and in the centre of the knot was graven the word “ Edith.”

CHAPTER III.

WHETHER owing to Hilda's runes, or to the merely human arts which accompanied them, the Earl's recovery was rapid, though the great loss of blood he had sustained left him awhile weak and exhausted. But, perhaps, he blessed the excuse which detained him still in the house of Hilda, and under the eyes of Edith.

He dismissed the leach sent to him by Vebba, and confided, not without reason, to the Vala's skill. And how happily went his hours beneath the old Roman roof!

It was not without a superstition, more characterized, however, by tenderness than awe, that Harold learned that Edith had been undefinably impressed with a foreboding of danger to her betrothed, and all that morning she had watched

his coming from the old legendary hill. Was it not in that watch that his good Fylgia had saved his life?

Indeed, there seemed a strange truth in Hilda's assertions, that in the form of his betrothed, his tutelary spirit lived and guarded. For smooth every step, and bright every day, in his career, since their troth had been plighted. And gradually the sweet superstition had mingled with human passion to hallow and refine it. There was a purity and a depth in the love of these two, which, if not uncommon in women, is most rare in men.

Harold, in sober truth, had learned to look on Edith as on his better angel; and, calming his strong manly heart in the hour of temptation, would have recoiled, as a sacrilege, from aught that could have sullied that image of celestial love. With a noble and sublime patience, of which perhaps only a character so thoroughly English in its habits of self-control and steadfast endurance could have been capable, he saw the months and the years glide away, and still contented himself with hope;—hope, the sole godlike joy that belongs to men!

As the opinion of an age influences even those who affect to despise it, so, perhaps, this holy and unselfish passion was preserved and guarded by that peculiar veneration for purity which formed the characteristic fanaticism of the last days of the Anglo-Saxons,—when still, as Aldhelm had previously sung in Latin less barbarous than perhaps any priest in the reign of Edward could command,—

“Virginitas castam servans sine crimine carnem
 Cætera virtutem vincit præconia laudi—
 Spiritus altithroni templum sibi vindicat
 almus;” *—

when, amidst a great dissoluteness of manners, alike common to Church and laity, the opposite virtues were, as is invariable in such epochs of society, carried by the few purer natures into heroic extremes. ‘And as gold, the adorning of the

* “The chaste who blameless keep unsullied fame,
 Transcend all other worth, all other praise.
 The Spirit, high-enthroned, has made their hearts
 His sacred temple.”

SHARON TURNER'S *Translation of Aldhelm*, vol. iii. p. 366.
 It is curious to see how, even in Latin, the poet preserves the *alliterations* that characterized the Saxon muse.

world, springs from the sordid bosom of earth, so chastity, the image of gold, rose bright and unsullied from the clay of human desire.*

And Edith, though yet in the tenderest flush of beautiful youth, had, under the influence of that sanctifying and scarce earthly affection, perfected her full nature as woman. She had learned so to live in Harold's life, that—less, it seemed, by study than intuition—a knowledge graver than that which belonged to her sex and her time, seemed to fall upon her soul—fall as the sunlight falls on the blossoms, expanding their petals, and brightening the glory of their hues.

Hitherto, living under the shade of Hilda's dreary creed, Edith, as we have seen, had been rather Christian by name and instinct than acquainted with the doctrines of the Gospel, or penetrated by its faith. But the soul of Harold lifted her own out of the Valley of the Shadow up to the Heavenly Hill. For the character of their love was so pre-eminently Christian, so, by the circumstances that surrounded it—so by hope and self-denial, elevated out of the empire, not only of the

* Slightly altered from ALDHELM.

senses, but even of that sentiment which springs from them, and which made the sole refined and poetic element of the heathen's love, that but for Christianity it would have withered and died. It required all the aliment of prayer; it needed that patient endurance which comes from the soul's consciousness of immortality; it could not have resisted earth, but from the forts and armies it won from heaven. Thus from Harold might Edith be said to have taken her very soul. And with the soul, and through the soul, woke the mind from the mists of childhood.

In the intense desire to be worthy the love of the foremost man of her land; to be the companion of his mind, as well as the mistress of his heart, she had acquired, she knew not how, strange stores of thought, and intelligence, and pure, gentle wisdom. In opening to her confidence his own high aims and projects, he himself was scarcely conscious how often he confided but to consult—how often and how insensibly she coloured his reflections and shaped his designs. Whatever was highest and purest, *that*, Edith ever, as by instinct, beheld as the wisest. She grew to him like a

second conscience, diviner than his own. Each, therefore, reflected virtue on the other, as planet illumines planet.

All these years of probation, then, which might have soured a love less holy, changed into weariness a love less intense, had only served to wed them more intimately soul to soul; and in that spotless union what happiness there was! what rapture in word and glance, and the slight, restrained, caress of innocence, beyond all the transports love only human can bestow!

CHAPTER IV.

It was a bright still summer noon, when Harold sate with Edith amidst the columns of the Druid temple, and in the shade which those vast and mournful relics of a faith departed cast along the sward. And there, conversing over the past, and planning the future, they had sate long, when Hilda approached from the house, and entering the circle, leant her arm upon the altar of the war-god, and gazing on Harold with a calm triumph in her aspect, said—

“ Did I not smile, son of Godwin, when, with thy short-sighted wisdom, thou didst think to guard thy land and secure thy love, by urging the monk-king to send over the seas for the Atheling? Did I not tell thee, ‘ Thou dost right, for in obeying thy judgment thou art but the instrument of fate; and the coming of the Atheling

shall speed thee nearer to the ends of thy life, but not from the Atheling shalt thou take the crown of thy love, and not by the Atheling shall the throne of Athelstan be filled?"

"Alas," said Harold, rising in agitation, "let me not hear of mischance to that noble prince. He seemed sick and feeble when I parted from him; but joy is a great restorer, and the air of the native land gives quick health to the exile."

"Hark!" said Hilda, "you hear the passing bell for the soul of the son of Ironsides!"

The mournful knell, as she spoke, came dull from the roofs of the city afar, borne to their ears by the exceeding stillness of the atmosphere. Edith crossed herself, and murmured a prayer according to the custom of the age; then raising her eyes to Harold, she murmured, as she clasped her hands,—

"Be not saddened, Harold; hope still."

"Hope!" repeated Hilda, rising proudly from her recumbent position, "Hope! in that knell from St. Paul's, dull indeed is thine ear, O Harold, if thou hearest not the joy-bells that inaugurate a future king!"

The Earl started; his eyes shot fire; his breast heaved.

“Leave us, Edith,” said Hilda, in a low voice; and after watching her grandchild’s slow reluctant steps descend the knoll, she turned to Harold, and leading him towards the grave-stone of the Saxon chief, said,—

“Rememberest thou the spectre that rose from this mound?—rememberest thou the dream that followed it?”

“The spectre, or deceit of mine eye, I remember well,” answered the Earl; “the dream, not;—or only in confused and jarring fragments.”

“I told thee then, that I could not unriddle the dream by the light of the moment; and that the dead who slept below never appeared to men, save for some portent of doom to the house of Cerdic. The portent is fulfilled; the Heir of Cerdic is no more. To whom appeared the great Scin-læca, but to him who shall lead a new race of Kings to the Saxon throne!”

Harold breathed hard, and the colour mounted bright and glowing to his cheek and brow.

“I cannot gainsay thee, Vala. Unless, despite

all conjecture, Edward should be spared to earth till the Atheling's infant son acquires the age when bearded men will acknowledge a chief,* I look round in England for the coming king, and all England reflects but mine own image."

His head rose erect as he spoke, and already the brow seemed august, as if circled by the diadem of the Basileus.

"And if it be so," he added, "I accept that solemn trust, and England shall grow greater in my greatness."

"The flame breaks at last from the smouldering

* It is impossible to form any just view of the state of parties, and the position of Harold in the later portions of this work, unless the reader will bear constantly in mind the fact that, from the earliest period, minors were set aside as a matter of course, by the Saxon customs. Henry observes, that, in the whole history of the Heptarchy, there is but one example of a minority, and that a short and unfortunate one; so, in the later times, the great Alfred takes the throne, to the exclusion of the infant son of his elder brother. Only under very peculiar circumstances, and, as in the case of Edmund Ironsides, precocious talents and manhood on the part of the minor, were there exceptions to the general laws of succession. The same rule obtained with the earldoms; the fame, power, and popularity of Siward could not transmit his Northumbrian earldom to his infant son Waltheof, so gloomily renowned in a subsequent reign.

fuel," cried the Vala, "and the hour I so long foretold to thee hath come!"

Harold answered not, for high and kindling emotions deafened him to all but the voice of a grand ambition, and the awakening joy of a noble heart.

"And then—and then," he exclaimed, "I shall need no mediator between nature and monkcraft;—then, O Edith, the life thou hast saved will indeed be thine!" He paused, and it was a sign of the change that an ambition long repressed, but now rushing into the vent legitimately open to it, had already begun to work in the character hitherto so self-reliant, when he said in a low voice, "But that dream which hath so long lain locked, not lost, in my mind; that dream of which I recall only vague remembrances of danger yet defiance, trouble yet triumph,—canst thou unriddle it, O Vala, into auguries of success?"

"Harold," answered Hilda, "thou didst hear at the close of thy dream, the music of the hymns that are chaunted at the crowning of a king,—and a crowned king shalt thou be; yet fearful foes

shall assail thee—foreshewn in the shapes of the lion and raven, that came in menace over the blood-red sea. The two stars in the heaven betoken that the day of thy birth was also the birth-day of a foe, whose star is fatal to thine; and they warn thee against a battle-field, fought on the day when those stars shall meet. Farther than this the mystery of thy dream escapes from my lore;—wouldst thou learn thyself, from the phantom that sent the dream;—stand by my side at the grave of the Saxon hero, and I will summon the Scin-læca to counsel the living. For what to the Vala the dead may deny, the soul of the brave on the brave may bestow !”

Harold listened with a serious and musing attention, which his pride or his reason had never before accorded to the warnings of Hilda. But his sense was not yet fascinated by the voice of the charmer, and he answered with his wonted smile, so sweet yet so haughty,—

“ A hand outstretched to a crown should be armed for the foe; and the eye that would guard the living should not be dimmed by the vapours that encircle the dead.”

CHAPTER V.

BUT from that date changes, slight, yet noticeable and important, were at work both in the conduct and character of the great Earl.

Hitherto he had advanced on his career without calculation; and nature, not policy, had achieved his power. But henceforth he began thoughtfully to cement the foundations of his House, to extend the area, to strengthen the props. Policy now mingled with the justice that had made him esteemed, and the generosity that had won him love. Before, though by temper conciliatory, yet, through honesty, indifferent to the enmities he provoked, in his adherence to what his conscience approved, he now laid himself out to propitiate all ancient feuds, soothe all jealousies, and convert foes into friends. He opened constant and friendly

communication with his uncle Sweyn, King of Denmark; he availed himself sedulously of all the influence over the Anglo-Danes which his mother's birth made so facile. He strove also, and wisely, to conciliate the animosities which the Church had cherished against Godwin's house; he concealed his disdain of the monks and monk-ridden; he showed himself the Church's patron and friend; he endowed largely the convents, and especially one at Waltham, which had fallen into decay, though favourably known for the piety of its brotherhood. But if in this he played a part not natural to his opinions, Harold could not, even in simulation, administer to evil. The monasteries he favoured were those distinguished for purity of life, for benevolence to the poor, for bold denunciation of the excesses of the great. He had not, like the Norman, the grand design of creating in the priesthood a college of learning, a school of arts; such notions were unfamiliar in homely, unlettered England. And Harold, though for his time and his land no mean scholar, would have recoiled from favouring a learning always made subservient to Rome; always at once

haughty and scheming, and aspiring to complete domination over both the souls of men and the thrones of kings. But his aim was, out of the elements he found in the natural kindliness existing between Saxon priest and Saxon flock, to rear a modest, virtuous, homely clergy, not above tender sympathy with an ignorant population. He selected as examples for his monastery at Waltham, two low-born humble brothers, Osgood and Ailred; the one known for the courage with which he had gone through the land, preaching to abbot and thegn the emancipation of the theowes, as the most meritorious act the safety of the soul could impose; the other, who, originally a clerk, had, according to the common custom of the Saxon clergy, contracted the bonds of marriage, and with some eloquence had vindicated that custom against the canons of Rome, and refused the offer of large endowments and thegn's rank to put away his wife. But on the death of that spouse, he had adopted the cowl, and while still persisting in the lawfulness of marriage to the unmonastic clerks, had become famous for denouncing the open concubinage which desecrated the holy office,

and violated the solemn vows, of many a proud prelate and abbot.

To these two men (both of whom refused the abbacy of Waltham,) Harold committed the charge of selecting the new brotherhood established there. And the monks of Waltham were honoured as saints throughout the neighbouring district, and cited as examples to all the Church.

But though in themselves the new politic arts of Harold seemed blameless enough, *arts* they were, and as such they corrupted the genuine simplicity of his earlier nature. He had conceived for the first time an ambition apart from that of service to his country. It was no longer only to serve the land, it was to serve it as its ruler, that animated his heart and coloured his thoughts. Expediencies began to dim to his conscience the healthful loveliness of Truth. And now, too, gradually, that empire which Hilda had gained over his brother Sweyn, began to sway this man, heretofore so strong in his sturdy sense. The future became to him a dazzling mystery, into which his conjectures plunged themselves more and more. He had not yet stood in the Runic

circle and invoked the dead; but the spells were around his heart, and in his own soul had grown up the familiar demon.

Still Edith reigned alone, if not in his thoughts at least in his affections; and perhaps it was the hope of conquering all obstacles to his marriage that mainly induced him to propitiate the Church, through whose agency the object he sought must be attained; and still that hope gave the brightest lustre to the distant crown. But he who admits Ambition to the companionship of Love, admits a giant that outstrides the gentler footsteps of its comrade.

Harold's brow lost its benign calm. He became thoughtful and abstracted. He consulted Edith less, Hilda more. Edith seemed to him now not wise enough to counsel. The smile of his Fylgia, like the light of the star upon a stream, lit the surface, but could not pierce to the deep.

Meanwhile, however, the policy of Harold throve and prospered. He had already arrived at that height, that the least effort to make power popular redoubled its extent. Gradually all voices swelled the chorus in his praise; gradually

men became familiar to the question, "If Edward dies before Edgar, the grandson of Ironsides, is of age to succeed, where can we find a king like Harold?"

In the midst of this quiet but deepening sunshine of his fate, there burst a storm, which seemed destined either to darken his day or to disperse every cloud from the horizon. Algar, the only possible rival to his power—the only opponent no arts could soften—Algar, whose hereditary name endeared him to the Saxon laity, whose father's most powerful legacy was the love of the Saxon Church, whose martial and turbulent spirit had only the more elevated him in the esteem of the warlike Danes in East Anglia, (the earldom in which he had succeeded Harold,) by his father's death, lord of the great principality of Mercia—availed himself of that new power to break out again into rebellion. Again he was outlawed, again he leagued with the fiery Gryffyth. All Wales was in revolt; the Marches were invaded and laid waste. Rolf, the feeble Earl of Hereford, died at this critical juncture, and the Normans and hirelings under him mutinied against

other leaders; a fleet of vikings from Norway ravaged the western coasts, and sailing up the Menai, joined the ships of Gryffyth, and the whole empire seemed menaced with dissolution, when Edward issued his Herr-bann, and Harold at the head of the royal armies marched on the foe.

Dread and dangerous were those defiles of Wales; amidst them had been foiled or slaughtered all the warriors under Rolf the Norman; no Saxon armies had won laurels in the Cymrian's own mountain home within the memory of man; nor had any Saxon ships borne the palm from the terrible vikings of Norway. Fail, Harold, and farewell the crown!—succeed, and thou hast on thy side the *ultimam rationem regum*, (the last argument of kings,) the heart of the army over which thou art chief!

CHAPTER VI.

IT was one day in the height of summer that two horsemen rode slowly, and conversing with each other in friendly wise, notwithstanding an evident difference of rank and of nation, through the lovely country which formed the Marches of Wales. The younger of these men was unmistakeably a Norman; his small cap of velvet just covered the crown of the head, which was shaven from the crown to the nape of the neck,* while in front the hair, closely cropped, curled short and thick round a haughty but intelligent brow. His dress fitted close to his shape, and was worn without mantle; his leggings were curiously crossed in the fashion of a tartan, and on his heels were spurs of gold. He was wholly unarmed; but

* Bayeux Tapestry.

behind him and his companion, at a little distance, his war horse, completely caparisoned, was led by a single squire; mounted on a good Norman steed; while six Saxon theowes, themselves on foot, conducted three sumpter-mules, somewhat heavily laden, not only with the armour of the Norman knight, but panniers containing rich robes, wines and provender. At a few paces farther behind, marched a troop, light-armed, in tough hides, curiously tanned, with axes swung over their shoulders, and bows in their hands.

The companion of the knight was as evidently a Saxon, as the knight was unequivocally a Norman. His square, short features, contrasting the oval visage and aquiline profile of his close-shaven comrade, were half concealed beneath a bushy beard and immense moustache. His tunic, also, was of hide, and, tightened at the waist, fell loose to his knee; while a kind of cloak, fastened to the right shoulder by a large round button or broach, flowed behind and in front, but left both arms free. His cap differed in shape from the Norman's, being round and full at the sides, somewhat in shape like a turban. His bare, brawny

throat was curiously punctured with sundry devices, and a verse from the Psalms.

His countenance, though without the high and haughty brow, and the acute, observant eye of his comrade, had a pride and intelligence of its own—a pride somewhat sullen, and an intelligence somewhat slow.

“My good friend, Sexwolf,” quoth the Norman in very tolerable Saxon, “I pray you not so to misesteem us. After all, we Normans are of your own race; our fathers spoke the same language as yours.”

“That may be,” said the Saxon, bluntly, “and so did the Danes, with little difference, when they burned our houses and cut our throats.”

“Old tales, those,” replied the knight, “and I thank thee for the comparison; for the Danes, thou seest, are now settled amongst ye, peaceful subjects and quiet men, and in a few generations it will be hard to guess who comes from Saxon, who from Dane.”

“We waste time, talking such matters,” returned the Saxon, feeling himself instinctively no match in argument for his lettered companion;

and seeing, with his native strong sense, that some ulterior object, though he guessed not what, lay hid in the conciliatory language of his companion; “nor do I believe, Master Mallet or Gravel—forgive me if I miss of the right forms to address you—that Norman will ever love Saxon, or Saxon Norman; so let us cut our words short. There stands the convent, at which you would like to rest and refresh yourself.”

The Saxon pointed to a low, clumsy building of timber, forlorn and decayed, close by a rank marsh, over which swarmed gnats, and all foul animalcules.

Mallet de Gravelle, for it was he, shrugged his shoulders, and said, with an air of pity and contempt,—

“I would, friend Sexwolf, that thou couldst but see the houses we build to God and his saints in our Normandy; fabrics of stately stone, on the fairest sites. Our Countess Matilda hath a notable taste for the masonry; and our workmen are the brethren of Lombardy, who know all the mysteries thereof.”

“I pray thee, Dan-Norman,” cried the Saxon, “not to put such ideas into the soft head of King

Edward. We pay enow for the Church, though built but of timber; saints help us indeed, if it were builded of stone!"

The Norman crossed himself, as if he had heard some signal impiety, and then said,

"Thou lovest not Mother Church, worthy Sexwolf?"

"I was brought up," replied the sturdy Saxon, "to work and sweat hard, and I love not the lazy who devour my substance, and say, 'the saints gave it them.' Knowest thou not, Master Mallet, that one-third of all the lands of England is in the hands of the priests?"

"Hem!" said the acute Norman, who, with all his devotion, could stoop to wring worldly advantage from each admission of his comrade; "then in this merrie England of thine, thou hast still thy grievances and cause of complaint?"

"Yea, indeed, and I trow it," quoth the Saxon, even in that day a grumbler; "but, I take it, the main difference between thee and me is, that I can say what mislikes me out like a man; and it would fare ill with thy limbs or thy life if thou wert as frank in the grim land of thy *heretogh*."

“Now, *Notre Dame* stop thy prating,” said the Norman, in high disdain, while his brow frowned and his eye sparkled. “Strong judge and great captain as is William the Norman, his barons and knights hold their heads high in his presence, and not a grievance weighs on the heart that we give not out with the lip.”

“So have I heard,” said the Saxon, chuckling; “I have heard, indeed, that ye thegns, or great men, are free enow, and plain-spoken. But what of the commons—the sixhændmen, and the ceorls, master Norman? Dare they speak as we speak of king and of law, of thegn and of captain?”

The Norman wisely curbed the scornful “No, indeed,” that rushed to his lips, and said, all sweet and debonnair,—

“Each land hath its customs, dear Sexwolf; and if the Norman were king of England, he would take the laws as he finds them, and the ceorls would be as safe with William as Edward.”

“The Norman, king of England!” cried the Saxon, reddening to the tips of his great ears, “What dost thou babble of, stranger? The Norman!—How could that ever be?”

“Nay, I did but suggest—but suppose such a case,” replied the knight, still smothering his wrath. “And why thinkest thou the conceit so outrageous? Thy king is childless; William is his next of kin, and dear to him as a brother; and if Edward did leave him the throne—”

“The throne is for no man to leave,” almost roared the Saxon. “Thinkest thou the people of England are like cattle and sheep, and chattels and theowes, to be left by will, as man fancies? The king’s wish has its weight, no doubt, but the Witan hath its yea or its nay, and the Witan and Commons are seldom at issue thereon. Thy duke king of England! Marry! Ha! ha!”

“Brute!” muttered the knight to himself; then adding aloud, with his old tone of irony (now much habitually subdued by years and discretion), “Why takest thou so the part of the ceorls? thou, a captain, and well nigh a thegn!”

“I was born a ceorl, and my father before me,” returned Sexwolf, “and I feel with my class; though my grandson may rank with the thegns, and, for aught I know, with the earls.”

The Sire de Graville involuntarily drew off

from the Saxon's side, as if made suddenly aware that he had grossly demeaned himself in such unwitting familiarity with a ceorl, and a ceorl's son; and he said, with a much more careless accent and lofty port than before,—

“Good man, thou wert a ceorl, and now thou leadeest Earl Harold's men to the war! How is this? I do not quite comprehend it.”

“How shouldst thou, poor Norman?” replied the Saxon compassionately. “The tale is soon told. Know that when Harold our Earl was banished, and his lands taken, we his ceorls helped with his sixhændman, Clapa, to purchase his land, nigh by London, and the house whercin thou didst find me, of a stranger, thy countryman, to whom they were lawlessly given. And we tilled the land, we tended the herds, and we kept the house till the Earl came back.”

“Ye had monies then, monies of your own, ye ceorls!” said the Norman avariciously.

“How else could we buy our freedom? Every ceorl hath some hours to himself to employ to his profit, and can lay by for his own ends. These savings we gave up for our Earl, and when the

Earl came back, he gave the sixhændman hydes of land enow to make him a thegn; and he gave the ceorls who had holpen Clapa, their freedom and broad shares of his boc-land, and most of them now hold their own ploughs and feed their own herds. But I loved the Earl (having no wife) better than swine and glebe, and I prayed him to let me serve him in arms. And so I have risen, as with us ceorls can rise."

"I am answered," said Mallet de Graville thoughtfully and still somewhat perplexed. "But these theowes, (they are slaves,) never rise. It cannot matter to them whether shaven Norman or bearded Saxon sit on the throne?"

"Thou art right there," answered the Saxon; "it matters as little to them as it doth to thy thieves and felons, for many of them are felons and thieves, or the children of such; and most of those who are not, it is said, are not Saxons, but the barbarous folks whom the Saxons subdued. No, wretched things, and scarce men, they care nought for the land. Howbeit, even they are not without hope, for the Church takes their part; and that, at least, I for one, think Church-

worthy," added the Saxon with a softened eye. "And every abbot is bound to set free three theowes on his lands, and few who own theowes die without freeing some by their will; so that the sons of theowes may be thegns, and thegns some of them are at this day."

"Marvels!" cried the Norman. "But surely they bear a stain and stigma, and their fellow-thegns flout them?"

"Not a whit—why so? land is land, money money. Little, I trow, care we what a man's father may have been, if the man himself hath his ten hides or more of good boc-land."

"Ye value land and the monies," said the Norman, "so do we, but we value more name and birth."

"Ye are still in your leading-strings, Norman," replied the Saxon, waxing good-humoured in his contempt. "We have an old saying and a wise one, 'All come from Adam except Tib the ploughman; but when Tib grows rich all call him 'dear brother.'"

"With such pestilent notions," quoth the Sire de Graville, no longer keeping temper, "I do not

wonder that our fathers of Norway and Daneland beat ye so easily. The love for things ancient—creed, lineage, and name, is better steel against the stranger than your smiths ever welded.”

Therewith, and not waiting for Sexwolf’s reply, he clapped spurs to his palfrey, and soon entered the court-yard of the convent.

A monk of the order of St. Benedict, then most in favour,* ushered the noble visitor into the cell of the Abbot; who, after gazing at him a moment in wonder and delight, clasped him to his breast and kissed him heartily on brow and cheek.

“ Ah, Guillaume,” he exclaimed in the Norman tongue, “ this is indeed a grace for which to sing *Jubilate*. Thou canst not guess how welcome is the face of a countryman in this horrible land of ill-cooking and exile.”

“ Talking of grace, my dear father, and food,” said de Grville, loosening the cincture of the tight vest which gave him the shape of a wasp—for even at that early period, small waists were in vogue with the warlike fops of the French Continent—“ talking

* Indeed, apparently the only monastic order in England.

of grace, the sooner thou say'st it over some friendly refection, the more will the Latin sound unctuous and musical. I have journeyed since day-break, and am now hungered and faint."

"Alack, alack!" cried the Abbot, plaintively, "thou knowest little, my son, what hardships we endure in these parts, how larded our larders, and how nefarious our fare. The flesh of swine salted—"

"The flesh of Beelzebub," cried Mallet de Gravelle aghast. "But comfort thee, I have stores on my sumpter-mules—*poulardes* and fishes, and other not despicable comestibles, and a few flasks of wine, not pressed, laud the saints! from the vines of this country: wherefore, wilt thou see to it, and instruct thy cooks how to season the cheer?"

"No cooks have I to trust to," replied the Abbot; "of cooking know they here as much as of Latin; nathless, I will go and do my best with the stew-pans. Meanwhile, thou wilt at least have rest and the bath. For the Saxons, even in their convents, are a clean race, and learned the bath from the Dane."

"That I have noted," said the knight, "for

even at the smallest house at which I have lodged in my way from London, the host hath courteously offered me the bath, and the hostess linen curious and fragrant; and to say truth, the poor people are hospitable and kind, despite their uncouth hate of the foreigner; nor is their meat to be despised, plentiful and succulent; but, *pardez*, as thou sayest, little helped by the art of dressing. Wherefore, my father, I will wile the time till the *poulardes* be roasted, and the fish broiled or stewed, by the ablutions thou profferest me. I shall tarry with thee some hours, for I have much to learn."

The Abbot then led the Sire de Graville by the hand to the cell of honour and guestship, and having seen that the bath prepared was of warmth sufficient, for both Norman and Saxon (hardy men, as they seem to us from afar) so shuddered at the touch of cold water, that a bath of natural temperature (as well as a hard bed) was sometimes imposed as a penance,—the good father went his way, to examine the sumpter-mules, and admonish the much suffering and bewildered lay brother who officiated as cook,—and who, speaking neither Norman nor Latin, scarce made out one

word in ten of his superior's elaborate exhortations.

Mallet's squire, with a change of raiment, and goodly coffers of soaps, unguents, and odours, took his way to the knight, for a Norman of birth was accustomed to much personal attendance, and had all respect for the body; and it was nearly an hour before, in a long gown of fur, reshaven, dainty, and decked, the Sire de Graville bowed, and sighed, and prayed before the refection set out in the Abbot's cell.

The two Normans, despite the sharp appetite of the layman, ate with great gravity and decorum, drawing forth the morsels served to them on spits with silent examination; seldom more than tasting, with looks of patient dissatisfaction, each of the comestibles; sipping rather than drinking, nibbling rather than devouring, washing their fingers in rose water with nice care at the close, and waiving them afterwards gracefully in the air, to allow the moisture somewhat to exhale before they wiped off the lingering dews with their napkins. Then they exchanged looks and sighed in concert, as if recalling the polished manners of

Normandy, still retained in that desolate exile. And their temperate meal thus concluded, dishes, wines, and attendants vanished, and their talk commenced.

“How camest thou in England?” asked the Abbot abruptly.

“Sauf your reverence,” answered De Graville, “not wholly for reasons different from those that bring thee hither. When, after the death of that truculent and orgulous Godwin, King Edward entreated Harold to let him have back some of his dear Norman favourites, thou, then little pleased with the plain fare and sharp discipline of the convent of Bec, didst pray Bishop William of London to accompany such train as Harold, moved by his poor king’s supplication, was pleased to permit. The Bishop consented, and thou wert enabled to change monk’s cowl for abbot’s mitre. In a word, ambition brought thee to England, and ambition brings me hither.”

“Hem! and how? May’st thou thrive better than I in this sus-stye!”

“You remember,” renewed De Graville, “that Lanfranc, the Lombard, was pleased to take in-

terest in my fortunes, then not the most flourishing, and after his return from Rome, with the Pope's dispensation for Count William's marriage with his cousin, he became William's most trusted adviser. Both William and Lanfranc were desirous to set an example of learning to our Latinless nobles, and therefore my scholarship found grace in their eyes. In brief—since then I have prospered and thriven. I have fair lands by the Seine, free from clutch of merchant and Jew. I have founded a convent, and slain some hundreds of Breton marauders. Need I say that I am in high favour? Now it so chanced that a cousin of mine, Hugo de Magnaville, a brave lance and franc-rider, chanced to murder his brother in a little domestic affray, and, being of conscience tender and nice, the deed preyed on him, and he gave his lands to Odo of Bayeux, and set off to Jerusalem. There, having prayed at the Tomb," (the knight crossed himself,) "he felt at once miraculously cheered and relieved; but, journeying back, mishaps befell him. He was made slave by some infidel, to one of whose wives he sought to be gallant, *par amours*, and only

escaped at last by setting fire to paynim and prison. Now, by the aid of the Virgin, he has got back to Rouen, and holds his own lands again in fief from proud Odo, as a knight of the bishop's. It so happened that, passing homeward through Lycia, before these misfortunes befell him, he made friends with a fellow-pilgrim who had just returned, like himself, from the Sepulchre, but not lightened, like him, of the load of his crime. This poor palmer lay broken-hearted and dying in the hut of an eremite, where my cousin took shelter; and, learning that Hugo was on his way to Normandy, he made himself known as Sweyn, the once fair and proud Earl of England, eldest son to old Godwin, and father to Haco, whom our Count still holds as a hostage. He besought Hugo to intercede with the Count for Haco's speedy release and return, if King Edward assented thereto; and charged my cousin, moreover, with a letter to Harold, his brother, which Hugo undertook to send over. By good luck, it so chanced that, through all his sore trials, cousin Hugo kept safe round his neck a leaden effigy of the Virgin. The infidels disdained to rob him of

lead, little dreaming the worth which the sanctity gave to the metal. To the back of the image Hugo fastened the letter, and so, though somewhat tattered and damaged, he had it still with him on arriving in Rouen.

“Knowing, then, my grace with the Count, and not, despite absolution and pilgrimage, much wishing to trust himself in the presence of William, who thinks gravely of fratricide, he prayed me to deliver the message, and ask leave to send to England the letter.”

“It is a long tale,” quoth the Abbot.

“Patience, my father! I am nearly at the end.

Nothing more in season could chance for my fortunes. Know that William has been long moody and anxious as to matters in England. The secret accounts he receives from the Bishop of London, make him see that Edward’s heart is much alienated from him, especially since the Count has had daughters and sons; for, as thou knowest, William and Edward both took vows of chastity in youth,* and William got absolved from his, while Edward hath kept firm to the plight. Not long

* See Note to ROBERT OF GLOUCESTER, vol. ii. p. 372.

ere my cousin came back, William had heard that Edward had acknowledged his kinsman as natural heir to his throne. Grieved and troubled at this, William had said in my hearing, "Would that amidst yon statues of steel, there were some cool head and wise tongue I could trust with my interests in England! and would that I could devise fitting plea and excuse for an envoy to Harold the Earl!" Much had I mused over these words, and a light-hearted man was Mallet de Graville when, with Sweyn's letter in hand, he went to Lanfranc the Abbot and said, 'Patron and father! thou knowest that I, almost alone of the Norman knights, have studied the Saxon language. And if the Duke wants messenger and plea, here stands the messenger, and in this hand is the plea.' Then I told my tale. Lanfranc went at once to Duke William. By this time, news of the Atheling's death had arrived, and things looked more bright to my liege. Duke William was pleased to summon me straightway, and give me his instructions. So over the sea I came alone, save a single squire, reached London, learned the King and his court were at Winchester, (but with them

I had little to do,) and that Harold the Earl was at the head of his forces in Wales against Gryffyth the Lion King. The Earl had sent in haste for a picked and chosen band of his own retainers, on his demesnes near the city. These I joined, and learning thy name at the monastery at Gloucester, I stopped here to tell thee my news and hear thine."

"Dear brother," said the Abbot, looking enviously on the knight, "would that, like thee, instead of entering the Church, I had taken up arms! Alike once was our lot, well born and penniless. Ah me!—Thou art now as the swan on the river, and I as the shell on the rock."

"But," quoth the knight, "though the canons, it is true, forbid monks to knock people on the head, except in self-preservation, thou knowest well that, even in Normandy, (which, I take it, is the sacred college of all priestly lore, on this side the Alps,) those canons are deemed too rigorous for practice; and, at all events, it is not forbidden thee to look on the pastime with sword or mace by thy side in case of need. Wherefore, remembering thee in times past, I little counted on finding thee—like a slug in thy cell! No; but with

mail on thy back, the canons clean forgotten, and helping stout Harold to sliver and brain these turbulent Welchmen."

"Ah me! ah me! No such good fortune!" sighed the tall Abbot. "Little, despite thy former sojourn in London, and thy lore of their tongue, knowest thou of these unmannerly Saxons. Rarely indeed do abbot and prelate ride to the battle;* and were it not for a huge Danish monk, who took refuge here to escape mutilation for robbery, and who mistakes the Virgin for a Valkyr, and St. Peter for Thor,—were it not, I say, that we now and then have a bout at sword-play together, my arm would be quite out of practice."

"Cheer thee, old friend," said the knight, pityingly, "better times may come yet. Meanwhile, now to affairs. For all I hear strengthens all William has heard, that Harold the Earl is the first man in England. Is it not so?"

* The Saxon priests were strictly forbidden to bear arms.—*SPELM. Concil.* p. 238.

It is mentioned in the English Chronicles, as a very extraordinary circumstance, that a bishop of Hereford, who had been Harold's chaplain, did actually take sword and shield against the Welch. Unluckily, this valiant prelate was slain so soon, that it was no encouraging example.

“Truly, and without dispute.”

“Is he married, or celibate? For that is a question which even his own men seem to answer equivocally.”

“Why, all the wandering minstrels have songs, I am told by those who comprehend this poor barbarous tongue, of the beauty of *Editha pulchra*, to whom it is said the Earl is betrothed, or it may be worse. But he is certainly not married, for the dame is akin to him within the degrees of the Church.”

“Hem, not married! that is well; and this Algar, or Elgar, he is not now with the Welch, I hear.”

“No; sore ill at Chester with wounds and much chafing, for he hath sense to see that his cause is lost. The Norwegian fleet have been scattered over the seas by the Earl’s ships, like birds in a storm. The rebel Saxons who joined Gryffyth under Algar have been so beaten, that those who survive have deserted their chief, and Gryffyth himself is penned up in his last defiles, and cannot much longer resist this stout foe, who, by valorous St. Michael, is truly a great captain. As soon as Gryffyth is subdued, Algar

will be crushed in his retreat, like a bloated spider in his web; and then England will have rest, unless our liege, as thou hintest, set her to work again."

The Norman knight mused a few moments, before he said, —

"I understand, then, that there is no man in the land who is peer to Harold;—not, I suppose, Tostig his brother?"

"Not Tostig, surely, whom nought but Harold's repute keeps a day in his earldom. But of late—for he is brave and skilful in war—he hath done much to command the respect, though he cannot win back the love, of his fierce Northumbrians, for he hath holpen the Earl gallantly in this invasion of Wales, both by sea and by land. But Tostig shines only from his brother's light; and if Gurth were more ambitious, Gurth alone could be Harold's rival."

The Norman, much satisfied with the information thus gleaned from the Abbot, who, despite his ignorance of the Saxon tongue, was, like all his countrymen, acute and curious, now rose to depart. The Abbot, detaining him a few moments, and looking at him wistfully, said in a low voice,

“What thinkest thou, are Count William’s chances of England?”

“Good, if he have recourse to stratagem—sure, if he can win Harold.”

“Yet, take my word, the English love not the Normans, and will fight stiffly.”

“That I believe. But if fighting must be, I see that it will be the fight of a single battle, for there is neither fortress nor mountain to admit of long warfare. And look you, my friend, everything here is *worn out!* The royal line is extinct with Edward, save in a child, whom I hear no man name as a successor; the old nobility are gone, there is no reverence for old names; the Church is as decrepit in the spirit as thy lath monastery is decayed in its timbers; the martial spirit of the Saxon is half rotted away in the subjugation to a clergy, not brave and learned, but timid and ignorant; the desire for money eats up all manhood; the people have been accustomed to foreign monarchs under the Danes; and William, once victor, would have but to promise to retain the old laws and liberties, to establish himself as firmly as Canute. The Anglo-Danes might trouble

him somewhat, but rebellion would become a weapon in the hands of a schemer like William. He would bristle all the land with castles and forts, and hold it as a camp. My poor friend, we shall live yet to exchange congratulations,—thou prelate of some fair English see, and I baron of broad English lands.”

“I think thou art right,” said the tall Abbot cheerily, “and marry, when the day comes, I will at least fight for the Duke. Yea—thou art right,” he continued, looking round the dilapidated walls of the cell; “all here is worn out, and nought can restore the realm, save the Norman William, or—”

“Or who?”

“Or the Saxon Harold. But thou goest to see him—judge for thyself.”

“I will do so, and heedfully,” said the Sire de Graville; and embracing his friend, he renewed his journey.

CHAPTER VII.

MESSIRE Mallet de Graville possessed in perfection that cunning astuteness which characterized the Normans, as it did all the old pirate races of the Baltic; and if, O reader, thou, peradventure, shouldst ever in this remote day have dealings with the tall men of Ebor or Yorkshire, there wilt thou yet find the old Dane-father's wit—it may be to thy cost—more especially if treating for those animals which the ancestors ate, and which the sons, without eating, still manage to fatten on.

But though the crafty knight did his best; during his progress from London into Wales, to extract from Sexwolf all such particulars respecting Harold and his brethren as he had reasons for wishing to learn, he found the stubborn sagacity

or caution of the Saxon more than a match for him. Sexwolf had a dog's instinct in all that related to his master; and he felt, though he scarce knew why, that the Norman cloaked some design upon Harold in all the cross-questionings so carelessly ventured. And his stiff silence, or bluff replies, when Harold was mentioned, contrasted much the unreserve of his talk when it turned upon the general topics of the day, or the peculiarities of Saxon manners.

By degrees, therefore, the knight, chafed and foiled, drew into himself; and seeing no farther use could be made of the Saxon, suffered his own national scorn of villein companionship to replace his artificial urbanity. He therefore rode alone, and a little in advance of the rest, noticing with a soldier's eye the characteristics of the country, and marvelling, while he rejoiced, at the insignificance of the defences which, even on the Marches, guarded the English country from the Cymrian ravager.* In musings of no very auspicious and friendly nature towards the land he thus visited, the Norman, on the second day from that in

* See Note (A), at the end of the Volume.

which he had conversed with the Abbot, found himself amongst the savage defiles of North Wales.

Pausing there in a narrow pass overhung with wild and desolate rocks, the knight deliberately summoned his squires, indued himself in his ring mail, and mounted his great *destrier*.

“Thou dost wrong, Norman,” said Sexwolf, “thou fatiguest thyself in vain—heavy arms here are needless. I have fought in this country before: and as for thy steed, thou wilt soon have to forsake it, and march on foot.”

“Know, friend,” retorted the Knight, “that I come not here to learn the horn-book of war; and for the rest, know also, that a noble of Normandy parts with his life ere he forsakes his good steed.”

“Ye outlanders and Frenchmen,” said Sexwolf, showing the whole of his teeth through his forest of beard, “love boast and big talk; and, on my troth, thou mayest have thy belly full of them yet; for we are still in the track of Harold, and Harold never leaves behind him a foe. Thou art as safe here, as if singing psalms in a convent.”

“For thy jests, let them pass, courteous sir,” said the Norman; “but I pray thee only not to call me Frenchman.* I impute it to thy ignorance in things comely and martial, and not to thy design to insult me. Though my own mother was French, learn that a Norman despises a Frank only less than he doth a Jew.”

“Crave your grace,” said the Saxon, “but I thought all ye outlanders were the same, rib and rib, sibbe and sibbe.”

“Thou wilt know better one of these days. March on, master Sexwolf.”

The pass gradually opened on a wide patch of rugged and herbless waste; and Sexwolf, riding up to the knight, directed his attention to a stone,

* The Normans and French detested each other; and it was the Norman who taught to the Saxon his own animosities against the Frank. A very eminent antiquary, indeed, De la Ruc, considered that the Bayeux tapestry could not be the work of Matilda, or her age, because in it the Normans are called *French*. But that is a gross blunder on his part; for William, in his own charters, calls the Normans ‘*Franci*.’ Wace, in his *Roman de Rou*, often styles the Normans ‘*French*’; and William of Poitiers, a contemporary of the Conqueror, gives them also in one passage the same name. Still, it is true that the Normans were generally very tenacious of their distinction from their gallant but hostile neighbours.

on which was inscribed the words, "*Hic victor fuit Haroldus*,"—Here Harold conquered.

"In sight of a stone like that, no Walloon dare come," said the Saxon.

"A simple and classical trophy," remarked the Norman complacently, "and saith much. I am glad to see thy lord knows the Latin."

"I say not that he knows Latin," replied the prudent Saxon; fearing that that could be no wholesome information on his lord's part, which was of a kind to give gladness to the Norman—"Ride on while the road lets ye—in God's name."

On the confines of Caernarvonshire, the troop halted at a small village, round which had been newly dug a deep military trench, bristling with palisades; and within its confines might be seen,—some reclined on the grass, some at dice, some drinking,—many men, whose garbs of tanned hyde, as well as a pennon waving from a little mound in the midst, bearing the tiger heads of Earl Harold's insignia, showed them to be Saxons.

"Here we shall learn," said Sexwolf, "what the Earl is about—and here, at present, ends my journey."

“Are these the Earl’s head-quarters then?—no castle, even of wood—no wall, nought but ditch and palisades?” asked Mallet de Graville in a tone between surprise and contempt.

“Norman,” said Sexwolf, “the castle is there, though you see it not, and so are the walls. The castle is Harold’s name, which no Walloon will dare to confront; and the walls are the heaps of the slain which lie in every valley around.” So saying, he wound his horn, which was speedily answered, and led the way over a plank which admitted across the trench.

“Not even a draw-bridge!” groaned the knight.

Sexwolf exchanged a few words with one who seemed the head of the small garrison, and then regaining the Norman, said, “The Earl and his men have advanced into the mountainous legions of Snowdon; and there, it is said, the blood-lusting Gryffyth is at length driven to bay. Harold hath left orders that, after as brief a refreshment as may be, I and my men, taking the guide he hath left for us, join him on foot. There may now be danger: for, though Gryffyth himself may be pinned to his heights, he may have yet some

friends in these parts to start up from crag and combe. The way on horse is impassable; wherefore, master Norman, as our quarrel is not thine, nor thine our lord, I commend thee to halt here in peace and in safety, with the sick and the prisoners."

"It is a merry companionship, doubtless," said the Norman; "but one travels to learn, and I would fain see somewhat of thine uncivil skirmishings with these men of the mountains; wherefore, as I fear my poor mules are light of the provender, give me to eat and to drink. And then shalt thou see, should we come in sight of the enemy, if a Norman's big words are the sauce of small deeds."

"Well spoken, and better than I reckoned on," said Sexwolf, heartily.

While De Graville, alighting, sauntered about the village, the rest of the troop exchanged greetings with their countrymen. It was, even to the warrior's eye, a mournful scene. Here and there, heaps of ashes and ruin — houses riddled and burned — the small, humble church, untouched indeed by war, but looking desolate and forlorn—

with sheep grazing on large recent mounds thrown over the brave dead, who slept in the ancestral spot they had defended.

The air was fragrant with the spicy smells of the gale or bog myrtle; and the village lay sequestered in a scene wild indeed and savage, but prodigal of a stern beauty to which the Norman, poet by race, and scholar by culture, was not insensible. Seating himself on a rude stone, apart from all the warlike and murmuring groups, he looked forth on the dim and vast mountain peaks, and the rivulet that rushed below, intersecting the village, and lost amidst copses of mountain ash. From these more refined contemplations, he was roused by Sexwolf, who, with greater courtesy than was habitual to him, accompanied the theowes who brought the knight a repast, consisting of cheese, and small pieces of seethed kid, with a large horn of very indifferent mead.

“The Earl puts all his men on Welch diet,” said the captain apologetically. “For indeed, in this lengthy warfare, nought else is to be had!”

The knight curiously inspected the cheese, and bent earnestly over the kid.

“It sufficeth, good Sexwolf,” said he, suppressing a natural sigh. “But instead of this honey-drink, which is more fit for bees than for men, get me a draught of fresh water: water is your only safe drink before fighting.”

“Thou hast never drunk ale, then!” said the Saxon; “but thy foreign tastes shall be heeded, strange man.”

A little after noon, the horns were sounded, and the troop prepared to depart. But the Norman observed that they had left behind all their horses; and his squire approaching, informed him that Sexwolf had positively forbidden the knight's steed to be brought forth.

“Was it ever heard before,” cried Sire Mallet de Graville, “that a Norman knight was expected to walk, and to walk against a foe too! Call hither the villein,—that is, the captain.”

But Sexwolf himself here appeared, and to him de Graville addressed his indignant remonstrance. The Saxon stood firm, and to each argument replied simply, “It is the Earl's orders;” and finally wound up with a bluff—“Go, or let alone; stay here with thy horse, or march with us on thy feet.”

“My horse is a gentleman,” answered the

knight, "and, 'as such, would be my more fitting companion. But as it is, I yield to compulsion—I bid thee solemnly observe, by compulsion; so that it may never be said of William Mallet de Graville, that he walked, *bon grè*, to battle." With that, he loosened his sword in the sheath, and still retaining his ring mail, fitting close as a shirt, strode on with the rest.

A Welch guide, subject to one of the Underkings, (who was in allegiance to England, and animated, as many of those petty chiefs were, with a vindictive jealousy against the rival tribe of Gryffyth, far more intense than his dislike of the Saxon,) led the way.

The road wound for some time along the course of the river Conway; Penmaen-mawr loomed before them. Not a human being came in sight, not a goat was seen on the distant ridges, not a sheep on the pastures. The solitude in the glare of the broad August sun was oppressive. Some houses they passed—if buildings of rough stones, containing but a single room, can be called houses—but they were deserted. Desolation preceded their way, for they were on the track of Harold the Victor. At length, they passed the old Conovium, now

Caer-hên, lying low near the river. There were still (not as we now scarcely discern them, after centuries of havoc,) the mighty ruins of the Roman,—vast shattered walls, a tower half demolished, visible remnants of gigantic baths, and, proudly rising near the present ferry of Tal-y-Cafn, the fortress, almost unmutilated, of Castell-y-Bryn. On the castle waved the pennon of Harold. Many large flat-bottomed boats were moored to the river side, and the whole place bristled with spears and javelins.

Much comforted (for,—though he disdained to murmur, and rather than forego his mail, would have died therein a martyr,—Mallet de Graville was mightily wearied by the weight of his steel,) and hoping now to see Harold himself, the knight sprang forward with a spasmodic effort at liveliness, and found himself in the midst of a group, among whom he recognised at a glance his old acquaintance, Godrith. Doffing his helm with its long nose-piece, he caught the thegn's hand, and exclaimed,—

“ Well met, *ventre de Guillaume!* well met, O Godrec the debonnair! Thou rememberest Mallet de Graville, and in this unseemly guise, on

foot, and with villeins, sweating under the eyes of plebeian Phœbus, thou beholdest that much suffering man !”

“ Welcome indeed,” returned Godrith, with some embarrassment; “but how camest thou hither, and whom seekest thou ?”

“ Harold, thy Count, man—and I trust he is here.”

“ Not so, but not far distant—at a place by the mouth of the river called *Caer Gyffin*.^{*} Thou shalt take boat, and be there ere the sunset.”

“ Is a battle at hand ? Yon churl disappointed and tricked me ; he promised me danger, and not a soul have we met.”

“ Harold’s besom sweeps clean,” answered Godrith, smiling. “ But thou art like, perhaps, to be in at the death. We have driven this Welch lion to bay at last—He is ours, or grim *Famine’s*. Look yonder ;” and Godrith pointed to the heights of *Penmaen-mawr*. “ Even at this distance, you may yet desery something gray and dim against the sky.’

“ Deemest thou my eye so ill practised in siege, as not to see towers ? Tall and massive they are,

* The present town and castle of Conway.

though they seem here as airy as masts, and as dwarfish as landmarks."

"On that hill-top, and in those towers, is Gryffyth, the Welch king, with the last of his force. He cannot escape us; our ships guard all the coasts of the shore; our troops, as here, surround every pass. Spies, night and day, keep watch. The Welch moels (or beacon-rocks,) are manned by our warders. And, were the Welch King to descend, signals would blaze from post to post, and gird him with fire and sword. From land to land, from hill to hill, from Hereford to Caerleon, from Caerleon to Milford, from Milford to Snowdon, through Snowdon to yonder fort, built, they say, by the fiends or the giants,—through defile and through forest, over rock, through morass, we have pressed on his heels. Battle and foray alike have drawn the blood from his heart; and thou wilt have seen the drops yet red on the way, where the stone tells that Harold was victor."

"A brave man and true king, then, this Gryffyth," said the Norman, with some admiration; "but," he added in a colder tone, "I confess, for my own part, that though I pity the valiant man beaten, I honour the brave man who wins; and

though I have seen but little of this rough land as yet, I can well judge from what I have seen, that no captain, not of patience unwearied, and skill most consummate, could conquer a bold enemy in a country where every rock is a fort."

"So, I fear," answered Godrith, "that thy countryman Rolf found; for the Welch beat him sadly, and the reason was plain. He insisted on using horses where no horses could climb, and attiring men in full armour to fight against men light and nimble as swallows, that skim the earth, then are lost in the clouds. Harold, more wise, turned our Saxons into Welchmen, flying as they flew, climbing where they climbed; it has been as a war of the birds. And now there rests but the eagle, in his last lonely eyrie."

"Thy battles have improved thy eloquence much, Messire Godree," said the Norman, condescendingly. "Nevertheless, I cannot but think a few light horse——"

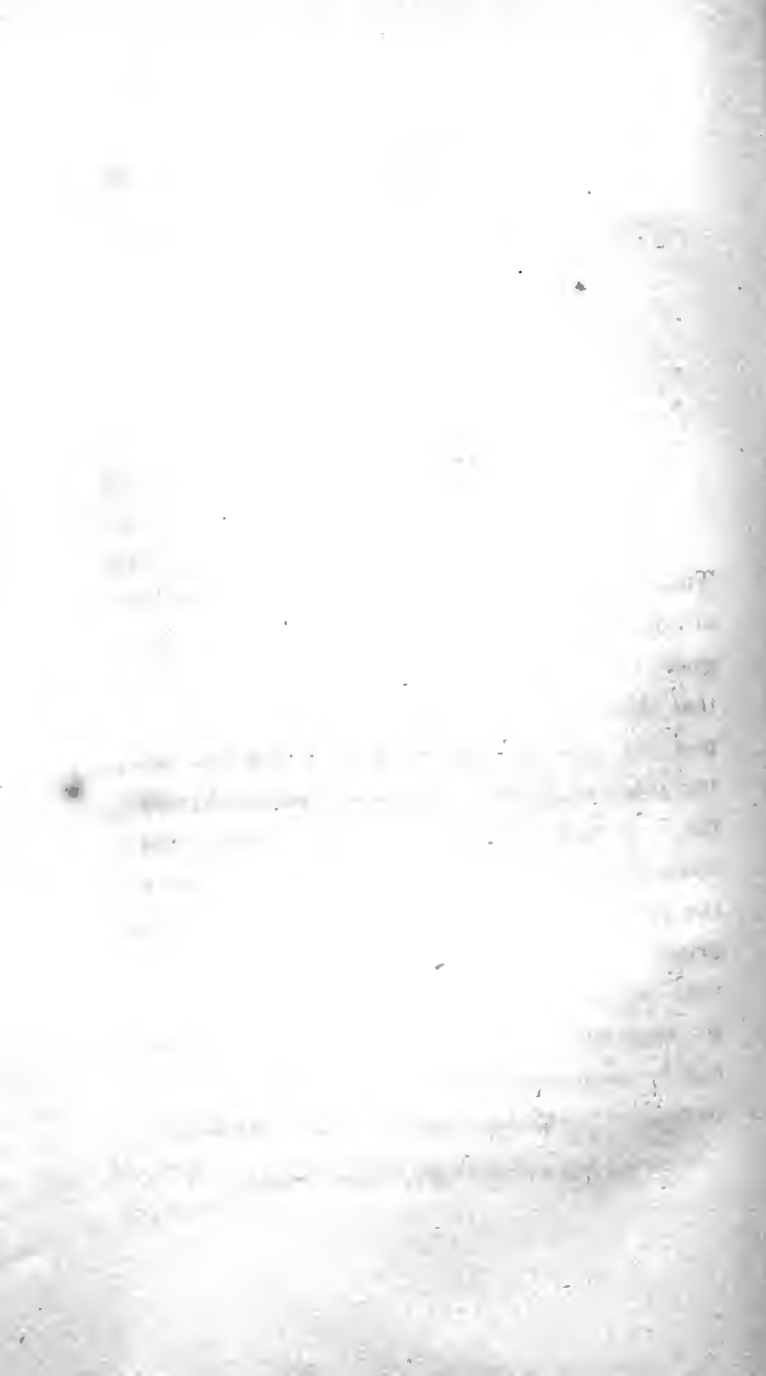
"Could scale yon mountain-brow?" said Godrith, laughing, and pointing again to Penmaen-mawr."

The Norman looked and was silent, though he thought to himself "That Sexwolf was no such dolt after all!"

BOOK VII.



THE WELCH KING.



BOOK VII.

CHAPTER I.

THE sun had just cast its last beams over the breadth of water into which Conway, or rather Cyn-wy, "the great river," merges its winding waves. Not at that time existed the matchless castle, which is now the monument of Edward Plantagenet, and the boast of Wales. But besides all the beauty the spot took from nature, it had even some claim from ancient art. A rude fortress rose above the stream of Gyffin, out of the ruins of some greater Roman hold,* and vast ruins of a former town lay round it; while opposite the fort, on the huge and ragged promontory of Gogarth, might still be seen, forlorn and grey, the wrecks of the imperial city, destroyed ages before by lightning.

* See CAMDEN's *Britannia*, "Caernarvonshire."

All these remains of a power and a pomp that Rome in vain had bequeathed to the Briton, were full of pathetic and solemn interest, when blent with the thought, that on yonder steep, the brave prince of a race of heroes, whose line transcended, by ages, all the other royalties of the North, awaited, amidst the ruins of man, and in the stronghold which nature yet gave, the hour of his doom.

But these were not the sentiments of the martial and observant Norman, with the fresh blood of a new race of conquerors.

“In this land,” thought he, “far more even than in that of the Saxon, there are the ruins of old; and when the present can neither maintain nor repair the past, its future is subjection or despair.”

Agreeably to the peculiar usages of Saxon military skill, which seems to have placed all strength in dykes and ditches, as being perhaps the cheapest and readiest outworks, a new trench had been made round the fort, on two sides, connecting it on the third and fourth with the streams of Gyffin and the Conway. But the boat

was rowed up to the very walls, and the Norman, springing to land, was soon ushered into the presence of the Earl.

Harold was seated before a rude table; and, bending over a rough map of the great mountain of Penmaen; a lamp of iron stood beside the map, though the air was yet clear.

The Earl rose, as De Graville, entering with the proud but easy grace habitual to his countrymen, said, in his best Saxon—

“Hail to Earl Harold! William Mallet de Graville, the Norman, greets him, and brings him news from beyond the seas.”

There was only one seat in that bare room—the seat from which the Earl had risen. He placed it with simple courtesy before his visitor, and, leaning, himself, against the table, said, in the Norman tongue, which he spoke fluently—

“It is no slight thanks that I owe to the Sire de Graville, that he hath undertaken voyage and journey on my behalf; but before you impart your news, I pray you to take rest and food.”

“Rest will not be unwelcome; and food, if unrestricted to goats’ cheese, and kid-flesh,—luxuries,

new to my palate,—will not be untempting ; but neither food nor rest can I take, noble Harold, before I excuse myself, as a foreigner, for thus somewhat infringing your laws by which we are banished, and acknowledging gratefully the courteous behaviour I have met from thy countrymen notwithstanding.”

“ Fair Sir,” answered Harold, “ pardon us if, jealous of our laws, we have seemed inhospitable to those who would meddle with them. But the Saxon is never more pleased than when the foreigner visits him only as the friend: to the many who settle amongst us for commerce—Fleming, Lombard, German, and Saracen—we proffer shelter and welcome ; to the few who, like thee, Sir Norman, venture over the seas but to serve us, we give frank cheer and free hand.”

Agreeably surprised at this gracious reception from the son of Godwin, the Norman pressed the hand extended to him, and then drew forth a small case, and related accurately, and with feeling, the meeting of his cousin with Sweyn, and Sweyn’s dying charge.

The Earl listened, with eyes bent on the ground,

and face turned from the lamp; and, when Mallet had concluded his recital, Harold said, with an emotion he struggled in vain to repress—

“ I thank you cordially, gentle Norman, for kindness kindly rendered! I—I—” The voice faltered. “ Sweyn was very dear to me in his sorrows! We heard that he had died in Lycia, and grieved much and long. So, after he had thus spoken to your cousin, He—he——Alas! O Sweyn, my brother!”

“ He died,” said the Norman, soothingly; “ but shriven and absolved; and my cousin says, calm and hopeful, as they die ever who have knelt at the Saviour’s tomb!”

Harold bowed his head, and turned the case that held the letter again and again in his hand, but would not venture to open it. The knight himself, touched by a grief so simple and manly; rose with the delicate instinct that belongs to sympathy, and retired to the door, without which yet waited the officer who had conducted him.

Harold did not attempt to detain him, but followed him across the threshold, and briefly com-

manding the officer to attend to his guest as to himself, said—"With the morning, Sire de Gravelle, we shall meet again; I see that you are one to whom I need not excuse man's natural emotions."

"A noble presence!" muttered the knight, as he descended the stairs; "but he hath Norman, at least Norse blood in his veins on the distaff side.—Fair Sir!"—(this aloud to the officer)—"any meat save the kid-flesh, I pray thee; and any drink save the mead!"

"Fear not, guest," said the officer; "for Tostig the Earl hath two ships in yon bay, and hath sent us supplies that would please Bishop William of London; for Tostig the Earl is a toothsome man."

"Commend me, then, to Tostig the Earl," said the knight; "he is an earl after my own heart."

CHAPTER II.

ON re-entering the room, Harold drew the large bolt across the door, opened the case, and took forth the distained and tattered scroll:—

“ When this comes to thee, Harold, the brother of thy childish days will sleep in the flesh, and be lost to men’s judgment and earth’s woe in the spirit. I have knelt at the Tomb; but no dove hath come forth from the cloud,—no stream of grace hath re-baptized the child of wrath! They tell me, now — monk and priest tell me — that I have atoned all my sins; that the dread weregeld is paid; that I may enter the world of men with a spirit free from the load, and a name redeemed from the stain. Think so, O brother!—Bid my father (if still he lives, the dear old man!) think so;—tell Githa to think it;—and oh, teach Haco, my son, to hold the belief as a truth! Harold, again I commend to thee my son; be to him as

a father! My death surely releases him as a hostage. Let him not grow up in the court of the stranger, in the land of our foes. Let his feet, in his youth, climb the green holts of England;—let his eyes, ere sin dims them, drink the blue of her skies! When this shall reach thee, thou, in thy calm, effortless strength, wilt be more great than Godwin our father. Power came to him with travail and through toil, the geld of craft and of force. Power is born to thee as strength to the strong man; it gathers around thee as thou movest; it is not thine aim, it is thy nature, to be great. Shield my child with thy might; lead him forth from the prison-house by thy serene right hand! I ask not for lordships and earldoms, as the appanage of his father; train him not to be rival to thee:—I ask but for freedom, and English air! So counting on thee, O Harold, I turn my face to the wall, and hush my wild heart to peace!”

The scroll dropped noiseless from Harold's hand.

“Thus,” said he, mournfully, “hath passed away, less a life than a dream! Yet of Sweyn, in our childhood, was Godwin most proud; who so lovely in peace, and so terrible in wrath? My

mother taught him the songs of the Baltic, and Hilda led his steps through the woodland with tales of hero and scald. Alone of our House, he had the gift of the Dane in the flow of fierce song, and for him things lifeless had being. Stately tree, from which all the birds of heaven sent their carol; where the falcon took roost, whence the mavis flew forth in its glee,—how art thou blasted and seared, bough and core!—smit by the lightning and consumed by the worm!”

He paused, and, though none were by, he long shaded his brow with his hand.

“Now,” thought he, as he rose, and slowly paced the chamber, “now to what lives yet on earth—his son? Often hath my mother urged me in behalf of these hostages; and often have I sent to reclaim them. Smooth and false pretexts have met my own demand, and even the remonstrance of Edward himself. But surely, now that William hath permitted this Norman to bring over the letter, he will assent to what it hath become a wrong and an insult to refuse; and Haco will return to his father’s land, and Wolnoth to his mother’s arms.”

CHAPTER III.

MESSIRE MALLET DE GRAVILLE, (as becomes a man bred up to arms, and snatching sleep with quick grasp whenever that blessing be his to command,) no sooner laid his head on the pallet to which he had been consigned, than his eyes closed, and his senses were deaf even to dreams. But at the dead of the midnight he was wakened by sounds that might have roused the Seven Sleepers—shouts, cries, and yells, the blast of horns, the tramp of feet, and the more distant roar of hurrying multitudes. He leaped from his bed, and the whole chamber was filled with a lurid blood-red air. His first thought was that the fort was on fire. But springing upon the settle along the wall, and looking through the loophole of the tower, it seemed as if not the fort but the whole land was

one flame, and through the glowing atmosphere he beheld all the ground, near and far, swarming with men. Hundreds were swimming the rivulet, clambering up the dyke mounds, rushing on the levelled spears of the defenders, breaking through line and palisade, pouring into the enclosures; some in half-armour of helm and corslet—others in linen tunics—many almost naked. Loud, sharp shrieks of “Alleluia!”* blended with those of “Out! out! Holy crosse!”† He divined at once that the Welch were storming the Saxon hold. Short time indeed sufficed for that active knight to case himself in his mail; and, sword in hand, he burst through the door, cleared the stairs, and

* When (A.D. 220) the Bishops, Germanicus, and Lupus, headed the Britons, against the Picts and Saxons, in Easter week, fresh from their baptism in the Alyn, Germanicus ordered them to attend to his war cry, and repeat it; he gave “Alleluia.” The hills so loudly re-echoed the cry, that the enemy caught panic, and fled with great slaughter. Maes Garmon, in Flintshire, was the scene of the victory.

† The cry of the English at the onset of battle was “Holy Crosse, God Almighty;” afterwards in fight, “Ouet, ouet,” out, out.—HEARNES’ *Disc. Antiquity of Motts*.

The latter cry, probably, originated in the habit of defending their standard and central post with barricades and closed shields; and thus, idiomatically and vulgarly, signified “get out.”

gained the hall below, which was filled with men arming in haste.

“Where is Harold?” he exclaimed.

“On the trenches already,” answered Sexwolf, buckling his corslet of hide. “This Welch hell hath broke loose.”

“And yon are their beacon fires? Then the whole land is upon us!”

“Prate less,” quoth Sexwolf; “those are the hills now held by the warders of Harold: our spies gave them notice, and the watchfires prepared us ere the fiends came in sight, otherwise we had been lying here limbless or headless. Now, men, draw up, and march forth.”

“Hold! Hold!” cried the pious knight, crossing himself, “is there no priest here to bless us? first a prayer and a psalm!”

“Prayer and psalm!” cried Sexwolf astonished, “an thou hadst said ale and mead, I could have understood thee.—Out! Out!—Holyrood, Holyrood!”

“The godless paynims!” muttered the Norman, borne away with the crowd.

Once in the open space, the scene was terrific.

Brief as had been the onslaught, the carnage was already unspeakable. By dint of sheer physical numbers, animated by a valour that seemed as the frenzy of madmen or the hunger of wolves, hosts of the Britons had crossed trench and stream, seizing with their hands the points of the spears opposed to them, bounding over the corpses of their countrymen, and with yells of wild joy rushing upon the close serried lines drawn up before the fort. The stream seemed literally to run gore; pierced by javelins and arrows, corpses floated and vanished, while numbers, undeterred by the havoc, leaped into the waves from the opposite banks. Like bears that surround the ship of a sea-king beneath the polar meteors, or the midnight sun of the north, came the savage warriors through that glaring atmosphere.

Amidst all, two forms were pre-eminent: the one, tall and towering, stood by the trench, and behind a banner, that now drooped round the stave, now streamed wide and broad, stirred by the rush of men—for the night in itself was breezeless. With a vast Danish axe wielded by both hands, stood this man, confronting hundreds,

and at each stroke, rapid as the levin, fell foe. All round him was a wall of his own—dead.

But in the centre of the space, leading on a fresh troop of shouting Welchmen who had forced their way from another part, was a form which seemed charmed against arrow and spear. For the defensive arms of this chief were as slight as if worn but for ornament: a small circlet of gold covered only the centre of his breast, a gold collar of twisted wires circled his throat, and a gold bracelet adorned his bicep arm, dropping gore, not his own, from the wrist to the elbow. He was small and slight-shaped, below the common standard of men—but he seemed as one made a giant by the sublime inspiration of war. He wore no helmet, merely a gold circlet; and his hair, of deep red (longer than was usual with the Welsh), hung like the mane of a lion over his shoulders, tossing loose with every stride. His eyes glared like the tiger's at night, and he leaped on the spears with a bound. For a moment amidst hostile ranks, save by the sparkle and glitter of his short sword, he made, amidst

a path for himself and his followers, and emerged from the heart of the steel unscathed and loud-breathing; while, round the line he had broken, wheeled and closed his wild men, striking, rushing, slaying, slain.

“*Pardex*, this is war worth the sharing,” said the knight. “And now, worthy Sexwolf, thou shalt see if the Norman is the vaunter thou deemest him. *Dieu nous aide! Notre Dame!*—Take the foe in the rear.” But turning round, he perceived that Sexwolf had already led his men towards the standard, which shewed them where stood the Earl, almost alone in his peril. The knight, thus left to himself, did not hesitate:—a minute more, and he was in the midst of the Welch force, headed by the chief with the golden panoply. Secure in his ring mail against the light weapons of the Welch, the sweep of the Norman sword was as the scythe of Death. Right and left he smote through the throng which he took in the flank, and had almost gained the small phalanx of Saxons, that lay firm in the midst, when the Cymrian Chief’s flashing eye was drawn to this new and strange foe, by the roar and the groan round the

Norman's way; and with the half-naked breast against the shirt of mail, and the short Roman sword against the long Norman falchion, the Lion King of Wales fronted the knight.

Unequal as seems the encounter, so quick was the spring of the Briton, so pliant his arm, and so rapid his weapon, that that good knight (who, rather from skill and valour than brute physical strength, ranked amongst the prowest of William's band of martial brothers) would willingly have preferred to see before him Fitzosborne or Montgomeri, all clad in steel and armed with mace and lance, than parried those dazzling strokes, and fronted the angry majesty of that helmless brow. Already the strong rings of his mail had been twice pierced, and his blood trickled fast, while his great sword had but smitten the air in its sweeps at the foe; when the Saxon phalanx, taking advantage of the breach in the ring that girt them, caused by this diversion, and recognising with fierce ire the gold torque and breastplate of the Welch King, made their desperate charge. Then for some minutes the *pêle mêle* was confused and indis-

tinct—blows blind and at random—death coming no man knew whence or how ; till discipline and steadfast order, (which the Saxons kept, as by mechanism, through the discord) obstinately prevailed. The wedge forced its way ; and, though reduced in numbers and sore wounded, the Saxon troop cleared the ring, and joined the main force drawn up by the fort, and guarded in the rear by its wall.

Meanwhile Harold, supported by the band under Sexwolf, had succeeded at length in repelling farther reinforcements of the Welch at the more accessible part of the trenches ; and casting now his practised eye over the field, he issued orders for some of the men to regain the fort, and open from the battlements, and from every loophole, the batteries of stone and javelin, which then (with the Saxons, unskilled in sieges,) formed the main artillery of forts. These orders given, he planted Sexwolf and most of his band to keep watch round the trenches ; and shading his eye with his hand, and looking towards the moon, all waning and dimmed in the watchfires, he said calmly, “ Now patience fights for us. Ere the moon reaches yon hill-top,

the troops at Aber and Caer hên will be on the slopes of Penmaen, and cut off the retreat of the Walloons. Advance my flag to the thick of yon strife."

But as the Earl, with his axe swung over his shoulder, and followed but by some half-score or more with his banner, strode on where the wild war was now mainly concentrated, just midway between trench and fort, Gryffyth caught sight both of the banner and the Earl, and left the press at the very moment when he had gained the greatest advantage; and when indeed, but for the Norman, who, wounded as he was, and unused to fight on foot, stood resolute in the van, the Saxons, wearied out by numbers, and falling fast beneath the javelins, would have fled into their walls, and so sealed their fate,—for the Welch would have entered at their heels.

But it was the misfortune of the Welch heroes never to learn that war is a science; and instead of now centering all force on the point most weakened, the whole field vanished from the fierce eye of the Welch king, when he saw the banner and form of Harold.

The Earl beheld the coming foe, wheeling round, as the hawk on the heron;—halted, drew up his few men in a semicircle, with their large shields as a rampart, and their levelled spears as a palisade; and before them all, as a tower, stood Harold with his axe. In a minute more he was surrounded; and through the rain of javelins that poured upon him, hissed and glittered the sword of Gryffyth. But Harold, more practised than the Sire de Graville in the sword-play of the Welch, and unencumbered by other defensive armour (save only the helm, which was shaped like the Norman's,) than his light coat of hide, opposed quickness to quickness, and suddenly dropping his axe, sprang upon his foe, and clasping him round with the left arm, with the right hand griped at his throat,—

“Yield, and quarter!—yield, for thy life, son of Llewellyn!”

Strong was that embrace, and deathlike that gripe; yet, as the snake from the hand of the dervise—as a ghost from the grasp of the dreamer, the lithe Cymrian glided away, and the broken torque was all that remained in the clutch of Harold.

At this moment a mighty yell of despair broke from the Welch near the fort : stones and javelins rained upon them from the walls, and the fierce Norman was in the midst, with his sword drinking blood ; but not for javelin, stone, and sword, shrank and shouted the Welchmen. On the other side of the trenches were marching against them their own countrymen, the rival tribes that helped the stranger to rend the land ; and far to the right were seen the spears of the Saxon from Aber, and to the left was heard the shout of the forces under Godrith from Caer hên ; and they who had sought the leopard in his lair were now themselves the prey caught in the toils. With new heart, as they beheld these reinforcements, the Saxons pressed on ; tumult, and flight, and indiscriminate slaughter, wrapped the field. The Welch rushed to the stream and the trenches ; and in the bustle and hurlabaloo, Gryffyth was swept along, as a bull by a torrent ; still facing the foe, now chiding, now smiting his own men, now rushing alone on the pursuers, and halting their onslaught, he gained, still unwounded, the stream, paused a moment,

laughed loud, and sprang into the wave. A hundred javelins hissed into the sullen and bloody waters. "Hold!" cried Harold the Earl, lifting his hand on high, "No dastard dart at the brave!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE fugitive Britons, scarce one-tenth of the number that had first rushed to the attack,—performed their flight with the same Parthian rapidity that characterized the assault; and escaping both Welch foe and Saxon, though the former broke ground to pursue them, they regained the steeps of Penmaen.

There was no further thought of slumber that night within the walls. While the wounded were tended, and the dead were cleared from the soil, Harold, with three of his chiefs, and Mallet de Graville, whose feats rendered it more than ungracious to refuse his request that he might assist in the council, conferred upon the means of terminating the war with the next day. Two of the thegns, their blood hot with strife and revenge,

proposed to scale the mountain with the whole force the reinforcements had brought them, and put all they found to the sword.

The third, old and prudent, and inured to Welch warfare, thought otherwise.

“None of us,” said he, “know what is the true strength of the place which ye propose to storm. Not even one Welchman have we found who hath ever himself gained the summit, or examined the castle which is said to exist there.”*

“Said!” echoed de Graville, who, relieved of his mail, and with his wounds bandaged, reclined on his furs on the floor. “Said, noble sir! Cannot our eyes perceive the towers?”

The old thegn shook his head. “At a distance, and through mists, stones loom large, and crags themselves take strange shapes. It may be castle, may be rock, may be old roofless temples of heathenesse that we see. But to repeat (and, as I am slow, I pray not again to be put out in my speech)—none of us know what, there, exists

* Certain high places in Wales, of which this might well be one, were held so sacred, that even the dwellers in the immediate neighbourhood never presumed to approach them.

of defence, man-made or Nature-built. Not even thy Welch spies, son of Godwin, have gained to the heights. In the midst lie the scouts of the Welch king, and those on the top can see the bird fly, the goat climb. Few of thy spies, indeed, have ever returned with life; their heads have been left at the foot of the hill, with the scroll in their lips—‘*Dic ad inferos—quid in superis novisti.*’ Tell to the shades below what thou hast seen in the heights above.”

“And the Walloons know Latin!” muttered the knight; “I respect them!”

The slow thegn frowned, stammered, and renewed—

“One thing at least is clear, that the rock is well-nigh insurmountable to those who know not the passes; that strict watch, baffling even Welch spies, is kept night and day; that the men on the summit are desperate and fierce; that our own troops are awed and terrified by the belief of the Welch, that the spot is haunted and the towers fiend-founded. One single defeat may lose us two years of victory. Gryffyth may break from the eyrie, regain what he hath lost, win back

our Welch allies, ever faithless and hollow. Wherefore, I say, go on as we have begun. Beset all the country round; cut off all supplies, and let the foe rot by famine—or waste, as he hath done this night, his strength by vain onslaught and sally.”

“Thy counsel is good,” said Harold, “but there is yet something to add to it, which may shorten the strife, and gain the end with less sacrifice of life. The defeat of to-night will have humbled the spirits of the Welch; take them yet in the hour of despair and disaster. I wish, therefore, to send to their outposts a nuncius, with these terms—‘Life and pardon to all who lay down arms and surrender.’”

“What, after such havoc and gore?” cried one of the thegns.

“They defend their own soil,” replied the Earl simply: “had not we done the same?”

“But the rebel Gryffyth?” asked the old thegn, “thou canst not accept *him* again as crowned sub-king of Edward?”

“No,” said the Earl, “I propose to exempt Gryffyth alone from the pardon, with promise,

natheless, of life, if he give himself up as prisoner; and count, without further condition, on the king's mercy." There was a prolonged silence. None spoke against the Earl's proposal, though the two younger thegns disliked it much.

At last said the elder, "But hast thou thought who will carry this message? Fierce and wild are yon blood-dogs; and man must needs shrive soul and make will, if he go to their kennel."

"I feel sure that my bode will be safe," answered Harold; "for Gryffyth has all the pride of a king, and, sparing neither man nor child in the onslaught, will respect what the Roman taught his sires to respect—envoy from chief to chief—as a head scatheless and sacred."

"Choose whom thou wilt, Harold," said one of the young thegns, laughing, "but spare thy friends; and whomsoever thou chooseth, pay his widow the weregeld."

"Fair Sirs," then said De Graville, "if ye think that I, though a stranger, could serve you as nuncius, it would be a pleasure to me to undertake this mission. First, because, being curious

as concerns forts and castles, I would fain see if mine eyes have deceived me in taking yon towers for a hold of great might. Secondly, because that same wild cat of a king must have a court rare to visit. And the only reflection that withholds my pressing the offer as a personal suit, is, that though I have some words of the Breton jargon at my tongue's need, I cannot pretend to be a Tully in Welch; howbeit, since it seems that one, at least, among them knows something of Latin, I doubt not but what I shall get out my meaning!"

"Nay, as to that, Sire de Graville," said Harold, who seemed well pleased with the knight's offer, "there shall be no hindrance or let, as I will make clear to you; and in spite of what you have just heard, Gryffyth shall harm you not in limb or in life. But, kindly and courteous Sir, will your wounds permit the journey, not long, but steep and laborious, and only to be made on foot?"

"On foot!" said the knight, a little staggered, "*Pardex!* well and truly, I did not count upon that!"

"Enough," said Harold, turning away in evident disappointment, "think of it no more."

“Nay, by your leave, what I have once said I stand to,” returned the knight; “albeit, you may as well cleave in two one of those respectable centaurs of which we have read in our youth, as part Norman and horse. I will forthwith go to my chamber, and apparel myself becomingly—not forgetting, in case of the worst, to wear my mail under my robe. Vouchsafe me but an armourer, just to rivet up the rings through which scratched so felinely the paw of that well-appelled *Griffin*.”

“I accept your offer frankly,” said Harold, “and all shall be prepared for you, as soon as you yourself will re-seek me here.”

The knight rose, and though somewhat stiff and smarting with his wounds, left the room lightly, summoned his armourer and squire, and having dressed with all the care and pomp habitual to a Norman, his gold chain round his neck, and his vest stiff with broidery, he re-entered the apartment of Harold. The Earl received him alone, and came up to him with a cordial face. “I thank thee more, brave Norman, than I ventured to say before my thegns, for I tell thee

frankly, that my intent and aim are to save the life of this brave king; and thou canst well understand that every Saxon amongst us must have his blood warmed by contest, and his eyes blind with national hate. You alone, as a stranger, see the valiant warrior and hunted prince, and as such you can feel for him the noble pity of manly foes."

"That is true," said De Graville, a little surprised, "though we Normans are at least as fierce as you Saxons, when we have once tasted blood; and I own nothing would please me better than to dress that catamaran in mail, put a spear in its claws, and a horse under its legs, and thus fight out my disgrace at being so clawed and mauled by its *griffes*. And though I respect a brave knight in distress, I can scarce extend my compassion to a thing that fights against all rule, martial and kingly."

The Earl smiled gravely. "It is the mode in which his ancestors rushed on the spears of Cæsar. Pardon him."

"I pardon him, at your gracious request," quoth the knight, with a grand air, and waiving his hand; "say on."

“ You will proceed with a Welch monk—whom, though not of the faction of Gryffyth, all Welchmen respect—to the mouth of a frightful pass, skirting the river; the monk will bear aloft the holy rood in signal of peace. Arrived at that pass, you will doubtless be stopped. The monk here will be spokesman; and ask safe-conduct to Gryffyth to deliver my message, he will also bear certain tokens, which will no doubt win the way for you.

“ Arrived before Gryffyth, the monk will accost him; mark and heed well his gestures, since thou wilt know not the Welch tongue he employs. And when he raises the rood, thou,—in the meanwhile, having artfully approached close to Gryffyth,—wilt whisper in Saxon, which he well understands, and pressing the ring I now give thee into his hand, ‘ Obey, by this pledge; thou knowest Harold is true, and thy head is sold by thine own people.’ If he ask more, thou knowest nought.”

“ So far, this is as should be from chief to chief,” said the Norman, touched, “ and thus had Fitzosborne done to his foe. I thank thee for this

mission, and the more that thou hast not asked me to note the strength of the bulwark, and number the men that may keep it."

Again Harold smiled. "Praise me not for this, noble Norman—we plain Saxons have not your refinements. If ye are led to the summit, which I think ye will not be, the monk at least will have eyes to see, and tongue to relate. But to thee I confide this much;—I know, already, that Gryf-fyth's strongholds are not his walls and his towers, but the superstition of our men, and the despair of his own. I could win those heights, as I have won heights as cloudeapt, but with fearful loss of my own troops, and the massacre of every foe. Both I would spare, if I may."

"Yet thou hast not shown such value for life, in the solitudes I passed," said the knight bluntly.

Harold turned pale, but said firmly, "Sire de Graville, a stern thing is duty, and resistless is its voice. These Welchmen, unless curbed to their mountains, eat into the strength of England, as the tide gnaws into a shore. Merciless were they in their ravages on our borders, and ghastly and torturing their fell revenge. But it is one thing

to grapple with a foe fierce and strong, and another to smite when his power is gone, fang and talon. And when I see before me the fated king of a great race, and the last band of doomed heroes, too few and too feeble to make head against my arms,—when the land is already my own, and the sword is that of the deathsman, not of the warrior,—verily, Sir Norman, duty releases its iron tool, and man becomes man again.”

“I go,” said the Norman, inclining his head low as to his own great Duke, and turning to the door; yet there he paused, and looking at the ring which he had placed on his finger, he said, “But one word more, if not indiscreet—your answer may help argument, if argument be needed. What tale lies hid in this token?”

Harold coloured and paused a moment, then answered,—

“Simply this. Gryffyth’s wife, the lady Aldyth, a Saxon by birth, fell into my hands. We were storming Rhadlan, at the farther end of the isle; she was there. We war not against women; I feared the licence of my own soldiers, and I sent the lady to Gryffyth. Aldyth gave me this ring

on parting; and I bade her tell Gryffyth that whenever, at the hour of his last peril and sorest need, I sent that ring back to him, he might hold it the pledge of his life."

"Is this lady, think you, in the stronghold with her lord?"

"I am not sure, but I fear yes," answered Harold.

"Yet one word: And if Gryffyth refuse, despite all warning?"

Harold's eyes drooped.

"If so, he dies; but not by the Saxon sword. God and our lady speed you!"

CHAPTER V.

ON the height called Pen-y-Dinas (or "Head of the City,") forming one of the summits of Pen-maen-mawr, and in the heart of that supposed fortress which no eye in the Saxon camp had surveyed,* reclined Gryffyth, the hunted king. Nor is it marvellous that at that day there should be disputes as to the nature and strength of the supposed bulwark, since, in times the most recent, and among antiquaries the most learned, the greatest discrepancies exist, not only as to theoretical opinion, but plain matter of observation, and simple measurement.* The place, however, I need scarcely say, was not as we see it now, with its foundations of gigantic ruin, affording ample space for conjecture; yet, even then, a wreck

* See Note (B) at the end of the Volume.

as of Titans, its date and purpose were lost in remote antiquity.

The central area (in which the Welch king now reclined), formed an oval barrow of loose stones : whether so left from the origin, or the relics of some vanished building, was unknown even to bard and diviner. Round this space were four strong circumvallations of loose stones, with a space about eighty yards between each ; the walls themselves generally about eight feet wide, but of various height, as the stones had fallen by time and blast. Along these walls rose numerous and almost countless circular buildings, which might pass for towers, though only a few had been recently and rudely roofed in. To the whole of this quadruple enclosure there was but one narrow entrance, now left open as if in scorn of assault ; and a winding narrow pass down the mountain, with innumerable curves, alone led to the single threshold. Far down the hill, walls again were visible ; and the whole surface of the steep soil, more than half way in the descent, was heaped with vast loose stones, as if the bones of a dead city. But beyond the innermost enclosure of the

fort (if fort, or sacred enclosure, be the correcter name), rose, thick and frequent, other mementos of the Briton; many cromlechs, already shattered and shapeless; the ruins of stone houses; and high over all, those upraised, mighty amber piles, as at Stonehenge, once reared, if our dim learning be true, in honour to Bel, or Bâl-Huan,* the idol of the sun. All, in short, showed that the name of the place, "the Head of the City," told its tale; all announced that, there, once the Celt had his home, and the gods of the Druid their worship. And musing amidst these skeletons of the past, lay the doomed son of Pen Dragon.

Beside him a kind of throne had been raised with stones, and over it was spread a tattered and faded velvet pall. On this throne sat Aldyth the Queen; and about the royal pair was still that mockery of a court which the jealous pride of the Celt king retained amidst all the horrors of carnage and famine. Most of the officers, indeed (originally in number twenty-four), whose duties attached them to the king and queen of the Cymry, were already feeding the crow or the worm. But

* See Note (C,) at the end of the volume.

still, with gaunt hawk on his wrist, the penhebo-gydd (grand falconer) stood at a distance ; still, with beard sweeping his breast, and rod in hand, leant against a projecting shaft of the wall, the noiseless gosdegwr, whose duty it was to command silence in the king's hall ; and still the penbard bent over his bruised harp, which once had thrilled, through the fair vaults of Caerleon and Rhadlan, in high praise of God, and the King, and the Hero Dead. In the pomp of gold-dish and vessel* the board was spread on the stones for the king and queen ; and on the dish was the last fragment of black bread, and in the vessel, full and clear, the water from the spring.

* The Welch seem to have had a profusion of the precious metals, very disproportioned to the scarcity of their coined money. To say nothing of the torques, bracelets, and even breastplates of gold, common with their numerous chiefs, their laws affix to offences penalties which attest the prevalent waste both of gold and silver. Thus, an insult to a sub-king of Aberfraw, is atoned by a silver rod as thick as the King's little finger, which is in length to reach from the ground to his mouth when sitting ; and a gold cup, with a cover as broad as the king's face, and the thickness of a ploughman's nail, or the shell of a goose's egg. I suspect that it was precisely because the Welch coined little or no money, that the metals they possessed became thus common in domestic use. Gold would have been more rarely seen, even amongst the Peruvians, had they coined it into money.

that bubbled up everlastingly through the bones of the dead city.

Beyond this innermost space, round a basin of rock, through which the stream overflowed as from an artificial conduit, lay the wounded and exhausted, crawling, turn by turn, to the lips of the basin, and happy that the thirst of fever saved them from the gnawing desire of food. A wan and spectral figure glided listlessly to and fro amidst those mangled and parched, and dying groups. This personage, in happier times, filled the office of physician to the court, and was placed twelfth in rank amidst the chiefs of the household. And for cure of the "three deadly wounds," the cloven skull, or the gaping viscera, or the broken limb (all three classed alike), large should have been his fee.* But feeless went he now from man to man, with his red ointment and his muttered charm; and those over whom he shook his lean face and matted locks, smiled ghastly at that sign that release and death were near. Within the enclosures, either lay supine, or stalked restless, the withered remains of the wild army. A sheep,

* *Leges Wallicæ.*

and a horse, and a dog, were yet left them all to share for the day's meal. And the fire of flickering and crackling brushwood burned bright from a hollow amidst the loose stones; but the animals were yet unslain, and the dog crept by the fire, winking at it with dim eyes.

But over the lower part of the wall nearest to the barrow, leant three men. The wall there was so broken, that they could gaze over it on that grotesque yet dismal court; and the eyes of the three men, with a fierce and a wolfish glare were bent on Gryffyth.

Three princes were they of the great old line; far as Gryffyth they traced the fabulous honours of their race, to Hu-Gadarn and Prydain, and each thought it shame that Gryffyth should be lord over him! Each had had throne and court of his own; each his "white palace" of peeled willow wands—poor substitutes, O kings, for the palaces and towers that the arts of Rome had bequeathed your fathers! And each had been subjugated by the son of Llewellyn, when, in his day of might, he reunited under his sole sway all the multiform principalities of Wales, and re-

gained, for a moment's splendour, the throne of Roderic the Great.

"Is it," said Owain, in a hollow whisper, "for yon man, whom heaven hath deserted, who could not keep his very torque from the gripe of the Saxon, that we are to die on these hills, gnawing the flesh from our bones? Think ye not the hour is come?"

"The hour will come, when the sheep, and the horse, and the dog are devoured," replied Modred, "and when the whole force, as one man, will cry to Gryffyth, '*Thou a king!—give us bread!*'"

"It is well," said the third, an old man, leaning on a wand of solid silver, while the mountain wind, sweeping between the walls, played with the rags of his robe,—“it is well that the night's sally, less of war than of hunger, was foiled even of forage and food. Had the saints been with Gryffyth, who had dared to keep faith with Tostig the Saxon?"

Owain laughed, a laugh hollow and false.

"Art thou Cymrian, and talkest of faith with a Saxon? Faith with the spoiler, the ravisher and butcher? But a Cymrian keeps faith with

revenge ; and Gryffyth's trunk should be still crownless and headless, though Tostig had never proffered the barter of safety and food. Hist ! Gryffyth wakes from the black dream, and his eyes glow from under his hair."

And indeed at this moment the King raised himself on his elbow, and looked round with a haggard and fierce despair in his glittering eyes.

"Play to us, Harper; sing some song of the deeds of old!"

The bard mournfully strove to sweep the harp, but the chords were broken, and the note came discordant and shrill as the sigh of a wailing fiend.

"O King!" said the bard, "the music hath left the harp."

"Ha!" murmured Gryffyth, "and Hope the earth! Bard, answer the son of Llewyllyn. Oft in my halls hast thou sung the praise of the men that have been. In the halls of the race to come, will bards yet unborn sweep their harps to the deeds of thy King? Shall they tell of the day of Torques, by Llyn-Afange, when the princes of Powys fled from his sword as the clouds from the blast of the wind? Shall they sing, as the Hirlas

goes round, of his steeds of the sea, when no flag came in sight of his prows between the dark isle of the Druid* and the green pastures of Huerdan?† Or the towns that he fired, on the lands of the Saxon, when Rolf and the Northmen ran fast from his javelin and spear? Or say, Child of Truth, if all that is told of Gryffyth thy King shall be his woe and his shame?"

The bard swept his hand over his eyes, and answered—

“Bards unborn shall sing of Gryffyth the son of Llewellyn. But the song shall not dwell on the pomp of his power, when twenty sub-kings knelt at his throne, and his beacon was lighted in the holds of the Norman and Saxon. Bards shall sing of the hero, who fought every inch of crag and morass in the front of his men,—and on the heights of Penmaen-mawr, Fame recovers thy crown!”

“Then I have lived as my fathers in life, and shall live with their glory in death!” said Gryffyth; “and so the shadow hath passed from my soul.” Then turning round, still propped upon

* Mona, or Anglesea.

† Ireland.

his elbow, he fixed his proud eye upon Aldyth, and said gravely, "Wife, pale is thy face, and gloomy thy brow: mournest thou the throne or the man?"

Aldyth cast on her wild lord a look of more terror than compassion, a look without the grief that is gentle, or the love that reveres; and answered—

"What matter to thee my thoughts or my sufferings? The sword or the famine is the doom thou hast chosen. Listening to vague dreams from thy bard, or thine own pride as idle, thou disdainest life for us both: be it so; let us die!"

A strange blending of fondness and wrath troubled the pride on Gryffyth's features, uncouth and half savage as they were, but still noble and kingly.

"And what terror of death, if thou lovest me?" said he.

Aldyth shivered and turned aside. The unhappy king gazed hard on that face, which, despite sore trial and recent exposure to rough wind and weather, still retained the proverbial beauty of the Saxon women—but beauty without the glow of

the heart, as a landscape from which sunlight has vanished ;—and as he gazed, the colour went and came fitfully over his swarthy cheeks, whose hue contrasted the blue of his eye, and the red tawny gold of his shaggy hair.

“Thou wouldst have me,” he said at length, “send to Harold thy countryman ; thou wouldst have me, *me*—rightful lord of all Britain—beg for mercy, and sue for life. Ah, traitress, and child of robber-sires, fair as Rowena art thou, but no Vortimer am I ! Thou turnest in loathing from the lord whose marriage-gift was a crown ; and the sleek form of thy Saxon Harold rises up through the clouds of the carnage.”

All the fierce and dangerous jealousy of man’s most human passion—when man loves and hates in a breath—trembled in the Cymrian’s voice, and fired his troubled eye ; for Aldyth’s pale cheek blushed like the rose, but she folded her arms haughtily on her breast, and made no reply.

“No,” said Gryffyth, grinding teeth, white* and

* The Welch were then, and still are, remarkable for the beauty of their teeth. Giraldus Cambrensis observes, as something very extraordinary, that *they cleaned them*.

strong as those of a young hound. “No, Harold in vain sent me the casket; the jewel was gone. In vain thy form returned to my side; thy heart was away with thy captor: and not to save my life (were I so base as to seek it), but to see once more the face of him to whom this cold hand, in whose veins no pulse answers my own, had been given, if thy House had consulted its daughter, wouldst thou have me crouch like a lashed dog at the feet of my foe! Oh shame! shame! shame! Oh worst perfidy of all! Oh sharp—sharper than Saxon sword or serpent’s tooth, is—is—”

Tears gushed to those fierce eyes, and the proud king dared not trust to his voice.

Aldyth rose coldly. “Slay me if thou wilt—not insult me. I have said, ‘Let us die!’”

With these words, and vouchsafing no look on her lord, she moved away towards the largest tower or cell, in which the single and rude chamber it contained had been set apart for her.

Gryffyth’s eye followed her, softening gradually as her form receded, till lost to his sight. And then that peculiar household love, which in uncultivated breasts often survives trust and esteem, rushed

back on his rough heart, and weakened it, as woman only can weaken the strong to whom Death is a thought of scorn.

He signed to his bard, who, during the conference between wife and lord, had retired to a distance, and said, with a writhing attempt to smile—

“Was there truth, thinkest thou, in the legend, that Guenever was false to King Arthur?”

“No,” answered the bard, divining his lord’s thought, “for Guenever survived not the King, and they were buried side by side in the Vale of Avallon.”

“Thou art wise in the lore of the heart, and love hath been thy study from youth to grey hairs. Is it love, is it hate, that prefers death for the loved one, to the thought of her life as another’s?”

A look of the tenderest compassion passed over the bard’s wan face, but vanished in reverence, as he bowed his head and answered—

“O King, who shall say what note the wind calls from the harp, or what impulse love wakes in the soul—now soft and now stern? But,” he

added, raising his form, and with a dread calm on his brow, "but the love of a king brooks no thought of dishonour: and she who hath laid her head on his breast should sleep in his grave."

"Thou wilt outlive me," said Gryffyth, abruptly. "This can be my tomb!"

"And if so," said the bard, "thou shalt sleep not alone. In this can what thou lovest best shall be buried by thy side; the bard shall raise his song over thy grave, and the bosses of shields shall be placed at intervals, as rises and falls the sound of song. Over the grave of *two* shall a new mound arise, and we will bid the mound speak to others in the far days to come. But distant yet be the hour when the mighty shall be laid low! and the tongue of thy bard may yet chant the rush of the lion from the toils and the spears. Hope still!"

Gryffyth, for answer, leant on the harper's shoulder, and pointed silently to the sea, that lay lake-like at the distance, dark studded with the Saxon fleet. Then turning, his hand stretched over the forms that, hollow-eyed and ghost-like, flitted

between the walls, or lay dying, but mute, around the water-spring. The hand then dropped, and rested on the hilt of his sword.

At this moment there was a sudden commotion at the outer entrance of the wall; the crowd gathered to one spot, and there was a loud hum of voices. In a few moments one of the Welch scouts came into the enclosure, and the chiefs of the royal tribes followed him to the carn on which the King stood.

“Of what tellest thou?” said Gryffyth, resuming on the instant all the royalty of his bearing.

“At the mouth of the pass,” said the scout, kneeling, “there are a monk bearing the holy rood, and a chief, unarmed. And the monk is Evan, the Cymrian, of Gwentland; and the chief, by his voice, seemeth not to be Saxon. The monk bade me give thee these tokens” (and the scout displayed the broken torque which the King had left in the grasp of Harold, together with a live falcon belled and blinded), “and bade me say thus to the King, — ‘Harold the Earl greets Gryffyth son of Llewellyn, and sends him, in proof of goodwill, the richest prize he hath ever won

from a foe ; and a hawk, from Llandudno ;—that bird which chief and equal give to equal and chief. And he prays Gryffyth, son of Llewellyn, for the sake of his realm and his people, to grant hearing to his nuncios.’”

A murmur broke from the chiefs—a murmur of joy and surprise from all, save the three conspirators, who interchanged anxious and fiery glances. Gryffyth’s hand had already closed, while he uttered a cry that seemed of rapture, on the collar of gold ; for the loss of that collar had stung him, perhaps, more than the loss of the crown of all Wales. And his heart, so generous and large, amidst all its rude passions, was touched by the speech and the tokens that honoured the fallen outlaw both as foe and as king. Yet in his face there was still seen a moody and proud struggle ; he paused before he turned to the chiefs.

“What counsel ye—ye strong in battle, and wise in debate ?” said he.

With one voice, all, save the Fatal Three, exclaimed,—

“Hear the monk, O king !”

“Shall we dissuade ?” whispered Modred to the old chief, his accomplice.

“No; for so doing, we shall offend all:—and we must win all.”

Then the bard stepped into the ring. And the ring was hushed, for wise is ever the counsel of him whose book is the human heart.

“Hear the Saxons,” said he briefly, and with an air of command when addressing others, which contrasted strongly his tender respect to the King; “hear the Saxons, but not in these walls. Let no man from the foe see our strength or our weakness. We are still mighty and impregnable, while our dwelling is in the realm of the Unknown. Let the King, and his officers of state, and his chieftains of battle, descend to the pass. And behind, at the distance, let the spearmen range from cliff to cliff, as a ladder of steel; so will their numbers seem the greater.”

“Thou speakest well,” said the King.

Meanwhile the knight and the monk waited below at that terrible pass,* which then lay between mountain and river, and over which the precipices frowned, with a sense of horror and weight. Looking up, the knight murmured,—

* I believe it was not till the last century that a good road took the place of this pass.

“ With those stones and crags to roll down on a marching army, the place well defies storm and assault; and a hundred on the height would overmatch thousands below.”

He then turned to address a few words, with all the far-famed courtesy of Norman and Frank, to the Welch guards at the outpost. They were picked men; the strongest and best armed and best fed of the group. But they shook their heads, and answered not, gazing at him fiercely, and showing their white teeth, as dogs at a bear before they are loosened from the band.

“ They understand me not, poor languageless savages !” said Mallet de Graville, turning to the monk, who stood by with the lifted rod; “ speak to them in their own jargon.”

“ Nay,” said the Welch monk, who, though of a rival tribe from South Wales, and at the service of Harold, was esteemed throughout the land for piety and learning, “ they will not open mouth till the King’s orders come to receive, or dismiss us unheard.”

“ Dismiss us unheard !” repeated the punctilious Norman; “ even this poor barbarous king can

scarcely be so strange to all comely and gentle usage, as to put such insult on Guillaume Mallet de Graville. But," added the knight, colouring, "I forgot that he is not avised of my name and land; and, indeed, sith thou art to be spokesman, I marvel why Harold should have prayed my service at all, at the risk of subjecting a Norman knight to affronts contumelious."

"Peradventure," replied Evan, "peradventure thou hast something to whisper apart to the King, which, as stranger and warrior, none will venture to question; but which from me, as countryman and priest, would excite the jealous suspicions of those around him."

"I conceive thee," said De Graville. "And see, spears are gleaming down the path; and, *per pedes Domini*, yon chief with the mantle, and circlet of gold on his head, is the cat-king that so spitted and scratched in the *mêlée* last night."

"Heed well thy tongue," said Evan, alarmed; "no jests with the leader of men."

"Knowest thou, good monk, that a facete and most *gentil* Roman, (if the saintly writer from whom I take the citation reports aright—for, alas!

I know not where myself to purchase, or to steal, one copy of Horatius Flaccus) hath said, '*Dulce est desipere in loco.*' It is sweet to jest, but not within reach of claws, whether of kaisars or cats."

Therewith the knight drew up his spare but stately figure, and, arranging his robe with grace and dignity, awaited the coming chief.

Down the pass, one by one, came first the chiefs, privileged by birth to attend the King; and each, as he reached the mouth of the pass, drew on the upper side, among the stones of the rough ground. Then a banner, tattered and torn, with the lion ensign that the Welch princes had substituted for the old national dragon, which the Saxons of Wessex had appropriated to themselves,*

* The Saxons of Wessex seem to have adopted the Dragon for their ensign, from an early period. It was probably for this reason that it was assumed by Edward Ironsides, as the hero of the Saxons; the principality of Wessex forming the most important portion of the pure Saxon race, while its founder was the ancestor of the Imperial House of the Basileus of Britain. The dragon seems also to have been a Norman ensign. The lions or leopards, popularly assigned to the Conqueror, are certainly a later invention. There is no appearance of them on the banners and shields of the Norman army in the Bayeux tapestry. Armorial bearings were in use amongst the Welch, and even the Saxons, long before heraldry was reduced to a science by the Franks and Normans. And the Dragon, which is supposed

preceded the steps of the King. Behind him came his falconer and bard, and the rest of his scanty household. The King halted in the pass, a few steps from the Norman knight ; and Mallet de Graville, though accustomed to the majestic mien of Duke William, and the practised state of the princes of France, and Flanders, felt an involuntary thrill of admiration at the bearing of the great child of Nature with his foot on his father's soil.

Small and slight as was his stature, worn and ragged his mantle of state, there was that in the erect mien and steady eye of the Cymrian hero, which showed one conscious of authority, and potent in will ; and the waive of his hand to the knight was the gesture of a prince on his throne. Nor, indeed, was that brave and ill-fated chief without some irregular gleams of mental cultivation, which, under happier auspices, might have centred into steadfast light. Though the learning which had once existed in Wales (the last legacy by many critics to be borrowed from the East, through the Saracens, certainly existed as an armorial ensign with the Cymrians before they could have had any obligation to the songs and legends of that people.

of Rome) had long since expired in broil and blood, and youths no longer flocked to the colleges of Caerleon, and priests no longer adorned the casuistical theology of the age, Gryffyth himself, the son of a wise and famous father,* had received an education beyond the average of Saxon kings. But, intensely national, his mind had turned from the literature of Rome, to the legends, and songs, and chronicles of his land; and if he is the best scholar who best understands his own tongue and its treasures, Gryffyth was the most erudite prince of his age. His natural talents, for war especially, were considerable; and judged fairly—not as mated with an empty treasury, without other army than the capricious will of his subjects afforded, and amidst his bitterest foes in the jealous chiefs of his own country, against the disciplined force, and comparative civilization of the Saxon—but as compared with all the other princes of Wales, in warfare, to which he was habituated, and in which chances were

* “In whose time the earth brought forth double, and there was neither beggar nor poor man from the North to the South sea.”—POWELL'S *Hist. of Wales*, p. 83.

even, the fallen son of Llewellyn had been the most renowned leader that Cymry had known since the death of the great Roderic.

So there he stood ; his attendants ghastly with famine, drawn up on the unequal ground ; above, on the heights, and rising from the stone crags, long lines of spears artfully placed ; and, watching him with deathful eyes, somewhat in his rear, the Traitor Threc.

“ Speak, father, or chief,” said the Welch King in his native tongue ; “ what would Harold, the Earl, of Gryffyth the King ? ”

Then the monk took up the word and spoke.

“ Health to Gryffyth-ap-Llewellyn, his chiefs and his people ! Thus saith Harold, King Edward’s thegn :—‘ By land all the passes are watched ; by sea all the waves are our own. Our swords rest in our sheaths ; but Famine marches each hour to gride and to slay. Instead of sure death from the hunger, take sure life from the foe. Free pardon to all, chiefs and people, and safe return to their homes,—save Gryffyth alone. Let him come forth, not as victim and outlaw, not with bent form and clasped hands, but as chief

meeting chief, with his household of state. Harold will meet him, in honour, at the gates of the fort. Let Gryffyth submit to King Edward, and ride with Harold to the Court of the Basileus. Harold promises him life, and will plead for his pardon. And though the peace of this realm, and the fortune of war, forbid Harold to say, ‘Thou shalt yet be a king;’ yet thy crown, son of Llewellyn, shall at least be assured in the line of thy fathers, and the race of Cadwallader shall still reign in Cymry.’”

The monk paused, and hope and joy were in the faces of the famished chiefs; while two of the traitor three suddenly left their post, and sped to tell the message to the spearmen and multitudes above. Modred, the third conspirator, laid his hand on his hilt, and stole near to see the face of the King;—the face of the King was dark and angry, as a midnight of storm.

Then, raising the cross on high, Evan resumed.

“And I, though of the People of Gwentland, which the arms of Gryffyth have wasted, and whose prince fell beneath Gryffyth’s sword on the hearth of his hall—I, as God’s servant, the brother

of all I behold, and, as son of the soil, mourning over the slaughter of its latest defenders,—I, by this symbol of love and command, which I raise to the heaven, adjure thee, O King, to give ear to the mission of peace, to cast down the grim pride of earth. And instead of the crown of a day, fix thy hopes on the crown everlasting. For much shall be pardoned to thee in thine hour of pomp and of conquest, if now thou savest from doom and from death the last lives over which thou art lord.”

It was during this solemn appeal that the knight, marking the sign announced to him, and drawing close to Gryffyth, pressed the ring into the king’s hand, and whispered,—

“Obey by this pledge. Thou knowest Harold is true, and thy head is sold by thine own people.”

The King cast a haggard eye at the speaker, and then at the ring, over which his hand closed with a convulsive spasm. And at that dread instant, the man prevailed over the king; and far away from people and monk, from adjuration and duty, fled his heart on the wings of the storm—fled to the cold wife he distrusted; and the pledge

that should assure him of life, seemed as a love-token insulting his fall:—Amidst all the roar of roused passions, loudest of all was the hiss of the jealous fiend.

As the monk ceased, the thrill of the audience was perceptible, and a deep silence was followed by a general murmur, as if to constrain the King.

Then the pride of the despot chief rose up to second the wrath of the suspecting man. The red spot flushed the dark cheek, and he tossed the neglected hair from his brow.

He made one stride towards the monk, and said, in a voice loud, and deep, and slow, rolling far up the hill,—

“Monk, thou hast said; and now hear the reply of the son of Llewellyn, the true heir of Roderic the Great, who from the heights of Eryri saw all the lands of the Cymrian sleeping under the dragon of Uther. King was I born, and king will I die. I will not ride by the side of the Saxon to the feet of Edward, the son of the spoiler. I will not, to purchase base life, surrender the claim, vain before men and the hour, but solemn before God and posterity—the claim of my line

and my people. All Britain is ours—all the Island of Pines. And the children of Hengist are traitors and rebels—not the heirs of Ambrosius and Uther. Say to Harold the Saxon, ‘Ye have left us but the tomb of the Druid and the hills of the eagle; but freedom and royalty are ours, in life and in death—not for you to demand them, not for us to betray.’ Nor fear ye, O my chiefs, few, but unmatched in glory and truth; fear not ye to perish by the hunger thus denounced as our doom, on these heights that command the fruits of our own fields! No, die we may, but not mute and revengeless. Go back, whispering warrior; go back, false son of Cymry—and tell Harold to look well to his walls and his trenches. We will vouchsafe him grace for his grace—we will not take him by surprise, nor under cloud of the night. With the gleam of our spears and the clash of our shields, we will come from the hill; and, famine-worn as he deems us, hold a feast in his walls which the vultures of Snowdon plume their pinions to share!”

“Rash man and unhappy!” cried the monk; “what curse drawest thou down on thy head!”

Wilt thou be the murtherer of thy men, in strife unavailing and vain? Heaven holds thee guilty of all the blood thou shalt cause to be shed."

"Be dumb!—hush thy screech, lying raven!" exclaimed Gryffyth, his eyes darting fire, and his slight form dilating. "Once, priest and monk went before us to inspire, not to daunt; and our cry, Alleluia! was taught us by the saints of the Church, on the day when Saxons, fierce and many as Harold's, fell on the field of Maes-Garmon. No, the curse is on the head of the invader, not on those who defend hearth and altar. Yea, as the song to the bard, the CURSE leaps through my veins, and rushes forth from my lips. By the land they have ravaged; by the gore they have spilt; on these crags, our last refuge; below the carn on yon heights, where the Dead stir to hear me,—I launch the curse of the wronged and the doomed on the children of Hengist! They in turn shall know the steel of the stranger—their crown shall be shivered as glass, and their nobles be as slaves in the land. And the line of Hengist and Cerdic shall be rased from the roll of empire. And the

ghosts of our fathers shall glide, appeased, over the grave of their nation. But we—WE, though weak in the body, in the soul shall be strong to the last! The ploughshare may pass over our cities, but the soil shall be trod by our steps, and our deeds keep our language alive in the songs of our bards. Nor, in the great Judgment Day, shall any race but the race of Cymry rise from their graves in this corner of earth, to answer for the sins of the brave!"*

So impressive the voice, so grand the brow, and sublime the wild gesture of the King, as he thus spoke, that not only the monk himself was awed; not only, though he understood not the words,

* "During the military expeditions made in our days against South Wales, an old Welchman, at Pencadair, who had faithfully adhered to him (Henry II.), being desired to give his opinion about the royal army, and whether he thought that of the rebels would make resistance, and what he thought would be the final event of this war, replied; 'This nation, O King, may now, as in former times, be harassed, and, in a great measure, be weakened and destroyed by you and other powers; and it will often prevail by its laudable exertions, but it can never be totally subdued by the wrath of man, unless the wrath of God shall concur. *Nor do I think that any other nation than this of Wales, or any other language, (whatever may hereafter come to pass) shall in the day of severe examination before the Supreme Judge, answer for this corner of the earth!*'"—HOARE'S *Giraldus Cambrensis*, vol. i. p. 361.

did the Norman knight bow his head, as a child when the lightning he fears as by instinct, flashes out from the cloud,—but even the sullen and wide-spreading discontent at work among most of the chiefs was arrested for a moment. But the spearmen and multitude above, excited by the tidings of safety to life, and worn out by repeated defeat, and the dread fear of famine, too remote to hear the King, were listening eagerly to the insidious addresses of the two stealthy conspirators, creeping from rank to rank; and already they begun to sway and move, and sweep slowly down towards the King.

Recovering his surprise, the Norman again neared Gryffyth, and began to reurge his mission of peace. But the chief waived him back sternly, and said aloud, though in Saxon:—

“No secrets can pass between Harold and me. This much alone, take thou back as answer:— ‘I thank the Earl, for myself, my Queen, and my people. Noble have been his courtesies as foe; as foe I thank him—as King, defy. The torque he hath returned to my hand, he shall see again ere the sun set. Messengers, ye are answered:

Withdraw and speed fast, that we may pass not your steps on the road."

The monk sighed, and cast a look of holy compassion over the circle; and a pleased man was he to see in the faces of most there, that the King was alone in his fierce defiance. Then lifting again the rood, he turned away, and with him went the Norman.

The retirement of the messengers was the signal for one burst of remonstrance from the chiefs—the signal for the voice and the deeds of the Fatal Three. Down from the heights sprang and rushed the angry and turbulent multitudes; round the King came the bard and the falconer, and some faithful few.

The great uproar of many voices caused the monk and the knight to pause abruptly in their descent, and turn to look behind. They could see the crowd rushing down from the higher steeps; but on the spot itself which they had so lately left, the nature of the ground only permitted a confused view of spear points, lifted swords, and heads crowned with shaggy locks, swaying to and fro.

“What means all this commotion?” asked the knight, with his hand on his sword.

“Hist!” said the monk, pale as ashes, and leaning for support upon the cross.

Suddenly, above the hubbub, was heard the voice of the King, in accents of menace and wrath, singularly distinct and clear; it was followed by a moment's silence—a moment's silence followed by the clatter of arms, a yell, and a howl, and the indescribable shock of men.

And suddenly again was heard a voice that seemed that of the King, but no longer distinct and clear!—was it laugh?—was it groan?

All was hushed; the monk was on his knees in prayer; the knight's sword was bare in his hand. All was hushed—and the spears stood still in the air; when there was again a cry, as multitudinous but less savage than before. And the Welch came down the pass, and down the crags.

The knight placed his back to a rock. “They have orders to murder us,” he murmured; “but woe to the first who come within reach of my sword!”

Down swarmed the Welchmen, nearer and nearer; and in the midst of them three chiefs—the fatal three. And the old chief bore in his hand a pole or spear, and on the top of that spear, trickling gore step by step, was the trunkless head of Gryffyth the King.

“This,” said the old chief, as he drew near, “this is our answer to Harold the Earl. We will go with ye.”

“Food! food!” cried the multitude.

And the three chiefs, (one on either side the trunkless head that the third bore aloft,) whispered, “We are avenged!”

BOOK VIII.



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BOOK VIII.

CHAPTER I.

SOME days after the tragical event with which the last chapter closed, the ships of the Saxons were assembled in the wide waters of Conway; and, on the small fore-deck of the stateliest vessel, stood Harold, bare-headed, before Aldyth the widowed queen. A chair of state, with dossell and canopy, was set for the daughter of Algar, and behind stood maidens of Wales, selected in haste for her attendants.

But Aldyth had not seated herself; and, side by side with her dead lord's great victor, thus she spoke:—

“Woe worth the day and the hour when Aldyth left the hall of her fathers, and the land of her birth! The crown she hath worn has been a crown

of thorns, and the air she has breathed has reeked as with blood. I go forth, widowed, and homeless, and lonely; but my feet shall press the soil of my sires, and my lips draw the breath which came sweet and pure to my childhood. And thou, O Harold, standest beside me, like the shape of my own youth, and the dreams of old come back at the sound of thy voice. Fare thee well, noble heart, and true Saxon. Thou hast twice saved the child of thy foe—first from shame, then from famine. Thou wouldest have saved my dread lord from open force, and dark murder; but the saints were wroth, and the blood of my kinsfolk, shed by his hand, called for vengeance, and the shrines he had pillaged and burned murmured doom from their desolate altars. Peace be with the dead, and peace with the living! I shall go back to my father and brethren; and if the fame and life of child and sister be dear to them, their swords will never more leave their sheaths against Harold. So thy hand, and God guard thee!”

Harold raised to his lips the hand which the Queen extended to him; and to Aldyth now seemed restored the rare beauty of her youth; as

pride and sorrow gave her the charm of emotion, which love and duty had failed to bestow.

“Life and health to thee, noble lady,” said the Earl. “Tell thy kindred from me, that for thy sake, and thy grandsire’s, I would fain be their brother and friend; were they but united with me, all England were now safe against every foe, and each peril. Thy daughter already awaits thee in the halls of Morcar; and when time has scarred the wounds of the past, may thy joys rebloom in the face of thy child. Farewell, noble Aldyth!”

He dropped the hand he had held till then, turned slowly to the side of the vessel, and re-entered his boat. As he was rowed back to shore, the horn gave the signal for raising anchor, and the ship righting itself, moved majestically through the midst of the fleet. But Aldyth still stood erect, and her eyes followed the boat that bore away the secret love of her youth.

As Harold reached the shore, Tostig and the Norman, who had been conversing amicably together on the beach, advanced towards the Earl.

“Brother,” said Tostig smiling, “it were easy

for thee to console the fair widow, and bring to our House all the force of East Anglia and Mercia."

Harold's face slightly changed, but he made no answer.

"A marvellous fair dame," said the Norman, "notwithstanding her cheek be somewhat pinched, and the hue sunburnt. And I wonder not that the poor cat-king kept her so close to his side."

"Sir Norman," said the Earl, hastening to change the subject, "the war is now over, and, for long years, Wales will leave our Marches in peace.—This eve I propose to ride hence towards London, and we will converse by the way."

"Go you so soon?" cried the knight, surprised. "Shall you not take means utterly to subjugate this troublesome race, parcel out the lands among your thegns, to hold as martial fiefs at need, build towers and forts on the heights, and at the river-mouths?—where a site, like this, for some fair castle and vawmure? In a word, do you Saxons merely overrun, and neglect to hold what you win?"

"We fight in self-defence, not for conquest, sir Norman. We have no skill in building castles ;

and I pray you not to hint to my thegns the conceit of dividing a land, as thieves would their plunder. King Gryffyth is dead, and his brothers will reign in his stead. England has guarded her realm, and chastised the aggressors. What need England do more? We are not like our first barbarous fathers, carving out homes with the scythe of their sæxes. The wave settles after the flood, and the races of men after lawless convulsions."

Tostig smiled, in disdain, at the Knight, who mused a little over the strange words he had heard, and then silently followed the Earl to the fort.

But when Harold gained his chamber, he found there an express, arrived in haste from Chester, with the news, that Algar, the sole enemy and single rival of his power, was no more. Fever, occasioned by neglected wounds, had stretched him impotent on a bed of sickness, and his fierce passions had aided the march of disease;—the restless and profitless race was run.

The first emotion which these tidings called forth, was that of pain. The bold sympathize with

the bold; and in great hearts, there is always a certain friendship for a gallant foe. But recovering the shock of that first impression, Harold could not but feel that England was freed from its most dangerous subject—himself from the only obstacle apparent to the fulfilment of his luminous career.

“ Now, then, to London,” whispered the voice of his ambition. “ Not a foe rests to trouble the peace of that empire which thy conquests, O Harold, have made more secure and compact than ever yet has been the realm of the Saxon kings. Thy way through the country that thou hast henceforth delivered from the fire and sword of the mountain ravager, will be one march of triumph, like a Roman’s of old; and the voice of the people will echo the hearts of the army; those hearts are thine own. Verily Hilda is a prophetess; and when Edward rests with the saints, from what English heart will not burst the cry, “ **LONG LIVE HAROLD THE KING !**”

CHAPTER II.

THE Norman rode by the side of Harold, in the rear of the victorious armament. The ships sailed to their havens, and Tostig departed to his northern earldom.

“And now,” said Harold, “I am at leisure to thank thee, brave Norman, for more than thine aid in council and war;—at leisure now to turn to the last prayer of Sweyn, and the often shed tears of Githa my mother, for Wolnoth the exile. Thou seest with thine own eyes that there is no longer pretext or plea for thy Count to detain these hostages. Thou shalt hear from Edward himself that he no longer asks sureties for the faith of the House of Godwin; and I cannot think that Duke William would have suffered thee to bring me over this news from the dead if he were not prepared to do justice to the living.”

“Your speech, Earl of Wessex, goes near to the truth. But, to speak plainly and frankly, I think William, my lord, hath a keen desire to welcome in person a chief so illustrious as Harold, and I guess that he keeps the hostages to make thee come to claim them.” The knight, as he spoke, smiled gaily; but the cunning of the Norman gleamed in the quick glance of his clear hazel eye.

“Fain must I feel pride at such wish, if you flatter me not,” said Harold; “and I would gladly myself, now the land is in peace, and my presence not needful, visit a court of such fame. I hear high praise from cheapman and pilgrim of Count William’s wise care for barter and trade, and might learn much from the ports of the Seine that would profit the marts of the Thames. Much, too, I hear of Count William’s zeal to revive the learning of the Church, aided by Lanfranc the Lombard; much I hear of the pomp of his buildings, and the grace of his court. All this would I cheerfully cross the ocean to see; but all this would but sadden my heart if I returned without Haco and Wolnoth.”

“I dare not speak so as to plight faith for the

Duke," said the Norman, who, though sharp to deceive, had that rein on his conscience that it did not let him openly lie; "but this I do know, that there are few things in his Countdom which my lord would not give to clasp the right hand of Harold, and feel assured of his friendship."

Though wise and farseeing, Harold was not suspicious;—no Englishman, unless it were Edward himself, knew the secret pretensions of William to the English throne; and he answered simply:—

"It were well, indeed, both for Normandy and England, both against foes and for trade, to be allied and well-liking. I will think over your words, Sire de Gravelle, and it shall not be my fault if old feuds are not forgotten, and those now in thy court be the last hostages ever kept by the Norman for the faith of the Saxon."

With that he turned the discourse; and the aspiring and able envoy, exhilarated by the hope of a successful mission, animated the way by remarks—alternately lively and shrewd—which drew the brooding Earl from those musings which had now grown habitual to a mind once clear and open as the day.

Harold had not miscalculated the enthusiasm his victories had excited. Where he passed, all the towns poured forth their populations to see and to hail him; and on arriving at the metropolis, the rejoicings in his honour seemed to equal those which had greeted, at the accession of Edward, the restoration of the line of Cerdic.

According to the barbarous custom of the age, the head of the unfortunate sub-king, and the prow of his special war-ship, had been sent to Edward as the trophies of conquest; but Harold's uniform moderation respected the living. The race of Gryffyth* were re-established on the tributary throne of that hero, in the persons of his brothers, Blethgent and Rigwatle, "and they swore oaths," says the graphic old chronicler, "and delivered hostages to the King and the Earl that they would be faithful to him in all things, and be everywhere ready for him, by water, and by land, and make such renders from the land as had been done before to any other King."

Not long after this, Mallet de Graville returned

* Gryffyth left a son, Caradoc; but he was put aside, as a minor, according to the Saxon customs.

to Normandy, with gifts for William from King Edward, and special requests from that prince, as well as from the Earl, to restore the hostages. But Mallet's acuteness readily perceived, that in much, Edward's mind had been alienated from William. It was clear, that the Duke's marriage, and the pledges that had crowned the union, were distasteful to the ascetism of the Saint-king; and with Godwin's death, and Tostig's absence from the Court, seemed to have expired all Edward's bitterness towards that powerful family of which Harold was now the head. Still, as no subject out of the House of Cerdic had ever yet been elected to the Saxon throne, there was no apprehension on Mallet's mind that in Harold was the true rival to William's cherished aspirations. Though Edward the Atheling was dead, his son Edgar lived, the natural heir to the throne; and the Norman, (whose liege had succeeded to the Duchy at the age of eight,) was not sufficiently cognizant of the invariable custom of the Anglo-Saxons, to set aside, whether for kingdoms or for earldoms, all claimants unfitted for rule by their tender years. He could indeed perceive that the

young Atheling's minority was in favour of his Norman liege, and would render him but a weak defender of the realm, and that there seemed no popular attachment to the infant orphan of the Germanized exile: his name was never mentioned at the court, nor had Edward acknowledged him as heir,—a circumstance which he interpreted auspiciously for William. Nevertheless, it was clear that, both at court and amongst the people, the Norman influence in England was at the lowest ebb; and that the only man who could restore it, and realise the cherished dreams of his grasping lord, was Harold the all-powerful.

CHAPTER III.

TRUSTING, for the time, to the success of Edward's urgent demand for the release of his kinsmen, as well as his own, Harold was now detained at the court by all those arrears of business which had accumulated fast under the inert hands of the Monk-king during the prolonged campaigns against the Welch; but he had leisure at least for frequent visits to the old Roman house; and those visits were not more grateful to his love than to the harder and more engrossing passion which divided his heart.

The nearer he grew to the dazzling object, to the possession of which Fate seemed to have shaped all circumstances, the more he felt the charm of those mystic influences which his colder reason had disdained. He who is ambitious

of things afar, and uncertain, passes at once into the Poet-Land of Imagination; to aspire and to imagine are yearnings twin-born.

When, in his fresh youth and his calm lofty manhood, Harold saw action, how adventurous soever, limited to the barriers of noble duty; when he lived but for his country, all spread clear before his vision in the sunlight of day; but as the barriers receded, while the horizon extended, his eye left the certain to rest on the vague. As self, though still half concealed from his conscience, gradually assumed the wide space love of country had filled, the maze of delusion commenced; he was to shape fate out of circumstance,—no longer defy fate through virtue; and thus Hilda became to him as a voice that answered the questions of his own restless heart. He needed encouragement from the Unknown to sanction his desires, and confirm his ends. But Edith, rejoicing in the fair fame of her betrothed, and content in the pure rapture of beholding him again, reposed in the divine credulity of the happy hour; she marked not, in Harold's visits, that, on entrance, the Earl's eye sought first the stern face

of the Vala—she wondered not why those two conversed in whispers together, or stood so often at moonlight by the Runic grave. Alone, of all womankind, she felt that Harold loved her,—that that love had braved time, absence, change, and hope deferred;—and she knew not that what love has most to dread in the wild heart of aspiring man, is not persons, but things,—is not things, but their symbols.

So weeks and months rolled on, and Duke William returned no answer to the demands for his hostages. And Harold's heart smote him, that he neglected his brother's prayer and his mother's accusing tears.

Now Githa, since the death of her husband, had lived in seclusion and apart from towns; and one day Harold was surprised by her unexpected arrival at the large timbered house in London, which had passed to his possession. As she abruptly entered the room in which he sate, he sprang forward to welcome and embrace her; but she waived him back with a grave and mournful gesture, and, sinking on one knee, she said thus:—

“See, the mother is a suppliant to the son for the son. No, Harold, no—I will not rise till thou

hast heard me. For years, long and lonely, have I lingered and pined,—long years! Will my boy know his mother again? Thou hast said to me, “Wait till the messenger returns.” I have waited. Thou hast said, “This time the Count cannot resist the demand of the King.” I bowed my head and submitted to thee as I had done to Godwin my lord. And I have not till now claimed thy promise; for I allowed thy country, thy king, and thy fame, to have claims more strong than a mother. Now I tarry no more; now no more will I be amused and deceived. Thine hours are thine own—free thy coming and thy going. Harold, I claim thine oath. Harold, I touch thy right hand. Harold, I remind thee of thy troth and thy plight, to cross the seas thyself, and restore the child to the mother.”

“Oh, rise, rise!” exclaimed Harold, deeply moved. “Patient hast thou been, O my mother, and now I will linger no more, nor hearken to other voice than your own. I will seek the King this day, and ask his leave to cross the sea to Duke William.”

Then Githa rose, and fell on the Earl’s breast weeping.

CHAPTER IV.

IT so chanced, while this interview took place between Githa and the Earl, that Gurth, hawking in the woodlands round Hilda's house, turned aside to visit his Danish kinswoman. The Prophetess was absent, but he was told that Edith was within; and Gurth, about to be united to a maiden who had long won his noble affections, cherished a brother's love for his brother's fair betrothed. He entered the gynœcium, and there still, as when we were first made present in that chamber, sate the maids, employed on a work more brilliant to the eye, and more pleasing to the labour, than that which had then tasked their active hands. They were broidering into a tissue of the purest gold the effigy of a fighting warrior, designed by Hilda for the banner of Earl Harold; and, removed from the awe of their mistress, as they worked, their tongues sang gaily, and it was in the midst of song and laughter that the fair

young Saxon lord entered the chamber. The babble and the mirth ceased at his entrance; each voice was stilled, each eye cast down demurely. Edith was not amongst them, and, in answer to his inquiry, the eldest of the maidens pointed towards the peristyle without the house.

The winning and kindly thegn paused a few moments, to admire the tissue and commend the work, and then sought the peristyle.

Near the water-spring that gushed free and bright through the Roman fountain, he found Edith, seated in an attitude of deep thought and gloomy dejection. She started as he approached, and, springing forward to meet him, exclaimed:—

“O Gurth, heaven hath sent thee to me, I know well, though I cannot explain to thee why, for I cannot explain it to myself; but know I do, by the mysterious bodements of my own soul, that some great danger is at this moment encircling thy brother Harold. Go to him, I pray, I implore thee, forthwith; and let thy clear sense and warm heart be by his side.”

“I will go instantly,” said Gurth, startled. “But do not suffer, I adjure thee, sweet kinswoman, the

superstition that wraps this place, as a mist wraps a marsh, to infect thy pure spirit. In my early youth I submitted to the influence of Hilda; I became man, and outgrew it. Much, secretly, has it grieved me of late, to see that our kinswoman's Danish lore has brought even the strong heart of Harold under its spell; and where once he only spoke of *duty*, I now hear him speak of *fate*."

"Alas! alas!" answered Edith, wringing her hands; "when the bird hides its head in the brake, doth it shut out the track of the hound? Can we baffle fate by refusing to heed its approaches? But we waste precious moments. Go, Gurth, dear Gurth! Heavier and darker, while we speak, gathers the cloud on my heart."

Gurth said no more, but hastened to remount his steed; and Edith remained alone by the Roman fountain, motionless and sad, as if the Nymph of the old Religion stood there to see the lessening stream well away from the shattered stone, and know that the life of the nymph was measured by the ebb of the stream.

Gurth arrived in London just as Harold was taking boat for the palace of Westminster, to seek

the King ; and, after interchanging a hurried embrace with his mother, he accompanied Harold to the palace, and learned his errand by the way. While Harold spoke, he did not foresee any danger to be incurred by a friendly visit to the Norman Court ; and the interval that elapsed between Harold's communication and their entrance into the King's chamber, allowed no time for mature and careful reflection.

Edward, on whom years and infirmity had increased of late with rapid ravage, heard Harold's request with a grave and deep attention, which he seldom vouchsafed to earthly affairs. And he remained long silent after his brother-in-law had finished ;—so long silent, that the Earl, at first, deemed that he was absorbed in one of those mystic and abstracted reveries, in which, more and more as he grew nearer to the borders of the World Unseen, Edward so strangely indulged. But, looking more close, both he and Gurth were struck by the evident dismay on the King's face, while the collected light of Edward's cold eye showed that his mind was awake to the human world. In truth, it is probable that Edward, at that moment, was recalling rash

hints, if not promises, to his rapacious cousin of Normandy, made during his exile. And, sensible of his own declining health, and the tender years of the young Edgar, he might be musing over the terrible pretender to the English throne, whose claims his earlier indiscretion might seem to sanction. Whatever his thoughts, they were dark and sinister, as at length he said, slowly—

“Is thine oath indeed given to thy mother, and doth she keep thee to it?”

“Both, O King,” answered Harold, briefly.

“Then I can gainsay thee not. And thou, Harold, art a man of this living world; thou playest here the part of a centurion; thou sayest ‘Come,’ and men come—‘Go,’ and men move at thy will.’ Therefore thou mayest well judge for thyself. I gainsay thee not, nor interfere between man and his vow. But think not,” continued the King in a more solemn voice, and with increasing emotion, “think not that I will charge my soul that I counselled or encouraged this errand. Yea, I foresee that thy journey will lead but to great evil to England, and sore grief or dire loss to thee.”*

* BROMTON *Chron.*: KNYGHTON, WALSINGHAM, HOVEDEN, &c.

“How so, dear Lord and King?” said Harold, startled by Edward’s unwonted earnestness, though deeming it but one of the visionary chimeras habitual to the Saint. “How so? William thy cousin hath ever borne the name of one fair to friend, though fierce to foe. And foul indeed his dishonour, if he could meditate harm to a man trusting his faith, and sheltered by his own roof-tree.”

“Harold, Harold,” said Edward impatiently, “I know William of old. Nor is he so simple of mind, that he will cede aught for thy pleasure, or even to my will, unless it bring some gain to himself.* I say no more.—Thou art cautioned, and I leave the rest to heaven.”

It is the misfortune of men little famous for worldly lore, that in those few occasions when, in that sagacity caused by their very freedom from the strife and passion of those around, they seem almost prophetically inspired,—it is their misfortune to lack the power of conveying to others their own convictions; they may divine, but they cannot reason: and Harold could detect nothing to deter his purpose, in a vague fear, based on no

* BROMTON, KNYGHTON, &c.

other argument than as vague a perception of the Duke's general character. But Gurth, listening less to his reason than his devoted love for his brother, took alarm, and said, after a pause,

“Thinkest thou, good my King, that the same danger were incurred if Gurth, instead of Harold, crossed the seas to demand the hostages?”

“No,” said Edward, eagerly, “and so would I counsel. William would not have the same objects to gain in practising his worldly guile upon thee. No; methinks *that* were the prudent course.”

“And the ignoble one for Harold,” said the elder brother, almost indignantly. “Howbeit, I thank thee gratefully, dear King, for thy affectionate heed and care. And so the saints guard thee!”

On leaving the King, a warm discussion between the brothers took place. But Gurth's arguments were stronger than those of Harold, and the Earl was driven to rest his persistence on his own special pledge to Githa. As soon, however, as they had gained their home, that plea was taken from him; for the moment Gurth related to his mother Edward's fears and cautions, she, ever

mindful of Godwin's preference for the Earl, and his last commands to her, hastened to release Harold from his pledge; and to implore him at least to suffer Gurth to be his substitute to the Norman court.

“Listen dispassionately,” said Gurth; “rely upon it that Edward has reasons for his fears, more rational than those he has given to us. He knows William from his youth upward, and hath loved him too well to hint doubts of his good faith without just foundation. Are there no reasons why danger from William should be special against thyself? While the Normans abounded in the court, there were rumours that the Duke had some designs on England, which Edward's preference seemed to sanction: such designs now, in the altered state of England, were absurd—too frantic, for a prince of William's reputed wisdom to entertain. Yet he may not unnaturally seek to regain the former Norman influence in these realms. He knows that in you he receives the most powerful man in England; that your detention alone would convulse the country from one end of it to the other; and enable him, perhaps, to

extort from Edward some measures dishonourable to us all. But against me he can harbour no ill design—my detention would avail him nothing. And, in truth, if Harold be safe in England, Gurth must be safe in Rouen. Thy presence here at the head of our armies, guarantees me from wrong. But reverse the case, and with Gurth in England, is Harold safe in Rouen? I, but a simple soldier and homely lord, with slight influence over Edward, no command in the country, and little practised of speech in the stormy Witan,—I am just so great that William dare not harm me, but not so great that he should even wish to harm me.”

“He detains our kinsmen, why not thee!” said Harold.

“Because with our kinsmen he has at least the pretext that they were pledged as hostages: because I go simply as guest and envoy. No, to me danger cannot come. Be ruled, dear Harold.”

“Be ruled, O my son,” cried Githa, clasping the earl’s knees, “and do not let me dread in the depth of the night to see the shade of Godwin, and hear his voice say, ‘Woman, where is Harold?’”

It was impossible for the Earl’s strong under-

standing to resist the arguments addressed to it; and, to say truth, he had been more disturbed than he liked to confess by Edward's sinister forewarnings. Yet, on the other hand, there were reasons against his acquiescence in Gurth's proposal. The primary, and to do him justice, the strongest, was in his native courage and his generous pride. Should he for the first time in his life shrink from a peril in the discharge of his duty; a peril too, so uncertain and vague? Should he suffer Gurth to fulfil the pledge he himself had taken? And granting even that Gurth were safe from whatever danger he individually might incur, did it become him to accept the proxy? Would Gurth's voice, too, be as potent as his own in effecting the return of the hostages?

The next reasons that swayed him were those he could not avow. In clearing his way to the English throne, it would be of no mean importance to secure the friendship of the Norman Duke, and the Norman acquiescence in his pretensions; it would be of infinite service to remove those prepossessions against his House which were still rife with the Normans, who retained a bitter

remembrance of their countrymen decimated,* it was said, with the concurrence if not at the order of Godwin, when they accompanied the ill-fated Alfred to the English shore, and who were yet sore with their old expulsion from the English court at the return of his father and himself.

Though it could not enter into his head that William, possessing no party whatever in England, could himself aspire to the English crown, yet at Edward's death there might be pretenders whom the Norman arms could find ready excuse to sanction. There was the boy Atheling, on the one side, there was the valiant Norwegian King Hardrada on the other, who might revive the claims of his predecessor Magnus as heir to the rights of Canute. So near and so formidable a neighbour as the Count of the Normans, every object of policy led him to propitiate; and Gurth, with his unbending hate of all that was Norman, was not, at least, the most politic envoy he could select for that end. Add to this, that despite their present

* The word 'decimated' is the one generally applied by the historians to the massacre in question; and it is therefore retained here. But it is not correctly applied; for that butchery was perpetrated, not upon one out of ten, but nine out of ten.

reconciliation, Harold could never long count upon amity with Tostig; and Tostig's connexion with William, through their marriages into the House of Baldwin, was full of danger to a new throne, to which Tostig would probably be the most turbulent subject: the influence of this connexion how desirable to counteract!*

Nor could Harold, who, as patriot and statesman, felt deeply the necessity of reform and regeneration in the decayed edifice of the English monarchy, willingly lose an occasion to witness all that William had done to raise so high in renown and civilization, in martial fame and commercial prosperity, that petty duchy, which he had placed on a level with the kingdoms of the Teuton and the Frank. Lastly, the Normans were the special darlings of the Roman church. William had obtained the dispensation to his own marriage with Matilda; and might not the Norman influence, duly conciliated, back the prayer he trusted

* The *above* reasons for Harold's memorable expedition are sketched at this length, because they suggest the most probable motives which induced it, and furnish, in no rash and inconsiderate policy, that key to his visit, which is not to be found in chronicles or historians.

one day to address to the pontiff, and secure to him the hallowed blessing, without which ambition lost its charm, and even a throne its splendour?

All these considerations, therefore, urged the Earl to persist in his original purpose; but a warning voice in his heart, more powerful than all, sided with the prayer of Githa, and the arguments of Gurth. In this state of irresolution, Gurth said seasonably,—

“Bethink thee, Harold, if menaced but with peril to thyself, thou wouldst have a brave man’s right to resist us; but it was of ‘great evil to England’ that Edward spoke, and thy reflection must tell thee, that in this crisis of our country, danger to thee is evil to England—evil to England thou hast no right to incur.”

“Dear mother, and generous Gurth,” said Harold, then joining the two in one embrace, “ye have well nigh conquered. Give me but two days to ponder well, and be assured that I will not decide from the rash promptings of an ill-considered judgment.”

Farther than this they could not then move the Earl; but Gurth was pleased shortly after-

wards to see him depart to Edith, whose fears, from whatever source they sprang, would, he was certain, come in aid of his own pleadings.

But as the Earl rode alone towards the once stately home of the perished Roman, and entered at twilight the darkening forest-land, his thoughts were less on Edith than on the Vala, with whom his ambition had more and more connected his soul. Perplexed by his doubts, and left dim in the waning lights of human reason, never more involuntarily did he fly to some guide to interpret the future, and decide his path.

As if fate itself responded to the cry of his heart, he suddenly came in sight of Hilda herself, gathering leaves from elm and ash amidst the woodland.

He sprang from his horse and approached her.

“Hilda,” said he, in a low but firm voice, “thou hast often told me that the dead can advise the living. Raise thou the Scin-læca of the hero of old—raise the Ghost, which mine eye, or my fancy, beheld before, vast and dim by the silent bautastein, and I will stand by thy side. Fain would I know if thou hast deceived me and thyself; or if, in truth, to man’s guidance

Heaven doth vouchsafe saga and rede from those who have passed into the secret shores of Eternity."

"The dead," answered Hilda, "will not reveal themselves to eyes uninitiate save at their own will, uncompelled by charm and rune. To me their forms can appear distinct through the airy flame; to me, duly prepared by spells that purge the eye of the spirit, and loosen the walls of the flesh. I cannot say that what I see in the trance and the travail of my soul, thou also wilt behold; for even when the vision hath passed from my sight, and the voice from my ear, only memories, confused and dim, of what I saw and heard, remain to guide the waking and common life. But thou shalt stand by my side while I invoke the phantom, and hear and interpret the words which rush from my lips, and the runes that take meaning from the sparks of the charmed fire. I knew ere thou camest, by the darkness and trouble of Edith's soul, that some shade from the Ash-tree of Life had fallen upon thine."

Then Harold related what had passed, and placed before Hilda the doubts that beset him.

The Prophetess listened with earnest attention ; but her mind, when not under its more mystic influences, being strongly biassed by its natural courage and ambition, she saw at a glance all the advantages towards securing the throne predestined to Harold, which might be effected by his visit to the Norman court, and she held in too great disdain both the worldly sense and the mystic reveries of the monkish king, (for the believer in Odin was naturally incredulous of the visitation of the Christian saints,) to attach much weight to his dreary predictions.

The short reply she made was therefore not calculated to deter Harold from the expedition in dispute. But she deferred till the following night, and to wisdom more dread than her own, the counsels that should sway his decision.

With a strange satisfaction at the thought that he should, at least, test personally the reality of those assumptions of preternatural power which had of late coloured his resolves and oppressed his heart, Harold then took leave of the Vala, who returned mechanically to her employment ; and leading his horse by the rein, slowly continued

his musing way towards the green knoll and its heathen ruins. But ere he gained the hillock, and while his thoughtful eyes were bent on the ground, he felt his arm seized tenderly—turned—and beheld Edith's face full of unutterable and anxious love.

With that love, indeed, there was blended so much wistfulness, so much fear, that Harold exclaimed,—

“Soul of my soul, what hath chanced? what affects thee thus?”

“Hath no danger befallen thee?” asked Edith falteringly, and gazing on his face with wistful, searching eyes.

“Danger! none, sweet trembler,” answered the Earl, evasively.

Edith dropped her eager looks, and clinging to his arm, drew him on silently into the forest land. She paused at last where the old fantastic trees shut out the view of the ancient ruins; and when, looking round, she saw not those grey gigantic shafts which mortal hand seemed never to have piled together, she breathed more freely.

“Speak to me,” then said Harold, bending his face to hers; “why this silence?”

“ Ah Harold!” answered his betrothed, “ thou knowest that ever since we have loved one another, my existence hath been but a shadow of thine; by some weird and strange mystery, which Hilda would explain by the stars or the fates, that have made me a part of thee, I know by the lightness or gloom of my own spirit when good or ill shall befall thee. How often, in thine absence, hath a joy suddenly broke upon me; and I felt by that joy, as by the smile of a good angel, that thou hadst passed safe through some peril, or triumphed over some foe! And now thou askest me why I am so sad;—I can only answer thee by saying, that the sadness is cast upon me by some thunder gloom on thine own destiny.”

Harold had sought Edith to speak of his meditated journey, but seeing her dejection he did not dare; so he drew her to his breast, and chid her soothingly for her vain apprehensions. But Edith would not be comforted; there seemed something weighing on her mind and struggling to her lips, not accounted for merely by sympathetic forebodings; and at length, as he pressed her to tell all, she gathered courage and spoke,—

“ Do not mock me,” she said, “ but what secret,

whether of vain folly or of meaning fate, should I hold from thee? All this day I struggled in vain against the heaviness of my forebodings. How I hailed the sight of Gurth thy brother! I besought him to seek thee—thou hast seen him?”

“I have!” said Harold. “But thou wert about to tell me of something more than this dejection.”

“Well,” resumed Edith, “after Gurth left me, my feet sought involuntarily the hill on which we have met so often. I sate down near the old tomb, a strange weariness crept on my eyes, and a sleep that seemed not wholly sleep fell over me. I struggled against it, as if conscious of some coming terror; and as I struggled, and ere I slept, Harold,—yes, ere I slept,—I saw distinctly a pale and glimmering figure rise from the Saxon’s grave. I saw—I see it still! Oh, that livid front, those glassy eyes!”

“The figure of a warrior?” said Harold, startled.

“Of a warrior, armed as in the ancient days, armed like the warrior that Hilda’s maids are working for thy banner. I saw it; and in one hand it held a spear, and in the other a crown.”

“A crown!—Say on, say on.”

“I saw no more; sleep, in spite of myself, fell on me, a sleep full of confused and painful—rapid and shapeless images, till at last this dream rose clear. I beheld a bright and starry shape, that seemed as a spirit, yet wore thine aspect, standing on a rock; and an angry torrent rolled between the rock and the dry safe land. The waves began to invade the rock, and the spirit unfurled its wings as to flee. And then foul things climbed up from the slime of the rock, and descended from the mists of the troubled skies, and they coiled round the wings and clogged them.

“Then a Voice cried in my ear,—‘Seest thou not on the perilous rock the Soul of Harold the Brave?—seest thou not that the waters engulf it, if the wings fail to flee? Up, Truth, whose strength is in purity, whose image is woman, and aid the soul of the brave.’ I sought to spring to thy side; but I was powerless, and behold, close beside me, through my sleep as through a veil, appeared the shafts of the ruined temple in which I lay reclined. And, methought, I saw Hilda sitting alone by the Saxon’s grave, and pouring from a crystal vessel black drops into a human heart which

she held in her hands; and out of that heart grew a child, and out of that child a youth, with dark mournful brow. And the youth stood by thy side and whispered to thee; and from his lips there came a reeking smoke, and in that smoke as in a blight the wings withered up. And I heard the Voice say,—‘Hilda, it is thou that hast destroyed the good angel, and reared from the poisoned heart the loathsome tempter!’ And I cried aloud, but it was too late; the waves swept over thee, and above the waves there floated an iron helmet, and on the helmet was a golden crown—the crown I had seen in the hand of the spectre!”

“But this is no evil dream, my Edith,” said Harold gaily.

Edith, unheeding him, continued,—

“I started from my sleep. The sun was still high—the air lulled and windless. Then through the shafts and down the hill there glided in that clear waking daylight, a grisly shape like that which I have heard our maidens say the witch-hags, sometimes seen in the forest, assume; yet in truth, it seemed neither of man nor woman. It turned its face once towards me, and on that

hideous face were the glee and hate of a triumphant fiend. Oh, Harold, what should all this portend?"

"Hast thou not asked thy kinswoman, the diviner of dreams?"

"I asked Hilda, and she, like thee, only murmured 'The Saxon crown!' But if there be faith in those airy children of the night, surely, O adored one, the vision forebodes danger, not to life, but to soul; and the words I heard seemed to say that thy wings were thy valour, and the Fylgia thou hadst lost was,—no, *that* were impossible—"

"That my Fylgia was TRUTH, which losing, I were indeed lost to thee. Thou dost well," said Harold loftily, "to hold *that* among the lies of the fancy. All else may, perchance, desert me, but never mine own free soul. Self-reliant hath Hilda called me in mine earlier days, and,—wherever fate casts me,—in my truth, and my love, and my dauntless heart, I dare both man and the fiend."

Edith gazed a moment in devout admiration on the mien of her hero-lover, then she drew close and closer to his breast, consoled and believing.

CHAPTER V.

WITH all her persuasion of her own powers in penetrating the future, we have seen that Hilda had never consulted her oracles on the fate of Harold, without a dark and awful sense of the ambiguity of their responses. That fate, involving the mightiest interests of a great race, and connected with events operating on the farthest times and the remotest lands, lost itself to her prophetic ken amidst omens the most contradictory, shadows and lights the most conflicting, meshes the most entangled. Her human heart, devotedly attached to the Earl through her love for Edith,—her pride obstinately bent on securing to the last daughter of her princely race that throne, which all her vaticinations, even when most gloomy, assured her was destined to the man with whom

Edith's doom was interwoven, combined to induce her to the most favourable interpretation of all that seemed sinister and doubtful. But according to the tenets of that peculiar form of magic cultivated by Hilda, the comprehension became obscured by whatever partook of human sympathy. It was a magic wholly distinct from the malignant witchcraft more popularly known to us, and which was equally common to the Germanic and Scandinavian heathens.

The magic of Hilda was rather akin to the old Cimbrian Alirones, or sacred prophetesses; and, as with them, it demanded the *priestess*,—that is, the person without human ties or emotions, a spirit clear as a mirror, upon which the great images of destiny might be cast untroubled.

However the natural gifts and native character of Hilda might be perverted by the visionary and delusive studies habitual to her, there was in her very infirmities a grandeur, not without its pathos. In this position which she had assumed between the earth and the heaven, she stood so solitary and in such chilling air,—all the doubts that beset her lonely and daring soul came in

such gigantic forms of terror and menace!— On the verge of the mighty Heathenesse sinking fast into the night of ages, she towered amidst the shades, a shade herself; and round her gathered the last demons of the Dire Belief, defying the march of their luminous foe, and centering round their mortal priestess, the wrecks of their horrent empire over a world redeemed.

All the night that succeeded her last brief conference with Harold, the Vala wandered through the wild forest land, seeking haunts, or employed in collecting herbs, hallowed to her dubious yet solemn lore; and the last stars were receding into the cold grey skies, when, returning homeward she beheld within the circle of the Druid temple a motionless object, stretched on the ground near the Teuton's grave; she approached, and perceived what seemed a corpse, it was so still and stiff in its repose, and the face upturned to the stars was so haggard and deathlike;—a face horrible to behold; the evidence of extreme age was written on the shrivelled livid skin and the deep furrows, but the expression retained that intense malignity which belongs to a power of life that extreme age

rarely knows. The garb, which was that of a remote fashion, was foul and ragged, and neither by the garb, nor by the face, was it easy to guess what was the sex of this seeming corpse. But by a strange and peculiar odour that rose from the form,* and a certain glistening on the face, and the lean folded hands, Hilda knew that the creature was one of those witches, esteemed of all the most deadly and abhorred, who, by the application of certain ointments, were supposed to possess the art of separating soul from body, and, leaving the last as dead, to dismiss the first to the dismal orgies of the *Sabbat*. It was a frequent custom to select for the place of such trances, heathen temples and ancient graves. And Hilda seated herself beside the witch to await the waking. The cock crowed thrice, heavy mists began to arise from the glades, covering the gnarled roots of the forest trees, when the dread face on which Hilda calmly gazed, showed symptoms of returning life; a strong convulsion shook the vague indefinite form under its huddled garments, the eyes opened; closed,—opened again;

* See Note (D) at the end of this volume.

and what had a few moments before seemed a dead thing, sate up and looked round.

“Wicca,” said the Danish Prophetess, with an accent between contempt and curiosity, “for what mischief to beast or man hast thou followed the noiseless path of the Dreams through the airs of Night?”

The creature gazed hard upon the questioner, from its bleared but fiery eyes, and replied slowly, “Hail, Hilda, the Morthwyrtha! why art thou not of us, why comest thou not to our revels? Gay sport have we had to-night with Faul* and Zabulus; but gayer far shall our sport be in the wassail hall of Senlac, when thy grandchild shall come in the torchlight to the bridal bed of her lord. A buxom bride is Edith the Fair, and fair looked her face in her sleep on yester noon, when I sate by her side, and breathed on her brow, and murmured the verse that blackens the dream; but fairer still shall she look in her sleep by her lord. Ha! ha! Ho! we shall be there, with Zabulus and Faul; we shall be there!”

* Faul was an evil spirit much dreaded by the Saxons. Zabulus and Diabolus (the Devil) seem to have been the same.

“How!” said Hilda, thrilled to learn that the secret ambition she cherished was known to this loathed sister in the art. “How dost thou pretend to that mystery of the future, which is dim and clouded even to me? Canst thou tell when and where the daughter of the Norse kings shall sleep on the breast of her lord?”

A sound that partook of laughter, but was so unearthly in its malignant glee that it seemed not to come from a human lip, answered the Vala; and as the laugh died the witch rose, and said,

“Go and question thy dead, O Morthwyrtha! Thou deemest thyself wiser than we are; we wretched hags, whom the corl seeks when his herd has the murrain, or the girl when her false love forsakes her; we, who have no dwelling known to man, but are found at need in the wold, or the cave, or the side of dull slimy streams, where the murderess-mother hath drowned her babe. Askest thou, O Hilda, the rich and the learned, askest thou counsel and lore from the daughter of Faul?”

“No,” answered the Vala haughtily, “not to such as thou, do the great Nornas unfold the

future. What knowest thou of the runes of old, whispered by the trunkless skull to the mighty Odin? runes that control the elements, and conjure up the Shining Shadows of the grave. Not with thee will the stars confer: and thy dreams are foul with revelries obscene, not solemn and haunted with the bodements of things to come! Only I marvelled, while I beheld thee on the Saxon's grave, what joy such as thou can find in that life above life, which draws upward the soul of the true Vala."

"The joy," replied the Witch, "the joy which comes from wisdom and power, higher than you ever won with your spells from the rune or the star. Wrath gives the venom to the slaver of the dog, and death to the curse of the Witch. When wilt thou be as wise as the hag thou despisest? When will all the clouds that beset thee roll away from thy ken? When thy hopes are all crushed, when thy passions lie dead, when thy pride is abased, when thou art but a wreck, like the shafts of this temple, through which the starlight can shine. *Then* only, thy soul will see clearly the sense of the runes, and then, thou and I will meet on the verge of the Black Shoreless Sea!"

So, despite all her haughtiness and disdain, did these words startle the lofty Prophetess, that she remained gazing into space long after that fearful apparition had vanished, and up from the grass, which those obscene steps had profaned, sprang the lark carolling.

But ere the sun had dispelled the dews on the forest sward, Hilda had recovered her wonted calm, and, locked within her own secret chamber, prepared the seid and the runes for the invocation of the dead.

CHAPTER VI.

RESOLVING, should the auguries consulted permit him to depart, to entrust Gurth with the charge of informing Edith, Harold parted from his betrothed, without hint of his suspended designs; and he passed the day in making all preparations for his absence and his journey, promising Gurth to give his final answer on the morrow,—when either himself or his brother should depart for Rouen. But more and more impressed with the arguments of Gurth, and his own sober reason, and somewhat perhaps influenced by the forebodings of Edith, (for that mind, once so constitutionally firm, had become tremulously alive to such airy influences,) he had almost predetermined to assent to his brother's prayer, when he departed to keep his dismal appointment with the Morthwyrtha. The night was dim, but not dark, no moon shone, but the stars, wan though frequent, gleamed pale, as from the farthest deeps of the

heaven; clouds grey and fleecy rolled slowly across the welkin, veiling and disclosing, by turns, the melancholy orbs.

The Morthwyrtha, in her dark dress, stood within the circle of stones. She had already kindled a fire at the foot of the bautastein, and its glare shone redly on the grey shafts; playing through their forlorn gaps upon the sward. By her side was a vessel, seemingly of pure water, filled from the old Roman fountain, and its clear surface flashed blood-red in the beams. Behind them, in a circle round both fire and water, were fragments of bark, cut in a peculiar form, like the head of an arrow, and inscribed with the mystic letters; nine were the fragments, and on each fragment were graved the runes. In her right hand the Morthwyrtha held her seid staff, her feet were bare, and her loins girt by the Hunnish belt inscribed with mystic letters; from the belt hung a pouch or gipsire of bear-skin, with plates of silver. Her face, as Harold entered the circle, had lost its usual calm—it was wild, and troubled.

She seemed unconscious of Harold's presence, and her eye, fixed and rigid, was as that of one in

a trance. Slowly, as if constrained by some power not her own, she began to move round the ring with a measured pace, and at last her voice broke low, hollow, and internal, into a rugged chaunt, which may be thus imperfectly translated—

“ By the Urdar-fount dwelling,
Day by day from the rill,
The Nornas besprinkle
The ash Ygg-drassill.*
The hart bites the buds,
And the snake gnaws the root,
But the eagle all-seeing
Keeps watch on the fruit.

“ These drops on thy tomb
From the fountain I pour;
With the rune I invoke thee,
With flame I restore.
Dread Father of men
In the land of thy grave,
Give voice to the Vala,
And light to the Brave.”

* *Ygg-drassill*, the mystic Ash-tree of Life, or symbol of the earth, watered by the Fates.—See Note (E) at the end of this volume.

As she thus chaunted, the Morthwyrtha now sprinkled the drops from the vessel over the bautastein,—now, one by one, cast the fragments of bark scrawled with runes on the fire. Then, whether or not some glutinous or other chemical material had been mingled in the water, a pale gleam broke from the grave-stone thus besprinkled, and the whole tomb glistened in the light of the leaping fire. From this light a mist or thin smoke gradually rose, and took, though vaguely, the outline of a vast human form. But so indefinite was the outline to Harold's eye, that gazing on it steadily, and stilling with strong effort his loud heart, he knew not whether it was a phantom or a vapour that he beheld.

The Vala paused, leaning on her staff, and gazing in awe on the glowing stone, while the Earl, with his arms folded on his broad breast, stood hushed and motionless. The sorceress recommenced—

“ Mighty Dead, I revere thee,
Dim-shaped from the cloud,
With the light of thy deeds
For the web of thy shroud!

“ As Odin consulted
 Mimir’s skull hollow-eyed, *
 Odin’s heir comes to seek
 In the Phantom a guide.”

As the Morthwyrtha ceased, the fire crackled loud, and from its flame flew one of the fragments of bark to the feet of the sorceress:—the runic letters all indented with sparks.

The sorceress uttered a loud cry, which, despite his courage and his natural strong sense, thrilled through the Earl’s heart to his marrow and bones, so appalling was it with wrath and terror; and while she gazed aghast on the blazing letters, she burst forth—

“ No warrior art thou,
 And no child of the tomb;
 I know thee, and shudder,
 Great Asa of Doom.

“ Thou constrainest my lips,
 And thou crushest my spell;
 Bright Son of the Giant—
 Dark Father of Hell!”†

* Mimir, the most celebrated of the giants. The Vaner, with whom he was left as a hostage, cut off his head. Odin embalmed it by his *seid*, or magic art, pronounced over it mystic runes, and, ever after, consulted it on critical occasions.

† Asa-Lok or Loke—(distinct from Utgard-Lok, the demon of the Infernal Regions)—descended from the Giants, but received

The whole form of the Morthwyrtha then became convulsed and agitated, as if with the tempest of frenzy; the foam gathered to her lips, and her voice rang forth like a shriek—

“ In the Iron Wood rages
 The Weaver of Harm,
 The giant Blood-drinker
 Hag-born MANAGARM.*

“ A keel nears the shoal;
 From the slime and the mud
 Crawl the newt and the adder,
 The spawn of the flood.

“ Thou stands't on the rock
 Where the dreamer beheld thee.
 O soul, spread thy wings,
 Ere the glamour hath spell'd thee.

among the celestial Deities; a treacherous and malignant Power, fond of assuming disguises and plotting evil;—corresponding in his attributes with our ‘Lucifer.’—One of his progeny was Hela, the queen of Hell.

* “ A hag dwells in a wood called Jamvid, the Iron Wood, the mother of many gigantic sons shaped like wolves; there is one of a race more fearful than all, named ‘Managarm.’ He will be filled with the blood of men who draw near their end, and will swallow up the moon and stain the heavens and the earth with blood.”—From the PROSE EDDA. In the Scandinavian poetry, Managarm is sometimes the symbol of *war*, and the ‘Iron Wood’ a metaphor for *spears*.

“ Oh, dread is the tempter,
And strong the control ;
But conquered the tempter,
If firm be the soul ! ”

The Vala paused ; and though it was evident that in her frenzy she was still unconscious of Harold's presence, and seemed but to be the compelled and passive voice to some power, real or imaginary, beyond her own existence, the proud man approached, and said—

“ Firm shall be my soul ; nor of the dangers which beset it would I ask the dead or the living. If plain answers to mortal sense can come from these airy shadows or these mystic charms, reply, O, interpreter of fate ; reply but to the questions, I demand. If I go to the court of the Norman, shall I return unscathed ? ”

The Vala stood rigid as a shape of stone while Harold thus spoke ; and her voice came so low and strange as if forced from her scarce-moving lips—

“ Thou shalt return unscathed.”

“ Shall the hostages of Godwin, my father, be released ? ”

“The hostages of Godwin shall be released,” answered the same voice; “the hostage of Harold be retained.”

“Wherefore hostage from me?”

“In pledge of alliance with the Norman.”

“Ha! then the Norman and Harold shall plight friendship and troth?”

“Yes!” answered the Vala; but this time a visible shudder passed over her rigid form.

“Two questions more, and I have done. The Norman priests have the ear of the Roman Pontiff. Shall my league with William the Norman avail to win me my bride?”

“It will win thee the bride thou wouldst never have wedded but for thy league with William the Norman. Peace with thy questions, peace!” continued the voice, trembling as with some fearful struggle; “for it is the Demon that forces my words, and they wither my soul to speak them.”

“But one question more remains; shall I live to wear the crown of England; and if so, when shall I be a king?”

At these words the face of the Prophetess

kindled, the fire suddenly leapt up higher and brighter; again, vivid sparks lighted the runes on the fragments of bark that were shot from the flame; over these last the Morthwyrtha bowed her head, and then, lifting it, triumphantly burst once more into song.

“ When the Wolf Month,* grim and still,
Heaps the snow-mass on the hill;
When, through white air sharp and bitter,
Mocking sunbeams freeze and glitter; -
When the ice-gems bright and barbed
Deck the boughs the leaves had garbed;
Then the measure shall be meted,
And the circle be completed.
Cerdic’s race, the Thor-descended,
In the Monk-king’s tomb be ended;
And no Saxon brow but thine
Wear the crown of Woden’s line.”

“ Where thou wendest, wend unfearing,
Every step thy throne is nearing.
Fraud may plot, and force assail thee,—
Shall the soul thou trustest fail thee?
If it fail thee, scornful hearer,
Still the throne shines near and nearer.”

* Wolfmonth, January.

Guile with guile oppose, and never
Crown and brow shall Force dissever :
Till the dead men unforgiving
Loose the war steeds on the living ;
Till a sun whose race is ending
Sees the rival stars contending ;
Where the dead men unforgiving,
Wheel the war-steeds round the living.

“ Where thou wendest, wend unfearing ;
Every step thy throne is nearing.
Never shall thy House decay,
Nor thy sceptre pass away,
While the Saxon name endureth
In the land thy throne secureth ;
Saxon name and throne together,
Leaf and root, shall wax and wither ;
So the measure shall be meted,
And the circle close completed.

“ Art thou answered, dauntless seeker ?
Go, thy bark shall ride the breaker,
Every billow high and higher,
Waft thee up to thy desire ;
And a force beyond thine own,
Drift and strand thee on the throne.

“ When the Wolf Month, grim and still,
Piles the snow-mass on the hill,

In the white air sharp and bitter,
Shall thy kingly sceptre glitter :
When the ice-gems barb the bough
Shall the jewels clasp thy brow :
Winter-wind, the oak uprending,
With the altar-anthem blending ;
Wind shall howl, and mone shall sing,
' Hail to Harold—HAIL THE KING ! ' ”

An exultation that seemed more than human, so intense it was, and so solemn,—thrilled, in the voice which thus closed predictions that seemed signally to belie the more vague and menacing warnings with which the dreary incantation had commenced. The Morthwyrtha stood erect and stately, still gazing on the pale blue flame that rose from the burial stone, till slowly the flame waned and paled, and at last died with a sudden flicker, leaving the grey tomb standing forth all weather-worn and desolate, while a wind rose from the north, and sighed through the roofless columns. Then as the light over the grave expired, Hilda gave a deep sigh, and fell to the ground senseless.

Harold lifted his eyes towards the stars and murmured—

“ If it be a sin, as the priests say, to pierce the dark walls which surround us here, and read the future in the dim world beyond, why gavest thou, O Heaven, the reason, never resting, save when it explores? Why hast thou set in the heart the mystic Law of Desire, ever toiling to the High, ever grasping at the Far?”

Heaven answered not the unquiet soul. The clouds passed to and fro in their wanderings, the wind still sighed through the hollow stones, the fire shot with vain sparks towards the distant stars. In the cloud and the wind and the fire couldst thou read no answer from Heaven, unquiet soul?

The next day, with a gallant company, the falcon on his wrist,* the sprightly hound gambolling before his steed, blithe of heart and high in hope, Earl Harold took his way to the Norman court.

* Bayeux tapestry.

BOOK IX.

THE BONES OF THE DEAD.



BOOK IX.

CHAPTER I.

WILLIAM, Count of the Normans, sate in a fair chamber of his palace of Rouen; and on the large table before him were ample evidences of the various labours, as warrior, chief, thinker and statesman, which filled the capacious breadth of that sleepless mind.

There, lay a plan of the new port of Cherbourg, and beside it an open MS. of the Duke's favourite book, the Commentaries of Cæsar, from which, it is said, he borrowed some of the tactics of his own martial science; marked, and dotted, and interlined with his large bold handwriting, were the words of the great Roman. A score or so of long arrows, which had received some skilful improve-

ment in feather or bolt, lay carelessly scattered over some architectural sketches of a new Abbey Church, and the proposed charter for its endowment. An open cyst, of the beautiful workmanship for which the English goldsmiths were then pre-eminently renowned, that had been among the parting gifts of Edward, contained letters from the various potentates near and far, who sought his alliance or menaced his repose.

On a perch behind him sate his favourite Norway falcon, unhooded, for it had been taught the finest polish in its dainty education,—viz. “to face company undisturbed.” At a kind of easel at the farther end of the hall, a dwarf, misshapen in limbs, but of a face singularly acute and intelligent, was employed in the outline of that famous action at Val des Dunes, which had been the scene of one of the most brilliant of William’s feats in arms—an outline intended to be transferred to the notable “stitchwork” of Matilda the Duchess.

Upon the floor, playing with a huge boar hound of English breed, that seemed but ill to like the play, and every now and then snarled and showed his white teeth, was a young boy,

with something of the Duke's features, but with an expression more open and less sagacious; and something of the Duke's broad build of chest and shoulder, but without promise of the Duke's stately stature, which was needed to give grace and dignity to a strength otherwise cumbrous and graceless. And indeed, since William's visit to England, his athletic shape had lost much of its youthful symmetry, though not yet deformed by that corpulence which was a disease almost as rare in the Norman as the Spartan. Nevertheless, what is a defect in the gladiator is often but a beauty in the prince; and the Duke's large proportions filled the eye with a sense both of regal majesty and physical power. His countenance, yet more than his form, showed the work of time; the short dark hair was worn into partial baldness at the temples by the habitual friction of the casque, and the constant indulgence of wily stratagem and ambitious craft had deepened the wrinkles round the plotting eye and the firm mouth: so that it was only by an effort like that of an actor, that his aspect regained the knightly and noble frankness it had

once worn. The accomplished prince was no longer, in truth, what the bold warrior had been,—he was greater in state and less in soul. And already, despite all his grand qualities as a ruler, his imperious nature had betrayed signs of what he, (whose constitutional sternness the Norman freemen, not without effort, curbed into the limits of justice,) might become, if wider scope were afforded to his fiery passions and unsparing will.

Before the Duke, who was leaning his chin on his hand, stood Mallett de Graville, speaking earnestly, and his discourse seemed both to interest and please his Lord.

“Eno’!” said William, “I comprehend the nature of the land and its men,—a land that, untaught by experience, and persuaded that a peace of twenty or thirty years must last till the crack of doom, neglects all its defences, and has not one fort, save Dover, between the coast and the capital,—a land which must be won or lost by a single battle, and men (here the Duke hesitated), and *men*, he resumed with a sigh, “whom it will be so hard to conquer, that, *pardez*, I don’t wonder they neglect their

fortresses. Enough, I say, of them. Let us return to Harold,—thou thinkest, then, that he is worthy of his fame?”

“He is almost the only Englishman I have seen,” answered De Graville, “who hath received scholarly rearing and nurture; and all his faculties are so evenly balanced, and all accompanied by so composed a calm, that methinks, when I look at and hear him, I contemplate some artful castle,—the strength of which can never be known at the first glance, nor except by those who assail it.”

“Thou art mistaken, Sire De Graville, said the Duke, with a shrewd and cunning twinkle of his luminous dark eyes. “For thou tellest me that he hath no thought of my pretensions to the English throne,—that he inclines willingly to thy suggestions to come himself to my court for the hostages,—that, in a word, he is not suspicious.”

“Certes, he is not suspicious,” returned Mallet.

“And thinkest thou that an artful castle were worth much without warder or sentry,—or a cultivated mind strong and safe, without its watchman,—Suspicion?”

“Truly, my lord speaks well and wisely,” said the knight, startled: “But Harold is a man thoroughly English, and the English are a *gens* the least suspecting of any created thing between an angel and a sheep.”

William laughed aloud. But his laugh was checked suddenly; for at that moment a fierce yell smote his ears, and looking hastily up, he saw his hound and his son rolling together on the ground, in a grapple that seemed deadly.

William sprang to the spot; but the boy, who was then under the dog, cried out,—“*Laissez aller! Laissez aller!* no rescue! I will master my own foe;” and so saying, with a vigorous effort he gained his knee, and with both hands gripped the hound’s throat, so that the beast twisted in vain, to and fro, with gnashing jaws, and in another minute would have panted out its last.

“I may save my good hound now,” said William, with the gay smile of his earlier days, and, though not without some exertion of his prodigious strength, he drew the dog from his son’s grasp.

“That was ill done, father,” said Robert, sur-

named even then the *Courthouse*, "to take part with thy son's foe."

"But my son's foe is thy father's property, my *vaillant*," said the Duke; "and thou must answer to me for treason in provoking quarrel and feud with my own four-footed vavasour."

"It is not thy property, father; thou gavest the dog to me when a whelp."

"Fables, *Monseigneur de Courthouse*; I lent it to thee but for a day, when thou hadst put out thine ankle bone in jumping off the rampire; and, all maimed as thou wert, thou hadst still malice enow in thee to worry the poor beast into a fever."

"Gave or lent, it is the same thing, father; what I have once, that will I hold, as thou didst before me, in thy cradle."

Then the great Duke, who in his own house was the fondest and weakest of men, was so doltish and doting as to take the boy in his arms and kiss him,—nor, with all his far-sighted sagacity, deemed he that in that kiss lay the seed of the awful curse that grew up from a father's agony, to end in a son's misery and perdition.

Even Mallet de Graville frowned at the sight of the sire's infirmity,—even Turolde the dwarf shook his head. At that moment an officer entered, and announced that an English nobleman, apparently in great haste, (for his horse had dropped down dead as he dismounted,) had arrived at the palace, and craved instant audience of the Duke. William put down the boy, gave the brief order for the stranger's admission, and, punctilious in ceremonial, and beckoning De Graville to follow him, passed at once into the next chamber, and seated himself on his chair of state.

In a few moments one of the seneschals of the palace ushered in a visitor, whose long moustache at once proclaimed him Saxon, and in whom De Graville with surprise recognised his old friend, Godrith. The young thegn, with a reverence more hasty than those to which William was accustomed, advanced to the foot of the dais, and, using the Norman language, said, in a voice thick with emotion,—

“From Harold the Earl, greeting to thee, *Monseigneur*. Most foul and unchristian wrong hath been done the Earl by thy liegeman, Guy,

Count of Ponthieu. Sailing hither in two barks from England, with intent to visit thy court, storm and wind drove the Earl's vessels towards the mouth of the Somme;* there landing, and without fear, as in no hostile country, he and his train were seized by the count himself, and cast into prison in the castle of Belrem.† A dungeon fit but for malefactors, holds, while I speak, the first lord of England, and brother-in-law to its King. Nay, hints of famine, torture, and death itself, have been darkly thrown out by this most disloyal count, whether in earnest, or with the base view of heightening ransom. At length, wearied perhaps by the Earl's firmness and disdain, this traitor of Ponthieu hath permitted me in the Earl's behalf to bear the message of Harold. He came to thee as to a prince and a friend: sufferest thou thy liegeman to detain him as a thief or a foe?"

"Noble Englishman," replied William gravely, "this is a matter more out of my cognizance than thou seemest to think. It is true that Guy,

* ROMAN. DE ROU. See Part. ii. 1078.

† *Belrem*, the present Beaurain, near Montreuil.

Count of Ponthieu, holds fief under me, but I have no control over the laws of his realm. And by those laws, he hath right of life and death over all stranded and waifed on his coast. Much grieve I for the mishap of your famous Earl, and what I can do, I will; but I can only treat in this matter with Guy as prince with prince, not as lord to vassal. Meanwhile I pray you to take rest and food; and I will seek prompt counsel as to the measures to adopt."

The Saxon's face showed disappointment and dismay at this answer, so different from what he had expected; and he replied with the natural honest bluntness which all his younger affection of Norman manners had never eradicated,—

"Food will I not touch, nor wine drink, till thou, Lord Count, hast decided what help, as noble to noble, Christian to Christian, man to man, thou givest to him who has come into this peril solely from his trust in thee."

"Alas!" said the grand dissimulator, "heavy is the responsibility with which thine ignorance of our land, laws, and men would charge me. If I take but one false step in this matter, woe

indeed to thy lord! Guy is hot and haughty, and in his *droits*; he is capable of sending me the Earl's head in reply to too dure a request for his freedom. Much treasure and broad lands will it cost me, I fear, to ransom the Earl. But be cheered; half my duchy were not too high a price for thy lord's safety. Go, then, and eat with a good heart, and drink to the Earl's health with a hopeful prayer."

"An it please you, my lord," said De Graville, "I know this gentle thegn, and will beg of you the grace to see to his entertainment, and sustain his spirits."

"Thou shalt, but later; so noble a guest none but my chief seneschal should be the first to honour." Then turning to the officer in waiting, he bade him lead the Saxon to the chamber tenanted by William Fitzosborne (who then lodged within the palace), and committed him to that Count's care.

As the Saxon sullenly withdrew; and as the door closed on him, William rose and strode to and fro the room exultingly.

"I have him! I have him!" he cried aloud;

“not as free guest, but as ransomed captive. I have him—the Earl!—I have him! Go, Mallet, my friend, now seek this sour-looking Englishman; and, hark thee! fill his ear with all the tales thou canst think of as to Guy’s cruelty and ire. Enforce all the difficulties that lie in my way towards the Earl’s delivery. Great make the danger of the capture, and vast all the favour of release. Comprehendest thou?”

“I am Norman, *Monseigneur*,” replied De Graville, with a slight smile; “and we Normans can make a short mantle cover a large space. You will not be displeased with my address.”

“Go, then—go,” said William, “and send me forthwith—Lanfranc—no, hold—not Lanfranc, he is too scrupulous; Fitzosborne—no, too haughty. Go, first, to my brother, Odo of Bayeux, and pray him to seek me on the instant.”

The knight bowed and vanished, and William continued to pace the room, with sparkling eyes and murmuring lips.

CHAPTER II.

NOT till after repeated messages, at first without talk of ransom, and in high tone, affected, no doubt, by William to spin out the negotiations, and augment the value of his services, did Guy of Ponthieu consent to release his illustrious captive,—the guerdon, a large sum and *un bel manoir** on the river Eaulne. But whether that guerdon were the fair ransom-fee, or the price for concerted snare, no man now can say, and sharper than ours the wit that forms the more likely guess. These stipulations effected, Guy himself opened the doors of the dungeon; and affecting to treat the whole matter as one of law and right, now happily and fairly settled, was as courteous and debonnair as he had before been dark and menacing.

* ROMAN DE ROU, part ii. 1079.

He even himself, with a brilliant train, accompanied Harold to the *Chateau d'Eu*,* whither William journeyed to give him the meeting; and laughed with a gay grace at the Earl's short and scornful replies to his compliments and excuses. At the gates of this chateau, not famous, in after times, for the good faith of its lords, William himself, laying aside all the pride of etiquette which he had established at his court, came to receive his visitor; and aiding him to dismount, embraced him cordially, amidst a loud fanfaron of fifes and trumpets.

The flower of that glorious nobility, which a few generations had sufficed to rear out of the lawless pirates of the Baltic, had been selected to do honour alike to guest and host.

There, were Hugo de Montfort, and Roger de Beaumont, famous in council as in the field, and already grey with fame. There was Henri, Sire de Ferrers, whose name is supposed to have arisen from the vast forges that burned around his castle, on the anvils of which were welded the arms impenetrable in every field. There was Raoul de Tancarville, the

* WILLIAM OF POITIERS, '*apud Aucense Castrum.*'

old tutor of William, hereditary Chamberlain of the Norman Counts; and Geoffroi de Mandeville, and Tonstain the Fair, whose name still preserved, amidst the general corruption of appellations, the evidence of his Danish birth; and Hugo de Grantmesnil, lately returned from exile; and Humphrey de Bohun, whose old castle in Carcutan may yet be seen; and St. John, and Lacie, and D'Aincourt, of broad lands between the Maine and the Oise; and William de Montfichet, and Roger, nicknamed "Bigod," and Roger de Mortemer; and many more, whose fame lives in another land than that of Neustria! There, too, were the chief prelates and abbots of a church that since William's accession had risen into repute with Rome and with Learning, unequalled on this side the Alps; their white aubes over their gorgeous robes; Lanfranc, and the Bishop of Coutance, and the Abbot of Bec, and foremost of all in rank, but not in learning, Odo of Bayeux.

So great the assemblage of Quens and prelates, that there was small room in the court-yard for the lesser knights and chiefs, who yet hustled each

other, with loss of Norman dignity, for a sight of the lion which guarded England. And still, amidst all those men of mark and might, Harold, simple and calm, looked as he had looked on his war-ship in the Thames, the man who could lead them all!

From those, indeed, who were fortunate enough to see him as he passed up by the side of William, as tall as the Duke, and no less erect—of far slighter bulk, but with a strength almost equal, to a practised eye, in his compacter symmetry and more supple grace,—from those who saw him thus, an admiring murmur rose; for no men in the world so valued and cultivated personal advantages as the Norman knighthood.

Conversing easily with Harold, and well watching him while he conversed, the Duke led his guest into a private chamber in the third floor* of the castle, and in that chamber were Haco and Wolnoth.

“This, I trust, is no surprise to you,” said the Duke, smiling; “and now I shall but mar

* As soon as the rude fort of the middle ages admitted something of magnificence and display; the state rooms were placed in the third story of the inner court, as being the most secure.

your commune." So saying, he left the room, and Wolnoth rushed to his brother's arms, while Haco, more timidly, drew near and touched the Earl's robe.

As soon as the first joy of the meeting was over, the Earl said to Haco, whom he had drawn to his breast with an embrace as fond as that bestowed on Wolnoth,—

"Remembering thee a boy, I came to say to thee, 'Be my son;' but seeing thee a man, I change the prayer;—supply thy father's place, and be my brother! And thou, Wolnoth, hast thou kept thy word to me? Norman is thy garb, in truth; is thy heart still English?"

"Hist!" whispered Haco; "hist! We have a proverb, that walls have ears."

"But French walls can hardly understand our broad Saxon of Kent, I trust," said Harold, smiling, though with a shade on his brow.

"True; continue to speak Saxon," said Haco, "and we are safe."

"Safe!" echoed Harold.

"Haco's fears are childish, my brother," said Wolnoth, "and he wrongs the Duke."

"Not the Duke, but the policy which surrounds

him like an atmosphere," exclaimed Haco. "Oh, Harold, generous indeed wert thou to come hither for thy kinsfolk—generous! But for England's weal, better that we had rotted out our lives in exile, ere thou, hope and prop of England, set foot in these webs of wile."

"Tut!" said Wolnoth, impatiently; "good is it for England that the Norman and Saxon should be friends."

Harold, who had lived to grow as wise in men's hearts as his father, save when the natural trustfulness that lay under his calm reserve lulled his sagacity, turned his eye steadily on the faces of his two kinsmen; and he saw at the first glance that a deeper intellect and a graver temper than Wolnoth's fair face betrayed, characterized the dark eye and serious brow of Haco. He therefore drew his nephew a little aside, and said to him,—

"Forewarned is forearmed. Deemest thou that this fair-spoken Duke will dare aught against my life?"

"Life, no; liberty, yes."

Harold started, and those strong passions native

to his breast, but usually curbed beneath his majestic will, heaved in his bosom, and flashed in his eye.

“Liberty!—let him dare! Though all his troops paved the way from his court to his coasts, I would hew my way through their ranks.”

“Deemest thou that I am a coward?” said Haco simply, “yet, contrary to all law and justice, and against King Edward’s well-known remonstrance, hath not the Count detained me, years, yea, long years, in his land? Kind are his words, wily his deeds. Fear not force; fear fraud.”

“I fear neither,” answered Harold, drawing himself up, “nor do I repent me one moment—No! nor did I repent in the dungeon of that felon Count, whom God grant me life to repay with fire and sword for his treason—that I myself have come hither to demand my kinsmen. I come in the name of England, strong in her might, and sacred in her majesty.”

Before Haco could reply, the door opened, and Raoul de Tancarville, as Grand Chamberlain, entered, with all Harold’s Saxon train, and a

goodly number of Norman squires and attendants, bearing rich vestures.

The noble bowed to the Earl with his country's polished courtesy, and besought leave to lead him to the bath, while his own squires prepared his raiment for the banquet to be held in his honour. So all further conference with his young kinsmen was then suspended.

The Duke, who affected a state no less regal than that of the Court of France, permitted no one, save his own family and his guests, to sit at his own table. His great officers (those imperious lords) stood beside his chair; and William Fitzosborne, "the Proud Spirit," placed on the board with his own hand the dainty dishes for which the Norman cooks were renowned. And great men were those Norman cooks; and often for some "delicate," more ravishing than wont, gold chain, and gem, and even "*bel maneir*," fell to their guerdon.* It was worth being a cook in those days!

* A manor, (but not, alas! in Normandy,) was held by one of his cooks, on the tenure of supplying William with a dish of dillegrouit.

The most seductive of men was William in his fair moods; and he lavished all the witcheries at his control upon his guest. If possible, yet more gracious was Matilda the Duchess. This woman, eminent for mental culture, for personal beauty, and for a spirit and an ambition no less great than her lord's, knew well how to choose such subjects of discourse as might most flatter an English ear: Her connexion with Harold, through her sister's marriage with Tostig, warranted a familiarity almost caressing, which she assumed towards the comely Earl; and she insisted, with a winning smile, that all the hours the Duke would leave at his disposal he must spend with her.

The banquet was enlivened by the song of the great Taillefer himself, who selected a theme that artfully flattered alike the Norman and the Saxon; viz. the aid given by Rolfganger to Athelstan, and the alliance between the English King and the Norman founder. He dexterously introduced into the song praises of the English, and the value of their friendship; and the Countess significantly applauded each gallant compliment to the land of the famous guest. If Harold was pleased by such

poetic courtesies, he was yet more surprised by the high honour in which Duke, baron, and prelate evidently held the Poet: for it was among the worst signs of that sordid spirit, honouring only wealth, which had crept over the original character of the Anglo-Saxon, that the bard, or scop, with them, had sunk into great disrepute, and it was even forbidden to ecclesiastics* to admit such landless vagrants to their company.

Much, indeed, there was in that court which, even on the first day, Harold saw to admire—that stately temperance, so foreign to English excesses, (but which, alas, the Norman kept not long when removed to another soil)—that methodical state and noble pomp which characterized the Feudal system, linking so harmoniously prince to peer, and peer to knight—the easy grace, the polished wit of the courtiers—the wisdom of Lanfranc, and the higher ecclesiastics, blending worldly lore with decorous, not pedantic, regard to their sacred calling—the enlightened love of music, letters, song, and art, which coloured the

* The Council of Cloveshoe forbade the clergy to harbour poets, harpers, musicians, and buffoons.

discourse both of Duke and Duchess and the younger courtiers, prone to emulate high example, whether for ill or good—all impressed Harold with a sense of civilization and true royalty, which at once saddened and inspired his musing mind—saddened him when he thought how far behind-hand England was in much, with this comparatively petty principality—inspired him when he felt how much one great chief can do for his native land.

The unfavourable impressions made upon his thoughts by Haco's warnings could scarcely fail to yield beneath the prodigal courtesies lavished upon him, and the frank openness with which William laughingly excused himself for having so long detained the hostages, "in order, my guest, to make thee come and fetch them. And, by St. Valery, now thou art here, thou shalt not depart till, at least, thou hast lost in gentler memories the recollection of the scurvy treatment thou hast met from that barbarous Count. Nay, never bite thy lip, Harold, my friend, leave to me thy revenge upon Guy. Sooner or later, the very *maneir* he hath extorted from me shall give excuse for sword and lance, and then, *pardex*, thou

shalt come and cross steel in thine own quarrel. How I rejoice that I can shew to the *beau frère* of my dear cousin and seigneur some return for all the courtesies the English King and kingdom bestowed upon me! To-morrow we will ride to Rouen; there, all knightly sports shall be held to grace thy coming; and by St. Michael, knight-saint of the Norman, nought less will content me than to have thy great name in the list of my chosen *chevaliers*. But the night wears now, and thou sure must need sleep;" and, thus talking, the Duke himself led the way to Harold's chamber, and insisted on removing the *ouche* from his robe of state. As he did so he passed his hand, as if carelessly, along the Earl's right arm. "Ha!" said he suddenly, and in his natural tone of voice, which was short and quick, "these muscles have known practice! Dost think thou couldst bend my bow?"

"Who could bend that of—Ulysses?" returned the Earl, fixing his deep blue eye upon the Norman's. William unconsciously changed colour, for he felt that he was at that moment more Ulysses than Achilles.

CHAPTER III.

SIDE by side, William and Harold entered the fair city of Rouen, and there, a succession of the brilliant pageants and knightly entertainments, (comprising those "rare feats of honour," expanded, with the following age, into the more gorgeous display of joust and tourney,) was designed to dazzle the eyes and captivate the fancy of the Earl. But though Harold won, even by the confession of the chronicles most in favour of the Norman, golden opinions in a court more ready to deride than admire the Saxon,—though not only the "strength of his body," and "the boldness of his spirit," as shewn in exhibitions unfamiliar to Saxon warriors, but his "manners," his "eloquence, intellect, and other good qualities,"*

* ORD. VITAL.

were loftily conspicuous amidst those knightly courtiers, that sublimer part of his character, which was found in its simple manhood and intense nationality, kept him unmoved and serene amidst all intended to exercise that fatal spell which Normanized most of those who came within the circle of Norman attraction.

These festivities were relieved by pompous excursions and progresses from town to town, and fort to fort, throughout the Duchy, and, according to some authorities, even to a visit to Philip the French King at Compeigne. On the return to Rouen, Harold and the six thegns of his train were solemnly admitted into that peculiar band of warlike brothers which William had instituted, and to which, following the chronicles of the after century, we have given the name of *Knights*. The silver baldrick was belted on, and the lance, with its pointed banderol, was placed in the hand, and the seven Saxon lords became Norman knights.

The evening after this ceremonial, Harold was with the Duchess and her fair daughters—all children. The beauty of one of the girls drew

from him those compliments so sweet to a mother's ear. Matilda looked up from the broidery on which she was engaged, and beckoned to her the child thus praised.

“Adeliza,” she said, placing her hand on the girl's dark locks, “though we would not that thou shouldst learn too early how men's tongues can gloze and flatter, yet this noble guest hath so high a repute for truth, that thou mayest at least believe him sincere when he says thy face is fair. Think of it, and with pride, my child; let it keep thee through youth proof against the homage of meaner men; and, peradventure, St. Michael and St. Valery may bestow on thee a mate valiant and comely as this noble lord.”

The child blushed to her brow; but answered with the quickness of a spoiled infant—unless, perhaps, she had been previously tutored so to reply,—“Sweet mother, I will have no mate and no lord but Harold himself; and if he will not have Adeliza as his wife, she will die a nun.”

“Froward child, it is not for thee to woo!” said Matilda smiling. “Thou heardest her, noble Harold: what is thine answer?”

“That she will grow wiser,” said the Earl, laughing, as he kissed the child’s forehead. “Fair damsel, ere thou art ripe for the altar, time will have sown grey in these locks; and thou wouldst smile indeed in scorn, if Harold then claimed thy troth.”

“Not so,” said Matilda seriously; “Highborn damsels see youth not in years but in fame—Fame, which is young for ever!”

Startled by the gravity with which Matilda spoke, as if to give importance to what had seemed a jest, the Earl, versed in courts, felt that a snare was round him; and replied in a tone between jest and earnest:—“Happy am I to wear on my heart a charm, proof against all the beauty even of this court.”

Matilda’s face darkened; and William entering at that time with his usual abruptness, lord and lady exchanged glances, not unobserved by Harold.

The Duke, however, drew aside the Saxon; and saying gaily, “We Normans are not naturally jealous; but then, till now, we have not had Saxon gallants closeted with our wives;” added

more seriously, "Harold, I have a grace to pray at thy hands—come with me."

The Earl followed William into his chamber, which he found filled with chiefs, in high converse; and William then hastened to inform him that he was about to make a military expedition against the Bretons; and knowing his peculiar acquaintance with the warfare, as with the language and manners, of their kindred Welch, he besought his aid in a campaign, which he promised him should be brief.

Perhaps the Earl was not, in his own mind, averse from returning William's display of power by some evidence of his own military skill, and the valour of the Saxon thegns in his train. There might be prudence in such exhibition, and, at all events, he could not with a good grace decline the proposal. He enchanted William therefore by a simple acquiescence; and the rest of the evening—deep into night—was spent in examining charts of the fort and country intended to be attacked.

The conduct and courage of Harold and his Saxons in this expedition are recorded by the

Norman chroniclers. The Earl's personal exertions saved, at the passage of Coësnon, a detachment of soldiers, who would otherwise have perished in the quicksands; and even the warlike skill of William, in the brief and brilliant campaign, was, if not eclipsed, certainly equalled, by that of the Saxon chief.

While the campaign lasted, William and Harold had but one table and one tent. To outward appearance, the familiarity between the two was that of brothers; in reality, however, these two men, both so able—one so deep in his guile, the other so wise in his tranquil caution—felt that a silent war between the two for mastery was working on, under the guise of loving peace.

Already Harold felt that the politic motives for his mission had failed him; already he felt, though he scarce knew why, that William the Norman was the last man to whom he could confide his ambition, or trust for aid.

One day, as, during a short truce with the defenders of the place they were besieging, the Normans were diverting their leisure with martial games, in which Taillefer shone pre-eminent;

while Harold and William stood without their tent, watching the animated field, the Duke abruptly exclaimed, to Mallet de Graville, "Bring me my bow. Now, Harold, let me see if thou canst bend it."

The bow was brought, and Saxon and Norman gathered round the spot.

"Fasten thy glove to yonder tree, Mallet," said the Duke, taking that mighty bow in his hand, and carefully feeling the string.

Then he drew the arc to his ear; and the tree itself seemed to shake at the shock, as the shaft, piercing the glove, lodged half way in the trunk.

"Such are not our weapons," said the Earl; "and ill would it become me, unpractised, so to peril our English honour, as to strive against the arm that could bend that arc and wing that arrow. But, that I may show these Norman knights, that at least we have some weapon wherewith we can parry shaft and smite assailer,—bring me forth, Godrith, my shield and my Danish axe."

Taking the shield and axe which the Saxon brought to him, Harold then stationed himself before the tree.

“Now, fair Duke,” said he smiling, “choose thou thy longest shaft—bid thy ten doughtiest archers take their bows; round this tree will I move, and let each shaft be aimed at whatever space in my mailless body I leave unguarded by my shield.”

“No!” said William hastily; “that were murder.”

“It is but the common peril of war,” said Harold simply; and he walked to the tree.

The blood mounted to William’s brow, and the lion’s thirst of carnage parched his throat.

“An he will have it so,” said he, beckoning to his archers; “let not Normandy be shamed. Watch well, and let every shaft go home; avoid only the head and the heart; such orgulous vaunting is best cured by blood-letting.”

The archers nodded, and took their post, each at a separate quarter; and deadly indeed seemed the danger of the Earl, for as he moved, though he kept his back guarded by the tree, some parts of his form the shield left exposed, and it would have been impossible, in his quick-shifting movements, for the archers so to aim as to wound, but to

spare life; yet the Earl seemed to take no peculiar care to avoid the peril; lifting his bare head fearlessly above the shield, and including in one gaze of his steadfast eye, calmly bright even at the distance, all the shafts of the archers.

At one moment five of the arrows hissed through the air, and with such wonderful quickness had the shield turned to each, that three fell to the ground blunted against it, and two broke on its surface.

But William, waiting for the first discharge, and seeing full mark at Harold's shoulder as the buckler turned, now sent forth his terrible shaft. The noble Taillefer with a poet's true sympathy cried, "Saxon, beware!" but the watchful Saxon needed not the warning. As if in disdain, Harold met not the shaft with his shield, but swinging high the mighty axe, (which with most men required both arms to wield it,) he advanced a step, and clove the rushing arrow in twain.

Before William's loud oath of wrath and surprise left his lips, the five shafts of the remaining archers fell as vainly as their predecessors against the nimble shield.

Then advancing, Harold said cheerfully:—
“This is but defence, fair Duke—and little worth the axe if it could not smite as well as ward. Wherefore, I pray you, place upon yonder broken stone pillar, which seems some relic of Druid heathenesse, such helm and shirt of mail as thou deemest most proof against sword and pertuizan, and judge then if our English axe can guard well our English land.”

“If thy axe can cleave the helmet I wore at Bavent, when the Franks and their King fled before me,” said the Duke, grimly, “I shall hold Cæsar in fault, not to have invented a weapon so dread.”

And striding back into his pavilion, he came forth with the helm and shirt of mail, which was worn stronger and heavier by the Normans, as fighting usually on horseback, than by Dane and Saxon, who, mainly fighting on foot, could not have endured the cumbrous burthen: and if strong and dour generally with the Norman, judge what solid weight that mighty Duke could endure! With his own hand William placed the mail on the ruined Druid stone, and on the mail the helm.

Harold looked long and gravely at the edge of the axe; it was so richly gilt and damasquined, that the sharpness of its temper could not well have been divined, under that holiday glitter. But this axe had come to him from Canute the Great, who himself, unlike the Danes, small and slight,* had supplied his deficiency of muscle by the finest dexterity and the most perfect weapons. Famous had been that axe in the delicate hand of Canute—how much more tremendous in the ample grasp of Harold! Swinging now in both hands this weapon, with a peculiar and rapid whirl, which gave it an inconceivable impetus, the Earl let fall the crushing blow: at the first stroke, cut right in the centre, rolled the helm; at the second, through all the woven mail (cleft asunder, as if the slightest filagree work of the goldsmith,) shore the blade, and a great fragment of the stone itself came tumbling on the sod.

The Normans stood aghast, and William's face was as pale as the shattered stone. The great Duke felt even his matchless dissimulation fail

* Canute made his inferior strength and stature his excuse for not meeting Edward Ironsides in single combat.

him; nor, unused to the special practice and craft which the axe required, could he have pretended, despite a physical strength superior even to Harold's, to rival blows that seemed to him more than mortal.

“Lives there any other man in the wide world whose arm could have wrought that feat?” exclaimed Bruse, the ancestor of the famous Scot.

“Nay,” said Harold, simply, “at least thirty thousand such men have I left at home! But this was but the stroke of an idle vanity, and strength becomes tenfold in a good cause.”

The Duke heard, and fearful lest he should betray his sense of the latent meaning couched under his guest's words, he hastily muttered forth reluctant compliment and praise; while Fitzosborne, De Bohun, and other chiefs more genuinely knightly, gave way to unrestrained admiration.

Then beckoning De Grville to follow him, the Duke strode off towards the tent of his brother of Bayeux, who, though, except on extraordinary occasions, he did not join in positive conflict, usually accompanied William in his military ex-

cursions, both to bless the host and to advise (for his martial science was considerable) the council of war.

The bishop, who, despite the sanctimony of the Court, and his own stern nature, was (though secretly and decorously) a gallant of great success in other fields than those of Mars,* was alone in his pavilion, inditing an epistle to a certain fair dame in Rouen, whom he had unwillingly left to follow his brother. At the entrance of William, whose morals in such matters were pure and rigid, he swept the letter into the chest of relics which always accompanied him, and rose, saying indifferently,—

“ A treatise on the authenticity of St. Thomas’s little finger! But what ails you? you are disturbed!”

“ Odo, Odo, this man baffles me—this man fools me; I make no ground with him. I have spent—God knows what I have spent,” said the Duke, sighing with penitent parsimony, “in banquets,

* Odo’s licentiousness was, at a later period, one of the alleged causes of his downfall, or rather against his release from the prison to which he had been consigned. He had a son named John, who distinguished himself under Henry I.—ORD. VITAL. lib. iv.

and ceremonies, and processions; to say nothing of my *bel manoir* of Yonne, and the sum wrung from my coffers by that greedy Ponthevin. All gone—all wasted—all melted like snow! and the Saxon is as Saxon as if he had seen neither Norman splendour, nor been released from the danger by Norman treasure. But, by the Splendour Divine, I were fool indeed, if I suffered him to return home. Would thou hadst seen the sorcerer cleave my helmet and mail just now, as easily as if they had been willow twigs. Oh, Odo, Odo, my soul is troubled, and St. Michael forsakes me!"

While William ran on thus distractedly, the prelate lifted his eyes inquiringly to De Graville, who now stood within the tent, and the knight briefly related the recent trial of strength.

"I see nought in this to chafe thee," said Odo; "the man once thine, the stronger the vassal, the more powerful the lord."

"But he is not mine; I have sounded him as far as I dare go. Matilda hath almost openly offered him my fairest child as his wife. Nothing dazzles, nothing moves him. Thinkest thou I care

for his strong arm? Tut, no; I chafe at the proud heart that set the arm in motion, the proud meaning his words symbolled out,—‘So will English strength guard English land from the Norman—so axe and shield will defy your mail and your shafts.’ Man, man, all the eloquence of Cicero was in the turn of that shield, and the stroke of that axe. But let him beware!” growled the Duke fiercely, “or——”

“May I speak,” interrupted De Graville, “and suggest a counsel?”

“Speak out, in God’s name!” cried the Duke.

“Then I should say, with submission, that the way to tame a lion is not by gorging him, but daunting. Bold is the lion against open foes; but a lion in the toils loses its nature. Just now my lord said that Harold should not return to his native land——”

“Nor shall he, but as my sworn man!” exclaimed the Duke.

“And if you now put to him that choice, think you it will favour your views? Will he not reject your proffers, and with hot scorn?”

“Scorn! darest thou that word to me?” cried

the Duke. "Scorn! have I no headsman whose axe is as sharp as Harold's? and the neck of a captive is not sheathed in my Norman mail."

"Pardon, pardon, my liege," said Mallet, with spirit; "but to save my chief from a hasty action that might bring long remorse, I spoke thus boldly. Give the Earl at least fair warning:—a prison, or fealty to thee, that is the choice before him!—let him know it; let him see that thy dungeons are dark, and thy walls impassable. Threaten not his life—brave men care not for that!—threaten thyself nought, but let others work upon him with fear of his freedom. I know well these Saxish men; I know well Harold; freedom is their passion, they are cowards when threatened with the doom of four walls."*

"I conceive thee, wise son," exclaimed Odo.

"Ha!" said the Duke, slowly; "and yet it was to prevent such suspicions that I took care, after the first meeting, to separate him from Haco and Wolnoth, for they must have learned much in Norman gossip, ill to repeat to the Saxon."

* William of Poitiers, the contemporary Norman chronicler, says of Harold, that he was a man to whom imprisonment was more odious than shipwreck.

“Wolnoth is almost wholly Norman,” said the bishop, smiling; “Wolnoth is bound *par-amours*, to a certain fair Norman dame; and, I trow well, prefers her charms here to the thought of his return. But Haco, as thou knowest, is sullen and watchful.”

“So much the better companion for Harold now,” said De Graville.

“I am fated ever to plot and to scheme!” said the Duke, groaning, as if he had been the simplest of men; “but, natheless, I love the stout Earl, and I mean all for his own good, that is, compatibly with my rights and claims to the heritage of Edward my cousin.”

“Of course,” said the bishop.

CHAPTER IV.

THE snares now spread for Harold were in pursuance of the policy thus resolved on. The camp soon afterwards broke up, and the troops took their way to Bayeux. William, without greatly altering his manner towards the Earl, evaded markedly (or as markedly replied not to) Harold's plain declarations, that his presence was required in England, and that he could no longer defer his departure; while, under pretence of being busied with affairs, he absented himself much from the Earl's company, or refrained from seeing him alone, and suffered Mallet de Graville, and Odo the bishop, to supply his place with Harold. The Earl's suspicions now became thoroughly aroused, and these were fed both by the hints, kindly meant, of De Graville, and the less covert discourse of

the prelate: while Mallet let drop, as in gossiping illustration of William's fierce and vindictive nature, many anecdotes of that cruelty which really stained the Norman's character, Odo, more bluntly, appeared to take it for granted that Harold's sojourn in the land would be long.

"You will have time," said he, one day, as they rode together, "to assist me, I trust, in learning the language of our forefathers. Danish is still spoken much at Bayeux, the sole place in Neustria,* where the old tongues and customs still linger; and it would serve my pastoral ministry to receive your lessons; in a year or so I might hope so to profit by them as to discourse freely with the less Frankish part of my flock."

"Surely, Lord Bishop, you jest," said Harold, seriously; "you know well that within a week, at farthest, I must sail back for England with my young kinsmen."

The prelate laughed.

* In the environs of Bayeux, still may perhaps linger the sole remains of the Scandinavian Normans, apart from the gentry. For centuries, the inhabitants of Bayeux and its vicinity were a class distinct from the Franco-Normans, or the rest of Neustria; they submitted with great reluctance to the Ducal authority, and retained their old heathen cry of Thor-aide, instead of Dieu-aide!

“I advise you, dear count and son, to be cautious how you speak so plainly to William. I perceive that you have already ruffled him by such indiscreet remarks ; and you must have seen eno’ of the Duke to know that, when his ire is up, his answers are short but his arms are long.”

“You most grievously wrong Duke William,” cried Harold, indignantly, “to suppose, merely in that playful humour, for which ye Normans are famous, that he could lay force on his confiding guest ?”

“No, not a confiding guest,—a ransomed captive. Surely my brother will deem that he has purchased of Count Guy his rights over his illustrious prisoner. But courage ! The Norman Court is not the Ponthevin dungeon ; and your chains, at least, are roses.”

The reply of wrath and defiance that rose to Harold’s lip, was checked by a sign from De Grville, who raised his finger to his lip with a face expressive of caution and alarm ; and, some little time after, as they halted to water their horses, De Grville came up to him and said in a low voice, and in Saxon,—

“Beware how you speak too frankly to Odo. What is said to him is said to William; and the Duke, at times, so acts on the spur of the moment that—But let me not wrong him, or needlessly alarm you.”

“Sire de Graville,” said Harold, “this is not the first time that the Prelate of Bayeux hath hinted at compulsion, nor that you (no doubt kindly) have warned me of purpose hostile or fraudulent. As plain man to plain man, I ask you, on your knightly honour, to tell me if you know aught to make you believe that William the Duke will, under any pretext, detain me here a captive?”

Now, though Mallet de Graville had lent himself to the service of an ignoble craft, he justified it by a better reason than complaisance to his lords; for, knowing William well, his hasty ire, and his relentless ambition, he was really alarmed for Harold’s safety. And, as the reader may have noted, in suggesting that policy of intimidation, the knight had designed to give the Earl at least the benefit of forewarning. So, thus adjured, De Graville replied sincerely,—

“Earl Harold, on my honour as your brother

in knighthood, I answer your plain question. I have cause to believe and to know that William will not suffer you to depart, unless fully satisfied on certain points, which he himself will, doubtless, ere long make clear to you."

"And if I insist on my departure, not so satisfying him?"

"Every castle on our road hath a dungeon as deep as Count Guy's; but where another William to deliver you from William?"

"Over yon seas, a prince mightier than William, and men as resolute, at least, as your Normans."

"*Cher et puissant*, my Lord Earl," answered De Graville, "these are brave words, but of no weight in the ear of a schemer so deep as the Duke. Think you really, that King Edward—pardon my bluntness—would rouse himself from his apathy, to do more in your behalf than he has done in your kinsmen's—remonstrate and preach?—Are you even sure, that on the representation of a man he hath so loved as William, he will not be content to rid his throne of so formidable a subject? You speak of the English people; doubtless you are popular and beloved, but it is

the habit of no people, least of all your own, to stir actively and in concert, without leaders. The Duke knows the factions of England as well as you do. Remember how closely he is connected with Tostig, your ambitious brother. Have you no fear that Tostig himself, earl of the most warlike part of the kingdom, will not only do his best to check the popular feeling in your favour, but foment every intrigue to detain you here, and leave himself the first noble in the land? As for other leaders, save Gurth, (who is but your own vice earl,) who is there that will not rejoice at the absence of Harold? You have made foes of the only family that approaches the power of your own—the heirs of Leofric and Algar.—Your strong hand removed from the reins of the empire, tumults and dissensions ere long will break forth that will distract men's minds from an absent captive, and centre them on the safety of their own hearths, or the advancement of their own interests. You see that I know something of the state of your native land; but deem not that my own observation, though not idle, sufficed to bestow that knowledge. I learn it more from William's

discourses ; William, who from Flanders, from Boulogne, from England itself, by a thousand channels, hears all that passes between the cliffs of Dover and the marches of Scotland.”

Harold paused long before he replied, for his mind was now thoroughly awakened to his danger ; and, while recognising the wisdom and intimate acquaintance of affairs with which De Graville spoke, he was also rapidly revolving the best course for himself to pursue in such extremes. At length he said :—

“ I pass by your remarks on the state of England, with but one comment. You underrate Gurth, my brother, when you speak of him but as the vice earl of Harold. You underrate one, who needs but an object, to excel, in arms and in council, my father Godwin himself.—That object a brother’s wrongs would create from a brother’s love, and three hundred ships would sail up the Seine to demand your captive, manned by warriors as hardy as those who wrested Neustria from King Charles.”

“ Granted,” said De Graville. “ But, William, who could cut off the hands and feet of his own

subjects for an idle jest on his birth, could as easily put out the eyes of a captive foe. And of what worth are the ablest brain, and the stoutest arm, when the man is dependent on another for very sight!"

Harold involuntarily shuddered, but recovering himself on the instant, he replied, with a smile:—

"Thou makest thy Duke a butcher more fell than his ancestor Rollo. But thou saidst he needed but to be satisfied on certain points. What are they?"

"Ah, *that* thou must divine, or he unfold. But see, William himself approaches you."

And here the Duke, who had been till then in the rear, spurred up, with courteous excuses to Harold for his long defection from his side; and as they resumed their way, talked with all his former frankness and gaiety.

"By the way, dear brother in arms," said he, "I have provided thee this evening with comrades more welcome, I fear, than myself—Haco and Wolnoth. That last is a youth whom I love dearly: the first is unsocial enow, and methinks would make a better hermit than soldier. But, by St. Valery, I forgot to tell thee that an envoy from

Flanders to-day, amongst other news, brought me some that may interest thee. There is a strong commotion in thy brother Tostig's Northumbrian earldom, and the rumour runs that his fierce vassals will drive him forth and select some other lord: talk was of the sons of Algar—so I think ye called the stout dead Earl. This looks grave, for my dear cousin Edward's health is failing fast. May the saints spare him long from their rest !”

“These are indeed ill tidings,” said the Earl ; “and I trust that they suffice to plead at once my excuse for urging my immediate departure. Grateful I am for thy most gracious hostship, and thy just and generous intercession with thy *liegeman*” (Harold dwelt emphatically on the last word,) for my release from a capture disgraceful to all Christendom. The ransom so nobly paid for me I will not insult thee, dear my lord, by affecting to repay ; but such gifts as our cheapmen hold most rare, perchance thy lady and thy fair children will deign to receive at my hands. Of these hereafter. Now may I ask but a vessel from thy nearest port.”

“We will talk of this, dear guest and brother

knight, on some later occasion. Lo, yon castle—ye have no such in England. See its vawmures and fosses!”

“A noble pile!” answered Harold. “But pardon me that I press for—”

“Ye have no such strongholds, I say, in England?” interrupted the Duke petulantly.

“Nay,” replied the Englishman, “we have two strongholds far larger than that—Salisbury Plain and Newmarket Heath!*—strongholds that will contain fifty thousand men who need no walls but their shields. Count William, England’s ramparts are her men, and her strongest castles are her widest plains.”

“Ah!” said the Duke, biting his lip, “ah, so be it—but to return;—in that castle, mark it well, the Dukes of Normandy hold their prisoners of state;” and then he added with a laugh: “but we hold you, noble captive, in a prison more strong—our love and our heart.”

* Similar was the answer of Goodyn the Bishop of Winchester, ambassador from Henry VIII. to the French King. To this day, the English entertain the same notion of forts as Harold and Goodyn.

As he spoke, he turned his eye full upon Harold, and the gaze of the two encountered: that of the Duke was brilliant, but stern and sinister; that of Harold, steadfast and reproachful. As if by a spell, the eye of each rested long on that of the other—as the eyes of two lords of the forest, ere the rush and the spring.

William was the first to withdraw his gaze, and as he did so, his lip quivered and his brow knit. Then waving his hand for some of the lords behind to join him and the Earl, he spurred his steed, and all further private conversation was suspended. The train pulled not bridle before they reached a monastery, at which they rested for the night.

NOTES.



NOTES.

NOTE (A), page 142.

THE WANT OF FORTRESSES IN ENGLAND.

THE Saxons were sad destroyers. They destroyed the strongholds which the Briton had received from the Roman, and built very few others. Thus the land was left open to the Danes. Alfred, sensible of this defect, repaired the walls of London, and other cities, and urgently recommended his nobles and prelates to build fortresses, but could not persuade them. His great-souled daughter, Elfleda, was the only imitator of his example. She built eight castles in three years.*

It was thus that in a country, in which the general features do not allow of protracted warfare, the inhabitants were always at the hazard of a single pitched battle. Subsequent to the Conquest, in the reign of John, it was,

* ASSEB, *de Reb. Gest. Alf.* pp. 17, 18.

in truth, the strong castle of Dover, on the siege of which Prince Louis lost so much time, that saved the realm of England from passing to a French dynasty; and as, in later periods, strongholds fell again into decay, so it is remarkable to observe how easily the country was overrun after any signal victory of one of the contending parties. In this truth, the Wars of the Roses abound with much instruction. The handful of foreign mercenaries with which Henry VII. won his crown, though the real heir, the Earl of Warwick, (granting Edward IV.'s children to be illegitimate, which they clearly were according to the rites of the Church,) had never lost his claim, by the defeat of Richard at Bosworth;—the march of the Pretender to Derby—the dismay it spread throughout England, and the certainty of his conquest had he proceeded;—the easy victory of William III. at a time when certainly the bulk of the nation was opposed to his cause;—are all facts pregnant with warnings, to which we are as blind as we were in the days of Alfred.

NOTE (B), page 190.

THE RUINS ON PENMAEN-MAWR.

IN CAMDEN'S *Britannia* there is an account of the remarkable relics assigned, in the text, to the last refuge of Gryffyth ap Llewellyn, taken from a manuscript by Sir John Wynne in the time of Charles I. In this account are

minutely described, "ruinous walls of an exceeding strong fortification, compassed with a treble wall, and, within each wall, the foundations of at least one hundred towers, about six yards in diameter within the walls. This castle seems (while it stood) impregnable; there being no way to offer any assault on it, the hill being so very high, steep, and rocky, and the walls of such strength,—the way or entrance into it ascending with many turnings, so that one hundred men might defend themselves against a whole legion; and yet it should seem that there were lodgings within those walls for twenty thousand men.

"By the tradition we receive from our ancestors, this was the strongest refuge, or place of defence, that the ancient Britons had in all Snowdon; moreover, the greatness of the work shows that it was a princely fortification, strengthened by nature and workmanship."*

But in the year 1771, Governor Pownall ascended Penmaen-mawr, inspected these remains, and published his account in the *Archæologia*, vol. iii. p. 303, with a sketch both of the mount and the walls at the summit. The Governor is of opinion that it never was a fortification. He thinks that the inward enclosure contained a cairn, (or arch-Druid's sepulchre,) that there is not room for any lodgement, that the walls are not of a kind which can form a cover, and give at the same time the advantage of fighting from them. In short, that the place was one of the Druids' consecrated high places of worship. He adds, however, that "Mr. Pennant has gone twice over it, intends to make an actual survey, and anticipates much from that great antiquary's 'knowledge and accuracy.'"

* CAMDEN, *Caernarvonshire*.

We turn next to Mr. Pennant, and we find him giving a flat contradiction to the Governor. "I have more than once,"* says he, "visited this noted rock, to view the fortifications described by the editor of Camden, from some notes of that sensible old baronet, Sir John Wynne, of Gwidir, and have found his account very just.

"The fronts of three, if not four walls, presented themselves very distinctly one above the other. I measured the height of one wall, which was at the time nine feet, the thickness seven feet and a half." (Now, Governor Pownall also measured the walls, agrees pretty well with Pennant as to their width, but makes them only five feet high.) "Between these walls, in all parts, were innumerable small buildings, mostly circular. These had been much higher, as is evident from the fall of stones which lie scattered at their bottoms, and probably had once the form of towers, as Sir John asserts. Their diameter is, in general, from twelve to eighteen feet, (ample room here for lodgement;) the walls were in certain places intersected with others equally strong. This stronghold of the Britons is exactly of the same kind with those on Carn Madryn, Carn Boduan, and Tre'r Caer.

"This was most judiciously chosen to cover the passage into Anglesey, and the remoter part of their country; and must, from its *vast strength*, have been invulnerable, except by famine; being inaccessible by its natural steepness towards the sea, and on the parts fortified in the manner described." So far, Pennant *versus* Pownall! "Who shall decide when doctors disagree?" The opinion of both

* PENNANT'S *Wales*, vol. ii. p. 146.

these antiquarians is liable to demur. Governor Pownall might probably be a better judge of military defences than Pennant; but he evidently forms his notions of defence with imperfect knowledge of the forts, which would have amply sufficed for the warfare of the ancient Britons; and moreover, he was one of those led astray by Bryant's crotchets as to "High places," &c. What appears most probable is, that the place was *both* camp and fort; that the strength of the place, and the convenience of stones, suggested the surrounding the narrow area of the central sepulchre with walls, intended for refuge and defence. As to the *circular* buildings, which seem to have puzzled these antiquaries, it is strange that they appear to have overlooked the accounts which serve best to explain them. Strabo says that "the houses of the Britons were round, with a high pointed covering;" Cæsar says that they were only lighted by the door; in the Antonine Column they are represented as *circular*, with an arched entrance, single or double. They were always small, and seem to have contained but a single room. These circular buildings were not, therefore, necessarily Druidical cells, as has been supposed; nor perhaps actual towers, as contended for by Sir John Wynne; but habitations, after the usual fashion of British houses, for the inmates or garrison of the enclosure. Taking into account the traditions of the spot mentioned by Sir John Wynne, and other traditions still existing, which mark, in the immediate neighbourhood, the scenes of legendary battles, it is hoped that the reader will accept the description in the text as suggesting, amidst conflicting authorities, the most probable supposition of the nature and character of these very interesting remains

in the eleventh century,* and during the most memorable invasion of Wales (under Harold), which occurred between the time of Geraint, or Arthur, and that of Henry II.

NOTE (C), page 192.

THE IDOL BEL.

MONS. JOHANNEAU considers that Bel, or Belinus, is derived from the Greek, a surname of Apollo, and means the archer; from Belos, a dart or arrow.†

I own I think this among the spurious conceits of the learned, suggested by vague affinities of name. But it is quite as likely, (if there be anything in the conjecture,) that the Celt taught the Greek, as that the Greek taught the Celt.

There are some very interesting questions, however, for scholars to discuss: viz. 1st, *When* did the Celts first introduce idols? 2d. Can we believe the classical authorities that assure us that the Druids originally admitted no idol worship? If so, we find the chief idols of the Druids cited by Lucan; and they therefore acquired them long before Lucan's time. From whom would they acquire them? Not from the Romans; for the Roman gods are not the least similar to the Celtic, when the last are fairly examined. Not from the Teutons, from whose deities those of the Celt equally differ. Have we not given too much

* The ruins still extant are much diminished since the time even of Pownall or Pennant; and must be indeed inconsiderable, compared with the buildings or walls which existed at the date of my tale.

† JOHANN. ap. Acad. Celt. tom. iii. p. 151.

faith to the classic writers, who assert the original simplicity of the Druid worship? And will not their popular idols be found as ancient as the remotest traces of the Celtic existence? Would not the Cimmerii have transported them from the period of their first traditional immigration from the East? and is not their Bel identical with the Babylonian deity?

NOTE (D), page 266.

UNGUENTS USED BY WITCHES.

LORD BACON, speaking of the ointments used by the witches, supposes that they really did produce illusions by stopping the vapours and sending them to the head. It seems that all witches who attended the *sabbat* used these unguents, and there is something very remarkable in the concurrence of their testimonies as to the scenes they declared themselves to have witnessed, not in the body, which they left behind, but as present in the soul; as if the same anointments and preparatives produced dreams nearly similar in kind. To the believers in mesmerism I may add, that few are aware of the extraordinary degree to which somnambulism appears to be heightened by certain chemical aids; and the disbelievers in that agency, who have yet tried the experiments of some of those now neglected drugs to which the medical art of the Middle Ages attached peculiar virtues, will not be inclined to dispute the powerful, and, as it were, systematic effect which certain drugs produce on the imagination of patients with excitable and nervous temperaments.

NOTE (E), page. 273.

HILDA'S ADJURATIONS.

I.

“ By the Urdar fount dwelling,
Day by day from the rill,
The Nornas besprinkle
The Ash Ygg-drasill.”

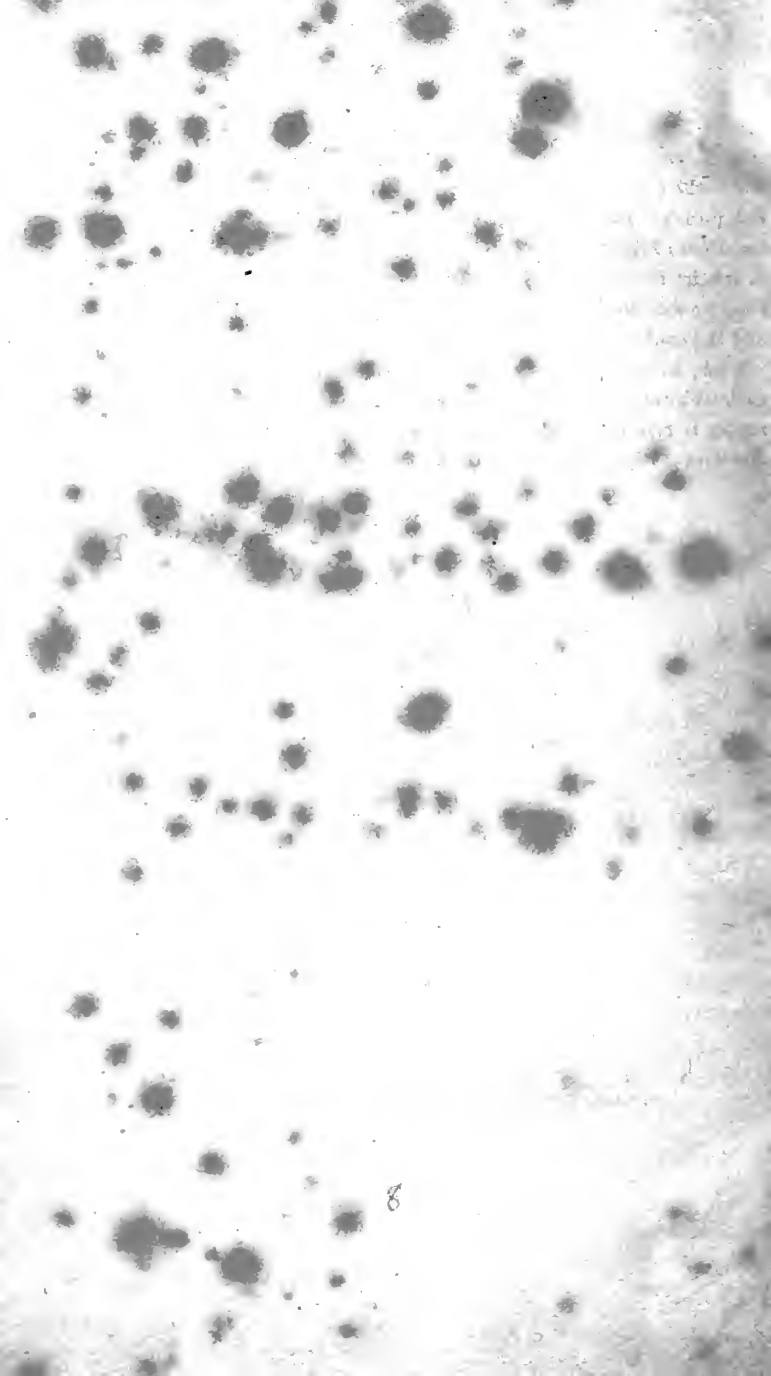
The ASH YGG-DRASIL.—Much learning has been employed by Scandinavian scholars in illustrating the symbols supposed to be couched under the myth of the Ygg-drasill, or the great Ash-tree. With this I shall not weary the reader; especially since large systems have been built on very small premises, and the erudition employed has been equally ingenious and unsatisfactory: I content myself with stating the simple myth.

The Ygg-drasill has three roots; two spring from the infernal regions—*i. e.* from the home of the frost-giants, and from Niff-heim, “vapour-home, or hell”—one from the heavenly abode of the Asas. Its branches, says the Prose Edda, extend over the whole universe, and its stem bears up the earth. Beneath the root, which stretches through Niff-heim, and which the snake-king continually gnaws, is the fount whence flow the infernal rivers. Beneath the root which stretches in the land of the giants is Mimir's well, wherein all wisdom is concealed; but under the root which lies in the land of the gods, is the well of Urda, the Norna—here the gods sit in judgment. Near this well is a fair building, whence issue the three maidens, Urda, Verdandi, Skulda (the Past, the Present, the Future). Daily they

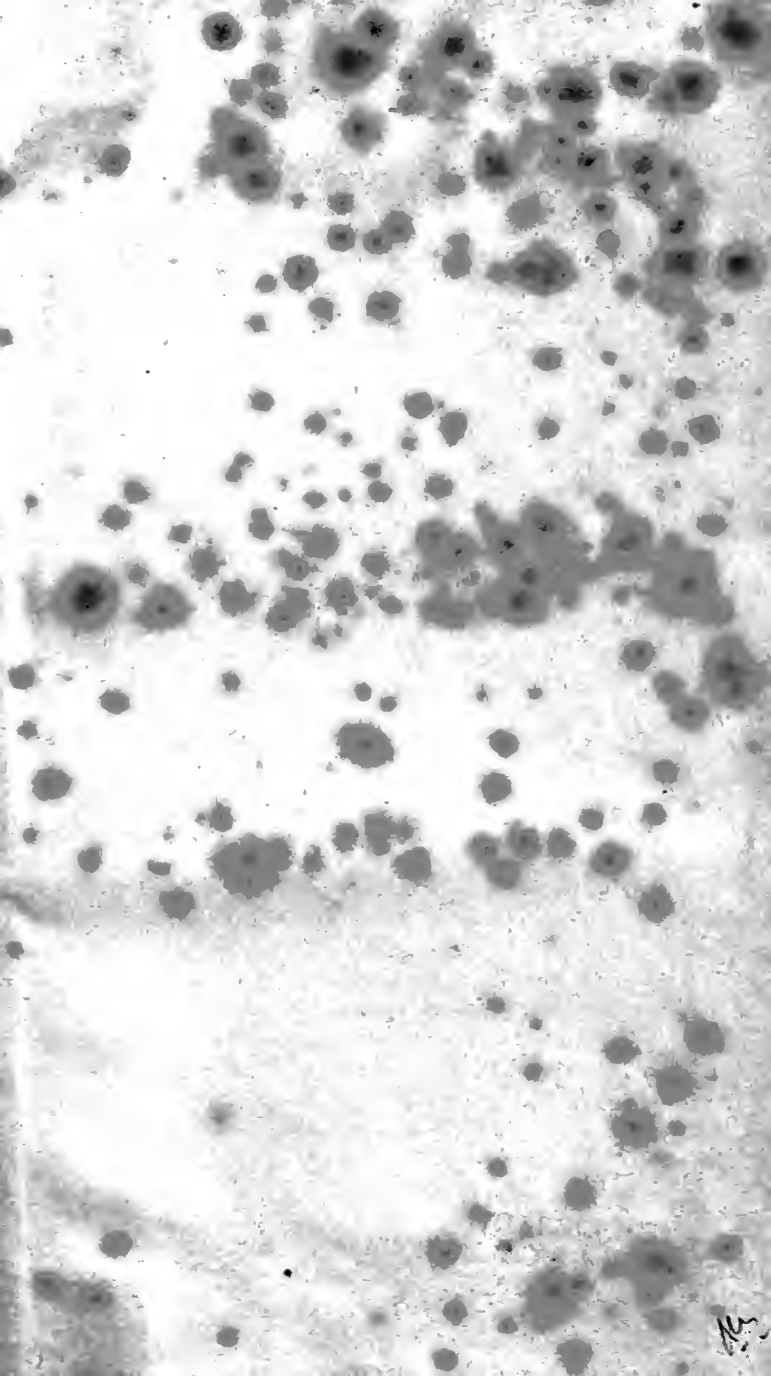
water the ash-tree from Urda's well, that the branches may not perish. Four harts constantly devour the buds and branches of the Ash-tree. On its boughs sits an eagle, wise in much; and between its eyes sits a hawk. A squirrel runs up and down the tree sowing strife between the eagle and the snake.

Such, in brief, is the account of the myth. For the various interpretations of its symbolic meaning the general reader is referred to Mr. Blackwell's edition of MALLETT'S *Northern Antiquities*, and PIGOTT'S *Scandinavian Manual*.

END OF VOL. II.



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