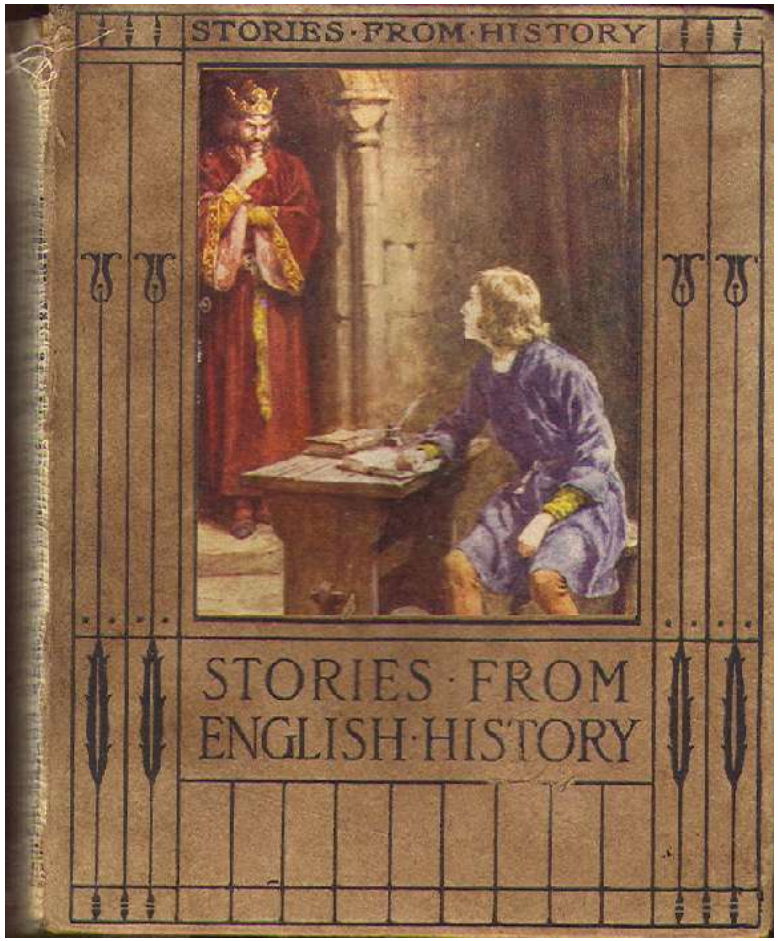

STORIES FROM ENGLISH HISTORY

BY

HILDA T. SKAE

WITH PICTURES BY

FRANK DADD

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TO CHARLIE

My dear Charlie,

You are very fond of stories; and so, I think, are all the other little boys and girls that I have ever known, and most of the grown-up people too. When you grow older, if you still like them—and I think you will—you will find that there are stories everywhere if only you are able to see them.

In this little book they are not quite the same kind as those that your Auntie used to tell you. I think they are nicer, for they are about things that have really happened; and the boys and girls and grown-up people that you read about in them were real people.

Some of those stories were so interesting, and some of them so beautiful, that they were written down for other people to read; and that is how history-books came to be made.

I hope that you will like to read about the people who lived long ago, and that these little tales may show you that history is made up of stories about people just like ourselves.

HILDA T. SKAE

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CHAPTER I

A HERO OF ANCIENT BRITAIN

There was a time, many years ago, when this England of ours was a savage country.

The oldest stories that we read about our island happened so long ago, that the English had not yet come to the land where we live. In those days, the country was not called England but Britain; and the people were the ancient Britons.

In the time of the Britons, the greater part of the country was covered with moors and swamps, and with great forests, where dangerous wild animals lived: wolves and bears and wild cats; where herds of deer wandered, and droves of wild cattle.

The ancient Britons lived in huts built of branches of trees plastered with mud, very low in the roof, and dark, having no windows; and there were no chimneys to let out the smoke. Their villages were only collections of huts surrounded by a fence or stockade, and a ditch to keep out the wild animals, as well as other Britons who were enemies of the tribe, for these wild people were always fighting among themselves.

The Britons had blue eyes, and yellow or reddish hair, which both men and women wore long, and hanging over their shoulders. In summer they went about with their chests and shoulders almost bare, and in winter they clothed themselves in the skins of animals killed in the chase.

They were a wild people, but so brave that we like to hear stories about them.

About two thousand years ago, when the Britons were living their savage life, there lived in the country which is now Italy another people called the Romans. These Romans were one of the greatest and wisest nations that have ever lived.

It seems strange that they should have left their own beautiful country to come to Britain, with its cold climate and savage inhabitants, but they were a very ambitious people, who would not be content until they had subdued every other nation of the earth.

The Romans had already conquered all the nations round about their own country when the Emperor Claudius became their chief; but Claudius wished to win glory by making fresh conquests, and he determined to subdue the wild northern island of Britain.

Knowing that the Britons were a very fierce and brave people, he sent against them an army of forty thousand men under the command of two skilful generals.

When the inhabitants of southern Britain saw the sea about their coasts covered with Roman vessels, while more vessels were always appearing above the horizon, their anger and dismay knew no bounds. They knew that the Romans were the bravest and most skilful soldiers in the world, and that they had come to conquer them if they could, and to take their country away from them.

As the soldiers, wearing their glittering breast-plates and helmets of polished steel, and with the sun flashing upon the gold and silver eagles which they carried for standards, landed from their vessels and marched on their way to the place where they were going to make their camp, the Britons watched them from their hiding-places with both rage and terror.

Still they did not despair. Old men among them were able to tell them how their ancestors had withstood the Romans who had come to their shores a hundred years before, and how the great Julius Caesar had been glad to make peace with the Britons and sail away to his own country.

Messengers were sent far and near to summon the chiefs and their followers, and they resolved to fight to the last.

The Britons proved to be some of the most determined foes that the Romans had ever met. Battle after battle was fought, and the country still remained unsubdued. Sometimes the Romans won, and sometimes the Britons were masters of the day. The Romans were trained soldiers, while their opponents were wild and undisciplined savages, but the Britons were fighting for their homes and freedom, and that made them very brave.

Among the British leaders the noblest was a chieftain of the name of Caradoc, or as the Romans called him, Caractacus. When some of the other chiefs, having been defeated many times, were forced to make peace with the invaders, Caradoc refused to yield. Fighting stubbornly, he contested every inch of southern Britain, but was slowly driven backwards to the mountains of Wales.

Here he gathered around him a band of Britons as brave and determined as himself, and for nearly nine years he held the Romans in check. The invaders, who did not know the country, were unable to penetrate far among these valleys, where thick forests hemmed in the view, and where every hillside might harbour a band of their savage foes.

It was impossible to reach Caradoc in this wild retreat. Accompanied by his followers, he would leave the mountains and sweep suddenly down upon a Roman camp in some distant part of the country. At a time when the Romans were least expecting it, a band of these wild, red-headed warriors would appear, yelling their war-cries as they let fly a shower of darts and arrows; then, after killing and wounding a number of the enemy, they would vanish among their mountains before the Romans had time to follow them up.

As years went on, a large number of Britons found their way to Caradoc in his Welsh retreat. The mountains became full of desperate men who had been driven from their homes, but were still determined to fight for freedom, and the example of their leader gave his followers fresh courage.

After many years of fighting, the Romans saw that the country would never be subdued so long as Caradoc should remain at liberty.

A great army was marched towards the stronghold of the daring chief. Caradoc mustered his retainers, and found himself at the head of a body of men almost as numerous as the Roman army. For nine years these Britons had remained unconquered; and the brave band hoped that the day had now come when they might gain a victory which would end in the invaders being driven out of the country.

Romans and Britons met on the borders of Wales.

The Britons, looking down from their mountains, saw the Romans on the plain far below. Between the armies there flowed a river, which was joined by a torrent rushing down by the side of a steep hill. Caradoc ordered his men to take up their station upon this hill, and all night long the Britons worked to strengthen their defences by building up barricades of loose stones.

When morning dawned the Britons could see the Roman legions forming in position. The sunbeams were glancing upon the crests of the soldiers' helmets and upon the points of their spears, and the Britons almost seemed to hear the voice of the general who was riding his prancing war-horse round the ranks of his army.

The Britons were eager to attack, but before a man left his post Caradoc came forward and spoke to his followers.

"Men of Britain," he said; "this day decides the fate of your country. Your liberty, or your eternal slavery, dates from this hour. Remember your brave ancestors, who drove the great Julius himself across the sea!"

The Britons were so stirred by these words that they replied by a great shout; then rushing down the hill, they let fly a hail of darts and arrows upon the Roman army.

For a long time the battle raged, and neither side appeared to gain the advantage.

In order to meet the Britons hand to hand, the Romans had to cross the river under a storm of darts. Many fell and were swept away by the current. Others struggled onward, to be received by savage cries from the Britons, who tore stones from the barricade to hurl at their advancing foes.

In spite of the fury of the defenders, the Romans swept steadily up the slope. Soon the foremost had reached the barriers. They stumbled and fell among the loose stones, but recovered themselves and pressed onwards, holding up their shields to ward off the blows rained down upon them. The hillside became a seething mass of combatants; the wild, active Britons flying hither and thither to repel the advance of the steel-clad host. From the thick of the fight, Caradoc himself shouted encouragement to his soldiers, who replied by shrill cries and by redoubled exertions.

The stone barriers were passed; Romans and Britons were mingled in a life-and-death struggle.

Soon it became apparent that the day belonged to the better-armed combatants; the soft copper swords of the Britons had been blunted upon the steel breast-plates of the Romans, while their own wooden shields were hacked to pieces by the Roman swords.

In a short time the Britons were flying in all directions, unable any longer to resist the Romans. Caradoc's two brothers were taken prisoners, and his wife and daughter fell into the hands of the conquerers.

The British leader himself, weary, wounded and disheartened, found his way to the hut of his mother-in-law, and asked her for shelter. She gave him a wolf-skin to lie upon by the fire and soon he was fast asleep, worn out by fatigue and loss of blood.

For a time the old woman sat and watched him.

It had needed no words from the wounded, half-fainting chieftain to tell her that the day was lost.

She thought of the proud Romans who were now masters of the country; of the villages which would be burned, and of their inhabitants who would be carried away into slavery.

Being a selfish old woman, she soon began to think less of other people's troubles than of her own.

What would happen to her, she wondered, were the Romans to come this way and find out that she was giving shelter to the vanquished chieftain?

She trembled as she thought that soon this poor hut might shelter her no longer; that her few belongings might be taken away from her, and she herself be driven out to perish upon the cold hill-side.

As she looked at her guest, lying asleep in a corner, and frowning a little with the pain of his wound, she felt as though she hated him.

An ugly look came into her face as she realised her helplessness.

Presently she heard cries echoing in the valley, and peeping from the door of the hut she saw some flying Britons, closely pursued by two Roman soldiers.

The Britons disappeared in a thicket and were lost, and as the woman watched the soldiers beating the bushes and brambles with their swords in a vain search for the fugitives, a very evil thought came into her mind.

She left the hut, and crept along in the shelter of the rocks and trees, so that the soldiers might not see where she had come from.

The soldiers were very much surprised when a little wild-looking, wrinkled old woman stood before them, trying to tell them something in the language that the Britons spoke.

They soon understood that she was offering to show them the hiding-place of a captive far more important than the poor British warriors whom they had been pursuing.

"Come along then, old woman," said one of the soldiers; "show us the way."

A sly look came into the woman's small twinkling eyes. "Wait a little," she said; "what are you going to give me for delivering this great captive into your hands?"

The soldiers looked at each other; and then one of them offered her a gold coin. The old woman shook her head.

"No," she said; "this is a very, very great man, and the Romans would like very much to catch him. You must give me far more than that if I show you the way to his hiding-place."

The soldiers consulted together for a moment. From the old woman's manner, she evidently had a noted chief or leader in her power.

"Here, old dame," they said, "if your prisoner is of such importance, you must come with us to the general."

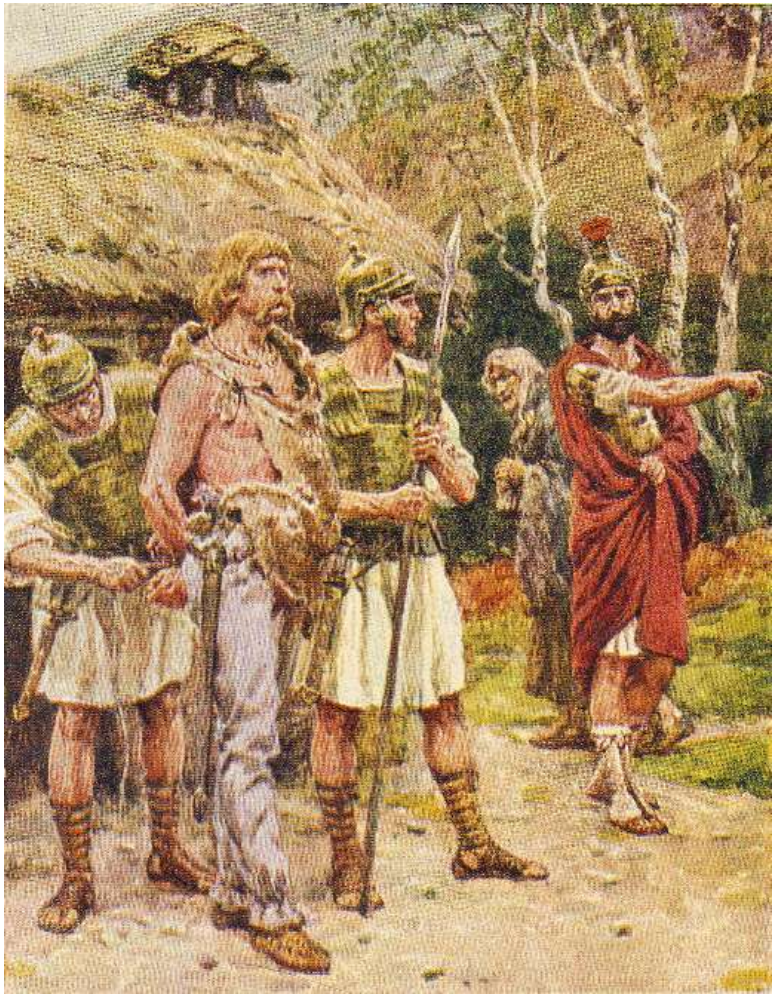
The old woman was delighted. The Roman general was of course a very rich man, and no doubt he would give her a great deal of money for the captive.

"Let us be quick," she said; "my prisoner may wake up and go away before we come back."

The soldiers were astonished at the nimble way in which the old creature skipped over the stones and heather, her little short steps covering the ground as quickly as their long, steady strides. They were almost inclined to think that she must be one of the witches about whom the Britons told such strange stories.

The general was not far away; and soon the old woman's little greedy eyes were looking up into his grave stern face.

"Well, my good woman," he said, "who is this prisoner?"



CARADOC BETRAYED TO THE ROMANS.

The old woman grinned, showing a few tusk-like teeth. "He is a very great man," she said, "and I can only give him up for a large sum of money."

"Tell me first who he is," said the general; "we can talk about the reward afterwards."

There was no one that the Romans despised so much as a traitor, and the general thought this old woman was the most mean and base person he had ever met.

"The prisoner," said the woman, with a still wider grin, "is Caradoc himself. He came to my hut after the battle; and you should have seen how pale and weary he was! He thought I would shelter him, because he is my son-in-law, but after he had fallen asleep I said to myself, 'The Romans are good folk, and they will be grateful to an old woman who hands over a wicked rebel—"

"That will do, my good woman," said the general, cutting her short. "Here is a bag of gold; it is your fee for delivering the British leader into our hands. Come and show us where he is to be found; or if you are playing us false it will be the worse for you.

The old woman's fingers closed round the gold, and her delight at getting so much money prevented her from feeling the contempt in the general's voice and eyes.

Presently the tiny hut was surrounded by Roman soldiers. Bending his tall form at the doorway, the general entered, followed by two soldiers leading between them the old woman, whose skinny fingers were tightly clutching the bag of gold.

Caradoc stirred in his sleep, then he sat up and looked at the Romans.

His eyes fell upon his mother-in-law; and he understood.

He had to stand up and submit to having his hands bound behind his back by the Roman soldiers.

The old woman left the hut and disappeared with her ill-gotten gains.

For once in her life she felt ashamed of herself.

She had betrayed her country, and although she was now one of the richest women in Britain she was never really happy again.

When the wounded chieftain joined the other prisoners in the Roman camp, his wife and daughter fell into his arms, weeping.

Caradoc tried his best to comfort them, and he begged all the prisoners to have courage, and to bear their misfortunes like brave men and women.

After this victory the Roman general returned to his own country. Caradoc and the other prisoners were carried on board the vessels of the conquerors; and after a voyage of many days they landed upon the strange, unknown shores of Italy.

The Roman people were delighted to hear that the wild, savage island of Britain had at last been subdued, and when the victorious general reached the city they resolved to give him a public triumph.

The emperor and empress sat on thrones in front of their palace while the general was drawn through the streets in a chariot decked with flowers and garlands. All the citizens came out to see him, and the balconies and even the roofs of the houses were crowded with people who shouted and hurrahed and threw up their caps as the conqueror passed by.

Behind the chariot came the troops who had taken part in the victory. The soldiers marched past in fighting array; their helmets and spears garlanded with flowers and with wreaths of laurel, and they looked round them proudly in response to the shouts of their countrymen.

But these were not the only people who took part in the procession.

Immediately behind the general followed the captives whom he had taken in the war; Caradoc with his wife and

daughter and the other prisoners who had helped him in his nine years' struggle with the Romans.

As these poor captives passed, loaded with chains, the people in the streets jeered at them and shouted out unkind speeches. Most of the prisoners walked with downcast eyes and sad faces, but Caradoc marched along with so proud a bearing that the spectators wondered at the courage shown by this savage chief. He did not seem to feel the dust and glare, or to be abashed by the hard, unfeeling gaze of the thousands of people who had come out to stare at him.

As he passed he looked at the fine buildings, at the triumphal arches, and the marble palaces, and at the gaily dressed people who thronged the streets. Sometimes he looked up into the sunny Italian sky; and he was evidently thinking deeply. Some one asked him what he was thinking" about.

"I was wondering," said Caradoc, "how these people could envy me my mud cottage and my few fields so far away in our poor, cold, northern Britain?"

The spectators, who had flocked from all parts of Italy to see the famous chief; began to think it was a pity that so brave a man should be put to death.

After the triumph, the emperor wished to meet this gallant savage face to face.

Caradoc and his wife were brought before Claudius, who, in royal garments of purple and gold, was seated upon an ivory throne.

Caradoc looked at the emperor with his calm, brave eyes, and did not appear to be in the least dismayed.

Claudius said to himself that this British chief was a truly great man. He asked his prisoner what he thought of Rome.

"I think it is a very great and wonderful city," replied Caradoc, "and that its people are a very great people."

"Do you know what this great people do to those who have been bold enough to resist their will?" asked the emperor.

"Yes," replied Caradoc simply; "I am told that you put their leaders to death when you have captured them; and I wonder that a wise and great people like the Romans should have such a custom. After having defeated a man, what greater glory is to be won by putting him to death? It seems to me that it would be more worthy of the Roman people to spare him in order to show that they are generous as well as brave."

Claudius was so pleased with his captive's wise and fearless reply that he had him restored to liberty, with his wife and family.

The Roman who has told us the story of Caradoc in one of his books does not say whether the brave chief was allowed to return to Britain, or whether he had to spend the rest of his life in the land of his conquerors.

I hope his captors sent him back to Britain, for I am sure that he loved his native land the best, and that he would have liked to end his days among the brave countrymen who had helped him to withstand the great and powerful nation of Rome.

CHAPTER II

THE BOY CAPTIVES

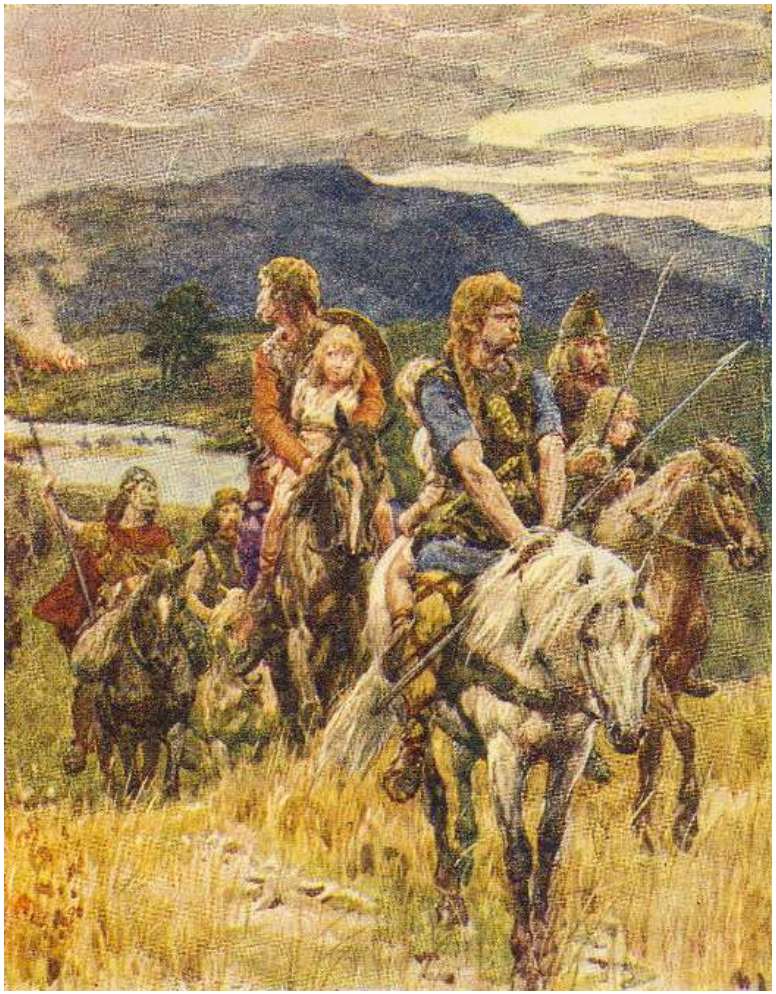
Five hundred years had passed.

Long ago the Romans had left Britain; and another people had come from across the sea to conquer the country and drive its inhabitants to take refuge in Wales and Cornwall. Britain had now become England. The English in these days were very fierce heathens, who loved fighting, and were never at peace. The country was divided into a number of little kingdoms, which were always at war with one another, for each king wanted to be more powerful than any other in the land.

While England was in this state of continual warfare, the kingdom of Deira in the north was invaded by a band of raiders from a neighbouring kingdom called Bernicia. Not finding any one at hand to resist them, the Bernicians began to lay waste the country as they passed. All the men of that neighbourhood seemed to be absent that day; and there was no one to give the alarm as the invaders destroyed the young crops and killed or drove away the cattle which were grazing upon the waste land. Presently the party came upon a little village, lying peacefully nestled on the hill-side. It was evening, and the smoke was rising tranquilly into the air, while the men and boys were driving the cows home for the evening milking.

Little did the raiders care about the quiet beauty of the scene. With a shout, they bore down upon the village. The inhabitants did their best to defend themselves; but being unprepared and armed for the most part only with clubs and ploughshares, they were quickly overpowered. Some escaped to the woods, while those who were not active enough to run away were either slain or made prisoners.

Soon flames were bursting from the walls and roofs of the cottages, which their destroyers had set on fire after removing everything that was worth carrying away.



THE CHILDREN CARRIED OFF BY THE BERNICIAN RAIDERS.

When the captives were brought in, they were found to be mostly old people, together with some trembling children, whose parents were lost or slain.

"Those," said the leader, pointing to the white-haired men and woman, "are no good. What do we want with old folk? —But these," he added, pointing to the children, "you may keep. They will grow into fine strong men by and by."

The children were bound hand and foot to prevent them from running away; and after posting sentries to keep a lookout, the raiders sat down to feast upon some of the slaughtered cattle, which they had roasted before the flames of the burning houses.

Suddenly one of the outposts called out to say there was something in the distance which looked like a band of armed men.

"Ay, ay," said the leader; "time we made the best of our way homeward. Our big bonfire is bright enough to bring the whole countryside upon us."

Hastily collecting their spoil, the raiders looked about for their horses. Each prisoner was made to mount beside one of his captors, and soon the whole band was trotting away in the gathering darkness.

It was in vain that the boys strained their eyes to look behind. Either they had not yet been missed, or else their rescuers had not found out the direction which the spoilers had taken.

The few people whom they passed, wood cutters or cow-herds on their way home from the day's work, only looked on helplessly as the troop swept by, band were unable to do anything. Once, seeing a man whom he knew, one of the boys cried out for help, but his captor roughly bade him be silent.

In a little while they were in the land of the Bernicians, and the children were handed over to the families of their captors, to work in the house and in the fields.

They were not unkindly treated, and after a while they began to feel less unhappy. Often when they met together in the evening, after the day's work was done, they would make plans for running away as soon as they should be grown up, and returning to their own old home in Deira.

But they were never to see their native village again.

One day a rich merchant came to Bernicia, a man who traded with the far-away countries of Gaul and Italy, and the children were brought for him to see.

The merchant looked at the rosy faces and strong limbs of the boys.

"They'll do," he said; "I'll take the lot. One of my ships is just starting for Italy, and they can go on board. The Roman ladies like fine boys like these to wait upon them. It is waste to keep such lads to work in our rough homesteads when we can get gold for them from the Romans."

A large sum of money was handed over to the owners of the children; and then the boys had to follow their new master to the seashore, where a vessel was in waiting.

No kind parents or friends were near, to bid good-bye to these poor children as they embarked. They were led on board and given into the charge of the captain and seamen of the vessel. Presently the sails were unfurled, and the vessel left the shore, the men singing as they worked. No one paid any attention to the poor children as they stood on deck and sorrowfully watched the shores of England grow farther and farther away, until they became lost in the distance.

The little captives felt very sad indeed. Had they known that they were about to become the means of bringing happiness and peace to their native land, perhaps they might not have felt so desolate as they did.

After what seemed to them a very long voyage, they were taken to the great slave-market in Rome.

The children clung together in confusion and fear as they looked around at the bewildering scene.

Groups of buyers and sellers were there, talking in an unknown language. There were many other slaves for sale; men, women, and children; white, black, and brown; brought together from many parts of the world. People in strange bright dresses were always passing; some coming to buy slaves, some to meet their friends, and others out of mere curiosity. In all the careless, chattering crowd there was not one face that seemed friendly towards the poor strangers from across the sea.

Presently the boys remarked among the gay throng an old man who seemed quite different from the rest. He wore a plain dark gown, with sandals on his feet. A long silvery beard flowed nearly to his girdle; and the boys liked his face, with its kind, benevolent expression.

This was the monk Gregory, who was loved by all the people of Rome for his simple goodness of heart.

As the old man passed through the hall he looked pityingly at the poor people who were waiting to be sold. When he came to the English boys he paused, struck by their beautiful rosy faces, fair hair, and rounded limbs.

"Who are these children?" he asked the trader who was standing beside them.

"They are Angles," replied the trader.

"Surely not Angles, but angels," said Gregory; "for they have the faces of angels."

He looked at them again very thoughtfully, and asked the trader whether these children were Christians.

"No, sir," replied the merchant; "the Angles are heathens, and have a very cruel religion."

"What a pity, what a pity!" said the good monk. "What is the name of their country?"

"They come from a place called Deira," said the trader.

"Ira" is the Latin word for wrath; and Gregory seemed to find a meaning in all the names connected with these angel-faced children.

"De ira," he said; "ay, from the wrath of God they shall be called to Christ's mercy.—And what is the name of their King?" he inquired.

"Ella," replied the merchant.

"Ella!" cried the monk; "Alleluia shall be sung in Ella's land"; and he passed on his way with a silent vow that one day he would find a means of teaching the English people to become Christians.

Here the history of these children ends, so far as we know it. The old writer who tells us of the meeting of the monk Gregory with the captive children does not say what became of them after this. Surely they found good masters and happy homes; for it was through them that the Good News was brought to their native land, and that the people learned to live peaceably in a united country.

After he left the slave-market the thought of these fair-faced boys followed Gregory wherever he went. He thought of many plans, and at last he resolved, old as he was, to undertake the long journey to the savage country of England and to teach the true religion to its inhabitants. But when the Roman people found that he was going to leave them, they begged Gregory so hard to stay that he made up his mind that he could not go away into a heathen country while he was so badly needed by his own people at home.

Still he had no rest when he thought that the English were living and dying as heathens. About four years after the meeting with the boys, he was made Pope, and then he saw that his opportunity was come.

A band of forty monks, with an Abbot of the name of Augustine at their head, was chosen by Pope Gregory for the conversion of England.

In those days the journey from Rome to England was a long and perilous one. Slowly the monks made their way through Italy and Switzerland, staying sometimes at the monasteries on their way. At last they were in Gaul, and were able to gain some information about the fierce and warlike people whom they had been sent to convert.

In an abbey near Paris they were kindly received by the monks, who were glad to meet the brave missionaries who had been sent to bring Christianity to the heathen inhabitants of England.

"Perhaps your task will be easier than you expect," said a monk who had been listening very attentively while the travellers told their tale.

All turned to look at the speaker.

"Do you not remember," he said, "that Ethelbert, King of Kent, married Bertha, the daughter of our good King? Bertha is Christian, and surely her husband will not harden his heart towards those who are of the religion of his good wife."

The monks were greatly cheered at this news. Messengers were sent to Ethelbert to prepare him for the coming of Augustine, an a few days later the leader and his party landed on the island of Thanet in Kent.

When Ethelbert heard that the missionaries had actually set foot in his dominions, he felt uneasy.

"The Christians are very good folk," he aid; "my wife is one, and I've given her little church of her own to do as she likes n; still, I'm not very sure about them; I think some of them are too fond of meddling with magic."

Still, after consulting with his wise men, he consented to meet the Romans and to hear what they had to say, provided that the meeting should take place out of doors, for he believed that the magic spells would have less power in the open air.

Thrones were placed for him and Bertha on the hillside, and the band of monk approached, bearing a silver cross, and chanting a hymn, with Augustine at their head.

Ethelbert listened attentively as Augustine told him about the Christian religion, and invited him to forsake the cruel bloodthirsty gods of the English.

"Your words," he said, when the abbot ad finished, "are fair; but what you tell and is new and strange. I cannot leave all at once what I and my English folk have believed for so long. But let me think over what yo say; and if any of my folk will believe what you believe, I will not hinder them."

The monks were overjoyed at the King's answer. Bearing their silver cross in front of them, they entered the town of Canterbury.

"Turn from this city, O Lord," they sang, "Thy wrath and anger."

Then in joy and thankfulness they sang "Alleluia" in the streets, while the people looked on and wondered.

Ethelbert gave the missionaries a church to preach in, and he and his people often came to listen to them. So well did the good monks speak that after a little while the king consented to become a Christian, and was baptized, and many of his men with him; and Kent thus became the first Christian kingdom of England.

Many years afterwards, Ethelbert's daughter was given in marriage to Edwin, King of Northumbria. Edwin was a good and wise man; but he vas a heathen. Among the people who accompanied the young queen to her northern home was her chaplain Paulinus, and it was the great wish both of Paulinus and of the queen that through their means Edwin might become converted to Christianity.

All that winter Edwin listened to the words of his queen and of Paulinus, and pondered them very deeply.

In the spring he called his wise men together, and asked them to advise him.

Paulinus, the Roman chaplain, tall, thin and stooping, with black hair falling round his dark, eager face, spoke to the stout, ruddy English, and told them about his religion.

The wise men listened very thoughtfully; and they asked Paulinus many questions.

After a while an old man rose up.

"So seems the life of man, O king," he said, "as a sparrow's flight through the hall when one is sitting at meat in the winter-tide. The warm fire is lighted on the hearth; the torches are blazing; and the hall is bright and warm.

"But without the snow is falling, and the winds are howling.

"Then comes a sparrow and flies into the hall, and passes out by the other door. She comes in at one door and goes out by the other; and passes from winter to winter. For a moment she has rest; for a moment she is in the light and warmth, she feels not the storm nor the cheerless winter weather.

"But the moment is brief.

"The short time of rest and warmth is soon over, and she is out in the storm again and has passed from our sight.

"So it is with the life of man; it, too, is but for a moment, what has gone before, and what will come after it, we do not know, and no man has yet told us.

"If, then, these strangers can tell us aught of what is beyond the grave—if they can tell us whence man comes and whither he goes, let us give ear to them and think over what they say."

A murmur went round the hall as the old man showed them by this story that the new religion told them of a life beyond this world, while their own did not.

Then up started Coifi, the chief priest of the heathen gods whom the king and his people had worshipped.

"O king," cried the priest, "there is no man in this hall has served the gods more faithfully than I, but they have never done anything for me."

When the wise men had made an end of speaking, the king rose up and said, "Let us worship the God of Paulinus, and follow his ways."

Then he called aloud and said, "Who will be the first to throw down the altar of these false gods and destroy their temple."

"I will be the first, O king," shouted Coifi the priest. "Give me a horse and weapons, and I will overthrow the temple of the false gods. Follow me, O thanes, and let us see if the gods can defend their own altars."

Then, snatching a sword, the high priest rushed from the hall and sprang upon the king's war-horse.

The king and his wise men followed; and on their way they were joined by a number of people who left their work or the cattle they were tending, and followed, shouting as they ran, "Coin the high priest is mad!"

Soon they arrived at the temple. Here the people hung back, afraid to enter, but the priest burst open the door with a blow of his spear, and rode into the wooden building.

The king and his wise men followed, but the others remained outside, wondering what dreadful thing would happen to the mad priest.

Before them was the dark interior of the temple with the altar at the farther end, and the great wooden figure of the god rising above it; a monstrous thing painted in gaudy colours, with a fierce, cruel grin on its ugly face; and the madman was riding his war-horse in the building.

Surely the god was about to take some terrible vengeance!

A great crash resounded through the temple as the priest hurled his sword at the wooden figure.

Some of the people ran away; others remained huddled at the door, too terrified to move.

But nothing happened.

There was the figure of the god still grinning down upon the people as before, without a change in its face. No thunder came down from heaven to destroy the rash priest and his followers who had insulted the temple.

"The gods are not4able to defend themselves," shouted the wise men. "The gods of the English are false gods"; then rushing into the temple, they pulled the idol from its place and dragged it out of doors, while the people threw themselves upon the temple and pulled it to pieces. After that they tore up the hedge that surrounded the temple; and with the hedge and the ruins of the temple they made a bonfire whose flames rose high in the air and were seen far and wide, while in the middle of the fire the idol was burned to ashes.

Then the people went home, and were baptized by Paulinus.

CHAPTER III

ENGLISH AND NORMAN

In England there was an old King called Edward; a gentle pious man who disliked the trouble of governing, and who left his brother-in-law to rule the country while he himself spent his time in praying and in reading good books and going to church.

Harold, Earl of Wessex, the king's brother-in-law, was one of the most able men then living; a true Englishman, wise and honourable. The people of England loved and trusted Harold; and as Edward had no children to succeed to the throne, they hoped that after his death Harold would become their king.

On the other side of the strip of sea which divides England from France, there lived at this time a very proud and ambitious man, William, Duke of Normandy.

William was descended from a great pirate who had come from the North, many years before, and had compelled the King of France to give him part of his dominions for himself and his followers to settle in. Ever since then, this part of France has been called Normandy; and the descendants of these Northmen are living there to this day.

The pirate was made a duke; but his great grandson William of Normandy wanted to become a king.

William's father had been a friend of King Edward of England, and when he was a young man William came from Normandy to spend some weeks at the Court of England. In after years William declared that during this visit Edward had promised that he, and not Harold, should be the next King of England.

If Edward really made this promise he must have known that he was undertaking what he had no power to fulfil, for the English people had the right of choosing their own king, and they did not wish to have a proud Norman rule over them.

But William had made up his mind to be a king; and he was a man who never let anything stand in the way of what he wanted.

One day Earl Harold went sailing in the English Channel, when a storm arose and drove his vessel out of her course.

Night came down, thick and foggy, and the captain did not know where they were. All remained on deck, keeping an anxious lookout; and in the darkness the vessel suddenly struck.

Before them they could see some masses of rock; and the men had just time to scramble out before the little ship filled with water and sank.

The unlucky pleasure-seekers found themselves clinging to a little rocky islet which would scarcely afford them foothold; and all night they remained there drenched with rain and spray.

At daybreak they were able to make out the coast of France, not very far away from them. By the side of the reef lay their little vessel, half in, half out of the water, with a large hole in her side. There was nothing that they could do but wait until some one should see them from the shore, and come off with a boat to rescue them.

In a little while Harold and his men saw a stir upon the coast. Men were coming and going; looking towards the rock and then running to fetch other men. After a while a party came down to the beach, launched a boat and rowed towards the wreck.

How thankful were the hungry, shivering castaways to get into the boat and be rowed ashore by these sturdy Norman-French fishermen!

They entered one of the cottages; and as they were warming themselves before a blazing fire the door was suddenly burst open, and a man in a shining coat of mail stood in the doorway. Behind him were grouped a dozen or so of stout men-at-arms.

"Aha," said the mail-clad knight, looking around him with restless, glittering black eyes; "if I am not mistaken it is a great man whom the wind and waves have done me the honour to waft to my shores.—I am Guy, Count of Ponthieu; and you, if I am not mistaken," he said to Harold, "are Earl Harold, brother-in-law to the King of England."

"I thought so," muttered Harold as he gravely inclined his head in answer to the count; "our troubles are only beginning."

"This is not a fitting spot in which to receive the kinsman of King Edward of England," said Guy in mock courtesy. "I must trouble you, Sir, to come to my poor dwelling, where I hope a short stay may be rendered as pleasant as possible to yourself and your followers."

Harold groaned in spirit as he realised that the count was going to keep him in prison in the hope of getting a ransom for him from King Edward. With these sturdy men-at-arms in the doorway it was no use for the unarmed Englishmen to try to resist.

"My poor countrymen," said Harold to himself; "I wonder how much money he will force them to hand over before he consents to give me up? It grieves me to think of the good English gold which will go to the enriching of this greedy hawk. And how is the kingdom going to be governed in my absence?—Alack the day!"

The count's dark mocking face was all aglow with triumph as he led his prisoner where some horses were ready waiting for them.

After a short ride they were in the court-yard of the grim frowning castle of Aonthieu, with the drawbridge raised behind them.

"You will allow some of my men to go to England and tell King Edward that I am here?" said Harold to the count.

Once more Guy smiled his mocking smile.

"I was going to ask the whole party, to accept my hospitality for a few weeks," he said. "His majesty of England will be the more pleased to welcome his brother-in-law after he has lacked tidings of him for a spice."

Harold fumed with anger and indignation. He saw that Guy meant to keep the king and his own family in ignorance of his fate in order that they might be more eager to ransom him once they heard that he was still living.

But one day Guy, Count of Ponthieu, was in a very bad humour. He strode up and down the courtyard with an angry scowl upon his handsome, haughty face; muttering to himself and reading a letter which had been brought to the castle by a mounted messenger. His mailed boots made a noisy clattering upon the pavement, and the men-at-arms felt that it would be safe to keep at a respectful distance that morning.

"Ha!" shouted Guy; "I am grossly insulted!—What traitor has dared to carry to the duke news of my prisoner? Had I that man, he should hang by the heels for his presumption!—Here is a letter from William of Normandy to say that if I do not instantly release Earl Harold, he will send an army against me and rase my castle to the ground. What right has the duke to interfere, I should like to know? The Earl was wrecked upon my land, not upon his; and if a man may not do as he likes with a prisoner whom the wind and waves have brought to his very door, things have come to a pretty pass!"

The count thought of the large sum of money which he had made so sure of getting; and rage and defiance swelled in his heart. Then he recollected the great power of William, and reflected that there was nothing for it but to make the best of things.

"Hey, Giles!" he called to his seneschal, who with a somewhat faltering step was venturing to cross the courtyard; "ask Earl Harold to have the goodness to speak with me."

"Raze my castle to the ground!" stormed the count as he paced the flagstones; "ay, and he would do it too; the tanner's grandson!

Duke William's mother had been the daughter of a tanner; and his enemies were never tired of reproaching him with this circumstance when they thought they could do so without fear of punishment.

Presently the Englishman stood before the angry count; and with a very bad grace, Guy told him that he was a free man, and that he owed his release to the Duke of Normandy.

Harold was very glad to find himself at liberty; and he felt that it would not be courteous for him to return to his own country until he had thanked the Duke for his generous help. Some of his men were sent to England to tell King Edward of his safety; and with only a few followers he set out for the court of Duke William.

Soon the earl and the duke met; Harold short and strong, with his good honest English face and steadfast blue eyes; William almost a giant in height, stern and proud, with steely eyes, and a face that had never yet shown pity to any that opposed him.

The two men had been friends of old; and they liked and admired each other.

William gave Harold a warm welcome to his dominions. At the court of the duke Harold found his youngest brother Wulfnoth, who had been sent to Normandy as a

hostage many years before. Each day was made a festival; the duke held tournaments in honour of his guest, and went hunting and hawking with him; and the Englishman showed such skill in all manly exercises that William learned to respect him more and more.

One day something happened which made him feel more than ever what a pity it was that this man must one day become his enemy.

Harold was walking on the sea-shore with his brother and the duke and a train of nobles, when several of the knights became caught in a quicksand and would have been lost had not Harold rushed forward, and with his unaided strength dragged each one of them into safety upon firm ground.

The duke said to himself that the short, sturdy Englishman was the bravest knight he had ever seen, and the one best fitted to become a king. Yet all the time that he was outwardly showing the greatest friendship for his guest he was secretly making plans by which he might compel Harold to help him to become King of England.

One day he asked Harold whether he knew that King Edward had promised that he should succeed him on the throne.

"No," replied Harold quietly; "I did not know that."

The duke put his hand upon the Englishman's shoulder.

"It is an old promise," he said, "and for many years I have looked upon myself as the future King of England."

"Listen to me," he added hastily, as he saw that Harold was about to speak: "I like you, and you are the man of all the English whom I most wish to have on my side. If you will give me your word of honour that you will help me to the crown, I promise that you shall be the greatest man in the kingdom next to myself; and not only that, but you shall be my son-in-law; I will give you my daughter Adela for your wife.—Now is it a bargain, son-in-law Harold?"

HAROLD TAKING THE OATH.

"No," said Harold quietly and firmly; "it cannot be. I cannot marry your daughter, because I already love a lady in England, Edith, a ward of the king; and you will never with my consent become King of England, because the English people have the right of choosing their own king; and we will never willingly have a Norman to rule over us. If King Edward made you any such promise he did very wrongly, for the crown of England is not his to give away."

Duke William was silent, and his eyes blazed with anger, as they always did when his will was crossed.

"So be it," he said, when he had regained sufficient mastery over himself to be able to speak; "I do not require help that is not freely given."

Harold knew that the duke was very angry; and he began to see what an imprudent action he had committed when he had put himself in the power of this ambitious man.

One of the Norman knights, whom he had rescued, came to Harold that evening.

"Do not anger the duke," he begged. "You little know his determined will. You are alone, it is useless to resist; and he will find a means of putting you to silence if you oppose him."

Harold's young brother, Wulfnoth, came to him next.

"Do not refuse to give the duke the promise he asks of you," implored the boy with a pale face. "I have seen their dungeons and the oubliettes—those dreadful underground cells where a man can scarcely stand upright, where he may spend years without ever seeing the light of day.—O Harold, the duke has sworn to imprison both you and me if you refuse to help him! Promise, Harold, promise; and when you are safe in England no one can make you hold to a promise which has been forced from you."

Harold passed the night in great perplexity.

Should he refuse to make a promise which he knew that he could not keep?

Then he and his young brother would be cast into these dreadful hiding-places; and they would never be heard of again. In years to come Englishmen might walk over the very turf under which they lay, and not know that beneath their feet the lost earls were still living, buried deep from the blessed sunshine, and the song of the birds, and the faces of their fellow-men.

Would it be right of him to bring such a fate upon his brother?

Then his native land; what would become of England while Harold lay in his dungeon?

He knew that without his help the weak, gentle king was unable to govern.

Then when Duke William came to demand the crown, and the English resisted him, as they were sure to do, there was no one save Harold to lead them to battle.

He knew that he was the one man whom England needed at that time. Already he had been absent too long.

Yet it was a terrible thing to make a promise which he did not intend to keep.

Morning found Harold with his mind not made up.

That day, William asked his guest to meet him in the great hall of the castle.

An unexpected sight met the Englishman as he entered. The hall was filled with knights and barons, all waiting in silence. Beneath the great stained-glass window was the duke in his state robes, seated upon a throne, with a bishop on either side of him. In front of the throne stood a chest covered with cloth of gold, and upon the cover lay an open Bible.

William was wearing his most grave and stony-hearted expression.

"Yesterday I told you that King Edward of England had left his crown to me," he said. "I ask you now, in presence of the barons and knights of my dukedom, to swear to support my just claim."

Harold looked at the Duke with a dark and angry face. William was taking a dishonourable advantage of him.

"Swear," said the Norman knight, his friend, in his ear. "If you do not, you will never see England again."

"Swear, Harold," whispered Wulfnoth; "the oubliettes!"

Harold was completely in the power of the Normans.

With downcast eyes he laid his hand upon the Bible and repeated the words of the oath after the duke.

Then the bishops came forward and raised the cloth of gold, showing that the chest was full of the bones of Norman saints.

Harold started back in horror; for an oath sworn upon the bones of saints was held to be the most sacred and binding oath that a man could take.

Instead of friendship, his heart now became filled with a fierce hatred towards the duke, whose ambition had led him to take an unfair advantage of his guest.

If he kept his oath, he would be a traitor to his country; while, if he broke it, he feared that a curse would rest upon himself.

When Harold had to make the choice, he remained true to his native land and braved the consequences; but he was never again the happy, fearless man that he had been before he had been compelled by the duke to swear a false oath.

Two years later, King Edward felt his end approaching, and he sent for Harold.

The earl found the old, white-haired king lying upon a couch, his kind blue eyes dim with age and sickness. His wife, Harold's sister, was sitting on a low seat by her husband's side, and the two archbishops of the realm were with the king.

Edward told Harold that he must soon die, and that he wished him, Harold, Earl of Wessex, to become king after him. He said that long ago he had repented of the promise made to William of Normandy, as he knew that his subjects would never consent to have any but an Englishman for their king.

In presence of the archbishops Harold promised to govern faithfully if the people of England should choose him for their king, and to fight against William of Normandy if need be.

Then King Edward told him that he had something to ask of him.

"If England is to be strong enough to resist the Normans," he said, "she must be a united country. The two earls in the north, Edwin and Mortar, are enemies of your house. Make them your friends by marrying their sister, Aldwyth."

Harold was silent.

"Ah, my son," said the old king, "I know that you have long hoped to marry my ward, the Lady Edith; but you must sacrifice yourself for England. We have both weakened our dear country, you and I; I by unduly favouring the Norman, and you by allowing a false oath to be extorted from you. We can only make her strong again by your marriage."

Harold struggled hard, but was unable to make up his mind to the sacrifice.

Then in came Edith, Harold's betrothed bride, fair and graceful as a lily: Edith of the Swan's Neck, as people called her. Her face was pale and sorrowful, but she had resolved to do her duty.

"Harold," she implored him, "for the sake of England; that our country may be free! I will never, never marry any one else; but you are a king! Marry Aldwyth!”

With a sore heart Harold yielded to her entreaty, and promised the old king that he would do as he asked.

Then Harold and Edith parted, Harold to marry the daughter of his enemy and Edith to enter a convent, where she might pray for England and for Harold.

A few days later the old king passed away, muttering sorrowful things about war and trouble which he feared would come upon England. He had been a good, kind old man, and his people grieved for him very much; but through his want of firmness he had prepared the way for some of the worst troubles that England was ever to know.

Immediately after King Edward was dead, the wise men chose Harold for their king, and on the following day the old king was buried and the new one crowned in the church which is now a part of Westminster Abbey.

The news was not slow in reaching Normandy. Duke William was just leaving his castle with a hunting-party when a messenger came to tell him that Harold had been crowned King of England.

Immediately the duke dismounted from his horse, went into his own room, closed the door, and remained there until nightfall. No one dared to enter that room or speak to the duke. When he left it, it was with the resolve to take a terrible vengeance upon the man who, he said, had broken his oath.

He sent for armourers, and sword-smiths, and carpenters, and ship-builders. Then he sent all over Normandy, and all over France, for soldiers to help him to fight against Harold.

For six months the people of Normandy worked with a will. The soldiers having been brought together, weapons had to be provided for them, horses found, and ships built to carry them over to England. William wrote to the Pope and told him the story of the broken oath, and the Pope sent his blessing and a sacred banner, and cursed Harold for having sworn falsely by the saints.

At last everything was ready; and in the ports and harbours of Normandy William's ships were only waiting for a fair wind to carry his forces to what they believed to be a holy war.

In the meanwhile Harold had been finding plenty of troubles at home. His own brother, Tostig, whom he had made Earl of Northumbria, had so offended his subjects by his cruelty and injustice that they had rebelled against him and driven him from the country. Tostig sent to ask Harold to restore him to his earldom, but Harold refused either to aid him or to allow him to return to a country where his misrule had caused him to be hated by every one.

Then Tostig went to one king after another asking for help; but they all refused to aid him. At last he found his way to King Harold Hardrada of Norway; and this warlike king gave him a fleet and an army and came himself to strike a blow against England.

The Norwegians landed on the shores of Northumbria, and began to ravage the country and burn the dwellings of the people.

Messengers were sent on swift horses to Harold. It was September, and all the fighting-men were away in the fields, gathering in the harvest, but at their country's need they left their work and flocked around their king.

In a short time Harold had collected an army; and he led his men northward by a road which had been made by the Romans hundreds of years before.

There was little time for rest on the long march from London to Northumbria. As they trudged steadily onwards the men talked of the enemy whom they were soon to meet; the world-renowned Harold King of Norway, who had led his sea-kings to battle in many lands.

"Ay," said one, "I've heard that he fought black heathen folk in an outlandish place called Egypt. Be there such a place?"

"Egypt?" said another; "that's the land parson preaches of in the church; there were Pharaohs there, and plagues."

"Ay," said the first; "when King Hardrada was in that land he met something worse far than Pharaohs."

"What was that?" asked the others.

"A fearsome beast that wore armour like a man. They call it a crocodile; and the country there is swarming with its like. Ten rows of teeth it had; and it came out of the river on its hind legs, and clawed at the king with iron gloves. They fought till sundown, they say, man and beast; and hard work had the king to slay the awesome creature.—He's a great fighter, is King Harold Hardrada."

The others marched in silence for a time, thinking about this fearful adventure of the Norwegian king. It was night, and the harvest moon was lighting up the long lines of men, with the king" and his nobles on. their tired horses at the head; the sleeping cottages, and the yellow shocks of corn standing ready cut in the fields on either side of the way.

"They do say," began another man after a time, "that the next enemy we shall have to fight will be the Duke of Normandy."

Weary as they were, all the hearers drew themselves up and squared their shoulders.

"Let him come," they said. "We will have no Norman for our king!"

"Ay," another voice was saying, "they do tell that the Pope has sent him a sacred banner, and calls it a holy war because our good king has broken an oath which he swore long ago, to help Duke William to be King of England."

"We will have no foreigner to be our king," repeated the men. "Neither Pope nor earl can give away the crown of England."

They marched resolutely onward; and for a time nothing was heard save the steady tramp of feet and the breathing of the tired horses.

Presently a halt was called, and the weary army lay down to snatch a few hours' sleep beneath the moon.

They were on foot again by daybreak; and at length they came face to face with their foes.

Near Stamford Bridge on the river Derwent, the Norwegian army was drawn up in a great circle, with the sunbeams glinting upon helmets and spear-points. High overhead floated the royal standard, a raven with outstretched wings, called by the Norwegians the land-waster.

Riding at a short distance from the army was a knight in a bright blue mantle and a shining helmet.

"Who is that man?" asked Harold of one of his captains.

"It is the King of Norway," replied the captain.

Harold looked at the rider again.

"He is a tall and stately king," he said; "but his end is near."

Then he looked again at the Norwegians, all drawn up in battle array; and he thought of his brother, somewhere among their ranks; and he wondered whether it was too late to try to make peace.

He rode out from his army until he was half-way between the two forces; and then he shouted, "Is Tostig the son of Godwin here?"

Tostig rode forward and said, "Behold, Tostig is here!"

Then Harold cried, "Harold of England offers Tostig peace and one-third of the kingdom of England that he may rule over it; for he would not that brother should fight against brother."

"Last winter," answered Tostig, "my brother had nought for me but words of scorn and high disdain; but now I am glad that he speaks both kindly and fairly. But what will

my brother King Harold of England give to King Harold of Norway for his trouble in coming here?"

"Seven feet of English ground," replied Harold; "or perhaps a foot over, seeing he is taller than most other men."

"Go thy way!" shouted the Earl; "Tostig will not desert his friends and go over to his foes. He and his friends will die on this spot like men, or will win England with their arms."

Riding back to his army, Tostig was met by King Harold Hardrada.

"Who is that man who spake with thee?" asked the King of Norway.

Tostig replied, "That is my brother Harold, the son of Godwin, and King of the English."

"He is but a little man," said Hardrada; "but he sits well in his stirrups."

Then the battle began.

Both sides fought well, but the English pressed the Northmen hard, and drove them backward until they came to the river Derwent. Then they pressed them harder than ever; and the Northmen might have been forced into the river and drowned but for the bravery of one of their number, who kept the bridge with uplifted sword while the other soldiers passed over. At last an Englishman got under the bridge, and thrust upward with his spear through the planks; and wounded the brave Northman so that he died.

After this the Northmen fell into confusion. Hardrada and Tostig were both slain; and the remnant of their army fled in a panic to their ships.

The English marched towards York, where the king gave a great feast in honour of the victory.

The guests were seated round the board, drinking healths and singing, and Harold was thinking sorrowfully of the brother who had fallen, a traitor to his country, when of a sudden there was a loud knocking at the door.

"What is that?" inquired the startled guests.

The door was thrown open, and a weary, white-faced man appeared, all splashed and caked with mud.

"What ill news have you come to bring me?" asked Harold, while the others all left the board and crowded round to hear.

"My lord the king," said the messenger, "I am from Pevensey—the Normans have landed—Duke William—sixty thousand men—laying waste the country—ships, horses, men-at-arms—"

"Ha!" said Harold; "he has chosen a time when the men who guard the coast are at their harvest; scattered over the country; and there is no one save myself to gather them together. How long is it since you left?"

"I hardly know," replied the messenger; "I took no count of time. I have galloped all the way—ridden day and night, changing horses where I could."

"Thanks, brave messenger," said the king; "by your speed you may have saved your country. We must set off without delay," he said, turning to his guests; "there is no more time for rest—who is ready to start for Sussex?"

"I—and I—and I," said the nobles, hurrying to fetch their followers; and soon the hall was deserted.

In an hour's time the army was once more upon the march. The two earls, Edwin and Morcar, whose sister Harold had married, remained in the north, promising to collect their forces and to follow the king with all speed.

As Harold approached the south of England, he was joined by hundreds of men who had fled from the invaders, and were eager to avenge the destruction of their homesteads.

"The English," reported Duke William's outposts to their master, "rush onward through their pillaged country with the fury of madmen."

"Let them come, and come soon!" was the duke's reply.

At Senlac, near the town of Hastings in Sussex, the English came in sight of their foes. The Normans lay encamped upon the plain, while Harold posted his army on a hill, with a little wood behind, and an old mossy apple-tree a little to one side.

Night came on, clear and cold; and the two armies lay in sight of one another's camp-fires, where they could hear the clinking of the armourer's hammers, and the rough voices of the men on the other side.

When all was ready, the Normans lay down quietly to sleep, and awoke in the morning refreshed end eager for the fray.

The English sat around their watch-fires, passing the horns of ale and mead from hand to hand, and singing glees and war-songs. Over all brooded the thought of the broken oath, and of the curse which had been pronounced against England; but they knew that the curse was unjust, and were resolved to fight to the last against the invader.

Harold rode round the camp to speak a last word of encouragement to his men before they slept. He still hoped that the northern earls, Edwin and Morcar, would come up before the battle; but Edwin and Morcar were traitors. They had said to themselves, "If Harold falls, we shall divide England with Duke William, and be kings of our share of the country instead of earls." So they remained in the north; and the sacrifice that Harold had made in marrying their sister proved to be in vain.

Morning dawned, and the two armies drew themselves up in order of battle. The English numbered only twenty thousand men, while William had brought against them sixty thousand; but the English had the advantage of a stronger position.

Harold drew up his bodyguard on the crest of the hill, where he had planted his standard, the Golden Dragon of Wessex. Close by were the men of London, who had the right of fighting by the side of their king. These men were all clad in coats of mail, and carried battle-axes, and javelins for throwing. On the sides of the hill were posted the other soldiers and the country people, many of whom were armed only with darts, knives, and pitchforks, for they had come in very hastily from the fields. Round the hill the men had dug a trench, and fortified it with a stockade; and behind the stockade Harold posted a line of soldiers, standing close together, shield touching shield.

Then Harold and his two brothers rode through the army, saying, "Keep your ranks, men! Stand shoulder to shoulder, and we shall win the day. But if you leave your line, or allow the Normans to break it, we are lost. Stand firm!"

After having passed from rank to rank, and spoken to all the men, Harold and his brothers rode back to the royal standard and dismounted, for they were resolved to fight on foot and take what came like the meanest of their soldiers.

Meanwhile Duke William had drawn up his men in three divisions, with a long line of archers in front. In the centre were posted the Norman knights with William at their head; and the sacred banner, the three lions of Normandy, floating above them.

Suddenly there burst from the Norman lines their battle-cry of "God aid us!" and the vast army began to move across the plain. At the head rode a minstrel-knight, singing an old battle-song, and whirling up his sword in the air and catching it again as it fell.

Now the battle began in real earnest.

A flight of arrows was let loose upon the English host, then the Normans charged up to the palisade.

As well might they have flung themselves against a stone wall. Standing shoulder to shoulder, the English swung their huge battle-axes, which clove their way through armour and shirts of mail. Again and again the Normans charged against the barricade, the duke himself at their head, his eyes shining like balls of living fire and his voice like a trumpet; but they were driven back like waves breaking around the base of a cliff.

On all sides the battle raged. Lances clashed, sword rang upon sword, arrows whizzed through the air, and battle-axes crashed through steel armour; while the cries of the wounded mingled with the blasts of the war-horn and English cries of "Out, out!" answered the Norman shouts of "God aid us!"

Stoutest of the English was Harold, whose heavy battle-axe would cut down horse and rider at a blow. Among the Normans there arose a cry that the duke was slain.

"Here am I," shouted William, tearing off his helmet, "and by God's aid will yet win the day!"

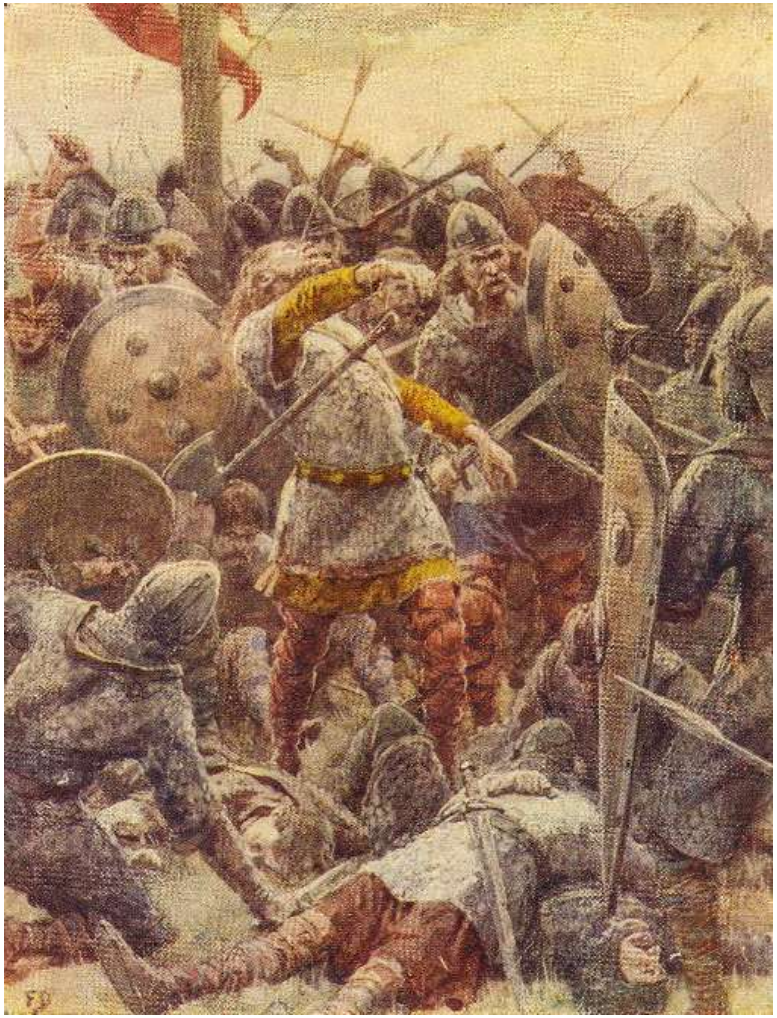
Maddened with war fury, he spurred up the hill, broke single-handed through the barrier, and rode straight to Harold. The brother of the king stepped before him, and was hewn down by a blow from William before the duke himself was unhorsed and fell to the ground. Mounting again quickly, William cut his way through his foes and was back again in the Norman lines before any one could harm him.

A body of Normans having given way, the Kentish men in their eagerness overleaped the barricade and gave chase to their flying foes. Instantly William saw his advantage. The Normans turned, galloped up the hill, and poured by thousands into the gap thus left undefended.

This proved the turning point of the day.

"Slowly and surely," says an old writer, "the Norman horse pressed along the crest of the hill, strewing the height with corpses as the hay is strewn in swaths before the mower."

Still the ring round the standard remained unbroken, and in the centre Harold and his bodyguard held their ground, dealing blows around them with their great battle-axes. Beyond the ring the dead lay piled up in heaps, English and Norman together.



THE DEATH OF HAROLD.

"Shoot upward," cried the duke to his archers, "that your arrows may fall like bolts from heaven."

A shower of arrows fell upon the heads and shoulders of the English, killing and wounding many a brave fighter.

The battle had lasted since early morning; and just as the sun went down an arrow pierced Harold's right eye.

The king dropped his battle-axe, and fell forward with a short, sharp cry of pain.

Twenty Norman knights rushed forward, seized the standard, and dealt Harold a mortal blow as he lay beside the dead bodies of his two brothers.

The English, having lost their leader, left the field fighting to the last, and then scattered over the country to carry far and wide the ill-tidings that King Harold was slain and the Norman master of England.

All was quiet when the moon rose over the hill where the Golden Dragon had been hauled down and the sacred banner of the Normans raised in its stead. The ground having been hastily cleared, William's tent was pitched upon the spot where Harold and his brothers had made their last stand, and the duke slept there all night.

The next day was a Sunday, and as the bells tinkled mournfully in the churches, Englishwomen came flocking to the field of battle, with pale faces and eyes red with weeping, to beg leave to look for their husbands and brothers and sons among the slain. Among them was the mother of Harold, offering William ,its weight in gold for the body of her son.

The conqueror gave her leave to search, and for a long time the noble English lady wandered over the battle-field, seeking vainly among the dead.

Then came Aldwyth, Harold's wife; but she too, was unable to find the body of her husband.

Last of all came Edith of the Swan's Neck, whom Harold had loved; and she sought long for the body.

At last she came to a corpse that was lying upon a heap of dead, disfigured with so many wounds that only she could have known it.

"That is Harold," she said.

William gave orders that the last of the English kings should be buried upon the cliffs that guard the shores of England, and a heap of stones raised upon it.

"Let him lie there," he said; "he kept the shore manfully while he lived; let him stay and guard it ever, now he is dead."

CHAPTER IV

THE BOY WHO WOULD BE A KING

The Norman King of England, a descendant of William the Conqueror, having died without leaving any children, his brother John made himself king.

John was a very bad man; and he was both mean and cowardly. Although he was King of England and Duke of Normandy he was never happy or at rest, for he knew that his nephew Arthur, the son of his elder brother, had a better right than himself to the crown. As time went on he became more and more uneasy, for he found that his subjects did not like him, and he was afraid that they might learn to like the fine, handsome lad whom many of them believed to be their rightful sovereign.

At the time when John made himself king, young Arthur was only twelve years old, and he was living safely in his own dukedom of Brittany. His father having died when Arthur was only a baby, the young prince had been Duke of Brittany all his life; and he had grown up among his people, who loved their young duke very much.

King Philip of France was an enemy of John; and when he heard that the man whom he despised had taken the crown which should have been Arthur's, he invited the young duke to his court, made him a knight, boy although he was, and promised him his daughter in marriage when he should be a man.

Alas! Poor Arthur never lived to marry the Princess of France.

One day the French king said to the young prince, "Arthur, you know your rights, and that your uncle John is not the true King of England. Would you not like to be a king?"

The boy looked at King Philip with his large, bright blue eyes.

"Truly," he said, "I should greatly like to be a king."

"Then win back your inheritance," said the King of France. "I will give you two hundred of my knights, and you shall come with me and make war upon your uncle in Normandy, which is yours by right. Once we have taken Normandy from the usurper, it will be easy to drive him from England.

Prince Arthur flushed with joy and pride; and his eyes sparkled more brightly than ever. The King of France gave him a beautiful horse, and Arthur had a fine suit of armour made for himself; and then he was unable to rest or sleep for joy at the thought that he would soon be a king, and marry the beautiful princess who had been promised to him as his wife.

When the people of Brittany heard that their gallant young duke was going to fight for his inheritance, they gathered together five hundred knights and five thousand foot soldiers and sent them to Arthur in France.

Arthur was very proud of his little army, and he felt sure that with the help of his followers he would soon win back England and Normandy. Seeing him upon his fine horse, and wearing his rich suit of armour, the knights and soldiers were delighted with the fine, spirited lad, and set off gaily under his leadership to besiege a town which was in the possession of King John.

Upon hearing the news, the King of England came himself to fight against his nephew. He did not bring a large army; he knew that King Philip of France was in another part of the country, and he did not think it would be very difficult to overcome Prince Arthur.

One night the prince's troops were surprised by treachery. A number of King John's soldiers stole into the camp, made prisoners of some of Arthur's knights, and stabbed others in the dark.

Prince Arthur was sleeping in his tent when he was rudely awakened by some armed men, who seized him by the wrists, and bade him come with them and not make any noise.

His captors hurried the lad through the streets of the little town, which were full of King John's soldiers, running to and fro with lighted torches, and some of them leading Prince Arthur's brave French and Breton soldiers as prisoners.

Presently they reached a lighted hall, and when his eyes became accustomed to the glare Arthur saw before him his uncle John, a look of triumph upon his mean face and in his shifty eyes. In a corner was a group of Arthur's knights, with fetters on their wrists and ankles.

"Do you know me, boy?" said King John, trying to look his nephew in the face.

The prince stood up boldly and looked at his uncle with his honest, fearless eyes.

"Yes," he said, "I know you; you are my uncle, the usurping King of England."

John's mean face became white with anger, and he was unable to speak.

"I command you," continued the boy, "to restore to me my rightful inheritance, of which you have unjustly deprived me, and to set my knights instantly at liberty."

Some of the bystanders were looking at the lad with pity, mingled with admiration for his courage; but the boy's fearlessness only filled the king with a desire to lower his pride.

By the time he had found his voice, John's eyes were glittering with a cruel determination.

"To Falaise with him!" he said. "Take him away; and in the dungeon there he will learn to rebel against his uncle and lawful king."

Arthur was not frightened yet. He remembered that King Philip had promised to make him King of England; and he saw nothing to be afraid of in the mean, cowardly face of the man before him.

"No king of mine," he said; "you may put me in a dungeon, but you cannot keep me there. The King of France is on my side and against you, base usurper; and he will send an army and deliver me from the strongest fortress of those that you have stolen from me."

King John made a sign; and the boy was hurried away, still defying his uncle. A horse was waiting for him, and he was made to ride, strongly guarded, all the long distance to the castle of Falaise, which was reached early one fine sunny morning.

Standing beneath the grim walls of the castle, the chief of Arthur's guards blew a horn.

Some men-at-arms stirred upon the battlements; then the drawbridge was lowered, the iron grating raised which guarded the entrance; and the party clattered under the entrance tower and into the courtyard.

Arthur descended from his horse; and weary as he was, he was led along a passage and down a stone staircase to a great iron door which one of his guides opened with a large key.

Arthur's spirits sank when he saw before him a dreary stone dungeon lighted only by a window high up in the wall, and furnished with a narrow bed, a stool, and a heap of straw.

Still, he said to himself, it was only for a few days. To-morrow, or the next day, or the day after that at farthest, the King of France was sure to come, and then Arthur would mount his gallant horse again, put himself at the head of his devoted little army, and set forth once more to make himself King of England.

To-morrow came, and the next day, and the day after that; and Arthur was still in his dungeon. Weeks passed; and the King of France had not arrived to rescue the prince who was to be his son-in-law.

Spring came, and sometimes the sun shone brightly through the small window, and made a brilliant patch of light on the opposite wall of Prince Arthur's dungeon.—When the breezes blew, branches with young unfolding leaves would appear for a minute at the opening and then vanish. Balmy air stole in at the unglazed window and breathed softly upon the face of the prisoner; and Arthur would hear the song-birds and the voices of other boys at their games beneath the castle walls, and all the pleasant sounds of a world where every one save himself appeared to be at liberty. Sometimes Arthur would sit for hours, gazing upwards at the tiny square of light, his heart swelling with impatience as he thought of the spring pastimes that he was losing; and he wondered when the King of France would come and set him free.

One day the bolts were withdrawn at an unusual hour.

Here, then, was King Philip at last!

Arthur turned quickly; and in the archway of the door, he saw the white face of his uncle.

"Arthur," said King John, trying to meet his nephew's eyes, "will you not trust to your loving uncle?"

"I will trust my loving uncle," replied the boy, "when he does me right. Restore to me my kingdom of England, and then come and ask me that question."

The king looked at his nephew, whose high-spirited young face had become so much paler by confinement; then he turned away without a word and left the prison.

After this King John took counsel with his advisers.

"What shall I do with this boy," he said, "who defies me and thinks that he is to become King of England?"

"Behead him," said one. "Have him poisoned," said another.

"Put his eyes out," suggested a hard-faced nobleman who had not spoken before; "the people will not care to have a blind man for their king."

"Put out his eyes," mused the king; "put out his eyes; those eyes which look with unseemly boldness at his uncle and true sovereign."

The longer he dwelt upon the idea the more attractive did it become to him.

The boy who could not be made to fear him; who persisted in believing that he would one day force his uncle to yield up the crown—it would be gratifying to know that he had been deprived of his frank, fearless eyes.

John sent to the prison a man called Hubert de Burgh, whom he believed to be devoted to himself; and gave him charge of Prince Arthur.

Hubert had a stern face but a kind heart, and he soon grew so much attached to the bright boy who was his prisoner, that he felt towards him almost as a father. He took the prince out of the dungeon, and gave him bright sunny rooms in another part of the castle; and often he spent hours with his young charge, enjoying his cheerful boyish conversation.

What was Hubert's dismay when one day he received a letter from the king, commanding that his prisoner's eyes should be burned out with hot irons. Not only that, but he had sent two executioners to see that it was done.

Hubert was hardly able to bear the pain which such an order gave him; but he was unable to see any way of escape for the prince.

He entered Arthur's room that morning with so sad a face that the prince asked what ailed him.

"May one not be sad at times, prince?" said Hubert, whose sorrow made him gruff.

ARTHUR IN PRISON VISITED BY KING JOHN.

"Indeed there may be many things that make people sad," replied Prince Arthur, "although I was nearly forgetting that any one could be unhappy who is out of prison—Indeed, Hubert, I am beginning to think that if only I were free and kept sheep I could be as merry as the day is long. Perhaps I should not trouble any longer about being a king if only I had the blue sky above my head once more, and no prison bars.—I wish I were your son, Hubert; and then I should not have to spend my time in prison."

Poor Hubert, it was necessary that he should tell the prince what was going to happen; and yet the longer he waited the more impossible it seemed for him to begin. He moved uneasily about the room, and looked so gloomy, that Arthur felt sure that something was the matter.

"Here, prince, read this letter," said Hubert abruptly at last, feeling it impossible that he could utter the dreadful news.

Arthur took the letter; and then he became deadly pale.

"Hubert, is this true?" he said.

"Prince, these are your uncle's orders!" said Hubert with a shaking voice.

"Have you the heart to do it?" said Arthur piteously. "Will you indeed burn out my eyes?"

"I must," said Hubert; "your uncle has sent two men to see that it is done."

"O Hubert!" was all that Arthur could say.

"Better get it over quickly," muttered Hubert to himself, and he called the executioners, who had been waiting outside the door.

"Send these men away, Hubert!" cried the boy. "I will stay quite still, Hubert, I will not move if you will do it yourself; but I cannot bear the sight of these men."

"You may go," said Hubert to the executioners; "I will call when I am ready for you."

"Indeed," said one of the men, who had pitied the boy, "I am best pleased to be away from such a deed."

But it was impossible for Hubert to burn out the eyes of his dear young prisoner; and it was impossible for Arthur not to beg for mercy.

"I cannot do it," said Hubert more to himself than to the prince, "and I will not; I shall have to take the consequences." He opened the door, and called in the two men.

They came in unwilling, each hoping that he would not have to do the deed.

"I have not burned out the prince's eyes," said Hubert abruptly. "What is more, I am not going to allow you to do so. You can tell the king if you like."

"Indeed, sir," said one of the men, "we won't tell his majesty anything at all. And by your leave, sir, we would both rather be excused from doing our duty if it's to be a young gentleman like this, who can't have done anything to deserve it. And so we will wish you good-day, sir."

The men shuffled out of the room, but Arthur's troubles were not over yet. King John began to think that Arthur, even without his eyes, was too dangerous a prisoner to keep on his hands; and he suggested to a knight named William de Bray that he should stab the prince in prison.

"I am a gentleman and not an executioner," replied William de Bray; and he turned from the king in disdain.

Then John hired an assassin for a large sum of money, and sent him to the castle to kill the prince.

"Upon what errand dost thou come?" asked Hubert de Burgh, as the fellow presented himself at the castle gates.

"To despatch Prince Arthur," said the man. "Go back to him that sent thee," said Hubert, "and say that I will do it."

King John, knowing very well that Hubert was trying to save his prisoner, separated Arthur from his kind gaoler, and had him imprisoned in the strong castle of Rouen, which is washed on one side by the river Seine.

Then he came himself in a boat by night and waited outside the castle walls.

Arthur was awakened by his gaoler and made to follow him to a small door by the river-side. When the door was unfastened, the gaoler threw down his torch and trod upon it to put it out, and Arthur was only able to distinguish two dark forms in the boat. From the voice he could tell that one of them was his uncle.

Arthur was dragged on board the boat, imploring the king to have mercy upon him; and what happened after that has never been told. Some say that John stunned his nephew with a large stone, and flung his body into the Seine; at all events, neither the prince, nor his dead body, was ever seen again.

If John thought that his nephew's murder would make him undisputed King of England he was much mistaken. The cruel deed aroused the greatest indignation throughout England and France. Through it the dukedom of Normandy was lost to the English crown, and some years later John died a ruined man, with his subjects in open rebellion against him.

CHAPTER V

THE BLACK PRINCE

Edward III, King of England, was a very warlike prince. When the King of France died he was succeeded by his nephew Philip, but Edward declared that he, being a grandson of the late king, had a better right than a nephew; and he set off with a gallant army and many knights and nobles to enforce his claim.

The war proved a much longer one than Edward had expected. Six years. after the English king's first march into France the two nations were still fighting. By this time King Edward's eldest son was fifteen years of age, and he implored his father to let him accompany him to the French war.

This young prince was a fine spirited youth, and skilful at all manly exercises. In appearance he was very fair, with light hair and laughing blue eyes. Perhaps he was a little vain of his appearance, because in order to show off the fairness of his complexion he always wore dark-coloured armour a habit which led to his being known in after life as Edward the Black Prince.

Seeing his boy's courage and warlike spirit, the king consented to his accompanying him upon his next expedition into France.

In the month of July, 1346, the king and the prince set sail with an army of thirty thousand men, ten thousand of whom were archers.

For seven weeks the English marched through the fair and smiling country of France, meeting with very little opposition, and plundering and burning wherever they went.

At last, by the little village of Crecy on the banks of the river Somme, the English came in view of the French army.

It was not difficult to tell that the army of the King of France numbered at least eight times as many men as were on the side of the English; but King Edward decided that it would never do to betray fear.

"We will go in," he said calmly to his men, "and beat, or be beaten."

It was too late to fight that day; and the English lay down within sight of the enemy.

Early in the morning the English king set his army in order of battle.

King Edward himself was to command one division; two of his earls another; and the eager young prince, assisted by the Earls of Warwick and Oxford, was given the charge of a third.

When the troops were all drawn up in fighting array, the king mounted his horse and rode from rank to rank, cheering and encouraging the men and their leaders.

"He spoke so sweetly," says an old writer, "and with so good a countenance and merry cheer, that all such as were discomfited took courage in seeing and hearing him."

By the time King Edward had gone round the whole army it was about nine o"clock, and the sun was shining warm and bright upon what was soon to be the field of battle. The king sent orders that his men were to "eat at their ease and drink a cup"; and the whole army sat down upon the grass and breakfasted. Then they returned to their ranks again and lay down, each man in his place, with his bow and helmet beside him, waiting until the enemy should be ready to begin the fight.

In the meanwhile the French army was approaching. By the time the king had brought his men within reach of the English lines, the bright morning had clouded over. The day had become dark and threatening, and soon the thunder began to growl, and the lightning to flash overhead. The frightened

birds flew screaming for shelter, and the clouds broke and fell in a heavy shower upon the French king's army.

One of his captains advised King Philip not to fight until the morrow. The king gave the order to halt; but the men in the rear, not understanding the message, pressed forward and forced the others to advance, thus throwing the army into confusion.

Finding that it was too late to put off the battle, King Philip ordered to the front a great body of Genoese cross-bowmen, whom he had hired to fight against the English.

By this time the rain was over and the sun had come out; but it shone full in the faces of the cross-bowmen, and prevented them from seeing the enemy. Their bows, too, had become wetted with the rain, and the strings were slackened.

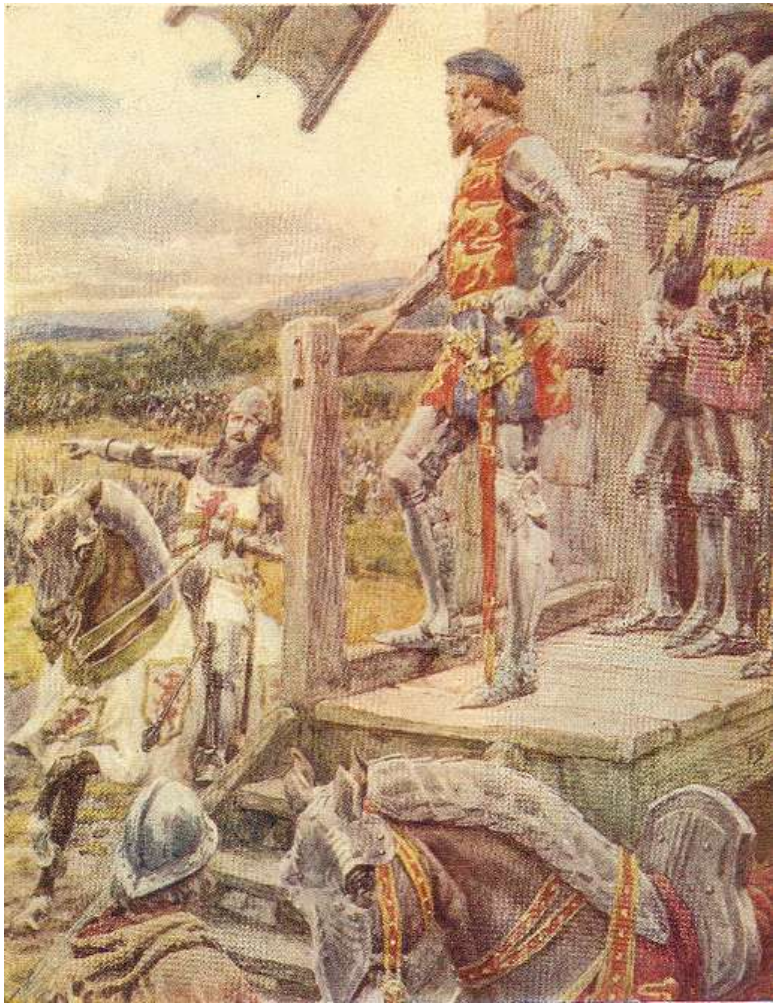
When they heard the king's order the Genoese moved forward; "then," says the historian, "they made a great cry to abash the English; but they stood still and stirred not for all that. A second and a third time the Genoese uttered a fell cry—very loud and clear, and a little stepped forward; but the English removed not one foot."

At last the Genoese sent a shower of arrows into the ranks of the calm, silent English.

The English received the shower quietly; then their reply was prompt. A quick movement went along the line of archers; the ten thousand men advanced one pace, and "their arrows flew so wholly together and so thick that it seemed as if it snowed."

The Genoese required time to wind up their cross-bows before they could reload; and in the meantime the English long-bowmen shot so continuously that the ranks of the Genoese broke in terror and fled.

Still the archers sent their deadly hail upon the French army, while a number of Welsh and Cornish soldiers, armed with long knives, crept in under the horses and stabbed them, so that both horse and rider fell heavily to the ground. The confusion was rendered still more dreadful by means of a weapon which King Edward used for the first time in battle; small "bombards," or cannon, as they were afterwards called, "which with fire threw little iron balls to frighten the horses."



WARWICK'S MESSENGER ASKING FOR AID TO BE SENT TO THE BLACK PRINCE.

While the battle raged with great fury on both sides, King Edward was sending out his orders from a windmill from which he could overlook the progress of the fight.

Presently a messenger came from the Earl of Warwick, beseeching to send aid to his son, the Black Prince.

"Is my son killed?" asked the king.

"No, Sire, please God," replied the messenger.

"Is he wounded?"

"No, Sire." "Is he thrown to the ground?"

"No, Sire, not so; but he is very hard pressed."

"Then," said the king, "go back to those that sent you, and tell them that he shall have no help from me. Let the boy win his spurs; for I wish, if God so order it, that the day may be his."

The messenger carried back these words to the prince, who fought harder than ever, and drove off his assailants.

For hours the battle raged, both sides fighting with great fury and determination. On the French side was the old blind King of Bohemia, who remained somewhat apart, mounted upon his warhorse, listening to the din and noise of the battle in which his son was engaged.

After some time he heard a French knight approaching, and asked him how the fight was going.

"The Genoese have been routed," was the reply; "and your son is wounded."

Then the king called to him two of his vassals and said to them, "Lords, you are my vassals, my friends, and my companions; I pray you of your goodness to lead me so far into the fight that I may at least strike one blow with my sword."

Then the two knights drew up, one on each side of their aged king; and all three fastened their bridle-reins together and rode into the fray.

"The king," says the old story-teller, "struck one blow with his sword; yea, and more than four; and fought right valiantly"; until he and his knights disappeared under the heaving, struggling mass of men, never to rise again.

In the meantime the King of France was fighting as hard as any man on the field. Twice he was wounded, and once he had his horse shot under him; but after having had his wounds bound up, he mounted again and rode back into the fight. Many times he led his men in furious charges against the English; but nothing could overcome the coolness and determination of the English forces.

At last the French were vanquished, and had to retire from the field. Their sacred banner, the Oriflamme, or Flame of Gold, was nearly captured, but a brave French knight broke his way through the crowd which was struggling around it, cut the banner from its staff with his sword, and winding it round his body, rode away with it in safety.

The French king, refusing to leave the field, was dragged away, almost by force, by some of his followers.

After riding for some miles, they came to a castle and knocked at the gate.

"Who is there?" shouted the gate-keeper. "It is the Fortune of France," was the reply.

Then the lord of the castle came down himself and opened the gates, and let in his weary, broken-hearted king.

Night was closing in, and the English were lighting their watch-fires upon the battle-field, when King Edward rode forward to meet the son who had fought so bravely. Taking the lad in his arms, he kissed him, and he told him that he had acted nobly, and worthy of the day and of his high birth.

Next morning the king and the prince went to look at the slain, and found among them the old King of Bohemia, lying dead between his two knights. Beside the king lay his shield and helmet, bearing his device, three ostrich feathers, with the motto "ich dien."

King Edward gave orders that the old hero should be borne from the field and buried with royal honours; and then he and the prince moved away in a very thoughtful mood.

"Truly," said Prince Edward, "I think that was well said; 'ich dien,' meaning that a king's duty is to serve his country."

"As thou hast served it well this day, my son," replied his father, "wilt thou take this device for thine own?"

So the prince took for his crest the three ostrich feathers with the motto, in remembrance of his gallant enemy, and the device is borne by the Princes of Wales to this day.

Ten years later, the Black Prince had become a man, and the war was not yet at an end. King Philip was dead, and had been succeeded by his son John, a brave and chivalrous king.

Edward being engaged in fighting with the Scots, the Black Prince took command of the army in France. Near the town of Poitiers he believed that the French king lay somewhere in readiness to give battle; but the English could not find out where he was.

The prince gave orders that the French peasants were to be made to tell him where their king lay encamped; but these poor people were so loyal that neither money nor threats could make them give any information.

Prince Edward was in great perplexity, for his army was now reduced to about ten thousand men; and if the King of France had a larger force, the prince felt that it might be more prudent for him to retire.

One day, quite unexpectedly, the English came in view of the French army, encamped near the town of Poitiers. The whole country, far and near, seemed to be occupied by the force which was to oppose the Prince's little body of ten thousand men.

"There was all the flower of France," says the historian, "for there was none durst abide at home without he were shamed for ever."

"God help us," said the Black Prince; "we must make the best of it."

He posted his army very strongly upon a hill, while the French king marshalled his forces upon the plain below.

That night the two armies lay, strongly guarded, within sight of each other.

In the morning the battle was about to begin when a cardinal came riding in haste to the French king, and implored him to give him leave to try to save the small body of English from rushing upon certain destruction.

"Sire," he said, "you have here all the flower of your realm against a handful of people, for so the English are as compared to your company. I pray you that you will allow me to ride to the prince and show him what danger you have him in."

The king gave permission, and the cardinal came riding over to the Black Prince, who received him courteously.

"Save my honour," he said, when the cardinal offered to try to arrange terms for him, "and the honour of my army, and I will make any reasonable terms."

He offered to give up all the towns and castles he had taken, and to make a truce with the French king for seven years; and the cardinal rode back to his own side with this message.

After an interval of suspense he came riding to the English camp again.

"The King of France consents to make peace," said the cardinal, "on condition that you will yield yourself up a prisoner, with a hundred of your knights."

The prince's face darkened.

Here would be shameful news to send to his father and the people of England!

As the King of France refused to make peace upon any other conditions, Prince Edward broke off the treaty and turned to his army, saying quietly, "God defend the right; we shall fight to-morrow."

All that day the English worked hard to make their position more secure. The sides of the hill were covered with woods and vineyards, and the principal approach was by means of a lane with hedges on either side, behind which a number of archers posted themselves. All the weaker places were strengthened by means of palisades.

On the following morning, when all was in order of battle, the prince addressed his men.

"Sirs," he said, "although we be but a small company compared with our enemies, we must not lose courage. If it is to be our good fortune to win the day, we shall be the most honoured people in all the world; and if we die in our right quarrel, I have the king my father and my brothers, and you have good friends and kinsmen, and they will avenge our deaths. I beg that each of you will do your duty to-day, and if God be pleased and St. George, this day you will see me a true knight."

After this the battle began.

The French cavalry charged up the lane, hoping to break the lines of archers, but the men who were posted behind the hedges received them with such a volley of arrows that the horses refused to advance, and some of them fell, blocking up the way.

Then a body of English knights, galloping down the hill, threw the foremost of the French lines into confusion.

Lord James Audley, who during the first part of the battle had been by the side of the prince, now said to him, "Sir, I have always truly served my lord your father and yourself also, and I shall do so as long as I live. I once made a vow that in the first battle that your father or any of his children should be in, I should be the first setter-on and the best combatant, or else die; therefore I beg of you that you will allow me to leave you in order that I may accomplish my vow."

The prince took him by the hand and said, "Sir James, God give you this day the grace to be the first knight of all"; and Lord James rode away into the battle and fought until he had to be carried, sorely wounded, from the field.

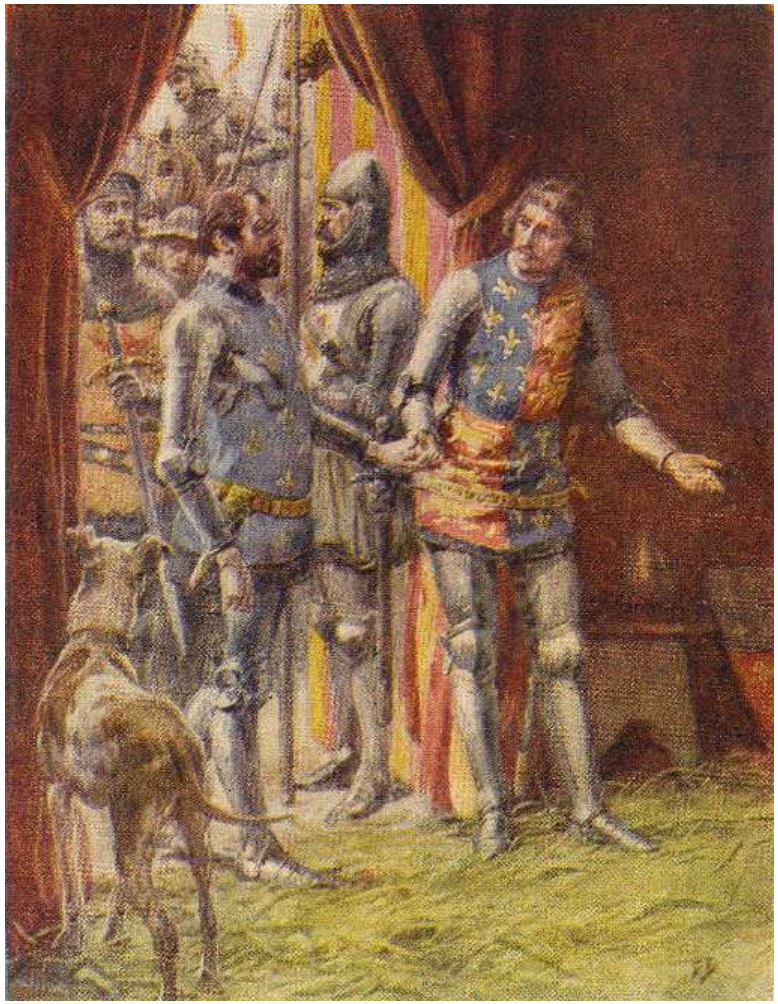
In the meantime the battle raged with great fury upon all sides, and many French and English knights were engaged in deadly combat.

An English knight, Sir John Chandos, who had never left the prince, said to his master, "Ride forward, noble prince, and the day is yours; let us get to the French king, for truly he is so valiant a gentleman that I think he will not fly, but may be taken prisoner; and, sir, I heard you say that this day I should see you a good knight."

"John," said the prince, "let us go forth; you shall not see me turn back this day, but I will ever be with the foremost"; then the prince and his friend rode into the thickest of the fight.

Where the battle raged most fiercely the French king, with his young son Philip by his side, was laying about him with his battle-axe. When the nobles around him were slain or had fled, the brave lad refused to leave his father, who made his last stand with the blood streaming down from a wound in the face.

At last the king was forced to yield, and he gave his glove to a banished French knight, Sir Denis de Marbeke, in token of surrender.



THE FRENCH KING BROUGHT PRISONER TO THE BLACK PRINCE AFTER POITIERS.

When the French were fleeing from the field, the Black Prince had become so exhausted with fighting that Sir John Chandos persuaded him to retire to his tent and take some rest.

Presently the news came to the royal tent that the king had been taken prisoner, and was on his way to the English camp. The prince immediately sent two of his lords to meet him, and had him brought to his own tent, where he received his brave enemy with the greatest respect.

After the king had rested and refreshed himself, the prince invited him and the other captive nobles to a supper in his tent, and Prince Edward himself waited upon King John, saying that he was not worthy to sit at table with so great a prince and so valiant a man.

Soon after this the .English returned to their own country, bringing with them the French king and many other prisoners.

The victorious army was received with the greatest joy; and on the day when the Black Prince entered London, the people crowded by thousands into the streets to see him pass as he rode on a little pony by the side of his prisoner, King John of France, whom he had mounted upon his own magnificent cream-coloured charger.

King John was kept, an honourable prisoner, until a peace was made with France. Then he was allowed to return to his own country upon condition that the French should pay, within six years, a sum of money for his ransom.

Until the ransom should be paid, the French king's three sons agreed to remain as hostages in the town of Calais, which belonged to the English. They were allowed to ride into French territory as often as they pleased, provided that they gave their word of honour not to remain away longer than four days at a time. King Edward and his son, knowing how honourable their father was, trusted in the honour of these young princes.

One day, however, one of the princes yielded to temptation, rode away, and never came back to Calais at all. Upon hearing the news the French king was so shocked that he

returned to England and yielded himself up a prisoner once more.

"If honour is to be found nowhere else," he said, "it should find a refuge in the breast of kings."

King Edward gave him a palace to live in, and he and his people did all they could to show the imprisoned king how much they loved and admired him for his noble conduct.

But King John never returned to his own country. Three months after his arrival in England he died, his end hastened by sorrow at the base and thoughtless conduct of his son.

CHAPTER VI

SINGEING THE KING OF SPAIN'S BEARD

Queen Elizabeth was seated in her private apartment, her white forehead puckered in anxious lines.

The trouble between herself and her great rival the King of Spain had reached its height.

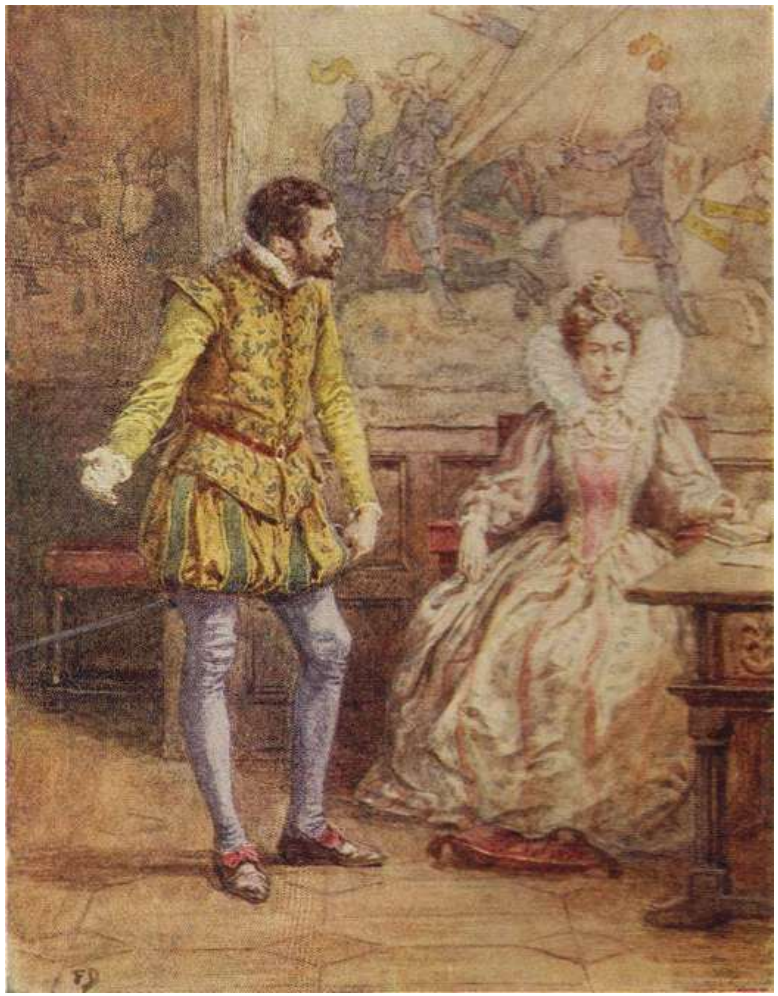
Throughout her reign English and Spaniards had been contending for the mastery of the new countries which had been discovered on the other side of the ocean, and for supremacy upon the seas. In South America the Spanish king possessed rich mines of silver and precious stones: and Queen Elizabeth's adventurers, half explorers, half pirates, gloried in making descents upon the coast towns, waiting there until the convoys came down from the mountains, and then seizing the treasure, burning the town, and departing.

Another frolicsome adventure of the English sailors was to hang about the rear of the Spanish "silver fleet" on its way from America to Spain, and when any vessel became separated from her fellows, to fall upon her, remove the precious cargo to their own vessel, and then set fire to the Spanish ship and send her adrift upon the high seas.

No wonder that after several years of these proceedings the Spanish king had made up his mind that the pride of the audacious islanders must be lowered, and a clean sweep made of the English pirates.

And it was no wonder that Queen Elizabeth was uneasy, for she had received tidings that even then the Spaniards had a great fleet in the harbour of Cadiz, ready for the invasion of England. At that time the Spanish navy was the greatest in the world, while the English only had a few hundred small vessels.

While the Queen was occupied with these gloomy thoughts, there was a knock at the door, and a short, pleasant-looking man stood on the threshold. The man bowed low, and the queen looked at him with an expression that was half angry and half pleased.



DRAKE MAKING HIS REQUEST OF THE QUEEN.

"Ha, Sir Francis Drake," she said, "what will you?

The great sailor smiled; and in spite of herself the sternness began to melt from the queen's face.

Few people could have remained looking into that sunburnt countenance and still have felt annoyed. There was such a breezy determination about the man; and his large, clear bright eyes met the eyes of every one else with a look which made them trust him. He had the appearance of one to whom danger and adventure are sport, and who is strong enough to carry out the wildest adventures with success. Through his daring exploits he had been the cause of more trouble with the Spaniards than any other man in Queen Elizabeth's dominions, and she knew it; but then the queen dearly loved a brave man.

"How now, Sir Francis," said the Queen, smiling a little in spite of herself, "are you already weary of dry land?"

The adventurer gravely bent his head. "Please your Majesty," he said, "I should be glad to have a commission."

"What do you want a commission for?" asked the queen.

The explorer's eyes twinkled.

"So please your Majesty, to singe the King of Spain's beard; it has grown somewhat too long."

The queen understood what he meant, but she felt that she must try to look forbidding.

"Ha, Sir Francis," she said, "have you not already made me enough trouble with the King of Spain? Know you not that for your plunderings in the new lands yonder he has called you 'the master thief of the unknown world'?"

"Your Majesty," said Sir Francis, "I am well aware of the King of Spain's opinion, and I think it the more reason that I should show him some good fighting nearer home."

Then, throwing off his jesting manner, he showed the queen his plans for destroying the mighty preparations which were being made against England.

By the time the audience was over, the clouds had lifted from the queen's brow, and the explorer had obtained leave to carry out his daring project.

A few weeks later, the harbour of Cadiz showed the same scene of animation which it had presented for many months past. The huge battle-ships, with their high prows and castellated turrets, rose majestically out of the water, while among them little boats and sloops flitted in and out, carrying arms and provisions for the great galleons. The clanking of armourers and hammering of ship-wrights was going on busily, and the swarthy sailors were singing at their toil as they coiled the ropes, polished brasses, and put the finishing touches to the preparations which were being made for the conquest of England.

Of a sudden, into the busy harbour there sailed some half dozen small, shabby vessels. Every head was turned to look at them, and the cry arose among the Spaniards that these ships belonged to the English pirates.

Instantly the guns of all the forts were turned upon them, but despite a perfect hail of shot the plucky little fleet made its way unharmed up to the very water-lines of the great war-vessels and set each one of them on fire; then in face of the helpless, astonished Spaniards the English ships turned and sailed away again, to repeat the adventure in every harbour into which they could obtain an entrance.

So well had the singeing of the King of Spain's beard been done that it was a year before the expedition was able to set sail for England; and when at last it came, the English people were ready for it.

By the time the "most fortunate and invincible Armada" was on its way, nearly every fighting man in England had volunteered for service. The small navy had been increased by the gifts of the nobility and gentry, who had built or hired vessels for the defence of their native land, fitted them out and manned them at their own expense; while the cities had collected money and sent it to the Treasury, to be used as the queen and her ministers should find it best. Lord Howard of Effingham had been made High Admiral of the Fleet; and with him were Sir Francis Drake and other bold seafarers.

The army was mustered at Tilbury Fort on the river Thames, and the queen herself went down to review the men.

"My loving people," she said, "I am come among you at this time, not for sport or pleasure, but in the midst and heat of battle—to live and die amongst you all; to lay down for my God, for my Kingdom, and my people, my honour and my blood, if need be, even in the dust. I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and courage of a king, and of a King of England too. And I think foul scorn that Spain, or any Prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm."

No wonder that these brave words were cheered to the echo, and that every man felt himself inspired to do his best.

The winds being light the Armada advanced only slowly. The English fleet was lying at Plymouth, and the Admirals, Lord Howard of Effingham, Sir Francis Drake and the others, were having a game of bowls upon Plymouth Hoe when the news was brought that the topmasts of the Spanish vessels had been sighted off Land's End, in Cornwall. Some of the players were about to break up the game, but Sir Francis Drake made them keep their places.

"There's plenty of time," he said, "to end the game and thrash the Spaniards too."

Then quietly, without any flurry, the English vessels were made ready.

Some hours later, the foremost ships of the great Armada came in view, and were soon followed by the rest of the fleet sailing majestically along in the form of a crescent, seven miles long from tip to tip.

The English watched her go by without interfering, then the little fleet was put to sea and followed the Armada, harassing her in the rear and cutting off a vessel here and there.

For fully a week this running fight was kept up; then the two fleets came face to face with each other off the town of Calais.

The first day's encounter was indecisive; the Spanish fired over the heads of the English, while the little vessels, low down in the water, poured their broadsides full into the huge bulk of the Spanish galleons; yet when night came it was discovered that the English were running short of powder, while comparatively little harm had been done to the enemy.

During the night an unpleasant surprise was prepared for the Spaniards.

Half a dozen of the oldest vessels in the English fleet filled with pitch, resin, tarry ropes, and anything else that "would burn well, were taken by two gallant Devonshire sailors, Young and Prowse, into tie very heart of the Armada and set on fire. Then the men who had steered the "fire ships" took to their boats and rowed quickly back to safety, while the burning vessels were left to drift about among the Spanish fleet.

In a panic the Spaniards cut their cables, hoisted sail, and made for the open sea, each vessel getting in the way of her neighbours; and by morning the entire fleet was in confusion.

Now was the opportunity of the English; the gallant little vessels darted in among the great galleons, and attacked them like little game-cocks fighting huge unwieldy cochinchinas.

From morning until sundown the battle raged; and it was the small vessels which had the advantage.

Many of the Spanish ships sank or ran aground—"the feathers of the Armada were plucked one by one"; then the remainder of the fleet made wildly for the northern seas, the little English ships in pursuit.

When the English had followed the Spaniards sufficiently far, Drake wrote from the deck of his vessel, "We have driven the Spanish admirals so far apart, that we hope they shall not shake hands these many days; and whensoever they shall meet, I believe neither of them will rejoice greatly at this day's service."

A great storm completed the destruction which the English had begun, and of the hundred and thirty-two ships that had set out for the invasion of England, only fifty-three returned to Spain. The others lay beneath the waters of the English Channel or had been wrecked upon the islands of Scotland and the coasts of Ireland and Devonshire.

When the Spanish king heard the news, he said that he had sent his fleet against men, and not against the wind and waves, and that he could easily send another armament to the shores of England.

But the King of Spain's beard had been too badly singed.

Never again did England have to fear a foreign invasion. By the destruction of the Armada she had proved herself worthy of the title which she bears to this day: that of Queen and Mistress of the Seas.