

Harold Hardrada the King of Norway and Tostig the brother of Harold Godwinson have just given battle to Harold Godwinson's men at York, by the river Ouse. At first the English are winning, but when Hardrada arrives, they smash through the English lines and the English Earls are forced to retreat to York, where they become besieged.

Quotes taken from Sharon Turner's 'History of the Anglo-Saxons' Book II (1841)

The Bayeux Tapestry continued

6.

Harold, watching anxiously the motions of the duke of Normandy, had stationed his troops on his southern coast. The success of Harald Hardrada compelled him to abandon this position of defence, and to march with his army into the North. To repel the king of Norway immediately was essential to his safety; and with this purpose he proceeded towards him so rapidly, as to reach York four days after the defeat of the earls, most concentrated vigour.

Hardrada had been much reinforced by the friends of Tostig,

and by those adventurers who always join the flag of
victory, as
the time would permit; but the sudden presence of the king
of
England was an incident which he did not anticipate.
He had committed his ships to the care of his son, Olaf,
with
a part of his forces, and had marched with the rest towards
the
city, to settle the government of the province. The day was
beautiful and mild. The sun shone with those pleasing
beams
which exhilarate the spirits, and give new charms to
irradiated
nature. But, alas! the drama of ambition was acting in the
country, and its melancholy catastrophe was about to scatter
round the dismal spectacle of death. Man was hastening to
deform the smiling scene with all the massacres of a
ferocious
battle. On a sudden, the king of Norway saw an army
march-
ing towards him. He inquired of Tostig who they were.
Tostig
stated his hope that they were a supply of his friends; but he
knew enough of his brother's activity also to add, that they
might
be the English forces.

The advancing troops were soon discerned to be hostile;
and
Tostig, wishing a more elaborate preparation, advised a

retreat to
the ships, that the strength of Norway might join the battle.
The king of Norway was hero
enough not to decline an offered combat; but he sent three
swift
couriers to command the immediate presence of his other
war-
riors.

7.

He drew out his men in a long but not dense line; and,
bend-
ing back the wings, he formed them into a circle
everywhere of
the same depth, with shield touching shield. In the centre
the
royal banner was planted, not unaptly surnamed the
Ravager of
the Earth. The peculiar mode in which the cavalry attacked,
was the cause of this arrangement. Then custom was to
charge
promiscuously in an impetuous mass, to fly off, and to
return in
the same or at some other point. Haralld Hardrada was as
yet
weak in cavalry. It was now but the 25th September, and he
had not had time to mount many of his troops The king of
England, on the contrary, came forth with the strength of
the
island, and of course a large part of his army must have

been
horse. To secure himself against this superiority, was the
first
care of the Norwegian.

The first line were ordered to fix their lances obliquely in
the
ground, with the points inclining towards the enemy, that
the
cavalry might impale themselves when they charged. The
second line held also their spears ready to plunge into the
breasts
of the horses when near. The archers were joined with the
array
of Haralld and Tostig, to contribute their efforts to the
success of
the day." Hardrada rode round his circle to inspect its order.
His horse
stumbling, he was thrown to the ground; but he sprang up,
and
wisely exclaimed, that it was an omen of good. Harold, who
observed the incident, thought otherwise. He inquired who
that
Norwegian was, clothed in a blue tunic, and with a splendid
helmet, who had fallen. He was answered the king of
Norway.
"He is a large and majestic person," replied Harold, " but
his
fortune will be disastrous."

An offer was sent to Tostig, before the battle joined, to give him Northumbria, and other honours, if he would withdraw from the impending conflict. Tostig remarked, that such a proposition in the preceding winter would have saved many lives : "But," added he, " if I should accept these terms, what is to be the compensation of the king, my ally ?" "Seven feet of ground, or, as he is a very tall man, perhaps a little more," was the answer. This intimation closed the negotiation, for Tostig was faithful to his friend.

8.

The Norwegians, not having expected a battle on that day, are said to have been without their coats of mail. The king of Norway sung some stanzas on the circumstance, and awaited the attack. His orders were implicitly obeyed. The charges of the English cavalry were received on their implanted points; and while the Norwegians kept their circle unbroken, they repulsed every attack. Weary of their unprevailing efforts, the English began to relax in some confusion, and their adversaries were tempted to pursue. It was then that the fortune of

Norway

first drooped. The English returned to the charge. The Norwegians were out of their defensive arrangement, and felt the

destructive fury of the English weapons. Hardrada encouraged

his men by the most heroic exertions; but he could not bind vic-

tory to his standard. A fatal dart pierced his throat; and his fall gave the first triumph to his kingly competitor.

Tostig assumed the command, and the battle still raged.

Harold again offered life and peace to his brother, and the Nor-

wegians, but the enraged Tostig was deaf to reconciliation.

Victory or death was his decision; and the arrival of the division

from the ships, under the command of Eysteinn Orr, gave new

hopes to his fury.

These fresh troops were completely armed. Their attack was

so vehement, that the fortune of the day was nearly changed;

but they were exhausted by the speed with which they had hur-

ried to the place of conflict. Their exertions relaxed as their strength ebbed; and after a desperate struggle, Tostig and the flower of Norway perished. Harold, who had shown

himself
the ardent warrior through all the combat, permitted Olave,
the
son of the unfortunate Hardrada, and Paul, the earl of the
Orkneys,' to retire from the island with their surviving
friends
and a few ships.' Olave went to the Orkneys, and in the
follow-
ing spring to Norway, where he reigned jointly with his
brother
Magnus."