

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

Not only had Harold Hardrada not had enough time to find horses for his men, they also had no chainmail coats of armour, while Harold Godwinson had all the strength of the island behind him. Hardrada was downed by an arrow to the throat and soon after, Tostig, Godwinson's brother, also met with his maker.

Harold behaved honourably to the family of his foe, allowing Olaf the son of Hardrada to return to the Orkneys and from there, back to Norway.

Continued

9.

Two of Harold's competitors had now fallen; and if an interval had elapsed before the assault of the other, of sufficient space to have permitted him to have supplied the consumption of the late battles, and to have organized a new force, it is probable that the duke of Normandy would have shared the fate of the king of Norway. But three days only intervened between the

defeat of the Norwegians, and the landing of Wilham. He arrived at Pevensey on the 28th of September, and the king of Norway had fallen on the 25th.

Harold, expecting an invasion from Willinm, had in the spring assembled, on the southern coasts, the best bulwark of the island.

He stationed his fleet off Wight, to encounter the Norman on the seas, and encamped an army in its vicinity. This guard was continued during the summer and autumn; and while it watched

at its allotted post, the throne of Harold was secure. But on the

8th of September, the fleet, which had lain along the coast at

Pevensey, Hastings, and the neighbouring ports, was, from the

want of provisions, obliged to disperse. Harold being immediately

after occupied by the Norwegian invasion, neglected to supply and reinstate it. By this unhappy mistake, he removed

the main obstacle to William's expedition.

Wilham had completed his armament in August, and it lay in

the mouth of the Dive, a little river between Havre and Caen.

Fortunately for his enterprise, the wind was adverse. If it had been favourable, he would have sailed, and the fleet of Harold would have received the first shock of the storm. If the English navy had been defeated, an army was lining its coasts, which would have disputed his landing. Should victory still have followed him, his force must have been diminished by the combats, and he would have had then to wrestle with the strength of the island, directed by the active talents of Harold. But the contrary winds detained him for a month at the Dive and in this interval the English feet left its position, and the invasion of Norway called Harold from the southern coasts.

At last the currents of the atmosphere came into the direction he desired, and the fleet sailed from the Dive, round Havre, to St. Vallery, near Dieppe, which was the nearest port between Normandy and England. Some unfavourable events had occurred. Of the large fleet several vessels were wrecked ; and many of the adventurers, whose courage lessened from their leisure of

reflection on the perils of the expedition, abandoned his standard.

Wilham caused the bodies of the drowned to be buried with speed and privacy; he exhilarated the spirits of his army by abundance of provisions, and he animated their drooping hopes by his eloquent exhortations. To excite their enthusiasm, he caused St. Vallery's body to be carried in procession, under the pretence of imploring, and perhaps with the hope of obtaining, a propitious navigation.

10.

A general eagerness to embark now pervaded the expedition.

The duke, more impatient than any, was everywhere urging his soldiers to hasten to their ships. To prevent disasters usual to an unknown coast, he enjoined all the vessels to anchor round his at night, and not to recommence their voyage till the lighted beacon on the top of his mast having given the signal, the general clangour of the trumpets should announce the time of resailing.

With seven hundred ships, or more, replete with horses, and every implement of battle, he quitted his native shores.

During the day, his ardent spirit not only led the van of his fleet, but his ship so far outsailed the others, that when a mariner was ordered to look round from the top of the mast, he declared he saw nothing but the clouds and the ocean. Wilham, though impatient for his landing, yet with dignified composure, ordered his men to cast anchor, and calmly took a cheerful refreshment. A second sailor ascended, and beheld four ships coming into the horizon.

Another, at a farther interval, declared he saw a sailing forest.

The duke's heart swelled with joy, and he anticipated all the triumphs of his daring adventure.

At Pevensey their voyage ceased on the 28th September. they landed peaceably, for no opposing force was near. They made no stay here, and proceeded immediately to Hastings to procure food. As William landed from his ship, it happened that he fell. In these days, when the mind in its most infant state was full of the groundless fantasies of childhood, the accident

was interpreted into an omen of disaster; but the spreading panic was checked by the judicious soldier who raised William from the ground. Seeing his hands full of mud, he exclaimed, "Fortunate General' you have already taken England. See, its earth is in your hands." How excitable must be the mind of man, when a casual stumble can intimidate thousands, and a lucky expression reassure them. How difficult must it be to lead such excitabihty into a steady course of wisdom and virtue!

11.

The duke forbade plunder, and built military works both at Pevensey and Hastings, to protect his shipping. It is mentioned that he went out with twenty-five companions, to explore the country. They fell into such a rugged course, that they were obliged to return on foot; and the army remarked, with high approbation, that Wilham had burdened himself with the armour of one of his party, who was unable to get to the camp without putting it off. Wilhiam was now involved in an expedition which required the most zealous and self-devoting support of all

his soldiers. Few things interest more strongly than the useful
condescensions of the great, and it is an argument of
William's
discernment and true dignity of mind, that he seized such
little
occasions of exciting, in his army, an affectionate
attachment.

A Norman friend conveyed to William the tidings of
Harold's
victory over Norway. The counsel of alarm was added to
the
news. "He is coming against you with all his power, and I
think you will but be as despised dogs against it. You have
prudently governed all your affairs in Normandy; be not
now
rash; keep to your fortifications; meet him not in battle."
William's mind was above these little agitations of fear. He
had thrown his die. His spirit was fixed to stand the full
ven-
ture, and to endure all the consequences, whether fatal or
propitious.

He returned for answer, that he should not intrench him-
self, but should give the battle as early as he could join it.
He
declared that this would have been his resolution, if he had
headed only 10,000 men, instead of the 60,000 who were
assem-

bled round his banners.'

Harold received the information of Wilham's landing, while he was dining at York. The impressive incident would have summoned a wary mind to the most deliberate circumspection. A new enemy coming in such power, demanded the wisest exertions of military intelligence. But the mind of Harold possessed not the judgment of his great adversary. His bravery had more vivacity than discretion, and its natural ardour was stimulated into presumption by his victory against the king of Norway. He looked upon William as his devoted prey; and instead of collecting all his means of defence, and multiplying these by the wisdom of their application, he flew to London, as if he had only to combat in order to conquer.

12.

This triumphant vanity, was the instrument as well as the signal of his ruin. In the deadly contest against Hardrada, he had lost many of his bravest warriors. By an ill-timed covetousness, he disgusted the surviving; for he monopolized

the
plunder. When he marched to London against William, a
large
part of his army deserted him. Those only who served on
pay,
and as mercenaries, kept to him.

He sent spies to inspect William's force. The judicious
duke,
who knew his strength, and the good appointment of his
army,
had nothing to conceal, he caused the spies to be well
feasted,
and to be led through his encampment. On their return to
Harold,
they magnified what they had beheld; but added, that, from
their shaven faces, they should have taken the Normans for
an
army of divines. Harold laughed at the conceit, but had
sense
enough to remark, that the divines would prove very
formidable
soldiers.

It was the interest of Harold to delay a battle with the inva-
ders, but it was his passion to hasten it. His brother Gurth
reminded him, that he had not recruited his losses in the
north.

Such an observation was evidence of his judgment. His
other
remarks, that if Harold fought, it would be committing

perjury,
and therefore that he, Gurth, had better lead on the English
in
his stead, were deservedly despised by Harold. The perjury,
if
any, was in the resistance, and could not be diminished by
the
change of the commander. But with what energy could the
troops be expected to fight in a quarrel of personal
competition, if
Harold was away? His absence, on such grounds, would
have
sanctified the claim of Wilham, and might have tainted his
own
fame with the perilous imputation of cowardice.

Monastic messengers were reciprocally sent by the two
rivals.

The one from the duke is said to have offered Harold his
option
of three proposals. To quit the throne, to reign under
William,
or to decide the dispute by a single combat.

The two first propositions Harold was too courageous to
regard.

The last was more compatible with his humour. But Harold
had been Wilham's guest, and well knew his personal
prowess.

The Norman excelled most men of his day, in strength,
stature,
agility, and skill. As he possessed such notorious

superiority,
there was little courage in his offer of the duel, and Harold
could
not be disgraced in refusing it. Harold therefore answered,
- with unusual discretion, when he declared, that God
should
judge between them."

13.

Harold stayed but six days at London to collect troops for
the
collision with the invaders;° his impatient presumption
could not
tarry for the force that was wanted to secure success. He
left
the city, and marched all night towards Hastings. His hope
was, to surprise the army of the duke, as he had surprised
the
Norwegians; and so confident were his expectations, that he
sent
round a fleet of 700 vessels to hinder William's escape.
This was another measure of his ill-judgment. A very large
part of his force must have been lost to him in manning
these
vessels; and yet, though he had not had time to collect an
army
of great power, he deprived himself, needlessly, of a
numerous
support, by sending it on the seas. Prudence would have coun-

elled him to have opened a passage on the ocean for his ene-
mies' retreat. If he had coolly reasoned, he must have seen that
William placed the issue of his adventure upon a land battle.
To
wage this successfully, he concentrated all his strength.
Harold,
instead of meeting him with his most consolidated force,
favoured
the wishes of his enemies by manning a fleet, whose
exertions
could not have the least influence on the impending
conflict. But
when pride assumes the helm of our conduct, discretion
disap-
pears.

In projecting to surprise William, he proved how little he un-
derstood of the duke's character. Alert in obtaining notice of
Harold's approach, William immediately commanded his
men to
remain all night under arms. Deterred by this preparation,
Ha-
rold ventured no night attack.

On the spot afterwards called Battle, the English rested on
an
adjacent hill. The Normans quitted Hastings,' and occupied
an

eminence opposite." The night before the battle was spent by the English in festivity, by the Normans, in devotion."

14.

While William was putting on his armour, it happened that he inverted his coat of mail. This petty mistake was a fatal omen ; but William, like all great souls, disdainng such puerilities, said, with a calm countenance, " If I believed in omens, I should not fight to-day, but I never credited such tales, and never loved the superstitious. In every concern which I ought to undertake, I commit myself, for the result, to my Creator's ordination.""