

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

The Bayeux Tapestry continued

The events which follow are peculiarly interesting to us.

William, in complete armour, extends one hand to Harold's right

temple ; his other is upon Harold's right arm and breast.

Harold

is a little inclining towards him, and supports a lance with a banner in his left hand. The words above are, " Here

William

gave arms to Harold." A Norman historian mentions, that William rewarded the exertions of Harold with splendid arms,

horses, and other insignia."

After three horsemen in armour, with the letters, " Here Wilham comes to Bagias," (Bayenx) William appears without

armour on his throne with a sword, his left hand extended.

Near this are two repositories of relics. Harold is between them, with a hand on each. Officers are at both ends. The inscription is: "Here Harold swears to duke William."

The historians state, that Harold swore to promote William's accession to the throne of England on Edmund's demise, to marry his daughter, and to put Dover into his power. Some other authorities mention that William, after Harold had

sworn,
uncovered the repositories, and showed him on what relics
he
had pledged himself; and Harold saw, with alarm, their
number
and importance. If this be true, these two great warriors
were,
at least in their religion, men of petty minds, or they would
not
have believed that the obligation of an oath was governed
by
the rules of arithmetical progression.

1.

The tapestry represents a ship under sail, expressive of
Harold's
return, and afterwards Harold making his report to Edward.
The king's sickness and funeral follow.
The next figures show Harold's coronation. One man offers
him the crown; and another a battle-axe. Beyond this,
Harold appears on his throne, with the globe and cross in
his left hand,
and a sceptre in his right. On his right two men are
presenting
to him a sword; and Stigand, the archbishop, is standing on
his
left.
On the evening of Edward's funeral, which was the day
after
his death, Harold possessed himself of the crown of

England.

As there were other pretenders to the dignity, of whom one at

least, Edgar Etheling, the grandson of Edmund Ironside, was

invested with the interesting right of hereditary descent, delay

was perilous to the ambition of Harold." Hence, while the nobles

were agitated with divided minds, Harold boldly decided the

splendid question by availing himself of the support of his friends

and by obtaining an instantaneous coronation from the suspended

archbishop of Canterbury.

That Harold used his authority with kingly dignity, and for the great ends of public utility, is asserted and must be admitted,

with the qualification that as his reign was so short, the pany

gyric must be referred to its intentions rather than to his actions.

It is, however, essential to a usurper to be popular; as human

ingenuity cannot invent a spell more potent to arrest the favour

of its contemporaries, than the practice of virtue. All rulers, whose right to power is ambiguous, and whose possession of it

depends on the public support, will affect to govern a while

with equity and popularity. The true character of Harold cannot therefore be judged from his actions in the emergency of competition ; and he perished before the virtues of his disposition could be distinguished from those of his convenience.

2.

It is amusing to remark how industrious the chroniclers of this period have been to record, that a comet appeared this year in the heavens, and that it forbode the revolutions of greatness, and the bloodshed which ensued. The popular impression produced by this comet is shown by its having been worked in the tapestry of Bayeux. This relic of ancient times contains, immediately after Harold's coronation, a rude figure of the comet, with several persons gazing at it with eager eyes and pointing hands.'

The enjoyment of a favourite felicity is seldom the consequence of its violent acquisition. Harold found his crown full of the thorns which poets and moralists have been fond of describing.

Three competitors prepared at the same time to wrestle with him for it; each was formidable enough to have endangered his

prosperity, but the combination of their hostilities could have hardly failed to overpower him.

The rivals of Harold were, his brother Tostig, William duke of Normandy, and Haralld Hardrada, the king of Norway. The two last were sovereigns of long established authority, and great military experience; and came with peculiar advantage into a conflict with Harold, whose ancestry was obscure, whose power was young, whose title was questionable, and whose friends were but a party in the nation which he governed. Tostig was a man of talents and activity, but his fraternal relation gave to his hostilities a peculiar venom. He had been expelled from Northumbria in a preceding reign, and he had not been recalled by Harold. His discontent and envy were fostered by William, who embraced the policy of multiplying the enemies and of dividing the strength of Harold. Eager to oppress his more fortunate brother, Tostig attempted, but in vain, to excite the king of Denmark to attack him, On the mind of Haralld Hardrada, king of Norway, he operated with more success. The Norwegian consented to invade Eng-land in the summer.

Tostig went to Flanders to prepare the means of an aggression

of his own. He visited William of Normandy, of whose ambition he was made a convenient instrument. He collected all the English who were willing to join him; he raised many supplies from Flanders, and with sixty ships proceeded to the English coast.

He levied contributions from the Isle of Wight, and plundered ' along the shore till he reached Sandwich. Harold was then at London. He collected a very numerous fleet and army, because he perceived that his brother's force was but the advanced guard of William. When Harold reached Sandwich, Tostig, whose friends were chiefly in the north, sailed hastily from Lincolnshire, and committed many ravages on Lindsey. The earls of Mercia and Northumbria allowed him no time to collect support, but commenced an immediate opposition. Tostig, defeated by their energy, fled to Scotland with twelve ships, to wait the arrival of his allies, and Malcolm gave him an asylum.

The first arrow of calamity was thus happily averted from Harold ; but the feeblest arm of the confederacy had thrown

it,
and the triumph did not much augment the security of the king.

The two sovereigns, whose power singly was sufficient to endanger him, were now preparing a combined attack.

3.

William, the rival of Harold, was the son of Robert, the fifth duke of Normandy. He was not a legitimate child, but in these days this circumstance, though always a reproach, did not prevent deserving talents from attaining the royal succession. William, like our Athelstan and Edmund Ironside, was admitted to assume the dignity of his father.

When Robert, obeying a fashion of his day, went to Jerusalem with a noble retinue, he appointed his boy William, though but a child, to govern Normandy in his stead, under the superintendance of a wise and faithful administration ; and he engaged his nobles and the king of France to guard his arrangement."

Robert died at Nice, on his return from Palestine, in 1035, the

same year in which Canute the Great departed from this scene of his existence.

William, at the age of eight, became the duke of Normandy. His minority tempted many nobles to rebel against him, and to be turbulent towards each other. The king of France also coveted his dominions. Normandy was for many years harassed by wars, murders, and civil feuds; and Wilham, like Philip of Macedon, experienced adversity enough to excite his energies, and to discipline his judgment. The abilities of his friends at first, and afterwards his own good conduct, surmounted every difficulty. He not only secured his own power, but having so often measured it against others with success, he was taught to know its strength, to nurture ambition upon that knowledge, and to look around him for new theatres on which his active mind could be employed with profit, and where increased celebrity would reward its exertions.'

The friendship of Edward, the visit of Harold, and the state of the English court, excited and determined him to aim at

the
sceptre of our island.

The sudden coronation of Harold prevented the effect of any private intrigues, and left to Wilham no hope but from his sword.

Wilham, however, knew that the combat was half gained if the moral impressions of society were in his favour; and he there-

fore sent an embassy to Harold, gently expostulating upon the seizure of the crown, reminding him of the sworn compact, and

announcing hostilities if he persisted in the violation. After Harold's coronation, such messages could be only a theatrical

trick, played off by the Norman, to call the attention of the people

to the moral circumstances of the case, to introduce the claims

of William publicly to their notice, to encourage his partisans,

and to assume the merit of peaceful discussion. William could

never have supposed that upon a mere message Harold could

have walked down humbly from the throne which he had been

so hasty to ascend.

Harold acted his part in the diplomatic farce, and gave a popular answer. His topics were as well selected as the case afforded. An oath extorted by violence could not be binding on the conscience. Human laws admitted a maiden's vow to be annulled, which was made without her parents' consent: as void must be the promise of an envoy, pledged without his master's knowledge. Besides, how could any individual claim the right of royal succession without the national consent? And how could he abandon voluntarily a dignity with which the favour of the most potent nobles of England had honoured him ?

By wedding Alditha, the daughter of Earl Algar,' instead of Adeliza, the daughter of Wilhiam," Harold strengthened himself at home, because Mercia and Northumbria were governed by the brothers of the lady.

4.

Wilham held council with his chiefs on his project of invasion.

Some thought the chance unfavourable to Normandy, and dissuaded it.' The influence of the duke surmounted

opposition,
and preparations were vigorously made. A great number of ships were immediately constructed. The tapestry, after the representation of a ship arriving from England, shows Wilham on his throne, with the inscription, " Here duke William gave orders to build ships." Men cutting down trees with axes, and planing them into planks; others arranging and hammering these into vessels, are the next figures. Afterwards, five men appear pulling ships after them by ropes. Above are these words : " Here they drew the ships to the sea."

Men carrying coats of mail, spears, swords, and wine, and two others dragging a car, laden with weapons, and a barrel, are then exhibited. The inscription is : " These carry arms to the ships, and here they draw a car with wine and arms." Such was the expedition of the workmen, that they were ready by the end of August.

While the means of conveyance were providing, William was active in assembling soldiers sufficient for his attempt. His purpose was diffused through every land, and the courageous

ad-venturer was invited from every coast to share in the honour, the danger, and the booty of the conflict. Crowds of fighters came from all parts adjacent. He collected powerful supplies from Bretagne, France, Flanders, and their vicinity, which, joined with the soldiers whom he raised in his own Normandy, presented a mass of force not less formidable from their spirit of enterprise and their enthusiasm, than from their numbers and the military skill of William, who had been accustomed to warfare from his infancy. The emperor so far favoured the expedition as to promise to protect Normandy against any enemies who might invade it in the duke's absence. William was here also peculiarly fortunate. The king of France, though so much interested in preventing the duke of Normandy from acquiring the additional power of the English crown, yet did not interfere to prevent the collection and departure of the expedition. Perhaps he judged it to be a desperate effort, and waited to profit by its failure. William availed himself of the oaths which Harold had broken, to give to his cause the appearance of religious

sanc-
tity; he therefore consulted with the pope, who sent him a
con-
secrated banner.

5.

While Willam was putting in action every means of
offensive
aggression, which talents like his, so exercised in warfare,
could
devise, the king of Norway was also summoning all the
resources
of his country to give prosperity to his ambitious hopes. It
is a
pleasing instance of the growing importance of England,
that
his notice to his subjects, of his intended expedition, did not
meet
with the unanimous concurrence of the Norwegian
mountaineers.
Though some, exulting in the recollection of then Haralld's
achievements, thought disaster impossible; yet others
intimated
that England abounded with valiant chiefs and soldiers.
Like
a part of the Norman nobility, they did not hesitate to
foretell
that the invasion would be a work of perilous difficulty and
doubtful issue.

The time had been, when, to mention an expedition against England, was to collect speedily a numerous fleet of eager ad-venturers. But now that experience had made known the bra-very of the natives, as the hour of attack drew near, ominous dreams began to fly through Norway. Snorre has detailed three of these, and mentions that many other portents occurred of dire and forboding import. The dark minds of the North discovered their feelings by their superstitions. They began to dread the English power, and they found deterring omens, because they were disposed to look for them.

Haralld Hardrada, having appointed his son Magnus to govern Norway in his absence, sailed with his other son, Olaf, and with his queen, Ellisif (Elizabeth), and her daughters, Maria and En-gegerdr, across the British ocean He reached Shetland; and, after a short delay, he sailed to the Orkneys. He left there his family, and directing his course along Scotland, he landed with his multitude of warriors at the Tyne. His aggression seems to have been unforeseen. The duke of Normandy absorbed the attention of Harold, who did not expect that his hour of

difficulty would have been made more stormy by a competitor from the North. Hardrada found no opposition of importance on the English coasts. Tostig joined him. They sailed onwards to Scarborough, which they plundered and burnt. They turned the point of Holderness, and with above five hundred ships entered the Humber.

They proceeded up the Ouse as far towards York as Richale.

The related earls Edwine and Morcar, though taken unawares,

prepared to oppose Haralld Hardrada with the same spirit which

had before expelled Tostig. On the 20th of September they gave battle to the invaders near York, on the right side of the

Ouse. Hardrada formed his warriors into such an arrangement,

that one of his wings reached to the river, and the other was flanked by a ditch and marsh full of water. The banner of the

king and the flower of his warriors were on the river. His line

at the ditch was weak, and tempted the attack of the earls, the

brothers in-law of Harold. They drove the enemy from their position. It was then that Hardrada rushed into the battle,

and,
with his compact troops, pierced through and divided the
pursu-
ing English. Some were driven to the river ; some to the
marsh
and ditch. The slaughter was so great, that the Norwegians
tra-
versed the marsh on the bodies of the fallen The Saxon
account
confirms the Icelandic ; it claims the first advantage for the
Eng-
lish, and acknowledges that in the disastrous close, more
were
pushed into the waters than were slain by the sword. The
earls
were besieged in York.