

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_174210

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

THE BANNER OF THE DRAGON.



‘They beheld a huge bear standing with its back against a rock.’—Page 5.

TALES OF STIRRING TIMES.

The Banner of the Dragon.

A Tale of the Norman Conquest.

BY

C. BERNARD RUTLEY.

E. J. ARNOLD & SON, LIMITED,

Educational Publishers,

LEEDS, GLASGOW & BELFAST.

Printed in England.

P R E F A C E .

THIS is a story book. Nevertheless a great deal of it is true, and when you read of Cedric taking part in great battles, attacking castles, and suffering hardship and privation because of his country's foes, you are reading about real events which actually took place in England over eight hundred and fifty years ago.

C. B. R.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
	DATES OF EVENTS MENTIONED IN THIS STORY	viii.
I.	A BEAR HUNT AND A RESCUE	1
II.	TREACHERY	10
III.	AT THE COURT OF KING HAROLD	24
IV.	THE SIEGE OF SCARBOROUGH	35
V.	THE FIGHT AT FULFORD	42
VI.	THE BATTLE OF STAMFORD BRIDGE	51
VII.	NORMAN WORK	62
VIII.	AN AMBUSH	73
IX.	HASTINGS	81
X.	IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY	95
XI.	THE SIEGE OF DOVER	105
XII.	A DISASTROUS VOYAGE	117
XIII.	THE RISING OF THE NORTH	130
XIV.	THE SWORD DECIDES	142

DATES OF EVENTS MENTIONED IN THIS STORY.

	A.D.
Death of King Hardicanute	1042.
Edward the Confessor becomes King	1042.
Banishment of Earl Godwine	1050
Duke William visits England	1051.
Return of Earl Godwine	1052.
Death of Earl Godwine	1053.
Harold a Captive in Normandy	1064.
Death of Edward	January 5th, 1066.
Coronation of Harold	January, 1066.
Tostig attacks the Coast of England	May, 1066.
Siege of Scarborough	September, 1066.
Battle of Fulford	September 20th, 1066.
Battle of Stamford Bridge	September 25th, 1066.
Landing of William of Normandy	September 28th, 1066.
Battle of Hastings	October 14th, 1066.
Coronation of William.. .. .	Christmas Day, 1066.
Departure of William for Normandy	Spring, 1067.
Siege of Dover	Summer, 1067.
Return of William	December, 1067.
William conquers Exeter and the West	February, 1068.
The First Conquest of the North	1068.
Landing of the Danes.. .. .	September, 1069.
Rising of the English, and Capture of York	September, 1069.
William recaptures York	Autumn, 1069.
William devastates Yorkshire, and completes his Conquest	Winter, 1069—70.

THE BANNER OF THE DRAGON.

A Tale of the Norman Conquest.

CHAPTER I.

A BEAR HUNT AND A RESCUE.

“WELL done, Cedric, well done ! He'll make a lusty fighter, eh, Thorold ?” cried Wulfric, Thane of Grinstead, as his son, with a swinging blow of his blunted axe, beat down Thorold's guard, and sent the great man-at-arms sprawling on the ground.

“Aye, that he will, master,” replied Thorold, sitting up and rubbing his head, while he gazed ruefully at a dent in his steel headpiece. “If that had been done with a sharpened axe, no monk or leech in England could have brought me back to life.”

“Indeed, Thorold, I meant not to hit you so hard,” laughed Cedric, leaning on his long-handled axe. “I was imagining you were a Norman knight, and forgot for a moment that this was but play.”

“Then forget it not again, lad, I pray you. The truth is, master,” said Thorold to Wulfric, as he got to his feet, “the lad knows not his strength. Nay, no more to-day, young master. When I practise axe play with you, I want a clear head, and at present my pate is buzzing as though there were a swarm of bees inside.”

Cedric laid aside his axe, and, taking off his steel headpiece, ran his fingers through his crisp, golden curls. He was a tall, handsome youth of eighteen, with a laughing, open face, and a body which showed promise of immense strength. At the moment he was wearing a suit of Saxon armour, consisting of a leathern tunic covered with rings of iron, each ring overlapping the other, close-fitting trousers, and leather shoes.

"You speak truth, Thorold," replied Wulfric, "the lad shows promise. Would that I could take a hand in his training myself, but alas! my fighting days ended when that Welsh knife made a cripple of me."

"Never mind, father," said a slim and beautiful girl—a year younger than Cedric—approaching the chair in which the Thane of Grinstead was sitting, "Cedric will soon have strength enough to deal blows for two."

"True, Edith; did you chance to see the buffet he dealt Thorold but a few moments past?"

"I did, father," laughed Edith, "and I am glad I was not Thorold. Cedric, Aylnoth has just ridden over from Charwood. He bade me tell you that a great bear has been ravaging his father's herds, and to ask if you would care to join him in the hunt."

"A bear hunt! Indeed I would! Ulf," said he to a youth of his own age who was lounging in the shade of a tree, "fetch our horses and the dogs, whilst I welcome Aylnoth."

The house in which Cedric lived was a one-storied

structure of timber, with several outbuildings and a large courtyard, the whole being surrounded by a strong wooden palisade, and a deep ditch. It was a rude building, but it was like the homes of all other wealthy Saxons of the time. Grinstead, for the house was named after the estate of which Wulfric was thane or lord, occupied the summit of a low knoll in the centre of a large clearing, surrounded on all sides by deep, shady woods. Along one side of the clearing ran the forest stream which filled the ditch, whilst at the opposite end a rough forest road was to be seen, leading in one direction to Lewes, and in the other to the town of Guildford.

Having doffed his war-gear, Cedric clothed himself in a tough leathern tunic, and then hastened to the great hall, where he found Aylnoth eagerly awaiting him. The hall was the chief room in the Saxon home. The roof was of massive timbers. At one end was a raised platform on which the family and guests of distinction took their meals, whilst the rest of the hall was occupied by the servants and retainers. Two great fireplaces warmed the huge room in winter, whilst the walls were covered with tapestries, and with arms and trophies of the chase.

“Greeting, Aylnoth!” cried Cedric as he entered.
“Edith tells me you bring news of a bear.”

“A bear of bears, if all accounts be true,” answered Aylnoth, a tall young man some two years older than Cedric. “Gurth, my father’s swineherd, reports that the brute has sorely ravaged our herds of swine, and

declares that the tracks are the largest he has ever seen."

"Good!" exclaimed Cedric. "I have been longing for some excitement these days past. Come, I hear Ulf at the door with the horses."

In a few minutes the three young men were riding through the forest, whilst four large dogs ran ahead. It was a glorious autumn day in the year 1065. The great trunks of the trees were flecked with a tracery of gold as the sunbeams found their way through the leafy canopy overhead, where late green, russet, red, and gold formed a gorgeous tapestry of colour. In the air there was a sharpness which set the blood tingling, and again and again the dogs started off at full cry after a deer, and had to be called sternly to heel.

At last, after an hour's riding, they crossed the boundary between the lands of Grinstead and Charwood, and came upon Gurth seated beneath a mighty oak, and surrounded by a large herd of swine which rooted and grunted amongst the bushes.

"What news, Gurth?" asked Aylnoth.

"Bad news," replied the herdsman. "I found the track of the bear this morning, and it led me to the bodies of two of my pigs. Young master, I think the brute must have its lair in a small ravine over yonder."

"I know the ravine," answered Aylnoth. "It is a narrow, rocky crack in the earth, with one rough, winding track along the bottom. 'Tis no place for horses, Cedric; so let us leave them with Gurth, and go forward on foot."

"You know the ground, Aylnoth, so you are in charge of the hunt," replied Cedric. "Ulf, leash the dogs, or they may go ahead and disturb the bear."

For a mile they tramped through the forest, and then the ground began to slope steeply downhill to a little brook which issued from the mouth of a narrow, dark defile, the thickly wooded sides of which rose steeply on either hand.

"A bad place to meet a savage bear," remarked Aylnoth. "Ulf, I should loose the dogs. See, they scent the brute already, and will soon bring it out into the open."

The dogs were, indeed, straining at the leash. As soon as they were freed, they set off down the ravine, baying loudly, and followed as closely as possible by the three youths armed with hunting spears, and long, straight daggers.

But the way was rough, and the dogs had already disappeared from view ahead, when the sound of snarling and fierce growls warned the huntsmen that the quarry had been brought to bay. Hurrying forward as fast as the rocky nature of the ground would allow them, they found that the ravine took a sharp turn, and on rounding the corner they beheld a huge bear standing with its back against a rock. The creature was on its hind legs, and was aiming savage blows with its formidable claws at the dogs which circled round it at a safe distance, waiting for the opportunity to close with their huge opponent. Even as the huntsmen ran up, one of the dogs, bolder than the rest, sprang straight

at the bear's throat, and was flung back, its head crushed by a single blow from the bear's gigantic paw.

With a cry of anger at the death of his favourite hound, Cedric sprang to the front, and drove his spear straight at the bear's heart. But with a sweep of a huge paw the bear turned the spear aside, and then, lunging forward, aimed a cruel, raking blow at the boy. Just in time Cedric sprang back, and even then the sharp claws of the bear ripped his stout leathern tunic from shoulder to waist.

Before the bear could recover its balance, Aylnoth and Ulf had both flung their spears at the huge body, one spear catching the bear full in the throat, whilst the other pierced its shoulder. With a coughing grunt the great animal flopped forward on all fours, tearing savagely at the hampering spears, whilst the dogs, seeing their huge adversary sorely wounded, sprang in with savage snarls.

Meanwhile Cedric, in no way disturbed by his narrow escape, had drawn his long dagger, and waiting until the bear's attention was fully engaged with the dogs, he suddenly sprang upon the back of the huge creature, and, leaning down, drove the gleaming steel deep into the bear's heart. With a sobbing sigh the great body relaxed; and, as Cedric sprang clear, the bear rolled over dead.

"Well done, Cedric!" cried Aylnoth. "There are few I trow who would have dared that feat. Leash the dogs, Ulf, or they will spoil the noble skin. Cedric, the bear is yours, but I promised the skin to Edith; so,

if you are willing, we will skin the animal, and when the skin is cured and dried I will send it over to Grinstead."

"'Tis yours, Aylnoth," answered Cedric, "and as for my killing the bear there was nothing in it. Your spear in its throat, and Ulf's through the shoulder, so crippled it that the killing was an easy matter."

"That may be," muttered Ulf, as he started to skin the great body, "but, having had my tunic rent by its claws as yours was done, I wouldn't have closed with the brute."

By the time the bear was skinned, and the skin had been packed on to the back of Aylnoth's horse, it was well on in the afternoon; and, withstanding Aylnoth's pressing invitation to return with him to Charwood, Cedric and Ulf mounted their horses, and started back to Grinstead. They had traversed about half the distance, and were following a winding forest track, their horses' hoofs making no sound on the soft turf, when suddenly, from some way ahead, the clash of steel upon steel came to their ears. The sounds were so unexpected in the stillness of the forest that for a moment the two youths paused to listen; then, calling upon Ulf to follow, Cedric clapped spurs to his horse, and galloped forward.

They had not gone far before they came within sight of the affray. A young man of noble aspect, a Norman by his dress, was standing with his back to a tree, defending himself with his sword against the vigorous assault of four lusty rogues armed with clubs and daggers. The Norman youth was already wounded

in three or four places ; his defence was growing weaker every moment, when Cedric sprang from his horse, and, with Ulf at his heels, rushed between the combatants.

"Back !" he commanded, threatening the rogues with his heavy spear. "Who dares to mishandle travellers on the land of Wulfric of Grinstead ?"

"I dare, young master," growled a bearded giant, armed with a mighty club, "and I should not have thought that Cedric, son of Wulfric, would have come between Osgot of the Woods, and a Norman dog."

"'Tis true we love not the Normans," answered Cedric. "Nevertheless it shall not be said that the son of Wulfric stood by, and allowed a man of gentle birth to be done to death by outlaws. So stand off, Osgot. If you have ought to bring against this Norman youth, come to Grinstead to-morrow, and you shall receive safe hearing."

For a moment it seemed as though the outlaws would attack Cedric and Ulf where they stood over the young Norman, now unconscious from loss of blood. But suddenly Osgot of the Woods shouldered his cudgel, and ordered his companions back. "So be it," he said. "I war not against Saxons, and the son of Wulfric is safe from me. Take your Norman, Cedric of Grinstead, but beware that he does not bite the hand that succours him. I trust not these foreigners, and the time will come when every true Saxon will rue the day they set foot in England." So saying Osgot and his companions vanished into the undergrowth.

"I fear there is much truth in what he says," said

Cedric, as, supporting the wounded youth on the back of one of their horses, they slowly made their way homewards. "King Edward favours the Normans, and fills his court with foreigners from across the seas. 'Tis even said that he has promised the crown of England, when he dies, to the Norman Duke, in place of our own Earl Harold. But I know not much about it. My father, like Osgot, hates the Normans, and will not speak of them."

It was dark by the time they reached Grinstead. Lifting the wounded youth from the horse's back, they carried him into the great hall. There they found Wulfric and Edith seated on the dais before a blazing log fire ; for, though the days were still warm, the nights were chill.

"Whom have you there, son ?" asked Wulfric, as Cedric and Ulf approached with their unconscious burden.

"A wounded Norman youth, father," answered Cedric.

"A Norman !" cried Wulfric, his brows darkening in a frown. "Why bring him here ? You know I will have none of that greedy race within these walls."

"I know, father," answered Cedric, "but this youth is of gentle blood, and Ulf and I came upon him sore beset by Osgot of the Woods and three other rogues on the lands of Grinstead. Could we stand by and see him done to death, and could Saxon hospitality deny help to the stranger wounded almost at our gates ?"

"You are right, son," replied Wulfric. "Edith, call your women, and see to this youth's wounds. If my eyes deceive me not, he is almost spent."

CHAPTER II.

TREACHERY.

The Norman youth was indeed sorely hurt. A dagger thrust had penetrated one lung, and his left arm was broken. He had, moreover, four wounds of lesser consequence, and had lost so much blood that it was three days before he regained consciousness, and many weeks before he was strong enough to rise from his bed. All that time Edith and her women—Wulfric's wife had died when Cedric and Edith were still children—nursed the stranger, whilst Cedric was a constant visitor to the sick man's bedside; indeed, a strong friendship soon grew up between the young Saxon and the Norman youth, Guy de Brionne.

"I like him greatly," declared Cedric to his father one winter's evening, when, for the first time since his arrival, Guy had spent an hour seated before the fire in the great hall.

"For a Norman he is well enough," admitted Wulfric grudgingly, "but, son, I would not have you become too friendly with one of that race. If I read the signs aright, the time will come when Saxon and Norman will be arrayed one against the other in battle; and then how will you fight wholeheartedly, if you have friends in the enemy's ranks?"

"No friendship will make any difference to my fighting when it comes to blows," answered Cedric stoutly. "But, father, what is the truth of this trouble

between Saxon and Norman? Edith, Guy, and I were talking over the matter this afternoon, but Edith and I, living in the forest, hear little but rumours, and Guy knows little more."

For some minutes Wulfric sat silent, frowning heavily. "Son, I will set the matter before you briefly," he said at last. "'Tis right that you should know the troubles that threaten this land, for on you and others like you will depend the safety of Saxon England.

"'Tis well known, Cedric, that on the death of King Hardicanute, Godwine, Earl of Wessex, might have been King of England, had he chosen. But Godwine knew that many would be jealous of him did he accept the crown; so, having the welfare of the country at heart, he persuaded the council of great men to elect Edward, son of Ethelred, King of England.

"Now, Edward had lived all his life in Normandy, and when he came to England he surrounded himself with Norman friends, giving them the chief places at court, and surrendering into their keeping the national fortresses. The Normans are an arrogant, grasping race, and the whole land murmured that the King should favour them above his own people; yet, when Earl Godwine and his sons raised their voices against such power being put into the hands of foreigners, King Edward banished them from the land, giving them five days wherein to leave the country.

"In those days I was at court, son Cedric; and before the days of grace had expired, Edward regretted having let Earl Godwine go. So, calling me to him, he

bade me take a troop of horse, and follow after the fugitives, and bring them back.

"Son, I started with great appearance of haste, but I took good care that we did not overtake the Earl and his sons, who escaped safely out of England. After that vain chase I retired from court, being unable to stomach Norman arrogance.

"The rest of the story is soon told. Duke William of Normandy visited England, and Edward, being childless, is said to have promised that, on his death, William should succeed him as King of England. Later, Earl Godwine and his sons returned, and were received again into favour, and the power of the Normans in England began to decline.

"Then Earl Godwine died, and Harold, his eldest son, became Earl of Wessex and chief councillor to the King, and it seemed as though the bad days of Norman power had passed. But Duke William never forgot the promise Edward had made him; so that when Earl Harold, through the misadventure of a storm, was wrecked on the coast of France, and fell into Duke William's hands, the Duke was quick to make the most of the opportunity fate had given him.

"He pretended to treat Harold as a brother and a guest, when in truth the Earl was a prisoner, and all the while the Norman Duke was scheming how he could compel Harold to support his claim to the crown of England. At last he thought of a way. He called a great council of all the chief barons of Normandy at the town of Avranches, and there William most unworthily

tricked Harold into swearing on a coffer of sacred relics that he would help the Duke to become King of England on Edward's death.

"Harold was then allowed to return to England, and there for the moment, son Cedric, the matter stands. Edward has made a promise, and Harold has sworn an oath, neither of which they have the power to keep, for it is the people of England who elect their king, and assuredly, when Edward dies, their choice will not fall on Duke William."

"That is true, father," agreed Cedric, "for surely Earl Harold will be elected King?"

"So I think, son, and then we may look for the evil fruit of that promise and that oath. Duke William will make the most of both; and, if I read his character truly, he will attempt to conquer the country he considers his by right."

"Let him come, father!" cried Cedric stoutly. "Be sure the housecarls* of England will be more than a match for the Norman soldiery. I am glad I know the truth of the matter, however. Now I shall go about my axe play and sword practice with greater interest, knowing that soon I may be taking a hand at the real thing."

One night, about a fortnight after the conversation between Cedric and his father, Wulfric, Cedric, Edith, and Guy, now almost restored to strength, were sitting round a blazing log fire in the large hall. A blizzard was

* The housecarls formed the only body of trained troops in Saxon England. They wore chain mail, and were armed with great two-handed axes, and they were bound to serve in the field as long as they were needed.

raging outside, and the snow was rapidly collecting in great drifts round the stockade, and in the rough forest tracks. Suddenly a new sound rose above the clamour of the storm—the baying of dogs, and the loud shouts and knockings of men demanding admittance.

A moment later Thorold entered the hall, and approached Wulfric. “Master,” he said, “there is a Norman lord at the gate, with a score of followers, demanding shelter from the storm.”

“A Norman !” cried Wulfric, starting to his feet ; and then, remembering his guest, he drew Thorold aside, and questioned him closely regarding the visitors. “Admit them, Thorold,” he said at last. “Grinstead cannot close its gates, even on Normans, on such a night as this.”

Thorold went to do his bidding, and soon returned, followed by a tall Norman, and his twenty retainers. The leader shook the snow from his mantle as he advanced, and his dark, handsome face wore a sinister frown.

“In truth, Saxon,” he complained, “you keep guests waiting over long at your gates for such a night.”

“The gates of Grinstead open when I will,” answered Wulfric haughtily, “and I tell you frankly that, had the night been other than it is, they would not have opened at all ; for I love not your race, who, having a country of your own, yet wish to usurp another’s.”

“By the Rood, you speak boldly !” retorted the Norman angrily. Then, catching sight of Guy, he cried out, “By all the saints ! ’tis Guy de Brionne,

whom we thought dead these weeks past. What do you here, lad? Know you not that Edward is dead, and that Harold, regardless of his solemn oath, reigns in his stead?"

"My Lord Gilbert de Lacy," answered Guy, "I know none of these things. As for what I do here, I would have you know that it is to the care of these Saxons that I owe my life."

"'Tis well for them," answered the Norman baron. "Now, Saxon, my men and I are hungry, so serve us with food at once."

Cedric, who had been listening with fast rising anger to the Norman's insolent language, started forward at this last haughty demand, and was about to burst into furious speech, when Wulfric signed to him to be silent.

"Food and shelter you shall have this night, proud Norman," he said, "but with to-morrow's dawn you leave this house, whether the storm still blows or not."

The Norman regarded Wulfric for a moment from under frowning brows; then, breaking into a harsh laugh, he answered, "That is a question the morning shall decide. Now let us eat."

"A word with you, Cedric," whispered Guy, drawing the other aside, as the Normans sat down at the rough trestle tables on which food had been placed by the Saxon serving men. "I trust not that Norman baron, who, in our country, is a man of evil repute. You have been true friends to me, and I should be thankless indeed, did I not warn you that I fear some treachery is afoot. His followers are skilled fighters

every one ; and if it be true that Harold is now King, then Gilbert de Lacy is fleeing the land, and there is no knowing what act of vengeance he may do before he leaves. So beware ! ”

Cedric thanked Guy for the friendly warning, and not wishing to disturb his father or Edith, he sought out Thorold, and told him of Guy's fears.

“ ’Tis a bad business, young master,” commented Thorold thoughtfully, when Cedric had finished. “ They outnumber us by two to one, and, moreover, our men are not trained soldiers like the Normans.”

“ That is so,” replied Cedric. “ Therefore must we match cunning against cunning. Now hearken, Thorold. I will return to the great hall, and speak this Norman fair, whilst you must dispatch messengers to the nearer tenants, bidding the men hasten to our aid, secretly and with their arms. So, if the night breeds treachery, we shall be prepared.”

Thorold promised to do as he was bidden ; so Cedric returned to the hall, and for three hours he and Wulfric talked to the Lord Gilbert de Lacy, smothering, as best they could, their anger at the cool insolence of his language. Then, when at last he expressed a desire to rest, Cedric conducted him to the guest-chamber, whilst his followers, wrapping their cloaks around them, threw themselves down on the rushes which covered the floor of the hall. Having thus disposed of the unwelcome guests, Cedric hastened to the rear of the building to discover how Thorold was progressing with his share of the plan.

Thorold, indeed, had done better than Cedric had dared to expect. Gathered together in a shed at the rear of the house, he found fifteen housecarls wearing the steel headpieces and metal-covered leathern tunics which constituted Saxon armour, and armed with heavy swords and battle-axes.

“These are all that I can get together in the time,” whispered Thorold, “but with you, and me, and Ulf, and the other men of the house, they should be more than enough to overcome that Norman rabble.”

“You have done well, Thorold,” praised Cedric. “Have you told the men the cause of this summons?”

“Yes, master.”

“That is good. Now hearken. I have posted the boy Wulfnoth where he can keep watch over the door of the guest-chamber, and over the Normans in the hall. Ulf and I will mount guard over the rooms where sleep my father and Edith; for if treachery is intended, 'tis most likely that the Normans will strike first at my father, the lord of all. Fear not for us, however. Wulfnoth will bring us warning at the first sign of treachery; and ere the attack commences, I will blow upon my horn. Do you then with the men rush into the house, and attack the Normans on the flank, so shall we have them between two foes.”

“I understand, young master,” replied Thorold, “but until help arrives you will be but two against many. Let me come with you.”

“Nay, Thorold,” answered Cedric, “your place is here with the housecarls. Besides, the passage where

lie the sleeping rooms is narrow, and three would get in one another's way, where two could make good play with axe or sword. Now I must go; the wind has sunk, so you will easily hear my horn."

Slowly the hours passed, and Cedric and Ulf, in the narrow passage which led to the sleeping rooms of the family, were beginning to think that their fears had been groundless. It was very dark, and the silence after the storm was intense. Suddenly a board creaked in the passage ahead, and a shadow, darker than the rest, detached itself from the surrounding blackness.

"It is I, master," whispered Wulfnoth in answer to Cedric's muttered challenge. "There is mischief afoot. A while ago the Norman's page left his master's room, and, stealing into the hall, awoke the men there. Now their master has joined them, and they are whispering together."

"You have done well, Wulfnoth," answered Cedric. "Go now, and warn Thorold to be ready."

The boy disappeared into the darkness, but was back again the next moment. "'Tis too late, master," he whispered. "They are coming." And, indeed, the watchers could now distinguish the faint footfalls of approaching men.

Cedric grasped his sword firmly in his right hand, whilst with his left he held his horn ready to wind the warning blast. Suddenly a dark, moving mass appeared in the blackness of the passage; and, stepping forward, Cedric ordered the approaching men to halt. The answer was a rush of feet; and even as Cedric raised

the horn to his lips, a sword stroke, aimed at random in the darkness, struck the horn, and sent it spinning from his hand down the passage behind him. The next moment the fray had closed, and Cedric and Ulf, side by side, were fighting for their lives against the treacherous foe.

“The horn, Wulfnoth !” cried Cedric, as he struck down a Norman. “Find it quickly, and blow a blast, or we are undone !” But the Saxon lad lay stunned by a blow from the flat of a Norman sword, and did not hear Cedric’s cry.

By this time the clash of arms and the cries of stricken men had roused the household. Doors opened, and suddenly the light of two torches fell upon the scene, as Wulfric and Edith appeared at their room-doors, bearing the brands aloft.

“What means this ?” cried Wulfric in amazement.

“Treachery, master,” gasped Ulf, turning aside a vicious thrust. “The horn, find the horn !”

“I see it,” cried Edith, darting forward.

“Then blow upon it, sister, I pray you,” urged Cedric, running his opponent through the body. The next moment a loud blast echoed down the passage, and through the house beyond.

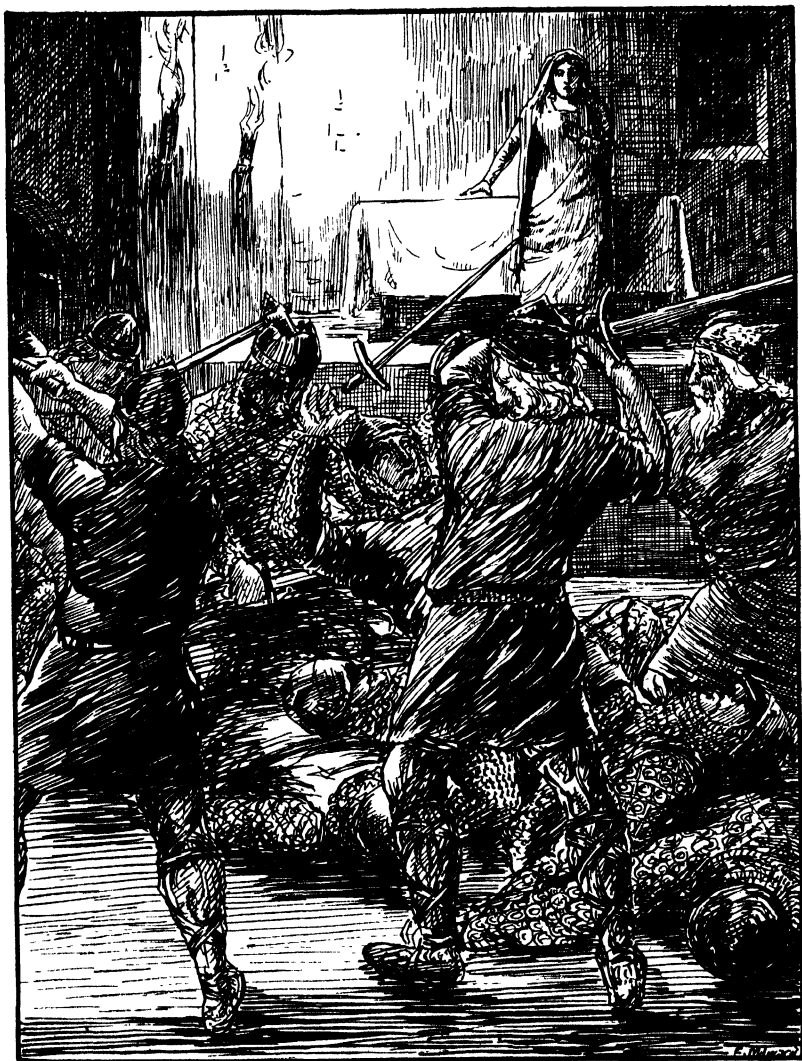
Recognizing the blast for a signal, the Normans redoubled their efforts to destroy the gallant pair before others came to their aid. But only two men could advance abreast along the passage ; and, with three of their enemies down, Cedric and Ulf were proving more than a match for their opponents.

“Kill the Saxon dogs!” roared De Lacy, urging on his men. But, even as he uttered the words, the sound of rushing feet heralded the arrival of the Saxon housecarls; and, springing forward, Cedric and Ulf attacked in their turn. Thrust, parry! Thrust, parry, and cut! The Normans, shaken by the arrival of fresh enemies, retreated, defending themselves desperately, until, driven back into the great hall, the survivors formed a circle, and made their last stand.

They were stout and skilful fighters, and De Lacy proved himself no mean leader. But they were fighting in a bad cause, whilst the Saxons were fighting for hearth and home. Light there was none, save that of two smoking torches which Edith, following in the wake of the fighters, had set in brackets upon the walls. Blows were dealt almost at random; but always Saxon axe beat down Norman sword, and crashed its way through steel helm to the brain beneath.

Wulfric, his lameness forgotten, fought side by side with his men, whilst Edith, proud daughter of a proud race, stood upon the dais, and gazed down upon a scene such as the hall of Grinstead had never seen before. The fight was nearing an end now. In the murky light the surviving Normans were fighting with the grim silence of despair. One by one they fell beneath the Saxon swords and axes, until at last only their leader remained, surrounded by a ring of foes; then, seeing that to fight longer was useless, he flung down his sword in token of surrender.

“Let him live,” commanded Wulfric, as some of



‘Edith gazed down upon a scene such as the hall of Grinstead had never seen before.’—Page 20.

the Saxons, enraged at the Norman's treachery, were about to cut him down. "Bind him well, and keep him safely till the morning. As for these," pointing to the fallen Normans, "if any live, let them be cared for. The rest fling into the courtyard. Now, Cedric, tell me how you came to learn of this treachery."

Briefly Cedric related the events of the evening, and when he had finished, Wulfric said, "You have proved yourself a stout fighter this night; also you have shown that you possess a shrewd brain, and believe me, son, in the years to come a shrewd brain will be a useful possession."

Then, speaking to the men around, he continued, "We have this night had a taste of Norman faith. Now, I bid you remember what has passed; for if the Normans come to rule this land, what they tried to do to us this night they will do to hundreds of other Saxon homes. Has anybody seen my guest, Guy de Brionne, to whom in truth we owe our safety?"

"I am here, Thane Wulfric," answered Guy, stepping forth from the shadows, "and I can hardly look you in the face for shame of what has passed. Believe me, all Normans are not as that man there." And he pointed to Gilbert de Lacy, who stood scowling between two brawny Saxons.

"I believe you," answered Wulfric kindly, "and thank you for your friendly warning. Thorold, let a horn of warmed mead be served out to every man, and then, when these bodies have been cleared away, let each man get what rest he can."

The next morning Wulfric sat in judgment on his prisoner. "False Norman," he began, "last night you outraged the most sacred laws of hospitality, and none would blame me, did I hang you from one of the trees in the forest yonder. I have decided otherwise, however. Your horse is outside. Go." Then Wulfric signed to the guards to lead the Norman away.

"Dog of a Saxon," snarled De Lacy, as he turned to go, "when Duke William comes to claim his rights, you shall regret this night's work."

"That the future shall decide," replied Wulfric. "But when you tell your Duke the story of this night, tell him that Saxon axes bite hard."

Later in the morning Guy sought out Cedric and Edith. "Cedric," he said, "I have come to say farewell. I cannot stay longer beneath a roof where one of my countrymen has so dishonoured my nation. Besides, the Normans have no place in England now that Edward is dead, and I would return to my own people. But this I would have you know; though our nations may go to war, and William may come to take the English crown, I shall always be your friend, and in token I ask you to wear this ring."

Cedric grasped the hand of the young Norman heartily. "And I shall always be your friend, Guy. I think you are right to go, but be sure Edith and I will miss you sorely."

"And I shall miss the Lady Edith," replied Guy warmly. "I pray that in happier and more settled times we may meet again."

CHAPTER III.

AT THE COURT OF KING HAROLD.

On the day following the expulsion of the Lord de Lacy, and the departure of Guy de Brionne, Wulfric called Cedric to him. "Son," he said, "the events of the past few hours have proved that you have reached man's estate; and whilst the future holds such promise of trouble, it is not right that you should remain idle at Grinstead. I propose therefore to send you to London, to the court of the King. Harold will remember me, and will receive you well for my sake, especially as you will tell him that I have taught the Grinstead men to fight, and that I have four score housecarls ready to aid him at any time. What say you, lad? Does the idea please you?"

"It does, indeed, father," answered Cedric joyfully. "I tire of Grinstead, and the continual round of hunting and practice with axe and sword, which, since the other night, I have learned to be so different from the real thing."

Wulfric laughed. "You are like to get your fill of fighting, if Duke William crosses to England—as I think he will. So it is settled that you go. You shall start to-morrow. Take Ulf with you; he is a stout fighter, and promises to rival you in strength and stature. Also the lad Wulfnoth. He is none the worse for that crack on his head, and is shrewd and true, as we know. Take your arms and armour, also your best clothes, three

good horses, and a supply of money. Grinstead is not poor, and the son of Wulfric must go to court well furnished."

The rest of the day was spent in busy preparations ; and on the following morning, a bright, frosty winter's day in January, 1066, Cedric bade farewell to his father and Edith, and, accompanied by Ulf and Wulfnoth, rode away from Grinstead. In his wallet he bore a letter to the King, written by Wulfric with great pains and labour, and commending Cedric to Harold's care and favour. Wulfnoth led a spare horse laden with their arms and armour, and wearing apparel.

All that day they travelled, meeting few wayfarers, and on reaching the village of Croydon that evening, they put up at the principal inn. It was a low, one-storied building of brick and wood, and the door opened directly into a great room, at one end of which a roaring fire of logs blazed a cheery welcome to the weary travellers. Round the fire were gathered a number of other wayfarers, who were all eagerly awaiting the arrival of supper, and who hospitably made room for Cedric and his companions in the circle round the cheery blaze.

Supper was not long in coming. The landlord and his serving men lifted the pots and cauldrons from the hooks over the fire, and set their contents on dishes on the table. There were broiled pork, fish, and fowls ; and as the dishes passed from guest to guest, each cut off with his dagger the portion which pleased him most, and ate it with the aid of his fingers. Afterwards great horns and flagons of mead and ale were handed round,

and the guests, taking their places on benches before the fire, began to discuss the affairs of the day.

"You have come far, my son?" inquired a traveling priest of Cedric.

"We journey from Grinstead to London, and the court of King Harold," replied Cedric.

"That is good," answered the priest, "for King Harold will have need of true men at his side. Already a summons has arrived from Duke William bidding Harold perform his oath, and surrender the crown to him. I am a Saxon, my son, and though I do not hold with broken oaths, yet I say that for Harold to keep his oath is impossible. He has been chosen King by the people, and he cannot give away a crown which is not his to give. Yet broken oaths are wont to fall back on their breakers, and I would that King Harold had never made that promise."

"But surely all England will rally round him?" asked Cedric.

"The South, yes!" replied the priest. "But the North, I doubt. 'Tis true that Harold is going to marry the Lady Ealdgyth, sister of the great northern Earls Edwin and Morcar, hoping thereby to bind the houses of Leofric and Godwine, North and South, together; but the North has ever been jealous of the South, and I fear it will need more than a marriage to make them one. Had Harold been of royal blood, 'twould have been different; but, as it is, I fear that Edwin and Morcar will be jealous of one whose house is no more noble than their own. Moreover, 'tis said that Tostig,

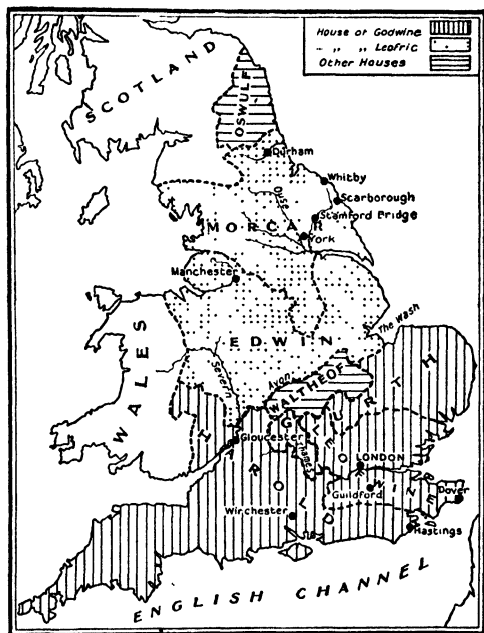
Harold's brother, whom the North cast out because of his misrule, is angry because Harold refuses to replace him in his Earldom of Northumbria, and in revenge is even now in Normandy urging Duke William to invade England."

"All this is news to me, indeed," replied Cedric. "At Grinstead we hear little of the outside world. Tell me, father, does the King soon wed the Lady Ealdgyth?"

"So 'tis rumoured, also it is said that Harold will shortly journey north, hoping that his presence may allay jealousies, and cause the northern folk to acknowledge him loyally as their King."

"Then 'tis well I started when I did," declared Cedric stoutly, "for, if the King will have me, I would travel north with him, and help guard him from harm."

"Well said, my son," replied the priest. "Now let us rest, for to-morrow I have far to go."



Map showing how England was divided mainly between the Houses of Godwin and Leofric.

The next morning, Cedric and his fellow-travellers rose with the dawn. By noon they had crossed the Thames, and were gazing in awe and wonder at the King's palace at Westminster, and the great abbey which Edward had raised near by.

"Truly 'tis a wondrous building," cried Ulf at last, "and such as I never dreamt of at Grinstead. And look, master, at the crowds. What ever are so many people doing all together?"

"I doubt not they are connected with the King's court," replied Cedric. "Come, we are attracting attention, standing here like so many country oafs. Let us find some one who will take my letter to the King, and so gain me audience."

After some difficulty they at last found a page who seemed disposed to help them. Telling Cedric to leave Ulf and Wulfnoth to look after the horses, the page led Cedric into the palace, and left him in a room whilst he went off to fulfil his errand. Two hours passed, and the page had not returned, and Cedric was getting heartily tired of waiting, when a youth of eighteen entered the room, and, having asked if he were Cedric of Grinstead, bade him follow.

The newcomer led Cedric along many passages till he stopped before a door, and, pushing it open, signed to Cedric to pass through. Cedric found himself in a room of considerable size, the walls hung with rich tapestries, and the floor strewn with rushes. At one end, beneath a great window, stood a large table at which a scribe sat writing to the dictation of a tall,

kingly-looking man who paced up and down as he spoke.

The King, for such he was, was the handsomest as well as the strongest man in England. As soon as he caught sight of Cedric, he dismissed the scribe, and called Cedric to him.

"Welcome, lad!" he said, as Cedric dropped on one knee, and kissed his hand. "I remember your father well, and have often wished he would come to court. He tells me in his letter that you wish to enter my service. Is that so?"

"It is, my Lord King," answered Cedric.

"He further says that you have already proved yourself possessed of a shrewd brain and a strong arm against your country's foes. What means he by that? Has there been an affray 'twixt Normans and Saxons at Grinstead?"

"There has, my Lord," and briefly Cedric related the story of De Lacy's treachery.

"A bad affair," commented Harold darkly, when Cedric had finished. Then after a few moments' thought he continued, "You spoke of housecarls, lad. How many can you muster at Grinstead? It is on trained troops that I must trust to defeat Duke William, should he come, and not on hastily armed levies."

"We keep a force of eighty housecarls, my Lord," answered Cedric.

"Eighty!" exclaimed the king. "That is, indeed, good hearing. Would that all my thanes were as mindful of their duty to England as Wulfric of Grinstead.



‘Cedric dropped on one knee, and kissed his hand.’—Page 29.

But few realize the danger which threatens this country, or believe that Duke William is earnest in seeking the crown. And now, Cedric, I expect you would eat and rest. You are too old to be a page, so I shall attach you to my personal following. I have already ordered rooms to be set aside for you and your companions. Nay, no thanks, lad. I owe much to Wulfric of Grinstead, and am indeed glad to have his son at my side."

In the weeks that followed Cedric learned much. More than once Harold employed him on missions of importance; and when he saw that Cedric fulfilled each one with faithfulness and sagacity, he placed his trust more and more in the son of the thane who had done his family such great service. At other times Cedric practised with axe and sword with Ulf, or with other youths of the court; or wandered through the streets of the great city of London, a never ceasing source of wonder to his country-bred eyes.

At last the time came when Harold was to journey north for his marriage, and to show himself to his northern subjects, who as yet had refused to recognize him as King. To Cedric's great delight he and his two companions were included in the King's small retinue; for Harold had decided to travel north, not as an armed invader at the head of a large army, but as a King going amongst faithful subjects.

Greatly, indeed, was his trust rewarded. The hardy northerners, most of whom were of Danish descent, had never before seen the Kings who ruled them; and Harold's courteous, winning manner, and the trust he

showed in coming amongst them almost unguarded, won all hearts. At York he married the Lady Ealdgyth ; and by Easter he was back in Westminster, with the certainty that at last all England acknowledged him as King.

Well for him that he had this knowledge, for signs were not wanting of the coming storm. From Normandy came news that Duke William, hopeless of obtaining the crown by other means, was building a great fleet, and collecting together a powerful army, not only of Normans, but of adventurers from many countries, who, attracted by the promise of wealth and lands, came in their thousands to assist in the conquest of England. In May, Tostig, Harold's brother, impatient that William would not embark at once on the conquest of the country, descended on the eastern shores of England with a few ships, and, having burnt some towns and villages, took refuge at the court of King Malcolm of Scotland.

Meanwhile Harold was preparing to meet the danger from abroad. He manned a powerful fleet, and kept it cruising in the waters which William must cross to invade England. At the same time he called together his housecarls and levies, and sent messages to all the thanes of the south bidding them come with their men, and help swell the army which was to guard England against the foreign invader. Cedric himself travelled down to Grinstead, and returned with Thorold and the eighty housecarls, and some two hundred rudely armed men whom he had hastily got together.

By these means Harold gathered together the

greatest army that England had ever seen, and all through the summer they kept watch at Sandwich for William's coming. But William did not come, though travellers reaching England brought news of his great preparations, telling how he had gained the Pope to his side, and had received from his Holiness a sacred banner and a bull* commanding him to go forth and conquer England in the name of the Church. But these signs of the coming storm were not understood by the rank and file of the Saxon army; and, with the approach of September, the men began to murmur that they were needed at home to gather in the harvest, and to ask why they were kept in idleness at Sandwich to meet a foe that never came. So, much against his will, Harold disbanded his fleet and army, keeping only the house-carls, who were bound to serve in the field as long as they were needed.

Whilst these events were happening in the south, and Harold guarded the southern shores of England, news arrived one day which made him send for Cedric.

"Cedric," said the King, as the young man entered the room where he was at work, "word has just reached me from a trusty source that a fresh foe is preparing to invade the north. It seems that my brother Tostig travelled from Scotland to Norway, and the court of King Harold Hardrada. Now I hear that he has persuaded that warlike monarch to invade England, in the hope that he may wrest the crown from my head before the Normans arrive.

* A proclamation or order issued by the Pope, so called from the *bulle*, or round leaden seal, attached to it.

"Cedric, threatened from two quarters as I am, I dare not leave the south unguarded, and must trust the protection of the north to my brothers-in-law, who, if lukewarm in my cause, will doubtless prove willing enough when it comes to guarding their own lands. Already I have sent to Earls Edwin and Morcar, bidding them prepare; but I doubt if they will heed my warning, and I would have some one I trust upon the spot, to send me messages from time to time telling of the progress of the invaders, and the measures taken for their defeat.

"I have chosen you for the post. You are young; but you are shrewd for your years, and, as I know, are to be trusted. Take twelve men, besides your two personal followers, and travel rapidly, resting only when necessary, for the danger is great. Having crossed the Humber, keep along the coast; for 'tis there you will first hear of the Norwegian fleet. Then, as you think necessary, send me news of the doings of the invaders, and of the Earls. Do you understand?"

"I understand, my Lord King," answered Cedric, delighted at the thought of action after the long weeks of inactivity, "and will do my best to serve you well."

"I know it," replied the King. "Now hasten, for time presses."

Within an hour Cedric was riding north, accompanied by Ulf and Wulfnoth, and twelve of the most trusted of the Grinstead housecarls.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SIEGE OF SCARBOROUGH.

Five days' hard riding brought Cedric and his party to the Humber, and having crossed the river, they turned east, and rode towards the coast as Harold had directed.

By noon of the second day they reached Scarborough; and as they approached the gate, they became aware of a great commotion amongst the inhabitants. Some were hastily leaving the town, carrying with them their wives and families, and the most valuable of their household goods, whilst others collected in crowds upon the walls, and gazed seaward.

"What is the cause of all this turmoil?" Cedric inquired of a woman who, with two little children, came hastening out of the town gate, as he was about to enter.

"The fleet of Harold Hardrada the Norwegian and the traitor Tostig has been sighted off Whitby, young sir," replied the woman nervously. "The messenger, who rode by in haste, said that they were sailing south; so I, who have seen more than one town given over to fire and massacre by the Norse robbers, am flying with my children, lest Harold and Tostig should stop at Scarborough. But you and your men, young sir, appear to be fighters, and will surely be welcomed by those who think to defend the town." So saying, the woman hastened on, casting many frightened glances behind her as she went.

"This is news, indeed," cried Cedric; and, calling

one of his housecarls to him, he said, " Ride south to the King, and tell him from Cedric of Grinstead that the fleet of Harold Hardada has been sighted between Whitby and Scarborough. Ride with all speed ; the money in this wallet will enable you to get fresh horses, when needful."

As soon as the messenger had ridden away, Cedric entered Scarborough with the rest of his men, and there found the citizens divided into two parties. One party wished to surrender the town, and to throw themselves upon the mercy of the invaders, whilst the other taunted their rivals with cowardice, and were hastily arming themselves, with the grim determination of defending their homes to the last.

The arrival of Cedric with such welcome reinforcements was greeted with acclamations by the party for defence ; and the rival factions, which were on the point of coming to blows, called upon Cedric, as a man of rank, to decide which of them was right.

" Surrender the town ? Never ! " declared Cedric. " Would you open your doors to a pack of wolves ? If you surrendered, Harold and Tostig would greet your ambassadors with honeyed words, and then, as soon as they were within the walls, would give the town over to fire and sword. Defy the Norwegian ! He cannot linger here for long, for he has bigger game to hunt. As for myself and my men, we will fight by your sides, should he attack you."

Cedric's stirring words carried the day. There was no more talk of surrender. Those that feared the coming

of the Norsemen left the town, whilst the stouter-hearted amongst the inhabitants prepared to give the Norsemen a warm reception, should they dare to attack Scarborough. Thus it happened that when, towards the middle of the afternoon, the Norwegian fleet arrived, and a haughty demand for immediate surrender was sent ashore, the answer was one of bold defiance.

But Harold Hardrada and Tostig were not men to be turned aside by the defiance of a few townsfolk, and running their galleys on to the beach, the Norsemen sprang ashore, and rushed to the attack. But the Norwegians were without any proper engines for attacking a walled town, and fiercely though they strove to batter down the gates, and to carry the walls by assault, the citizens, rendered desperate by the knowledge that if the enemy gained an entrance now, they would show no mercy, repelled all attacks. At last, seeing that only by heavy loss of men could the town be carried by assault, if it could be carried at all, King Harold Hardrada called off the attack, giving the defenders a much-needed respite.

"Well fought, indeed!" cried Cedric to the townsmen in his immediate neighbourhood. Then, seeing that the defenders looked upon him as their leader, he made the round of the walls, praising all, and urging the hardy fisherfolk to hold out to the end, assuring them that the Norwegians dared not spend long over the siege of a small, unimportant town.

"Master," said Wulfnoth, who, since the memorable night at Grinstead when he had received a crack on the

head from a Norman sword, had grown immensely, "there is something happening on that hill above us. I have been watching for the last hour, and have seen many hundreds of men carrying branches and faggots of wood to the top."

It was now evening, but there was still light enough for Cedric to make out a huge pile of wood built on the top of the high, precipitous cliff overlooking the town.

"'Tis as you say, Wulfnoth," he replied. "But why should the Norwegians build a bonfire up there? If they need light for a night attack, 'twill aid us as much as them."

"'Tis not to give them light, master, I think," replied Wulfnoth. "I know not their reason for collecting so much wood in such a place, but I feel that it bodes us no good."

"It may be so; what think you, Ulf?" asked Cedric, turning to his other companion.

"I know not, master; my head was not made to solve riddles, and all I can think of is that somehow or other the Norwegians hope to set the town on fire."

"You may have no head for riddles, Ulf," cried Cedric, "but truly I believe you have solved this puzzle. Quick, Wulfnoth, go fetch the chief townsmen to me. Bid them hasten, for the danger presses. See, even now men with torches are approaching the wood pile."

But, long before Wulfnoth returned, the fell purpose of the Norwegians had made itself plain. Night had now fallen, and as torches were applied to the bonfire, and the huge pile of wood blazed up, a great pillar

of fire in the darkness, hundreds of men suddenly appeared on the summit of the cliff, and, seizing the burning brands, cast them down in a flaming hail upon the helpless town beneath.

Within ten minutes Scarborough was blazing fiercely in a dozen places, the wooden buildings with their thatched roofs, dry with a summer's heat, burning like tinder. From all quarters a terrible wail of utter despair arose, as the citizens, leaving the walls, strove desperately but in vain to save their homes. Meantime, from the hill above, the Norsemen yelled in triumph, and kept up a never-ceasing shower of blazing brands upon the stricken town.

Suddenly Cedric, who had kept his post upon the walls, distinguished a new sound amidst the roar and crackle of the flames. It was the regular tramp of armed men; and, turning, he beheld the army of the Norwegians again advancing to the attack through the billowing clouds of smoke.

"To the walls!" he cried. "To the walls!" But his shouts were drowned in the roar of the flames; and if any heard, none obeyed. The sight of their blazing homes had taken all heart out of the defenders; not even the crashing and splintering of stout timbers, or the triumphant shouts of the Norsemen, as, meeting with no resistance, they burst open the gates, and poured into the stricken town, could rouse the townsfolk to further opposition.

"All is lost, master!" cried Wulfnoth, as he ran up panting to where Cedric stood with Ulf by his side.

“The Norwegians are already plundering and killing at the other end of the town, and none are offering any resistance.”

“We have done our best,” said Cedric. “Now we must endeavour to escape, for I have the King’s mission to fulfil. Call our men from the walls, Ulf. Now,” when the housecarls had formed up in a solid body, “follow me closely, and cut down all who bar our path.”

Keeping as much as possible in the shadows of the wall, Cedric led the way towards a little postern gate which he had noted earlier in the day. From all sides came the cries of the vanquished, and the shouts of the victors, whilst now and then a dull crash, followed by a spouting column of sparks, betokened the fall of some building. Once, in an open space, terribly lit by the flames, they found their way barred by a body of Norwegians. With a roar of rage the Saxons rushed at the enemy, cutting them down with axe and sword; and such was the fury of their onset that the Norwegians, though they outnumbered the Saxons by four to one, turned and fled.

Now Cedric led his men down a little alley, as yet untouched by the flames, and was hoping that they were clear of the enemy, when a shout from behind made him look back. There, at the farther end of the alley, considerably reinforced, were their late opponents in full pursuit.

Breaking into a run, Cedric dashed forward towards the little postern, now almost in sight. On their left was the city wall, on their right a blazing building, a



‘With a roar of rage the Saxons rushed at the enemy.’—Page 40.

furnace of spouting flames, the heat of which was so intense that it singed the hair of the flying Saxons.

Reaching the postern, they found it fast barred and locked, and two of the strongest housecarls set to work to batter it down with their heavy axes, whilst Cedric with the remainder formed a half circle round the door, and prepared to hold off the Norsemen until the way of escape was open.

The enemy were now but fifty yards away, and already they were shouting their triumph at seeing the Saxons at last brought to bay. But suddenly, without the slightest warning, the fire-scorched shell of the building, which the Saxons had passed in safety, collapsed with a sickening crash, burying in its fall all but a few of the pursuers, whilst the panic-stricken survivors turned and fled.

A moment later the postern gate gave way beneath the blows of the housecarls, and the little party of Saxons, miraculously unscathed by fire and sword, stepped gratefully out from the doomed town into the cool darkness of the night.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIGHT AT FULFORD.

All that night Cedric and his companions tramped steadily forward; and, ever as they came to human habitations, they found that news of the Norsemen had preceded them, and that already the messengers of the Earls Edwin and Morcar were out, bidding all men to

arms. With the morning they obtained horses, and late the following evening they entered York, which city they found humming with busy preparations to repel the invader.

That night Cedric laboriously composed a letter to King Harold, telling what had happened at Scarborough. Towards the end he wrote, "My Lord King, there is much haste here to meet the enemy, but these northern levies, though brave, lack discipline, and I doubt if they will withstand the attack of the Norwegians." The next morning, in the first light of dawn, one of the Grinstead housecarls rode south with all speed, bearing the letter in his wallet.

Meanwhile, as day followed day, each brought fresh news of the doings of the dreaded Norsemen. Holderness suffered the same fate as Scarborough; and the great Norwegian fleet, sailing up the Humber, entered the Ouse, and disembarked its fighting men at a spot nine miles from York. From there King Hardrada and Tostig advanced seven miles to a place called Fulford, where, on a narrow ridge of land between the river and a large swamp, they stationed their army to await the coming of the English.

Cedric had joined his little troop to the levies under Earl Morcar, who led the left wing of the English army; and as they neared the enemy, and he saw how greatly the Norsemen outnumbered the English, Cedric's anxiety as to the result of the battle increased tenfold.

"Ulf," he said, calling that young man to him, "I fear that the rudely armed levies of these northern Earls

will not stand for long against those well armed and well disciplined Norsemen. Should the day go against us, and I fall, then I charge you to make your way south to the King with all speed, and tell him all. Now let us forward. See, the Earls are going to attack, and there I think they are right. If we can once break the enemy's shield-wall,* victory may be ours."

The English were now within striking distance of the Norwegian army, and, advancing their banners to the front, the Earls gave the signal for attack. With a roar the English sprang after them, charging down upon the ranks of the Norsemen with such fury that the left wing under Earl Morcar broke through the close locked shield-wall, and drove the Norsemen before them.

In vain did their leaders call upon the Norwegians to stand firm. In vain did they perform prodigies of valour with their mighty two-handed swords. The English under Earl Morcar, with Cedric and his compact little body of heavily armed housecarls fighting in the van, were not to be denied; and, with yells of triumph, they saw the right wing of the Norwegian army crumple up before their attack, and turn to fly.

"We win, Cedric, we win!" cried Ulf, felling a yellow-bearded Norseman with a single blow from his heavy axe. But hardly had the words left his lips, when the shouts of triumph around them suddenly changed to cries of dismay.

The cause was not far to seek. The English right under Earl Edwin had attacked the Norwegian left wing

* A defensive barrier made by the first-line men of the army standing so closely together that their shields formed a continuous wall facing the enemy.

with equal bravery, but without the success of the attack led by Earl Morcar. They had found opposed to them the flower of the Norwegian army—led by King Harold Hardrada himself, who towered a full head above any of his followers—and had striven desperately, but in vain, to burst a way through the solid array of the enemy. Then, as the fury of the English attack died down, King Harold Hardrada had suddenly sounded his horn, and, with his terrible banner called the “Ravager of the World” fluttering above his head, had sprung to the attack.

With yells of triumph the Norsemen had followed him, leaping like wolves upon their foes. Back, back they pressed the English, the Norse King ever a pace ahead of his men, his gleaming two-handed sword cutting down all who opposed him. Hundreds of the English were slain, hundreds more were driven into the river and drowned, until, beholding the irresistible advance of the terrible Norsemen, the undisciplined English levies were seized with panic, and with cries of dismay and terror they turned to flee.

It was this disastrous defeat of half their army which had caused the victorious English under Earl Morcar to halt in their pursuit. Instantly the flying Norsemen rallied; and, encouraged by the shouts of triumph from their left, they returned to the attack with such vigour that in a few minutes defeat had been turned to victory, and all along the line the English were flying for their lives.

“Ulf,” cried Cedric, as, with Wulfnoth and the

surviving housecarls, they strove to extricate themselves from the press of flying, terror-stricken fugitives, "do you take the first horse you can find, and ride south to the King, bearing tidings of this disaster. Tell King Harold that I shall strive to reach York, which may yet be defended till help arrives."

At last they neared the edge of the flying throng. Espying a riderless horse, Ulf mounted it, and rode off at a gallop, making a wide detour to avoid the victorious Norsemen.

Meanwhile the survivors of the battle retreated within the walls of York, and prepared for a siege. But Edwin and Morcar, caring little who ruled in England so long as they retained possession of their estates, called a council of their chief men, and before the second day had passed it was rumoured through York that the city was to be surrendered, and that Harold Hardrada was to be acknowledged King.

"King Harold never trusted these Earls," declared Cedric bitterly, when he heard the news, "and now indeed it seems that he was right, and that they are knaves. Would that I were a man of greater standing! Yet, even as it is, my word may have some weight, since I am on a mission from the King."

Accordingly the following morning Cedric made his way to the house where Earls Edwin and Morcar were living; and, entering, he found them deep in conversation with a number of Norwegians.

"'Tis Cedric of Grinstead," said Morcar to his brother, as the young man entered. "What can we do

for you, Cedric ? After the way you fought in the battle, there is little I will refuse."

"Then, Earl Morcar, I would speak with you and your brother alone, where these Norwegian robbers cannot hear me," replied Cedric coldly.

"These are strange words to be said of men who are my guests," cried Earl Morcar, whilst a murmur of anger came from the Norsemen. "Still, it shall be as you wish."

Leading the way with his brother into a small room, he bade Cedric speak.

"Earl Morcar, and you, Earl Edwin," began Cedric boldly, "it is rumoured in the city without that you intend to surrender to the Norwegian ; and, coming here, I find you deep in talk with his messengers. Nay, frown not ! I speak not as Cedric of Grinstead, but as the representative of King Harold, who sent me north that I might report to him the doings of the invaders. I pray you be bold, and hold this city to the last. King Harold will not leave you unsuccoured. Even now my messenger rides south with news of the defeat at Fulford ; and all men will call you worthless and cowardly, if you surrender York without a blow."

"These are hard words," cried Earl Edwin furiously, starting forward with his hand upon his sword ; but, ere he could strike Cedric, Morcar stayed him with a gesture. "Peace, brother !" he cried. "The youth speaks without knowledge. Cedric, we have no thought of surrendering York. Even now we are about to return defiance to the Norwegian, and I beg you to give the lie

to any who say we have acted otherwise." With these words he clapped his hands, and bade the page who answered conduct Cedric to the street.

But, though he had received assurance from Earl Morcar himself, Cedric was far from satisfied. All that day he paced the narrow streets of York, seeking to learn the true intentions of the Earls. But everywhere he found turmoil and conflicting information. The stout-hearted were for holding the city at all costs; others, remembering the fate of Scarborough and Holderness, cried out that they would all be massacred, and the city given over to the flames; whilst there were yet others who openly said that they should surrender, and throw themselves upon the mercy of the Norwegian.

"I like it not, young sir," said a brawny blacksmith, named Oswin, who had taken part in the fight at Fulford, and who, with the coming of night, had entered the tavern where Cedric and his followers were lodging. "Three days have passed since we shut ourselves up inside this city, and instead of fighting there has been nothing but the coming and going of messengers between the Norseman and our Earls. Until now I have looked upon them as stout-hearted men; but if they surrender to this Norwegian robber, then will I travel south where I hear that a *man* rules the land."

"'Tis so, indeed," replied Cedric warmly. "King Harold is a leader any man might be proud to follow; and whilst he lives, he will never surrender a foot of English soil to any invader, be he Norman or Norseman. What would you, Wulfnoth?"

"Master, I have news," replied Wulfnoth, who had just entered the inn. "The Earls and their friends have agreed with the Norwegian, Harold Hardrada, to surrender York, and to accept him as their King. 'Tis even reported that they have promised to fight for him against King Harold of England, and under cover of the night they are exchanging hostages with the enemy. With mine own eyes I have seen the men passing through a small postern gate."

"The foul traitors!" cried Cedric, springing to his feet. "Bid the housecarls to horse, Wulfnoth. We must ride south this night to King Harold. Hasten, lad! Every moment is precious."

"With your permission, young sir, I will ride with you," put in Oswin the smith. "I am a man of no birth, but I believe in keeping faith, nor will I serve cowards."

"You are welcome," declared Cedric, grasping the smith's brawny hand. A few minutes later Wulfnoth beckoned to them from the door, and led them to the back of the inn, where the housecarls stood waiting with the horses in a dark, narrow alley.

"I thought 'twere safer to start from here, master, where no one can see our going," whispered Wulfnoth. "As like as not, these Earls may try to stop your taking the news to the King."

"You have done well, Wulfnoth," praised Cedric; and even as the little party mounted their horses, the sound of loud knocking came from the front of the inn, and a voice was heard calling for Cedric of Grinstead.

"This way, master!" whispered Wulfnoth. "The gates will surely be shut against you, but the little postern I told you of will not be so closely watched, and perchance we may pass as messengers of the Earls."

"'Tis a clever thought," answered Cedric; and, led by the lad, the little cavalcade set off through the dark streets.

The crowds of the day had vanished, and none barred their progress through the narrow lanes, except once when a party of cut-throats stepped out from the shadow of a deep doorway. But these, seeing a well armed band, vanished as swiftly as they had appeared, and at last Wulfnoth pointed ahead to where the city wall rose dark and forbidding against the night sky.

"The postern gate lies straight ahead, master," whispered the boy.

Halting his men, Cedric bade them be ready for a sudden dash, should the guard at the gate attempt to bar their passage; and then he rode forward alone.

"Who goes there?" cried a voice from the darkness.

Leaning forward, Cedric made out the figure of an armed man standing in the shadow of a narrow gate, just wide enough to admit the passage of one horseman at a time.

"A messenger to the King!" announced Cedric in reply.

"The King! Now *which* King do you mean, my friend?" asked the guard. "Come, let's have a look at you," said he, as Cedric rode forward. "'Tis dark,"

he grumbled. "Wait till I get a light. There is one Cedric of Grinstead I have been warned not to let pass on any account. Not that he is likely to know of this gate, but there is no harm in being sure."

He was turning away, when Cedric leant forward in his saddle, and dealt the guard a blow with his bare fist which laid him senseless on the ground. Then, springing from his horse, he plucked the key of the postern from where it hung at the belt of the unconscious man. A few moments later the gate was open, and men and horses were filing through into the country beyond.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BATTLE OF STAMFORD BRIDGE.

It was dawn before the little cavalcade, weary and dusty with hard riding, drew rein at a wayside hamlet where they obtained food. Having rested a short time, they mounted fresh horses, and all through the hot autumn morning they rode south along a wide, straight road which the Romans had built hundreds of years before.

Midday was approaching, when Cedric, who was riding with Wulfnoth and Oswin some paces ahead of the housecarls, espied a great cloud of dust in the distance. "Strange!" he mused, standing up in his stirrups to obtain a better view. "Some great body of men approaches, but who can they be? Surely King Harold could not have travelled thus far in so short a time.



'Cedric dealt the guard a blow which laid him senseless on the ground.'—Page 51.

And yet who else could be marching towards York with such force ?

At that moment a gust of wind dispelled the distant dust cloud, revealing a dense body of armed men on the march, with a banner displaying a golden dragon waving at their head. "Now Heaven be praised !" cried Cedric. "'Tis in truth the King."

He spurred his horse forward, and presently reined in before a tall, kingly figure who rode at the head of the marching troops.

"Well met, Cedric !" cried King Harold, recognizing the young man. "Your messengers have all reached me ; and, as you see, lad, I have lost no time in coming to the aid of these northern Earls. 'Tis true that by doing so I have had to leave the south unguarded, and at the mercy of Duke William. Yet contrary winds have kept his great fleet in harbour for so long that I pray they may do so a few weeks longer, and give me time to settle with the Norwegians ere William lands. Ride by my side, Cedric, and tell me why I meet you hastening south at such speed. Bear you news of another disaster ?"

"Alas ! my Lord King, I do," replied Cedric, turning his horse, and riding by the King's side. He then briefly told of the earls' treachery, and of the bargain they had made with the invader.

"I feared as much," said Harold sadly. "Would that men thought more of their country, and less of their own interests ! A united England need fear no foe ; but whilst jealousies and rivalries divide North

from South, then is the task of the invader made doubly easy."

The King had brought with him a great force of housecarls, the terrible *thingmen* whose fame was known all over Europe, and who were said never to retreat, every man of them being reputed equal to any two men of other races. Also, as he marched north, he had gathered to him the hastily mustered levies of the counties he had traversed, and with this great body of troops he pressed forward all day, with only short intervals for the men to eat and rest.

That evening the army lay at Tadcaster on the Wharfe; and as soon as it was light the next morning, Harold started forward again, hoping to take the Norsemen by surprise. Reaching York, Harold found that the city had not yet been occupied by the Norwegians; and the citizens, gladly welcoming the army of the south, opened their gates, and prepared once again to defy the invader. Entering the city, Harold paused a brief time to allow his men to satisfy their hunger, and then, strengthened by the survivors of the army which had fought at Fulford, he marched forward to give battle to the Norwegian host.

Meanwhile, King Harold Hardrada had moved his army to Stamford Bridge on the River Derwent; and whilst Harold of England was advancing towards him, the King of Norway and the Earl Tostig were preparing to march on York with a small, lightly-armed force, and take over the government of the conquered territory.

Never dreaming that so near at hand was an armed

force capable of disputing their conquest, the Norsemen, all unprepared for battle, were scattered along the banks of the river. On the western bank, the side nearer to the advancing English, were gathered those who were preparing to march on York; and these suddenly perceived a cloud of dust advancing rapidly towards them, amidst which the sunlight glinted on steel cap and spearhead.

Instantly all was confusion. There was no doubting who the newcomers were. Harold of England and his *thingmen* were upon them; and Tostig, knowing that here were foes very different from the rudely armed levies that the Norsemen had defeated five days before, counselled retreat towards Riccall on the Ouse, where the Norwegian fleet lay at anchor. But Harold Hardrada scorned such counsels of timidity; and, having dispatched messengers to his main army on the eastern bank of the Derwent, he formed up his half-armed warriors in a thin, curved line. Mounted on a huge black horse, the Norwegian King rode up and down the front of his array, bidding the men be of good courage. "Let us fight," he cried, "without armour! Swords and helmets are enough for the valiant."

By this time the English army was close at hand; and Harold, watching the movements of the enemy, and the giant figure that rode up and down in front of their line, suddenly beheld the black horse stumble, and throw its rider to the ground. "Who is the tall man who fell from his horse, the man with the blue kirtle, and the goodly helm?" asked Harold of Cedric, who rode close by at the head of the Grinstead housecarls.

"He is the King of Norway, my Lord King," answered Cedric.

"A tall man and a goodly," mused Harold, "but methinks his luck has left him. Now let us on!"

Then, signing to his horn-blowers to sound the attack, Harold of England led his army against the Norwegians.

At the very first onset the English carried all before them. Shouting their battle cries of "Holy Rood," and "God Almighty," the heavily armed housecarls cut down the half-armed enemy by scores with their great two-handed axes, and soon the Norsemen were in full flight towards their main body on the eastern shore of the river. The way of retreat lay across one narrow bridge, and there the carnage was terrible. Hundreds were driven into the river and drowned. The English, following hard upon the fugitives, might have crossed the bridge in their wake, and taken the main body unprepared, had not a gigantic Norseman taken his stand in the very centre of the narrow way, and held the English at bay, whilst his countrymen formed up on the opposite bank.

"Truly he is a man of might!" cried Cedric, as, leaning on his red axe, he viewed with admiration the prowess of the great Norse warrior. But one Englishman could approach him at a time, so narrow was the way; and as man after man went up against him, he slew them one by one with his long two-handed sword, until a score or more Englishmen had been slain.

"He is a great fighter," growled Thorold, "but



'A gigantic Norseman held the English at bay.'—Page 56.

whilst he holds the bridge his countrymen are making ready. But look yonder ! One goes out in a boat. See, he is under the bridge, and has stabbed the Norseman from below. Good ! The way is clear now, and the King advances again."

The English army crossed the bridge, and formed up in a dense, compact body. Above them, awaiting their coming, was the Norwegian host, bristling with steel, their shields forming a solid wall, and with the "Ravager of the World" fluttering overhead.

Slowly the English moved up the slope ; but ere the armies closed, King Harold bade one of his most trusted thanes take twenty men, and carry a message of peace to his brother Tostig. Accordingly, advancing close to the Norwegian lines, the thane cried out in a loud voice, "Where is Tostig, the son of Godwine ?"

"He is here," answered Tostig from his place in the front line of the enemy.

"If you are Tostig," continued the messenger, "your brother bids me salute you, and to offer you peace, his friendship, and your former honours."

"These," replied Tostig, "are fine words. But, should I accept, what does my brother offer to my friend, the noble King Harold of Norway ?"

"He promises him seven feet of English ground, or a little more, since he is taller than most men," answered the thane in a loud voice.

"Then return to my brother," cried Tostig, "and bid him make ready for battle. Never shall it be said by any but a liar that Tostig deserted his friend."

“What said he?” asked King Harold of England, when his messenger returned.

“My Lord King, he refuses your offer,” replied the thane.

“I feared as much,” said Harold, and signed to his horn-blowers once more to sound the advance.

Now the battle began in real earnest. Moving up the slope, the English housecarls flung themselves upon the closely packed line of the Norsemen. Both sides fought with terrible ferocity. English axe clashed against Norwegian broadsword, and where either struck, steel headpiece or breastplate cracked like an eggshell beneath the terrible blow. The slaughter was immense; yet through it all, the English housecarls remained unbroken, and slowly but surely forced the Norsemen back.

Desperately did Harold of Norway strive to stem the English advance. Swinging his long two-handed sword above his head, he flung himself again and again upon the English housecarls, whilst his bravest warriors pressed after him into the thickest of the fight. In vain! No sooner did an Englishman fall than another stepped into his place; and, in spite of all the efforts of the Norwegians, the English axemen pressed relentlessly forward in the wake of the Golden Dragon, beneath which Harold of England and his thanes fought ever a pace ahead of their men.

Slowly the long day wore away, and the fight, upon which depended the fate of a kingdom, raged as furiously as ever. The litter of dead and dying behind them

showed how far the English had advanced. Men were so weary that they reeled with fatigue, and could hardly find strength to wield their swords and axes ; yet still the English pressed forward, and still the Norsemen stubbornly resisted. Both Kings were so far unhurt, though Tostig and hundreds of the bravest on either side lay dead upon the field. Then, as the sun was setting, an English arrow struck King Harold Hardrada in the throat, and stretched him dying upon the ground.

With the fall of their King despair at last seized upon the surviving Norsemen ; and, for the first time that day, their line broke, and they fled towards Riccall, where their fleet lay at anchor. The English were too spent to follow. They flung themselves down upon the ground and spent the night in the open amidst the dead and dying, whilst hundreds of women and monks and priests from York and the surrounding country moved backwards and forwards tending the wounded.

“ ’Tis a great victory, young master,” said Oswin, who, with Cedric, Ulf, and Wulfnoth, had come unscathed through the fight. “ King Harold must surely be pleased.”

“ He is grateful for the victory,” replied Cedric, “ but I doubt if there is much cause for joy. There is Duke William of Normandy still to be met, and this battle has sorely thinned the ranks of the housecarls, upon whom victory over the Norman must chiefly depend. Of my own men from Grinstead, but fifty survive out of the eighty that came hither.”

“ I had not thought of it that way,” replied Oswin.

“As you say, 'tis a sad business. Still it might have been much worse; and, had things gone differently, we might have been flying for our lives. Where would King Harold's chance of beating this Duke William have been then?”

The next day, Harold received the submission of the Norsemen who had survived the battle, and of those who had remained with the fleet; and, having received hostages from them, he allowed them to depart in peace.

Then followed a week during which the northern thanes flocked to York to pay homage to the man who had delivered them from the Norwegians, whilst the weary troops rested after their great exertions.

On the Saturday after the battle of Stamford Bridge, a great banquet for all the chief men was held in York. The Earls Edwin and Morcar were there, once again reconciled to the King and his sworn liegemen. The feasting was in full swing when a page approached the King, and whispered something in his ear. The next minute a weary, travel-stained messenger entered, flung himself on one knee before Harold, and spoke swiftly. As he listened, the King's face grew grave. When the messenger had finished speaking, Harold rose to his feet, and lifted a hand for silence.

“Earls and thanes,” he cried in ringing tones, “the time for feasting has passed. A new invader threatens our land. Two days ago, Duke William of Normandy landed with his army at the town of Pevensey in the county of Sussex.”

CHAPTER VII.

NORMAN WORK.

There was no more feasting that night. Instead, everywhere was the turmoil of preparation for the march south to meet the new invader. Earls Edwin and Morcar dispatched messengers in all directions, calling every man capable of bearing arms to their standard, and promised within a few days to have the whole force of the north in arms to aid Harold. But the King, impatient that the Normans should ravage his realm a moment longer than he could help, determined to march south at daybreak with the men he had, and to leave the northern army to follow after.

"If you hasten," he said to Edwin and Morcar, "you will overtake me at London, for there I must wait to gather the southern levies about me." The Earls solemnly promised to make all speed.

In the midst of the bustle of preparation, a page brought Cedric a message saying that the King desired his presence. "Cedric," said Harold, as the young man presented himself, "I have an important task for you. I shall march south with all speed, but the pace of an army is not the pace of a few, and there are letters which must be delivered in London with all dispatch. These I intend to send by you. Take but a few men—the Grinstead housecarls I will join to my own following—and, having delivered the letters, hasten to Grinstead, and collect your father's levies. Here are the letters,

Cedric. Ride within the hour, and join me again in London. Farewell ! ”

Leaving the King, Cedric sought out Thorold, and told him that he and his housecarls were now a part of the King's personal following. Then he ordered four horses to be saddled, and with Oswin, Ulf, and Wulfnoth rode out of York, and took the road south through the night. All night they journeyed, and with the dawn they rested awhile, ate some food, and then hastened on again.

That night they rested a few hours at Lincoln, and the next day reached the fen country below the Wash. It was a wild, desolate region. Clumps of coarse grass rose out of stagnant pools covered with green slime, whilst here and there groups of stunted trees, growing on higher and drier ground, broke the dreary monotony of the landscape. Human habitation there was none, and no sounds broke the silence save the cry of wild-fowl, and the occasional boom of a bittern.

“ ’Tis a cold, damp country,” cried Ulf with a shiver, drawing his cloak closer round him. “ Even in the sunlight it chills one to the bone. Give me the forest round Grinstead for warmth, and —— ”

He stopped. From some distance ahead there had suddenly risen a wild, despairing cry, a cry that froze the very blood in the veins, and caused the riders to rein their horses back on their haunches.

“ ’Tis a boggle,” cried Oswin ; and cheeks that had never blanched at the sight of the whirling blades of the Norsemen, grew pale as the terrible cry was repeated.

Even Cedric, shrewder and better educated than

his companions, experienced a strange chill ; but, rallying quickly, he started forward again, crying out, " Boggle or no boggle, we are on the King's errand, and shall four strong men be turned aside by the cry of some unhappy goblin ? "

Emboldened by their leader's example, the others followed ; and they had progressed some fifty yards when, from close at hand, the cry again rang out, causing the horses to shy and rear so as almost to unseat their riders. But this time the travellers clearly distinguished a cry for help, and curbing his horse, Cedric sprang to the ground.

" 'Tis no boggle," he declared. " Some human being is in dire danger. Hi ! my friend, where are you ? "

" Here, master, to your right."

Glancing in the direction of the cry, Cedric made out the head of a man protruding from a pool of green slime, whilst the man clutched desperately at a small bush which grew upon a hillock of dry ground, and which every moment threatened to come up by the roots.

" Hold on, friend," cried Cedric, " we will help you." Having taken the bridles from the four horses, he knotted them together, and then, winding the line round his waist, prepared to go to the rescue of the unknown.

" Jump from one clump of grass to another, master," cried the stranger, seeing what Cedric was about to do ; and, following his advice, Cedric safely crossed the intervening marsh with Ulf at his heels.

The hillock was but three yards across. Flinging himself upon the ground, Cedric passed the line round



'Flinging himself upon the ground, Cedric passed the line beneath the arms of the drowning man.'—Page 64.

beneath the arms of the drowning man, and knotted it tightly. Then, whilst Ulf grasped the man's hands, Cedric pulled on the rope, and together they drew the unknown from the swamp.

He was a sorry sight, covered from head to foot with green slime, and he trembled so violently that they had difficulty in getting him to the safety of the road. So far the man had not spoken, but no sooner did he feel firm ground beneath his feet than his terror seemed to leave him.

"Thanks, Cedric of Grinstead!" he said, to the amazement of his hearers. "This is the second time we have met. The first time you came between me and my prey, and this time you save my life."

"Friend," replied Cédric, "you know more of me than I of you." Then, as the other wiped the slime from his face, he exclaimed, "Why, 'tis Osgot of the Woods!"

"Aye, master," replied the rescued man. "Osgot I am, though now Osgot of the Fen, outlaw and robber, yet one who never forgets a debt. Young master, strange rumours reach me even here, and there may come a time when England may hold little of safety for such as you. Then come to this spot—I pray you mark it well—and in the night-time light a fire, and look towards the east. Before long you will see an answering light.

"Then take your cloak, and shield and uncover your fire five times, after which trample it out lest those see it who should not. Presently one will come to you who will say, 'Osgot of Grinstead;' and you shall

answer, 'Cedric of the Woods.' Follow that one without fear.

"Yonder you will find dry land, human habitations, men, women, and safety. Now farewell!" Turning abruptly, he ran towards the edge of the road, and started off across the swamp with great leaps and bounds, following a zig-zag course which it was impossible to trace, and which soon carried him out of sight.

"A strange meeting!" said Cedric, and for long he rode in silence, musing on what the future might hold in store.

The rest of the journey was performed without event. Two days later, entering London at sunset, Cedric delivered his letters, and then sought shelter for the night at an inn.

Everywhere the topic of conversation was the Norman invasion. "'Tis reported, my son," said a portly monk who sat beside Cedric at the high table, "that Duke William has built a castle at Pevensey, and another at Hastings, and that from there he ravages the land most cruelly, robbing, burning, and slaying—sparing neither man, woman, nor child."

"The villain!" cried Cedric in just anger. "Yet well I see his aim, my father. He dare not advance far from the sea, lest he be cut off from his fleet; and so he lays waste the land, hoping that by so doing he will compel Harold to march south to give him battle."

"Doubtless it is as you say, my son," replied the monk. "I am from the Abbey of Peterborough, sent hither by Leofric, the Abbot, to purchase twenty suits

of mail with swords and axes. For Leofric holds that this is a quarrel in which the Church should support the King, and he and eighteen of his monks travel hither to change for awhile the robe for a cuirass, and the crozier for a sword."

"That is good hearing, indeed, father," cried Cedric heartily. "I hear that Ælfric, Abbot of the new Abbey at Westminster, also intends to join the King's army with twelve of his brethren. With the Church fighting by our sides, we plain soldiers should do doubly well."

"I pray it may be so, my son," replied the monk seriously; "for, should Duke William prove victorious, I foresee much misery for this land."

Soon after they parted for the night. Early the next morning, Cedric and his companions were on their way to Grinstead; and Cedric, in spite of the shadow which hung over the land, was all eagerness to see again his father and Edith.

All day they rode south, meeting ever and again bands of fugitives flying from the ravages of the Norman horsemen, and telling piteous tales of fire, pillage, and sudden death. The night was spent in a monastery. The next morning they set out again, and by noon had entered the forest, and were approaching their journey's end.

"By the smell there has been a fire not far away, and that quite recently," said Ulf, breaking a long silence, and sniffing the breeze.

"I have noticed the smell also," replied Cedric. "But there cannot have been a forest fire, for at the

monastery last night they told me there had been much rain lately."

The smell of fire and charred wood was now plainly noticeable, and the farther they advanced the stronger it became, until it overpowered all the natural scents of the forest.

"I like it not!" cried Cedric at last in an anxious voice; and, putting spurs to his horse, he dashed forward along the forest track, followed by his companions. Soon the trees began to thin, and in another moment they had left the forest behind, and had entered the well remembered clearing.

Terrible, indeed, was the scene that met their eyes. Where the Saxon homestead had stood, there was nothing but a pile of smoking, blackened ruins, from the midst of which charred beams protruded like the bones of a skeleton. Dotted here and there about the clearing were the bodies of men, some lying as they had died, others burned hideously beyond recognition.

In silence the Saxons moved forward, and examined the poor remains of humanity scattered amongst the ruins. "This is Norman work," cried Cedric, his voice hoarse with rage and grief, pointing to a body at his feet clad in mail of foreign workmanship. "See, one at least of the murderers has paid the penalty of his deeds."

"Master," said Ulf, coming up and laying his hand upon the young man's arm, "I have sought everywhere, and I have found no signs of the Thane Wulfric, or of the Lady Edith. Perchance they yet live somewhere in the forest."

"My father, no!" answered Cedric proudly. "The Thane of Grinstead would lie there," and he pointed to the mound of smoking ruins which had once been his home. "Something tells me he died fighting, Ulf—sword in hand, defending his home to the last. But Edith," and his voice broke, "where is *she*? Have they carried her off? A thousand times rather would I see her dead at my feet than think of her in the hands of the Normans."

At that moment Oswin, who had been scouring round the edge of the clearing, approached, bearing in his hand a long dagger with a richly jewelled hilt. "Young master," he said, "here is a pretty thing which I found lying in the grass. 'Tis a weapon of price, as I should know who have dealt with swords and daggers all my life."

Cedric took the beautiful weapon in his hand, and turned it over, examining the sharp blue steel blade, and the richly ornamented hilt. "'Tis a Norman dagger," he said at last, "but beyond that it tells us nothing. There are no arms, nothing to prove who was the owner. Yet I will keep it. By its quality it belonged to a man of position, and perchance it may lead me to the doers of this dark deed."

He was about to thrust the dagger into his belt, when Wulfnoth, who had approached during the examination, uttered a cry, and, taking the dagger from Cedric, gazed at it eagerly.

"I know this dagger," he declared. "When last I saw it, it hung from the belt of a certain Norman who

sat at meat in the hall of Grinstead, and later repaid Thane Wulfric's hospitality with base treachery."

"De Lacy!" cried Cedric. "Ah! now I understand why a band of Normans travelled so far from Duke William's camp. This is revenge—revenge because his own treachery brought its proper reward. Now be my witnesses, all of you! If we live through the coming battle, this Norman and I, I will seek him out and slay him for this evil deed."

"That is a good oath," said Oswin, "and one which something tells me you will live to fulfil, my master. And now, methinks, one comes who may tell us more of this fell deed than these poor ruins," and he pointed to where a man, with his head and arms swathed in rough bandages, came stumbling towards them across the clearing.

The newcomer proved to be Sweyn, Wulfric's steward. When he reached them, he fell on his knees, and grasping Cedric's hand, raised it to his lips. "'Tis the young master, 'tis the young master," he whimpered. "Now Heaven be praised, we shall be safe, safe!"

Cedric saw that the man was half-crazed with pain and fear, and, drawing away his hand, he spoke gently. "You are safe enough, Sweyn, but tell me, who are 'we'? Is the Lady Edith safe and well?"

"The Lady Edith!" Sweyn glanced fearfully around, whilst Cedric waited his reply with fast-beating heart. "Yes, the Lady Edith is safe," he whispered. "We fought our way through the Normans, and carried her with us, though she wished to stay by her father in

Then the Norman, De Lacy, caught was angry because the Lady Edith had he had meant to carry her away with him. me say where she was hidden ; and when I ot, he tortured me to make me speak. But still s dumb, and last night, by the mercy of Heaven, I aped, and this morning the Normans rode away to the west. Then I must have slept, for 'twas but a moment ago that I awoke to the sound of voices, and saw you standing here." With this, the man burst into tears.

" You have done bravely, Sweyn," answered Cedric, " and I, who now am Thane of Grinstead in my father's place, promise never to forget your faithfulness. Now lead us to the Lady Edith, for we must away again to London with what men are left to me. The King will be expecting me, and I may not even wait to search for my father's body, and give it proper burial."

Cedric found Edith with her women and some ten men, most of whom bore marks of the recent fight, in a secret glen deep-hidden in the forest, five miles from Grinstead. Brother and sister greeted each other affectionately, and from the girl Cedric learned how De Lacy and a party of Norman men-at-arms had surprised the unsuspecting household, as they sat at meat the previous evening.

The Saxons, taken unawares though they were, had offered a desperate resistance. When Wulfric had fallen, the survivors, with Edith in their midst, had fought their way through the ring of foes surrounding the blazing hall, and reached the safety of the forest beyond.

When she had finished, Cedric called the least injured of the Saxons before him, and with Ulf and Wulfnoth sent them in all directions throughout his lands, bidding them summon all men capable of bearing arms to meet him in the glen, the following day.

“I shall leave you here, Edith, with some men to guard you,” he said. “You might seek shelter at the home of one of our neighbours, I know. But until the Normans have been driven from the land, and this De Lacy punished, you are safer in the greenwood where he cannot find you, than under a Saxon roof. When the battle is over, I will return to you if I still live. By that time we shall be either fugitives, or masters once more in our own land.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN AMBUSH.

The next morning Cedric found that over two hundred men had answered his call to arms. They were rudely armed with spears and javelins, in some cases even with nothing better than heavy clubs, or wooden poles with sharpened points, nor were they trained fighters like the housecarls; but one and all were burning with ardour, and clamouring to be led against the enemy who had slain their thane.

Little time was lost in farewells. Leaving ten of his most trusted men to guard Edith, Cedric set off with his following; but, instead of marching directly towards London, he took a route more to the east. All the morning they marched by secret forest tracks, and by

midday had reached a spot where a road, running between high wooded banks, wound its way through the forest.

Here Cedric halted, and caused two great trees to be felled across the road so that the track ahead of them was blocked. He then divided his force into two, placing half his men on either side of the road, with instructions that they were to remain hidden, and were not to make any movement until he sounded his horn. Then, having sent Wulfnoth some distance along the road to the west so that he could give timely warning of the approach of any strangers, he sat down to await whatever the afternoon would bring forth.

Slowly the long, hot hours wore away, and the green, forest track lay silent and deserted, save once when a herd of wild pigs scampered along it, disturbed by the unseen presence on either side. At last, just when Cedric had decided to wait no longer, there came a faint rustle in the undergrowth behind him, and Wulfnoth crept forth.

"They come, master," he whispered.

"Who come?" asked Cedric, eagerly.

"De Lacy and his men," answered Wulfnoth. "Master, when they went west yesterday morning, they must have attacked some other homestead, for they now return with two children and a Saxon lady of noble bearing as prisoners. The road bends so that I have gained upon them by taking a short cut."

"This is the best news I have heard for many a day," returned Cedric. "Cross the road, Wulfnoth,

and bid Ulf and his men be ready to attack, when I sound my horn."

By this time the tramp of horses and the jingle of harness was distinctly audible, and soon the unseen watchers beheld the head of an armed column appear round the bend in the road. First came thirty men-at-arms riding carelessly along with never a thought for possible enemies. Following them came De Lacy, riding beside his prisoners, in whom Cedric recognized the wife and children of a thane who owned lands fifteen miles from Grinstead. Finally, bringing up the rear, came thirty more armed horsemen, riding in the same careless manner.

Slowly the cavalcade advanced along the forest road, all unconscious of the fierce eyes that watched them from bush and thicket. Soon they were abreast of the ambush, and then, for the first time, the advance guard saw the obstacle that blocked the road ahead.

Instantly all was shouting and confusion, whilst De Lacy, furious at the delay, spurred angrily forward. At the same moment the shrill blast of Cedric's horn rose above the hubbub. As though by magic, the banks on either side of the road became alive with men, and a deadly hail of darts and javelins fell upon the closely-packed ranks of the Normans below. Thrice the deadly shower was repeated, whilst cries of rage and terror, and the scream of wounded horses rose from the struggling mass. Then, with loud yells of hate and fury, the Saxons poured down upon the Norman men-at-arms.

Taken by surprise, hemmed in owing to the narrow-

ness of the road, and huddled in a confused mass which prevented them from using their weapons to the best advantage, the Normans offered but a feeble resistance to the impetuous attack of the Saxons. Swords, axes, and spears took their toll of the wretched invaders, whilst others were dragged from their horses, and stabbed to death by their furious enemies.

In five minutes the fight was over. Most of the Normans lay dead upon the ground, whilst those that had managed to force their horses from the struggling mass were galloping panic-stricken back the way they had come, not caring whither they went so long as they escaped from their relentless foes.

All through the brief fight, Cedric had been striving desperately to reach Gilbert de Lacy; and as the Normans turned to flee, he at length came face to face with his enemy.

"At last!" he cried, springing in front of the Norman. Then, as De Lacy strove to ride over him, and follow his retreating men, Cedric sprang lightly to one side, and delivered a heavy blow with his axe which struck the Norman on his shield. "Turn and fight, Gilbert de Lacy!" he taunted. "Or is it true that you war only against women, and surprised and defenceless men?"

Mad with rage at the disaster which had befallen him, and seeing himself surrounded on three sides by armed enemies, whilst on the fourth the fallen trees barred escape, De Lacy turned furiously to bay. With his long sword he aimed a sweeping blow at Cedric;

missing, he again essayed to ride him down. But Cedric easily evaded the trampling hoofs of the great war-horse, and circling warily on his toes, he waited, with axe swung aloft, the moment to strike.

Suddenly he espied the opening he sought; and, rushing in, he dealt a terrific blow at his adversary's head. But De Lacy, skilled in war, turned the blow with his shield, and made a deadly thrust which missed Cedric by a hair's breadth.

Then followed a fierce exchange of blows, in which victory now inclined towards the horseman, now towards the man on foot. Soon both men were bleeding from wounds. Again and again De Lacy tried to ride Cedric down; but the young Saxon always leapt clear of the clumsy war-horse, and retaliated with crushing blows of his heavy axe, which De Lacy warded off only with the greatest difficulty.

At length, taking advantage of a momentary opening, Cedric rushed in, and dealt such a mighty blow that he beat down his opponent's guard, and his axe, descending upon De Lacy's helm, caused the Norman to reel in his saddle. Shouts of encouragement came from the onlookers. "In! In!" they yelled. Seeing his advantage, Cedric swung his axe aloft again, with a cry of fierce joy, and was about to deal the death-blow, when one of his feet caught in a root, and he stumbled forward.

With a snarl of triumph De Lacy swung up his long sword, and, ere Cedric could heed the shout of warning which rose from the ranks of his followers, and raise his guard, the gleaming blade had descended full upon his



‘One of his feet caught in a root, and he stumbled forward.’—Page 77.

steel cap, and had laid him stunned upon the ground. His opponent thus disposed of, De Lacy drove spurs into his horse's flanks ; and before any of the Saxons could stop him, he had leapt his steed over the felled trees, and was galloping down the road, followed by a hissing shower of javelins.

When he opened his eyes, Cedric found himself lying on the grass beneath a large tree, his head resting in the lap of the Saxon lady, whilst Ulf, kneeling by his side, bathed his face and forehead with cold water.

"Heaven be praised !" cried Ulf, when he saw that Cedric had recovered consciousness. "When I saw you go down beneath that blow, I never expected to see you rise again. As it is, master, thanks to the good steel cap, you have come to little harm. Your other wounds are nothing, and will soon be healed."

Cedric slowly raised himself, holding his aching head in his hands. Then, as memory returned, he sat straight up, crying, "Where is De Lacy ?"

"Gone," replied Ulf. "After he had struck you down, he leapt his horse over the barrier, and was off before we could stop him."

Cedric groaned aloud. "Had it not been for that root, my slaughtered father had now been avenged, for I had the villain at my mercy. Now the chance has gone, and who knows when we may meet again ?"

"You speak of your slaughtered father. Tell me not that Wulfric of Grinstead is dead !" exclaimed the lady.

"Alas ! 'tis indeed so, Lady Hilda," replied Cedric,

"slain by the very man who but now escaped me. But how came you and your children in his hands?"

"'Tis your own story over again," answered the woman fiercely. "Yesterday they came upon us by surprise; and, having slain my husband and all who opposed them, they spent the night in the home they had made desolate. Then this morning they set fire to the house, and, taking me and my children with them as prisoners, started back to the camp of the Norman Duke. I know not what was in the mind of this De Lacy; but maybe he thought that, with me and my children in his power, he could lay claim to our lands, if this invasion prospered."

For some moments Cedric sat deep in thought. "Lady," he said at last, "I must away to London, where the King expects me with my levies; but be sure that I shall not forget De Lacy, or the wrongs you and I have suffered at his hands. In the day of battle I will seek him out, and I pray that we may meet, and that this matter may be settled once and for all. Now, Lady, I propose that you and your children go where my sister Edith lies in hiding. Horses there are in plenty to carry you, and three of my most trusted men shall act as your guides. With Edith you will be safe until I return, which I have promised to do, should I survive the battle. Then, according to the event, we must order our doings."

"I accept your offer, Cedric of Grinstead," replied the Lady Hilda, and ten minutes later the two parties had started on their separate ways—Cedric and his men

towards London, and the rescued prisoners with their guides to Edith's hiding place.

Cedric with his followers spent that night in the forest. All the next day and the next they travelled, and by the following noon they entered London. There Cedric found that King Harold had already arrived, and was busily gathering the army of the south around him.

CHAPTER IX.

HASTINGS.

As soon as he had settled his men in the quarters assigned to them, Cedric made his way to Westminster Palace, and was immediately shown into the presence of the King, whom he found alone with his brothers, Gurth and Leofwine.

"Welcome, Cedric!" was the King's greeting, as he entered the room. "Bring you any fresh news of the invaders?"

"Only that they are ravaging the land in all directions, my Lord," he replied, and then briefly told the story of his sad homecoming, and the fierce fight in the forest.

As he proceeded, the King's face clouded over. "By the Rood!" he cried, "but this shall cease, nor will I tarry here a moment longer than is necessary to gather the army of the south about me. If Edwin and Morcar come, they will be welcome, but I shall not wait for them."

"I thought they promised to follow with all speed, my Lord," put in Cedric.

"So indeed they promised, but I fear they are but lukewarm in our cause. They see not that the freedom of all England is at stake. They think this is simply a quarrel between Duke William and me ; and they believe that no matter who reigns here in London, William or Harold, they will be equally secure in their Earldoms in the north. But enough of this ! Cedric, you are now Thane of Grinstead ; and, if you are ready, it would please me to receive your oath of fealty, and to confirm you in possession of your lands, before we march to meet the Normans."

"Indeed, my Lord, I had hoped to hear you speak thus," replied Cedric ; and then and there, in the presence of the King's brothers and a royal scribe, he swore to be the King's true liegeman, and in return received the golden chain which was the sign of his new rank of thane.

When the ceremony was over, the Earls Gurth and Leofwine congratulated Cedric, and talked to him whilst the King spoke apart with the scribe. Then, as Cedric approached to take his leave, the King dismissed the scribe, and, seating himself in a chair, waved the others to the stools which stood around.

"I would have your counsel, Cedric, on a certain point," he said. "My brothers here are wishful that I should not march with the army. They say that if I lose my life the cause of England is lost with it ; and they would have me remain in London, and gather together a second army, whilst they march south with

what men we have, to meet the Normans. Now, Cedric, you are shrewder by far than many men twice or thrice your age, so I bid you give me your true opinion on this matter."

Cedric sat for some moments in deep thought before he spoke. "My Lord King, there is much truth in what the Earls Gurth and Leofwine say, and to hazard all on one battle seems to me bad policy. Yet methinks that if you stay behind it will take the heart out of your men, who know nothing of policy, and reck only of deeds. Therefore, my Lord, judging the matter solely as it affects the welfare of England, my counsel is this. Do you accompany the army south, and strive in one battle to destroy the invader. But, in case you should be defeated, let one of your brothers remain behind to gather a second army for your support."

"Here is indeed a wise counsellor," began Harold, when a page entered, and whispered in his ear.

"Let him be brought hither," ordered the King, his face clouding over. "'Tis another envoy from Duke William," he explained. "Nay, sit down, Cedric. This is no secret matter, so wait and hear what this messenger has to say."

A few moments later a Norman knight of tall and haughty aspect was shown into the room, and, having saluted the King, addressed him thus—

"Harold, son of Godwine, my master, Duke William of Normandy, again calls upon you to perform the oath you swore upon the holy relics at Avranches, and surrender unto him the crown of England. If you do so, he

promises you all Northumberland for your own, and to your brother, the Earl Gurth, he promises the earldom of Wessex."

"Sir Knight," replied Harold, "return to your Duke, and tell him that I cannot fulfil the oath he so unworthily tricked from me; for the crown of England is not mine to give, as, indeed, he well knows."

"Expecting such an answer, my master bade me make you yet other offers," continued the Norman. "Firstly, he suggests that the matter should be placed before the Holy Pope in Rome, and that he should decide between you who has the better right to be King. Secondly, he says that it is a pity a great battle should be fought, for in such a battle many men must lose their lives in a quarrel which is between you and him. Therefore, in his kindness of heart, he suggests that you and he should decide the matter by single combat."

"I have listened to you patiently, Sir Knight," replied Harold, when the Norman ceased speaking, "but I ask you, what sort of judgment should I get from a Pope who has already blessed your master's cause, and sent him a banner? Duke William must think poorly of me to suggest such a course, and besides, the crown of England can no more be given away by the Pope than it can by me.

"As for the challenge, that also I decline. This quarrel is not between me and your Duke, it is between England and Normandy. England chose me to wear the crown which your Duke now comes in force to take away. Therefore it is with England he must deal. Even

did we meet, and one of us kill the other, what would be the gain, except that afterwards one side would fight without its natural leader? Now return with these my answers, and tell your Duke that I hope to meet him in the hour of battle." So saying, he waved his hand; and, without another word, the Norman messenger withdrew.

"You see how this Duke tries to trap me, and to place himself in the right," said Harold, turning to his brothers and Cedric. "Now, more than ever, I am minded not to wait for the army of the north. Two days hence we march; so get you gone, my friends, and make ready."

There followed two days of feverish preparations—two days in which the clanging of hammers never ceased throughout the great city, as the armourers worked day and night fashioning weapons and coats of mail—two days which saw a constant stream of armed men coming in from all directions to swell Harold's army.

At last, on October 11th, a fortnight after the Battle of Stamford Bridge, Harold set out from London to meet the invader. The army consisted of his own housecarls, and the housecarls of thanes, such as Wulfric of Grinstead, who had been patriotic enough to maintain a permanent armed force. Added to these there was a great body of armed levies, the tenants of the southern thanes, and the entire force of Kent and the City of London, armed and disciplined like the housecarls, and claiming as their right the front line of the battle, and the defence of the royal standard. Harold and both his

brothers accompanied the army; for the King had decided to stake all on a single battle, being confident in the ability of his famous housecarls to break the Norman attack, as they had broken the Norwegian defence at Stamford Bridge.

"I take shame that I am of the north country," declared Oswin, as he rode beside Cedric. "I thought that, at any rate, the Earls Edwin and Morcar would keep their solemn promise, and advance to Harold's aid, after the way he fought for them at Stamford Bridge. But now I perceive that they are traitors, and I doubt not they await to see the result of the battle we are going to fight. If Harold wins, they will say they could not arrive in time. If the Norman is victorious, they will hasten to make their peace, pointing out how they forbore to bear arms against him."

"I fear you speak truth," agreed Cedric moodily.

Swiftly the army marched through Kent and Sussex, and on the afternoon of the second day after leaving London it reached the hill of Senlac, where the town of Battle now stands. It was a wild and lonely spot, the southernmost spur of the northern Sussex hills. There Harold pitched his camp, and prepared to withstand the invader.

Harold shared with Duke William the prestige of being one of the greatest captains of the age, and he fully realized that in the coming battle he must employ tactics different from those used at Stamford Bridge. At the Battle of Stamford Bridge both armies had fought on foot, and the superior endurance and prowess of the

English housecarls had enabled them to break the Norsemen, and drive them from the field. But at Senlac Harold was faced with an army which relied chiefly on its horsemen for victory ; and the Saxon King well knew that, to win the day, he must wait for the Norman cavalry to attack him, and then depend upon his housecarls to stand firm and unbroken until the Normans had wasted their strength in fruitless assaults.

So, having reached Senlac, Harold halted his army on the summit of the ridge, in the very centre of which the royal standard was planted. He then ordered the position to be fortified ; and, for the rest of the day, the English laboured at cutting down trees, and building a palisade, behind which Harold intended his men to take their stand, and await the attack of the Norman horsemen.

Meanwhile news of the approach of the English army had reached the Normans at Hastings, and Duke William, as eager to fight as Harold, prepared for battle on the morrow.

That night both armies rested so as to be fresh for the next day's fray. As soon as day broke, Duke William marshalled his army, and set out to march the seven miles which lay between Hastings and the English position.

The English were also early astir ; and as the advance-guard of the Normans came in sight, the Saxons formed up behind their palisades. In the centre, gathered round the old Wessex standard of the Golden Dragon, and the King's personal banner, on which figured a fighting man, were the heavily armed house-

carls and the men of Kent and London. This body of troops was the flower of the English army, and Harold depended upon it for victory. On either flank were the shire levies, equally brave, but without the arms or discipline of the housecarls.

When the English were all in their places, King Harold spoke to them. He told them that Duke William had crossed the sea to conquer them, and take away their land. Then he instructed them how they were to fight. They were to stand firm, and no man was to leave the ranks until he gave the order. "Let the enemy waste their strength on attacking you," he told them. "So long as you stand firm, and keep your ranks unbroken, they are sure to suffer defeat." After that, Harold took his place on foot beneath the standards; and there, with Gurth and Leofwine and many of his thanes, he awaited the coming of the foe.

By this time the Normans were advancing to the attack. In front came the archers, whose flights of arrows it was hoped would throw the English into confusion, and so enable the heavily armed foot, who followed, to force an entrance through the palisade. Lastly came the great body of Norman horsemen, led by Duke William himself.

It was now about nine o'clock. As the Normans approached, the archers in the front rank opened the battle with showers of arrows, without, however, any visible effect upon the solid line of the English. The archers then fell back, and the heavily armed foot-soldiers advanced up the hill. Leading them came a

minstrel named Taillefer, who spurred on ahead, singing and tossing his sword into the air, and catching it as it fell. Right up to the palisade he rode, and slew two men with his lance and sword ere he was himself struck down. Then the tide of advancing Normans flowed over him, and the battle commenced in earnest.

A shower of javelins and stones greeted the Normans, doing tremendous execution in their closely packed ranks ; but, undeterred by their losses, they pressed forward, and engaged the defenders of the palisade hand to hand.

Now there began a terrible contest. Shouting their war-cry, " God help us," the Normans strove to hew their way with sword and spear through the palisade, and the solid ranks of the defenders behind. The English, on the other hand, encouraged each other with shouts of " God Almighty," and " Holy Cross ; " and as their heavy axes cut down all who dared approach within striking distance of the palisade, the housecarls accompanied their blows with cries of " Out ! Out ! "

For a long time the struggle continued, both sides fighting with dogged courage. Yet, try how they would, the Normans could make no impression on the English line, and at last, broken and demoralized, they fell back, leaving hundreds of dead upon the field.

Seeing his infantry defeated, Duke William now placed himself at the head of his armour-clad horsemen, and, charging upon the English, strove to burst a way by sheer weight through the lines of the defenders. But again Norman dash and valour were of no avail against



‘A minstrel named Taillefer, spurred on ahead, tossing his sword into the air.’—Page 89.

the stubborn courage of the English. The great battle-axes swung by Harold and his housecarls struck down man and horse with a single blow, and at length Duke William and his horsemen fell sullenly back, followed by shouts of triumph from the victorious Saxons.

Now, indeed, the Saxons were sorely tempted to break their lines, and charge down upon a foe already half defeated. But Harold had commanded that no man was to leave the ranks and follow until he himself gave the order ; and so the housecarls stood firm, whilst they watched their enemies fall slowly back.

On the right of the English position, however, the less disciplined levies, having defeated a force of Breton men-at-arms, forgot Harold's orders ; and, seeing their enemies in full retreat, they broke their lines, and charged down upon the Bretons with cries of exultation. Already demoralized, the Bretons broke altogether before this impetuous attack, and, retreating on the horsemen under Duke William, communicated their panic to the Norman soldiers, so that in a few minutes the whole army was in full retreat. At the same time a cry arose that the Duke was dead.

It seemed, indeed, as though the English had won. But at this moment Duke William, who was not even wounded, proved his greatness as a general. Flinging away his helmet, he rode bareheaded amongst his panic-stricken soldiers, crying out to them to look upon him and see that he was not dead, taunting them with cowardice, and asking if they were going to fly when victory was almost theirs.

At last the panic was allayed, and order restored. The flying Bretons, turning upon their pursuers, drove them back up the hill, and once more the whole of the Norman army advanced to the attack.

Hour after hour dragged slowly by, and still the fight continued. By this time the palisade had been destroyed in many places, but the lines of the defenders still remained unbroken, despite the desperate valour of Duke William and his knights. Again and again the Duke strove to force his way towards the royal standard, and engage King Harold in personal combat. Once indeed he approached so near that Earl Gurth flung a spear at him. The spear missed William, but killed his horse ; and William, pressing forward on foot, slew Gurth with his own hand, whilst almost at the same moment the King's other brother, Leofwine, also fell beneath a Norman sword.

Undaunted by the fall of two of their leaders, the English still maintained their stubborn defence. Three times that day William's horse was killed under him. Three times he mounted fresh steeds, and spurred again to the attack. Yet, as hour followed hour, and the English front remained unbroken, William perceived that victory was slipping from him. If his men retreated now, not even *he* would be able to rally them. In this crisis of the battle, William bethought himself of what had happened earlier in the day, when the Bretons had retreated, and decided to try and entice the English again from their position.

He accordingly dispatched a messenger to the

Bretons, bidding them turn and flee. If the English followed them, they were told to lead their pursuers some distance from their lines by a feigned retreat, and then to turn and fall upon them.

The Bretons did as they were commanded, and again the undisciplined levies broke their lines, and started in pursuit, thinking that their enemies were at last in full flight. But they had not followed far before the Bretons turned and assailed them with such vigour that the English were forced to retreat. Some took refuge on a small hill, whilst others defended themselves on the steep bank of a ravine, where, with showers of darts and stones, they beat off all who assailed them.

The damage had been done, however, and no gallantry in other parts of the field could repair the gap in the English line where the levies had broken away. Into this gap poured the Norman cavalry, and, for the first time that day, the invaders obtained a footing on the summit of the hill, and were able to assail the defenders on equal terms.

But for a long time yet the shield-wall of the English remained unbroken. In vain did Duke William lead his cavalry in desperate charges upon that solid front. The English still fought on with stubborn valour, and might even yet have made good their ground, until night brought an end to the contest, had not William ordered up his archers, and commanded them to shoot flights of arrows high into the air.

Dreadful, indeed, was the effect of this rain of steel upon the diminishing numbers of the defenders. The

arrows pierced through shields and steel helmets, and one, striking Harold in the eye, laid the noble King dead at the foot of his standard, just as night began to fall upon the terrible scene.

The fall of their King stifled the last hopes of victory the English may have had. Yet even then no thought of retreat entered the minds of the housecarls. Stubbornly they still fought on—no man asking for quarter—until at last the Normans burst through the few survivors, and swept towards the standards.

The battle was over. Norman courage and cunning had proved more than a match for English courage alone. In the brief time of daylight that remained the Norman cavalry pursued the flying English, but the darkness befriended the vanquished, and large numbers of the shire levies succeeded in making their escape. Of the housecarls and the men of London and Kent few, if any, left the field alive. Each man of those famous fighters had fallen where he had stood, none giving ground, none thinking to flee.

Throughout the long fight Cedric had borne himself valiantly. Guarded by Oswin on one side and Ulf on the other, he had come unscathed through the battle; and when at last the Normans burst through the ring of the defenders round the standard, the three companions were still unhurt.

“’Tis all over, master,” cried Ulf, cutting down a huge Norman. Then, as the enemy bore down upon the last of the defenders, a lance penetrated Cedric’s coat of mail, and pierced him in the side. Desperately

wounded, Cedric would have fallen, had not the brawny Oswin caught him, and flung him across his shoulder. Then, crying to Ulf to guard his back, the smith essayed to bear the young thane from the field.

How they did it they never knew. Perhaps the last struggle round the standards attracted the attention of their enemies, or the swiftly falling darkness may have hidden them. However it came about, Oswin and Ulf, with their sorely stricken burden, did at last find themselves clear of the fight, and with the scene of the battle behind them. Riderless horses there were in plenty; and, having caught two, Oswin and Ulf mounted and rode off with Cedric through the darkness.

That night Duke William pitched his tent on the hill of Senlac. In times to come he built a stately abbey on the fatal hill, and the high altar was placed on the very spot where the standards of the Golden Dragon and the Fighting Man had flown all through the long and terrible day.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

That night Oswin and Ulf rested in the forest of the Weald, and with rough surgery dressed Cedric's wound. The next day and the two following they travelled by devious forest paths, and on the evening of the third day they reached the ravine where Edith lay in hiding. Tidings of the defeat at Hastings had preceded them by

other fugitives, and they found the Saxon girl waiting in an agony of suspense for news of her brother.

Then followed days and weeks in which Cedric battled for life in a tiny forest hut, upon a bed of leaves and heather. More than once his friends despaired of his life, but a strong constitution, and the devoted nursing of Edith and the Lady Hilda at last pulled him round. Then, though weak as a child, he began to take interest in the world about him.

It was a world greatly changed from that which he had last known. News of the doings of the Conqueror had reached the fugitives from time to time; and as Cedric grew stronger, he eagerly listened to all that his companions could tell him.

He learned how William had marched from Hastings to Dover, which had surrendered without a blow. Next Canterbury had submitted, and from there the Conqueror had advanced on London. But London had barred its gates against the invader, and had proceeded to elect a new King in Harold's place. The choice had lain between Edgar the Atheling, the last descendant of the old Saxon kings, and one of the northern Earls, Edwin and Morcar, who had arrived with the army of the north after Harold had marched against the Normans. Edgar had been elected, and Edwin and Morcar had returned to their Earldoms in anger, taking the army of the north with them.

But Edgar was never crowned. Left at the mercy of the invader by the one armed force in England powerful enough to offer battle, London had perforce submitted

to the Conqueror. William had thereupon built a strong fortress in the centre of the city to overawe the turbulent inhabitants, and on Christmas Day, 1066, he had been crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey. Soon after came the news that Edwin and Morcar had journeyed south again, and had taken the oath of allegiance to the new King, and that many other wealthy Saxons, hoping to save their lands, were doing likewise.

This last piece of news stirred Cedric to anger. "The cowards!" he cried. "Sooner would I be a fugitive all my life than seek peace by such ignoble means."

Slowly the winter passed away, and the fugitives, who had often suffered from cold and hunger, saw the coming of spring with thankfulness. With it also there came news that the Normans were building castles all over the land to hold the inhabitants in check, and later that William had returned to Normandy for a while, leaving England to be governed by his brother Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, and William Fitz-Osbern, the former of whom he had created Earl of Kent, and the latter Earl of Hereford.

By this time Cedric had fully recovered from his wound, and was anxiously deliberating with his companions whether he should rebuild Grinstead. "So far the Normans have left us undisturbed," he said, "and it may be that these forest lands hold no attraction for them, and that they will let us bide here in peace. On the other hand, it is possible that if we rebuild Grin-

stead, news of our doings may reach Norman ears, and bring about the very thing we wish to avoid. What think you, Lady Hilda, and you, Edith, and you my friends, Ulf and Oswin ? ”

But his companions were silent. Indeed, what *could* they say when, from beyond the forest, there daily came news of fresh outrages upon the Saxon owners of the land—some family turned adrift, some thane slain under his own roof-tree to make room for the greedy conquerors ?

At last Edith broke the silence. “ Has anyone heard aught of Gilbert de Lacy ? ” she asked, and her hearers shook their heads, knowing full well the reason for her question. If Gilbert de Lacy lived, sooner or later he would come to Grinstead to complete the fell work he had begun months before.

Strangely enough, the next day brought an answer to Edith’s question. Wulfnoth had been out hunting, and with night he returned bearing strange news.

“ The Normans are at Grinstead,” he said, relating his news to Cedric, Ulf, and Oswin, who were seated round a crackling fire which cast a ruddy glow across the narrow glen. “ I met Ernulf, and he told me they had been there a week already, and with my own eyes I have seen them. They are De Lacy’s men, and with them they have masons and master-builders who have already begun to build a castle. Moreover, master, they have been asking if you were slain at Hastings, and also for news of the Lady Edith. They are trying to find out where she is hiding.”

"This is ill news!" said Cedric. "De Lacy is the evil fate of my family. I see well what he has done. He has begged my lands from his master, William—it is all part of his revenge and hate—and now he wishes to know if Edith and I still live. Should he learn the truth, and we fall into his hands, he will kill me, and make Edith his wife, thinking thereby to make his claim on Grinstead doubly sure."

"You speak truth, master," growled Oswin, "and we shall do well to leave this place, and seek shelter elsewhere before we are discovered."

"So think I," agreed Cedric, "though I am loath to leave Grinstead to De Lacy without a blow. Yet if I were to call my Saxons together, and drive De Lacy away, the Normans would soon return in greater numbers, and wreak vengeance on those who helped me."

For some moments there was silence, as the four men sat thinking. Then Cedric spoke again.

"Hearken, my friends, I have a plan. You remember the outlaw Osgot whom we rescued from drowning in the swamp below the Wash, and how he offered us a home amongst his fens, did we ever stand in need of such a refuge. Methinks the time has come to take him at his word. In that fen country the women will be safe, and then we men shall be free to harass the invader; for I cannot believe that all resistance has yet died down in England."

Oswin and Ulf both thought well of Cedric's plan, and as the danger was pressing, and there was no know-

ing how soon De Lacy might learn of their whereabouts, it was decided to start that very night. Accordingly Edith and the Lady Hilda were bidden to make ready, and within an hour a little party consisting of four men, two women, and two children stole forth from the ravine, and set off through the forest.

They were clad in rags, and the men carried their weapons concealed beneath their cloaks; for to be a Saxon in those days, and to be found bearing arms, or clad in rich raiment, was to court death or spoliation. All night they travelled by dark ways known only to Cedric and Ulf, and with the dawn they sought shelter in a little dell at the edge of the forest, and within sight of a rough highway. There they rested till noon, the men taking turns to keep watch, and then they started forward again.

They met but few wayfarers, and these seemed as furtive as themselves, and passed them by with scarcely a look. The country wore a deserted and forbidding aspect. The fields were uncultivated. Here and there they saw a pile of charred and blackened ruins where once had stood a Saxon homestead. Towards evening they passed a spreading oak tree, from the branches of which dangled the poor remains of five men, a sight which made the women hide their eyes, and the men swear great oaths of vengeance upon their cruel conquerors.

At nightfall they came to a wayside inn. It was a mean place, dark and filthy; but the fugitives could not afford to be particular, and they sought shelter

within, giving out that they were strolling players. The food was poor and scanty, but hunger made them eat; having finished, they rolled themselves in their cloaks and lay down on the floor to sleep. But hardly had they composed themselves to rest than there came a jingling of harness outside the inn, followed by a peremptory rap on the door, and a loud demand for entry.

Hastily the trembling innkeeper unbarred the door, disclosing a Norman knight and a number of men-at-arms who clanked into the inn, loudly demanding food and drink.

"Out of my way, Saxon curs!" cried the knight, spurning the figures upon the floor; and Cedric, furious at the insult, was about to answer with a blow, when Ulf and Edith caught hold of his arms, and drew him into the corner farthest from the newcomers.

"Silence, as you value our lives!" muttered Ulf. And then, as the Norman roughly inquired who they were, he answered, "We are strolling players, Lord, on our way to Guildford."

"Strolling players, are you?" growled the Norman. "Never saw I people less like strolling players. However, let be; when I have eaten, you shall prove your words."

Whilst the Normans ate and drank, the fugitives spoke together in low whispers. Immediate escape was their only hope; for their imposture would be discovered if they once started to perform. Luckily they were near the door, which, in his alarm, the landlord had left unbarred. In a hurried whisper, Cedric bade Ulf and

Wulfnoth aid the women and children to escape, whilst he and Oswin held the Normans in check.

"Seek refuge with Osgot in the fens as quickly as you may," he whispered. "Oswin and I will follow; but do not you tarry, lest aught befall us."

"I will not go without you," declared Edith, when the plan was made known to her; but Cedric sternly commanded that she should, pointing out that therein lay the only chance of escape for any of them.

Meanwhile the Normans were busily engaged satisfying their hunger, and paid little attention to the Saxons, as they slowly edged their way towards the entrance. But suddenly the Norman knight looked up, and in the same moment Ulf leapt for the door, and tore it open. In another second the women and children had disappeared into the darkness without, followed by Ulf and Wulfnoth, whilst the astonished Normans found their way barred by Cedric and Oswin.

Instantly all was confusion. Stools were tossed to one side, the table was overturned, and with loud oaths the Normans drew their swords, and sprang to overtake the fugitives.

But the grim aspect of Cedric and Oswin, their great axes swung aloft, made them hesitate. "Down with the Saxon dogs!" cried their leader, springing forward. The next moment he lay dead upon the floor, cleft to the chin by a terrible blow from Cedric's heavy axe.

Furious at the fate of their leader, the men-at-arms rushed at the two Saxons, and a savage fight began.



• The Normans drew their swords, and sprang to overtake the fugitives. —Page 102.

Again and again, Cedric and Oswin cleared the space in front of them with sweeping blows of their axes. Three of the Normans were down, and, though wounded, the Saxons seemed likely to make good their defence—in spite of the dim light in which they fought, and the heavy odds against them—when one of their opponents flung a heavy stool at their feet. The clumsy object rolled between Oswin's legs, causing him to trip, and lose his balance, and before he could recover himself, a Norman sword had descended upon his steel cap, stretching him apparently lifeless upon the ground.

Now Cedric was hard put to it to defend himself. Standing over his friend, he fought with the courage of desperation, and so great was his strength and skill that at length the Normans drew back, and no longer dared approach within reach of that ruddy axe.

Leaning upon his weapon, Cedric taunted them to come on, whilst the Normans spoke together in whispers. Presently two of their number stole away towards the back of the inn, whilst the remainder again attacked Cedric, though taking good care to keep beyond reach of his deadly weapon. But Cedric had seen the departure of the two men-at-arms; and, knowing well that their companions but played for time until they arrived to take him in the rear, he determined to make a desperate effort to escape. Springing forward, he attacked his enemies with such fury that they fled before him. Then, stooping down, he picked up the inert body of Oswin, and, flinging it across his shoulder, made for the door.

But fortune was against him. The same stool which

had proved the downfall of Oswin lay in Cedric's path, unseen in the dim light. Two steps Cedric took with his heavy burden ; then he stepped upon the stool and, staggering forward, fell. Frantically he strove to rise, but the dead weight of Oswin held him down. The next moment a heavy blow fell upon his head, and all went dark.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SIEGE OF DOVER.

"The dog wears a golden chain round his neck. What shall we do with him ? "

"Stick a knife into him, and divide the chain."

"Nay, let be," growled a third voice. "That chain proclaims him a man of rank, and I am minded of some words I heard passing between our master, who lies there with a cloven skull, and the Lord de Lacy. They were about a certain Cedric of Grinstead whom the Lord de Lacy wanted to lay hands on, and now that I think of it the youth there might be the very man."

"What if he is ? " asked another.

"Reward, you fool ! The Lord de Lacy will give us the worth of many gold chains for Cedric of Grinstead delivered alive into his hands."

Dimly Cedric heard the words, as he drifted back to consciousness. Then he felt rough hands bandaging his head. Afterwards his legs and arms were bound, and a feeling of great weariness stole over him, so that presently he sank into a deep, dreamless sleep.

When he awoke it was daylight, and he saw that his captors were already astir, breakfasting off the remains of last night's supper. They were soon finished, and one of them, crossing to where Cedric lay, cut his bonds, and pulled him roughly to his feet.

"Your name, dog?" he asked, but Cedric took no notice, and began to rub some of the stiffness from his limbs.

With a savage oath the soldier raised his hand to strike Cedric, when a grizzled man-at-arms interposed. "Let be," he commanded. "If he is the man I think, De Lacy will know. If not, there are trees in plenty to hang him from in the forest. Now to horse!"

Five minutes later the Normans were on their way, with Cedric riding bound in their midst. Of Oswin there was no sign, and Cedric sadly concluded that he was dead. But neither was there sign of Edith, and the thought that she and those with her had escaped cheered him greatly.

All that morning they rode, and with the afternoon they entered the familiar woods of Grinstead. As they proceeded along the forest road, Cedric became conscious of an unusual stir around them. Once they passed a long train of wagons laden with blocks of stone, and as they neared Grinstead, the ringing of axes and the crash of falling trees sounded from all directions.

At last they entered the clearing, and, after halting his men, the leader rode away, leaving Cedric to gaze about him with angry eyes. Men swarmed everywhere, the great majority being Saxons who worked sullenly

under the watchful eyes of Norman men-at-arms. Some were engaged in widening and deepening the ditch. Others roughly trimmed the trunks of felled trees, which were then fixed upright in the ground, forming a stout wooden palisade. From the summit of the knoll the pile of blackened ruins had disappeared, and in their place a small army of masons was rapidly raising the thick walls of a square stone tower.

The leader of the party which had brought Cedric was not gone long, and on his return ordered two of his men to bring Cedric, and follow him. "This is the Saxon, my Lord," he said, halting in front of a large tent before which stood a tall man richly apparelled; and Cedric, meeting the man's eyes, found himself gazing into the hateful, smiling face of Gilbert de Lacy.

"So again we meet, Cedric of Grinstead!" sneered De Lacy. "Indeed, I am glad you survived the battle, for I have a heavy score to pay."

"Not so heavy as the score I have to settle with you, Gilbert de Lacy," answered Cedric fearlessly. "Coward that strikes in the dark the hand that feeds him, slayer of unsuspecting men!"

"Dog!" hissed De Lacy, his face contorted with passion; and, stepping forward, he struck Cedric a savage blow across the mouth. "That for your insolence, Saxon cur," he snarled. "Now tell me what has become of your sister, and those others who escaped last night."

"Sooner would I tell the wolves, or deliver the Lady Edith to a hungry bear, than tell you whither she



“So again we meet, Cedric of Grinstead!”—Page 107.

has gone," answered Cedric boldly. "Rest assured, base Norman, it is where you will never find her."

"So!" And now De Lacy's voice was icy cold. "Fool! I know of ways that will make even the dumb talk. Away with him. Put him in the dungeon beneath the new tower;" and, turning on his heel, he disappeared into his tent.

The dungeon into which Cedric was thrown had but recently been completed. It was still damp, and the mortar between the rough-hewn stones had scarcely hardened. A tiny, barred opening high above Cedric's head was the only inlet for light and air, a truss of straw the only furniture of his prison.

A week passed, two weeks, and Cedric began to lose count of the days. No one came near him except his jailer, who twice a day brought him a platter of coarse food and a pitcher of water. Of his enemy, Gilbert de Lacy, he saw and heard nothing. Escape was impossible, for a stout iron chain, one end firmly embedded in the wall, encircled his body. When he sought information from his jailer, a surly silence met his every question.

Six weeks passed, and Cedric was becoming weak from confinement and lack of exercise. Of rescue he had lost all hope; for who was there to know of his whereabouts, or, even if aware of them, was strong enough to break into his prison, and set him free?

At last, one evening, when he had been a prisoner for over two months, the jailer for the first time broke his sullen silence. "The Lord de Lacy has been away

to London," he said, "but to-morrow he returns, and then the sport will begin. Eat well, Saxon, for unless you tell my Lord that which he wishes to know, you will have no appetite for food to-morrow." And he laughed coarsely.

Cedric deigned no reply, and to make him speak the jailer kicked him savagely with his heavy boot. But still Cedric kept silent, his eyes fixed intently on the door of the cell, which was being slowly and stealthily pushed open from without.

What was about to happen ? Cedric turned to the jailer, fearful lest the man should detect the excitement in his face. But something, the tense look in Cedric's eyes, perhaps, had roused the man's suspicions, and he turned swiftly on his heel, just as a dark form slipped into the cell.

The jailer opened his mouth to shout, but the new-comer, springing forward, locked his hands round the jailer's throat, stifling his cry for help. Backwards and forwards reeled the struggling men, the jailer battering his opponent with his fists, whilst the stranger, his head sunk low between his arms to avoid the hail of blows, grimly maintained his hold upon the other's throat.

Round and round the cell they fought, but gradually the jailer's struggles grew weaker, and at last the combatants fell crashing to the ground. For a few moments they rolled over and over ; then the figure of the jailer suddenly relaxed, and the stranger, loosening his hold, plucked the bunch of keys from the dead man's belt, and rose stiffly to his feet.

"Quick, master!" he gasped. "The men are at meat, and we may escape without being observed."

"Oswin, how come you here?" cried Cedric in amazement. But the burly smith signed to him to be silent, and, having unfastened the chain from around Cedric's body, led the way out of the cell, locking the door behind him. Up a flight of stone steps they went, and past a door whence came the voices of many men. The next moment Cedric felt a breath of fresh air on his face, and found that Oswin had opened a small postern which led into the courtyard without.

"This way, master!" whispered Oswin, keeping in the shadow of the tower. Luckily for the Saxons the night was dark, and the watchmen on the tower and over the gateway saw nothing of the two silent figures that crept towards a corner of the palisade where the shadow lay deepest. Here Oswin had already fixed a rope to the top of the palisade, and swarming up, he helped Cedric to mount, and then lowered him on to the bank of earth which lay between the palisade and the moat.

"Now we must swim," whispered Oswin. "Hang on to me, young master—for I doubt not you are weak—and I will bear you safely across."

Across the moat the fugitives were beyond immediate danger, and, thanks to the darkness, they reached the shelter of the surrounding trees without being observed. There Cedric found that Oswin had two horses awaiting them; these they mounted, and rode away through the dark forest.

"Thanks, friend!" said Cedric, grasping Oswin's hand. "I thought they had killed you in the fight at the inn, and rejoiced am I to see you alive."

Oswin chuckled. "It takes more than a crack on the head to kill me, master. My steel cap broke the blow; and when I came to, I found myself lying in a ditch outside the inn. The fools had taken me for dead, and had cast me out. The next morning I followed you to Grinstead, and sought work under the Normans as a smith. Many times I have tried to reach you, but in vain until this evening. Now, master, speak no more for the forest is full of masterless men, and who knows who may hear?"

All night they rode, and with the morning Cedric was reeling in his saddle with fatigue. That day they hid in a secluded dell, but with darkness they again set forth, and at dawn came to an open glade where men were already astir, busily cooking food round crackling fires.

"What have we here?" cried Cedric in amazement.

"A Saxon camp, master," replied Oswin, "and here comes one who will be rejoiced to see you." So saying, he pointed to Ulf, who was hastening towards them, followed by no less a person than Aylnoth, whom Cedric had not seen since the adventure with the bear.

"Heaven be praised!" cried Ulf, grasping Cedric's hand. "A messenger shall go to the Lady Edith this very day, saying that you are safe."

Cedric wrung his faithful follower's hand. "Oswin has told me that you reached the fens in safety,

and I thank you heartily for the service you have done. Greeting, Aylnoth ! 'Tis long since we met. . But tell me, what is the meaning of this gathering in the forest ? ”

“ Come to my hut, and, whilst you rest, I will explain,” answered the young thane. “ William, as you know, has returned to Normandy, leaving Bishop Odo and William Fitz-Osbern to rule in his absence. Now, these men are sorely oppressing the people. They allow the Normans to slay and rob at will. No man’s life is safe, nor are the lives of his wife and children, and to such a pass have things come that Eadric has raised the banner of rebellion in Herefordshire against the Normans.

“ In this part of the land there is also much distress. For some time the men of Kent have been looking beyond the sea for aid, and they have persuaded Count Eustace of Boulogne to come to their help. A week from now he sails to England with some troops, and the men here and all the men of Kent will join him in an attack on Dover Castle. If we capture the castle we shall be in a strong position, and may be able to drive the Normans out of Kent and Sussex before William returns.”

“ This is good news,” cried Cedric, “ and glad am I to be free, and able to take part in the enterprise.”

For five days the Saxons remained in the forest glade, while Cedric rapidly regained his strength and vigour, and was able to take his place amongst the leaders of the expedition. Hourly their strength increased, until, on the fifth day, over one thousand men had collected together. The same evening messengers arrived from the Saxon leaders in Kent, announcing that Count

Eustace was expected to land the following night ; and within an hour the camp had been broken up, and the force was on the march.

All that night and the greater part of the next day the march continued. So far, no news of what was happening had reached the Norman commanders in Dover. Indeed, so confident were Odo of Bayeux and Hugues de Montfort that the country had been reduced to absolute subjection, that they had marched with a part of the garrison to the country beyond the Thames. Thus it happened that the insurgents were able to gather unmolested ; and as Cedric and his friends approached Dover, they met other parties of Saxons all converging on the same point.

As night fell the sky clouded over, and in pitchy darkness the Saxon leaders waited on the seashore for the coming of Count Eustace. Fires had been lighted, in spots visible only from the sea, to guide the newcomers. But as hour followed hour, and there was no sign of the promised aid, the waiting men began to think that their ally had failed them.

"I trust not this foreign Count," muttered Cedric to Aylnoth. "In King Edward's time he ravaged Dover. At Hastings he fought for the Normans, and now he only aids us because he thinks to gain Dover, and command the narrow seas. Mark my words, Aylnoth, if we fail, he will be the first to desert us, and make his peace with William."

Aylnoth was about to reply, when a faint hail, followed by the splash of oars, came from the darkness

covering the sea. A few moments later, and the black hulls of a dozen ships loomed up through the night. Then came the splash of anchors dropped overboard, the sound of men wading towards the shore, and the next moment the beach was alive with knights and men-at-arms.

The news of the arrival of Count Eustace and his soldiers spread like wildfire amongst the Saxons. Messengers went spurring in all directions, calling upon every man who had not yet come in to answer the call to arms ; and it was with a considerable force that Count Eustace advanced on Dover with the first light of dawn.

The town was occupied without opposition, but the Normans in the castle, hearing the tramp of armed men, took alarm, and manned the walls. There was no turning back now, however, and, having failed to take the castle by surprise, the Saxons and their allies placed rough scaling ladders against the walls, and strove to take it by assault.

Hour after hour the attack continued, some of the besiegers striving to scale the walls, whilst others endeavoured to force their way through the great gateway. But the garrison resisted gallantly, casting the ladders back upon the climbers, and showering stones and flights of arrows down upon them with deadly effect.

At last the besiegers desisted from the vain attempt, and Count Eustace and the Saxon chiefs took counsel together. "'Tis hopeless to attempt anything more," cried the former. "Without proper engines we cannot hope to reduce the castle."

"Courage, man!" urged Cedric. "Within two days our numbers will be doubled. Is it not so?" And he turned to the other Saxons present to bear out his words.

"'Tis true," replied a burly thane who leaned upon a great battle-axe. "We have but to wait, cutting off the Normans from assistance, and in a few days our force will be such that the garrison must be overcome by very weight of numbers."

"But I dare not wait," faltered Count Eustace. "You told me that the castle could be taken by surprise. I have been misled, and have estranged myself from William of Normandy for nothing. By the Saints! I would I had never listened to your whinings, Saxon dogs."

At these insulting words the Saxons started forward with angry murmurings, and Count Eustace might then and there have paid for his cowardice and contempt but for the sudden arrival of a messenger on horseback. The stranger spurred up to the group, and sprang from his smoking steed; then, bursting through the ring of men, he addressed Count Eustace.

"Fly, Count!" he cried. "Odo of Bayeux and Hugues de Montfort are advancing with a great body of men-at-arms; and should you wait to give them battle, you will surely be overwhelmed."

"We are betrayed! We are betrayed!" cried Count Eustace. "Sound the retreat." With that, he broke through the Saxons, sprang upon the messenger's horse, and spurred wildly away.

Now all was confusion. The knights and men-at-arms from Boulogne, deserted by their leader, were seized with a sudden fear, and fled panic-stricken to their ships. Seeing what was passing, the garrison of the castle opened their gates, and rushed forth in pursuit of the fugitives, killing many, and driving others to their death over the steep cliffs upon which the castle stood.

"This is what comes from trusting a foreigner," cried Aylnoth bitterly. "Come, Cedric, we have failed this time. Let us scatter and seek safety, so that we may live to strike another day. I shall go back to Sussex, where I know of safe hiding in the forest. Will you accompany me?"

"Nay, Aylnoth," replied Cedric. "Things having turned out as they have, I will seek refuge in the fens where Edith awaits me."

Then, seeing a party of Normans approach, the two friends grasped hands, and whilst Aylnoth and his Saxons went one way, Cedric with Ulf and Oswin struck off in another direction. Nor did any attempt to stop them, for the Normans were too few to pursue the fugitives far.

CHAPTER XII.

A DISASTROUS VOYAGE.

Travelling by night and hiding by day, the fugitives reached the fens in safety, and there, on an island hidden deep in the marshy waste, Cedric found Edith and some hundreds of others, both men and women.

Brother and sister greeted each other affectionately,

and through the summer and winter dwelt undisturbed in the secret retreat.

Hardly a day passed but brought fresh fugitives to their sanctuary, and with them came news of the world without. They told how there was much discontent in London, and how it was hoped that the great city would rise against Norman rule. But with December came tidings of William's return from Normandy. Later, they heard how he had celebrated Christmas in London, and had quieted the people by promising to uphold their ancient liberties and laws.

Cedric did not spend his time in idleness. With Ulf and Oswin he made many journeys, once travelling as far as Grinstead, where he found De Lacy firmly installed as lord of the land. Secretly he came and went, and those whom he saw related stories of Norman cruelty which made his blood run cold, and told him that the Lord de Lacy had offered to reward anyone who would inform him where Cedric and Edith were hiding.

The winter passed, and spring brought new glory to the damp, marshy waste amidst which the fugitives dwelt. But the lengthening days also brought news of fresh doings on the part of the Conqueror. Having pacified the Londoners, William had marched westward with his army, intent on capturing the strong city of Exeter, where Gytha, the mother of Harold, was stirring up revolt. It was his purpose also to subdue the country as far as Cornwall.

Meanwhile Cedric was in the country beyond the Humber, where no Norman had yet set foot, striving to

persuade the northerners to rebel. But the men he dealt with could not realize that the one hope of driving William from the land was for the whole population to revolt at once. Old jealousies and enmities kept them from assisting their countrymen in the west, and Exeter had fallen, and the west had been subdued, before an event occurred which at last stirred the north into flame.

This was the arrival of the Earls Edwin and Morcar, who, tired of living captive at the Conqueror's court in London, had escaped, and returned to their own northern lands. With the coming of their rightful leaders, the northerners sprang to arms. Alliance was made with the Welsh, messengers were dispatched to Scotland, begging assistance, and a special embassy was sent to Swegen, King of Denmark, craving his aid.

To his surprise, the Earls chose Cedric for this last, important task. "We know you for a shrewd man and true," said Earl Morcar, seemingly forgetting that once he had tried to trap Cedric. "Tell King Swegen how matters stand, and do your best to bring him to our aid. Now hasten ! A galley awaits you in the Humber, and may Heaven prosper your voyage !"

Though he had little faith in the patriotism of the Earls, Cedric agreed to be their ambassador. With Ulf and Oswin he boarded the galley, and set sail for Denmark. A brisk breeze sped them on their way, and they were within a day of their journey's end when the sky became overcast, and the breeze increased to a furious hurricane which rapidly lashed the sea to anger.

Hour after hour the galley flew before the storm,

and as the great waves buffeted the frail craft, causing her to shiver and creak from end to end, the face of the master-mariner grew worn with anxiety. Night fell, and the storm raged fiercer than ever. Cedric, approaching the master on the poop, asked if there was any danger.

"Danger enough, Thane Cedric!" replied the sailor. "We are driving straight on to the shores of Denmark, and I know not how near we be, nor shall we know until we strike; for the shores of Denmark are low and sandy, and are not to be seen in this darkness. If we go ashore, then it must be every man for himself, and those that can swim may perchance reach safety."

Slowly the night wore away, and it was half gone when the cry suddenly arose that the ship had sprung a leak, through which the water was pouring in great quantities.

"Alas! 'tis true," answered the master, in reply to Cedric's question, when he returned from inspecting the danger. "I have done what I can, but her planks are starting in all directions, and now our one hope is that we may go ashore before she sinks."

An hour passed, and though every man on board had been bailing desperately, the ship was half full of water, and rose sluggishly to the great waves.

"She cannot last much longer," declared the master. Even as he spoke, the ship lurched forward, and dived bows foremost into the sea, whilst a great wave broke over her stern, sweeping her from end to end.

Cedric felt himself caught up by the water, and flung hither and thither. He seemed to be sinking, sinking

until his lungs felt as though they would burst. Then something struck him, and he lost consciousness.

When he opened his eyes, the sun was shining, and he lay blinking in the strong glare, trying to remember what had happened. Suddenly recollection of the storm and wreck returned to him, and he sat up with a groan, for the movement racked every joint in his body.

"Now Heaven be praised!" cried a voice, and then, turning, Cedric beheld Ulf and Oswin seated on the sand beside him, whilst farther away the master-mariner and five sailors were kindling a fire of driftwood. Beyond all he saw a grey sea beating angrily upon a low, sandy shore.

"Where are we?" was Cedric's first question.

"This is Denmark," replied Ulf, "and lucky are we to be here. The galley sank almost within touch of land, and we and those others over there were cast ashore. The rest I greatly fear have perished. Now come, the sailors have been gathering shell-fish. Let us eat! For who knows what lies before us?"

As the little party of survivors sat round the fire, eating the rank fare, they discussed together what they should do, and so intent were they that they did not notice the approach of a body of armed men, until the shadows of the newcomers fell across them.

"Who are you?" demanded the leader, a huge warrior with a long yellow beard, and bearing a great two-handed sword.

The Saxons had sprung to their feet at the unexpected interruption, and now Cedric answered boldly,

giving out that he carried messages to King Swe and relating the story of the wreck.

The great Dane heard him in silence, and ordering his followers to surround the little party announced his intention of taking them to the King.

The way lay over great, rolling sand-dunes, and presently, from the top of one higher than the others, the prisoners saw below them a winding creek thronged with many galleys, whilst the wooden houses of a considerable town lined its banks. Towards this town their captors directed their steps, passing through curious crowds of men, women, and children to a great wooden building. Here the leader left the Saxons in charge of his men, whilst he disappeared within, to return shortly, and order the prisoners to follow him.

He led them into a great hall with a raised dais at one end, on which, seated in a massive chair, was King Swegen, surrounded by many warriors. "Thorkel the Tall has told me a strange story," said the King, addressing Cedric. "Let me hear it from your own lips that I may judge of its truth."

Thus commanded, Cedric set forth the purposes of his voyage, explaining how he had sailed thither to ask King Swegen's help against the Normans, and also related how they had been wrecked in the storm, barely escaping with their lives.

When he had finished, King Swegen sat awhile in thought. "Your story bears the mark of truth," he declared at last. "Now you shall eat and rest, and tomorrow I will give you my answer."

So the Saxons were led away to another room, where food and drink were set before them, and afterwards they were shown piles of skins on which to sleep.

Some hours later they were rudely awakened to find the room full of armed men. Roughly they were jerked to their feet, and their arms pinioned behind them with stout ropes.

"What is the meaning of this ?" demanded Cedric furiously.

"It means, Saxon," answered one of their captors, "that our King has learned that you are not ambassadors, but robbers and pirates whom fate has cast upon our shores. Now he is very wrath that you lied to him, and at first talked of killing you. But slaves are needed to work on the galleys, so you are not to die yet awhile." And he laughed grimly.

"'Tis a lie !" cried Cedric, but his captor struck him heavily across the mouth, and bade him be silent.

That night they spent chained together in a bare, barn-like building, and the next morning they were marched down to the creek-side, and set to work on building a galley. Nor had protests any effect except to bring them blows ; so presently they ceased, and fell to working in gloomy silence.

The next day towards noon, Ulf, who was working beside Cedric, whispered in his ear, "Look to your right."

Cedric did so, and there, standing not a dozen yards away, was Gilbert de Lacy regarding him with a cruel smile. "Again we meet, Cedric of Grinstead," said the

Norman, seeing himself discovered. “ ’Twas a scurvy trick of fate that I should be here with messages from King William, and recognize you as a noted Saxon pirate, was it not ? King Swegen was very wrath, when I told him who you were, and wanted to kill you. But I dissuaded him. What is death but a swift release ? But slavery goes on from year to year, a living doom. Truly a poor ending for an ambassador, Cedric, but a sweet revenge for me ! ” and with a cruel laugh he strode away.

“ Now I understand,” mused Cedric bitterly, and spoke no more that day.

Day followed day, and week followed week, and still they laboured on the galleys with hundreds of other slaves. King Swegen planned to invade England the following year, so the rumour went, and intended to sail with a greater fleet than had ever before crossed the sea. Often Cedric sought means of escape, but none came. They were too well guarded ; and whenever they left off working, the cruel whips of the overseers fell upon their naked backs.

Winter came with its biting cold and cruel winds, but still the slaves were kept at work building the great war-galleys. By this time their own mothers would not have recognized Cedric and Ulf. Lean with privation and hard labour, their skins browned by exposure to sun and wind, their matted beards and hair growing unchecked, the two young Saxons looked like wild men, rather than the comely young warriors that had sailed from England some months before.

Spring arrived, and the galley the Saxons were working upon was almost finished. She was a fine vessel; and as he viewed her curving lines, Cedric's heart was filled with a great home-sickness. That vessel would take them home! Could they but board her, and hoist the great crimson sail, they might make their way to England.

That night Cedric imparted his idea to his eight companions. They were no longer chained at night. There was not even a guard set to watch them, for even were they able to break down the stout oaken door of their prison, whence could they escape in a land of enemies? So reasoned their Danish captors.

A week passed, and the galley had been launched, and some food and water placed on board. The same night was fixed by the prisoners for their escape. To break down the door was impossible without axes, but no sooner were they bolted within their prison than they began to scrape at the earthen floor, and at the end of some five hours, by dint of ceaseless exertion, had made a small tunnel under the wall to the open air beyond.

Now they waited till all was quiet in the town without, and then, creeping silently forth, they made their way down to the creek-side, and swam out to the galley. Climbing silently on board, they cut the ropes which moored her, and slowly at first, but with ever gathering speed, the ship began to float down towards the sea.

The tide was on the ebb, and like a shadow the galley drifted down the creek, none seeing her go, and out

on to the ocean beyond. There the sailors hoisted sail, and with a favourable breeze behind them they set their course for England.

Day found them out of sight of land, but with the breeze sinking, so that by midday they lay becalmed, the crimson sail drooping lazily from the yard. They were too few to man the great oars, and they could but pray for a wind, and gaze anxiously towards the horizon whence they had come.

"This is an evil chance," said Cedric, standing with the master on the poop. "If they come in pursuit, now is their time to overtake us; for they have men to row, whilst we cannot move. What chance is there of a breeze, master, do you think?"

"Little till evening," replied the master-mariner gloomily; and, turning away, he sent a man to the mast-head to keep watch.

Slowly the afternoon passed, and the sun was already sinking, when the sailor at the mast-head shouted out that a ship was in sight. Soon the pursuer could be seen from the deck, and before long the fugitives could make out the clouds of spray about her bows, as the long banks of oars sent her foaming through the water.

"See, the breeze comes with her!" cried the master, pointing to a line of foam on the sea behind the pursuing craft. "Now our fate depends on which shall reach us first." And he shouted orders which sent the five sailors to their stations.

By this time the pursuers were less than a mile astern, whilst on the Saxon galley the sail was beginning

to flap in the strengthening breeze. Then, as the sail filled, and the vessel gathered way, the oarsmen on the pursuing craft redoubled their efforts, so that their vessel continued to gain amidst shouts of triumph from the Danes who crowded her decks.

But the breeze was rapidly growing stronger ; and soon, to their joy, the Saxons saw that their lightly burdened vessel was more than holding her own.

Not for long, however ! Seeing their quarry escaping them, the Danes now hoisted a great sail ; and, urged on by wind and oars, their vessel started to gain once more, until there was but a bare three hundred yards between the two galleys.

“ Now I think the end is near,” said Cedric, watching the rapidly advancing vessel ; and he and his companions were about to arm themselves as best they could, when the master-mariner ordered all hands to carry the great, useless oars up to the poop, where the sailors rapidly tied them together, with long lengths of rope between.

By the time the work was finished but fifty yards separated the two vessels, and the enemy clustered shouting in the bows of their galley, ready to board the Saxon ship as soon as the ships touched. Then, as the fugitives cast the line of rope and oars out on to the sea behind them, the shouts of triumph turned to cries of fear and rage, and desperately the pursuers backed their oars, striving to check the progress of their vessel.

Too late ! Right into the centre of the obstruction surged their galley, and the long line of rope and oars,



‘Urged on by wind and oars, their vessel started to gain once more.’—Page 127.

swinging back on either side of their vessel, became entangled with their own oars, throwing the rowers from their benches, and bringing the galley to a standstill with her great sail flapping heavily in the wind.

Leaving their pursuers busily engaged in disentangling their oars, the fugitives now forged rapidly ahead, and, night coming to their aid, they were soon out of sight of the enemy.

Morning found them alone on a lonely sea, and for seven days they steered westward, sighting no ship, friend or foe. On the afternoon of the seventh day they found themselves in the Wash. They landed and tramped all through the night, and came just before dawn to the well-remembered spot where the path wound across the fens to the secret camp. Leading the way, Cedric plunged into the morass, guided by the secret signs which Osgot had taught him when first he took refuge in the fens. Often they were up to their knees in water, sometimes it even reached to their waists, but always there was firm ground beneath their feet.

At last, after they had been wading through the swamp for half an hour, they stepped forth on to dry ground ; and, as they did so, a well-known voice challenged them from out the grey morning mist. In answer Cedric uttered the secret password, and the next moment a great burly man held him in a giant's grip. "'Tis Cedric, Cedric of Grinstead !" cried Osgot. "Man, we have given you up for dead these many months, and the Lady Edith has been sad at heart. This will be a glad day for her."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RISING OF THE NORTH.

There was much to be told and heard that day. "So King Swegen sails for England this summer," said Osgot, as Cedric concluded the recital of his adventures.

"So it was rumoured," answered Cedric. "Now, Osgot, how fare things in England? Did last year's rising in the north prosper?"

"Prosper!" cried Osgot. "Nay, it did *not* prosper. Never was there such a miserable failure, and why? Because the leaders betrayed us. I marched with the rest to strike a blow for freedom, so I should know. It fell out in this wise. After he had subdued the west, William marched north, conquering town after town. Wherever he went he built castles, and filled them with soldiers. And what did we do to stop him? Nothing. Edwin and Morcar, who had talked so much of freedom, were the first to submit, and receive William's pardon, whilst the Earl Gospatrick and Edgar the Atheling, who had joined the army, fled to Scotland, leaving us common men to save ourselves as best we could. After that William marched on York, and built a castle there."

"This is ill news," said Cedric, with a frown. "But surely something has been done against the usurper?"

"A little," growled Osgot. "Early this year William sent one of his hirelings, Robert de Comines, to Durham to be its Earl. But the men of the north would not have him. They let him enter the city, and take up

his quarters, and I doubt not he thought all was well. But that night the men from the country round entered Durham, and with the morning they and the men of the city attacked the Normans, and slew them to a man.

“When this success became known, the faint-hearted took fresh courage. Gospatrick and Edgar came from Scotland to York, and laid siege to the castle. But it proved too hard a nut to crack, and William, marching north, drove the besiegers away, and built a second castle, leaving Earl William of Hereford in charge.

“But no sooner had William gone than the north-erners again attacked the castles, only to be defeated with heavy loss. So matters stand. ’Tis a sorry tale, master, and I see no hope of better things until we have a leader. William the Norman is at least a man who knows his own mind.”

“You speak truth,” replied Cedric sadly. “Since Harold fell, there has been no great man who puts England first, and his own interests second. King Swegen may drive out the Normans, but I doubt if it will benefit us Saxons much. ’Twill be but exchanging one foreign master for another.”

Slowly the summer passed, bringing with it news that the English had risen in the west, and were attacking Shrewsbury, Exeter, and other important places held by the Normans. But in the north, where most of the population were of Danish descent, all men looked for the coming of the Danes. Nor had they long to wait. In August two hundred and forty galleys, crowded with warriors under Earl Osbeorn and Harold and Cnut, sons

of King Swegen, sailed forth from the creeks of Denmark ; and, harrying as they went, they steered up the east coast, and entered the Humber.

When the news reached Fenland that the Danes had at last come, Cedric called all the able-bodied men together, and persuaded them to march with him to join the Danish army. They found the fleet anchored in the Humber, whilst from the country round thousands of men were flocking to join the army of the newcomers, whom they fondly looked upon as deliverers come to free them from the Norman yoke.

Presently, having gained sufficient strength, the army of the allies sailed up the Ouse, disembarked, and then marched on York. As the army approached the city, the Normans, thinking themselves too few to withstand such a host, abandoned the walls, and shut themselves up in their castles. But first, fearing lest the houses of the citizens should provide cover for the besiegers, they set the buildings on fire, so that the greater part of the city was destroyed.

"So they treat our homes !" cried Cedric bitterly, as, at the head of his little band, he watched the raging flames.

There was no time for regrets, however. The English and Danes were already advancing through the smoking ruins to the assault of the castles, and, calling upon his men to follow, Cedric rushed to the attack. But the Normans were prepared for them ; and, manning the walls, they beat down all who strove to get within, so that at last the attacking force fell sullenly back.

Elated at their success, the Normans now made a determined sally, and, falling upon the Danes and English, endeavoured to turn the retreat into a rout. At first, indeed, the besiegers gave before the furious onset ; but soon numbers began to tell, and, attacking in their turn, the Danes and English drove their enemies back.

“ Here methinks is the chance to end this matter,” exclaimed Cedric, who was on one side of the main battle ; and, followed by his men, he raced down a narrow alley between two piles of smoking ruins, and came out in the rear of the retiring Normans, so cutting off their retreat.

With cries of triumph the daring band flung themselves upon their hated foes, whilst the Normans, assailed on both sides at once, fought back to back, their whirling blades slowly cutting a path to safety through the masses of their enemies.

Desperately the English fought, but, rudely armed as they were, they could not stay the retreat of the mail-clad Normans. One by one Cedric saw his men fall about him, until with Ulf and Oswin, and but a remnant of his former strength, he stood the sole barrier between the Normans and safety.

“ Down with the Saxon dogs ! ” shouted the Norman leader, William Malet ; and, springing at Cedric, he drove a fierce thrust at him, which would have ended Cedric’s days then and there, had not Ulf turned the thrust aside with his sword.

“ Thanks, Ulf ! ” cried Cedric. “ I owe you my life.” Then, as the Norman lurched forward, Cedric

brought his axe down upon his enemy's steel headpiece, stretching him unconscious on the ground.

With the fall of their leader panic seized the Normans; and, breaking through the few survivors of Cedric's band, they fled to their castles, followed so closely by their assailants that the Danes and English passed through the gates at their heels.

Now began a terrible massacre in which the Danes and English, swarming into the castles in ever increasing numbers, hunted the luckless Normans from place to place, until none remained alive but a few prisoners. Then, the resistance overcome, the victors vented their fury upon the walls and towers which had sheltered their oppressors. The castles, constructed chiefly of wood, were broken up, thrown to the ground, and burnt; the earthworks were levelled; and everything that could remind the English of Norman tyranny was destroyed.

"'Tis wicked waste," declared Cedric bitterly, as he watched the work of destruction. "When William hears of this defeat, he will come with his army, and those walls we are so senselessly destroying would then stand us in good stead."

"That is true, master," grumbled Osgot. "To my mind we are like a wall of rough stones which are without cement to bind them together. We are full of valour and fury now; but will English and Dane hold together, when there is nothing to do but wait for William's coming?"

"You croak like a raven, friend," scoffed Ulf, who was standing by. But events were soon to prove Osgot's

fears well founded. The victory complete, the army, instead of holding York, dispersed, the English breaking up into a number of small bands, whilst the Danes returned to their ships. Nor could Cedric and a few other shrewd men, who saw beyond the immediate present, persuade the leaders to hold together.

Thus, when the Norman army reached the north, William found no great body of insurgents gathered to oppose him ; for the Danes shunned a battle, whilst the Norman horsemen made short work of the isolated bands of English which roamed the countryside. Accordingly, leaving his brother, Robert, to hold the north in check, William marched away to quell a revolt in Staffordshire.

Cedric, meanwhile, scorning to seek safety whilst there was a blow to be struck for freedom, gathered around him a number of kindred spirits, and attacked the Normans on every occasion. Such loss, indeed, did he cause them that he became known as the "Wolf," and strong bodies of Norman men-at-arms were dispatched to hunt him down.

But for a long time Cedric evaded his enemies. With guides who knew every inch of the country, he and his band disappeared immediately the enemy gathered against them in force, whilst no sooner had the main body of the Normans retired than the Wolf and his men emerged from their hiding place, cutting off the stragglers, and attacking small bodies of the enemy, until the Normans no longer dared go abroad except in strong numbers.

Winter had now come, and with it William returned

from subduing the rebellion in Staffordshire. His first act was to break the alliance between the Danes and the English by offering the former a large sum of money, if they would return home without fighting against him any more. Having thus rid himself of his most dangerous enemy, he marched on York, recaptured the city, and then set about his terrible revenge. From York to the Tees he laid the country waste, burning towns and villages, destroying food, and killing or driving off the sheep and cattle, until the whole country was one terrible, blackened desert, amidst which thousands of wretched inhabitants starved to death.

It was December, and Cedric with the remnant of his band was encamped in a small valley. Some rude huts, built against a sheer hillside, gave them shelter, whilst a few small fires provided all the warmth to be had in that desert place.

The sun had just risen, and the men were making a wretched breakfast off a thin gruel made of flour mixed with water. They were a fierce-looking crowd. Gaunt with hunger and hardships, their arms and armour dented and rusty, they ate their food in gloomy silence. England, they knew, had missed the best chance she would ever have of casting out the Normans; and now, with Yorkshire a ruined waste, William was Conqueror indeed.

Moreover, their own hours were numbered. The Norman bands were closing in upon them from all directions, and, driven to bay in the little valley, they awaited the coming of their enemies to fight their last fight.

Having finished his breakfast, Cedric rose to his feet, and with Ulf climbed the valley side to a point where the surrounding country lay spread out below them. In the distance, forming a great circle round the valley, the smoke of many fires arose in the still, frosty air, whilst here and there, nearer at hand, the rays of the rising sun glinted upon the steel cap of some mounted scout.

"To-day will see the end, Ulf," said Cedric sadly, "and I would not care, were it not for Edith. If by Heaven's aid you escape death this day, my friend, I charge you go to her, and take her from this unhappy country to some kinder land. Think not of me. But when the fight is almost done, escape, if escape you can, and go to her. Will you promise?"

"I promise, Cedric," answered Ulf, grasping the hand of his leader and friend. "But talk not of dying. You will come through this day in safety, and live to care for the Lady Edith yourself."

Now a stir could be seen around the distant fires, and soon from all directions bodies of armed men were advancing towards the valley.

"'Tis time to make ready," said Cedric; and, descending the valley side, he uttered a call which brought his men to their feet. There were four score of them, all told; and now they ranged themselves round the top of a small knoll which was backed by a steep cliff, and on which they had built a low barricade of boulders.

"'Tis a grand place for a stand, lads," cried Oswin,

making his axe whistle round his head. "They can but come at us in front, and I trow there will be many live Normans the less in the land ere this day ends."

This speech was greeted with a hoarse shout by the ragged band, and now from round a bend in the valley came the steady tramp of horses. Soon the leading files of the enemy appeared in sight; and as they saw the Wolf and his dreaded band at last brought to bay, the Normans raised a shout of triumph.

The English were drawn up in two lines, those in front, armed with heavy axes, standing with shields fast locked together, whilst the rear rank was armed with javelins and long spears.

Now the Norman horsemen were near at hand, and, at the shrill blast of a trumpet, the leading files set spurs to their horses, and charged up the hill. But it was no place for horsemen. The rough, boulder-strewn ground, slippery with frost, offered a treacherous foothold, and many fell ere they were half-way up the slope. Then, at a word from Cedric, the English, standing so grim and silent upon the hill-top, suddenly sprang to life. With a shout they loosed a shower of javelins upon the advancing Normans, slaying them by the score. Great boulders, poised in readiness, were set in motion; and, rolling down the hillside, they ploughed their way through the advancing mass, crushing all in their path until, having suffered terrible losses, the Normans turned and fled from the fatal hill.

As their enemies fell back, the English raised a shout of triumph, and flung themselves on the ground to rest.

But their respite was short-lived. The main body of the Normans was still intact ; and, dismounting his men, the Norman leader led them forward on foot.

This time the javelin shower fell harmlessly upon the great shields which the Normans held in front of them ; and as the boulders rolled down the hill, the ranks of the attackers opened to let them through. So the Normans at length came to the rampart of rocks, and English axe and Norman sword met in the last, long struggle.

For an hour the fight raged furiously. Outnumbered twenty to one, the English fought with the grimness of despair, each man striving to slay the greatest number of his hated enemies before he fell. Cedric with Ulf and Oswin was wherever the fight raged fiercest, or the line seemed weakest, encouraging his followers by word and deed. But there could be only one end to such an unequal fight. The English ranks dwindled from two to one. Then, as they became too few to hold the rampart, they fell back, and formed a half-circle of desperate men against the side of the valley.

With cries of triumph the Normans swarmed over the rampart, and rushed upon the English to make an end. Man after man went down, until Cedric, Oswin, Osgot, Ulf, and three others alone remained on their feet.

"Now, Ulf, 'tis time for you to go," gasped Cedric during a lull in the fight.

"Master, I cannot leave you," cried Ulf.

"Remember your promise, and go !" commanded

Cedric sternly. "You will have time to climb the valley side ere we fall. Hasten now, for they come again!" He grasped his faithful follower's hand, and then turned to face another attack.

Ulf hesitated a moment, and then, at an imperious gesture from Cedric, turned and started to clamber up the cliff, whilst from below him came the sound of a desperate struggle. Reaching the top, he looked back. Cedric and Osgot alone remained, surrounded by a ring of foes; and even as he watched, Osgot went down beneath a Norman sword. Then, unable to look longer, Ulf turned, and hastened away.

Meanwhile Cedric, sole survivor of his band, faced his victorious foes, and such was his strength that for a while his great axe kept clear the space about him. At last, amazed at his prowess, the Normans raised the cry, "'Tis the Wolf himself. 'Tis the Wolf!" And a knight in hacked armour called upon Cedric to yield.

"Why should I yield?" demanded Cedric haughtily.

"Sir," replied the knight courteously, "you have done all that a brave warrior can, and have won much honour. Now yield yourself my prisoner, and I will endeavour to obtain for you my master's clemency."

"I desire not your master's clemency," replied Cedric, and leaned upon his axe to rest. As he did so, the knight stepped forward with a cry of surprise, and, pointing to Cedric's left hand, cried, "That ring! Where did you get it? Man, who *are* you?"

"Who am I?" replied Cedric. "Why, I am the Wolf."



‘Reaching the top, he looked back.’—Page 140.

"Nay," answered the Norman, "you are Cedric of Grinstead, and I am Guy de Brionne whose life you saved." And he took off his helmet so that Cedric could recognize him. "Now, my friend, will you yield?"

"I yield," replied Cedric, "and right glad am I to see you once more, friend Guy." With that he let fall his axe in token of his surrender.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SWORD DECIDES.

Three days later Cedric was brought for judgment before King William, who kept Christmas in York. True to his promise, Guy de Brionne stood Cedric's friend, and, stepping forth from an attendant crowd of knights and barons, he thus addressed the King:—

"Sire, this is a noble Saxon, Cedric, Thane of Grinstead, and my friend, who has yielded himself my prisoner in fair fight, and I crave of you his life and freedom."

William frowned. "Sir Guy," he answered, "I have heard that this Saxon has another name, and that he is the Wolf who has done me much harm."

"'Tis true, Sire," replied Guy, "but he has never sworn allegiance to you, and is but a Saxon fighting for his land. Sire, I have asked little of you, but now I ask pardon for my friend."

"'Tis true you have served me well, Sir Guy," replied William; and he was about to continue when another knight stepped forward, and craved leave to speak. Cedric, watching the scene, felt a surge of fury

within him, for the newcomer was his enemy, Gilbert de Lacy.

"Sire," urged De Lacy vehemently, "grant no pardon to this Saxon dog. Hang him as an example to others, or there will be no safety for Normans in England."

William regarded De Lacy with a smile. "You are suddenly timorous, my Lord. And now I come to think of it, I remember that you are in possession of this Saxon's lands, and have ever sought his destruction. Now, what is the truth of this matter?"

"Sire, I will tell you the truth," interposed Sir Guy; and, disregarding De Lacy's black looks, he related the story of De Lacy's treachery towards Cedric and his family.

"You lie!" cried De Lacy, white with rage. But the King sternly bade him be silent, and, turning to Cedric, asked him what he had to say on the matter.

"Sir Guy de Brionne speaks truth, King William," replied Cedric. "This man, Gilbert de Lacy, abused the hospitality of my home, treacherously trying to slay my father and myself ere ever there was war between our nations. He slew my father, a cripple, by a surprise attack. He has taken my lands, and has pursued my sister and myself with his implacable hatred ever since, striving in all ways to work us ill."

"I have also heard something of this from divers sources," frowned the King. "What say you, my Lord? Much I can stomach, but the laws of hospitality I have ever held sacred. If this Saxon is willing, will you meet him and decide this matter with the sword?"

"Yea, I will meet him, right readily," growled De Lacy, "and this time he shall not escape me."

"And you, Saxon?" asked William, turning to Cedric.

Cedric smiled. "Three years, Sire, I have been seeking this man to slay him, and I wish nothing better than to meet him in single combat."

"'Tis well," replied William. "For the nonce I will suspend my judgment on the Wolf. Sir Guy de Brionne, I pray you care for Thane Cedric, seeing that he lacks nothing in food, raiment, and arms. Then, on the day after to-morrow, let this matter be settled."

"My friend," said Guy when he had brought Cedric to his own quarters, "you are fortunate. Frankly, I knew not how William would regard you, and had it not been for De Lacy, and the story of his treachery, I doubt if you would now be a free man."

"Free I may be, and for Edith's sake I rejoice, but my heart is sad when I think of all my brave comrades."

"They died a warrior's death," declared the other. "But tell me of the Lady Edith. Is she safe and well?"

So the two friends talked of old times. Later, the conditions of the combat had to be discussed, and Cedric fitted with a suit of mail.

The day of the combat dawned bright and fine, and early the lists were crowded with Norman knights and men-at-arms, eager to see the fight between such a renowned knight as Gilbert de Lacy, and the famous Wolf. Each combatant had a tent to himself, where

squires waited upon him, garbing him in his mail, and preparing him for the fray.

The combatants were to fight with battle-axes. As soon as William had taken his place, the heralds advanced to the centre of the lists, and, having blown a fanfare on their trumpets, announced in loud tones the reasons for the contest and its conditions. The lists were then cleared, and amidst a breathless silence the adversaries advanced towards each other, bearing their heavy weapons sloped across their shoulders.

The two men presented a striking contrast—De Lacy, tall and wiry, hawk-faced, and moving with quick, light steps; Cedric, topping his adversary by a head, slow moving, but of a strength far greater than the Norman's. Reaching the centre of the lists, the two men saluted William, and then stood face to face.

For some moments they circled warily round each other, their battle-axes held ready to strike or turn a blow. Then, so quickly that the onlookers could scarcely follow his movements, De Lacy sprang in, and his great axe flashed in the sunlight. But, with an agility amazing in one of his size, Cedric avoided the blow, and aimed a back cut at his opponent, missing De Lacy by a hair's breadth.

Loud cheers from the onlookers greeted this spirited opening to the battle, whilst the adversaries again commenced their slow circling. Suddenly, with one accord, they sprang at each other, and the great weapons rang as axe crashed against axe. Now caution was flung to the winds, and, spurred on by a mutual hatred, Cedric

and De Lacy rained blows at each other till the sparks flew from the whirling weapons.

In a fever of excitement at the sight, the onlookers yelled encouragement and advice. "De Lacy ! De Lacy ! In ! In !" sounded from one end of the lists to the other, and the feeble shouts of the few Saxons who dared to encourage their champion, were lost in the roar of sound.

But Cedric scarcely heard the noise. Ever before his eyes there rose a pile of blackened ruins which covered a slaughtered father, and blow after blow he struck at his opponent, striving to penetrate his guard. But De Lacy was a skilled fighter, and coolly he warded off the crushing blows, watching meanwhile for an opening to strike at his adversary. Presently it came, and, springing in, he aimed a mighty blow at Cedric's head.

Cedric saw the blow coming, and partially turned the stroke aside. But still De Lacy's axe found Cedric's helm, and sent him reeling back. Like a tiger De Lacy followed up his advantage, but Cedric, swinging his axe low, struck him on his mailed shoulder, checking his advance.

Now the adversaries rested a moment, leaning on their axes, and glaring at each other with eyes of hate. Then, spurred on by the shouts of his countrymen, De Lacy rushed at Cedric. But Cedric met him with a swinging cut which drove him back, and, attacking in turn, reached his opponent's helm with a blow which beat De Lacy to his knees.

"Cedric ! Cedric !" rose the voice of Guy de

Brionne, clear in the hush which followed De Lacy's fall ; and, thus encouraged, the Saxon advanced to complete his victory. But a piece of ice, the remnant of the morning's frost, lay in his path, and, stepping upon it, Cedric slipped.

In a flash De Lacy was on his feet, and was raining blows on Cedric, who backed step by step, desperately striving to guard himself against the deadly hail. One stroke fell upon his left shoulder, numbing his arm so that no longer could he wield his axe with both hands ; another shore away his helm, leaving his head unguarded, and, dazed, Cedric realized dimly that the end was near.

The crowd had ceased to shout, and waited breathlessly for the final stroke. But suddenly a new voice rang out, "Remember Wulfric ! Up, Wolf, up !" it cried, and the words, reaching Cedric's brain, cleared away the mists, and made him his own man again.

The cry had come just in time. As the torpor passed, Cedric saw De Lacy in front of him, a smile of triumph upon his face, his axe raised to strike. But the blow never reached its mark. Stepping to one side, Cedric felt the axe whistle harmlessly past, and then, swinging up his own weapon with his right hand, he brought it down with terrific force upon De Lacy's unguarded neck, cutting through steel mail right to the bone. Without a sound the Norman lurched forward, and fell dead at Cedric's feet.

An awesome silence greeted Cedric's victory, and the heralds, advancing, led the victor before the King.



“Nobly fought, Saxon,” praised William.’—Page 149.

"Nobly fought, Saxon," praised William. "And now that you have avenged your private wrongs, 'tis for me to pass judgment upon you for the wrongs you have done to me. What say you, Cedric of Grinstead, in your defence?"

"I say nothing, King William," answered Cedric wearily. "Do with me as you will."

"Good!" replied William. "You are a brave man, and a lusty fighter, and my judgment is this. The estates of Grinstead lack a master, for you have just slain their ruler. Therefore I charge you, go and rule in his stead."

"Sire!" cried Cedric, in amazement.

"Nay, 'tis nothing," answered William. "Be true man to me. I ask you not to fight my battles; I say but this, 'Fight not *against* me.' There, Lady, is that done to your liking?"

Stepping to one side, William now disclosed Edith standing between Sir Guy de Brionne and Ulf, whose cry, "Remember Wulfric," had reached Cedric in the nick of time.

Dazed with the fatigue of the battle, and the unlooked-for turn of events, Cedric found no words to reply, and William said with a smile, "Take him away, Sir Guy, and care for him well. And remember, I would speak with the Wolf and his sister ere they depart for their estates."

As if in a dream, Cedric allowed himself to be led away. Pages stripped him of his mail, bathed and washed his wounds, and clothed him in a soft gown.

Then food and wine were set before him ; and whilst he ate, Edith, Guy, and Ulf talked by turns.

“ My friend,” said Guy, “ the bad days are past. You are once more in possession of your rightful inheritance, nor need you feel shame to hold it from William ; for what man have you amongst the Saxons so fitted to be King ? And mark my words, Cedric ! A hundred years from now there will be neither Saxon nor Norman in this land, but all will be English.”

“ I hope so,” replied Cedric. “ Nay, something seems to tell me that you are right, and I think that even Harold would be satisfied with such an ending to the quarrel between our races.”

Thereupon, leaning forward, he grasped the hand of his friend.

PRINTED BY E. J. ARNOLD AND SON, LTD.,
AT THEIR WORKS,
BUTTERLEY STREET, LEEDS, ENGLAND.

Tales of Stirring Times.

BY

C. BERNARD RUTLEY.

EACH Book in this Series is a Story of Adventure located in some period of outstanding importance in our country's history, and the books are intended to supplement the history teaching and the text-book. The chief figures in the story are young people, so as to appeal the more strongly to young readers.

The information on the manners, usages, dress, habits, armour, weapons, etc., of the various periods, and the main facts on which the stories are based, are historically accurate.

The books are well illustrated with sketches, and with maps where such appear to be necessary; and both Teachers and Pupils will find these books a wonderful help in throwing light on the period and events with which the book deals.

FIRST BOOKS OF THE SERIES.

No. 1.—**THE BANNER OF THE DRAGON**

(The Norman Conquest).

„ 2.—**A KNIGHT OF THE CROSS**

(The Third Crusade).

„ 3.—**FOR QUEEN AND FREEDOM**

(The Roman Occupation of Britain).

E. J. ARNOLD & SON, Ltd., Educational Publishers,
LEEDS, GLASGOW & BELFAST