GEORGE HEREFORD BROOKE

BATTLES OF ENGLISH HISTORY

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Содержание

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PREFACE

It has been the business of my life to teach history: and the informal division of labour which comes to pass in a University has led me to pay special attention to the military side of it. This aspect of history involves much comparison of statements and weighing of evidence, and is therefore calculated to be very useful to those for whom the study of history is, not their permanent occupation, but the means of completing their mental training. Campaigns and battles present in an exceptionally clear shape the stock problems of history, what was done, why it was done, what were the results, what ought to have been done, what would have been the consequences if this or that important detail had been different.

It is however not easy to gain from books a clear general idea of a campaign or a battle, harder perhaps than to obtain a similar grasp of the work of a legislator, or of the drift of a social change. To the ordinary historian the military side is only one aspect of his theme, and very possibly an aspect which interests him but little. He narrates the facts as given him by his authorities: but when these are vague, as mediæval writers mostly are, or discrepant, as modern writers are who mean to be precise and write from different standpoints, he need be something of an expert to make his narrative lifelike. On the other hand, purely military works are, very reasonably, technical: they are written for experts, to whom the technical language is familiar, and they often go into considerable detail. Ordinary readers are apt, consequently, to want help in obtaining from them a clear idea of the outline of events. Like Pindar's poetic shafts, they are φωνᾶντα συνετοῖσιν, ἐς δὲ τοπὰν ἑρμηνέων χατίζει.

Having experienced these difficulties myself, both as student and as teacher, I have thought that I might render some service by trying to act as interpreter, and to describe the chief military events of English history in a way which shall not be technical, but yet shall bring out their meaning. I do not write for experts, though it is they who must judge whether I have described correctly. I write for those who do not know much about battles, and would like to understand events which are interesting in themselves, and are great turning-points in history: they must judge whether I have described intelligibly. If I have met the proverbial fate of those who sit on two stools, it is not for want of pains in trying to keep my balance.

I feel that it is *prima facie* presumptuous for a civilian to write what is in some sense a military book: but after all it is the customer who feels where the shoe pinches. Moreover many of the battles of English history occurred in past ages, in relation to which the professional training of a modern soldier would teach him little beyond the permanent principles of strategy, which every educated man should understand. Given also an elementary knowledge of tactics, which has spread pretty widely in this country since volunteering began and the war-game became popular, a civilian ought to be able to deal adequately with Hastings and Crecy, with Towton and Marston Moor, if not with the campaigns of Marlborough and Wellington. If I have failed, it is not because the subject is outside the province of a civilian, but because the writer has been unequal to his task.

Si vis pacem, para bellum is a sound maxim for statesmen: for ordinary citizens it may be paraphrased thus – the better you understand war, the more you will desire peace. I have found that soldiers' love for peace, and horror of war, is usually in proportion to their experience: they deem no sacrifice too heavy to secure the greatest of national blessings. I think therefore that it is reasonable for one who belongs to a profession pre-eminently peaceful, to attempt to aid his countrymen in realising what war means. The better they understand this, the less they will be tempted to enter on

war lightly, the more they will feel how amply worth while is every effort to put their country beyond the risk of attack.

I wish here to acknowledge a great debt of gratitude to my friend Col. Cooper King, formerly Professor of Tactics at Sandhurst, who has not only taken great trouble in drawing the maps to suit my scheme, but has also obtained for me useful information, besides helping me with some valuable suggestions and much friendly criticism. I would not however do him the ill service of sheltering myself behind his authority as an expert. The faults of my work, whatever they are, are mine and not his, though they might well have been more numerous without his assistance.

I have made no reference to the naval battles of English history, hardly less numerous than the great land battles, and, two or three of them at least, even more important. To deal with them adequately would require knowledge to which I cannot pretend. Moreover they might best be treated on a separate plan, similar perhaps to that which I have followed, but entirely distinct from it.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Battles are the most generally interesting class of events in history, and not without reason. Until mankind have all been reduced to a single pattern, which would put an end to history, there will be conflicting interests, sentiments, creeds, principles, which will from time to time lead to war. We may settle many disputes peacefully by mutual concession, or by voluntary submission to external arbitration: but an appeal to arms always lies behind, and is the only resource when differences go too deep for reconciliation, or when the self-respect of nations is too severely wounded. Even within a nation there are many possibilities, remote perhaps yet never unimaginable, which may bring about civil war. And though it is perfectly conceivable that a given war may be waged to the end without a single important battle, if the superior skill of one side enables it to gain overwhelming advantage without fighting, yet practically this does not happen. Battles are in fact the decisive events in the contests which are of sufficient moment to grow into war. It is very easy to exaggerate their importance, to fix attention on the climax only, and lose sight of the events which led up to it, and which went very far in most cases towards determining its result. But after all the battle is the climax, and the world in general may be forgiven for over-estimating it.

Writers, whose humane instincts have been outraged by the way in which other people ignore the horrors of war, and dwell only on its glories, have sometimes argued that wars settle nothing, as they only leave behind a legacy of hatred which tends to fresh wars. No doubt in some cases, and in a certain sense, this is true. Napoleon trampled Prussia under foot at Jena, and the spirit engendered in the Prussian government and people by their ignominious defeat brought about in course of time the war of 1870, in which France in her turn was crushed almost as ruthlessly, to cherish ever since a hope of revenge. Still Jena was decisive for the time, and Sedan for a still longer period; and there is nothing to prove that France and Germany may not be the best of friends one day. If peaceful accord at one time does not prevent a future quarrel should circumstances alter, no more does past hostility prevent future alliance. Austria and Prussia were permanent, apparently natural, enemies during a century and a half, except when the common danger from Napoleon forced them into tardy and unwilling union; now their alliance is paraded as the permanent guarantee of the peace of Europe. Russia contributed more than any other power, except perhaps England, to the destruction of that fabric of universal empire with which Napoleon dazzled the French. Forty years later, another Napoleon joined England in making war on Russia and humbling her in the Crimea: now France and Russia advertise their enthusiastic attachment to each other. This is however only to say that men's interests will often be stronger motives of action than their passions; and if the interests of two nations conflict again in the present, as they have done in the past, their animosity will be all the keener for the memories of past defeats sustained at each other's hands.

Is it then undesirable that the memory of past wars should be fostered? Does it produce nothing but a longing for revenge on the part of those who have suffered defeat, a sentiment of vainglory on the part of the victors? Is the roll of English victories over France to breed in us nothing but an arrogant notion that an Englishman is worth three Frenchmen, an inference which the mere numbers engaged at Crecy or Agincourt, if we knew no more, might seem to justify? There is some danger that this may be the case, if we remember only the battles, the points of decisive collision, and take no heed to the wars as a whole, and to the contemporary conditions generally. An isolated battle is like a jewel out of its setting; it may look very brilliant, but no use can be made of it. The glories of Sluys and Crecy, of Trafalgar and Waterloo, would be a *damnosa hereditas* indeed, if they led us to despise our neighbours and possible enemies.

Battles however which are not isolated, but are fitted into their places in the wars to which they belong, and sufficiently linked together to make them illustrate the political and social changes from age to age which are reflected in the changes of armament, may be a subject of study both interesting and instructive. Detailed narratives of the battles themselves appeal to the imagination in more ways than one. There is the romantic element, not merely the "pomp and circumstance of glorious war," and the feats of brilliant courage which are often admired out of all proportion to their utility, but also the occasional startling surprises. What drama ever contained a more thrilling incident than the battle of Marengo, changed in a moment from a more than possible French defeat into a complete victory, through a sudden cavalry charge causing the panic rout of an Austrian column up to that moment advancing successfully? And there is the personal interest of noting how one man's great qualities, skill, promptitude, forethought, fertility of resource, in all ages, bodily powers also in the days before gunpowder, lift him above his fellows, and enable him visibly to sway their destinies – how the rashness and incompetence of another entail speedy and visible punishment. And behind and above all, is the great fact which of itself suffices to justify the universal interest, that the lives of the combatants are at stake. "All that a man hath will he give for his life;" yet the call of duty, or zeal for his cause, induces the soldier to expose his life to danger, never insignificant, and often most imminent and deadly; and discipline enables him to do this coolly, and therefore with the best prospects, not of escaping the sacrifice, but of making it effectual. The admiration of the soldier which is caricatured in the nursery-maid's love for a red coat is obviously silly, but the demagogue's denunciation of him as a bloodthirsty hireling is equally foolish, and far more mischievous.

If detailed narratives are to be fitted into their historical place, the first question that suggests itself is why battles were fought where they were. The exact site is usually a matter of deliberate choice on the part of one combatant or the other, the assailant seizing his enemy at a disadvantage as he crosses a river, for instance, or the defendant selecting what seems to him the best position in which to await attack; and what position is most favourable obviously depends on the tactics of the age. Of the latter Hastings and Waterloo furnish conspicuous examples; of the former the clearest instance in English history is Tewkesbury. The locality however, as distinguished from the exact spot, is determined by a variety of considerations. Some are geographical: the formation of the country, which includes not only the direction and character of rivers and chains of hills, but also the position of towns and forests and the course of roads, limits in various ways the movements of armies. Some may be called political: the course of events practically compels the attempting of a particular enterprise. For instance, the battle of Bannockburn had to be fought because Stirling Castle was to be surrendered to the Scots, if an English army did not relieve it by a given day. The majority of the considerations involved are however strategical; and it is worth while to attempt to make clear what is implied by this often misapplied word.

Strategy is the art of moving an army to advantage, so that either when it comes to fight it may do so on favourable terms, or it may gain ground on the enemy without fighting. An invasion so directed as to give the invader the command of the resources of a rich district, or to deprive the enemy of access to an important harbour, is an instance of the latter form of strategic movement. The former and commoner form, so moving as to compel the enemy to fight at some disadvantage, may take either of two shapes, or may involve both. There are two elements to be considered in comparing the situation of the combatants before a decisive battle. Which side has the best chance of winning? This depends mainly on the relative strength that can be brought into the field. To which side will the consequences of defeat be most serious? This depends mainly on the position of the two armies in the theatre of war. James IV. of Scotland, when the battle of Flodden was fought, had allowed Surrey to get between him and Scotland: here a defeat meant destruction. Henry V. was in a similar strait before Agincourt, but in this case victory in the field extricated him from danger. Obviously one of two combatants may begin with very inferior strength to his opponent; in that case he will probably be obliged to stand on the defensive, and his strategy must be directed to making the most of his

force, to doing the best he can with very small numbers for minor purposes, to avoiding battle until he can equalise matters somewhat, and bring as large a proportion as possible to bear on the decisive point. Obviously also one side may have an advantage over the other derived from geography; for instance, one may have, while the other has not, a great fortress near the common frontier, which will serve as a starting point for invasion. A general has to take the facts as he finds them, and make the best of them. He is the most skilful strategist who gains the most without fighting, and who succeeds in shifting the balance most largely in his own favour before engaging in decisive battle.

Changes in tactics again are matters of great interest from age to age, not merely in themselves, but in connection with other developments on which at first sight they seem to have no bearing. Primarily they are matters of intellectual progress: the invention of gunpowder was an event of incalculable importance in human history. Similarly the material progress exemplified in making good roads brought with it the possibility of supplying an army in the field, instead of its being compelled to subsist on the country; and the possibility of doing this presently became a virtual necessity, because the best supplied army had a visible advantage. Thus gradually, through the progress of civilisation, armies have become highly elaborate machines, which require to be continuously supplied with food, ammunition, clothing, all the material without which they cannot act effectually. Hence they need to keep up continuous communication with their base of operations: and the conditions of strategy have been proportionally altered and rendered more complicated.

There are other changes in tactics, that is to say in equipment and mode of fighting, which may be called political: and it is not always easy to see whether they are the causes, or the effects, of social and political changes; possibly they are both. In the early middle ages, the feudal aristocracy was dominant politically, the mailed knights were preponderant on the battle-field. When infantry had learned on the continent of Europe to repel mailed cavalry with the pike, in England to destroy them with the clothyard arrow, the political supremacy of the feudal nobles waned along with their military superiority: their overthrow was consummated when the development of artillery placed feudal castles at the mercy of the crown. Inasmuch as political power must in the last resort depend on physical force, it is plain that the nature of the armed strength of a nation at any time will be an important element in determining the nature of its government.

There are also lessons to be learnt from battles which may roughly be called moral. Frederick the Great remarked cynically that, so far as he had observed, Providence was always on the side of the strongest battalions: and if the phrase be given sufficient width of interpretation it is perfectly true. No man ever exhibited more clearly than Frederick that strength has many elements. Discipline, endurance, mobility, courage, are all important constituents of military strength, as also is the relative excellence of armament. Soldiers who can be trusted not to lose their heads, either from eagerness or from panic, are worth far more in the long run than more excitable men. The bulldog, that never relaxes his grip but in death, is a more formidable opponent, weight for weight, than the tiger. Still more valuable is the iron tenacity which is capable of fighting after all hope is lost: it may apparently succumb, but such defeat is worth many a victory. The Spartans at Thermopylae were cut to pieces, but they taught the Persian king what Greeks could do, and prepared the way for his headlong flight when his fleet was beaten at Salamis: and the English in the Indian Mutiny enforced the same lesson. The individuals are lost to their country, but their death is worth more than many lives.

English history is in many ways well suited for illustrating the lessons that may be learnt from battles and their setting. It is continuous beyond any other national history of even moderate length. Englishmen of to-day have more in common with the axemen of Harold than Frenchmen of to-day have with the horsemen of Condé. Hence it is easier in England than elsewhere to see the significance of the changes, social and political, which accompany the military changes. The Norman feudal cavalry overcome the Saxon foot-soldiers, and the long-bow presently discomfits the lance; artillery makes mediæval walls worthless: the musket and pike supersede the bow, and the invention of the bayonet combines pike and musket in one. Later still have come enormous extension of the range of

fire, both for infantry and artillery, the invention of new explosives and other engines of destruction, the effects of which are still matters of conjecture. Happily more than a generation has passed since British troops fought on a European battle-field: we have not yet tried long range artillery and machine guns, and cordite and melinite, and the other deadly things that end in – ite, except on a very small scale and against inferior races. But all the previous stages are reflected in our history of a thousand years, to go no further back than Alfred, and in some instances with very special significance.

Moreover English history is on the whole a history of success. We have suffered defeat from time to time, but the last crushing rout of a considerable army even mainly English, which history records, occurred nearly six centuries ago at the hands of our kindred the Scots, who have long since become our fellow-citizens. Why this has been the case is obvious enough; and the battle-fields point the moral very distinctly. First of all the English obtained a coherence of organisation and of feeling which entitled them to be called a nation, as that word is understood now-a-days, centuries before any other peoples of modern Europe; and the military value of that advantage is the foremost lesson of the so-called Hundred Years' War with France. Secondly, "the English don't know when they are beaten," as a great enemy said, in scorn for the stupidity of men who would fight on without perceiving that their opponents had gained tactical advantages, which to the quicker apprehension of some troops would have meant defeat. Such stupidity however is very difficult to distinguish from the dogged resolution which will not give way while life remains: and the quality, by whichever name it is called, is very apt to win. It needs no words to show that the lessons deducible from battles are more obvious to the victors; the losers have a great temptation to see only what may serve to excuse or palliate their defeat.

It may be added that in English history there is a considerable proportion of civil war, where the purely military aspect of things is not obscured by the possible or probable results of diversity of race. The conquest of India is also unique in history, for the mode in which it was achieved as well as for its extent. Thus English history gives every variety – its long continuity spreads its great battles over eight centuries, and those battles have been fought against European equals, in internal conflict, against the alien races of India. The only experience which England has not had is that of one armed nation precipitating itself on another; from this we are happily preserved by the narrow seas.

CHAPTER II
HASTINGS

It is probably needless to say that Hastings was not the first battle of English history. The Romans met with desperate resistance in more than one locality before they could complete their conquest of Britain: indeed it was not completed at all, for the wild tribes of the Scottish highlands never submitted. Details are scantily given: some of the principal scenes of conflict cannot even be identified with any certainty. But any one who desires to know how our British ancestors fought against the Romans may feel sure that the narratives given by Caesar of his battles with the Gauls afford a pretty faithful picture of the battles fought by the Celts on this side of the Channel. He may even be content with newspaper accounts of the fighting in Africa between English troops and Soudanese, or Zulus, or Matabeles. The picture of the fierce enthusiasm, the desperate courage, of untrained savages dashing themselves to pieces against the coolness of disciplined troops armed with superior weapons, is essentially the same, whether the legionaries use the *pilum* or the Maxim gun.

So too, after the Romans had quitted Britain, and the Angles and Saxons came pouring across the narrow seas, the contest between them and the Britons was in some localities most stubborn. The scanty but reasonably trustworthy information which we possess indicates this clearly enough: the kingdom of Wessex in particular extended itself westward very gradually and at the cost of serious battles. The localities of some of these are known, and the geographical and other reasons which led to their taking place on these fields may be fairly well inferred. But of detail there is none, though we may safely conclude that the "dim weird battle of the west" in Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*, which belongs to this age so far as it has other than ideal existence, was totally unlike, except for the fury of hand-to-hand conflict, any actual encounter between British king and heathen invaders leagued with his own rebel subjects.

Similarly when the Anglo-Saxon conquest was complete, and the new kingdoms began to contend for mastery among themselves, there were many bloody battles, some of them of real importance to the history of our island, as marking the decisive points in the severe struggle between Christian Northumbria and heathen Mercia, but little or nothing more than their names is known. Hume in a well-known passage cites with apparent approval the saying of a greater man than himself, to the effect that the battles of the Heptarchy period were of no more interest than the conflicts of kites and crows. If this be overstated from the point of view of their permanent results, it is impossible to dispute its truth relatively to the military aspect of these wars. Little as is known about them, there is every reason to believe that the art of war formed no exception to the general rudeness and ignorance of the age.[1] Indeed there is positive evidence, in the fact that the first Danish invaders, who appeared before England had come to own a single ruler, found the English far their inferiors in arms, in skill, in everything but mere courage. The English had no coherent organisation, no practice in combined warfare, no defensive armour. Hence they were no match for the pirates, clad in mail shirt and iron cap, trained to rapid movement, and prompt to defend themselves behind rudely constructed fortifications when hard pressed.

Gradually the scene changed. The Danes who had begun as mere marauders, landing here and there to plunder and destroy and then return to their ships, remained in the land as conquering settlers. The English gradually adopted arms and equipment similar to those of their enemies, and learned to encounter them on equal terms. By degrees the Saxon kings of Wessex (their power, like good metal, rendered tougher by the hammering it had received from the Danes) became the effective rulers over the main part of the island, over Angles, Saxons and Danes alike, and at least nominally supreme over

[1] There was doubtless learning in Northumbria, but it was altogether monastic, and limited to that one kingdom.

the Celtic fringe in the north and west. Gradually too the organisation took somewhat of a feudal character. The free ceorl bound by the general law to appear in arms for the defence of the country, becomes the "man" of a lord, bound to serve at his call. The Danish Cnut, who won the English crown by the sword after a long conflict in which there are no military differences traceable between Saxon and Dane, but who was in the end fully accepted by both alike, carried the approximation to feudalism still further. He divided England into great earldoms, resembling only too closely the duchies of Normandy and Burgundy in their tendency to become both hereditary and practically independent. When the Danish dynasty died out, the weakness of the restored Saxon king worked for good in one respect: the power of the crown was virtually wielded by Godwine, the ablest of the earls, and by his greater son after him. On the other hand the very preponderance of Godwine's house sharpened the antagonism of its rivals. When Harold, at length king in name as well as in fact, had to face the two-fold danger of invasion from Norway and from Normandy, he found those parts of England which were not ruled by himself or his brothers lukewarm in the national cause: the old separate traditions, the old race jealousy of Angle, Saxon, Dane, had resumed serious activity. The only solid support he had was the finest body of trained infantry which the world had seen since the decay of the Roman legion.

On January 5, 1066, Edward the Confessor died: his last public act had been the consecration of his new abbey at Westminster. The Witenagemot, assembled as usual at Christmas time, and probably in unusual numbers for the sake of the ceremony so dear to the heart of Edward, whose end was known to be near, felt that no time must be lost in filling the throne. The right of election beyond all possible question lay with the Witan: custom prescribed the choice of a member of the royal house, and gave obvious and natural preference to the last king's son, at any rate if he were a grown man; but not even he could have any right save by election and coronation. Now however the royal house was extinct, save a feeble boy, grandson of Edward's elder half-brother; William duke of Normandy was known to be dreaming of the English crown. Under such circumstances there was virtually no alternative but to elect some one not of royal birth: and Harold the earl of Wessex, the virtual ruler of England for some years past, was the only possible choice. Accordingly the crown was offered to him on the very day of Edward's death, and the next day saw the burial of the dead saint and the coronation of the living hero. Harold's position was a difficult one even at home, besides the danger from over seas. The earldom of Mercia, the whole centre of England, was ruled by Edwin, third in succession of a family which had been permanently hostile to the house of Godwine. Northumbria was in the hands of his younger brother Morcar, who had replaced Harold's brother Tostig, against whose tyrannous rule the men of Northumbria had revolted. The young earls were in every way contemptible, feeble in action, narrow-minded, selfish, short-sighted. They saw no reason why Harold should be preferred to themselves, and in their hatred of him lost sight of their own true interests. They dallied with the thought that England might once more be divided into separate kingdoms for their benefit, being ignorant or reckless enough to imagine that they would be able to withstand the Norman if he, through their inactivity, succeeded in conquering Wessex. For the time Harold's personal influence won over the Northumbrians, and the two earls acquiesced in his rule, and were only too glad of his assistance against the Northmen: but when the final stress came not a man whom Edwin and Morcar could control was found by the king's side.

William the Norman had absolutely no claim to the crown of England: his ambition saw an opportunity, and his unscrupulous skill made a string of baseless pretexts look sufficiently plausible to be accepted by those who wished to believe in them. He said that he was the nearest of kin to the late king, which was false; he was a distant cousin, but only through Edward's Norman mother, and so was in no way descended from the English royal house. As reasonably might the king of France have claimed the crown of the Stuarts, on the ground that the wife of Charles I. was a French princess. He said that Edward the Confessor had promised him the succession; and it is most probable that Edward, whose education had been Norman and whose sympathies were not English, had encouraged him,

years before, to hope for it. But the king of England had no right to bequeath the crown; and whatever influence a dying king's recommendation might have, had been exerted in favour of Harold. He said that Harold had done him homage, and sworn[2] solemnly to recognise him as king after Edward's death; but nothing that Harold might have done could bind England. The crown of England was elective, freely so in form: and the only limitation which custom imposed, or which could be pretended to have legal force, confined the choice to members of a single family to which William did not belong.

Nevertheless William succeeded in making this farrago of insolent irrelevancy deceive those whom he was interested in persuading, by the aid of a policy even more unscrupulous and far-reaching than his own. In the eleventh century clearness of thought was rare; men were capable of grasping the idea of kindred, without understanding that not every form of kindred could give rights of inheritance. No one in England, except the handful of Norman settlers, would listen for a moment to William's pretensions: but in Europe generally the notions of hereditary right, and of the sacredness of royal blood, had gained a firmer hold, though fortunately for William they were still vague. It seemed as if a duke of Normandy must needs have a better claim to a vacant throne than any mere subject. Most important of all, William obtained the aid of the Church to condemn Harold for perjury. England had always been too independent to please the papacy; and Hildebrand, afterwards the greatest of popes as Gregory VII., who already swayed the papal policy, saw the value of the opportunity. To denounce Harold as having forfeited the crown by his perjury, to grant the solemn blessing of the Church to William's mission of pure conquest, would, if William succeeded, be a great step towards establishing the papal claim to make and unmake kings at will, to be supreme temporally as well as spiritually. William could thus appeal for aid to the superstition as well as to the cupidity of all the adventurers of western Europe, as the popes did later for the crusades. It was indeed the first, the most successful, and perhaps the most wicked of all crusades.

William lost no time in solemnly demanding the crown of England as his by right, and formally calling on Harold to fulfil his oath; of course he expected the curt refusal which he received. It was no part of his policy to conceal his purpose: rather he hoped to awaken superstitious terrors in the minds of the English, and give them time to grow. His preparations however took many months, and when he was ready, contrary winds delayed the passage of the Channel for many weeks more, to his great advantage. Harold got together a large fleet to guard the Channel, and called out the *fyrd* of the southern counties to defend the coast. But a body of men serving without pay is hard to keep together, and the imperfect resources of the age made it difficult to feed them. In September, when the summer was over, and no Norman expedition had appeared, Harold was obliged to disband his army, and let the fleet go back to London. Almost immediately he received the news that another and to all appearance more formidable enemy was on the point of invading England in the north.

Tostig, Harold's brother, who had been driven out by his Northumbrian subjects, and whom Harold's justice had refused to support against them, thought he saw his opportunity for revenge and restoration. Whether he suggested to Harold Hardrada, king of Norway, that he should attempt to seize the English throne, or whether Hardrada had already thought of it as a fitting crown to his career of warlike adventure, is not clear. Certainly they united in the last, the greatest and the most disastrous of the Viking expeditions. With a fleet of several hundred ships, manned it is said by half the fighting population of his kingdom, Harold Hardrada crossed to the Orkneys, and drawing contingents from thence and from Scotland, sailed down the Northumbrian coast, plundering and destroying. Entering

[2] The famous story of Harold having sworn unconsciously on all the relics in Normandy, is told by the Norman writers in many different forms, more or less inconsistent with each other, and some of them demonstrably incorrect; and it is impossible to discover the truth. That William accused Harold of perjury all over Europe, and that no answer was attempted, is evidence that something of the sort had happened. As Professor Freeman points out, the absolute silence of all the English chroniclers implies that they did not know how to meet the accusation. Harold must have taken some such oath, under some form of coercion, and so have given his enemy an advantage; but obviously it would have been a greater crime to keep such an oath than to break it. Obviously too, on any version of the story that is not self-refuted, William's conduct was far more dishonourable than Harold's.

the Humber, he went up the Ouse as far as Riccall, some ten miles south of York, and leaving his ships there under a guard, marched upon York. Morcar the earl of Northumbria had so far made no attempt at resistance, but he had gathered the *fyrd* of his earldom, and perhaps of his brother's also, for the two earls moved together from York to meet the invaders. On September 20 a battle took place at Fulford, only two miles from York, in which the earls, after a severe struggle, were decisively defeated. The city surrendered, and the Northmen withdrew to Stamford Bridge on the Derwent, eight miles east of York, to await the collecting of hostages in token of the submission of the whole earldom. King Harold, on hearing the news of his namesake's expedition, had hastily gathered what forces he could, and marched with all speed northwards. On the morning of September 25 he reached York, which had only surrendered the day before, and without halting went in search of the enemy.

Harold Hardrada's camp was pitched on the eastern side of the Derwent – the locality is still known as the Battle Flats – but some of his men were on the western bank, keeping no watch, and in no way prepared for battle. The road from York rises slightly most of the way, and then descends a mile or two to the Derwent: hence Harold's approach was not seen until he was near at hand. The Northmen on the western bank resisted as long as they could, but were driven over the river. One man, we are told by his enemies, defended the bridge with his single arm for some time, until he was killed by a thrust from below. Then the English crossed the Derwent, and the real struggle began.

The Northmen were drawn up, according to their usual tactics when standing on the defensive, in a continuous ring, their shields interlocking. In the centre rose their standard, the black raven, significantly known as the Landwaster, the gigantic form of the last of the Vikings towering beside it. Their weapon of offence was the long two-handed sword, though how they managed to wield it, and yet maintain the continuity of the shield wall, is rather difficult to understand.

According to the famous saga of Snorro Sturleson, the English king made one last effort for peace before beginning the final onset. His face concealed by his helmet, he rode across with a few of his thegns to the enemy, and offered his brother forgiveness and the restoration of his earldom if he would return to his allegiance. "And what," replied Tostig, "shall be given to king Harold of Norway?" "Seven feet of land for a grave, or as much more as he needs, since he is taller than other men." "Then go back, and tell king Harold of England to prepare for battle: it shall never be said in Norway that I brought their king over to England, and then deserted him." The story is too true to the spirit of the age not to be told; but authority for it there is none, any more than for the words of the champions in Homer. The saga was written so long after the event that it had been quite forgotten how the English of that day fought: they are described as consisting entirely of horsemen and archers, after the fashion prevalent two centuries and more later. Nothing on the contrary is more certain than that at Stamford Bridge there were few or none of either arm. The battle was fought and won mainly by king Harold's housecarls, armed with the Danish axe.

It needs little imagination to picture the encounter of the two hosts, clad and armed substantially in the same fashion, practically of the same race. After a desperate hand-to-hand conflict the English prevailed; Harold Hardrada and Tostig were both killed, and the host of the Northmen was almost annihilated. With politic mercy Harold allowed his namesake's youthful son and the remnant of the invaders to sail home, on their giving pledges for peace, which in truth they were long in no condition to break. The victory of Stamford Bridge was a great stroke for the security of Europe generally: it broke for ever the aggressive power of the Northmen, which for two centuries had been a standing danger to all coasts from the mouth of the Baltic to far into the Mediterranean, and which had completely conquered two regions as far remote from each other as Sicily and Normandy. At the same time the fearful losses of the battle may well have turned the scale in the struggle that was impending with the transformed Northmen from across the Channel.

William of Normandy's fleet and army was assembled in the first instance at the mouth of the Dive, west of the Seine. Of its numbers it is impossible to speak with confidence, the accounts vary so greatly; but it was as large and complete as the resources of his duchy and the promises he

held out to adventurers could make it. He was ready to sail some time in August, but the wind was steadily contrary. About the time when the English fleet was perforce withdrawn from the Channel, he was able to move his whole expedition to the mouth of the Somme, a necessary preliminary to attempting to cross the Channel. So large a fleet, consisting no doubt to a great extent of open boats, could not possibly have ventured to make the passage from the original point of assembly, which was doubtless selected as being more central to Normandy generally. Not for two or three weeks more did the necessary south wind blow. On September 27 the wind was at last favourable: next day William landed at Pevensey, and on the 29th occupied Hastings, where he formed a fortified camp to protect his ships. Nothing could have been more opportune for his interests: he had been unable to move while the English fleet was at sea, nor until Harold, far away in the north, had been weakened by the slaughter among his housecarls at Stamford Bridge. It was not the Norman's policy to plunge into a hostile country. Harold must needs come to meet him, and the nearer he could bring on a battle to his fleet, and therefore to his means of escape in case of defeat, the better for him. Accordingly he remained at Hastings, ravaging the country far and wide, partly for subsistence, partly to compel Harold to approach him.

A Sussex thegn soon brought the news to Harold: he had ridden the whole distance to York in three days, and found the king, so the story is told, at the banquet held in honour of his recent victory. Harold returned to London at once with his housecarls, summoning in all haste the forces of the south and east of England, which responded heartily to the call, the men of Kent and of London foremost. As soon as an adequate number was assembled, he marched straight to meet the invader. The king's exact movements cannot be traced, but the speed with which the whole was accomplished was extraordinary. In sixteen days at the latest from the time of William's landing, Harold and his army were close to him. In that time the news had been conveyed to York, the king's army had marched the whole way back, and men had been sent for and gathered from every shire from the Wash to the Exe. While in London, say the chroniclers, Harold was urged to let his brother Gyrth lead the army against the Norman, on the ground that, while he could not deny his promise to William, and there was a widespread fear of the wrath of the saints at his breaking the oath sworn on their relics, all this applied only to Harold personally. The king might stay in London, organise further levies, and by wasting the country render the advance of the invaders impossible: all would not be lost even if Gyrth were defeated. Harold rejected the well-meant advice; he would ask no one to run a risk he was not prepared to share, he would never harm those who were entrusted to his care. The decision was wise as well as chivalrous, in his peculiar position: his standing aloof would only have strengthened the superstitious awe which the maledictions of the Church on his perjury aroused, and given excuse for other defections than those for which Edwin and Morcar were responsible. Under ordinary circumstances a king's or a commander-in-chief's obvious duty is not to risk his own life. In Harold's case every consideration dictated his being personally foremost in the fight. It would have been well for England had he acted on the advice in a reversed sense, and left Gyrth behind in his stead. While Harold lived Gyrth was only of minor importance; when Harold had fallen, the cause of England might still have been sustained successfully by his brother.

The contemporary, or nearly contemporary, accounts of the battle of Hastings are numerous, both English and Norman, but their statements differ greatly. Hardly any of them write with knowledge of the ground; none, it may be safely said, with anything like military precision. It is easy to discount the exaggerations of partisanship; it is easy to perceive that some statements made cannot be true, for reasons of time and distance, or because they are based on misapprehension of known facts. Beyond this one can only conjecture, as one statement seems more probable than another, or more easily reconcilable with things ascertained beyond reasonable doubt. Moreover, though the locality of the battle is open to no question, the appearance of it has been so much changed, that reconstruction of its condition at the date of the battle must again be imperfect. Much was probably altered in the building of Battle Abbey, much has certainly been altered in forming the grounds of

the modern house, which include the ruins of the abbey church. For instance the slope up to the spot where Harold's standard was planted, a spot fixed for all time by the high altar of Battle Abbey being placed there, is in its upper part scarped to form a terrace. Again, the whole position looks very like one that might have been selected in earlier days for a camp. The ditch which some accounts say covered Harold's front may possibly have been an ancient one; in which case the hollow bearing the name of Malfosse on the other side, where the defeated English turned and smote their pursuers, may have been partly artificial also. But the present state of the ground affords no positive support to this conjecture, though it does not negative it. All that can be done, in attempting to picture the battle for modern readers, without going into wearisome detail, is to tell the story in a form that does not contradict the known conditions, and to refer to the original authorities[3] readers who desire to judge for themselves.

Harold was by the necessity of the case compelled to fight a battle: so far the Norman had prevailed. Tactically however Harold succeeded in forcing the Norman to fight on ground of his choosing, under conditions favourable to the English method of fighting, and unfavourable to the Norman method. He posted his army on a projecting bit of hill, a spur in fact of the South Downs, close to the direct road from Hastings towards London. William of Normandy could not possibly pass the English without fighting: if he did so he was liable to be cut off from his ships. Nor could he wait indefinitely at Hastings: he had no choice but to advance. Further, to receive attack in a defensive position was what gave the best chance of success to the English, practically all foot-soldiers, the best of them clothed in mail shirts and armed with axes. Finally, the piece of ground actually chosen was exactly suitable for its purpose: it was not too large to be fully manned, and it compelled the Normans to charge uphill. On the other hand it is obvious that the Normans, whose main strength lay in mailed horsemen, could not stand on the defensive; attack was what they were fitted for.

Harold's army was drawn up facing to the south, on a ridge somewhat under a mile in length. The ground in front sloped away, gently on the right, steeply in the centre, rather less steeply on the left flank, where the little town of Battle now stands. Behind the right and again behind the left there were hollows, the latter being apparently then the most marked. Behind the centre of the hill was a sort of broad isthmus connecting it with the mass of the Downs. Along the whole or part of the front a palisade[4] of some kind seems to have been constructed, by way of protection against the onset of the Norman horsemen: but this cannot possibly have been an elaborate and solid barrier. In the first place there was not time to make such a thing; as has been already noted, the interval between William's landing and the battle was amazingly short for what was done in it. Harold cannot possibly have had more than one October day in which to fortify his position. Nor is there the least probability that the Norman would have looked on, while the position he would have to attack was strengthened to the extent suggested. Moreover there were no materials for such a work ready to hand, though there may well have been plenty for a slighter fence. A chronicler of later date does indeed say that houses were pulled down for the purpose; but the contemporaries imply, if they do not positively assert, that there

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[3] Professor Freeman's great History of the Norman Conquest contains a very minute discussion of every point of detail, and a narrative framed by laboriously piecing together the statements which on careful comparison he deems most correct. Much of this is very valuable, though there is at least one important point in which his account cannot be right. Much of it is more or less wasted labour, because it involves giving a precise meaning to expressions in the authorities which were probably used loosely. The main outlines are clear enough, the details are at least partially conjectural, and inferences based on physical facts are a safer guide, so far as they go, than interpretations of the inconsistent and perhaps unmeaning language of monkish writers.There is also the Bayeux Tapestry, which has been reproduced by Mr. Collingwood Bruce, and which for costume and arms is invaluable: but from the nature of the case it is a very poor guide in determining the tactics of the battle. To rely on it for such purposes, as Professor Freeman and others do, seems to me as unreasonable as to deduce a military history of the battle of Agincourt from Shakespeare's *Henry V.*, as put on the stage.

[4] A vehement controversy has raged since Professor Freeman's death regarding the accuracy of his narrative, the point most strenuously disputed being his statement that Harold's front was protected by a solid wooden barrier. It is maintained in opposition that there was nothing but the wall of interlaced shields familiar to both Saxons and Danes. Without entering into the controversy, I content myself with saying that while the weight of testimony seems to be in favour of some kind of obstacle having been erected, I am satisfied, for the reasons given in the text, that there cannot have been anything like the massive structure described by Professor Freeman.

were none near: the spot is identified in one English chronicle only as being "by the hoary apple-tree." Again, the narratives of the actual battle describe close hand-to-hand fighting, which must have been across the barrier, if there was one; and this is obviously inconsistent with its having been a massive structure, still more so with its having been double or triple. Whatever the nature of the fortification, whether palisade or ditch, or both, it was only a slight additional protection: the real defence of the position was the stout arms of the English.

The Norman camp was still at Hastings, seven miles off. We hear of spies being sent out by both sides, and of the Englishmen, unused to see shaven faces, coming back with the report that there were more priests than soldiers among the Normans. We hear of formal demands made by William that Harold should keep his oath, or submit to the arbitration of the Church, an obvious mockery, as the Pope had already sent William a consecrated banner in token of his solemn blessing on the invasion. We even hear of William challenging Harold to decide the dispute by single combat. Such are just the details likely to be invented by a narrator desiring to be picturesque; the only intrinsic improbability about them is that they imply a longer time spent by the two armies in the presence of each other than is consistent with the known facts.

Early on the morning of October 14, the Norman host marched out from Hastings, and passing over the intervening high ground, halted on the hill of Telham, whence they looked down on the English position, a mile and a half away on the other side of the valley. Here the knights assumed their heavy armour, and the duke by accident put on his coat of mail hind part before. His superstitious followers were shocked at the evil omen, but he readily turned it, as most such supposed presages can be turned, in his own favour, saying, "That means that my duchy will be turned into a kingdom." Hearing from one of his spies that Harold's standard was displayed, so that there was no doubt that the king was there and meant to fight, William went on to vow that in case of victory he would build an abbey where that standard stood. The centre of the army, when drawn up for attack, consisted of the native Normans, the left of the auxiliaries from Brittany and Maine, more or less dependent on Normandy; the right was formed of the French adventurers who had joined in the expedition in hopes of sharing the plunder of England, but was commanded by William Fitzosborn and Roger of Montgomery, two of William's most trusted nobles. The sole idea of battle being an attack straight to the front, the whole line was formed in the same way. The archers went foremost to do what mischief they could to the stationary English. Next came the heavier armed foot-soldiers to break down the defences (whatever they were), and open the way for the mounted knights, who constituted the third line, and on whom the chief stress of decisive fighting would fall. In the centre rode the duke himself, with his brother Odo bishop of Bayeux by his side, each armed, as the tapestry shows them, with the heavy mace.

It was about nine a.m.,[5] according to the chroniclers who note the hour, that the battle began. About the centre of the English line were planted the twin royal standards. The red dragon of Wessex, which had waved over many a battle-field and had but rarely seen defeat, appeared now for the last time. Beside it Harold's own personal device, the Fighting-man, the figure of an armed warrior embroidered in gold, marked on its first and last field the spot where the king and his brothers fought. Harold's housecarls, and the men of London and Kent armed in like fashion, formed the centre of the line. On their left were seemingly men less heavily armed, but quite able to hold their own against their opponents. On this part of the line the fighting throughout the battle seems to have been obstinate, equal, and uneventful; the great oscillations of fortune, the murderous repulses, the ultimate success of the Normans, are at the centre and on the right. From the present appearance of the ground there can be no doubt that the access to the English right was by a much gentler slope than elsewhere.

[5] It must have been later in reality; since sunrise, the whole Norman army had marched seven miles, had halted, and had then been arrayed in order of battle, and this on October 14. Moreover, such a battle could not have lasted nine hours, and it certainly ended at dark.

Nevertheless the ill-armed portion of the English host, peasants with no defensive armour, carrying javelins or clubs, a few possibly with bows, were there placed. A modern general would certainly have guarded with special care the flank that was most easily assailable. Harold doubtless took for granted, and quite correctly, that wherever he planted his standard, thither the principal attack would be directed.

While the archers covered the general advance with a flight of arrows, a minstrel named Taillefer rode forward singing "of Charlemagne and Roland, and those who died at Roncesvalles." Throwing his sword into the air and catching it again, he made straight for the English, and killed two, one with his lance and one with his sword, before he himself fell. Behind him the Norman foot-soldiers charged up the hill, met by darts and stones, and as they reached the line by the deadlier hand weapons. Finding that they made no impression, William led in person the charge of the mailed knights, to be equally repulsed. Horse and man went down under the blows of the terrible axe. The Bretons and others on the Norman left fled in confusion, pursued by some of the English right, who contrary to orders broke their ranks to follow up the flying enemy. Panic and disorder spread more or less to the centre: there was a cry that the duke was slain: the battle was almost lost. Baring his head, William in person stemmed the tide and drove the fugitives back: they rallied and cut down such of the English as had ventured far in pursuit.

The duke, as soon as order was restored, led a fresh attack on the English standard. This time his horse was killed under him, but he himself escaped unhurt, to deal with his own hand, if one is to follow Professor Freeman's account, a very serious blow to the English cause, by slaying Gyrth, Harold's brother and most trusted counsellor. Harold's other brother Leofwine fell, according to the picture in the Tapestry, about the same time with Gyrth. Still the English line remained unbroken; though the defences must have been by this time more or less broken down, the men behind were as firm as ever. Had not William possessed a ready insight, prompter than anything we find elsewhere in mediæval warfare, the Norman chivalry would have exhausted itself finally in vain charges, and Hastings had been as Crecy. The Norman duke however had noted that the only thing which hitherto had disturbed the impregnable line of the English was the rush from the right in pursuit of the flying Bretons. He ventured on the bold experiment of bidding his left make a fresh assault, take again to flight, and if the English rushed forward, turn suddenly on the pursuers. The stratagem succeeded; again the English, out of reach of their king's direct authority, broke their line entirely. When the feigned flight was converted into a fresh charge they were taken utterly at a disadvantage, and though they filled the hollow round the right of the position with French dead, they none the less were routed. The Norman horsemen could now easily reach the level of the hill top, and charge along it towards the standard, instead of toiling up the slope in front. Even yet the battle was in doubt; the Normans could bring the weight of horses and men to bear more effectually, and the English had lost the protection such as it was of their palisade, but the horsemen could charge only on a narrow front, the width of the ridge, instead of up its whole face. Once more William's ready skill suggested a combination against which mere courage and strength must ultimately fail. His archers had obviously been useless while the direct charges up the slope were going on, and of little avail in the intervals, when the English could protect themselves with their shields. He could now use both archers and horsemen together, for the ground to the south was free[6] for the archers, when the knights had reached the hill top on their left. Bidding his archers shoot into the air, so that their arrows fell like rain about the standard, he led the horsemen on once more. The device was fatal. The English could not ward off the arrows, while engaged in hand-to-hand conflict: they must perish or give way, unless darkness came to their rescue. Just before sunset the final blow was struck: an arrow pierced Harold's eye, and as he lay in

[6] This suggestion is not based on any direct statement, but it seems to be the only way in which the archers could have aimed effectually. If they had been behind the horsemen, shooting over their heads, the arrows would have been as likely to strike Normans as Saxons.

agony at the foot of the standard he was despatched by four knights. If we could believe the exulting French poet they mangled his body brutally; but this is happily inconsistent with the certain fact that his corpse was found and buried. The standards were trampled down, the position was at every part seized by the Normans; still the desperate English fought on, and hardly a man of Harold's personal following, or of the nobility of southern England, survived the day, except those already too badly wounded to move. Under cover of the darkness the light armed English fled, again inflicting serious loss on their pursuers, who rolled headlong into the hollow that afterwards bore the significant name of Malfosse.

Had Harold, or even Gyrth, survived the battle, the conquest of England, it is said, need not have ensued. The remark is a futile one; under the peculiar conditions there was no third alternative. Harold, we may safely say, never dreamed of the possibility of surviving defeat: and his brothers, once in the field, would share his fate, whether victory or death. The Norman duke, we are told, to taste the full flavour of his triumph, had his tent pitched where the English standard had stood, and passed the night there, surrounded by the piled-up dead. Next day William superintended the burial of his own dead; the corpses of the English he left to the dogs and birds, except such as their kindred carried away. Two monks from Harold's own abbey of Waltham came offering large sums, in their own name and in the name of his aged mother, for leave to inter the fallen king within the walls he had built. But the conqueror was inexorable: he bade one of his knights bury the body of the accursed of the Church beneath a cairn of stones on the Sussex shore.[7] Little as William meant it, he was giving the noblest of sepulchres to the fallen hero, the one English king who has died fighting for his fatherland.

Our sympathies are naturally with Harold and the English, defending their homes and their independence against unprovoked foreign aggression. William's claim was based on falsehood, supported by fraud, established by violence. Nevertheless when once king he ruled well and wisely. If he rewarded his followers with English lands, he prevented the intrusive nobles from obtaining the position and privileges which would render them a mere curse to England. In the fifth generation their descendants had become the leaders of a fairly united nation, winning for all ranks and classes the Great Charter of liberty. Without the Norman Conquest, without the new blood mingled with the English race, without the new ideas introduced into church and state through closer intercourse with the continent, the subsequent history must have been totally different, and so far as conjecture is admissible, far less eminent than it in fact has been, alike in arts and arms, in commerce and in government.

From the point of view of the art of war, the battle of Hastings is also important, marking an epoch there too very decidedly. For more than two centuries after Hastings infantry are of no account in western Europe. The battle had indeed been won by the skilful combination of archery with the charge of mailed horsemen. It is at least doubtful whether the latter would finally have prevailed without the rain of arrows to smite and perplex those whom they were attacking in front. The horsemen however did in fact trample under foot the last relics of Harold's heavy armed foot-soldiers, and feudal pride did the rest. It was taken for granted on all hands that mailed knights, and they alone, constituted strength in war, and this fell in with the political ideas of the age only too well. Seven generations were destined to elapse before the tables began to be turned on the knights.

[7] Harold's tomb was shown at Waltham down to the date of the dissolution of the abbey. There is no positive information on the point, but there seems no reason for rejecting the explanation that William afterwards allowed the corpse of Harold to be removed to Waltham. It is at least much more probable than that a falsehood should have been allowed to pass unchallenged.

CHAPTER III
THE BARONS' WAR

The Norman Conquest was, to the English body politic, like one of those powerful drugs which seriously disorder the constitution for the time, but if the patient has strength to bear the treatment do him permanent good. The Barons' War was, as it were, the last feverish fit resulting from the Conquest. The Normans, though they had adopted French ideas and speech, were in race closely akin to the Anglo-Danes; and the fusion between them was hastened by the accession of the house of Anjou to the throne. The Conqueror and his sons had to a certain extent identified themselves with England, leaning for support against the turbulent Norman barons upon their English subjects. Henry II., though he did great things for England as a wise legislator and strong administrator, was distinctly a foreigner. His father was French, his wife was French, his ambition was to dominate France. Henry III., without his grandfather's strong qualities for both good and evil, was still more completely un-English. His confidence was given only to foreigners, to the Poitevin kindred of his mother, to the Provençal and Savoyard kindred of his wife, never to Englishmen. He fleeced the nation and the church beyond endurance to enrich foreign favourites, to satisfy the Pope, to further schemes of vague ambition alien, if not hostile, to English interests. Naturally strong opposition was roused, which pervaded the nation generally, and was headed by the greatest of the nobles and the most conspicuous prelates who were not foreign intruders. Their chief, Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester, though French by birth, had inherited a great station from his English mother, and was as thorough an English patriot as was in that age possible. The barons at length forced upon the king changes in his government, which amounted to a temporary superseding of the royal authority. The king of course strove to free himself from restraint: and desultory hostilities followed, which led to an agreement to refer the matters in dispute to the arbitration of the king of France. The high reputation of Saint Louis seems to have blinded the barons to the fact that he was on principle a steady upholder of royal power. His award was completely in Henry's favour, and the appeal was most injurious to the barons' cause. They must either abandon all that they had been contending for, or repudiate the judgment they had themselves accepted beforehand. The former evil was the worse of the two: they chose war.

The decisive struggle took place at Lewes in Sussex, which the king had made his headquarters, as being the seat of earl Warrenne, his brother-in-law and most powerful supporter. Montfort marched to Fletching, some nine miles from Lewes, whence he despatched the bishops of London and Worcester to attempt to come to terms with the king. The royalist party were far too confident to listen to any compromise; probably they were ignorant of Montfort's strength, for they did not even send out scouts to watch his movements. On receiving the contemptuous defiance of the king the barons resolved to march before daylight next morning (May 14, 1264). Religious feeling ran high in their camp: earl Simon exhorted all his followers to confess their sins before the battle, and the bishop of Worcester solemnly absolved and blessed the kneeling host, after which all put a white cross on breast and back, as a token that they were going to war for the right. The army advanced unopposed and unobserved, till they came up on the great ridge of the South Downs, whence they could see Lewes, about two miles off. Here a halt was made, to form order of battle, before beginning the descent. The Londoners, a numerous body and zealous in the cause, but little trained to war, were on the left. Montfort's sons commanded the right, the earl of Gloucester the centre. Montfort himself was at the head of a fourth division, which was either in reserve, or on the right centre. Modern writers seem agreed that it was in reserve, though the contemporary authorities do not say so expressly: apparently

they assume it, because the regular mediæval practice was to divide into three "battles."[8] If Montfort really did so organise his line of battle, he was in advance of his contemporaries, and most thoroughly deserved his victory. The earl is credited with a rather puerile device by way of deceiving the enemy. He had injured his leg some time before, and had been obliged to travel in some kind of carriage,[9] or horse litter. This had accompanied him so far: he now left it behind on the ridge of the downs, with the baggage of the army, under a guard; and it is suggested that he did this in order to make the royalists think he had stayed there in person, unable to ride.

The barons' army was approaching Lewes from the north-west. The tidal river Ouse half encircles the town; coming from the north it bends round the east side, where the bridge was and is, and then flows southwards to the sea, but at that date the ground to the south of the town was more or less flooded every tide. On the north edge of the town is the castle, on the south the large priory of St. Pancras, which was the king's headquarters. From the height where Montfort left his baggage a well-marked ridge runs southwards, falling almost to the level of the plain two miles due west of Lewes. South of this the ground again rises in a sort of hog's back on which stand two wind-mills, bearing the name of Kingstone mills: the present Brighton road runs through the gap. East of the ridge is a hollow, large enough to hold the present race-course, and beyond this is a gentler slope, straight down to Lewes, which is hollowed out in its lower part, so as to divide it into two, the easternmost portion leading straight to the castle.

On the alarm being given the royalist army assembled in all haste, in the usual three divisions, of which prince Edward, the king's eldest son, commanded the right; the king in person was in the centre; the left was under his brother Richard, earl of Cornwall, the titular king of the Romans.[10] The prince, issuing from the castle, found himself opposed to the Londoners who formed Montfort's left wing, and who seem to have been somewhat in advance. With youthful zeal he charged them at once, and put them to flight. Some writers say that he selected the Londoners for attack, because of his eagerness to avenge the insults offered to his mother in passing through London a little while before: and it is perfectly possible that this animosity led him to pursue them, as in fact he did, several miles, thereby losing the battle: but it is obvious that he had no time to select his opponents, even if the arrangement which committed the right wing to his leadership had allowed it. Gloucester with the centre came down the other part of the slope leading straight to the town, and thus encountered the king: of this there can be no reasonable doubt, or that the king after an obstinate conflict was driven into the priory. But it seems to be generally assumed that Henry and Guy de Montfort led their wing down the ridge which runs southwards, and that Richard of Cornwall met them at the bottom. The slope is extremely steep for a mediæval force of mounted horsemen in order of battle; moreover to do this would have left a very dangerous gap between the right and centre. It seems more probable that Montfort's right descended straight on Lewes in close proximity to the centre. However this may be, the right wing encountered the earl of Cornwall's troops, and could make no impression on them, until Montfort supported his sons with his own division. Then the king of the Romans was routed, and himself took refuge in a wind-mill, doubtless on the spot now known as

[8] This word, which is of course French but was adopted in English with the same signification, definitely means a body of men, originally mailed horsemen, drawn up together; but it implies nothing as to their formation or strength. The usual practice was to form three; the vanguard, which became ordinarily the right when in line of battle; the rearguard, which similarly became the left; and the main battle or centre. In the Latin chroniclers the equivalent term is generally *acies*, which occasionally leads to some confusion in interpreting their statements, as the classical sense of *acies* is order of battle, as contrasted with *agmen*, order of march.

[9] It is suggested that this was a waggon, such as was habitually used in Italy at an earlier date, and occasionally at least in England (as at the battle of the Standard), to carry to battle the standard of the town. The earl's standard certainly floated over it, and attracted prince Edward's attention: and from the account given of the prisoners being shut up in it, it would seem to have been very substantially built. Montfort however would hardly have travelled in such a waggon, and certainly the royalists imagined he was in it. There is no reason except the silence of the chroniclers why there should not have been both a *carroccio*, and also Montfort's own carriage.

[10] As he had not been crowned at Rome he had no right to use the imperial title.

Kingstone,[11] where he eventually surrendered. By this time the king's own division had also been broken, and though part escaped into the priory, most part of them were cut off from both it and the castle, and were slaughtered in the streets of the town. The only hope of retrieving even partially the fortunes of the day lay in the prince, who after pursuing the Londoners to his heart's content, had caught sight on his return of Montfort's carriage, and assuming that the earl was lying helpless in it, made a dash to seize him and the baggage. The carriage however contained three citizens of London who had entered into some plot against Montfort, and had been carried off as prisoners and left there for safety; but in the confusion of the sudden onslaught the poor citizens were killed by their own friends. By the time prince Edward had got back to Lewes it was growing dark; many of his companions, including earl Warrenne himself, seeing that all was lost, fled over the bridge, which soon became a scene of frightful confusion, hundreds being drowned in the river, or forced into the tidal mud and there suffocated.

The foregoing account of the battle of Lewes is partly conjectural: the chroniclers are as usual wanting in precision of language, and not altogether in accord; and there is always room for doubt as to the identification of localities vaguely described. It agrees with the conformation of the ground, and with the ascertained facts: particularly it explains the king being driven into the priory, and the earl of Cornwall into a wind-mill. With the royal right wing gone, after the prince had dashed on the Londoners, Gloucester would have had no real difficulty in pressing the king's right, so as to cut him off from the castle, which would be an obvious advantage. Again Montfort's own troops, whether in the right centre or in the second line, would naturally have come down on Richard of Cornwall's right, and separated him from the king, and unless the story of Richard's barricading himself in a wind-mill is altogether an invention, which there is not the slightest reason to imagine, it could only have been the Kingstone mill. Wind-mills, beyond most things, remain for centuries on the same spot.

The Barons' War is the only occasion in English history, except the great civil war of the seventeenth century, in which a national party in arms against the crown won a great victory in the field, and became dominant in consequence, at least temporarily. It is an interesting coincidence that the blunder which lost Lewes, the eagerness of a youthful prince to pursue his routed opponents, regardless of the general fate of the battle, should have been repeated, not once only, by his descendant four centuries later. The hastiness of Rupert prevented Edgehill from being a victory, and definitely lost Naseby, the final battle of the war. Otherwise Lewes has no great military interest. It exhibits the disastrous results to a defeated army of having a river in its rear, and (possibly) the value of a reserve. But the two armies were alike in equipment, in straightforward hard fighting all along the line, in the preponderance of mailed horsemen. Of missile weapons we hear nothing, except that *balistarii* assisted in defeating Richard of Cornwall: the word is often used to denote cross-bowmen, and probably has that meaning here. The strange thing is that there should be no trace of the archers, who only thirty years later played an important part at Falkirk.

The battle of Lewes made Montfort master of England, and gave him the opportunity of summoning the famous assembly, to which for the first time the towns sent representatives. His rule was not very successful: hampered as he was by the natural hostility of the king and his adherents, and by the selfish jealousy of some of his own party, he would have been more than human if he had overcome all his difficulties, and laid himself open to no imputations of personal love of power. The fact that he had the king in his hands, virtually a prisoner, made his position especially difficult. So long as the king was in his power, he could not expect the royalists to acquiesce in his new policy: to let him go was to give up his one safeguard. The earl of Gloucester, the most powerful of his supporters, broke away from him, chiefly out of personal jealousy. Earl Warrenne and others of the fugitives from Lewes landed in South Wales with a strong force in the spring of 1265. Montfort was at Hereford, trying to quiet the disordered marches of Wales, the king and prince Edward with him.

[11] The name itself may very possibly be derived from the event.

From Hereford the prince made his escape on May 28, and became naturally the head of the royalist party. Bristol, Gloucester, Worcester fell into the hands of prince Edward; the earl was unable to cross the Severn, and was obliged to wait until his second son Simon could bring an army to his assistance. Simon had been besieging Pevensey, and was a long time in reaching Kenilworth, his father's principal stronghold. The castle was too small to contain his troops, and Simon with incredible carelessness allowed them to remain outside without keeping any guard, apparently for two or three days at least, since Edward at Worcester had time to hear of it, it is said through a female spy. On the night of July 31, Edward marched rapidly from Worcester, and completely surprised young Simon's forces, capturing several important prisoners and all the baggage. Simon himself escaped into the castle, but he and his army were utterly lost to his father's cause.

On the same day the earl of Leicester left Hereford, and crossing the Severn in boats camped some miles to the south of Worcester. He probably had heard that his son had reached Kenilworth, and may either have purposed to attack prince Edward, while, as he might expect, his son was approaching the prince from another quarter, or simply to effect a junction with his son. Edward had taken great pains, apparently with success, to let no fugitives escape from Kenilworth: for the earl never heard of his son's overthrow. The exact times are somewhat differently given by the various authorities, but it is quite certain that Montfort was in Evesham early on August 4, and that Edward knew of his movements and had time to anticipate him. One story is that the king, who was still with him, insisted on stopping at Evesham on the evening of the 3rd, that he might sup in the abbey and hear mass there next morning, a request with which the earl could not decently refuse to comply without a strong motive, which, ignorant as he was of the disaster at Kenilworth, he could not have. The king's love of ease, and of devotion, would account for this well enough: that he did it in concert with his son, in order to delay Montfort, is not credible, for in that case Edward might have saved some miles of a hard march. The prince, on ascertaining that the earl had moved from his camp at Kempsey south of Worcester, in the direction of Kenilworth, formed a plan for cutting him off.

Evesham stands on the north bank of the Avon, at the bottom of a loop some two miles deep and one wide. In the thirteenth century the banks were marshy, and there was no bridge for a long distance, except one at Evesham leading to the hamlet of Bengeworth on the east of the loop. Over the high ground known as Green Hill, rising above the town and filling the north part of the loop, ran the direct road from Worcester, crossing the Avon by a ford[12] at Offenham, two miles above Evesham. By this road prince Edward set part of his forces, including probably all his foot-soldiers, to march in the night of August 3, in pursuit of Leicester, entrusting the command to his new supporter the earl of Gloucester. He himself started with a large body of horsemen on the north road, so that his purpose might not be detected, then cutting across country to the eastward reached the ford on the Avon at Prior's Cleeve, some miles above Evesham, early on the 4th. As the road from Evesham to Kenilworth passes near Prior's Cleeve on the left bank, he hoped thus to intercept the earl in front, while Gloucester pressed on his rear. Finding that there was no sign of Montfort's approach, he descended the left bank as far as Offenham: thence he despatched Roger Mortimer with a detachment to hold the bridge at Bengeworth and prevent the earl escaping that way, and himself recrossed the Avon and occupied Green Hill.[13]

When troops were first seen from Evesham on the slopes above, it was supposed that they were young Montfort's army come to join his father: for among the banners that waved over the prince's ranks were those captured at Kenilworth. "It is my son," said the old earl, "nevertheless go up and

[12] There are the remains of an ancient bridge at this spot, where so many of the fugitives from the battle were cut to pieces that the meadow bears the name of Dead Man's Eyot: but there is no mention of a bridge in the authorities, so that probably the bridge was built later.

[13] Here again I have given the account which seems to me most probable, after study of the ground and of the authorities. Professor Prothero, in his *Life of Simon de Montfort* (p. 339 note), gives the different possibilities, and comes to a conclusion differing from mine on one point only.

look, lest we be deceived." The earl's barber, Nicholas, ascended the bell-tower of the abbey, and soon detected the banners of the prince and his supporters, and presently saw Gloucester's forces come up the western side of the hill from the road along the Avon. The earl went up to see for himself, but he knew that he was ruined: the only road of escape for his army must by this time have been almost barred by Mortimer, and his men were not even formed for march. Individuals might yet escape by swimming the Avon, or dashing across the bridge before Mortimer arrived, but for the main body the only way lay through the hostile army, outnumbering his by three or four to one. "God have mercy on our souls," he exclaimed, "for our bodies are the enemy's." The rest of the story cannot be told better than in Professor Prothero's words.

"His friends urged him to fly, but the thought of flight for himself was not in his mind. A natural flash of anger burst forth in the remark that it was the folly of his own son which had brought him to this pass. Nevertheless he endeavoured to persuade his eldest son Henry, his old comrade Hugh Despenser, and others to fly while there was yet time, and maintain the good cause when fortune should smile again. But one and all refused to desert him, preferring not to live if their leader died. 'Come then,' he said, 'and let us die like men; for we have fasted here and we shall breakfast in heaven.' His troops were hastily shriven by the aged bishop of Worcester, who had performed the same office a year before upon a happier field. Then he led them out against the enemy, with the white cross again upon their shoulders, in as close order as he could. In the midst of them was the king, for Simon seems to the last to have cherished a faint hope of cutting his way through his adversaries; and as at Lewes, the possession of the royal person was everything to him. As they neared the hill, prince Edward's troops, who had been in no hurry to leave their point of vantage, began to descend upon them. Simon's heart was struck with admiration of the fair array before him, so different from that which he had met a year before; his soldierly pride told him to whom their skill was due. 'By the arm of St. James,' he cried, 'they come on well; they learnt that not of themselves but of me.'

"On the south-western slope of Green Hill there is a small valley or combe; in this hollow the chief struggle raged. On the further side, in the grounds of a private house, stands the obelisk, which marks the spot where, according to tradition, Simon de Montfort fell. Towards the higher part of the combe is a spring, still called Montfort's Well, which, on the day of the battle, is said to have run with blood. Prince Edward began the fray, and while the earl was engaged with him, Gloucester came up with a second body on his left, so that he was soon surrounded. The Welsh infantry, poor, half-armed troops, fled at once, and were cut down in the neighbouring gardens by Mortimer's forces, which must now have been advancing from the rear. Simon's horse was killed under him; his eldest son was among the first to fall. When this was told him, he cried, 'Is it so? then indeed is it time for me to die;' and rushing upon the enemy with redoubled fury, and wielding his sword with both his hands, the old warrior laid about him with so terrific force, that had there been but half-a-dozen more like himself, says one who saw the fight, he would have turned the tide of battle. As it was he nearly gained the crest of the hill. But it was not to be. For a while he stood 'like a tower,' but at length a foot-soldier, lifting up his coat of mail, pierced him in the back, and, with the words *Dieu merci* on his lips, he fell. Then the battle became a butchery. No quarter was asked or given. The struggle lasted for about two hours in the early summer morning, and then all was over.

"Of the horrid cruelties practised by the victors on the body of their greatest foe it is better not to speak. The gallant old man lay, with the few who remained faithful to him and to his cause, dead upon the field, and with him the curtain seemed to fall upon all that was free and noble in the land. The tempests which raged throughout the country that day were remarked as shadowing forth the grief of heaven. The accompanying darkness, which was so thick that in some places the monks could no longer see to chant their prayers, was nothing to that which must have fallen on many when they heard of the death of their protector. But he had not lived in vain. England had learnt a lesson from him, and had seen glimpses of what might be; and a retributive justice brought his principles to life again through the very hands which had destroyed him."

It is a coincidence that Montfort, whose victory at Lewes was made so complete by the royalists having the Ouse behind them to cut off their flight, should have himself been destroyed by being caught in the same trap. He did not however wilfully commit the blunder of fighting with a river at his back: his ruin was due to the overthrow which his son had incurred by his own folly at Kenilworth, and to the skill with which the prince utilised his very superior information. Edward seems indeed to have developed in these few months from a headstrong boy into a general of exceptional power for his age. At Lewes he threw away a fair chance by his impetuosity, while Montfort, employing his inferior numbers to the best advantage, was securing the victory behind him. At Evesham he so used his opportunities that the earl, who had given him that severe lesson, had no scope for generalship: he could only fight and die as a brave man should.

CHAPTER IV
FALKIRK AND BANNOCKBURN

In 1290 Margaret of Norway, the infant queen of Scotland, died, and a difficult question arose as to the succession to her. Edward I. of England had made it the chief object of his policy to strengthen and consolidate his power within the island. To this end he made Parliament a permanent institution, truly representative of the nation as then constituted, though it was not very willingly that he concurred in limitations of his prerogative at the hands of Parliament, which he had systematised, if not created. To this end was directed much of the legislation which is his highest title to fame. To this end he had conquered Wales, and taken the first steps towards incorporating it with England. Now he had an opportunity of uniting Scotland to his own kingdom (he had made plans already for effecting this through a marriage between his heir and the little Maid of Norway), at any rate of making his influence paramount in Scotland.

National prejudices have very naturally coloured the views of historical writers, especially on the Scottish side, who have discussed the right and wrong of the conflict that ultimately ensued. There is no need to enter deeply into the controversy, but it is safe to say that neither party was entirely in the wrong. The English kings had for centuries had some kind of superiority over Scotland, but it dated back to times when feudal theories had not been formulated; and it is clear that Edward I. claimed too much when he asserted his right to be feudal suzerain over Scotland in the widest sense. On the other hand the Scots could not honestly maintain that he had no rights at all over it, as being an independent kingdom. The question of the succession was a thorny one in every way. There was not, and could not be, any written law on the subject: all the claimants were remotely related to the royal house: all of them whose claims could be seriously pressed, even in an age when ideas on such matters were vague, were nobles of Norman descent, having lands in England as well as in Scotland. Edward on being called in to award the crown required all concerned to acknowledge him as feudal overlord. The competitors, already personally his subjects, naturally made no objection, and if any was made by others, their voice was drowned. Edward awarded the crown to John Balliol, the person who had the best claim according to the legal principles now fully recognised. Difficulties soon arose: the new king's subjects appealed against him to the king of England, which they had a right to do if the king of Scotland was in the full sense vassal, but not otherwise. Edward entertained the appeals, asserting to the very utmost his feudal authority, till the patience of John Balliol was overtaxed. Taking advantage of a quarrel between England and France,[14] John Balliol repudiated his allegiance to Edward; the latter, caring infinitely more for Scotland than for his dominions over sea, let things take their chance in Guienne, and returned to make war on Scotland. His success was easy and complete: Balliol was declared to have forfeited his kingdom, which the lord paramount took into his own hands. At first there was no opposition; there existed in the country a considerable amount of patriotic feeling, but there were no leaders, until one suddenly appeared in William Wallace. Personal injuries received from English soldiers led to his taking up arms, but he was welcomed as a leader by such elements in the Scottish people as cared for their independence, and he justified their confidence. The English forces in Scotland were but small, and Wallace had time to organise resistance on a large scale before he was called on to face an invading army.

A glance at the map[15] will show how completely Stirling is the military centre of Scotland. The firths of Forth and Clyde indent the country very deeply on the east and west, almost dividing it into two parts. Hence Stirling, the lowest point where the Forth is bridged, and commanding the entrances

[14] Philip IV. was playing the same game, over-asserting his claims as feudal suzerain over Guienne.

[15] A map showing all this part of Scotland will be found at p. 147.

into Fife, into the basin of the Tay, and into the western Highlands, is of primary importance. Here Wallace defeated in 1297 the army first sent against him; at Falkirk not far off he was defeated in the next year; at Bannockburn, within sight of Stirling Castle, was fought the great battle of 1314, which virtually achieved Scottish independence.

Wallace was a born soldier, as he proved alike by his easy victory of Cambuskenneth, and by his dispositions for meeting king Edward's superior force at Falkirk. The Forth flows through the plain, from above Stirling till it opens into the estuary, in many loops and windings; there was then but one narrow bridge across it, leading from close to Stirling to the abbey of Cambuskenneth, which stands in one of the loops on the eastern bank. When Wallace learned that his enemies were approaching, he posted his men on a bold steep hill known as the Abbey Craig, which is in fact the extreme south-western spur of the Ochil hills. The English leaders, ignorant of their business and despising their opponents, began crossing the river to attack him. Wallace waited till a considerable portion of the English had crossed, and were crowded together in a loop of the Forth, and then led his men down to attack. It was rather a butchery than a battle: the English on the east of the Forth, outnumbered, unable to take order, devoid of any way of retreat, could make no effectual resistance. The numbers given in the chronicles are probably excessive: it is most unlikely that the earl of Surrey should have had 50,000, or Wallace 40,000 men: but under the conditions it is obvious that Wallace could choose his time, so as to have a decisive superiority to that portion of the enemy which alone could encounter him. The slaughter of the defeated side in a hand-to-hand battle was always great, and Cambuskenneth was no exception. The earl of Surrey had never crossed the fatal bridge; but among other Englishmen of note who fell, was Cressingham, the king's treasurer for Scotland, who was much hated for his exactions. "And so," says the chronicler, "he who had terrified many with the sword of his tongue was himself slain with the sword: and the Scots flayed him, and divided his skin into little bits, *non quidem ad reliquias, sed ad contumelias*."

In consequence of this victory, Wallace was recognised as guardian of the kingdom in the name of the fugitive John Balliol, and governed Scotland with some success for the time. Edward I. fully understood the wisdom of doing things thoroughly, and when he next year invaded Scotland, came with an overwhelming army. It took him some time to capture Berwick, and during the siege Wallace contrived to leave Lothian bare of inhabitants and of food. His hope was to baffle the invaders by preventing their finding sustenance or guidance. Two Scottish nobles are said to have sent word to Edward where his enemy was, but it is hardly likely that this would have been so serious a difficulty as the lack of food, which rendered abortive, at one time or another, several invasions of Scotland on a large scale. Obviously Wallace must fight at or near Stirling, if not sooner, or else retire into the wild country of the north, which meant giving up all the valuable parts of Scotland to the English king. His numbers were far below those of his enemy: his only chance lay in skilful arrangements for defence. He selected a piece of sloping ground near Falkirk, where a small stream, running at that part through very soft and boggy ground, covered his front. The mass of his soldiers were spearmen, and these he drew up in four circular masses, the front rank sitting, with their spear-butts resting on the ground. The intermediate spaces were occupied by the archers, who were neither efficient nor very numerous; and the mounted men-at-arms, very few in comparison with the English array, were drawn up in rear. One chronicler adds that Wallace addressed to his men the somewhat grim jest, "I have brought you to the ring; hop gif ye can." He had done all that a skilful commander could do: but the result was a foregone conclusion unless king Edward was guilty of some gross blunder.

When the English army came in sight of Wallace's position, the king desired that they should rest and eat before attacking; but his knights, perhaps remembering Cambuskenneth, represented that it was not safe to do so, with the Scots so near at hand. The first "battle," apparently consisting entirely of men-at-arms, commanded by the earl Marshal, accordingly advanced to the attack, found the stream impassable, and had to make a wide circuit to the left. The second division, under the warlike bishop of Durham, saw the obstacle and turned it on the right. Seeing how far the earl Marshal had

to go, the bishop tried to check the impetuosity of his men, till the king with the third "battle" should be at hand to support them; but Ralph Basset rudely told him that he had better attend to his own business of saying mass, and not interfere in military matters. The bishop was a better judge than the knight; the men-at-arms rode down the Scottish archers, and easily defeated the small body of horse, but they could make little impression on the spearmen. The latter could not charge without breaking their order, but they could and did stand on the defensive till the English archers came up. Then it was soon all over with them: the arrows made gaps in their ranks, through which the horsemen charged, breaking up their formation, and slaughtering them in thousands. Wallace drew off the relics of his army towards the Highlands, and from that time practically disappears from history. Partisanship has always dealt eagerly with his name: the contemporary English chroniclers call him *latro*, the Scots exalt him into an ideal patriot hero. The truth would seem to be that, while by no means superior to his age in humanity, he gave evidence of real ability and integrity in his very difficult post as guardian of Scotland; moreover, he exhibited exceptional military skill.

Wallace's "schiltrons," to use the Scottish name for his great clumps of spearmen, were in truth an important advance in the art of war; and though they were not in fact a novelty, they were no doubt a real invention on his part, for it is scarcely conceivable that he should ever have heard of the Macedonian phalanx. The natural formation for men armed with spears is close together, in line, the ranks being drawn up one behind the other, two, four or more deep. Such a line can hold its own against attacks in front, and can advance: but if it is once broken it can be destroyed, and it is almost helpless if its flank is turned. This was substantially the sole order of battle during the palmy days of Greece. Philip of Macedon improved upon it by forming the phalanx, a solid square of pikemen, who faced outwards in case of need, and could not therefore be taken in flank. The phalanx moved slowly, and hardly at all over rough ground; and it obviously had no power of vigorous attack. Hence in its turn it was beaten by the Roman legionaries, who threw their heavy *pila* from a short distance, and then charged sword in hand. With the fall of the Roman Empire the military art, like all others, had suffered eclipse in western Europe; and though the Anglo-Danes with their axes and shields had reproduced in some sense the Roman tactics, yet from the day of Hastings, when they went down before the feudal horsemen of the Normans, the mailed chivalry had been everywhere dominant. The political preponderance of the feudal nobility was partly cause, partly effect, of their military supremacy. They alone could procure, for themselves and their following, the armour which rendered them almost invulnerable to the ill-armed foot-soldier: the contempt they felt for the villein and the trader seemed justified by the facility with which they could slaughter the lower classes in the field. Slowly the pike reappeared on the scene, in the hands of peoples who were not over-ridden entirely by feudalism, and who had to defend themselves against men-at-arms. It is Wallace's most undoubted title to fame, if not his highest glory, that he was the first to organise plebeian spearmen afresh, not indeed for victory,[16] but with success as against mailed horsemen only. It was the combination of archers with the men-at-arms which won Falkirk for king Edward, just as the same combination had won Hastings for William the Norman. The great difference lay in the fact that in times wholly feudal the credit of the victory of Hastings went entirely to the knights, whereas Edward I. was wiser: from the day of Falkirk onwards the archers became more and more the mainstay of an English army.

England has been destined in three wars to experience the truth that a country whose people refuse to submit to invaders cannot practically be conquered, however superior may be the invaders in military skill or resources: in a fourth war she helped the Spaniards to exemplify the same maxim. Between England and Scotland at the beginning of the fourteenth century no comparison was possible; the southern people were wealthier, more numerous, better organised. Yet the war begun by Wallace's brief career ended in the establishment of Scottish independence. So also the French had no chance in the field against the English of Edward III. and Henry V.; yet the English attempt

[16] The first victory of the pike was gained by the Flemings at Courtrai, five years later.

at conquering France ended in total failure. The little English armies won nearly every engagement against the revolted American colonists; yet the task of subjugating the colonies would have been hopeless, even if other enemies had not assailed England, and hastened the catastrophe.

Edward I. won a great victory at Falkirk, but he never was able to subdue Scotland. Just before his death the Scots found a new leader in Robert Bruce, representing the house rival to the Balliols at the time of the disputed succession and now accepted instead of them, who was duly crowned king. Edward's death stopped a great invasion of Scotland, and his incompetent son neglected Scottish affairs, till gradually the whole country was lost except Stirling Castle. This was, as has been pointed out, the most important post in Scotland: but it could not be held indefinitely, and the governor ultimately agreed to surrender unless relieved before Midsummer day 1314. Edward II. was driven for once into activity, and approached just in time, with an army to which the chroniclers ascribe the incredible number of 100,000 men. Robert Bruce had no choice but to await attack at Stirling: if he marched to meet his enemy, it was obvious that the English might evade him and reach Stirling unopposed. They might even, with their great superiority of numbers,[17] engage him on more than equal terms, and have plenty to spare to be pushed forward to Stirling. Fortunately for him, he had an admirable position ready to his hand within a very short distance.

About 2½ miles south of Stirling a small stream, the Bannockburn, flows from west to east, and then curving northwards flows into the Forth. Between it and Stirling lay the king's park, in which the Scottish army camped. The position chosen for receiving battle was immediately behind this stream. Bruce, who was comparatively weak in horsemen, had to depend, like Wallace, mainly on his spearmen for receiving the charge of the English men-at-arms. Barbour's long-winded poem on the life and acts of Robert Bruce, from which is derived the traditional account of the battle, contains sundry picturesque incidents, the truth of which need not be doubted, though he indulges in a vast amount of patriotic exaggeration. He does not, however, give the details in a form which renders the battle really intelligible. For instance, he describes minutely the "pots," round holes a foot broad and as deep as a man's knee, covered over with sticks and grass all green, which were intended to break the charge of the English horse. But he does not say where, relatively to the army, these pots were: nor does he mention them as having answered their purpose. An English chronicler, Baker of Swinbrook, describes a ditch, three feet deep and wide, as having been dug along the whole front, and covered over with hurdles and grass, into which the first line of the English fell; and the confusion thus occasioned involved the defeat of the English. Neither refers to the burn as having been any obstacle; Barbour indeed mentions houses having been pulled down by the English, with the timbers of which they made bridges over certain pools, but he does not say where the pools were. It is possible that as the battle was fought at midsummer, and Barbour lays great stress on the intense heat, the marshy ground on the north of it was unusually dry and firm; otherwise it is not obvious why Bruce should have wanted either pots or ditch.

The English host, marching from the direction of Linlithgow, came in sight of the Scottish position in the afternoon of June 23. When they were about two miles off, a body of 800 men-at-arms under Clifford was sent forward to try and pass by the left of the Scottish army, between it and the lower course of the burn, so as to reach Stirling Castle. Had this attempt succeeded the castle might have been said to be relieved in time to save the promised surrender: and it was within an ace of succeeding. Thomas Randolph, earl of Moray, Bruce's nephew, commanded on the Scottish left; and it was only on Bruce's express order, telling him that a rose had fallen from his chaplet, that he hastened with a body of spearmen to place himself, just in time, across their path. The spearmen formed a clump, like a hedgehog with all his spikes out, and the English horsemen were unable to break their array. James of Douglas, seeing that Moray was very hard pressed, asked the king's

[17] All accounts agree in representing the English numbers as more than double the Scottish, with an enormous superiority in men-at-arms, the most important item.

permission to go to his assistance. Bruce for the moment allowed his chivalrous instincts to overcome his judgment as a general, and wished to leave Moray to take his chance, but on Douglas urging him consented. On the approach of reinforcements, the English saw that the opportunity was lost, and retired. Douglas, in the true spirit of the age, abstained from pursuit, lest he should rob Moray of any of the glory of having repulsed them.

Edward II., on coming fully in front of the Scots, ordered a halt, but the order was not made known in time to prevent some of the vanguard from coming into collision with them. According to the fashion of the time, Sir Henry Bohun rode out in advance, and seeing Bruce in front of his line charged at him. The king was mounted on a pony, but did not avoid the combat, as in any age when a commander was not a knight first and a general afterwards he certainly would and ought to have done, and killed the Englishman. The story goes that the Scottish lords, having better sense than their king, blamed him for having risked his life, which might have meant the ruin of every one, and that Bruce's sole answer was that he was sorry he had broken his battle-axe. The English vanguard, on seeing the issue of this duel, retired again without coming into serious collision with the Scots, and doubtless feeling the omen to be a bad one.

Next morning early the battle commenced in earnest, and the authorities are hopelessly at variance as to what happened. Barbour describes the attack of the English men-at-arms on the Scots in their position, with severe fighting which ended in their defeat. Incidentally he mentions Sir Robert Keith having charged into the flank of the English archers with five hundred men armed with steel that on light horse were horsed well, and having totally discomfited them so that they did not shoot any more. But he does not say where the archers were posted, and as he declares there were 52,000 of them, it is simply impossible to accept his story. More than one English chronicler says that the English front line was formed of archers and spearmen, with the mounted men-at-arms behind: but they do not explain what became of the front line. It has been suggested as an explanation that the archers were so far in advance of the men-at-arms that the Scottish horse were able to charge and disperse them before they were supported: but this is scarcely possible, as the whole English array was too near. Baker of Swinbrook says that the archers were in the second line, and as he carefully adds that it was a great mistake not placing them on the flanks of the men-at-arms, as was done afterwards, his informant may be presumed to have noted the point. According to his account, which is the most intelligible and coherent, the English men-at-arms charged straight on the Scottish front, were thrown into utter confusion by the front rank falling into Bruce's concealed ditch and the hinder lines pressing on, and were slaughtered helplessly by the Scots, who reserved only the rich for ransom. The archers seeing the disaster, tried to shoot over their heads; but many of them, in the excitement of battle shooting straight to their front, "struck a few Scots in the breast and many English in the back." The crush and hopeless confusion will be all the more intelligible when it is remembered that the space occupied by the Scots was far too narrow to give room for the charging masses, who consequently impeded and overthrew each other. The fight was still going on, when over the little hill above the Scottish right, which has ever since been known as the Gillies' hill, appeared the "yeomen and swaynes" of the Scottish army, who had rigged up an apology for banners, so that they seemed to the English to be a large reinforcement to the Scots, coming to take them in flank. A panic seized that portion of the army which was not engaged, and they fled in confusion, the king himself following their example.

Whatever uncertainty may hang over the details, there is no doubt about the completeness of the victory. The number of the slain may well have been large, seeing how the knights and men-at-arms were crowded together in a confused mass, incapable of resistance. The gross incompetence of Edward II. or his advisers, who with all the material for victory in their hands, and the precedent of Falkirk to guide them, threw their advantage away, was responsible for the defeat. Their hasty flight was also probably the cause of the dispersion in panic rout of the whole English host, a disgrace which has never since fallen on an English army. According to Barbour, the king with his immediate

attendants sought shelter in Stirling Castle, and was refused admittance by Mowbray the governor, who pointed out that the castle could not hold out long, now that the English army was defeated, and that therefore the king's only chance of safety lay in making off. How Edward could possibly have made his way round to Stirling Castle, with the victorious Scots between him and it, can with difficulty be imagined. The advice, however, if ever given, was sound as far as it went. Better judgment still would have bidden him rally his host, for even after the defeat he must still have greatly outnumbered the Scots. But if he had been capable of taking this obvious and soldierlike step, he would not have committed the folly which lost the battle.

The victory of Bannockburn virtually gained the cause of Scottish independence, though fourteen years had yet to elapse before England acknowledged it by treaty. That the Scots fully deserved to win their independence, and that they had a right to win it if they could, no one in modern times will deny. No impartial reader of history can doubt that in some sense they had been dependent on England before the war, or that the exaggerated claims of Edward I. gave reasonable ground for repudiating them entirely. Whether the success of the Scots was for their permanent benefit is another question. The union of the whole island into one kingdom was, it may be fairly said, inevitable sooner or later. Scotland must needs have gained enormously in all material respects by incorporation with her more advanced neighbour. Had this taken place before centuries of political antagonism and repeated wars had developed national hatred, and quickened into a passion Scottish national feeling, the union would have been easier and more thorough. With Scotland added, instead of permanently hostile, the weight of England in the European scale, already great, would have been much increased, with consequences impossible to calculate. At the same time the world would have been the poorer for the loss of the distinctive character, which was developed in the Scots mainly through their separate Reformation.

INTERMEDIATE NOTE

THE LONG-BOW

The long-bow is like many other inventions which have played a great part in history: its origin is obscure. The bow in some form is almost as old as the human race; but it on the whole was regarded as the weapon of inferior soldiers, down to near the time when the invention of gunpowder was destined to render it altogether antiquated. We have seen that the Norman archers at Hastings, skilfully used, contributed greatly to the victory: but the evidence of the Bayeux Tapestry may be taken as conclusive that these bows were only the short bows of the ancient world. Richard I., the only really warlike king between the Conqueror and Edward I., took pains to introduce the cross-bow, then a comparatively new weapon.[18] It is incredible that the ablest soldier, as Richard undoubtedly was, even of an ignorant age, should have preferred the cross-bow to a weapon which could beat it at every point. Hence we must conclude that the feats of archery attributed to Robin Hood, Richard's contemporary, were reflected back upon his memory from a later time, when such feats were no longer impossible. In the Barons' War the archers play no important part; but in the course of the reign of Edward I., the long-bow came into general use. Edward used his archers with such effect at Falkirk, that it may fairly be inferred that he had long before seen the value of the long-bow and taken steps to foster the use of it, though even then they were employed as an afterthought, to help the horsemen, who alone could not break the Scottish spears. There is nothing like clear evidence as to the locality which developed the long-bow, which not only exceeded the older bows in size and

[18] The use of the crossbow was solemnly condemned by the Lateran Council of 1139: no reasons were given, but presumably it was thought that the cross-bow neutralised the natural, and therefore divinely intended, advantage of superior strength.

power, but was used in a different manner, though there are slight indications suggesting that South Wales had that honour. At any rate in the fourteenth century it was the familiar and trusted weapon of the English, the instrument of their great and repeated victories.

Archery, as an amusement, has lost much of its popularity of late years, being superseded by other sports which demand less space and afford more active exercise. Probably however every Englishman, if a bow were put into his hands, would instinctively draw it more or less in the right fashion, whether he has ever seen an arrow shot off or not. That is to say he would hold it upright, and draw the string back on his right side, standing himself sideways. Before the introduction of the English long-bow, all archers held their bows more or less horizontal, and drew the string to their bodies. The advantages of the English method are probably obvious: at any rate the briefest experiment will render them so. First, a much longer bow can be drawn to the side than to the breast, which enables a longer and therefore more powerful arrow to be used. Secondly, a much stronger bow can be pulled in that way, which means greater penetrating force. Thirdly, if the long-bow is drawn correctly, the arrow is brought up close to the right ear, which enables the archer to look along the arrow, and aim it with considerable accuracy, whereas obviously no arrow drawn to the breast could be really aimed. Practice makes perfect, in archery more than in many other things: the English archers of the fourteenth century practised assiduously, and attained corresponding proficiency. The regular practising distance was a furlong,[19] which implies that arrows discharged at a high elevation would travel much further. In fact we find "a bow shot" used as a rough measure of distance, equivalent to about 400 yards. If they struck armour obliquely, of course they would be likely to glance and not penetrate; but it required the very best steel to stop an arrow which struck full and true. Add the fact that a trained archer could shoot with astonishing rapidity, so that the arrows in their flight dazzled and bewildered the enemies at whom they were aimed, and still more their horses: and we have the picture of a missile weapon unequalled till the introduction of the rifle.

Why the long-bow should have remained, as in fact it did, the exclusive property of the English, is a mystery. It is true that archers could not stand alone: they required the assistance of troops differently armed, to protect them against determined attack by mailed horsemen in adequate numbers. It is true also that the long-bow needed considerable muscular strength for using it; and the average Englishman had probably the advantage in this respect over the average Frenchman, then as now. But Lowland Scots are to all intents and purposes of the same race, yet they went on generation after generation losing their fights large and small against the English, chiefly through the archers, yet never learning to shoot. The explanation may perhaps be that among all who came to feel the power of the clothyard shaft, feudal pride was too stubborn to be taught quickly, so that gunpowder was coming into use before they had digested the lesson. Whatever the cause, the fact is certain that the English kept their monopoly of the long-bow, and consequently were, for a century at least, supreme on the field of battle.

[19] There is a statute of Henry VIII. which forbids practising at any less distance.

CHAPTER V
CRECY AND POITIERS

A few months after the accession of Edward III., his uncle the king of France died. Edward had a claim in right of his mother, which, if the crown of France had been a bit of land, to be inherited according to the subtleties of English real property law, would have been plausible, if not sound. The conclusive answer to his claim however lay in the fact that France had a right to settle the matter in her own way. If there was a law of succession, which from the jurist's point of view is more than doubtful,[20] it was against Edward: if there was not, the peers of France, who must be taken to constitute France for this purpose, chose Philip of Valois. Edward's pretensions were not seriously urged, and he acknowledged the new king as his suzerain for the duchy of Guienne; but disputed questions were left open both as to the amount of territory belonging to Edward, and as to the nature of his homage for it to the king of France. Peace was not broken for ten years, but Philip VI. showed himself steadily hostile, assisting Edward's enemies in Scotland, interfering with English commerce, encroaching in Guienne. Philip was entirely unscrupulous, and naturally desirous of carrying on the work of his predecessors, by obtaining effective possession of another of the great feudal domains over which the king of France had titular suzerainty. The south-west had never acknowledged more than the most nominal inferiority: it is no paradox to say that the Plantagenets defended the ancient independence of Aquitaine against French aggression.[21] Nevertheless the people of Aquitaine had closer affinities of race and language with France than with England: the ultimate and natural result of the war was to make them French subjects.

Finding war inevitable, Edward III. thought to rouse the enthusiasm of his subjects by reviving his claim to the French crown. Without the cordial support of England Edward was weaker than his rival; with it he was, as the event showed, very decidedly stronger. England was, and had been for two centuries, a nation in the true sense of the word: it needed the long agony of the Hundred Years' War to give France real national coherence. Henry II. had given England a strong central administration, with a system of law fairly equal and well enforced. Ever since the barons had extorted Magna Charta from John, not for themselves only but for the whole people, the powers of the Parliament, and its significance as the representative body of the nation, had been growing. No laws could be made, no new taxation could be imposed, without the advice and consent of Parliament. This was only the beginning of political liberty, in the modern sense, but it was a beginning. In France on the other hand the king ruled over a number of vassals who had little or no relation to each other, and each of whom was much more effectually master of his dependents than the king. The political contrast showed itself in the military organisation of the two kingdoms. Though Edward III. was deeply imbued with the spirit of chivalry, he was far too sensible to carry into the field the noble's absolute contempt for the villein. Moreover there existed in England a class of yeomen who were in fact completely above villeinage, from which on the whole the archers were drawn. The feudal rule, by which the king summoned his vassals to serve him in war, and they came with their following (or did not come if they were disinclined, and the king lacked force to coerce them), had long been obsolete in England. The Parliament granted the king money for war, to supplement his own resources; and the king agreed with individual noblemen to bring so many men into the field, who were adequately paid and came voluntarily; hence they tended to make war their business, and to acquire something like discipline.

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[20] The so-called Salic law had never been heard of till Philip V. evolved it for his own purposes a few years before: but the principle of exclusive male succession is a natural one for a feudally organised nation to adopt.

[21] Louis VII. of France had it is true married the heiress of Aquitaine and ruled the province for a few years, but only in her name: and she soon repudiated him, to marry Henry II. of England.

Edward had not far to look for allies. The commercial relations between England and Flanders were close, and highly important to both. The Flemish cities, then at the height of their prosperity, had recently quarrelled with their count, who appealed to his suzerain the king of France; and they promised Edward much more assistance than in fact they afforded. However Flanders gave him a base of operations as against France, and the first years of the war were occupied in more or less futile efforts at invasion, though they brought an overwhelming victory over the French fleet at Sluys on the Flemish coast. Later, a disputed succession to the duchy of Brittany, in which the candidate rejected by the king of France naturally asked help from England, opened a new field for hostility. In 1345 there was serious fighting in Guienne, in the course of which the earl of Derby won a considerable victory at Auberoche. On the other hand the murder of Jacques van Artevelde, the virtual ruler of Flanders and a strong partisan of England, made the prospects of effectual support from the Flemings worse than ever. The English Parliament, though desiring peace, probably realised that it was hopeless except at the price of abandoning Guienne, and therefore wisely desired that war should be waged in earnest. Great preparations were made for the campaign of 1346, which the king was to conduct in person. The king of France had raised a very large army, which was commanded by his son the duke of Normandy, and which early in 1346 occupied part of the English possessions in the south-west of France. The obvious thing for Edward to do with the large expedition he was fitting out was to defend his own provinces, since Flanders now offered a very unpromising field. Instead of this he decided suddenly to invade Normandy,[22] and on July 12 he landed at Cape La Hogue.

There is no evidence that Edward had formed any coherent plan of operations. Able tactician as he showed himself at Crecy, he was no strategist; indeed no one in that age had any idea of strategical combinations, though of course it is easy after the event to see that a particular direction given to an army was or was not judicious from this point of view. This invasion of France might have been an extremely brilliant stroke. The English command of the sea made it feasible to land almost anywhere; the main French army was engaged in the south-west: there were no preparations for attempting to meet invasion anywhere else. Had Edward landed near the mouth of the Seine, at the nearest point to the capital, and marched straight on Paris, he would have had the king of France almost at his mercy, for Paris might have been in his hands before the duke of Normandy could come to its rescue. Instead of this, Edward landed at the extremity of the Cotentin peninsula, and then marched in a leisurely way through Normandy, capturing and plundering town after town, there being virtually no resistance. The absolute vagueness of his intentions may be gathered from his having sent away his fleet, laden with the booty of the Norman towns, thus depriving himself of the means of retreat in case of need. If Froissart is to be believed, he had already determined to march on Calais and attempt to seize it; but if so, it is still more difficult to explain his having landed in the Cotentin, Calais being within a march or two of Flanders, where if he had not met with much support he would have at least found a friendly reception. The only thing which looks as if he really meant to go towards Calais is that having reached Louviers, he seems to have marched some way down the Seine again towards Rouen; but this may have been in the hope of being able to plunder the capital of Normandy. The French meanwhile had broken down all the bridges on the Seine, which can only have been in order to prevent the English from extending their ravages to the right bank of the Seine, as it was obvious that they could reach the coast as easily on one side as on the other. Whatever may have been his original plan, or want of one, Edward, unable to cross the Seine in Normandy, did what he ought to have done weeks before, and marched up the left bank towards Paris. The king of France had used the breathing time unwisely allowed him to collect an army, which is said to have amounted to 100,000 men. Why he made no attempt to interfere with Edward earlier is a mystery. The English king marched unopposed to Poissy, a few miles below Paris, and there amused himself, while the

[22] This is said by Froissart to have been done on the advice of Godfrey of Harcourt, who was certainly one of the king's most trusted officers during the campaign, habitually leading the advanced guard.

bridge was being rebuilt, in ravaging the country to the very gates of the capital; he no doubt knew that the city was by this time full of soldiers, and therefore not open to attack. On August 16 the bridge was finished, and Edward crossed the Seine, his advanced guard having a sharp but successful fight with a large body of men coming from Amiens to join king Philip. Seeing that the huge French army was gathered at St. Denis, on the right bank, nearly half-way to Poissy, it is equally mysterious to find Edward crossing the Seine close to an enormously superior force, and Philip making no attempt to take him at a disadvantage. However Edward had by this time resolved on making for Flanders, and marched hastily northwards, sending out a strong detachment to endeavour to seize some point of passage over the Somme. As was natural, these were all broken or defended; Edward went on down the Somme, with an enemy of four or five times his strength behind him, till on August 23 he came opposite Abbeville, below which the river becomes a tidal estuary. The town was fortified and garrisoned, and there was a large body of troops on the right bank: it looked as if Edward's reckless movements had led him at last into a trap, as if the king of France had achieved a success which his own military management had by no means deserved. In the nick of time a peasant told Edward of a ford some way below Abbeville, broad and firm, but available only at low water. Early on the morning of the 24th the English army crossed by this ford, the archers giving a foretaste of what was to happen at Crecy by completely driving off the French force stationed to defend it. They were barely across when Philip was upon them; but the rising tide prevented pursuit.

Edward was now safe: he had only a short march before him to reach Flanders. Here however the spirit of chivalry took possession of him: he chose to turn and await battle, saying that he was now in his own heritage,[23] and would defend it against the usurper. Accordingly he encamped on August 25 near the little village of Crecy, and selected a position in which to give battle, into which he moved the next morning. The army was divided as usual into three "battles," each consisting of about 800 men-at-arms and 2000 archers, besides light-armed infantry, chiefly Welsh. The prince of Wales commanded the first, the earl of Northampton the second: the king kept the third, which was to act as a reserve, under his own immediate orders. The exact position is not easy to determine: but it was on a piece of sloping ground, with a wind-mill on the upper part of it at which the king took up his station, facing the south-east or nearly so. The French attacked in such a hasty and irrational manner that it is not safe to infer anything from what they did: but certainly they did not attempt, with all their vast superiority of numbers, to turn Edward's position. A competent tactician would most probably have taken care that his flanks were protected in some way; and therefore it is probable that the English right rested on Crecy, through which flows the little river Maye, in which case its left may have been covered by the adjoining hamlet of Wadicourt. This position is shown in the accompanying map, not as ascertained, but as answering well to the conditions.

The essential novelty in Edward's tactics, the fact which makes Crecy an epoch in the history of the art of war, was that having to fight with very inferior numbers he discerned an effective way of combining the two elements of his army. He caused all the men-at-arms to dismount, and placed the horses with the baggage in an enclosed park in rear. The men-at-arms were to serve simply as spearmen, like the Scots at Falkirk and Bannockburn: they were to form the solid line of resistance, while the archers shot down the assailants. There is a certain discrepancy between the accounts, as to the position of the archers. Froissart says that they were drawn up in front, after the fashion of a harrow (*herse*).[24] Baker of Swinbrook says very precisely that they were put on the wings, so as not to be in the way of the men-at-arms, nor meet the enemy in front, but shoot into their flanks. The two may be reconciled, if we bear in mind that the archers would naturally not be drawn up in the same

[23] He was in the county of Ponthieu, which had been the portion of Margaret of France, second wife of Edward I. He was not descended from her, but from Eleanor of Castile: there does not however seem to have been any provision for Ponthieu being inherited by Margaret's children.

[24] *Herse* has another and less familiar meaning, which still better corresponds to the formation indicated – the stands used in churches for seven candles, the centre one forming the apex, and those at the sides gradually lower.

straight line with the men-at-arms, but thrown forward at an angle, so as to allow them to shoot more freely at the advancing enemy. Moreover it is certain that the prince of Wales' "battle" was on the right, in front, Northampton's on the left, a very little further back, perhaps because of some slight irregularity in the ground. If each division had part of its archers on each flank, thrown somewhat forward, the two inner lines of archers would meet at an angle: and the whole front would present an appearance not very unlike a harrow.[25]

All through the middle of the day (August 26) the English sat in their lines, waiting quietly for the enemy. As evening drew near the French host came in sight: the knights and men-at-arms were divided into nine "battles," but no attempt had been made to form any plan of action, or even to make the commanders of them understand that they were expected to obey general orders. There was also a large body, 15,000 it is said, of Genoese cross-bowmen, besides an indefinite number of ill-armed peasants who only served to cumber the space. On hearing from certain knights who had pushed forward that the English were drawn up to await attack, the king of France, in accordance with their advice, ordered a halt, intending his army to bivouac where it was, and to form regularly for battle the next morning. On the word being given, the front halted, but those in rear pushed on, saying they would not halt till they were equal with those in front. Neither the king nor the marshals could assert any authority over the rabble of nobles and knights, and they advanced anyhow till they were close in front of the English position. Then the king, seeing that it was too late to avoid an action, ordered the Genoese forward. Just as the sun was close on its setting, and shining full in the face of the French line, the battle began. The cross-bowmen advanced, shouting, but the English never stirred; presently they began to shoot. The English archers then took one step forward, and shot their arrows with such force and quickness that it seemed to be snowing. The cross-bow bolts fell short: the clothyard arrows totally discomfited the Genoese,[26] already worn out with a long hot march. Therefore the king of France, with the true feudal contempt for all that was not noble, bade the men-at-arms trample down these rascals. The knights, nothing loth, rode over the unhappy Genoese, and charged tumultuously on the English front. Men and horses went down in heaps before the arrows, which were shot from both flanks into the surging mob. Those who escaped fell furiously on the English line, and were with difficulty kept at bay. It shows how blindly the French came on, that the main stress fell on the prince of Wales, who was on the right, and therefore in the part of the line nearest to the French coming from Abbeville: Northampton on his left seems to have had much less to do. Time after time the French charged, with the effect of adding to the heaps of dead and wounded: between the charges the English bill-men slipped out through the front line to kill and take prisoners. Edward, who was watching the whole course of the action from his post on the higher ground, was once appealed to for help for his son: he could see that there was no real need, and refused it, saying, according to the well-known story, "Let the boy win his spurs." One account tells how the king sent twenty knights down, who found the prince and his men sitting on the heaps of slain, resting themselves while the enemy were withdrawn and preparing for a fresh charge. Darkness at length put an end to the battle. Edward was far too prudent to attempt a counter attack: he owed his victory to firmly maintaining the position he had chosen, and could not afford to risk a disaster by quitting it. The slaughter on the

[25] This theory is so far as I know novel, and I put it forward as a suggestion for what it may be worth. It explains, I venture to think, the extraordinary success of the English tactics, and it contradicts no ascertained facts. Every one who knows a little about drill will see that in this formation the archers would be able to change the direction of their shooting with perfect ease, and without interfering with each other. The archers cannot have been on the flanks of the whole line only, or their arrows, long as the range was, would not have told across the whole front. They could obviously move with ease and rapidity, and it is quite possible that they may have formed a line in front of the dismounted men-at-arms, when no attack was impending, as for instance to encounter the Genoese, and have fallen back to the *herse* when the knights were seen preparing to charge.

[26] There is no need to insist on the picturesque detail of the rain which fell just before the battle having wetted the strings of the cross-bows, while the English kept their bows under cover. It may well have been true: but the range of the long-bow was always greater than that of the cross-bow.

French side had been frightful – 4000 knights and men-at-arms, and uncounted multitudes besides: the English loss had naturally been but slight.

A tinge of romance is always supposed to be thrown over Crecy by the conduct of the blind king of Bohemia, who caused some of his knights to lead him in one of the charges, the bridles of the whole party being fastened together, with the natural result of all being killed. But as he had no sort of concern with the quarrel, one feels rather inclined to dismiss him with Polonius' epitaph —

"Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell."

It would seem as if, after such a victory, Edward III. might have resumed the offensive, with good prospect of reducing the king of France to sue for peace. But it must be remembered that his army was relatively small, that the battle had been won in a defensive position, and that he could not possibly know how soon he might find himself face to face with the duke of Normandy's army recalled from Guienne. It rather speaks well for Edward's military judgment that he should have quietly carried out his previous design, and marched on Calais, which he succeeded in taking after an unexpectedly long siege, and which furnished from that day forth a ready door into France. Small however as the direct and immediate results of the battle of Crecy were, it was in its ultimate consequences of incalculable importance. Superficially it resembles Bannockburn: a very superior army, badly and presumptuously led, attacks an inferior enemy well posted for defence, and is decisively and deservedly beaten. The difference lies a little deeper, in the fact that the foremost kingdom in Europe in point of national organisation, ruled as it was by a king who was the mirror of chivalry, adopted tactics which could and must overthrow feudal chivalry. All ranks and classes fought side by side, and fought on foot; the men-at-arms, the archers, the bill-men all contributed their share. Such a victory would naturally stimulate national feeling more than twenty won by the knights alone. And such victories, as the event showed, were sure to be repeated, as often as opportunity offered. The French, as will be seen, were slow to learn the lesson: but from Crecy may fairly be dated the preponderance of infantry, though much time elapsed, and many changes in the battle-field were seen, before this was finally established.

The capture of Calais in 1347 was followed by a truce, which, largely on account of the frightful ravages of the Black Death in both countries, was renewed again and again. In 1350 Philip VI. died, and was succeeded by his son John, who continued his father's policy. Year after year there were acts of hostility, chiefly but by no means exclusively on the French side, and abortive negotiations for peace. Edward offered repeatedly to resign his claims to the French crown on terms, but the price he asked was larger than the king of France could be expected to pay. At length in 1355 Edward was led by offered co-operation from the king of Navarre, which however came to nothing, to invade France in earnest once more. Two subsidiary expeditions were foiled by the winds, but the main one was carried out, and led to the great victory of Poitiers. The Black Prince, who commanded it, and who thenceforth was his father's representative in France, led a successful plundering expedition from Bordeaux across the south of France, but avoided serious fighting. Early in July the next year the prince started for a similar expedition on a larger scale, striking this time into the very heart of France. Two or three weeks earlier, the duke of Lancaster had left Brittany to unite with some Norman nobles who had risen in rebellion: and it is supposed by some writers that the two invasions were parts of a concerted scheme, by which the English hoped finally to conquer France. The direction of the Black Prince's march, the leisurely character of his proceedings, and the amount of plunder carried off, make this view highly improbable. Ignorance of topography, and the necessity of avoiding strong places which could not be captured, might account for some deviations from the straight route; the necessity of living on the country might account for the loss of a few days. It is not impossible that, aiming merely at the Loire, he should have gone as far east as Vierzon, instead of taking the direct route by Poitiers to Tours. But it is incredible that with such an object in view he should have consumed about three times the number of days necessary for covering the distance, or that he should

have deliberately burdened his march with vast quantities of plunder. The prince was certainly a competent soldier for his age: and all accounts agree that his army was thoroughly under control, and that the plundering was systematic. He doubtless knew of his cousin's enterprise: but that there was intended to be real co-operation between them could only be believed on very good and positive evidence, which does not exist.

The duke of Lancaster had in fact effected nothing: he had been obliged to retreat before the vastly superior armies brought to bear against him: but king John was still occupied in reducing the rebellious towns, when he heard somewhat tardily of the Black Prince's march. He instantly went to Chartres, and there gathered a large army, besides garrisoning every town on the Loire, to guard against the Black Prince crossing that river and making his way into Normandy.

The prince had by this time reached Vierzon, after plundering and destroying unresisted across Angoumois, La Marche and Berri. He there heard that the king of France was assembling a large army on the Loire, and therefore gave up all thought of continuing his elaborate raid. One would have thought that the necessity of prompt action, seeing that he had only from 8000 to 10,000 men, would have been sufficiently obvious: but the chivalric point of honour was of so much importance that he wasted several days in taking the castle of Romorantin, which had offered unexpected resistance. It was a fortunate piece of rashness, for otherwise the French king would not have compelled him to fight at Poitiers.

There seems to be no doubt that the Black Prince thought of crossing the Loire; but this gives no real support to the theory that his whole expedition was made in concert with Lancaster. Of course each was generally aware that the other was going to move, which would imply the possibility, if both succeeded, of their meeting somewhere thereabouts; but this is a very long way from deliberate co-operation. He might well have thought that if he could pass the Loire he would have as safe a refuge, would harass and perplex the French king more, and would not seem to have been driven to retreat; otherwise he would certainly have never gone near Poitiers, but would have followed a line of retreat as straight on Bordeaux as possible, every march in which would take him further from king John's overwhelming army. Some of the authorities trace his route, some do not; the places named do not always agree, and are not all to be certainly identified. The most precise of them says that he went straight to Tours, remained near that city several days hoping to cross the river there, and decamped south on hearing that the French king was crossing at Blois. The same account states that king John through his scouts was acquainted with the prince's movements: if so, one would think he ought to have made a little more haste. When he did move however the French king marched not straight towards his enemy, but in a direction intended to intercept his retreat, a piece of strategy which may seem obvious enough, but not so common in the middle ages. From Loches he directed his army on Poitiers, the main part with the king in person crossing the Vienne at the bridge of Chauvigny, fifteen miles east of that city. The slight information which each side had of the other, seems to have failed totally at the critical juncture. On Friday September 16 king John slept between Chauvigny and Poitiers, in complete ignorance where the Black Prince was. The same night the prince was a few miles north of the Chauvigny-Poitiers road, in equal ignorance that his enemy was between him and safety. Starting early on the 17th, the prince took, none too soon, the precaution of sending a small troop of men-at-arms forward to reconnoitre. These fell in with the last of king John's great army to cross the bridge of Chauvigny; it would be an abuse of language to call them a rearguard. Outnumbered four to one, the English[27] fell back on the main body, and the French pursuing heedlessly were nearly all killed or captured. The prince, thus warned of the proximity of his enemy, pushed on a few miles further, till he was well on the Bordeaux side of Poitiers, and there halted. King John, on hearing

[27] It is convenient to use this word for those who were fighting in the English cause: but as a matter of fact two-thirds of the Black Prince's men-at-arms were from among his Gascon subjects, and the *servientes* therefore in about the same proportion. The archers doubtless were all, or nearly all, English: there is no trace of the long-bow except in English armies.

the news, ordered his forces to retrace their steps, and passed the night of the 17th about three miles south-east of Poitiers.

The locality of the battle of Poitiers, or Maupertuis as the French name it, has now been ascertained. Documentary evidence shows that the spot formerly called Maupertuis is La Cardinerie, a farm near the Limoges road, about five miles south-east of Poitiers. This disposes of the theory of the battle, based upon expressions of the chroniclers to the effect that the Black Prince could not help fighting, that the French army was between him and Bordeaux. It also destroys all ground for the charge against king John of wasteful folly in attacking his enemy strongly posted, when that enemy had no choice, unless he would starve or surrender, but to attack an enormously superior force. The Black Prince, it is clear, was not cut off: he had the choice between standing to fight, and attempting to escape from the French, who were within two or three miles of him, and several times his strength. There is no doubt, further, that the Black Prince selected the strongest position available, fortified it to the best of his power, and there awaited attack. He evidently thought that it was scarcely possible to get away in safety, or else he would certainly not have halted comparatively early in the day.

The position was a strong one, for the arms of that age. Like his father, the Black Prince, though his strategy might be faulty, possessed great tactical skill, and coolness in encountering danger. The essentials for his situation were, ample scope for his archers, all possible impediments to the French horsemen, and some security against being attacked on all sides at once, seeing how great were the odds against him. All these conditions he managed to fulfil, and all would hardly have sufficed to save him from destruction, but for the disastrous blunder of the French, in dismounting to attack.

The scene of the battle is slightly undulating country, the variations of level being only a few feet. The chroniclers, to whom language for expressing minute differences was wanting, talk of hills and deep valleys, and have thereby misled writers who have not seen the ground, nor examined with attention a contoured map. South-eastwards from Poitiers runs the modern Limoges road, almost parallel to an ancient Roman road, which may have been still the working road of the fourteenth century. A small rivulet, the Miosson, flows at the bottom of a ravine, about 100 feet below the level of the battle-field, and joins the Clain just above Poitiers. The bottom is presumably muddy, and the quantity of water varies greatly with the season. But there is a ford (the Gué de l'Homme marked on the map) to which a narrow road, believed on good evidence to be ancient, leads from close to La Cardinerie. That farm itself is not so old as the battle, having taken the place of the hamlet of Maupertuis, which stood somewhere in the same neighbourhood, and is said to have been destroyed at the time of the battle. Maupertuis was[28] supplied with water from a pond, now almost filled up, which used to be known as "la mare aux Anglais," and out of which sundry relics of the battle have been taken. The overflow of this pond, and doubtless the surface drainage of the immediate neighbourhood, which in rainy weather might be considerable, passed down a very slight hollow running nearly north and south on the Poitiers side of La Cardinerie. As the soil is soft, and the slope very gentle till near the Miosson, the bottom of this hollow may well have been boggy. It is a good illustration of the exaggerated impression conveyed by the defective vocabulary of the chroniclers, that this depression of a very few feet is the place best answering to the *profunda vallis*, and the *torrens* of Baker of Swinbrook, the chronicler whose narrative of the battle has a far greater air of precision in details than any other.

Not far on the east side of this little depression was the Black Prince's position. His front was covered by a hedge with a ditch in front: Baker expressly mentions a *sepes subterfossata*, and it was

[28] I am indebted for these details, except so far as they are from my own observation, to Colonel Babinet, a retired French officer living at Poitiers, who has published in the *Bulletin des Antiquaires de l'Ouest* a very elaborate memoir on the battle, which he has kindly supplemented by private letters. His study of the topography has been most minute, and his conclusions about it, so far as I can judge, are entirely sound. If there were many investigators as patient and careful, historians would find many battles less perplexing. Every one who attempts to understand the battle of Poitiers must feel grateful to Colonel Babinet, even if he does not accept all that gentleman's views as to the course of events.

the usual custom in Poitou to fence in this way. Behind it was a space partly planted with vines, but by no means clear of bushes, on which the English encamped. The hedge was apparently on rather lower ground, for the French knights sent to reconnoitre were able to bring back a pretty accurate report of the position and numbers of the enemy. Somewhere in this hedge was a gap left for carts to reach the upper level, the hedge apparently curving up to it so as to form a sort of funnel-shaped opening. There is now no long hedge anywhere east of the wood of Nouaillé, half a mile to the south-eastwards; but hedges and ditches disappear easily in a fertile soil under continuous cultivation. It is most probable, though it cannot be said to be certainly known, that the Black Prince's hedge ran from very near La Cardinerie towards the hamlet of Les Bordes, and that through the gap passed the road to the Gué de l'Homme.

On the morning of Sunday September 18, king John, according to Froissart, sent some knights to reconnoitre the English position, which he proposed to attack at once. On hearing their report, the king, we are told, asked them in what way the attack should be made; and Eustace de Ribeaumont, their chief, advised the king to make all his men-at-arms dismount, except a few who were to charge and break the English archers. According to Baker of Swinbrook the advice was given by a Douglas, who had fought many times against the English, and affirmed that the English always dismounted their men-at-arms, ever since their defeat at Bannockburn. Whoever gave the advice, it was suicidal folly. A little learning is proverbially a dangerous thing; probably the most dangerous form which a little learning can assume is to know a fact, and to draw utterly baseless and absurd inferences from it. Edward II. was not routed at Bannockburn because his men-at-arms fought on horseback, but because they attacked in a confused and tumultuous manner on ground too narrow for their numbers. Edward III. did not win Crecy merely because his men-at-arms fought on foot, but because he had learned, alike from the victory of Falkirk and from the defeat of Bannockburn, how to combine the destroying force of archers with the defensive firmness of spearmen on foot. Moreover the difference between offensive and defensive tactics is fundamental. Horsemen obviously by dismounting lose most of their *momentum* for attack; as obviously, they cannot in any other way stand firm to sustain a charge. Want of numbers compelled the English, at Crecy and at Poitiers alike, to stand on the defensive: therefore, and therefore only, their men-at-arms abandoned their natural mode of fighting.

Reminiscences of Crecy may well have inclined king John to try whether some other tactics would not succeed better than the tumultuous rush of mailed horsemen straight on a front better protected than at Crecy: but the choice he made, whether inspired by sheer stupidity, or dictated by the insane class pride which refused to see in the plebeian archers the real victors over noble knights, was the worst possible. With his overwhelming numbers he could have surrounded the English; he could have kept them fully occupied in resisting attack while detaching a superior force to cut their retreat; he could have done anything he pleased. His defeat was even more crushing than his father's, and was all the more discreditable, in that it was due to his own deliberate orders, and not to the undisciplined rush of nobles too vain-glorious to obey.

Before the battle could begin, however, the cardinal of Perigord begged John to let him try to arrange terms with the Black Prince. There was some division on the subject in the French councils, some of the king's advisers thinking that the English could not escape destruction, and that therefore any concession was folly. The king ultimately consented, and the whole day was spent by the cardinal in going to and fro between the two camps. The accounts vary as to the exact course of these negotiations: very possibly several offers and counter offers were exchanged. The king, if he thought his enemies in his power, may reasonably have proposed very severe terms as the price of their lives; the prince was apparently ready to concede a good deal; but all the efforts of the cardinal were unavailing to bring about an agreement. Whatever the terms finally offered by the king of France may have been, they were such as the prince felt he could not honourably accept, while an appeal to the arbitrament of battle was still open. The delay enabled the English to improve their defences, probably by intrenching on their right flank and rear, which had been protected on their first taking

up the position by a *lager* of waggons. It was injurious in another way, as they were very short of food; but this mattered little, as the morrow must bring victory or destruction.

Down to the morning of September 19, the day of the battle, every detail can be determined, if not with certainty, yet with reasonable probability. At this point, however, we encounter very serious difficulties. The two authorities which describe the battle minutely, Froissart and Baker, differ from one another in points too important to be called details, though they agree in representing the Black Prince as having remained in his position. The Chandos Herald, whose testimony is *primâ facie* deserving of the highest respect, affirms that the prince had in the night made up his mind to retreat, that he had sent off his vanguard to convey the baggage across the stream, and would have followed with his whole army, had not the French made haste to attack the rear-guard. The discrepancy is obviously fundamental;[29] one side or the other must start from a total misconception, and if so, it is hardly worth while to speculate as to what rags of truth may be left in the narrative.

The Black Prince's army was as usual divided into three parts, under the earl of Warwick, the prince himself, and the earl of Salisbury. The numbers are disputed, the French being naturally inclined to raise the total, the English to diminish it. The authorities on the English side agree in giving about 8000, and they obviously would have the best means of knowing. A real element of uncertainty is, however, always present, in the doubt whether the attendants on the knights are to be added, or are meant to be included in the number given of other soldiers besides the men-at-arms and archers. Probably it would be safe to affirm that the number did not exceed 10,000 of all arms. Having to fight a defensive action against very superior forces, the prince necessarily resorted to tactics much like those of Crecy. The earl of Warwick's division, comprising comparatively a large proportion of archers, lined the hedge in front. Salisbury's men-at-arms, dismounted, were drawn up in line, a stone's-throw back from the gap in the hedge, with archers on their flanks, who would naturally be thrown forwards. The prince's own "battle" he moved[30] up on to a gentle eminence on one flank; this was at the spot marked Bernon on the map, and on the left flank, assuming Colonel Babinet to be right in his identification of the position. From this point he returned after the battle had begun, to sustain Warwick and Salisbury, except that he throughout kept some hundreds of men-at-arms mounted, in reserve.

The numbers on the French side are stated with much greater discrepancy than on the English. Froissart gives no less than 60,000, but there seems reason to believe that the real amount was about

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[29] The Chandos Herald was in the service of Sir John Chandos, one of the Black Prince's best officers. The herald was not apparently present, but he obviously must have had every means of knowing about the battle, in which Sir John fought; he did not, however, publish his rhymed narrative till some thirty years later. Froissart, who was nineteen years old in 1356, devoted his whole life to the work of his history; he was familiar with courts, if not with camps, indefatigable in acquiring information, but not critical. He too had ample opportunities of learning all about the battle of Poitiers, at any rate from the English side. The manuscripts of Froissart, however, vary greatly, which casts a certain doubt over the trustworthiness of such details as are not given identically in all. Baker was a clerk of Swinbrook in Oxfordshire: the last words of his chronicle were written before the peace of Bretigny in 1360, so that he was even more strictly contemporary than Froissart. Several passages in his history, in which he makes very definite statements about the tactics of the long-bow, prove that he, or his informant, understood military matters well. None of them can have seen the ground, and therefore no stress need be laid on minor inaccuracies of description. Mistakes about the names of actors in the drama might easily be made: all that can be said is that the writer who has made fewest errors has a slightly better claim to general credibility. None of them can be deemed likely to have deliberately misrepresented, or to have been totally misinformed about the ground-work of the whole story. Yet there is the fact, that their narratives are substantially contradictory. Critical ingenuity may no doubt patch up some sort of superficial reconciliation between them, but it can only be superficial. Under these conditions I have no alternative but to follow the narrative which seems to be most in accordance with the known facts. I am not ignorant of the difficulties involved in this course, but my plan does not admit of a full discussion of every point that might be raised. On the whole I incline to discard the Chandos Herald, the more so because none of the less detailed narratives support him, and as between Froissart and Baker, to prefer the latter. My account of the actual battle will therefore follow the chronicle of Baker of Swinbrook, in all matters in which he and Froissart are completely at variance.

[30] According to Baker, the prince began this movement *cum cariagiis*, to which, however, there is no further reference. It is obviously possible that the prince may have wished to get the baggage out of the way, and therefore started it towards the Gué de l'Homme, and that he shifted his troops in order to cover this from the French. If so, this would be the element of truth in the Chandos Herald's narrative; but it does not in any way remove the essential contradiction between the Chandos Herald and the other authorities.

40,000, or fully four times the Black Prince's total. A picked body of 500 horsemen, under the two marshals Audrehen and Clermont, was to lead the attack. This was followed by the first of the main "battles" under the duke of Normandy, John's eldest son. The second was commanded by his brother the duke of Orleans, the third by the king in person; both of these remained apparently at some distance. As the marshals advanced up the funnel-shaped opening leading to the gap, which was itself only wide enough for four horsemen abreast, the archers, protected by the hedge, poured in volleys of arrows. Thanks to their armour, the French were not all shot down, and engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict with Salisbury's men, ranked beyond the gap. The first French line, as they followed, engaged with Warwick's troops along the whole line of the hedge.

Seeing that many arrows were broken on the stout armour, or glanced from it, the earl of Oxford bade the archers, who were closing round the flank and rear of the mounted force, aim at the horses, which were less protected. In this way the horsemen were soon routed; one marshal was killed, the other taken prisoner, their immediate command was nearly destroyed, and the whole first line was driven back in confusion. The temptation to pursue must have been strong: but the English leaders knew that their work was only begun. They reformed their ranks, and awaited a fresh attack, which was not long in coming. The French second line under the duke of Orleans advanced in its turn, and after a similar struggle was repulsed even more completely. Still the English commanders would not allow pursuit, though Sir Maurice Berkeley[31] charged on his own private account into the retreating mass, and was, as might be expected, taken prisoner, desperately wounded, after performing prodigies of valour. The breathing time was spent in carrying back the wounded into safety behind the hedges, and in gathering as many arrows as possible, for the stock was running short. It speaks volumes for the deadliness of the shooting at that short range, that the chronicler speaks of the archers drawing the arrows out of the bodies of the dead and wounded, not picking them up from the ground. The French king, on hearing that his son had been beaten back, swore solemnly that he would not leave the field that day, unless dead or a prisoner, and led on the third line. The English, all of whom, except the prince's small reserve, had now been fighting for hours against heavy odds, were nearly worn out; a great many had been wounded, and the numbers left seemed too small to withstand another onset. At this juncture some dismay was caused by the Captal de Buch, a Gascon noble who won a great reputation in the latter part of the war, riding off the field followed by a handful of men-at-arms and a hundred archers. It was naturally imagined that he was flying or deserting: instead of this, he had obtained the prince's permission to make a bold stroke for victory, by circling round the French flank and attacking them in their left rear. This third conflict was the severest of all, the more so as the archers, their arrows being exhausted, had to resort to their bills. At length the Captal de Buch was seen emerging from beyond the slightly rising ground which had masked his movements from the French, displaying the red cross of St. George as a signal: thereupon the Black Prince charged with his reserve of mounted men-at-arms. The day was finally won: though the king of France fought on desperately for awhile, showing himself as good soldier as he was bad general, he was at length obliged to surrender himself prisoner.

A long list of nobles and knights interred in the churches of Poitiers, another long list of distinguished captives, mark the overwhelming nature of the defeat which the French had sustained. So great was the number of prisoners that the Black Prince released a very large part, on their undertaking to pay their ransom at Bordeaux. The English loss must have been severe, relatively to the force engaged, though no authoritative figures can be given. The French of course lost much more heavily; but the mere number of slain was as nothing compared to the crushing effect of the unexpected blow. Had there been any spirit of resistance left in the French, the Black Prince

[31] Froissart calls him Thomas lord of Berkeley, a young man in his first battle, and says he was son of Sir Maurice Berkeley, who died at Calais a few years before. Thomas the then lord of Berkeley, and elder brother of that Sir Maurice, was in the battle, but he was a man of over fifty, and he had his son Maurice with him for his first campaign. That Baker should be right, and Froissart wrong, on a point peculiarly within Froissart's province, is a striking incidental testimony to Baker's trustworthiness.

could hardly have reached Bordeaux in safety. The relics of the army defeated at Poitiers must have amounted to several times his diminished force: yet he carried off his noble prisoners, with all the spoil of the royal camp and of his previous raid, without a trace of opposition.

It would almost seem as if Edward III. and his son never seriously contemplated the subjugation of France: for instead of attempting to take advantage of the virtual dissolution of all government resulting from the defeat of Poitiers and the king's capture, the Black Prince returned to England with his prisoner. The treaty of Bretigny, by which Edward resigned his claims to the French crown, and the French king abandoned all suzerainty over the south-west, was a reasonable solution of the difficulty, if nothing had been at stake but the personal pretensions of the two monarchs. But the national feelings of the French were too strongly roused: the treaty was never carried out. John's son and successor Charles V., or rather his military adviser the Constable Duguesclin, learned wisdom from the crushing defeats of Crecy and Poitiers, and steadily abstained from confronting English armies in the field. All the arts of minor warfare, raids, surprise of castles, cutting off of small parties, were adopted against the English, and the success though slow was steady, and was twofold. Outnumbered from the nature of the case, the English could not but lose in a war thus carried on; and the French subjects of the Black Prince were alienated, through being exposed both to injury at the hands of their own countrymen, and to heavy demands on their resources made by the prince to help him fight a losing game. Gradually things went more and more against the English, until by the time the Black Prince's health failed, and he went home to die, little was left beyond a few towns, which were bound to England by commercial ties. Nor was this all; in the second active stage of the great war, when Henry V. was formally accepted as heir to the French crown, the south-west was the region in which the cause of the Dauphin, the national cause, was most steadily supported.

CHAPTER VI
AGINCOURT AND ORLEANS

For nearly forty years after the death of the Black Prince the English pretensions against France lay dormant. Something like friendly relations existed from time to time between the two countries: Richard II. even contracted a marriage with a French princess, though he was deposed before his child bride was grown up. Cordial peace however was impossible: the English possessions in Guienne were a standing temptation to French ambition and patriotism: the English claim to the French crown was a standing provocation. That claim had by no means been forgotten: the glories of Crecy and Poitiers had made a deeper impression than the slow failure of the following years, the burden of which had fallen much more heavily on Guienne than on England. To the English mind the pretensions of their kings to the throne of France had become a national rather than a personal matter. It was England that considered herself entitled to dominate over France, rather than an individual claiming an inheritance for himself. Richard II. had been succeeded by his cousin the duke of Lancaster, who reigned by a perfectly valid national title, formally voted by Parliament, and substantially accepted by the country as a whole. He was, as it happened, the heir male of Edward III., heir according to the theory embodied in the Salic law which France had made her rule of succession: but he was not the heir of Edward III. according to the theory which alone could render valid Edward III.'s claim to France. What is commonly said in relation to Edward is strictly true of Henry V.: if his contention was based on a sound theory, it held good in favour of some one else. There is no trace of this being recognised in England: Henry V. was the lawful king of England, lawful successor of his great-grandfather, and might reasonably urge his great-grandfather's pretensions.

The state of France at the date of the accession of Henry V. was deplorable. The king, Charles VI., had long been mad; his occasional lucid intervals, when he was supposed to resume the reins of government, only served to make confusion worse. The queen was one of the worst of women, without the great abilities which went some way towards atoning for the wickedness of Catharine de Medicis or her namesake of Russia. The Dauphin was a dissolute and reckless boy. All good government was lost: for power was disputed by two bitterly hostile factions, each of which used it in turn for its own purposes. One was headed by the duke of Burgundy, cousin of the king, son of the boy who was taken prisoner at Poitiers beside his father king John. The other, which bore the name of Armagnacs,[32] was headed by the young duke of Orleans, the king's nephew, between whom and John of Burgundy there was an irreconcilable blood-feud. The statesmanship of France was not ill-represented by the Dauphin's insult to Henry V., in sending him a present of balls at his accession, with a message implying that he deemed the young king, perhaps the ablest man of his age, little better than a child. Shakespeare makes much of the story that the archbishop of Canterbury urged Henry to undertake war with France, in order to divert his attention from ecclesiastical affairs at home. Whatever weight this may have had, the opportunity was obvious, and Henry was very well competent to use it.

In August 1415 Henry V. landed at the mouth of the Seine, with a well-equipped army of about 30,000 men. No better point for an invasion could be chosen: there was a good harbour for his base, and almost the shortest distance from the sea-shore to Paris is straight up the Seine. Before however he could advance Harfleur must be taken, and this cost an unexpectedly long time. More than a month elapsed before the town surrendered; and then it is suggested that dysentery, which was raging alike inside and outside the walls, was largely answerable for the surrender. The siege was conducted entirely by battering, like a siege of three or four centuries later: probably the comparative slowness

[32] The name was derived from Bernard Count of Armagnac, the duke's father-in-law, who gave the party most of its energy.

and inadequacy of the cannonade was more or less balanced by the inferiority of the defensive works to those of later times. When the town had fallen (or was on the point of falling, for the date is not quite certain), Henry sent a message to the Dauphin, offering to settle the dispute by single combat with him, as his father was incapacitated. The proposal is altogether in the style of chivalry, and was doubtless considered the right and proper thing to do: but seeing that the Dauphin was a weak and debauched lad, and Henry in the very prime of vigour, there was nothing really high-minded about it. Henry deemed himself bound to wait for an answer, and during the interval resolved on his course of action. His army had been frightfully reduced by illness as well as by the losses in the siege: we are told that 5000 men had to be sent home invalided, besides the large number who died. A garrison was also wanted for Harfleur; altogether the king could not move with above a third of his original force. The accounts given from the English side, which are numerous and unusually circumstantial, vary only slightly: and one French writer, who expressly says that he saw the English army, agrees pretty closely with them. French writers in general had only hearsay to guide them, and had every motive to exaggerate the English numbers. Of men-at-arms Henry had left from 800 to 1000, of archers five or six thousand, besides other foot-soldiers who were probably about half as numerous. Whatever the number was, it had suffered no material change before the battle of Agincourt.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.