

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**HAROLD : THE LAST
OF THE SAXON
KINGS — VOLUME 03**

Эдвард Джордж Бульвер-Литтон
Harold : the Last of the
Saxon Kings — Volume 03

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BOOK III. THE HOUSE OF GODWIN

CHAPTER I

And all went to the desire of Duke William the Norman. With one hand he curbed his proud vassals, and drove back his fierce foes. With the other, he led to the altar Matilda, the maid of Flanders; and all happened as Lanfranc had foretold. William's most formidable enemy, the King of France, ceased to conspire against his new kinsman; and the neighbouring princes said, "The Bastard hath become one of us since he placed by his side the descendant of Charlemagne." And Mauger, Archbishop of Rouen, excommunicated the Duke and his bride, and the ban fell idle; for Lanfranc sent from Rome the Pope's dispensation and blessing¹, conditionally only that bride and bridegroom founded

¹ See Note (E), at the end of the volume (foot-note on the date of William's

each a church. And Mauger was summoned before the synod, and accused of unclerical crimes; and they deposed him from his state, and took from him abbacies and sees. And England every day waxed more and more Norman; and Edward grew more feeble and infirm, and there seemed not a barrier between the Norman Duke and the English throne, when suddenly the wind blew in the halls of heaven, and filled the sails of Harold the Earl.

And his ships came to the mouth of the Severn. And the people of Somerset and Devon, a mixed and mainly a Celtic race, who bore small love to the Saxons, drew together against him, and he put them to flight.²

Meanwhile, Godwin and his sons Sweyn, Tostig, and Gurth, who had taken refuge in that very Flanders from which William the Duke had won his bride,—(for Tostig had wed, previously, the sister of Matilda, the rose of Flanders; and Count Baldwin had, for his sons-in-law, both Tostig and William,)—meanwhile, I say, these, not holpen by the Count Baldwin, but helping themselves, lay at Bruges, ready to join Harold the Earl. And Edward, advised of this from the anxious Norman, caused forty ships³ to be equipped, and put them under command of Rolf, Earl of Hereford. The ships lay at Sandwich in wait for Godwin. But the old Earl got from them, and landed quietly on the

marriage).

² Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

³ Some writers say fifty.

southern coast. And the fort of Hastings opened to his coming with a shout from its armed men.

All the boatmen, all the mariners, far and near, thronged to him, with sail and with shield, with sword and with oar. All Kent (the foster- mother of the Saxons) sent forth the cry, "Life or death with Earl Godwin."⁴ Fast over the length and breadth of the land, went the bodes⁵ and riders of the Earl; and hosts, with one voice, answered the cry of the children of Horsa, "Life or death with Earl Godwin." And the ships of King Edward, in dismay, turned flag and prow to London, and the fleet of Harold sailed on. So the old Earl met his young son on the deck of a war-ship, that had once borne the Raven of the Dane.

Swelled and gathering sailed the armament of the English men. Slow up the Thames it sailed, and on either shore marched tumultuous the swarming multitudes. And King Edward sent after more help, but it came up very late. So the fleet of the Earl nearly faced the Julliet Keape of London, and abode at Southwark till the flood-tide came up. When he had mustered his host, then came the flood tide.⁶

⁴ Hovenden.

⁵ Bodes, i.e. messengers.

⁶ Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

CHAPTER II

King Edward sate, not on his throne, but on a chair of state, in the presence-chamber of his palace of Westminster. His diadem, with the three zimmes shaped into a triple trefoil⁷ on his brow, his sceptre in his right hand. His royal robe, tight to the throat, with a broad band of gold, flowed to his feet; and at the fold gathered round the left knee, where now the kings of England wear the badge of St. George, was embroidered a simple cross⁸. In that chamber met the thegns and procures of his realm; but not they alone. No national Witan there assembled, but a council of war, composed at least one third part of Normans—counts, knights, prelates, and abbots of high degree.

And King Edward looked a king! The habitual lethargic meekness had vanished from his face, and the large crown threw a shadow, like a frown, over his brow. His spirit seemed to have risen from the weight it took from the sluggish blood of his father, Ethelred the Unready, and to have remounted to the brighter and earlier sources of ancestral heroes. Worthy in that hour he seemed to boast the blood and wield the sceptre of Athelstan and Alfred.⁹

⁷ Or Fleur-de-lis, which seems to have been a common form of ornament with the Saxon kings.

⁸ Bayeux Tapestry.

⁹ See note (F), at the end of the volume.

Thus spoke the King:

"Right worthy and beloved, my ealdermen, earls, and thegns of England; noble and familiar, my friends and guests, counts and chevaliers of Normandy, my mother's land; and you, our spiritual chiefs, above all ties of birth and country, Christendom your common appanage, and from Heaven your seignories and fiefs,—hear the words of Edward, the King of England under grace of the Most High. The rebels are in our river; open yonder lattice, and you will see the piled shields glittering from their barks, and hear the hum of their hosts. Not a bow has yet been drawn, not a sword left its sheath; yet on the opposite side of the river are our fleets of forty sail—along the strand, between our palace and the gates of London, are arrayed our armies. And this pause because Godwin the traitor hath demanded truce and his nuncius waits without. Are ye willing that we should hear the message? or would ye rather that we dismiss the messenger unheard, and pass at once, to rank and to sail, the war-cry of a Christian king, 'Holy Crosse and our Lady!'"

The King ceased, his left hand grasping firm the leopard head carved on his throne, and his sceptre untrembling in his lifted hand.

A murmur of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, the war-cry of the Normans, was heard amongst the stranger-knights of the audience; but haughty and arrogant as those strangers were, no one presumed to take precedence, in England's danger, of men English born.

Slowly then rose Alred, Bishop of Winchester, the worthiest prelate in all the land.¹⁰

"Kingly son," said the bishop, "evil is the strife between men of the same blood and lineage, nor justified but by extremes, which have not yet been made clear to us. And ill would it sound throughout England were it said that the King's council gave, perchance, his city of London to sword and fire, and rent his land in twain, when a word in season might have disbanded yon armies, and given to your throne a submissive subject, where now you are menaced by a formidable rebel. Wherefore, I say, admit the nuncius."

Scarcely had Alred resumed his seat, before Robert the Norman prelate of Canterbury started up,—a man, it was said, of worldly learning—and exclaimed:

"To admit the messenger is to approve the treason. I do beseech the King to consult only his own royal heart and royal honour. Reflect—each moment of delay swells the rebel hosts, strengthens their cause; of each moment they avail themselves to allure to their side the misguided citizens. Delay but proves our own weakness; a king's name is a tower of strength, but only when fortified by a king's authority. Give the signal for—war I call it not—no—for chastisement and justice."

¹⁰ The York Chronicle, written by an Englishman, Stubbs, gives this eminent person an excellent character as peacemaker. "He could make the warmest friends of foes the most hostile." "De inimicissimis, amicissimos faceret." This gentle priest had yet the courage to curse the Norman Conqueror in the midst of his barons. That scene is not within the range of this work, but it is very strikingly told in the Chronicle.

"As speaks my brother of Canterbury, speak I," said William, Bishop of London, another Norman.

But then there rose up a form at whose rising all murmurs were hushed.

Grey and vast, as some image of a gone and mightier age towered over all, Siward, the son of Beorn, the great Earl of Northumbria.

"We have naught to do with the Normans. Were they on the river, and our countrymen, Dane or Saxon, alone in this hall, small doubt of the King's choice, and niddering were the man who spoke of peace; but when Norman advises the dwellers of England to go forth and slay each other, no sword of mine shall be drawn at his hest. Who shall say that Siward of the Strong Arm, the grandson of the Berserker, ever turned from a foe? The foe, son of Ethelred, sits in these halls; I fight thy battles when I say Nay to the Norman! Brothers-in-arms of the kindred race and common tongue, Dane and Saxon long intermingled, proud alike of Canute the glorious and Alfred the wise, ye will hear the man whom Godwin, our countryman, sends to us; he at least will speak our tongue, and he knows our laws. If the demand he delivers be just, such as a king should grant, and our Witan should hear, woe to him who refuses; if unjust be the demand, shame to him who accedes. Warrior sends to warrior, countryman to countryman; hear we as countrymen, and judge as warriors. I have said."

The utmost excitement and agitation followed the speech of

Siward,— unanimous applause from the Saxons, even those who in times of peace were most under the Norman contagion; but no words can paint the wrath and scorn of the Normans. They spoke loud and many at a time; the greatest disorder prevailed. But the majority being English, there could be no doubt as to the decision; and Edward, to whom the emergence gave both a dignity and presence of mind rare to him, resolved to terminate the dispute at once. He stretched forth his sceptre, and motioning to his chamberlain, bade him introduce the nuncius.¹¹

A blank disappointment, not unmixed with apprehensive terror, succeeded the turbulent excitement of the Normans; for well they knew that the consequences, if not condition, of negotiations, would be their own downfall and banishment at the least;—happy, it might be, to escape massacre at the hands of the exasperated multitude.

The door at the end of the room opened, and the nuncius appeared. He was a sturdy, broad-shouldered man, of middle age, and in the long loose garb originally national with the Saxon, though then little in vogue; his beard thick and fair, his eyes grey and calm—a chief of Kent, where all the prejudices of his race were strongest, and whose yeomanry claimed in war the hereditary right to be placed in the front of battle.

He made his manly but deferential salutation to the august

¹¹ Heralds, though probably the word is Saxon, were not then known in the modern acceptation of the word. The name given to the messenger or envoy who fulfilled that office was bode or nuncius. See Note (G), at the end of the volume.

council as he approached; and, pausing midway between the throne and door, he fell on his knees without thought of shame, for the King to whom he knelt was the descendant of Woden, and the heir of Hengist. At a sign and a brief word from the King, still on his knees, Vebba, the Kentman, spoke.

"To Edward, son of Ethelred, his most gracious king and lord, Godwin, son of Wolnoth, sends faithful and humble greeting, by Vebba, the thegn-born. He prays the King to hear him in kindness, and judge of him with mercy. Not against the King comes he hither with ships and arms; but against those only who would stand between the King's heart and the subject's: those who have divided a house against itself, and parted son and father, man and wife."

At those last words Edward's sceptre trembled in this hand, and his face grew almost stern.

"Of the King, Godwin but prays with all submiss and earnest prayer, to reverse the unrighteous outlawry against him and his; to restore him and his sons their just possessions and well-won honours; and, more than all, to replace them where they have sought by loving service not unworthily to stand, in the grace of their born lord and in the van of those who would uphold the laws and liberties of England. This done—the ships sail back to their haven; the thegn seeks his homestead and the ceorl returns to the plough; for with Godwin are no strangers; and his force is but the love of his countrymen."

"Hast thou said?" quoth the King.

"I have said."

"Retire, and await our answer."

The Thegn of Kent was then led back into an ante-room, in which, armed from head to heel in ring-mail, were several Normans whose youth or station did not admit them into the council, but still of no mean interest in the discussion, from the lands and possessions they had already contrived to gripe out of the demesnes of the exiles;—burning for battle and eager for the word. Amongst these was Mallet de Graville.

The Norman valour of this young knight was, as we have seen, guided by Norman intelligence; and he had not disdained, since William's departure, to study the tongue of the country in which he hoped to exchange his mortgaged tower on the Seine, for some fair barony on the Humber or the Thames.

While the rest of his proud countrymen stood aloof, with eyes of silent scorn, from the homely nuncius, Mallet approached him with courteous bearing, and said in Saxon:

"May I crave to know the issue of thy message from the reb—that is from the doughty Earl?"

"I wait to learn it," said Vebba, bluffly.

"They heard thee throughout, then?"

"Throughout."

"Friendly Sir," said the Sire de Graville, seeking to subdue the tone of irony habitual to him, and acquired, perhaps, from his maternal ancestry, the Franks. "Friendly and peace-making Sir, dare I so far venture to intrude on the secrets of thy mission as

to ask if Godwin demands, among other reasonable items, the head of thy humble servant—not by name indeed, for my name is as yet unknown to him—but as one of the unhappy class called Normans?"

"Had Earl Godwin," returned the nuncius, "thought fit to treat for peace by asking vengeance, he would have chosen another spokesman. The Earl asks but his own; and thy head is not, I trow, a part of his goods and chattels."

"That is comforting," said Mallet. "Marry, I thank thee, Sir Saxon; and thou speakest like a brave man and an honest. And if we fall to blows, as I suspect we shall, I should deem it a favour of our Lady the Virgin if she send thee across my way. Next to a fair friend I love a bold foe."

Vebba smiled, for he liked the sentiment, and the tone and air of the young knight pleased his rough mind, despite his prejudices against the stranger.

Encouraged by the smile, Mallet seated himself on the corner of the long table that skirted the room, and with a debonnair gesture invited Vebba to do the same; then looking at him gravely, he resumed:

"So frank and courteous thou art, Sir Envoy, that I yet intrude on thee my ignorant and curious questions."

"Speak out, Norman."

"How comes it, then, that you English so love this Earl Godwin?—Still more, why think you it right and proper that King Edward should love him too? It is a question I have often

asked, and to which I am not likely in these halls to get answer satisfactory. If I know aught of your troublous history, this same Earl has changed sides oft eno'; first for the Saxon, then for Canute the Dane—Canute dies, and your friend takes up arms for the Saxon again. He yields to the advice of your Witan, and sides with Hardicanute and Harold, the Danes—a letter, nathless, is written as from Emma, the mother to the young Saxon princes, Edward and Alfred, inviting them over to England, and promising aid; the saints protect Edward, who continues to say aves in Normandy—Alfred comes over, Earl Godwin meets him, and, unless belied, does him homage, and swears to him faith. Nay, listen yet. This Godwin, whom ye love so, then leads Alfred and his train into the ville of Guildford, I think ye call it,—fair quarters enow. At the dead of the night rush in King Harold's men, seize prince and follower, six hundred men in all; and next morning, saving only every tenth man, they are tortured and put to death. The prince is born off to London, and shortly afterwards his eyes are torn out in the Islet of Ely, and he dies of the anguish! That ye should love Earl Godwin withal may be strange, but yet possible. But is it possible, cher Envoy, for the King to love the man who thus betrayed his brother to the shambles?"

"All this is a Norman fable," said the Thegn of Kent, with a disturbed visage; "and Godwin cleared himself on oath of all share in the foul murder of Alfred."

"The oath, I have heard, was backed," said the knight drily, "by a present to Hardicanute, who after the death of King Harold

resolved to avenge the black butchery; a present, I say, of a gilt ship, manned by fourscore warriors with gold-hilted swords, and gilt helms.—But let this pass."

"Let it pass," echoed Vebba with a sigh. "Bloody were those times, and unholy their secrets."

"Yet answer me still, why love you Earl Godwin? He hath changed sides from party to party, and in each change won lordships and lands. He is ambitious and grasping, ye all allow; for the ballads sung in your streets liken him to the thorn and the bramble, at which the sheep leaves his wool. He is haughty and overbearing. Tell me, O Saxon, frank Saxon, why you love Godwin the Earl? Fain would I know; for, please the saints (and you and your Earl so permitting), I mean to live and die in this merrie England; and it would be pleasant to learn that I have but to do as Earl Godwin, in order to win love from the English."

The stout Vebba looked perplexed; but after stroking his beard thoughtfully, he answered thus:

"Though of Kent, and therefore in his earldom, I am not one of Godwin's especial party; for that reason was I chosen his bode. Those who are under him doubtless love a chief liberal to give and strong to protect. The old age of a great leader gathers reverence, as an oak gathers moss. But to me, and those like me, living peaceful at home, shunning courts, and tempting not broils, Godwin the man is not dear— it is Godwin the thing."

"Though I do my best to know your language," said the knight, "ye have phrases that might puzzle King Solomon. What meanest

thou by 'Godwin the thing'?"

"That which to us Godwin only seems to uphold. We love justice; whatever his offences, Godwin was banished unjustly. We love our laws; Godwin was dishonoured by maintaining them. We love England, and are devoured by strangers; Godwin's cause is England's, and— stranger, forgive me for not concluding."

Then examining the young Norman with a look of rough compassion, he laid his large hand upon the knight's shoulder and whispered:

"Take my advice—and fly."

"Fly!" said De Grville, reddening. "Is it to fly, think you, that I have put on my mail, and girded my sword?"

"Vain—vain! Wasps are fierce, but the swarm is doomed when the straw is kindled. I tell you this—fly in time, and you are safe; but let the King be so misguided as to count on arms, and strive against yon multitude, and verily before nightfall not one Norman will be found alive within ten miles of the city. Look to it, youth! Perhaps thou hast a mother—let her not mourn a son!"

Before the Norman could shape into Saxon sufficiently polite and courtly his profound and indignant disdain of the counsel, his sense of the impertinence with which his shoulder had been profaned, and his mother's son had been warned, the nuncius was again summoned into the presence-chamber. Nor did he return into the ante-room, but conducted forthwith from the council—his brief answer received—to the stairs of the palace, he reached

the boat in which he had come, and was rowed back to the ship that held the Earl and his sons.

Now this was the manoeuvre of Godwin's array. His vessels having passed London Bridge, had rested awhile on the banks of the Southward suburb (Suth-weorde)—since called Southwark—and the King's ships lay to the north; but the fleet of the Earl's, after a brief halt, veered majestically round, and coming close to the palace of Westminster, inclined northward, as if to hem the King's ships. Meanwhile the land forces drew up close to the Strand, almost within bow-shot of the King's troops, that kept the ground inland; thus Vebba saw before him, so near as scarcely to be distinguished from each other, on the river the rival fleets, on the shore the rival armaments.

High above all the vessels towered the majestic bark, or aescas, that had borne Harold from the Irish shores. Its fashion was that of the ancient sea-kings, to one of whom it had belonged. Its curved and mighty prow, richly gilded, stood out far above the waves: the prow, the head of the sea-snake; the stern its spire; head and spire alike glittering in the sun.

The boat drew up to the lofty side of the vessel, a ladder was lowered, the nuncius ascended lightly and stood on deck. At the farther end grouped the sailors, few in number, and at respectful distance from the Earl and his sons.

Godwin himself was but half armed. His head was bare, nor had he other weapon of offence than the gilt battle-axe of the Danes—weapon as much of office as of war; but his broad breast

was covered with the ring mail of the time. His stature was lower than that of any of his sons; nor did his form exhibit greater physical strength than that of a man, well shaped, robust, and deep of chest, who still preserved in age the pith and sinew of mature manhood. Neither, indeed, did legend or fame ascribe to that eminent personage those romantic achievements, those feats of purely animal prowess, which distinguished his rival, Siward. Brave he was, but brave as a leader; those faculties in which he appears to have excelled all his contemporaries, were more analogous to the requisites of success in civilised times, than those which won renown of old. And perhaps England was the only country then in Europe which could have given to those faculties their fitting career. He possessed essentially the arts of party; he knew how to deal with vast masses of mankind; he could carry along with his interests the fervid heart of the multitude; he had in the highest degree that gift, useless in most other lands—in all lands where popular assemblies do not exist—the gift of popular eloquence. Ages elapsed, after the Norman conquest, ere eloquence again became a power in England.¹²

But like all men renowned for eloquence, he went with the popular feeling of his times; he embodied its passions, its prejudices—but also that keen sense of self-interest, which is the invariable characteristic of a multitude. He was the sense of the commonalty carried to its highest degree. Whatever the

¹² When the chronicler praises the gift of speech, he unconsciously proves the existence of constitutional freedom.

faults, it may be the crimes, of a career singularly prosperous and splendid, amidst events the darkest and most terrible,—shining with a steady light across the thunder-clouds,—he was never accused of cruelty or outrage to the mass of the people. English, emphatically, the English deemed him; and this not the less that in his youth he had sided with Canute, and owed his fortunes to that king; for so intermixed were Danes and Saxons in England, that the agreement which had given to Canute one half the kingdom had been received with general applause; and the earlier severities of that great prince had been so redeemed in his later years by wisdom and mildness—so, even in the worst period of his reign, relieved by extraordinary personal affability, and so lost now in men's memories by pride in his power and fame,—that Canute had left behind him a beloved and honoured name¹³, and Godwin was the more esteemed as the chosen counsellor of that popular prince. At his death, Godwin was known to have wished, and even armed, for the restoration of the Saxon line; and only yielded to the determination of the Witan, no doubt acted upon by the popular opinion. Of one dark crime he was suspected, and, despite his oath to the contrary, and the formal acquittal of the national council, doubt of his guilt rested then, as it rests still, upon his name; viz., the perfidious surrender of

¹³ Recent Danish historians have in vain endeavoured to detract from the reputation of Canute as an English monarch. The Danes are, doubtless, the best authorities for his character in Denmark. But our own English authorities are sufficiently decisive as to the personal popularity of Canute in this country, and the affection entertained for his laws.

Alfred, Edward's murdered brother.

But time had passed over the dismal tragedy; and there was an instinctive and prophetic feeling throughout the English nation, that with the House of Godwin was identified the cause of the English people. Everything in this man's aspect served to plead in his favour. His ample brows were calm with benignity and thought; his large dark blue eyes were serene and mild, though their expression, when examined, was close and inscrutable. His mien was singularly noble, but wholly without formality or affected state; and though haughtiness and arrogance were largely attributed to him, they could be found only in his deeds, not manner—plain, familiar, kindly to all men, his heart seemed as open to the service of his countrymen as his hospitable door to their wants.

Behind him stood the stateliest group of sons that ever filled with pride a father's eye. Each strikingly distinguished from the other, all remarkable for beauty of countenance and strength of frame.

Sweyn, the eldest¹⁴, had the dark hues of his mother the

¹⁴ Some of our historians erroneously represent Harold as the eldest son. But Florence, the best authority we have, in the silence of the Saxon Chronicle, as well as Knyghton, distinctly states Sweyn to be the eldest; Harold was the second, and Tostig was the third. Sweyn's seniority seems corroborated by the greater importance of his earldom. The Norman chroniclers, in their spite to Harold, wish to make him junior to Tostig—for the reasons evident at the close of this work. And the Norwegian chronicler, Snorro Sturleson, says that Harold was the youngest of all the sons; so little was really known, or cared to be accurately known, of that great house which so nearly founded a new dynasty of English kings.

Dane: a wild and mournful majesty sat upon features aquiline and regular, but wasted by grief or passion; raven locks, glossy even in neglect, fell half over eyes hollow in their sockets, but bright, though with troubled fire. Over his shoulder he bore his mighty axe. His form, spare, but of immense power, was sheathed in mail, and he leant on his great pointed Danish shield. At his feet sate his young son Haco, a boy with a countenance preternaturally thoughtful for his years, which were yet those of childhood.

Next to him stood the most dreaded and ruthless of the sons of Godwin—he, fated to become to the Saxon what Julian was to the Goth. With his arms folded on his breast stood Tostig; his face was beautiful as a Greek's, in all save the forehead, which was low and lowering. Sleek and trim were his bright chestnut locks; and his arms were damascened with silver, for he was one who loved the pomp and luxury of war.

Wolnoth, the mother's favourite, seemed yet in the first flower of youth, but he alone of all the sons had something irresolute and effeminate in his aspect and bearing; his form, though tall, had not yet come to its full height and strength; and, as if the weight of mail were unusual to him, he leant with both hands upon the wood of his long spear. Leofwine, who stood next to Wolnoth, contrasted him notably; his sunny locks wreathed carelessly over a white unclouded brow, and the silken hair on the upper lip quivered over arch lips, smiling, even in that serious hour.

At Godwin's right hand, but not immediately near him, stood

the last of the group, Gurth and Harold. Gurth had passed his arm over the shoulder of his brother, and, not watching the nuncius while he spoke, watched only the effect his words produced on the face of Harold. For Gurth loved Harold as Jonathan loved David. And Harold was the only one of the group not armed, and had a veteran skilled in war been asked who of that group was born to lead armed men, he would have pointed to the man unarmed.

"So what says the King?" asked Earl Godwin.

"This; he refuses to restore thee and thy sons, or to hear thee, till thou hast disbanded thine army, dismissed thy ships, and consented to clear thyself and thy house before the Witanagemot."

A fierce laugh broke from Tostig; Sweyn's mournful brow grew darker;

Leofwine placed his right hand on his ateghar; Wolnoth rose erect;

Gurth kept his eyes on Harold, and Harold's face was unmoved.

"The King received thee in his council of war," said Godwin, thoughtfully, "and doubtless the Normans were there. Who were the Englishmen most of mark?"

"Siward of Northumbria, thy foe."

"My sons," said the Earl, turning to his children, and breathing loud as if a load were off his heart; "there will be no need of axe or armour to-day. Harold alone was wise," and he pointed to the

linen tunic of the son thus cited.

"What mean you, Sir Father?" said Tostig, imperiously. "Think you to——"

"Peace, son, peace;" said Godwin, without asperity, but with conscious command. "Return, brave and dear friend," he said to Vebba, "find out Siward the Earl; tell him that I, Godwin, his foe in the old time, place honour and life in his hands, and what he counsels that will we do.—Go."

The Kent man nodded, and regained his boat. Then spoke Harold.

"Father, yonder are the forces of Edward; as yet without leaders, since the chiefs must still be in the halls of the King. Some fiery Norman amongst them may provoke an encounter; and this city of London is not won, as it behoves us to win it, if one drop of English blood dye the sword of one English man. Wherefore, with your leave, I will take boat, and land. And unless I have lost in my absence all right here in the hearts of our countrymen, at the first shout from our troops which proclaims that Harold, son of Godwin, is on the soil of our fathers, half yon array of spears and helms pass at once to our side."

"And if not, my vain brother?" said Tostig, gnawing his lip with envy.

"And if not, I will ride alone into the midst of them, and ask what Englishmen are there who will aim shaft or spear at this breast, never mailed against England!"

Godwin placed his hand on Harold's head, and the tears came

to those close cold eyes.

"Thou knowest by nature what I have learned by art. Go, and prosper.

Be it as thou wilt."

"He takes thy post, Sweyn—thou art the elder," said Tostig, to the wild form by his side.

"There is guilt on my soul, and woe in my heart," answered Sweyn, moodily. "Shall Esau lose his birthright, and Cain retain it?" So saying, he withdrew, and, reclining against the stern of the vessel, leant his face upon the edge of his shield.

Harold watched him with deep compassion in his eyes, passed to his side with a quick step, pressed his hand, and whispered, "Peace to the past, O my brother!"

The boy Haco, who had noiselessly followed his father, lifted his sombre, serious looks to Harold as he thus spoke; and when Harold turned away, he said to Sweyn, timidly, "He, at least, is ever good to thee and to me."

"And thou, when I am no more, shalt cling to him as thy father, Haco," answered Sweyn, tenderly smoothing back the child's dark locks.

The boy shivered; and, bending his head, murmured to himself, "When thou art no more! No more? Has the Vala doomed him, too? Father and son, both?"

Meanwhile, Harold had entered the boat lowered from the sides of the aescas to receive him; and Gurth, looking appealingly to his father, and seeing no sign of dissent, sprang down after the

young Earl, and seated himself by his side. Godwin followed the boat with musing eyes.

"Small need," said he, aloud, but to himself, "to believe in soothsayers, or to credit Hilda the saga, when she prophesied, ere we left our shores, that Harold—" He stopped short, for Tostig's wrathful exclamation broke on his reverie.

"Father, father! My blood surges in my ears, and boils in my heart, when I hear thee name the prophecies of Hilda in favour of thy darling. Dissension and strife in our house have they wrought already; and if the feuds between Harold and me have sown grey in thy locks, thank thyself when, flushed with vain soothsayings for thy favoured Harold, thou saidst, in the hour of our first childish broil, 'Strive not with Harold; for his brothers will be his men.'"

"Falsify the prediction," said Godwin, calmly; "wise men may always make their own future, and seize their own fates. Prudence, patience, labour, valour; these are the stars that rule the career of mortals."

Tostig made no answer; for the splash of oars was near, and two ships, containing the principal chiefs that had joined Godwin's cause, came alongside the Runic aescra to hear the result of the message sent to the King. Tostig sprang to the vessel's side, and exclaimed, "The King, girt by his false counsellors, will hear us not, and arms must decide between us."

"Hold, hold! malignant, unhappy boy!" cried Godwin, between his grinded teeth, as a shout of indignant, yet joyous

ferocity broke from the crowded ships thus hailed. "The curse of all time be on him who draws the first native blood in sight of the altars and hearths of London! Hear me, thou with the vulture's blood-lust, and the peacock's vain joy in the gaudy plume! Hear me, Tostig, and tremble. If but by one word thou widen the breach between me and the King, outlaw thou enterest England, outlaw shalt thou depart—for earldom and broad lands; choose the bread of the stranger, and the weregeld of the wolf!"

The young Saxon, haughty as he was, quailed at his father's thrilling voice, bowed his head, and retreated sullenly. Godwin sprang on the deck of the nearest vessel, and all the passions that Tostig had aroused, he exerted his eloquence to appease.

In the midst of his arguments, there rose from the ranks on the strand, the shout of "Harold! Harold the Earl! Harold and Holy Crosse!" And Godwin, turning his eye to the King's ranks, saw them agitated, swayed, and moving; till suddenly, from the very heart of the hostile array, came, as by irresistible impulse, the cry, "Harold, our Harold! All hail, the good Earl!"

While this chanced without,—within the palace, Edward had quitted the presence-chamber, and was closeted with Stigand, the bishop. This prelate had the more influence with Edward, inasmuch as though Saxon, he was held to be no enemy to the Normans, and had, indeed, on a former occasion, been deposed from his bishopric on the charge of too great an attachment to the Norman queen-mother Emma¹⁵

¹⁵ Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A. D. 1043. "Stigand was deposed from his bishopric,

and all that he possessed was seized into the King's hands, because he was received to his mother's counsel, and she went just as he advised her, as people thought." The saintly Confessor dealt with his bishops as summarily as Henry VIII. could have done, after his quarrel with the Pope.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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