

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**HAROLD : THE LAST  
OF THE SAXON  
KINGS — VOLUME 02**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

**Harold : the Last of the  
Saxon Kings — Volume 02**

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# Edward Bulwer-Lytton Harold : the Last of the Saxon Kings — Volume 02

## BOOK II. LANFRANC THE SCHOLAR

### CHAPTER I

Four meals a day, nor those sparing, were not deemed too extravagant an interpretation of the daily bread for which the Saxon prayed. Four meals a day, from earl to ceorl! "Happy times!" may sigh the descendant of the last, if he read these pages; partly so they were for the ceorl, but not in all things, for never sweet is the food, and never gladdening is the drink, of servitude. Inebriety, the vice of the warlike nations of the North, had not, perhaps, been the pre- eminent excess of the earlier Saxons, while yet the active and fiery Britons, and the subsequent petty wars between the kings of the Heptarchy, enforced on hardy warriors the safety of temperance; but the example of the Danes had been fatal. Those giants of the sea, like all who pass from great vicissitudes of toil and repose, from the tempest to the haven, snatched with full hands every pleasure in their reach. With much that tended permanently to elevate the character of the Saxon, they imparted much for a time to degrade it. The Anglian learned to feast to repletion, and drink to delirium. But such were not the vices of the court of the Confessor. Brought up from his youth in the cloister-camp of the Normans, what he loved in their manners was the abstemious sobriety, and the ceremonial religion, which distinguished those sons of the Scandinavian from all other kindred tribes.

The Norman position in France, indeed, in much resembled that of the Spartan in Greece. He had forced a settlement with scanty numbers in the midst of a subjugated and sullen population, surrounded by jealous and formidable foes. Hence sobriety was a condition of his being, and the policy of the chief lent a willing ear to the lessons of the preacher. Like the Spartan, every Norman of pure race was free and noble; and this consciousness inspired not only that remarkable dignity of mien which Spartan and Norman alike possessed, but also that fastidious self-respect which would have revolted from exhibiting a spectacle of debasement to inferiors. And, lastly, as the paucity of their original numbers, the perils that beset, and the good fortune that attended them, served to render the Spartans the most religious of all the Greeks in their dependence on the Divine aid; so, perhaps, to the same causes may be traced the proverbial piety of the ceremonial Normans; they carried into their new creed something of feudal loyalty to their spiritual protectors; did homage to the Virgin for the lands that she vouchsafed to bestow, and recognised in St. Michael the chief who conducted their armies.

After hearing the complin vespers in the temporary chapel fitted up in that unfinished abbey of Westminster, which occupied the site of the temple of Apollo<sup>1</sup>, the King and his guests repaired to their evening meal in the great hall of the palace. Below the dais were ranged three long tables for the knights in William's train, and that flower of the Saxon nobility who, fond, like all youth, of change and imitation, thronged the court of their Normanised saint, and scorned the rude patriotism

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<sup>1</sup> CAMDEN—A church was built out of the ruins of that temple by Sibert, King of the East Saxons; and Canute favoured much the small monastery attached to it (originally established by Dunstan for twelve Benedictines), on account of its Abbot Wulnoth, whose society pleased him. The old palace of Canute, in Thorney Isle, had been destroyed by fire.

of their fathers. But hearts truly English were not there. Yea, many of Godwin's noblest foes sighed for the English- hearted Earl, banished by Norman guile on behalf of English law.

At the oval table on the dais the guests were select and chosen. At the right hand of the King sat William; at the left Odo of Bayeux. Over these three stretched a canopy of cloth of gold; the chairs on which each sate were of metal, richly gilded over, and the arms carved in elaborate arabesques. At this table too was the King's nephew, the Earl of Hereford, and, in right of kinsmanship to the Duke, the Norman's beloved baron and grand seneschal, William Fitzosborne, who, though in Normandy even he sate not at the Duke's table, was, as related to his lord, invited by Edward to his own. No other guests were admitted to this board, so that, save Edward, all were Norman. The dishes were of gold and silver, the cups inlaid with jewels. Before each guest was a knife, with hilt adorned by precious stones, and a napkin fringed with silver. The meats were not placed on the table, but served upon small spits, and between every course a basin of perfumed water was borne round by high-born pages. No dame graced the festival; for she who should have presided—she, matchless for beauty without pride, piety without asceticism, and learning without pedantry—she, the pale rose of England, loved daughter of Godwin, and loathed wife of Edward, had shared in the fall of her kindred, and had been sent by the meek King, or his fierce counsellors, to an abbey in Hampshire, with the taunt "that it was not meet that the child and sister should enjoy state and pomp, while the sire and brethren ate the bread of the stranger in banishment and disgrace."

But, hungry as were the guests, it was not the custom of that holy court to fall to without due religious ceremonial. The rage for psalm-singing was then at its height in England; psalmody had excluded almost every other description of vocal music; and it is even said that great festivals on certain occasions were preluded by no less an effort of lungs and memory than the entire songs bequeathed to us by King David! This day, however, Hugoline, Edward's Norman chamberlain, had been pleased to abridge the length of the prolix grace, and the company were let off; to Edward's surprise and displeasure, with the curt and unseemly preparation of only nine psalms and one special hymn in honour of some obscure saint to whom the day was dedicated. This performed, the guests resumed their seats, Edward murmuring an apology to William for the strange omission of his chamberlain, and saying thrice to himself, "Naught, naught—very naught."

The mirth languished at the royal table, despite some gay efforts from Rolf, and some hollow attempts at light-hearted cheerfulness from the great Duke, whose eyes, wandering down the table, were endeavouring to distinguish Saxon from Norman, and count how many of the first might already be reckoned in the train of his friends. But at the long tables below, as the feast thickened, and ale, mead, pigment, morat, and wine circled round, the tongue of the Saxon was loosed, and the Norman knight lost somewhat of his superb gravity. It was just as what a Danish poet called the "sun of the night," (in other words, the fierce warmth of the wine,) had attained its meridian glow, that some slight disturbance at the doors of the hall, without which waited a dense crowd of the poor on whom the fragments of the feast were afterwards to be bestowed, was followed by the entrance of two strangers, for whom the officers appointed to marshal the entertainment made room at the foot of one of the tables. Both these new-comers were clad with extreme plainness; one in a dress, though not quite monastic, that of an ecclesiastic of low degree; the other in a long grey mantle and loose gonna, the train of which last was tucked into a broad leathern belt, leaving bare the leggings, which showed limbs of great bulk and sinew, and which were stained by the dust and mire of travel. The first mentioned was slight and small of person; the last was of the height and port of the sons of Anak. The countenance of neither could be perceived, for both had let fall the hood, worn by civilians as by priests out of doors, more than half way over their faces.

A murmur of great surprise, disdain, and resentment, at the intrusion of strangers so attired circulated round the neighbourhood in which they had been placed, checked for a moment by a certain air of respect which the officer had shown towards both, but especially the taller; but breaking out with greater vivacity from the faint restraint, as the tall man unceremoniously stretched across the

board, drew towards himself an immense flagon, which (agreeably to the custom of arranging the feast in "messes" of four) had been specially appropriated to Ulf the Dane, Godrith the Saxon, and two young Norman knights akin to the puissant Lord of Grantmesnil,—and having offered it to his comrade, who shook his head, drained it with a gusto that seemed to bespeak him at least no Norman, and wiped his lips boorishly with the sleeve of his huge arm.

"Dainty sir," said one of those Norman knights, William Mallet, of the house of Mallet de Graville<sup>2</sup>, as he moved as far from the gigantic intruder as the space on the settle would permit, "forgive the observation that you have damaged my mantle, you have grazed my foot, and you have drunk my wine. And vouchsafe, if it so please you, the face of the man who hath done this triple wrong to William Mallet de Graville."

A kind of laugh—for laugh absolute it was not—rattled under the cowl of the tall stranger, as he drew it still closer over his face, with a hand that might have spanned the breast of his interrogator, and he made a gesture as if he did not understand the question addressed to him.

Therewith the Norman knight, bending with demure courtesy across the board to Godrith the Saxon, said:

"Pardex<sup>3</sup>, but this fair guest and seigneur seemeth to me, noble Godree (whose name I fear my lips do but rudely enounce) of Saxon line and language; our Romance tongue he knoweth not. Pray you, is it the Saxon custom to enter a king's hall so garbed, and drink a knight's wine so mutely?"

Godrith, a young Saxon of considerable rank, but one of the most sedulous of the imitators of the foreign fashions, coloured high at the irony in the knight's speech, and turning rudely to the huge guest, who was now causing immense fragments of pasty to vanish under the cavernous cowl, he said in his native tongue, though with a lisp as if unfamiliar to him—

"If thou beest Saxon, shame us not with thy ceorlish manners; crave pardon of this Norman thegn, who will doubtless yield it to thee in pity. Uncover thy face—and—"

Here the Saxon's rebuke was interrupted; for one of the servitors just then approaching Godrith's side with a spit, elegantly caparisoned with some score of plump larks, the unmannerly giant stretched out his arm within an inch of the Saxon's startled nose, and possessed himself of larks, broche, and all. He drew off two, which he placed on his friend's platter, despite all dissuasive gesticulations, and deposited the rest upon his own. The young banqueters gazed upon the spectacle in wrath too full for words.

At last spoke Mallet de Graville, with an envious eye upon the larks—for though a Norman was not gluttonous, he was epicurean—"Certes, and foi de chevalier! a man must go into strange parts if he wish to see monsters; but we are fortunate people," (and he turned to his Norman friend, Aymer, Quen<sup>4</sup> or Count, D'Evreux,) "that we have discovered Polyphemus without going so far as Ulysses;" and pointing to the hooded giant, he quoted, appropriately enough,

"Monstrum, horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum."

The giant continued to devour his larks, as complacently as the ogre to whom he was likened might have devoured the Greeks in his cave. But his fellow intruder seemed agitated by the sound of the Latin; he lifted up his head suddenly, and showed lips glistening with white even teeth, and curved into an approving smile, while he said: "Bene, me fili! bene, lepidissime, poetae verba, in militis ore, non indecora sonant."<sup>5</sup>

The young Norman stared at the speaker, and replied, in the same tone of grave affectation: "Courteous sir! the approbation of an ecclesiastic so eminent as I take you to be, from the modesty

<sup>2</sup> See note to PLUQUET's Roman de Rou, p. 285. N.B.—Whenever the Roman de Rou is quoted in these pages it is from the excellent edition of M. Pluquet.

<sup>3</sup> Pardex or Parde, corresponding to the modern French expletive, pardie.

<sup>4</sup> Quen, or rather Quens; synonymous with Count in the Norman Chronicles. Earl Godwin is strangely styled by Wace, Quens Qwine.

<sup>5</sup> "Good, good, pleasant son,—the words of the poet sound gracefully on the lips of the knight."

with which you conceal your greatness, cannot fail to draw upon me the envy of my English friends; who are accustomed to swear in verba magistri, only for verba they learnedly substitute vina."

"You are pleasant, Sire Mallet," said Godrith, reddening; "but I know well that Latin is only fit for monks and shavelings; and little enow even they have to boast of."

The Norman's lip curled in disdain. "Latin!—O, Godree, bien aime!— Latin is the tongue of Caesars and senators, fortes conquerors and preux chevaliers. Knowest thou not that Duke William the dauntless at eight years old had the Comments of Julius Caesar by heart?—and that it is his saying, that 'a king without letters is a crowned ass?'<sup>6</sup> When the king is an ass, asinine are his subjects. Wherefore go to school, speak respectfully of thy betters, the monks and shavelings, who with us are often brave captains and sage councillors,—and learn that a full head makes a weighty hand."

"Thy name, young knight?" said the ecclesiastic, in Norman French, though with a slight foreign accent.

"I can give it thee," said the giant, speaking aloud for the first time, in the same language, and in a rough voice, which a quick ear might have detected as disguised,— "I can describe to thee name, birth, and quality. By name, this youth is Guillaume Mallet, sometimes styled De Graville, because our Norman gentilhommes, forsooth, must always now have a 'de' tacked to their names; nevertheless he hath no other right to the seigneurie of Graville, which appertains to the head of his house, than may be conferred by an old tower on one corner of the demesnes so designated, with lands that would feed one horse and two villeins—if they were not in pawn to a Jew for moneys to buy velvet mantelines and a chain of gold. By birth, he comes from Mallet<sup>7</sup>, a bold Norwegian in the fleet of Rou the Sea-king; his mother was a Frank woman, from whom he inherits his best possessions—videlicet, a shrewd wit, and a railing tongue. His qualities are abstinence, for he eateth nowhere save at the cost of another—some Latin, for he was meant for a monk, because he seemed too slight of frame for a warrior—some courage, for in spite of his frame he slew three Burgundians with his own hand; and Duke William, among their foolish acts, spoilt a friar sans tache, by making a knight sans terre; and for the rest—"

"And for the rest," interrupted the Sire de Graville, turning white with wrath, but speaking in a low repressed voice, "were it not that Duke William sate yonder, thou shouldst have six inches of cold steel in thy huge carcase to digest thy stolen dinner, and silence thy unmannerly tongue.—"

"For the rest," continued the giant indifferently, and as if he had not heard the interruption; "for the rest, he only resembles Achilles, in being impiger iracundus. Big men can quote Latin as well as little ones, Messire Mallet the beau clerc!"

Mallet's hand was on his dagger; and his eye dilated like that of the panther before he springs; but fortunately, at that moment, the deep sonorous voice of William, accustomed to send its sounds down the ranks of an army, rolled clear through the assemblage, though pitched little above its ordinary key:—

"Fair is your feast, and bright your wine, Sir King and brother mine! But I miss here what king and knight hold as the salt of the feast and the perfume to the wine: the lay of the minstrel. Beshrew me, but both Saxon and Norman are of kindred stock, and love to hear in hall and bower the deeds of their northern fathers. Crave I therefore from your gleemen, or harpers, some song of the olden time!"

A murmur of applause went through the Norman part of the assembly; the Saxons looked up; and some of the more practised courtiers sighed wearily, for they knew well what ditties alone were in favour with the saintly Edward.

The low voice of the King in reply was not heard, but those habituated to read his countenance in its very faint varieties of expression, might have seen that it conveyed reproof; and its purport soon became practically known, when a lugubrious prelude was heard from a quarter of the hall,

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<sup>6</sup> A sentiment variously assigned to William and to his son Henry the Beau Clerc.

<sup>7</sup> Mallet is a genuine Scandinavian name to this day.

in which sate certain ghost-like musicians in white robes—white as winding-sheets; and forthwith a dolorous and dirgelike voice chaunted a long and most tedious recital of the miracles and martyrdom of some early saint. So monotonous was the chaunt, that its effect soon became visible in a general drowsiness. And when Edward, who alone listened with attentive delight, turned towards the close to gather sympathising admiration from his distinguished guests, he saw his nephew yawning as if his jaw were dislocated—the Bishop of Bayeux, with his well-ringed fingers interlaced and resting on his stomach, fast asleep—Fitzosborne's half-shaven head balancing to and fro with many an uneasy start—and, William, wide awake indeed, but with eyes fixed on vacant space, and his soul far away from the gridiron to which (all other saints be praised!) the saint of the ballad had at last happily arrived.

"A comforting and salutary recital, Count William," said the King.

The Duke started from his reverie, and bowed his head: then said, rather abruptly, "Is not yon blazon that of King Alfred?"

"Yea. Wherefore?"

"Hem! Matilda of Flanders is in direct descent from Alfred: it is a name and a line the Saxons yet honour!"

"Surely, yes; Alfred was a great man, and reformed the Psalmster," replied Edward.

The dirge ceased, but so benumbing had been its effect, that the torpor it created did not subside with the cause. There was a dead and funereal silence throughout the spacious hall, when suddenly, loudly, mightily, as the blast of the trumpet upon the hush of the grave, rose a single voice. All started—all turned—all looked to one direction; and they saw that the great voice pealed from the farthest end of the hall. From under his gown the gigantic stranger had drawn a small three-stringed instrument—somewhat resembling the modern lute—and thus he sang,—

## THE BALLAD OF ROU.<sup>8</sup>

### I

From Blois to Senlis, wave by wave, roll'd on the Norman flood,  
And Frank on Frank went drifting down the weltering tide of blood;  
There was not left in all the land a castle wall to fire,  
And not a wife but wailed a lord, a child but mourned a sire.  
To Charles the king, the mitred monks, the mailed barons flew,  
While, shaking earth, behind them strode the thunder march of Rou.

### II

"O King," then cried those barons bold, "in vain are mace and mail,  
We fall before the Norman axe, as corn before the hail."  
"And vainly," cried the pious monks, "by Mary's shrine we kneel,  
For prayers, like arrows, glance aside, against the Norman teal."  
The barons groaned, the shavelings wept, while near and nearer drew,  
As death-birds round their scented feast, the raven flags of Rou.

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<sup>8</sup> Rou—the name given by the French to Rollo, or Rolf-ganger, the founder of the Norman settlement.

### III

Then said King Charles, "Where thousands fail, what king can stand alone,  
The strength of kings is in the men that gather round the throne.  
When war dismays my barons bold, 'tis time for war to cease;  
When Heaven forsakes my pious monks, the will of Heaven is peace.  
Go forth, my monks, with mass and rood the Norman camp unto,  
And to the fold, with shepherd crook, entice this grisly Rou."

### IV

"I'll give him all the ocean coast, from Michael Mount to Eure,  
And Gille, my child, shall be his bride, to bind him fast and sure:  
Let him but kiss the Christian cross, and sheathe the heathen sword,  
And hold the lands I cannot keep, a fief from Charles his lord."  
Forth went the pastors of the Church, the Shepherd's work to do,  
And wrap the golden fleece around the tiger loins of Rou.

### V

Psalm-chanting came the shaven monks, within the camp of dread;  
Amidst his warriors, Norman Rou stood taller by the head.  
Out spoke the Frank Archbishop then, a priest devout and sage,  
"When peace and plenty wait thy word, what need of war and rage?  
Why waste a land as fair as aught beneath the arch of blue,  
Which might be thine to sow and reap?"—Thus saith the King to Rou.

### VI

"I'll give thee all the ocean coast, from Michael Mount to Eure,  
And Gille, my fairest child, as bride, to bind thee fast and sure;  
If then but kneel to Christ our God, and sheathe thy paynim sword,  
And hold thy land, the Church's son, a fief from Charles thy lord."  
The Norman on his warriors looked—to counsel they withdrew;  
The saints took pity on the Franks, and moved the soul of Rou.

## VII

So back he strode and thus he spoke, to that Archbishop meek:  
"I take the land thy king bestows from Eure to Michael-peak,  
I take the maid, or foul or fair, a bargain with the toast,  
And for thy creed, a sea-king's gods are those that give the most.  
So hie thee back, and tell thy chief to make his proffer true,  
And he shall find a docile son, and ye a saint in Rou."

## VIII

So o'er the border stream of Epte came Rou the Norman, where,  
Begirt with barons, sat the King, enthroned at green St. Clair;  
He placed his hand in Charles's hand,—loud shouted all the throng,  
But tears were in King Charles's eyes—the grip of Rou was strong.  
"Now kiss the foot," the Bishop said, "that homage still is due;"  
Then dark the frown and stern the smile of that grim convert, Rou.

## IX

Rou lifts up his head as from the wind springs up the mast;  
"I said He takes the foot, as if the foot to slavish lips to bring;  
The Normans scowl; he tilts the throne, and backwards falls the King.  
Loud laugh the joyous Norman men—pale stare the Franks aghast;  
And I would adore a God, but not a mortal too;  
The foot that fled before a foe let cowards kiss!" said Rou.

No words can express the excitement which this rough minstrelsy— marred as it is by our poor translation from the Romance-tongue in which it was chanted—produced amongst the Norman guests; less perhaps, indeed, the song itself, than the recognition of the minstrel; and as he closed, from more than a hundred voices came the loud murmur, only subdued from a shout by the royal presence, "Taillefer, our Norman Taillefer!"

"By our joint saint, Peter, my cousin the King," exclaimed William, after a frank cordial laugh; "Well I wot, no tongue less free than my warrior minstrel's could have so shocked our ears. Excuse his bold theme, for the sake of his bold heart, I pray thee; and since I know well" (here the Duke's face grew grave and anxious) "that nought save urgent and weighty news from my stormy realm could have brought over this rhyming petrel, permit the officer behind me to lead hither a bird, I fear, of omen as well as of song."

"Whatever pleases thee, pleases me," said Edward, drily; and he gave the order to the attendant. In a few moments, up the space in the hall, between either table, came the large stride of the famous minstrel, preceded by the officer and followed by the ecclesiastic. The hoods of both were now thrown back, and discovered countenances in strange contrast, but each equally worthy of the attention it

provoked. The face of the minstrel was open and sunny as the day; and that of the priest, dark and close as night. Thick curls of deep auburn (the most common colour for the locks of the Norman) wreathed in careless disorder round Taillefer's massive unwrinkled brow. His eye, of light hazel, was bold and joyous; mirth, though sarcastic and sly, mantled round his lips. His whole presence was at once engaging and heroic.

On the other hand, the priest's cheek was dark and sallow; his features singularly delicate and refined; his forehead high, but somewhat narrow, and crossed with lines of thought; his mien composed, modest, but not without calm self-confidence. Amongst that assembly of soldiers, noiseless, self-collected, and conscious of his surpassing power over swords and mail, moved the SCHOLAR.

William's keen eye rested on the priest with some surprise, not unmixed with pride and ire; but first addressing Taillefer, who now gained the foot of the dais, he said, with a familiarity almost fond:

"Now, by're Lady, if thou bringest not ill news, thy gay face, man, is pleasanter to mine eyes than thy rough song to my ears. Kneel, Taillefer, kneel to King Edward, and with more address, rogue, than our unlucky countryman to King Charles."

But Edward, as ill-liking the form of the giant as the subject of his lay, said, pushing back his seat as far as he could:

"Nay, nay, we excuse thee, we excuse thee, tall man." Nevertheless, the minstrel still knelt, and so, with a look of profound humility, did the priest. Then both slowly rose, and at a sign from the Duke, passed to the other side of the table, standing behind Fitzosborne's chair.

"Clerk," said William, eying deliberately the sallow face of the ecclesiastic; "I know thee of old; and if the Church have sent me an envoy, per la resplendar De, it should have sent me at least an abbot."

"Hein, hein!" said Taillefer, bluntly, "vex not my bon camarade, Count of the Normans. Gramercy, thou wilt welcome him, peradventure, better than me; for the singer tells but of discord, and the sage may restore the harmony."

"Ha!" said the Duke, and the frown fell so dark over his eyes that the last seemed only visible by two sparks of fire. "I guess, my proud Vavasours are mutinous. Retire, thou and thy comrade. Await me in my chamber. The feast shall not flag in London because the wind blows a gale in Rouen."

The two envoys, since so they seemed, bowed in silence and withdrew.

"Nought of ill-tidings, I trust," said Edward, who had not listened to the whispered communications that had passed between the Duke and his subjects. "No schism in thy Church? The clerk seemed a peaceful man, and a humble."

"An there were schism in my Church," said the fiery Duke, "my brother of Bayeux would settle it by arguments as close as the gap between cord and throttle."

"Ah! thou art, doubtless, well read in the canons, holy Odo!" said the King, turning to the bishop with more respect than he had yet evinced towards that gentle prelate.

"Canons, yes, Seigneur, I draw them up myself for my flock conformably with such interpretations of the Roman Church as suit best with the Norman realm: and woe to deacon, monk, or abbot, who chooses to misconstrue them."<sup>9</sup>

The bishop looked so truculent and menacing, while his fancy thus conjured up the possibility of heretical dissent, that Edward shrank from him as he had done from Taillefer; and in a few minutes after, on exchange of signals between himself and the Duke, who, impatient to escape, was too stately to testify that desire, the retirement of the royal party broke up the banquet; save, indeed, that a few of the elder Saxons, and more incorrigible Danes, still steadily kept their seats, and were finally dislodged

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<sup>9</sup> Pious severity to the heterodox was a Norman virtue. William of Poitiers says of William, "One knows with what zeal he pursued and exterminated those who thought differently;" i.e., on transubstantiation. But the wise Norman, while flattering the tastes of the Roman Pontiff in such matters, took special care to preserve the independence of his Church from any undue dictation.

from their later settlements on the stone floors, to find themselves, at dawn, carefully propped in a row against the outer walls of the palace, with their patient attendants, holding links, and gazing on their masters with stolid envy, if not of the repose at least of the drugs that had caused it.

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