Throughout this vast assemblage of provinces, Charlemagne established an organized and firm government. But it is not as a mere conqueror that he demands admiration. "In a life restlessly active, we see him reforming the coinage and establishing the legal divisions of money; gathering about him the learned of every country; founding schools and collecting libraries; interferring, with the air of a king, in religous controversies; attempting, for the sake of commerce, the magnificent enterprise of uniting the Rhine and the Danube, and meditating to mold the discordant code of Roman and barbarian laws into a uniform system."*

814–888. Repeated partitions of the empire and civil wars between Charlemagne's descendants. Ultimately the kingdom of France is finally separated from Germany and Italy. In 962, Otho the Great of Germany revives the imperial dignity.

827. Egbert, king of Wessex, acquires the supremacy over the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

832 The first Danish squadron attacks part of the English coast. The Danes, or Northmen, had begun their ravages in France a few years earlier. For two centuries Scandinavia sends out fleet after fleet of sea-rovers, who desolate all the western kingdoms of Europe, and in many cases effect permanent conquests.

871–900. Reign of Alfred in England. After a long and varied struggle, he rescues England from the Danish invaders.

911. The French king cedes Neustria to Hrolf the Northman. Hrolf (or Duke Rollo, as he thenceforth was termed) and his army of Scandinavian warriors become the ruling class of the population of the province, which is called after them, Normandy.

1016. Four knights from Normandy, who had been on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, while returning through Italy, head the people of Salerno in repelling an attack of a band of Saracen corsairs. In the next year many adventurers from Normandy settle in Italy, where they conquer Apulia (1040), and afterward (1060) Sicily.

1017. Canute, king of Denmark, becomes king of England. On the death of the last of his sons, in 1041, the Saxon line is restored, and Edward the Confessor (who had been bred in the court of the Duke of Normandy) is called by the English to the throne of this island, as the representative of the house of Cerdic.

1035. Duke Robert of Normandy dies on his return from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and his son William (afterward the conqueror of England) succeeds to the dukedom of Normandy.

* Hallam, *ut supra.*

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS, A.D. 1060.

Els vos la Bataille assemblee,
Dunc encore est grant renomee.
Roman de Rou, 13,183.

ARLETTA's pretty feet twinkling in the brook made her the mother of William the Conqueror. Had she not thus fascinated Duke Robert the Liberal of Normandy, Harold would not have fallen at Hastings, no Anglo-Norman dynasty would have arisen, no British empire. The reflection is Sir Francis Palgrave's;* and it is emphaticly true. If any one should write a history of "Decisive loves that have materially influenced the drama of the world in all its subsequent scenes," the daughter of the tanner of Falaise would deserve a conspicuous place in its pages. But it is her son, the victor of Hastings, who is now the object of our attention; and no one who appreciates the influence of England and her empire upon the destinies of the world, will ever rank that victory as one of secondary importance.

It is true that in the last century some writers of eminence on our history and laws mentioned the Norman Conquest in terms from which it might be supposed that the battle of Hastings led to little more than the substitution of one royal family on the throne of this country and to the garbling and changing of some of our laws through the "cunning of the Norman lawyers." But, at least since the appearance of the work of Augustin Thierry on the Norman Conquest, these forensic fallacies have been exploded. Thierry made his readers keenly appreciate the magnitude of that political and social catastrophe. He depicted in vivid colors the atrocious cruelties of the conquerors, and the sweeping and enduring innovations that they wrought, involving the overthrow of the ancient constitution, as well as of the last of the Saxon kings. In his pages we see new tribunals and tenures superseding the old ones, new divisions of race and class introduced, whole districts devastated to gratify the vengeance or the caprice of the new tyrant, the greater part of the lands of the English confiscated and divided among aliens, the very name of Englishmen turned into a reproach, the English language rejected as servile and barbarous, and all the high places in church and state for upward of a century filled exclusively by men of foreign race.

No less true than eloquent is Thierry's summing up of the social effects of the Norman Conquest on the generation that witnessed it, and on many of their successors. He tells his reader that "if

* "History of Normandy and England," vol. I., p. 526.

he would form a just idea of England conquered by William of Normandy, he must figure to himself—not a mere change of political rule—not the triumph of one candidate over another candidate—of the man of one party over the man of another party, but the intrusion of one people into the bosom of another people—the violent placing of one society over another society which it came to destroy, and the scattered fragments of which it retained only as personal property, or (to use the words of an old act) as 'the clothing of the soil;' he must not picture to himself on the other hand, William, a king and a despot—on the other, subjects of William's, high and low, rich and poor, all inhabiting England, and consequently all English; he must imagine two nations, one of which William is a member and the chief—two nations which (if the term must be used) were both *subject* to William, but as applied to which the word has quite different senses, meaning, in the one case, *subordinate*—in the other, subjugated. He must consider that there are two countries, two soils, included in the same geographical circumference—that of the Normans, rich and free; that of the Saxons, poor and serving, vexed by *rent* and *toilage*: the former full of spacious mansions, and walled and moated castles; the latter scattered over with huts and straw, and ruined hovels: that peopled with the happy and the idle—with men of the army and of the court—with knights and nobles; this with men of pain and labor—with farmers and artisans: on the one side, luxury and insolence; on the other, misery and envy—not the envy of the poor at the sight of opulence they cannot reach, but the envy of the despoiled when in the presence of the despoilers."

Perhaps the effect of Thierry's work has been to cast into the shade the ultimate good effects on England of the Norman Conquest. Yet these are as undeniable as are the miseries which that conquest inflicted on our Saxon ancestors from the time of the battle of Hastings to the time of the signing of the Great Charter at Runnymede. That last is the true epoch of English nationality; it is the epoch when Anglo-Norman and Anglo-Saxon ceased to keep aloof from each other—the one in haughty scorn, the other in sullen abhorrence; and when all the free men of the land, whether barons, knights, yoemen, or burghers, combined to lay the foundations of English freedom.

Our Norman barons were the chiefs of that primary constitutional movement; those "iron barons," whom Chatham has so nobly eulogized. This alone should make England remember her obligations to the Norman Conquest, which planted far and wide, as a dominant class in her land, a martial nobility of the bravest and most energetic race that ever existed.

It may sound parodoxical, but it is in reality no exaggeration to say, with Guizot,* that England's liberties are owing to her having

* "Essais sur l'Histoire de France," p. 278, *et seq.*

been conquered by the Normans. It is true that the Saxon institutions were the primitive cradle of English liberty, but by their own intrinsic force they could never have founded the enduring free English Constitution. It was the Conquest that infused into them a new virtue, and the political liberties of England arose from the situation in which the Anglo-Saxon and the Anglo-Norman populations and laws found themselves placed relatively to each other in this island. The state of England under her last Anglo-Saxon kings closely resembled the state of France under the last Carlovingian and the first Capetian princes. The crown was feeble, the great nobles were strong and turbulent; and although there was more national unity in Saxon England than in France—although the English local free institutions had more reality and energy than was the case with any thing analogous to them on the Continent in the eleventh century, still the probabilty is that the Saxon system of polity, if left to itself, would have fallen into utter confusion, out of which would have arisen, first, an aristocratic hierarchy; like that which arose in France; next, an absolute monarchy, and, finally, a series of anarchial revolutions, such as we now behold around, but not among us.*

The latest conquerors of this island were also the bravest and the best. I do not except even the Romans. And, in spite of our sympathies with Harold and Hereward, and our abhorrence of the founder of the New Forest and the desolator of Yorkshire, we must confess the superiority of the Normans to the Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Danes, whom they met here in 1066, as well as to the degenerate Frank noblesse, and the crushed and servile Romanesque provincials, from whom, in 912, they had wrested the district in the north of Gaul, which still bears the name of Normandy.

It was not merely by extreme valor and ready subordination to military discipline that the Normans were pre-eminent among all the conquering races of the Gothic stock, but also by an instinctive faculty of appreciating and adopting the superior civilizations which they encountered. The Duke Rollus and his Scandinavian warriors readily embraced the creed, the language, the laws, and the arts, which France, in those troubled and evil times with which the Capetian dynasty commenced, still inherited from imperial Rome and imperial Charlemagne. "Ils adopterent les usages, les devoirs, les subordination que les capitulaires des empereurs et les rois ævoient institues. Mais ce qu'ils apporterent dans l'application de ces lois, ce fut l'esprit de vie, l'esprit de liberte, l'habitude de la subordination militaire, et l'intelligence d'un etat politique qui conciliat la surete de tous aveo l'independance de chacun."† So, also, in all chivalric feelings, in enthusiastic religious zeal, in almost idolatrous respect to females of gentle birth, in generous

* See Guizot, *ut supra.*
† Sismondi, "Histoire de Français," vol. iii., p. 174.

fondness for the nascent poetry of the time, in a keen intellectual relish for subtle thought and disputation, in a taste for architectural magnificence, and all courtly refinement and pageantry. The Normans were the Paladins of the world. Their brilliant qualities were sullied by many darker traits of pride, of merciless cruelty, and of brutal contempt for the industry, the rights, and the feelings of all whom they considered the lower classes of mankind.

Their gradual blending with the Saxons softened these harsh and evil points of their national character; and in return they fired the duller Saxon mass with a new spirit of animation and power. As Campbell boldly expressed it, "*They high-mettled the blood of our veins.*" Small had been the figure which England made in the world before the coming over of the Normans and without them she never would have emerged from insignificance. The authority of Gibbon may be taken as decisive when he pronounces that "assuredly England was a gainer by the Conquest." And we may proudly adopt the comment of the Frenchman Rapin, who, writing of the battle of Hastings more than a century ago, speaks of the revolution effected by it as "the first step by which England is arrived to the height of grandeur and glory we behold it in at present."*

The interest of this eventful struggle, by which William of Normandy became king of England, is materially enhanced by the high personal character of the competitors for our crown. They were three in number. One was a foreign prince, from the north; one was a foreign prince, from the south; and one was a native hero of the land. Harald Hardrada, the strongest and the most chilvalric of the kings of Norway,† was the first; Duke William of Normandy was the second; and the Saxon Harold, the son of Earl Godwin, was the third. Never was a nobler prize sought by nobler champions, or striven for more gallantly. The Saxon triumphed over the Norwegian, and the Norman triumphed over the Saxon; but Norse valor was never more conspicuous than when Harald Hardrada and his host fought and fell at Stamford Bridge; nor did Saxons ever face their foes more bravely than our Harold and his men on the fatal day of Hastings.

During the reign of King Edward the Confessor over this land, the claims of the Norwegian king to our crown were little thought of; and though Hardrada's predecessor, King Magnus of Norway, had on one occasion asserted that, by virtue of a compact with our former king, Hardicanute, he was entitled to the English throne, no serious attempt had been made to enforce his pretensions. But the rivalry of the Saxon Harold and the Norman William was

* Rapin, "Hist. England," p. 164. See, also, on this point, Sharon Turner, vol. iv., p. 72.

† See in Snorre the Saga Heraldi Hardrada.

foreseen and bewailed by the Confessor, who was believed to have predicted on his death-bed the calamities that were impending over England. Duke William was King Edward's kinsman. Harold was the head of the most powerful noble house, next to the royal blood, in England; and, personally, he was the bravest and most popular chieftain in the land. King Edward was childless, and the nearest collateral heir was a puny unpromising boy. England had suffered too severely, during royal minorities, to make the accession of Edgar Atheling desirable; and long before King Edward's death, Earl Harold was the destined king of the nation's choice, though the favor of the Confessor was believed to lead toward the Norman duke.

A little time before the death of King Edward, Harold was in Normandy. The causes of the voyage of the Saxon earl to the Continent are doubtful; but the fact of his having been, in 1065, at the ducal court, and in the power of his rival, is indisputable. William made skilful and unscrupulous use of the opportunity. Though Harold was treated with outward courtesy and friendship, he was made fully aware that his liberty and life depended on his compliance with the duke's requests. William said to him in apparent confidence and cordiality, "When King Edward and I once lived like brothers under the same roof, he promised that if ever he became King of England, he would make me heir to his throne. Harold, I wish that thou wouldst assist me to realize this promise." Harold replied with expressions of assent, and further agreed, at William's request, to marry William's daughter, Adela, and to send over his own sister to be married to one of William's barons. The crafty Norman was not content with this extorted promise; he determined to bind Harold by a more solemn pledge, the breach of which would be a weight on the spirit of the gallant Saxon, and a discouragement to others from adopting his cause. Before a full assembly of the Norman barons, Harold was required to do homage to Duke William, as the heir apparent to the English crown. Kneeling down, Harold placed his hands between those of the duke, and repeated the solemn form by which he acknowledged the duke as his lord, and promised to him fealty and true service. But William exacted more. He had caused all the bones and relics of saints, that were preserved in the Norman monasteries and churches, to be collected into a chest, which was placed in the council-room, covered over with a cloth of gold. On the chest of relics, which were thus concealed, was laid a missal. The duke then solemnly addressed his titular guest and real captive, and said to him, "Harold, I require thee, before this noble assembly, to confirm by oath the promises which thou hast made me, to assist me in obtaining the crown of England after King Edward's death, to marry my daughter Adela, and to send me thy sister, that I may give her in marriage to one of my barons." Harold, once more taken by

surprise, and not able to deny his former words, approached the missal, and laid his hand on it, not knowing that the chest of relics was beneath. The old Norman chronicler, who describes the scene most minutely,* says, when Harold placed his hand on it, the hand trembled, and the flesh quivered; but he swore, and promised upon his oath to take Ele [Adela] to wife, and to deliver up England to the duke and thereunto to do all in his power, according to his might and wit, after the death of Edward, if he himself should live; so help him God. Many cried, "God grant it!" and when Harold rose from his knees, the duke made him stand close to the chest, and took off the pall that had covered it, and showed Harold upon what holy relics he had sworn; and Harold was sorely alarmed at the sight.

Harold was soon after permitted to return to England; and after a short interval, during which he distinguished himself by the wisdom and humanity with which he pacified some formidable tumults of the Anglo-Danes in Northumbria, he found himself called on to decide whether he would keep the oath which the Norman had obtained from him, or mount the vacant throne of England in compliance with the nation's choice. King Edward the Confessor died on the 5th of January, 1066, and on the following day an assembly of the thanes and prelates present in London, and of the citizens of the metropolis, declared that Harold should be their king. It was reported that the dying Edward had nominated him as his successor. But the sense which his countrymen entertained of his pre-eminent merit was the true foundation of his title to the crown. Harold resolved to disregard the oath which he made in Normandy as violent and void, and on the 7th day of that January he was anointed King of England, and received from the archbishop's hands the golden crown and scepter of England, and also an ancient national symbol, a weighty battle-ax. He had truly deep and speedy need of this significant part of the insignia of Saxon royalty.

A messenger from Normandy soon arrived to remind Harold of the oath which he had sworn to the duke "with his mouth, and his hand upon good and holy relics." "It is true," replied the Saxon king, "that I took an oath to William; but I took it under constraint: I promised what did not belong to me—what I could not in any way hold: my royalty is not my own; I could not lay it down against the will of the country, nor can I, against the will of the country, take a foreign wife. As for my sister, whom the duke claims that he may marry her to one of his chiefs, she has died within the year; would he have me send her corpse?"

William sent another message, which met with a similar answer; and then the duke published far and wide through Christendom what he termed the perjury and bad faith of his rival, and proclaimed his intention of asserting his rights by the sword, before the year should expire, and of pursuing and punishing the perjurer even in those places where he thought he stood most strongly and most securely.

* Wace, "Roman de Rou." I have nearly followed his words.

Before, however, he commenced hostilities, William, with deep-laid policy, submitted his claims to the decision of the pope. Harold refused to acknowledge this tribunal, or to answer before an Italian priest for his title as an English king. After a formal examination of William's complaints by the pope and the cardinals, it was solemnly adjudged at Rome that England belonged to the Norman duke, and a banner was sent to William from the Holy See, which the pope himself had consecrated, and blessed for the invasion of this island. The clergy throughout the Continent were now assiduous and energetic in preaching up William's enterprise as undertaken in the cause of God. Besides these spiritual arms (the effect of which in the eleventh century must not be measured by the philosophy or indifferentism of the nineteenth) the Norman duke applied all the energies of his mind and body, all the resources of his duchy, and all the influence he posessed among vassals or allies, to the collection of "the most remarkable and formidable armament which the Western nations had witnessed."* All the adventurous spirits of Christendom flocked to the holy banner, under which Duke William, the most renowned knight and sagest general of the age, promised to lead them to glory and wealth in the fair domains of England. His army was filled with the chivalry of Continental Europe, all eager to save their souls by fighting at the pope's bidding, eager to signalize their valor in so great an enterprise, and eager also for the pay and the plunder which William liberally promised. But the Normans themselves were the pith and the flower of the army, and William himself was the strongest, the sagest, and the fiercest spirit of them all.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1066, all the sea-ports of Normandy, Picardy, and Brittany rang with the busy sound of preparation. On the opposite side of the Channel King Harold collected the army and the fleet with which he hoped to crush the southern invaders. But the unexpected attack of King Harald Hardrada of Norway upon another part of England disconcerted the skilful measures which the Saxon had taken against the menacing armada of Duke William.

Harold's renegade brother, Earl Tostig, had excited the Norse king to this enterprise, the importance of which has naturally been eclipsed by the superior interest attached to the victorious expedition of Duke William, but which was on a scale of grandeur which the Scandinavian ports had rarely, if ever, before witnessed. Hardrada's fleet consisted of two hundred war ships and three

* Sir James Mackintosh's "History of England," vol. I., p. 97.

hundred other vessels, and all the best warriors of Norway were in his host. He sailed first to the Orkneys, where many of the islanders joined him, and then to Yorkshire. After a severe conflict near York, he completely routed Earls Edwin and Morcar, the governors of Northumbria. The city of York opened its gates, and all the country, from the Tyne, to the Humber, submitted to him. The tidings of the defeat of Edwin and Morcar compelled Harold to leave his position on the Southern coast, and move instantly against the Norwegians. By a remarkably rapid march he reached Yorkshire in four days, and took the Norse king and his confederates by surprise. Nevertheless, the battle which ensued, and which was fought near Stamford Bridge, was desperate and was long doubtful. Unable to break the ranks of the Norwegian phalanx by force, Harold at length tempted them to quit their close order by a pretended flight. Then the English columns burst in among them, and a carnage ensued, the extent of which may be judged of by the exhaustion and inactivity of Norway for a quarter of a century afterward. King Harald Hardrada, and all the flower of his nobility, perished on the 25th of September, 1066, at Stamford Bridge, a battle which was a Flodden to Norway.

Harold's victory was splendid; but he had bought it dearly by the fall of many of his best officers and men, and still more dearly by the opportunity which Duke William had gained of effecting an unopposed landing on the Sussex coast. The whole of William's shipping had assembled at the mouth of the Dive, a little river between the Seine and the Orne, as early as the middle of August. The army which he had collected amounted to fifty thousand knights and ten thousand soldiers of inferior degree. Many of the knights were mounted, but many must have served on foot, as it is hardly possible to believe that William could have found transports for the conveyance of fifty thousand war-horses across the Channel. For a long time the winds were adverse, and the duke employed the interval that passed before he could set sail in completing the organization and in improving the discipline of his army, which he seems to have brought into the same state of perfection as was seven centuries and a half afterward the boast of another army assembled on the same coast, and which Napoleon designed (but providentially in vain) for a similar descent upon England.

It was not till the approach of the equinox that the wind veered from the northeast to the west, and gave the Normans an opportunity of quitting the weary shores of the Dive. They eagerly embarked and set sail, but the wind soon freshened to a gale and drove them along the French coast to St. Valery where the greater part of them found shelter; but many of their vessels were wrecked, and the whole coast of Normandy was strewn with the bodies of the drowned. William's army began to grow discouraged and averse

to the enterprise, which the very elements thus seemed to fight against; though, in reality, the northeast wind, which had coped them so long at the mouth of the Dive, and the western gale, which had forced them into St. Valery, were the best possible friends to the invaders. They prevented the Normans from crossing the Channel until the Saxon king and his army of defense had been called away from the Sussex coast to encounter Harald Hardrada in Yorkshire; and also until a formidable English fleet which by King Harold's orders had been cruising in the Channel to intercept the Normans, had been obliged to disperse temporarily for the purpose of refitting and taking in fresh stores of provisions.

Duke William used every expedient to reanimate the drooping spirits of his men at St. Valery; and at last he caused the body of the patron saint of the place to be exhumed and carried in solemn procession, while the whole assemblage of soldiers, mariners, and appurtenant priests implored the saint's intercession for a change of wind. That very night the wind veered, and enabled the mediæval Agamemnon to quit his Aulis.

With full sails, and a following southern breeze, the Norman Armada left the French shores and steered for England. The invaders crossed an undefended sea, and found an undefended coast. It was in Pevensey Bay, in Sussex, at Bulverhithe, between the castle of Pevensey and Hastings, that the last conquerors of this island landed on the 29th of September, 1066.

Harold was at York, rejoicing over his recent victory, which had delivered England from her ancient Scandinavian foes, and resettling the government of the counties which Harald Hardrada had overrun, when the tidings reached him that Duke William of Normandy and his host had landed on the Sussex shore. Harold instantly hurried southward to meet this long-expected enemy. The severe loss which his army had sustained in the battle with the Norwegians must have made it impossible for many of his veteran troops to accompany him in his forced march to London, and thence to Sussex. He halted at the capital only six days, and during that time gave orders for collecting forces from the southern and midland counties, and also directed his fleet to reassemble off the Sussex coast. Harold was well received in London, and his summons to arms was promptly obeyed by citizen, by thane, by sokman, and by ceorl, for he had shown himself, during his brief reign, a just and wise king affable to all men, active for the good of his country, and (in the words of the old historian) sparing himself from no fatigue by land or by sea.* He might have gathered a much more numerous army than that of William; but his recent victory had made him over-confident, and he was irritated by the

* See Roger de Hoveden and William of Malmesbury, cited in Thierry, book iii.

reports of the country being ravaged by the invaders. As soon, therefore, as he had collected a small army in London, he marched off toward the coast, pressing forward as rapidly as his men could traverse Surrey and Sussex, in the hope of taking the Normans unawares, as he had recently, by a similar forced march, succeeded in surprising the Norwegians. But he had now to deal with a foe equally brave with Harald Hardrada, and far more skilful and wary.

The old Norman chroniclers describe the preparations of William on his landing with a graphic vigor, which would be wholly lost by transfusing their racy Norman couplets and terse Latin prose into the current style of modern history. It is best to follow them closely, though at the expense of much quaintness and occasional uncouthness of expression. They tell us how Duke William's own ship was the first of the Norman fleet. It was called the Mora, and was the gift of his duchess, Matilda. On the head of the ship, in the front, which mariners called the prow, there was a brazen child bearing an arrow with a bended bow. His face was turned toward England, and thither he looked as though he was about to shoot. The breeze became soft and sweet, and the sea was smooth for their landing. The ships ran on dry land, and each ranged by the other's side. There you might see the good sailors, the sergeants, and squires sally forth and unload the ships; cast the anchors, haul the ropes, bear out shields and saddles, and land the war-horses and the palfreys. The archers came forth, and touched land the first, each with his bow strung, and with his quiver full of arrows slung at his side. All were shaven and shorn; and all clad in short garments, ready to attack, to shoot, to wheel about and skirmish. All stood well equipped, and of good courage for the fight; and they scoured the whole shore, but found not an armed man there. After the archers had thus gone forth, the knights landed all armed, with their hauberks on, their shields slung at their necks, and their helmets laced. They formed together on the shore, each armed, and mounted on his war-horse; all had their swords girded on, and rode forward into the country with their lances raised. Then the carpenters landed, who had great axes in their hands, and planes and adzes hung at their sides. They took counsel together, and sought for a good spot to place a castle on. They had brought with them in the fleet three wooden castles from Normandy in pieces, all ready for framing together, and they took the materials of one of these out of the ships, all shaped and pierced to receive the pins which they had brought cut and ready in large barrels; and before evening had set in, they had finished a good fort on the English ground, and there they placed their stores. All then ate and drank enough, and were right glad that they were ashore.

When Duke William himself landed, as he stepped on the shore, he slipped and fell forward upon his two hands. Forthwith all

raised a loud cry of distress. "An evil sign," said they, "is here." But he cried out lustily, "See, my lords, by the splendor of God,* I have taken possession of England with both my hands. It is now mine, and what is mine is yours."

The next day they marched along the sea-shore to Hastings. Near that place the duke fortified a camp, and set up the two other wooden castles. The foragers, and those who looked out for booty, seized all the clothing and provisions they could find lest what had been brought by the ships should fail them. And the English were to be seen fleeing before them, driving off their cattle, and quitting their houses. Many took shelter in burying-places, and even there they were in grievous alarm.

Besides the marauders from the Norman camp, strong bodies of cavalry were detached by William into the country, and these, when Harold and his army made their rapid march from London southward, fell back in good order upon the main body of the Normans, and reported that the Saxon king was rushing on like a madman. But Harold, when he found that his hopes of surprising his adversary were vain, changed his tactics, and halted about seven miles from the Norman lines. He sent some spies, who spoke the French language, to examine the number and preparations of the enemy, who, on their return, related with astonishment that there were more priests in William's camp than there were fighting men in the English army. They had mistaken for priests all the Norman soldiers who had short hair and shaven chins, for the English laymen were then accustomed to wear long hair and mustachios. Harold, who knew the Norman usages, smiled at their words, and said, "Those whom you have seen in such numbers are not priests, but stout soldiers, as they will soon make us feel."

Harold's army was far inferior in number to that of the Normans, and some of his captains advised him to retreat upon London, and lay waste the country, so as to starve down the strength of the invaders. The policy thus recommended was unquestionably the wisest, for the Saxon fleet had now reassembled, and intercepted all William's communications with Normandy; and as soon as his stores of provisions were exhausted, he must have moved forward upon London, where Harold, at the head of the full military strength of the kingdom, could have defied his assault, and probably might have witnessed his rival's destruction by famine and disease without having to strike a single blow. But Harold's bold blood was up, and his kindly heart could not endure to inflict on his South Saxon subjects even the temporary misery of wasting the country. "He would not burn houses and villages, neither would he take away the substance of his people."

Harold's brothers, Gurth and Leofwine, were with him in the camp, and Gurth endeavored to persuade him to absent himself

* William's customary oath.

from the battle. The incident shows how well devised had been William's scheme of binding Harold by the oath on the holy relics. "My brother," said the young Saxon prince, "thou canst not deny that either by force or free will thou hast made Duke William an oath on the bodies of saints. Why then risk thyself in the battle with a perjury upon thee? To us, who have sworn nothing, this is a holy and a just war, for we are fighting for our country. Leave us then alone to fight this battle, and he who has the right will win." Harold replied that he would not look on while others risked their lives for him. Men would hold him a coward, and blame him for sending his best friends where he dared not go himself. He resolved, therefore, to fight, and to fight in person; but he was still too good a general to be the assailant in the action; and he posted his army with great skill along a ridge of rising ground which opened southward, and was covered on the back by an extensive wood. He strengthened his position by a palisade of stakes and osier hurdles, and there he said he would defend himself against whoever should seek him.

The ruins of Battle Abbey at this hour attest the place where Harold's army was posted; and the high altar of the abbey stood on the very spot where Harold's own standard was planted during the fight, and where the carnage was the thickest. Immediately after his victory, William vowed to build an abbey on the site; and a fair and stately pile soon rose there, where for many ages the monks prayed and said masses for the souls of those who were slain in the battle, whence the abbey took its name. Before that time the place was called Senlac. Little of the ancient edifice now remains; but it is easy to trace in the park and the neighborhood the scenes of the chief incidents in the action; and it is impossible to deny the generalship shown by Harold in stationing his men, especially when we bear in mind that he was deficient in cavalry, the arm in which his adversary's main strength consisted.

William's only chance of safety lay in bringing on a general engagement; and he joyfully advanced his army from their camp on the hill over Hastings, nearer to the Saxon position. But he neglected no means of weakening his opponent, and renewed his summonses and demands on Harold with an ostentatious air of sanctity and moderation.

"A monk, named Hugues Maigrot, came in William's name to call upon the Saxon king to do one of three things—either to resign his royalty in favor of William, or to refer it to the arbitration of the pope to decide which of the two ought to be king, or to let it be determined by the issue of a single combat. Harold abruptly replied, 'I will not resign my title, I will not refer it to the pope, nor will I accept the single combat.' He was far from being deficient in bravery; but he was no more at liberty to stake the crown which he had received from a whole people in the chance of a duel, than to deposit it in the hands of an Italian priest.

William, not at all ruffled by the Saxon's refusal, but steadily pursuing the course of his calculated measures, sent the Norman monk again, after giving him these instructions: 'Go and tell Harold that if he will keep his former compact with me, I will leave to him all the country which is beyond the Humber, and will give his brother Gurth all the lands which Godwin held. If he still persist in refusing my offers, then thou shalt tell him, before all his people, that he is a perjurer and a liar; that he and all who shall support him are excommunicated by the mouth of the pope, and that the bull to that effect is in my hands.'

"Hugues Maigrot delivered this message in a solemn tone; and the Norman chronicle says that at the word *excommunication*, the English chiefs looked at one another as if some great danger were impending. One of them then spoke as follows: 'We must fight, whatever may be the danger to us; for what we have to consider is not whether we shall accept and receive a new lord, as if our king were dead; the case is quite otherwise. The Norman has given our lands to his captains, to his knights, to all his people, the greater part of whom have already done homage to him for them; they will all look for their gift if their duke become our king; and he himself is bound to deliver up to them our goods, our wives, and our daughters: all is promised to them beforehand. They come, not only to ruin us, but to ruin our descendants also and to take from us the country of our ancestors. And what shall we do—whither shall we go, when we have no longer a country?' The English promised, by a unanimous vote to make neither peace, nor truce, nor treaty with the invader, but to die, or drive away the Normans."*

The 13th of October was occupied in these negotiations, and at night the duke announced to his men, that the next day would be the day of battle. That night is said to have been passed by the two armies in very different manners. The Saxon soldiers spent it in joviality, singing their national songs, and draining huge horns of ale and wine round their camp-fires. The Normans, when they had looked to their arms and horses, confessed themselves to the priests with whom their camp was thronged, and received the sacrament by thousands at a time.

On Saturday, the 14th of October was fought the great battle.

It is not difficult to compose a narrative of its principal incidents from the historical information which we possess, especially if aided by an examination of the ground. But it is far better to adopt the spirit-stirring words of the old chroniclers, who wrote while the recollections of the battle were yet fresh, and while the feelings and prejudices of the combatants yet glowed in the bosoms of living men. Robert Wace, the Norman poet, who presented his "Romau de Rou" to our Henry II., is the most picturesque and

* Thierry.