

HAROLD - BOOK 2.

EDWARD BULWER-LYTTON*

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

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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 [53], 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 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 [54], 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 [55], 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 [56] 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.” [57]

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 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?’ [58] 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 Gravelle, 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 Gravelle, 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 [59], 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 Gravelle, 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, 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. [60]

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.

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.

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 Rou lifts up his head as from the wind springs up the mast;
"I said 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, eyeing deliberately the sallow face of the ecclesiastic; "I know thee of old; and if the Church have sent me an envoy, per la respendar 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." [61]

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 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.

CHAPTER II.

"And now," said William, reclining on a long and narrow couch, with raised carved work all round it like a box (the approved fashion of a bed in those days), "now, Sire Taillefer—thy news."

There were then in the Duke's chamber, the Count Fitzosborne, Lord of Breteuil, surnamed "the Proud Spirit"—who, with great dignity, was holding before the brazier the ample tunic of linen (called dormitorium in the Latin of that time, and night-rail in the Saxon tongue) in which his lord was to robe his formidable limbs for repose [62],—Taillefer, who stood erect before the Duke as a Roman sentry at his post,—and the ecclesiastic, a little apart, with arms gathered under his gown, and his bright dark eyes fixed on the ground.

"High and puissant, my liege," then said Taillefer, gravely, and with a shade of sympathy on his large face, "my news is such as is best told briefly: Bunaz, Count d'Eu and descendant of Richard Sanspeur, hath raised the standard of revolt."

"Go on," said the Duke, clenching his hand.

"Henry, King of the French, is treating with the rebel, and stirring up mutiny in thy realm, and pretenders to thy throne."

"Ha!" said the Duke, and his lip quivered; "this is not all."

"No, my liege! and the worst is to come. Thy uncle Mauger, knowing

that thy heart is bent on thy speedy nuptials with the high and noble damsel, Matilda of Flanders, has broken out again in thine absence—is preaching against thee in hall and from pulpit. He declares that such espousals are incestuous, both as within the forbidden degrees, and inasmuch as Adele, the lady's mother, was betrothed to thine uncle Richard; and Mauger menaces excommunication if my liege pursues his suit! [63] So troubled is the realm, that I, waiting not for debate in council, and fearing sinister ambassage if I did so, took ship from thy port of Cherbourg, and have not flagged rein, and scarce broken bread, till I could say to the heir of Rolf the Founder—Save thy realm from the men of mail, and thy bride from the knaves in serge.”

”Ho, ho!” cried William; then bursting forth in full wrath, as he sprang from the couch. ”Hearest thou this, Lord Seneschal? Seven years, the probation of the patriarch, have I wooed and waited; and lo, in the seventh, does a proud priest say to me, ’Wrench the love from thy heart-strings!’—Excommunicate me—ME—William, the son of Robert the Devil! Ha, by God’s splendour, Mauger shall live to wish the father stood, in the foul fiend’s true likeness, by his side, rather than brave the bent brow of the son!”

”Dread my lord,” said Fitzosborne, desisting from his employ, and rising to his feet; ”thou knowest that I am thy true friend and leal knight; thou knowest how I have aided thee in this marriage with the lady of Flanders, and how gravely I think that what pleases thy fancy will guard thy realm; but rather than brave the order of the Church, and the ban of the Pope, I would see thee wed to the poorest virgin in Normandy.”

William, who had been pacing the room like an enraged lion in his den, halted in amaze at this bold speech.

”This from thee, William Fitzosborne!—from thee! I tell thee, that if all the priests in Christendom, and all the barons in France, stood between me and my bride, I would hew my way through the midst. Foes invade my realm—let them; princes conspire against me—I smile in scorn; subjects mutiny—this strong hand can punish, or this large heart can forgive. All these are the dangers which he who governs men should prepare to meet; but man has a right to his love, as the stag to his hind. And he who wrongs me here, is foe and traitor to me, not as Norman Duke but as human being. Look to it—thou and thy proud barons, look to it!”

”Proud may thy barons be,” said Fitzosborne, reddening, and with a brow that quailed not before his lord’s; ”for they are the sons of those who carved out the realm of the Norman, and owned in Rou but the feudal chief of free warriors; vassals are not villeins. And that which we hold our duty—whether to Church or chief—that, Duke William, thy proud barons will doubtless do; nor less, believe me, for threats which, braved in discharge of duty and defence of freedom, we

hold as air.”

The Duke gazed on his haughty subject with an eye in which a meaner spirit might have seen its doom. The veins in his broad temples swelled like cords, and a light foam gathered round his quivering lips. But fiery and fearless as William was, not less was he sagacious and profound. In that one man he saw the representative of that superb and matchless chivalry—that race of races—those men of men, in whom the brave acknowledge the highest example of valiant deeds, and the free the manliest assertion of noble thoughts [64], since the day when the last Athenian covered his head with his mantle, and mutely died: and far from being the most stubborn against his will, it was to Fitzosborne’s paramount influence with the council, that he had often owed their submission to his wishes, and their contributions to his wars. In the very tempest of his wrath, he felt that the blow belonged to strike on that bold head would shiver his ducal throne to the dust. He felt too, that awful indeed was that power of the Church which could thus turn against him the heart of his truest knight: and he began (for with all his outward frankness his temper was suspicious) to wrong the great-souled noble by the thought that he might already be won over by the enemies whom Mauger had arrayed against his nuptials. Therefore, with one of those rare and mighty efforts of that dissimulation which debased his character, but achieved his fortunes, he cleared his brow of its dark cloud, and said in a low voice, that was not without its pathos:

”Had an angel from heaven forewarned me that William Fitzosborne would speak thus to his kinsman and brother in arms, in the hour of need and the agony of passion, I would have disbelieved him. Let it pass—”

But ere the last word was out of his lips, Fitzosborne had fallen on his knees before the Duke, and, clasping his hand, exclaimed, while the tears rolled down his swarthy cheek, ”Pardon, pardon, my liege! when thou speakest thus my heart melts. What thou willest, that will I! Church or Pope, no matter. Send me to Flanders; I will bring back thy bride.”

The slight smile that curved William’s lip, showed that he was scarce worthy of that sublime weakness in his friend. But he cordially pressed the hand that grasped his own, and said, ”Rise; thus should brother speak to brother.” Then—for his wrath was only concealed, not stifled, and yearned for its vent—his eye fell upon the delicate and thoughtful face of the priest, who had watched this short and stormy conference in profound silence, despite Taillefer’s whispers to him to interrupt the dispute. ”So, priest,” he said, ”I remember me that when Mauger before let loose his rebellious tongue thou didst lend thy pedant learning to eke out his brainless treason. Methought that I then banished thee my realm?”

”Not so, Count and Seigneur,” answered the ecclesiastic, with a grave

but arch smile on his lip; "let me remind thee, that to speed me back to my native land thou didst graciously send me a horse, halting on three legs, and all lame on the fourth. Thus mounted, I met thee on my road. I saluted thee; so did the beast, for his head well nigh touched the ground. Whereon I did ask thee, in a Latin play of words, to give me at least a quadruped, not a tripod, for my journey. [65] Gracious, even in ire, and with relenting laugh, was thine answer. My liege, thy words implied banishment—thy laughter pardon. So I stayed."

Despite his wrath, William could scarce repress a smile; but recollecting himself, he replied, more gravely, "Peace with this levity, priest. Doubtless thou art the envoy from this scrupulous Mauger, or some other of my gentle clergy; and thou comest, as doubtless, with soft words and whining homilies. It is in vain. I hold the Church in holy reverence; the pontiff knows it. But Matilda of Flanders I have wooed; and Matilda of Flanders shall sit by my side in the halls of Rouen, or on the deck of my war-ship, till it anchors on a land worthy to yield a new domain to the son of the Sea-king."

"In the halls of Rouen—and it may be on the throne of England—shall Matilda reign by the side of William," said the priest in a clear, low, and emphatic voice; "and it was to tell my lord the Duke that I repent me of my first unconsidered obeisance to Mauger as my spiritual superior; that since then I have myself examined canon and precedent; and though the letter of the law be against thy spousals, it comes precisely under the category of those alliances to which the fathers of the Church accord dispensation:—it is to tell thee this, that I, plain Doctor of Laws and priest of Pavia, have crossed the seas."

"Ha Rou!—Ha Rou!" cried Taillefer, with his usual bluffness, and laughing with great glee, "why wouldst thou not listen to me, monseigneur?"

"If thou deceivest me not," said William, in surprise, "and thou canst make good thy words, no prelate in Neustria, save Odo of Bayeux, shall lift his head high as thine." And here William, deeply versed in the science of men, bent his eyes keenly upon the unchanging and earnest face of the speaker. "Ah," he burst out, as if satisfied with the survey, "and my mind tells me that thou speakest not thus boldly and calmly without ground sufficient. Man, I like thee. Thy name? I forget it."

"Lanfranc of Pavia, please you my lord; called some times 'Lanfranc the Scholar' in thy cloister of Bec. Nor misdeem me, that I, humble, unmitred priest, should be thus bold. In birth I am noble, and my kindred stand near to the grace of our ghostly pontiff; to the pontiff I myself am not unknown. Did I desire honours, in Italy I might seek them; it is not so. I crave no guerdon for the service I proffer; none but this—leisure and books in the Convent of Bec."

"Sit down—nay, sit, man," said William, greatly interested, but still suspicious. "One riddle only I ask thee to solve, before I give thee all my trust, and place my very heart in thy hands. Why, if thou desirest not rewards, shouldst thou thus care to serve me—thou, a foreigner?" A light, brilliant and calm, shone in the eyes of the scholar, and a blush spread over his pale cheeks.

"My Lord Prince, I will answer in plain words. But first permit me to be the questioner."

The priest turned towards Fitzosborne, who had seated himself on a stool at William's feet, and, leaning his chin on his hand, listened to the ecclesiastic, not more with devotion to his calling, than wonder at the influence one so obscure was irresistibly gaining over his own martial spirit, and William's iron craft.

"Lovest thou not, William Lord of Breteuil, lovest thou not fame for the sake of fame?"

"Sur mon ame—yes!" said the Baron.

"And thou, Taillefer the minstrel, lovest thou not song for the sake of song?"

"For song alone," replied the mighty minstrel. "More gold in one ringing rhyme than in all the coffers of Christendom."

"And marvellest thou, reader of men's hearts," said the scholar, turning once more to William, "that the student loves knowledge for the sake of knowledge? Born of high race, poor in purse, and slight of thews, betimes I found wealth in books, and drew strength from lore. I heard of the Count of Rouen and the Normans, as a prince of small domain, with a measureless spirit, a lover of letters, and a captain in war. I came to thy duchy, I noted its subjects and its prince, and the words of Themistocles rang in my ear: 'I cannot play the lute, but I can make a small state great.' I felt an interest in thy strenuous and troubled career. I believe that knowledge, to spread amongst the nations, must first find a nursery in the brain of kings; and I saw in the deed-doer, the agent of the thinker. In those espousals, on which with untiring obstinacy thy heart is set, I might sympathise with thee; perchance"—(here a melancholy smile flitted over the student's pale lips), "perchance even as a lover: priest though I be now, and dead to human love, once I loved, and I know what it is to strive in hope, and to waste in despair. But my sympathy, I own, was more given to the prince than to the lover. It was natural that I, priest and foreigner, should obey at first the orders of Mauger, archprelate and spiritual chief, and the more so as the law was with him; but when I resolved to stay despite thy sentence which banished me, I resolved to aid thee; for if with Mauger was the dead

law, with thee was the living cause of man. Duke William, on thy nuptials with Matilda of Flanders rests thy duchy—rest, perchance, the mightier sceptres that are yet to come. Thy title disputed, thy principality new and unestablished, thou, above all men, must link thy new race with the ancient line of kings and kaisars. Matilda is the descendant of Charlemagne and Alfred. Thy realm is insecure as long as France undermines it with plots, and threatens it with arms. Marry the daughter of Baldwin—and thy wife is the niece of Henry of France—thine enemy becomes thy kinsman, and must, perforce, be thine ally. This is not all; it were strange, looking round this disordered royalty of England—a childless king, who loves thee better than his own blood; a divided nobility, already adopting the fashions of the stranger, and accustomed to shift their faith from Saxon to Dane, and Dane to Saxon; a people that has respect indeed for brave chiefs, but, seeing new men rise daily from new houses, has no reverence for ancient lines and hereditary names; with a vast mass of villeins or slaves that have no interest in the land or its rulers; strange, seeing all this, if thy day-dreams have not also beheld a Norman sovereign on the throne of Saxon England. And thy marriage with the descendant of the best and most beloved prince that ever ruled these realms, if it does not give thee a title to the land, may help to conciliate its affections, and to fix thy posterity in the halls of their mother’s kin. Have I said eno’ to prove why, for the sake of nations, it were wise for the pontiff to stretch the harsh girths of the law? why I might be enabled to prove to the Court of Rome the policy of conciliating the love, and strengthening the hands, of the Norman Count, who may so become the main prop of Christendom? Yea, have I said eno’ to prove that the humble clerk can look on mundane matters with the eye of a man who can make small states great?”

William remained speechless—his hot blood thrilled with a half superstitious awe; so thoroughly had this obscure Lombard divined, detailed all the intricate meshes of that policy with which he himself had interwoven his pertinacious affection for the Flemish princess, that it seemed to him as if he listened to the echo of his own heart, or heard from a soothsayer the voice of his most secret thoughts.

The priest continued

”Wherefore, thus considering, I said to myself, Now has the time come, Lanfranc the Lombard, to prove to thee whether thy self-boastings have been a vain deceit, or whether, in this age of iron and amidst this lust of gold, thou, the penniless and the feeble, canst make knowledge and wit of more avail to the destinies of kings than armed men and filled treasuries. I believe in that power. I am ready for the test. Pause, judge from what the Lord of Breteuil hath said to thee, what will be the defection of thy lords if the Pope confirm the threatened excommunication of thine uncle? Thine armies will rot from thee; thy treasures will be like dry leaves in thy coffers; the Duke of Bretagne will claim thy duchy as the legitimate heir of thy forefathers; the

Duke of Burgundy will league with the King of France, and march on thy faithless legions under the banner of the Church. The handwriting is on the walls, and thy sceptre and thy crown will pass away." William set his teeth firmly, and breathed hard.

"But send me to Rome, thy delegate, and the thunder of Mauger shall fall powerless. Marry Matilda, bring her to thy halls, place her on thy throne, laugh to scorn the interdict of thy traitor uncle, and rest assured that the Pope shall send thee his dispensation to thy spousals, and his benison on thy marriage-bed. And when this be done, Duke William, give me not abbacies and prelacies; multiply books, and stablish schools, and bid thy servant found the royalty of knowledge, as thou shalt found the sovereignty of war."

The Duke, transported from himself, leaped up and embraced the priest with his vast arms; he kissed his cheeks, he kissed his forehead, as, in those days, king kissed king with "the kiss of peace."

"Lanfranc of Pavia," he cried, "whether thou succeed or fail, thou hast my love and gratitude evermore. As thou speakest, would I have spoken, had I been born, framed, and reared as thou. And, verily, when I hear thee, I blush for the boasts of my barbarous pride, that no man can wield my mace, or bend my bow. Poor is the strength of body—a web of law can entangle it, and a word from a priest's mouth can palsy. But thou!—let me look at thee."

William gazed on the pale face: from head to foot he scanned the delicate, slender form, and then, turning away, he said to Fitzosborne:

"Thou, whose mailed hand hath fell'd a war-steed, art thou not ashamed of thyself? The day is coming, I see it afar, when these slight men shall set their feet upon our corslets."

He paused as if in thought, again paced the room, and stopped before the crucifix, and image of the Virgin, which stood in a niche near the bed-head.

"Right, noble prince," said the priest's low voice, "pause there for a solution to all enigmas; there view the symbol of all-enduring power; there, learn its ends below—comprehend the account it must yield above. To your thoughts and your prayers we leave you."

He took the stalwart arm of Taillefer, as he spoke, and, with a grave obeisance to Fitzosborne, left the chamber.

CHAPTER III.

The next morning William was long closeted alone with Lanfranc,—that man, among the most remarkable of his age, of whom it was said, that "to comprehend the extent of his talents, one must be Herodian in grammar, Aristotle in dialectics, Cicero in rhetoric, Augustine and Jerome in Scriptural lore," [66]—and ere the noon the Duke's gallant and princely train were ordered to be in readiness for return home.

The crowd in the broad space, and the citizens from their boats in the river, gazed on the knights and steeds of that gorgeous company, already drawn up and awaiting without the open gates the sound of the trumpets that should announce the Duke's departure. Before the hall-door in the inner court were his own men. The snow-white steed of Odo; the alezan of Fitzosborne; and, to the marvel of all, a small palfrey plainly caparisoned. What did that palfrey amid those steeds?—the steeds themselves seemed to chafe at the companionship; the Duke's charger pricked up his ears and snorted; the Lord of Breteuil's alezan kicked out, as the poor nag humbly drew near to make acquaintance; and the prelate's white barb, with red vicious eye, and ears laid down, ran fiercely at the low-bred intruder, with difficulty reined in by the squires, who shared the beast's amaze and resentment.

Meanwhile the Duke thoughtfully took his way to Edward's apartments. In the anteroom were many monks and many knights; but conspicuous amongst them all was a tall and stately veteran, leaning on a great two-handed sword, and whose dress and fashion of beard were those of the last generation, the men who had fought with Canute the Great or Edmund Ironsides. So grand was the old man's aspect, and so did he contrast in appearance the narrow garb and shaven chins of those around, that the Duke was roused from his reverie at the sight, and marvelling why one, evidently a chief of high rank, had neither graced the banquet in his honour, nor been presented to his notice, he turned to the Earl of Hereford, who approached him with gay salutation, and inquired the name and title of the bearded man in the loose flowing robe.

"Know you not, in truth?" said the lively Earl, in some wonder. "In him you see the great rival of Godwin. He is the hero of the Danes, as Godwin is of the Saxons, a true son of Odin, Siward, Earl of the Northumbrians." [67]

"Norse Dame be my aid,—his fame hath oft filled my ears, and I should have lost the most welcome sight in merrie England had I not now beheld him."

Therewith, the Duke approached courteously, and, doffing the cap he had hitherto retained, he greeted the old hero with those compliments

which the Norman had already learned in the courts of the Frank.

The stout Earl received them coldly, and replying in Danish to William's Romance-tongue, he said:

"Pardon, Count of the Normans, if these old lips cling to their old words. Both of us, methinks, date our lineage from the lands of the Norse. Suffer Siward to speak the language the sea-kings spoke. The old oak is not to be transplanted, and the old man keeps the ground where his youth took root."

The Duke, who with some difficulty comprehended the general meaning of Siward's speech, bit his lip, but replied courteously:

"The youths of all nations may learn from renowned age. Much doth it shame me that I cannot commune with thee in the ancestral tongue; but the angels at least know the language of the Norman Christian, and I pray them and the saints for a calm end to thy brave career."

"Pray not to angel or saint for Siward son of Beorn," said the old man hastily; "let me not have a cow's death, but a warrior's; die in my mail of proof, axe in hand, and helm on head. And such may be my death, if Edward the King reads my rede and grants my prayer."

"I have influence with the King," said William; "name thy wish, that I may back it."

"The fiend forfend," said the grim Earl, "that a foreign prince should sway England's King, or that thegn and earl should ask other backing than leal service and just cause. If Edward be the saint men call him, he will loose me on the hell-wolf, without other cry than his own conscience."

The Duke turned inquiringly to Rolf; who, thus appealed to, said:

"Siward urges my uncle to espouse the cause of Malcolm of Cumbria against the bloody tyrant Macbeth; and but for the disputes with the traitor Godwin, the King had long since turned his arms to Scotland."

"Call not traitors, young man," said the Earl, in high disdain, "those who, with all their faults and crimes, have placed thy kinsman on the throne of Canute."

"Hush, Rolf," said the Duke, observing the fierce young Norman about to reply hastily. "But methought, though my knowledge of English troubles is but scant, that Siward was the sworn foe to Godwin?"

"Foe to him in his power, friend to him in his wrongs," answered Siward. "And if England needs defenders when I and Godwin are in our shrouds, there is but one man worthy of the days of old, and his name

is Harold, the outlaw.”

William’s face changed remarkably, despite all his dissimulation; and, with a slight inclination of his head, he strode on moody and irritated.

”This Harold! this Harold!” he muttered to himself, ”all brave men speak to me of this Harold! Even my Norman knights name him with reluctant reverence, and even his foes do him honour;—verily his shadow is cast from exile over all the land.”

Thus murmuring, he passed the throng with less than his wonted affable grace, and pushing back the officers who wished to precede him, entered, without ceremony, Edward’s private chamber.

The King was alone, but talking loudly to himself, gesticulating vehemently, and altogether so changed from his ordinary placid apathy of mien, that William drew back in alarm and awe. Often had he heard indirectly, that of late years Edward was said to see visions, and be rapt from himself into the world of spirit and shadow; and such, he now doubted not, was the strange paroxysm of which he was made the witness. Edward’s eyes were fixed on him, but evidently without recognising his presence; the King’s hands were outstretched, and he cried aloud in a voice of sharp anguish:

”Sanguelac, Sanguelac!—the Lake of Blood!—the waves spread, the waves redden! Mother of mercy—where is the ark?—where the Ararat?—Fly—fly—this way—this—” and he caught convulsive hold of William’s arm. ”No! there the corpses are piled—high and higher—there the horse of the Apocalypse tramples the dead in their gore.”

In great horror, William took the King, now gasping on his breast, in his arms, and laid him on his bed, beneath its canopy of state, all blazoned with the martlets and cross of his insignia. Slowly Edward came to himself, with heavy sighs; and when at length he sate up and looked round, it was with evident unconsciousness of what had passed across his haggard and wandering spirit, for he said, with his usual drowsy calmness:

”Thanks, Guillaume, bien aime, for rousing me from unseasoned sleep. How fares it with thee?”

”Nay, how with thee, dear friend and king? thy dreams have been troubled.”

”Not so; I slept so heavily, methinks I could not have dreamed at all. But thou art clad as for a journey—spur on thy heel, staff in thy hand!”

”Long since, O dear host, I sent Odo to tell thee of the ill news from

Normandy that compelled me to depart.”

”I remember—I remember me now,” said Edward, passing his pale womanly fingers over his forehead. ”The heathen rage against thee. Ah! my poor brother, a crown is an awful head-gear. While yet time, why not both seek some quiet convent, and put away these earthly cares?”

William smiled and shook his head. ”Nay, holy Edward, from all I have seen of convents, it is a dream to think that the monk’s serge hides a calmer breast than the warrior’s mail, or the king’s ermine. Now give me thy benison, for I go.”

He knelt as he spoke, and Edward bent his hands over his head, and blessed him. Then, taking from his own neck a collar of zimmer (jewels and uncut gems), of great price, the King threw it over the broad throat bent before him, and rising, clapped his hands. A small door opened, giving a glimpse of the oratory within, and a monk appeared.

”Father, have my behests been fulfilled?—hath Hugoline, my treasurer, dispensed the gifts that I spoke of?”

”Verily yes; vault, coffer, and garde-robe—stall and meuse.—are well nigh drained,” answered the monk, with a sour look at the Norman, whose native avarice gleamed in his dark eyes as he heard the answer.

”Thy train go not hence empty-handed,” said Edward fondly. ”Thy father’s halls sheltered the exile, and the exile forgets not the sole pleasure of a king—the power to requite. We may never meet again, William,—age creeps over me, and who will succeed to my thorny throne?” William longed to answer,—to tell the hope that consumed him,—to remind his cousin of the vague promise in their youth, that the Norman Count should succeed to that ”thorny throne:” but the presence of the Saxon monk repelled him, nor was there in Edward’s uneasy look much to allure him on.

”But peace,” continued the King, ”be between thine and mine, as between thee and me!”

”Amen,” said the Duke, ”and I leave thee at least free from the proud rebels who so long disturbed thy reign. This House of Godwin, thou wilt not again let it tower above thy palace?”

”Nay, the future is with God and his saints;” answered Edward, feebly. ”But Godwin is old—older than I, and bowed by many storms.”

”Ay, his sons are more to be dreaded and kept aloof—mostly Harold!”

”Harold,—he was ever obedient, he alone of his kith; truly my soul mourns for Harold,” said the King, sighing.

"The serpent's egg hatches but the serpent. Keep thy heel on it," said William, sternly.

"Thou speakest well," said the irresolute prince, who never seemed three days or three minutes together in the same mind. "Harold is in Ireland—there let him rest: better for all."

"For all," said the Duke; "so the saints keep thee, O royal saint!"

He kissed the King's hand, and strode away to the hall where Odo, Fitzosborne, and the priest Lanfranc awaited him. And so that day, halfway towards the fair town of Dover, rode Duke William, and by the side of his roan barb ambled the priest's palfrey.

Behind came his gallant train, and with tumbrils and sumpter-mules laden with baggage, and enriched by Edward's gifts; while Welch hawks, and steeds of great price from the pastures of Surrey and the plains of Cambridge and York, attested no less acceptably than zimme, and golden chain, and embroidered robe, the munificence of the grateful King. [68]

As they journeyed on, and the fame of the Duke's coming was sent abroad by the bodes or messengers, despatched to prepare the towns through which he was to pass for an arrival sooner than expected, the more highborn youths of England, especially those of the party counter to that of the banished Godwin, came round the ways to gaze upon that famous chief, who, from the age of fifteen, had wielded the most redoubtable sword of Christendom. And those youths wore the Norman garb: and in the towns, Norman counts held his stirrup to dismount, and Norman hosts spread the fastidious board; and when, at the eve of the next day, William saw the pennon of one of his own favourite chiefs waving in the van of armed men, that sallied forth from the towers of Dover (the key of the coast) he turned to the Lombard, still by his side, and said:

"Is not England part of Normandy already?"

And the Lombard answered:

"The fruit is well nigh ripe, and the first breeze will shake it to thy feet. Put not out thy hand too soon. Let the wind do its work."

And the Duke made reply:

"As thou thinkest, so think I. And there is but one wind in the halls of heaven that can waft the fruit to the feet of another."

"And that?" asked the Lombard.

"Is the wind that blows from the shores of Ireland, when it fills the sails of Harold, son of Godwin."

"Thou fearest that man, and why?" asked the Lombard with interest.

And the Duke answered:

"Because in the breast of Harold beats the heart of England."