

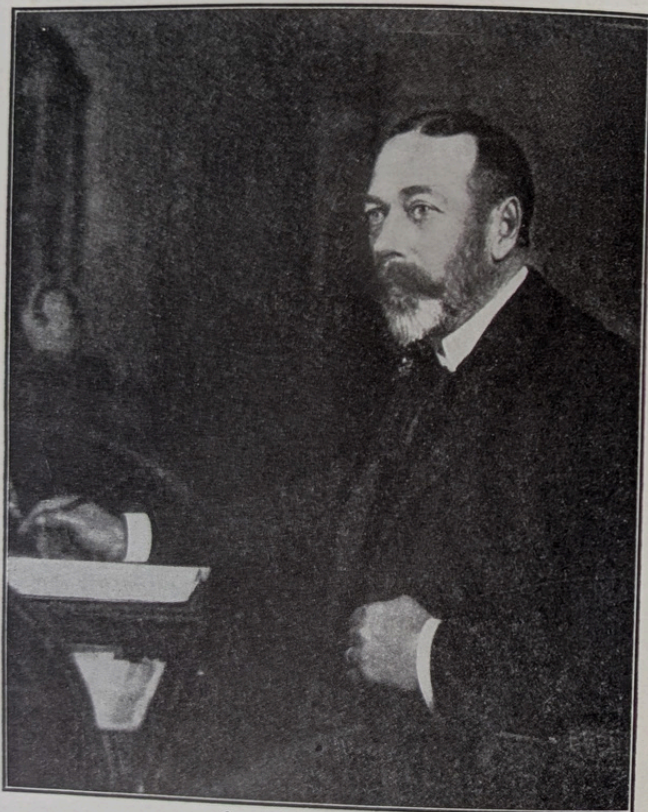
A JUNIOR
HISTORY OF ENGLAND



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M. McDonald
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JUNIOR HISTORY OF ENGLAND



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JUNIOR HISTORY OF ENGLAND

55 B.C. TO THE PRESENT TIME

THE BRITONS AND THE ROMANS



1. THE ANCIENT BRITONS

The first man to tell us much about the people of Britain was the great Roman general, Julius Cæsar. Cæsar was an able writer as well as a distinguished soldier, and he wrote a book in which he gave a full and interesting

account of his wars. It is from this book that we learn almost everything we know about the ancient Britons.

At that time—nearly two thousand years ago—Britain was very different from what it is now. No splendid high-roads were then to be seen, with carts and carriages passing to and fro; no railways, with trains rushing by every hour of the day and night; no fine harbours, with gallant merchant-ships riding at anchor; no large towns or pretty villages, such as we see now wherever we go; no beautiful fields and gardens, with their rich displays of fruits and flowers.

The country was for the most part covered with marsh, forest, and moorland, through which roamed the wolf and the wild boar. The only roads were pathways through the forest. The houses were made of turf and branches of trees daubed with clay. The only towns were places of refuge in the forest or on the hill-tops, which were fortified with a stockade of felled trees.

In the southern parts of the island the people cultivated the soil, and knew how to spin and weave their garments out of the wool of their flocks. But in the northern parts they grew little or no wheat; they lived mostly on the milk and flesh of their herds, and were clad in skins. The wild animals which roamed in the woods, and the fish which swarmed in the rivers, were also used as food.

The ancient Britons were tall and strong, with blue eyes and long fair hair. They spent their time in the chase and in fishing, and were fond of war, in which they were frequently engaged. They used to stain their bodies blue with a plant called woad, and in the fury of

battle would throw aside their garments, and exhibit their naked bodies marked with strange figures, in order to terrify their foes.

They were not united into one kingdom, but were divided into many tribes, each having its own petty chief; and these tribes often fought with each other, striving each to obtain the mastery. Yet we shall see that, when a foreign enemy invaded their country, they defended it with great valour, and performed many deeds of heroism.

Besides the warriors there were the priests, who were called Druids. The religion of the ancient Britons was a cruel one; even human beings were offered up as sacrifices to their gods. The victims were put into large image-shaped cages of wicker-work, and then burned. The persons who were condemned to die in this manner were generally such as had been found guilty of some crime; sometimes they were prisoners taken in war.

But the Druids had one beautiful custom. The mistletoe was sacred to the gods, and at a certain season of the year, the priests went into the woods to cut it with a golden sickle from the oak on which it grew. The plant was then distributed among the crowd of worshippers; and happy was the man who received a portion, for he fancied that he then possessed a charm which would save him from danger and disease.

Among the Druids was a famous class of men called the bards, whose office it was to compose songs in honour of the great men of their tribe, and sing them to the music of the harp.

2. THE COMING OF CÆSAR

55 B.C.

At this period the Romans were the most powerful nation in the world. Their generals and soldiers were brave and skilful, and had conquered all the nations round the Mediterranean Sea. Julius Cæsar, one of the most famous of their generals, was then engaged in the conquest of Gaul, which we now call France. As the people of Gaul had received help from their kinsmen in Britain, Cæsar resolved to invade this island.

On a summer day in the year 55 before the birth of Christ, Cæsar set sail with a fleet and about ten thousand of his bravest soldiers. As they approached the island, they saw the tops of the cliffs crowded with warriors, who were gazing in wonder at the strange ships that were coming across. Cæsar sailed along the coast for some miles till he found a place suitable for landing; but the Britons were there before him.

The Roman soldiers were in no haste to leave their vessels, for the fierce appearance of the British warriors struck them with fear. The trumpets sounded, but for a minute not a man stirred. While they thus hesitated, a standard-bearer leapt into the sea, calling upon his comrades to follow unless they wished to see their standard, the Roman Eagle, in the hands of the enemy; he at least would do his duty to his country and his general. This was enough to rouse them. With a loud shout they all sprang ashore, and rushed upon the Britons.

For a time the native warriors stood their ground against the Romans; but as the latter were better armed,

the Britons were soon defeated. That year Cæsar stayed only about three weeks in Britain, and he did not advance far into the island.

Next summer he came with a larger army, which he carried in a fleet of several hundred ships. On this



The Landing of the Romans

occasion the Britons did not attempt to prevent his landing. They gathered, however, a large army under a native king, named Cassivellaunus, who struggled with wonderful bravery against the mighty power of Cæsar. But he was gradually driven back across the Thames,

and his stronghold, which was situated near the modern town of St. Albans, was taken.

In fighting with the Britons, the Romans were struck most of all by their war-chariots. These chariots the Britons managed with great skill, driving along the front of the enemy till they saw an opening in their ranks. They would then leap down and fight on foot, whilst the drivers took the chariots to a safe distance from the battle; but they held them ready in case the warriors were pressed by the enemy.

The rude skill and bravery of the Britons, however, were of no avail against the best soldiers in the world. They were obliged to submit, and to agree to pay tribute. No tribute was paid; but Cæsar had added to his fame by the invasion of Britain, and he left its shores, never to return.

3. THE ROMANS IN BRITAIN

43-410 A.D.

The Britons were left in peace for nearly a hundred years after the departure of Julius Cæsar. At the end of that time, however, the Emperor Claudius sent distinguished generals, with numerous troops, to carry on the war, and even came himself for a short time. The Britons defended their country with great valour; but the Roman legions were too strong for them, and the southern part of the island was subdued after a brief struggle.

The champion of the Britons was Caractacus, King of the Silures, in South Wales. In a terrible battle he was

defeated, and being made captive, was taken to Rome. When brought before the Emperor Claudius, he expressed his wonder that people who had such grandeur at home should grudge him his poor hut in Britain. Pleased with his noble bearing and proud spirit, the Emperor ordered him to be set free and to be treated with kindness.

The Romans soon came to see that it was the Druids who encouraged the Britons in the spirit of resistance. The general Suetonius therefore resolved to crush the Druids, who had their chief seat in the Isle of Mona, now called Anglesey. He landed on the island with an army, slew them in great numbers, and cut down the sacred groves in which they worshipped. In the meantime, the much-wronged Boadicea, Queen of the Iceni, who lived in the eastern part of the country, had risen in revolt. For a time the rebellion was successful, and thousands of Romans were put to death. But Suetonius quickly returned to the help of his countrymen, and Boadicea was defeated with great slaughter. Rather than fall into the hands of the enemy, the ill-fated Queen poisoned herself.

The commander who really made Britain into a Roman province was Julius Agricola, whose rule began in the year 78. He led his army as far north as the Grampian Mountains, and gained a great victory there over the fierce Caledonians. He also built a line of forts between the Firths of Forth and Clyde, to protect the territory he had gained from the wild tribes of the north.

But Agricola was not only a great warrior; he was also a wise ruler. He wished to Romanize the Britons—that is, to make them like the Romans in their ways of living. He knew this could not be done by harsh means.

He therefore treated all who submitted to him with great kindness, and by degrees persuaded them to imitate their conquerors. The Britons were a grateful race, and honoured him in return; and when he left the country, after a rule of six years, he carried away with him their respect and good wishes.

The whole of the southern portion of the island might



Roman Galleys

now have been at peace if it had not been for the fierce Caledonians, who frequently plundered and laid waste the northern part of it. So troublesome had they become in the reign of Hadrian, that the Emperor himself came to punish them in the year 121.

To stop their inroads for the future, he caused a huge rampart to be built right across the country, from the

mouth of the Tyne to the Solway Firth. It was guarded by many soldiers, who lived in forts placed at certain distances all along it. So strongly built was Hadrian's Wall that even now, after a lapse of nearly eighteen hundred years, parts of it remain here and there.

For more than three hundred years Britain remained a Roman province. Great changes took place during this period. Some of the thick forests were cut down, and many of the wild beasts that used to roam in them were destroyed. Fine cities were built, remains of which have been brought to light in later times. Such were London, Bath, Chester, Lincoln, and many others. To make travelling easy, good roads were made. These were called *strata*, and hence we have our word street.

The Britons became civilized, and learned how to cultivate the soil and carry on trade. Merchant-vessels sailed to and fro between Britain and the Continent, taking tin, cattle, oysters, and corn, and bringing other things in exchange. Many of the Britons spoke the Latin tongue and wore the Roman dress; while the youths of the better class were educated in Roman schools and colleges. Christianity was introduced by some of the Roman soldiers.

But the time came at last when the Roman troops were forced to leave Britain. The warlike tribes of northern Europe were pressing so hard on Italy that their help was required at home. So the stately tramp of the Roman legions was no longer heard in this northern land, and the unfortunate Britons were left to themselves.

THE SAXONS AND THE DANES

4. THE COMING OF THE ENGLISH

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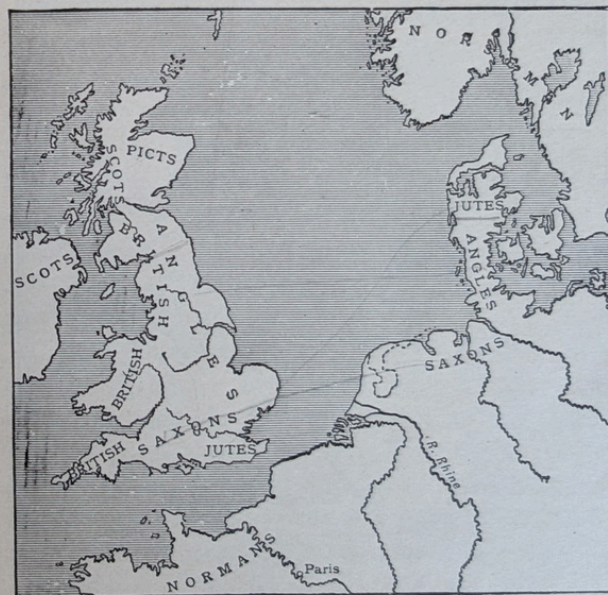
After the departure of the Romans, the Britons were in a very wretched condition. They had been so long under the Roman rule that they had lost much of the warlike spirit of their forefathers. Thus they were not able to defend themselves against the attacks of their old foes from the north, the Picts, as the Caledonians were now called, who, accordingly, overspread the land, plundering and killing without mercy. They were also attacked by the Scots from the north of Ireland.

Some time before this, war-vessels from the coasts of Germany and Denmark had begun to make their appearance on the shores of Britain. They were manned by pirates, who were never so happy as when they were sailing to some distant land in search of booty. These pirates were mostly very tall, with blue eyes and long yellow hair. Their weapons were axes, swords, spears, and maces; and in battle they were terrible foes. They had different names, such as Angles, Saxons, and Jutes; but they were all akin to each other, and spoke much the same language—the language, in fact, from which our English speech has grown.

They were heathens, and their chief god was Woden, the god of war, from whom we have our name Wednesday. Thor, the god of thunder and storms, was another of their gods; hence the name Thursday. Those warriors who fell in battle, fighting bravely with their faces to the foe, expected to go straight to their heaven. and to be

rewarded by continual feasting and by drinking out of the skulls of their enemies.

The unhappy Britons, we are told, implored these warlike visitors to help them against the Picts and Scots, and promised to reward them with grants of land. They



The Home of the English

accepted the invitation, and soon drove the invaders out of the country. But having once obtained a footing in what appeared to them so fertile a land, these hardy warriors desired to have the whole country for their own. They sent word across the sea to their countrymen,

who came in large numbers. They landed now upon one part of the coast, now upon another burning villages



and churches, killing and robbing the inhabitants, and spreading terror far and wide throughout the land.

Brought to bay on all sides, the Britons regained

some of their old hardihood, and met their enemies bravely on many a hard-fought field. But fresh bands of invaders were continually coming over the sea, and bit by bit the natives were driven farther and farther westward, until the greater portion of the country remained in the hands of their fierce conquerors.

These invasions lasted for more than a hundred years. At the end of that time the English, as the new-comers came to be called, were settled in all the eastern portion of the island from the English Channel to the Firth of Forth, and as far west as the river Severn; while the Britons were confined to the western portion of the country. The principal kingdoms founded by the English were Kent, Sussex, and Wessex in the south; Essex and East Anglia in the east; Northumbria in the north; and Mercia in the middle.

These kingdoms did not, however, always remain exactly the same. They were frequently at war with each other, and also with the Britons, or Welsh, as the English called them. So there were sometimes more than seven kingdoms; at other times fewer. When any of the kings had shown himself greater than the others by his bravery in war, he received the title of Bretwalda, or Wide Ruler.

During all those long years of strife, our forefathers were still heathens. They might have heard of the gospel from the Britons; but we may be sure that, being the conquerors, they would despise the religion of their slaves.

5. HOW THE ENGLISH BECAME CHRISTIANS

About the end of the sixth century the Pope of Rome was Gregory the Great. He had heard much of the English people. He knew that they were a noble race, and was grieved to think that they should still be heathens.



Augustine and Ethelbert

He therefore resolved to send a band of missionaries to preach the gospel to them. He accordingly chose a pious monk named Augustine, together with a band of forty others, to undertake the task, and sent them forth with his blessing in the year 597.

Taking ship, Augustine and his companions crossed

the Strait of Dover and landed in Kent. Their landing-place proved a fortunate one. The King of Kent at that time was Ethelbert, a wise and powerful prince, whose Queen, Bertha, was already a Christian. For her sake, Ethelbert gave a kindly welcome to the little band of peaceful monks who had landed on his shores, and willingly granted them leave to preach before him. Within a year, the King himself was baptized into the Christian faith, and thousands of his subjects followed his example.

After this, Christianity continued to spread slowly but surely over all the land, and both in the palace and the cottage, to monarch and to peasant, the "glad tidings of great joy" were at last made known. Churches were built for worship. In many places monasteries also rose, where the monks might live apart from the world and serve God. The monks were the only people who had any learning in those days, and it was only in connection with monasteries and churches that there were any schools.

The most learned man of that time was a monk known as the Venerable Bede. It is from his writings that we get most of the stories of that period with which we are acquainted; among others, that of the coming of St. Augustine, about which we have just read.

Bede received his education at the famous monastery of Monkwearmouth, in the county of Durham. As a boy he was always very studious, and loved to pore over his books, which were written in Latin. He grew up to be a very learned man, and became a priest at an early age. From the time of his entering the monastery at Jarrow-on-Tyne—his birthplace—till the day of his

death, he lived a quiet and peaceful life, studying, teaching, and writing. His chief book, which is in Latin, is called the *History of the Anglo-Saxon Church*.

6. ALFRED THE GREAT (871-901)

HIS EARLY TROUBLES

The kingdoms which were founded by our Anglo-Saxon forefathers lasted more than two hundred years. At the end of that time, however, Egbert, the great and wise King of Wessex, succeeded in bringing the other kingdoms under his sway, and thus became overlord of all England in the year 827. But amidst all this glory a new danger threatened the land. Bands of strange warriors had lately arrived on the coasts in their war-vessels, and they fought so fiercely and so bravely that it was all Egbert could do to drive them back to their ships.

These strange warriors were Danes, who had come from Denmark and Norway in their galleys in search of plunder. They were also called Northmen, or Norsemen, because they came from the north of Europe. They were known, too, as Vikings, from *vik*, the name for the bays or sheltered creeks on the coast of Norway from which they started on their voyages. The Danes were of the same race as the English, and spoke almost the same language. But they were still heathens, and therefore they hated the Christian English; and whenever they got a chance, they burned the churches and monasteries and slew the monks.

The first parties of Danes who landed came for

plunder, and when they had obtained it, sailed away again, and carried the news of what they had seen to their countrymen across the ocean. After this, the Northmen were no longer satisfied with their own cold and bleak shores. They determined to conquer England.



Alfred in Hiding

At intervals, for over two hundred years, the terrible struggle went on.

Over thirty years had passed away since the death of Egbert. Wessex was the only kingdom which the Danes had not yet quite overrun, and they were gathering round it on all sides, like wolves to the feast. It was

at this time of dire distress that Alfred, grandson of Egbert, and greatest of all the old English kings, came to the throne.

At first he had many battles to fight with the Danes, who obliged him in the year 878 to take refuge in the huts of the poor peasantry in the forests and swamps of Somersetshire. In this wild and lonely spot, disguised in the coarse dress of a peasant, Alfred remained for several months, waiting for happier times. At last he found himself strong enough to come forth from his place of concealment, and give battle to the foe.

The main army of the Danes was encamped on a hill in Wiltshire. Before attacking them, however, Alfred, it is said, resolved to visit their camp himself, in the disguise of a wandering minstrel, in order to learn their strength. The Danes, little thinking who their guest really was, treated him kindly, and he in turn did all he could to please them. Having seen all he wished to see, the minstrel took his departure, and returned to his followers, who were glad to see him again in safety after his daring adventure.

ALFRED'S GREATNESS

The day had at last arrived which was to decide the fate of Wessex. Not expecting an attack, many of the Danes had left their camp on the summit of the hill, and spread themselves in careless groups over the plain of Edington. At the head of his brave troops, Alfred rushed forward to separate them from their camp. The Danes were completely taken by surprise; and although they fought with all their old bravery, Alfred obtained

a signal victory over them. So complete was their overthrow that they were obliged to beg for peace.

Alfred was not strong enough to drive them entirely out of the country, so he offered them a large part of the east and north of England to live in, on condition that they became Christians. The Danish chief, Guthrum, together with many of his followers, accepted these terms, and were baptized into the Christian faith. They afterwards settled down quietly in the lands set apart for them.

His people had suffered greatly during the terrible struggle with the Danes, and to restore his kingdom to happiness and prosperity was the great aim of Alfred's after-life. The first thing needed was to make his country safe from invasion. He therefore built strong castles and forts, and trained his subjects in the art of war. Above all, he had vessels built for the purpose of meeting the Danes on the ocean, and thus revived the old seafaring spirit of his people.

Alfred also made a collection of the best laws of the older kings, and appointed just judges to see them properly carried out. Under his wise rule, towns and villages began to rise from their ruins once more; churches and monasteries were rebuilt; the husbandman returned to his tillage, the shepherd to his flocks and herds, and the country entered upon a long course of peace and prosperity.

Alfred likewise encouraged learning by building schools, and by inviting learned men from other countries to come and live at his court. He himself translated certain books from Latin into English, so that not only the clergy, but also the common people, might be able

to read them. Among these were several portions of the Holy Scriptures, and the Venerable Bede's *History*.

In order that he might have time for all these good works, Alfred never wasted an hour, dividing the day into equal portions, each of which had its appointed task. Thus, although he did not live to be old—for he died at the age of fifty-two—no king ever did more for the good of his subjects, or was more deserving of the title "Great."

7. THE DANISH CONQUEST

For seventy-seven years after the death of the great Alfred, England was, on the whole, prosperous. Those Danes who were already settled in the east and north did, indeed, give some trouble at times, by trying to set up a separate kingdom of their own; but there were no more invasions of foreign Danes during that period.

During these seventy-seven years, seven kings, all descendants of Alfred, reigned in England. The first of them was Edward the Elder, Alfred's son. He had a good deal of fighting to go through with the Danes who were settled in the country, but in the end he overcame them, and ruled over them. He was the first king who styled himself "King of England."

After Edward came the great Athelstan, his son. Towards the end of his reign, the Danes, with the Scots and the Welsh, formed a league against him. But in a great battle in the north of England, fought in the year 937, Athelstan defeated them so completely that they never again became formidable during the time of the "Seven Kings."

Another famous king during this period was Edgar the Peaceful, so called because his reign was tranquil and happy. His fleets swept the seas so that foreign enemies did not dare to approach. He regularly made journeys through the country to see that the laws were properly carried out. Both the Scottish and Welsh princes did homage to him as their overlord; and we are told that on



Edgar being rowed on the Dee by eight Under-Kings

one occasion he was rowed down the river Dee by eight under-kings.

The most remarkable man in England during the time of the "Seven Kings" was Dunstan—monk, abbot, and archbishop. He became the chief minister of the kings of England, and proved himself to be the wisest and ablest man in the country. King Edgar promoted him to be Archbishop of Canterbury, and made him his trusted friend and adviser.

The "seventy-seven prosperous years" were followed

by a time of great distress. Ethelred the Unready occupied the throne from 978 to 1016, and throughout the greater part of his long reign the Danes tried to conquer the country. Instead of facing them boldly, like Alfred or Athelstan, Ethelred adopted the foolish and cowardly practice of bribing them to go away by giving them large sums of money. In order to raise this money, he was obliged to lay a hateful tax upon his subjects, called Dane-geld.

As might have been expected, the hope of receiving money tempted the Danes to return in greater numbers than ever. At his wits' end, Ethelred then formed the cruel plan of putting to death all the Danes within his dominions, on St Brice's Day (13th November), 1002. On the appointed day, large numbers of the hated Danes, of both sexes and all ages, were slain in cold blood.

As soon as the news of this cruel deed reached King Sweyn in Denmark, he vowed never to rest till he had conquered England. He kept his word. Year after year fresh bands of Danes kept coming, till the country was gradually overrun by them; and Ethelred fled for safety to the court of Normandy. Although Sweyn had succeeded in conquering England, he did not live to become king himself. He died in the hour of his triumph, leaving his conquests to his son Canute.

Then followed a fierce contest for the kingdom between Canute and Edmund Ironside, the son of Ethelred. At last, after six pitched battles had been fought, they agreed to a division of the kingdom, the English holding the counties south of the Thames, while the Danes held those north of that river. Shortly after

this Edmund died and Canute became king of the whole country.

Canute ruled over all his subjects with equal justice, and did much to blend Englishmen and Danes into one nation. He was a great warrior, and conquered Norway. He was thus king, at one and the same time, of England, Denmark, and Norway; but he seems to have liked his kingdom of England best.

Canute died in the year 1035. The time of Danish rule lasted seven years longer, under his two sons, and then the old line of kings was restored in the person of Edward son of Ethelred the Unready.

8. EDWARD THE CONFESSOR AND HAROLD

1042-1066

Edward, afterwards surnamed the Confessor on account of his saintly character, had lived so long in Normandy that he was more like a Norman than an Englishman. Normandy was a fine, large province in the north of France. Its people were descendants of the famous sea-king Rolf and his followers, who had settled in it more than a hundred years before.

The Normans had greatly improved in many ways since Rolf's time, and were now as different from their ancestors as the smiling and fertile province of Normandy was different from their old and rugged home in the north. They had given up their old language, had learned to speak French, and were as accomplished in the arts of peace as they were brave and expert in war.

When Edward came to England, he did not take well

to the ways of the islanders, who were rough and uncouth compared with the more polished Normans. He therefore brought over from Normandy great numbers of his old friends, and raised many of them to high offices in Church and State. This gave great offence to his English subjects, and especially to Godwin, Earl of Wessex, his father-in-law, who was the most powerful man in the country during the first half of Edward's reign.

As may be supposed, the Norman friends of Edward both hated and feared Godwin, and did all they could to set the king against him; once, indeed, they succeeded in getting him and his sons banished for a short time, but they were soon restored to favour. During Godwin's absence from the kingdom, King Edward had a remarkable visitor. This was his half-cousin, the famous Duke William of Normandy. It is said that during this visit the King promised to leave the crown to William. Whether this was really so or not, William seems from that time to have set his mind upon becoming King of England some day.

After Earl Godwin's death, his son Harold became the King's chief adviser. Edward himself was better suited to be a priest than a monarch, and the affairs of the nation were chiefly managed by Harold. It is said that on one occasion Harold, having been wrecked on the coast of France, was taken to the Norman court. There he was detained by Duke William until a promise was wrung from him that he would assist the Duke in securing the crown of England. This promise Harold was made to repeat while his hand rested on a covered chest. But the chest, when opened, was seen to contain relics of the

saints, and Harold found that he had been tricked into making a more solemn promise than he intended.

After the death of Edward, the Council of Wise Men, called the Witan, met and chose Harold as king. He was not of the royal family, but he was by far the ablest



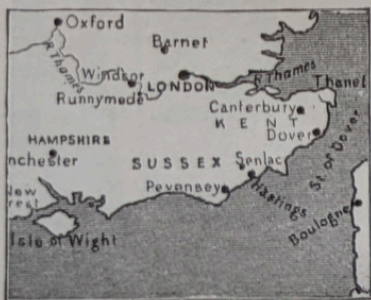
Harold's Oath

Englishman of the time. William of Normandy also laid claim to the throne, and upon Harold's refusing to yield in his favour, collected a large army to invade England and take the crown by force. He built a numerous fleet of ships; and by the promise of great rewards when

England should be conquered, he drew to his standard bands of adventurers from all parts of France.

Harold prepared to oppose William's landing; but just at this time he had to meet a new enemy. His brother Tostig had turned traitor to him, and having obtained the help of the King of Norway and an army of Northmen, sailed up the Humber, and captured the city of York. Harold at once marched northwards, and gained a complete victory at Stamford Bridge, both Tostig and the King of Norway being slain.

After his victory, Harold marched to York to rest his army. While he was sitting at a banquet with his nobles, the clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard outside. The door was thrown open, and a messenger entered with the evil tidings that William and his Norman host had



landed at Pevensey, on the shore of Sussex (September 29, 1066). Nothing daunted, Harold rallied his men, and marched southward with all speed. In a few days he was in London; and within a week after that he was posted

on the famous hill of Senlac, within seven miles of the Norman army, prepared to make a stand for his life, his crown, and his country.

THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS (1066)

The battle which took place was one of the most deadly ever fought on English ground. Harold acted the part of a wise general in posting his army on the brow of a



The Battle of Hastings

hill, with woods and marshes on each side. To make his position still stronger, a barricade, made of earth, stones, and trunks of trees, had been raised in front, to break the charge of the Norman horsemen.

Right in the centre of the hill was pitched Harold's own standard—the figure of a fighting man, glittering with gold and precious stones. Beneath and around, under Harold himself and his two brothers, were ranged the victors of Stamford Bridge, standing foot to foot and shoulder to shoulder, as gallant a band as ever defended hearth and home.

Very soon the Normans, who were three times as numerous as the English, were seen advancing to the attack. On they came in three lines—archers, heavily armed foot-soldiers, and knights sheathed from head to foot in armour. A shower of arrows commenced the attack, and soon the combatants got to close quarters. Long and fiercely the Normans strove to break through the barricade, but in vain. Down went footmen and horsemen beneath the sweep of the terrible English battle-axes, which went crashing through helmets and shields and breastplates at every stroke; and all who tried to scale the rampart were soon stretched on the ground, to rise no more.

Time after time the Normans charged desperately against the English lines. William himself displayed the greatest valour in these attacks, having three horses killed under him, and using his heavy iron mace with terrible effect. But in spite of all his efforts, the main body of the English still stood as firm as a rock.

At last, in order to draw the English from their ranks, the crafty William ordered his troops to feign a retreat.

The ruse succeeded. Many of the English rushed down the hill in pursuit. The Normans, at a given signal, turned upon their pursuers, put them to flight, and forced a way through the barricade.

The struggle, however, was not yet over. The English still continued to fight bravely in scattered groups, and especially round their King and standard. Every man of this gallant band, which included the King's two faithful brothers, sold his life dearly, and died the death of a hero.

Night was fast approaching when William ordered his archers to shoot up in the air, so that their arrows might fall upon the faces of the English, whose breasts were covered by their shields. By this means many a brave Englishman was slain, and the King himself was pierced through the eye. Thus, at last, covered with wounds, fell the mighty Harold, surrounded by heaps of Norman dead.

9. CONDITION OF THE ENGLISH BEFORE THE NORMAN CONQUEST

The old English people were divided into three classes—the nobles, the churls, and the slaves. The king, of course, was the head of the nobles, and was chosen, as we have seen, by the Witan. Witan simply meant "wise men." This was at first an assembly of all the freemen of the country; but it was generally only the leading men, such as the bishops and nobles, who attended. They usually met together three times a year, and assisted the king in framing laws and governing the country. The king's wife was called "the lady."