

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

EDMUND IRONSIDES—CANUTE—HAROLD HAREFOOT—HARDICANUTE—EDWARD THE CONFESSOR—HAROLD— THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS.

ON the decease of Ethelred the citizens of London offered the throne to his son Edmund, who had got the strange nickname of Ironsides, He obtained this appellation from his extreme toughness; for it has been said by a contemporary that if you gave him a poke in the ribs they rattled like the bars of a gridiron, or the railings round an area, There can be no doubt that Edmund had strength on his side, as far as he was personally concerned, but Canute, or as some called him, C'nute and 'Cute, often overreached young Ironsides in cunning.

In one of their battles—the fifth of a series—the Danes were on the point of defeat, when Edric, whom Edmund, however hard in the ribs, was soft enough in the head to trust after former treachery, raised the cry that the young leader had fallen.

By some ingenious contrivance, Edrio had cut off somebody's head which resembled Edmund in features, and, perhaps,

improving the likeness with burnt cork or other preparations, raised it on a spear in the field, exclaiming "Flee, English! flee, English! dead is Edmund." The whole army became paralysed at the sight, and even Ironsides himself was completely put out of countenance, for he was unable to tell at the moment whether his head was really upon his own shoulders. How Edric could have had the face to practise such an imposition may puzzle the reader of the present day; but it was exceedingly likely that the trick would be aided by Edmund undergoing, as he no doubt would at the moment, a sudden change of countenance.

These are the very words, exactly as they have been preserved Vide Sir F. Palgrave, chapter xliii.



Ironsides, though for the moment put to flight, having been as it were frightened at his own shadow, found on reflection, in the first piece of water he came to, that his head was in its right place, though his heart had slightly failed him, and he consequently paused in his retreat, and met Canute face to face, on the road to Gloucestershire. Ironsides, stepping forward in front of his army, made the cool proposition to Canute that instead of risking the lives of so many brave men, they should settle the quarrel by single combat. Considering that Edmund had not only the advantage of patent-safety sides, which rendered him nearly battle-axe proof, but was also about twice the height of his antagonist, it is not surprising that Canute declined coming in immediate contact with the metallic plates, which would have acted as a powerful battery upon the diminutive Dane. Had he accepted the crafty challenge, every blow inflicted on Ironsides would have been a severe rap on the knuckles to Canute, who might as well have run his head against a brick wall as engage in a single combat with a person of such undoubted metal. It was, however, agreed that they should divide the realm, and though as a general rule it is not advisable to do anything by halves, this arrangement was decidedly

beneficial to all parties. The armies were both delighted at the proposal, and their joy affords proof that their discretion formed a great deal more than the better part of their valour.

Canute took the north, and Edmund the south, with a nominal superiority over the former, so that the crown is said by the chroniclers to have belonged to Ironsides.

It was certainly better that the ascendancy should have been given to one of the two, for if their territory had been equal the crown must have been divided, and he that had the thickest head might have claimed the larger share of the regal diadem. Edmund lived only two months after the agreement had been signed, and as Canute took the benefit of survivorship, it has been good-naturedly suggested that he must have been either the actual or virtual murderer of Ironsides. There are only one or two facts which spoil this ingenious and amiable theory; the first of which is, that there is no proof of his having been killed at all,—an uncertainty that is quite sufficient to allow the benefit of the doubt to those who have been named as his murderers. Hume has, without hesitation, appointed Oxford as the scene of the assassination, and has been kind enough to select two chamberlains as the perpetrators of the deed, but we have been unable to collect sufficient evidence to go to a jury against the anonymous chamberlains, whom we beg leave to dismiss with the comfortable assurance that they quit these pages without any stain on their characters. Canute, as the succeeding partner in the late firm of Edmund and Canute, found himself, in 1017, all alone in his glory on the British throne. His first care was to call a public meeting of “bishops,” “duces,” and “optimates,” at which he voted himself into the chair; and he caused it to be proposed and seconded that he should be king to the exclusion of all the descendants of Ethelred. There can be no doubt that the meeting was packed, for every proposition of Canute was received with loud cries of “hear,” and repeated cheers. Strong resolutions were passed

against Edwy, the grown-up brother of Edmund Ironsides. Proceedings were instantly commenced; he was declared an outlaw, and was soon taken in execution in the then usual form.

Edmund and Edwy, the two infant sons of Ironsides, were protected by the plea of infancy; but Canute sent them out to dry-nurse to the king of the Swedes, with an intimation that if their mouths could be stopped by Swedish turnips, or anything else, the arrangement would be satisfactory to the English monarch. His Swedish majesty, whether moved by pity or actuated by the feeling of "None of my child," sent the babies on to Hungary, where they were taken in, but not done for, as Canute had desired. The little Edmund died early, but his brother Edward settled respectably in life, married a relation of the Emperor of Germany, became a family man, and one of his daughters was subsequently a Mrs. Malcolm, the lady of Malcolm, king of Scotland.

Edmund and Alfred, the other sons of Ethelred by Emma of Normandy, who were still living with their uncle Robert, had a sort of lawyer's letter written in their name to Canute, threatening an action of trover for the sceptre, unless it were immediately restored.

After offering a moiety—being equal to a composition of ten shillings in the pound—he proposed to settle the matter by marrying their mamma, who consented to this arrangement; and the claims of the infants were never heard of again. Neglected by their mother, they forgot their mother tongue—they grew up Normans instead of Saxons, say the old chroniclers, which seems to be going a little too far, for a Saxon cannot become a Norman by living in Normandy, any more than a man becomes a horse by residence in a stable.

After triumphing over his enemies, Canute somewhat altered for the better, and became a quiet, gentlemanly, but rather jovial man. He was fond of music, patronised vocalists, and occasionally wrote ballads, one of which is still preserved.

As it was said of a certain performer, that he would have been a good actor if he had been possessed of figure, voice, action,

expression, and intelligence; so we may say of Canute, that if he had known anything of sense or syntax, if he had been happy at description, or possessed the slightest share of imagination, he would have been a very fair poet.

A portion of one of Canute's once popular ballads has been preserved, and if the other verses resembled the one that has come down to us, there is no reason to regret that the rest is out of print and that nobody has kept the manuscript.

The following is the queer quatrain which remains as the sole specimen of his majesty's poetical abilities:—

“Merrily sing the monks within Ely, When C'nute King rowed there by;
Row, my knights, row near the land, And hear we these monks sing.” This dismal distich is said to have been suggested by his hearing the solemn monastic music of the choir as he rowed near the Minster of Ely; but we suspect the song must have been rather of a secular kind, or the term merrily would have been exceedingly inappropriate.

Some writers have endeavoured to justify the royal author or vindicate the characters of the monks of Ely, by saying, that in those days “merry” meant “sad.” These gentlemen might just as well argue that black meant white—aproposition some people would not hesitate to put forth as a plea for the errors of royalty. About the year 1017, Edric, the royal favourite, evinced some disposition to strike for an advance of salary, when Canute resisting the demand, the king and the courtier came to high words. Eric of Northumbria, who happened to be sitting in the room with his battle-axe,—which was in those days as common a companion as an umbrella or a walking-stick in the present age,—got up, on a hint from the king, and axed the miserable Edric to death.

Canute, who was also king of the Danes, the Swedes,—whose sovereign was his vassal—and of the Northmen, had many turbulent subjects abroad as well as at home, but he was in the habit of employing one against the other, so that it was utterly immaterial to him which of them were slain, so that he



got rid of some of them. He kept a strong hand over his Danish earls, and even his nephew, "the doughty Haco," though why he should have been called "doughty," is a matter of much doubt—was exiled for disregard of the royal authority.

The Swedes, who were always boiling over, got at last completely mashed by Earl Godwin; and the kings of Fife, who, although mere *piccoli*, were monarchs of some note, having exerted themselves in a melancholy strain for independence, at length fell, for the sake of harmony, into the general submission to Canute. Six nations were now reduced into one general subordi—nation to the English king, who of course became the object of the grossest flattery, and upon one memorable occasion was nearly sacrificed to the puffing system of his injudicious friends. One day, when in the plenitude of his power, he caused the throne to be removed from the throne-room and erected, during low tide, on the sea-shore. Having taken his seat, surrounded by his courtiers, he issued a proclamation to the ocean, forbidding it to rise, and commanding it not, on any account, to leave its bed until his

permission for it to get up was graciously awarded. The courtiers backed the royal edict, and encouraged with the grossest adulation this first great practical attempt to prove that Britannia rules the waves. Such a rule, however, was soon proved to be nothing better than a rule nisi, which it is impossible to make absolute when opposed by Neptune's irresistible motion of course. Every wave of Canute's sceptre was answered by a wave from the sea, and the courtiers, who were already up to their ankles in salt water, began to fear that they should soon be pickled in the foaming brine.

At length the monarch himself found his footstool disposed to go on swimmingly of its own accord, and there was every prospect that the whole party would undergo the ceremony of an immediate investiture of the bath. The sovereign, who was very lightly shod, soon found that his pumps were not capable of getting rid of the water, which was now rising very rapidly. Having sat with his feet in the sea for a few minutes, and not relishing the slight specimen of hydropathic treatment he had endured, he jumped suddenly up, and began to abuse his courtiers for the mess into which he had been betrayed by their outrageous flattery.



One of the attendants who had remained at the back of the others during this ridiculous scene, observed drily, that the whole party would have been inevitably washed and done for, if Canute had not made a timely retreat. The sovereign was so humbled by this incident, that he took off his crown upon the spot, made a parcel of it at once, forwarded it to Winchester Cathedral, and never wore it again.

Water, as we all know, can subdue the strongest spirit, and though the spirit of Canute could bear a great deal of mixing, it is evident that the sea had shown him his own weakness. In the year 1030 he went on a pilgrimage to Rome, with no other staff than a wooden one in his hand; and instead of a valet to follow him, he had a simple wallet at his back. From a letter he wrote to his bishops while abroad, it would seem that he received presents of "vases of gold and vessels of silver, and stuffs, and garments of great price;" so that by the time he got home again, his wallet must have been a tolerable burden for the royal back. He died at Shaftesbury, in 1035, about three years after his return from Rome, and was buried at Winchester; so that he finally laid his head where his crown had been already deposited.

On the death of Canute there was the usual difficulty as to what was to be done with the British crown; for there were two or three who thought the cap fitted themselves, and who consequently claimed the right to wear it. There is no doubt that Hardicanute, the only legitimate son of the late king, would have tried it on had it not been left by will to Harold, while his brother Sweyn was the legatee of Norway. A compromise was, however, effected, by which Harold took everything north of the Thames, including, of course, the Baker Street and Finsbury districts, while Hardicanute, to whom Denmark had been bequeathed, took the territories on the south shore, commencing in the Belvidere Road, Lambeth, and terminating at the southern extremity of the kingdom. He however, left his English dominions to the management of his mother and Earl Godwin, while

he himself lingered in Denmark; on account of the convivial habits of the Scandinavian chiefs; for Hardicanute drank, as the phrase goes, “like a fish,” though the liquid he imbibed was very different from that which the finny tribe are addicted to.

Edward and Alfred, the two sons of Ethelred, had come over to be in the way in case of anything turning up on the death of Canute, but Edward finding himself rather too much in the way, and fearing an unpleasant removal, took a return ticket for himself and party for Normandy. Alfred, after vainly attempting to land at Sandwich, happily thought of Heme Bay, and though it was in the height of the season, he of course found no one there to resist his progress. Having ventured up to Guildford on the invitation of Godwin, Alfred and his soldiers found a sumptuous repast and comfortable lodgings

prepared for them. But Godwin had been more downy even than the beds, and the soldiers having been seized and imprisoned found wet blankets thrown on their hopes of hospitable treatment. Edward himself was cruelly murdered, and Harold, who was called

Harefoot, from the speed with which he could ran, was now able to walk over the course, for there was no opposition to him in the race for the stakes of Royalty. He was fond of nothing but hunting, and as he could catch a hare by his own velocity he generally had the game in his own hands. He died a.d. 1040, after a short reign of four years; and though, if he had lived to old age, he might have proved a good sovereign in the long-run, he was certainly not happy in the walk of life where fortune had placed him.

Hardicanute, a name signifying Canute the Hardy, or the tough, came over on the death of Harold; but with all his toughness he evinced or assumed some tenderness at the cruel fate of his brother Alfred, He showed his sympathy for one by brutality towards another, and subjected Harold’s memory to the most barbarous indignities. Godwin, fearing that he might share the obloquy of his former master, propitiated Hardicanute by giving him a magnificent toy, consisting of a gilt ship, with a crew of eighty men,

each having a bracelet of pure gold weighing sixteen ounces, and dressed in the most valuable habiliments. The new king no doubt melted the gold very speedily in drink, to which he was so much addicted, that he actually died intoxicated at a party given at Clapham, by one Clapa, from whose name, or home, that suburb was called. His majesty was, according to the chroniclers, "on his legs," and the waiters had of course left the room, when Hardicanute unable to get further than

"Gentlemen," staggered into his seat, and was carried out mortally inebriated.

Other historians say in so many words, that "he died drunk." We prefer using the milder expression of "mortally inebriated," The throne being now vacant, Edward, the half-brother of the late king, who happened to be on the spot, was induced to step up and take a seat, though he was the senior of the late sovereign. In those days, however, the rules of hereditary descent were not very rigidly followed, for it was success that chiefly regulated succession. Edward's cause had, however, derived much support from Earl Godwin, the most extraordinary teetotum of former times. He had practised the political *chassez croisser* to an extent that even in our own days has seldom been surpassed, He had turned his coat so frequently that he had lost all consciousness of which was the right side and which the wrong; but he always treated that side as the right which happened to be uppermost.

Godwin had, it is said, commenced life as a cowboy, but he soon raised himself above the low herd, and eventually succeeded in making his daughter Editha the queen of Edward.

The king, who had lived much in Normandy, and had derived some assistance from Duke William, afterwards the Conqueror, had formed many Norman predilections, which created jealousy among his Saxon subjects. In 1061, he had received as a visitor his brother-in-law, one Eustace, Count of Boulogne, who, on returning home with his followers through Dover, insolently demanded gratuitous lodgings of one of the inhabitants.



The Dover people, who are still remarkable for their high charges, and who seldom think of providing a cup of tea under two shillings, or a bed for less than half-a-crown, resisted the demands of Eustace and his friends, when a fight ensued, and the Normans were compelled to make the best of their way out of the neighbourhood.

Eustace, still smarting under the blows he had received, ran howling to Edward, like a boy who, upon receiving a thrashing, flies to his big brother for redress. The king desired Godwin, who was governor of Dover, to chastise the place; but the earl positively refused, and insisted that the Count of Boulogne could not complain if, when he required to be served gratuitously, he had got regularly served out. Edward, irritated at this message, prepared for war, and Godwin, who was joined by his sons, Sweyn and Harold, had collected a powerful army; but when it came to the point, the soldiers on both sides gave evident symptoms of a desire to see the matter amicably arranged. As the king's forces consisted chiefly of the fryd or militia, there can be little doubt where the panic commenced; and Godwin's men, recognising among the foe some of their fellow-countrymen trembling from head to foot,

immediately commenced shaking hands, so that there was an end to all firmness on both sides. A truce was consequently concluded, and the disputes of the parties referred to the arbitration of the Witenagemote; who doomed Sweyn to outlawry, and Godwin and Harold to banishment. Thus the “king’s darlings,” as they had been called, were disposed of, and the pets became the object of petty vengeance. Editha, the daughter of Godwin, shared in the general disgrace of her family; for the king, her husband, “reduced her,” say the chroniclers, “to her last groat;” and with this miserable fourpence she was consigned to a monastery, where she was waited on by one servant of all-work, and controlled by the abbess, who was the sister of her royal tyrant. Edward being now released from the presence of Godwin, began to think of seeing his friends, and invited William of Normandy to spend a few months at the English court. He came with a numerous retinue, and finding most of the high offices in the possession of Normans, he was able to feel himself perfectly at home. On the conclusion of his stay he departed, with a gift of horses, hounds, and hawks; in fact, a miniature menagerie, which had been presented to him by his host, without considering the inconvenience occasioned by adding “a happy family” to the luggage of the Norman visitor.

Edward was not allowed much leisure, for his guest had no sooner departed, than he found himself threatened by Earls Godwin and Harold, who sailed up to London, and landed a large army in the Strand. This important thoroughfare, which has been in modern times so frequently blockaded, was stopped up at that early period by men who were paving their way to power; so that pavours of some kind have for ages been a nuisance to the neighbourhood.

Edward agreed to a truce, by which Godwin and his sons were restored to their rank; but the earl, while dining soon afterwards with Edward at Windsor, was, according to some, choked in the voracious endeavour to swallow a tremendous mouthful. Thus

perished, from an appetite larger than his windpipe, one of the most illustrious characters of his age. Harold, his son, succeeded him in his titles and estates; but as the latter are said to have consisted chiefly of the Goodwin Sands, the legatee could not hope to keep his head above water on such an inheritance. Harold commenced his career by worrying Algar, a rival earl, who got worried to death (a.d. 1059), and he then turned his attention to the father-in-law of his victim, one Griffith, a Welsh sovereign, whose army not liking the bother of war, cut off his head and sent it as a peace-offering to the opposite leader. This unceremonious manner of breaking the neck of a difficulty by decapitating their king, says more for the decision than the loyalty of the Welsh people.



It was not long after this circumstance, that Harold, going out in a fishing-boat on the coast of Sussex with one or two bungling mariners, got carried out to sea, and was ultimately washed ashore like an old blacking-bottle in the territory of Guy, Count of Ponthieu. Having been picked up by the count, poor Harold was treated as a waif, and impounded until a heavy sum was paid for his ransom. William of Normandy,

upon hearing that an earl and retinue were pawned in the distinguished name of Harold, good-naturedly redeemed them, at a great expense, but made the English earl solemnly pledge himself to assist his deliverer in obtaining the English crown at the death of Edward. The king expired on the 5th of January, 1066, leaving the crown to William, according to some, and to Harold, according to others; but as no will was ever found, it is probable enough that he agreed to leave the kingdom first to one and then to the other, according to which happened to have at the moment the ear of the sovereign.

This Edward was generally called the Confessor, but how he got the name we are unable to say with certainty. It has been ingeniously suggested that it was on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle, and that he was called the Confessor, from his never confessing anything.

Harold, forgetting the circumstance of his awkward predicament in the fishing-boat, and ungrateful of William's services, immediately assumed the title of king, and got his coronation over the very same evening. It is even believed by some that the ceremony was so hastily performed as to have been a mere tête-à-tête affair between Stigand, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the new sovereign.

When William received the news of Harold's accession he was having a game with a bow and arrows in his hunting-ground near Rouen. His trembling knees suddenly took the form of his bow, and his lip began to quiver. He threw himself hastily into a skiff, and crossing the Seine, never stopped till he reached his palace, where he walked up and down the hall several times, occasionally sitting down for a moment in the porter's chair, then starting up and resuming his promenade up and down the passage. On recovering from his reverie he sent ambassadors to demand of Harold the fulfilment of his promise; but that dishonest person replied, that he being under duress when he gave his word, it could not be considered binding.



William accordingly called a public meeting of Normans, at which it was resolved unanimously, that England should be invaded as speedily as possible. A subscription was immediately entered into to defray the cost, and volunteers were admitted to join the expedition without the formality of a reference.

Tag from Maine and Anjou, Rag from Poitou and Bretagne, with Bob-tail from Flanders, came rapidly pouring in; while the riff of the Rhine, and the raff of the Alps, formed altogether a mob of the most miscellaneous character. Those families who are in the habit of boasting that their ancestors came in with the Conqueror, would scarcely feel so proud of the fact if they were aware that the companions of William comprised nearly all the roguery and vagabondism of Europe.

A large fleet having been for some time in readiness at St. Valery, near Dieppe, crossed in the autumn of 1066, and on the 28th of September the Normans landed without opposition at Pevensey, near Hastings. William, who was the last to step on shore, fell flat upon his hands and face, which was at first considered by the soldiers as an evil omen; but opening his palm, which was covered with mud, he gaily exclaimed, "Thus do I lay my hands upon this ground—and be assured that it is a pie

you shall all have a finger in." This speech, or words to the same effect, restored the confidence of the soldiers, and they marched to Hastings, where they waited the coming of the enemy.

Harold, who had come to London, left town by night for the Sussex coast, and halted at Battle, where the English forces kept it up for two or three days and nights with Bongs and revelry. At length, on Saturday, the 14th of October, William gave the word to advance, when a gigantic Norman, called Taillefer, who was a minstrel and a juggler, went forward to execute a variety of tricks, such as throwing up his sword with one hand and catching it with the other; balancing his battle-axe on the tip of his chin; standing on his head upon the point of his spear, and performing other feats of pantomimic dexterity.

He next proceeded to sing a popular ballad, and having asked permission to strike the first blow, he succeeded in making a tremendous hit; but some one happening to return the compliment, he was very soon quieted.

The men of London, who formed the bodyguard of Harold, made a snug and impenetrable barrier with their shields, under which they nestled very cosily.

Some of them, who were buried under their bucklers, may have been inhabitants of Bucklersbury, which may have derived its name from the practice we have described.

From nine in the morning till nine in the afternoon the Normans continued watching for the English to emerge from under their shields, as a cat waits for a mouse to quit its hiding-place.

As the mouse refuses to come to the scratch, so the Londoners declined to quit their snuggery, until William had the happy idea of ordering his bowmen to shoot into the air; and they were thus down upon the foe, with considerable effect, by the falling of the arrows. Still the English stood firm until William, by a pretended retreat, induced the soldiers of Harold to quit their position of safety.



Three times were the Saxon snails tempted to come out of their shells by this crafty manouvre, but their courage was still unshaken, until an arrow, shot at random, hit Harold in the left eye, when his dispirited followers fled like winking. The English king was carried to the foot of the standard, where a few of his soldiers formed round him a little party of Protectionists, William fought with desperate valour, and was advancing towards the banner, when an English billman drew a bill which he made payable at sight on the head of the Duke of Normandy. Fortunately the precious metal of William's helmet was sufficient to meet the bill, which must otherwise have crushed the Norman leader. Harold, whose spirit never deserted him, observed with reference to the wound in his eye, that it was a bad look-out, but he must make the best of it. At length he fell exhausted, when the English having lost their banner, found their energies beginning to flag, and William became the Conqueror.