THIS PAMPHLET IS NUMBER 2 IN THE
1066 COMMEMORATION SERIES

HON. GENERAL EDITOR: W. P. COAKLEY

Published 1966 by the Hastings and Bexhill Branch of the Historical Association

Reprinted 1971 by the Historical Association

Printed in Great Britain by Oscar Blackford Ltd., London and Truro

Copies may be obtained at 30p each (post free) from the Secretary of the Historical Association, 59a Kennington Park Road, London, S.E.11 or through any bookseller.

Harold son of Godwin

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THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
HASTINGS AND BEXHILL BRANCH
1966

Reprinted
THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
1971

OUR THANKS are due to Dr. Henry Loyn now Professor of Mediaeval History at University College, Cardiff for permission to reprint this pamphlet as one of the publications of the Association and to Mr. Peter Coakley for his ready agreement.

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Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest
(Longmans, 1962)

The Norman Conquest
(Hutchinson, 1965)

Norman Britain (with Alan Sorrell)
(Lutterworth, 1966)

Alfred the Great
(Oxford: Clarendon, 1967),

and essays mostly on Anglo-Saxon and Norman history.

30.11.70. E.D.H.

Harold, Son of Godwin

To lecture on Harold Godwinson, earl of Wessex, King Harold II of England, in the year 1966 at Hastings is a presumption. We appear to know much about him, and yet in fact there are many gaps in knowledge. Much information, so plausible at first sight, proves unreliable on closer investigation. Edward the Confessor and William the Conqueror are both better subjects for the biographer. Harold had one disastrous attribute. He aroused the partisan feeling of the victorious side. The result is a variety and confusion in later assessments. One formidable shadow falls on all recent workers on Harold—that of the Victorian scholar, Edward Augustus Freeman. Freeman's faults are well known. It is pleasing to see his virtues increasingly appreciated, the ability to tell a fine story, the rhetoric, the breadth of knowledge especially of the chroniclers, the accuracy in citation. But Freeman is at his most unreliable in relation to Godwin and his son Harold. Godwin was credited with the qualities of William Ewart Gladstone—'endowed with all the highest attributes of the statesman . . . the great minister, the unrivalled parliamentary leader, the man who could sway councils and assemblies at his will'.[1] Harold was equally idealised. Freeman's view is summed up in the following eulogy, prompted by the thought that Harold may have been buried at Waltham, and that Edward I's body rested there on the way south to Westminster:[2]

> "But for a while the two heroes lay side by side—the last and the first of the English kings, between whom none deserved the English name or could claim honour or gratitude from the English nation. The one was the last king who reigned purely by the will of the people without any claim either of conquest or of hereditary right. The other was the first king who reigned purely as the son of his father, the first who succeeded without competitor or interregnum. But each alike, as none between them did, deserved the love and trust of the people over whom they reigned. With Harold our native kingship ends . . . In Edward the line of English kings begins once more . . . All between

them were Normans or Angevins, careless of England and her people . . . The king with whom England fell greeted his first true successor in the king with whom she rose again. Such were the men who met in death within the now vanished choir of Waltham. And in the whole course of English history we hardly come across a scene which speaks more deeply to the heart, than when the first founder of our later greatness was laid by the side of the last kingly champion of our earliest freedom—when the body of Edward was laid, if only for a short space, by the side of Harold, the son of Godwine."

Harold to Freeman was a Carlyle hero—the last kingly champion of our earliest freedom. No wonder we react—sometimes too far. Harold deserves his share of tragic grandeur. But where do we turn for a reliable body of evidence relating to his career and character?

We cannot complain of lack of written material. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries showed great interest in Harold. Unfortunately even the best of their historians could do little more than copy with suitable embellishments and imaginative extensions the eleventh-century sources. These sources in turn suffer from a serious handicap. None of them can be treated as impartial. The English sources, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, the Life of King Edward, the now lost copy of the Chronicle used by the Worcester historians, treated Harold with natural sympathy. To the Normans Harold was the villain, the oath-breaker, perjurer and usurper, purse-proud and puffed up with the profits of pillage. Only the Bayeux Tapestry offered a distinctive variant on this theme, possibly for artistic reasons demanded in a visual *chanson de geste.*

The English sources themselves are complicated in their approach. Later English loyalties were attracted to others, to Waltheof or Hereward or the native dynasty, not to Godwin and his sons. Harold left no legitimate heir, and his illegitimate sons did not rise above the pirate level. The heirs of the House of Cerdic lived on, Edgar Atheling blockish but respectable, Margaret of Scotland a remarkable dominant woman in a remarkable age, St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland, mother of three Scottish kings. The house of Godwin was a pale shadow by the side of these illustrious survivors.

But even so enough remains. Domesday Book tried to deny Harold his kingly title but could not ignore the man.[3] There is some diplomatic evidence, mostly from the reign of the Confessor, charters and writs and wills. There are many coins. There is some

reasonable Chronicle material. A factual reconstruction of the course of Harold's career is possible, and the main chronological outline of his life is clear. We can begin with his ancestry. His father was Godwin, earl of Wessex, 1018-53, an Englishman but the right-hand man of Canute to whom, after an initial period of doubt, he owed fame and fortune. His mother was Gytha, sister-in-law of Canute, sister of the powerful Jarl Ulf who had married Estrith, Cnut's sister and mother of a line of Danish kings. Harold was their third child or just possibly their second if his sister Edith was younger than he. The eldest son was Sweyn, a figure straight from bloodstained saga. He seduced the abbess of Leominster in 1046. He slew his own cousin Beorn Estrithsson in 1049, and was outlawed and exiled for a year. His hot temper threatened the Godwin family with disaster from inside, and it was as well for them that he died young at Constantinople on his way home from pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Of the other children of Godwin and Gytha two were of especial importance. Their eldest daughter, Edith (who by God's grace shone above all others in counsel if she was heard[4]) was married to Edward the Confessor in 1045. The third son, Tostig, earl of Northumbria, 1055-65, proved a key figure in the circumstances of 1066. There were also other vigorous sons, two of whom, Leofwine and Gyrth, attained an earl's rank. One of the personal ironies of the situation is the fading into oblivion or obscurity of this vigorous kindred. Godwin and Gytha had nine children who are known to have survived into energetic manhood or womanhood. Yet their descendants even to the grandchild level are few and dubious.[5]

Harold was born in the early years of the 1020's, certainly not later than 1026 and probably in 1021 or 1022. His early manhood was full of promise. He had a powerful father, and was reckoned, while still a young man, worthy of an earl's rank. He witnessed as earl at the head of the Norfolk witnesses a will which is dated to 1044, or, at latest, 1045.[6] In a Charter of 1044 he subscribed as *nobilis.* Other subscriptions as *minister* are known, but from 1045 he appears in witness lists as *dux.*[7] He exercised his earl's office at this stage in East Anglia. During the exiles of his brother Sweyn he (together with Beorn) appears to have shared in the exercise of Sweyn's sphere of office. There was one serious weakness in the family's political position. King Edward's attitude to them was uncertain. Another saga-element enters the story. Edward had been

brought up, together with his younger brother Alfred, at the Norman court. After Canute's death Alfred made an unwise expedition to England, and was captured by Godwin who massacred his followers and handed the prince over to Harold Harefoot, son of Canute. Harold Harefoot had him blinded, and Alfred died of his injuries at Ely. Many blamed Godwin. Edward relied on Godwin to safeguard his throne, but a brother's death was not lightly to be forgotten.

It is probable, too, that the growing power and prosperity of Godwin's sons caused the king some alarm. Edward was not always the gentle, white-haired old man of some traditions. The *Vita Ædwardi* described him as a man of passionate temper and prompt and vigorous action.[8] Crisis came in 1051. A secular brawl involving the royal brother-in-law, Count Eustace of Boulogne, precipitated the quarrel between the king and the Godwins but behind it were bigger issues. In ecclesiastical matters Edward had been asserting himself. He had appointed to Canterbury Robert of Jumièges, chief of his Norman supporters, and he let the papal voice be heard in the subsequent vacancy in London. In political matters it is likely that Edward made in the course of 1051 some firm promise to Duke William to work for his succession to the throne of England. Much is still dark and dubious about the whole affair. The weight of evidence—predominantly Norman, it is true—favours the existence of such a promise, probably made verbally by Robert of Jumièges on Edward's behalf, as the archbishop travelled to Rome to receive his pallium in the early summer of 1051. To promise the succession was more than lay in the royal power. To acknowledge a strong claim, and to promise to work for the succession, would be acts more in accord with propriety and interest. Here in Normandy could be found a counterpoise to the threat of overmighty subjects. The headstrong Sweyn was still alive in 1051. Queen Elizabeth I, another childless monarch, found it not impolitic to have many candidates for the succession.[9]

The crisis erupted into a dramatic confrontation in Gloucestershire in September 1051. The king supported by the northern earls succeeded in holding a council. The Godwins rather than force the issue to battle, scattered and fled, some with Godwin to Flanders, others with Harold and Leofwine to Ireland. They recruited far and wide, returned under arms in the autumn of 1052, and were set up again in their earldoms, though perhaps on terms. A son and grandson of Godwin were held as hostages by Duke William of

Normandy, possibly as a pledge against acquiescence in the succession and possibly as a pledge for Edward's safety.[10] Godwin was received back at the royal court. He celebrated Easter 1053 with the king, and collapsed under a fatal stroke in the royal presence. Later chroniclers made most of the incident. It is said that the death of Alfred was mentioned. Godwin affirmed his innocence. Rashly he prayed:

> "May the morsel which I have in my hand
> choke me if I am guilty."[11]

It did.

The death of Godwin had no adverse effect on the fortunes of his house. Harold succeeded his father in the earldom of Wessex. There may have been a hint of hesitation on King Edward's part. The author of the *Vita Ædwardi* tells how the king agreed to the elevation "whereupon all the host of the English sighed with relief," but the writer proceeds to eulogise Harold as:

> 'a second Judas Maccabeus, a true friend of his race and country who wielded his father's powers even more actively, and walked in his ways, that is in patience and mercy and with kindness to men of good will. But disturbers of the peace, thieves and robbers, this champion of the law threatened with the terrible face of a lion.'[12]

There was a further reshuffle of the other earldoms. Aelfgar, son of the Mercian earl Leofric, succeeded to East Anglia before taking over what was regarded as his Mercian inheritance on Leofric's death in 1057. But the sons of Godwin were in the ascendant. In 1055 a fresh peak was reached when, on the death of Siward, earl of Northumbria, Tostig was appointed to the northern earldom.

In the ascendant they might be, but not supreme. The earls were great men. They were still subordinate. Harold himself was sent on an embassy to Flanders and the Rhineland in 1056, an embassy presumably instrumental in arranging the return of Edward Atheling, the Confessor's nephew, from his exile in Hungary.[13] The Atheling's return is one of the many mysteries of the age. Interpretation depends upon the weight given to the Confessor's personal strength and diplomatic skill. It is likely that royal initiative prompted the recall, possibly as the prospect of a peaceful Norman succession grew dimmer, possibly as the news of the birth of a well-born, male heir to the Atheling reached England. In the event the Atheling's return achieved little, save to bring his children Edgar, Margaret, and Christine back into the Anglo-Scottish-Norman world. The

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle D records grimly (and retrospectively, it is true) under the year 1057 of Edward:

We do not know for what reason it was brought about that he was not allowed to see the face of his kinsman, King Edward. Alas, that was a miserable fate and grievous to all the people that he so speedily ended his life after he came to England, to the misfortune of all this poor people.[14]

Some believe that Harold may have been instrumental in the recall. Edward Atheling could have been a useful balance to William the Norman. Others believe, with no evidence, that Harold may have been instrumental in this early death. Harold seems to have been very much the subordinate in the whole affair. King Edward was no cypher. Even as late as 1064 it is likely that Harold acted as the dutiful ambassador.

Yet the main themes of the decade 1055-65 concern the consolidation of political and military power in the hands of the sons of Godwin, and especially in the hands of Harold. Tostig held his earldom of Northumbria, with some authority in Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire. Gyrth, the fourth son, succeeded the Mercian Aelfgar in East Anglia in 1057, and was also active as an earl in Oxfordshire from late in 1057 or 1058. The fifth son, Leofwine, was an earl in the Home Counties, Middlesex and Hertfordshire, from 1057, and may have exercised authority, subordinate to Harold, in Kent and Surrey. All were wealthy in landed estates. The four brothers, brothers-in-law as they were to Edward the king, had prestige as warriors and governors without parallel in English affairs. The safety of the realm seemed to depend upon them. Harold and Tostig in particular stood out for military prowess, the one in the West, the other in the North.

> These two great brothers of a cloud-born land
> The kingdom's sacred oaks, two Hercules
> . . . who excelled all Englishmen when joined
> in peace.[15]

Harold built up his own reputation in these years in one special field, against the Welsh notably in the area which later developed into the modern shires of Hereford and Monmouth. This reputation had two aspects, a regional and a national. Harold became a true lord of the March, and was long remembered for his ferocity. The Welsh king, Gruffydd ap Llywelyn, in temporary alliance with earl

Aelfgar during periods when the Mercian was exiled in 1055 and again in 1058, was a powerful border raider. He sacked and burnt the ancient minster at Hereford in 1055. He defeated and killed the warlike bishop Leofric, who dared to ride against him in 1056. Harold took slow but certain revenge, especially during the final campaign of May-October 1063. Harold's harrying of the Welsh was no less severe than William's harrying of the North less than a decade later. John of Salisbury held Harold's campaign as a model of its kind, and reported that so many Welshmen were killed that King Edward allowed Welsh women to marry Englishmen.[16] Gerald the Welshman, perhaps more acutely, ascribed Norman success to it. Harold made the task of the first three Norman kings easy.[17] The ineffective Earl Ralph the Timid, King Edward's nephew, died in 1057. Harold was the successor of this Norman earl, in turn to be succeeded after the Conquest by William Fitzosbern, trusted lieutenant of the Conqueror, and first Norman earl of Hereford of the new dispensation. Clear lines of policy may be traced from the 1050's to the 1070's. Castles were built, and Normans employed. Ewyas Harold, Hereford, and Richard's castle are three of the very few certain examples of pre-Conquest castles. Some marvel that Harold could fit in so well with a Norman army in 1064, forgetting his recent experience of fighting by their side on the Welsh March, a successful experience with no extravagant attempts (such as those of 1056) at turning the English into cavalrymen before their time.[18]

Harold's Welsh successes had an importance well beyond the regional field. The ferocity of the campaigns was symbolised in their end. The Welsh turned against Gruffydd, put him to death, and as proof of Harold's victory and their treachery, brought to the English earl the king's head and the beak of his warship in which he had planned to escape to Ireland. Florence of Worcester preserved the important fact that the Welsh swore fealty to the king and to earl Harold, promising to obey them by land and by sea.[19] Harold in the eyes of many, including the Welsh, had won himself an extraordinary place within the English realm.

There was one ironic footnote to the Welsh campaigns. The alliance between the Welsh and the Mercians had been strengthened by an arranged marriage between Aelfgar's daughter Ealdgyth and the Welsh king. In 1066 Harold himself married the widow of the king for whose death he had been primarily responsible.[20]

Soon after the Welsh triumphs, probably in 1064, occurred one

of the best-known incidents in Harold's career, the visit to Normandy. This could have been a deliberate embassy to confirm the offer of rights in the succession. It could have been an accidental fishing-trip turned by desperation into an embassy. Our account of it is solidly Norman. Harold fought on William's side against the Bretons, distinguished himself, and was rewarded by William with the gift of arms. In return, we are told, at Bonneville, or at Bayeux, or at Rouen, Harold swore a solemn oath. William of Poitiers gives the most detailed account, stating that Harold promised to be the *vicarius* of William at Edward's court, that he would work actively for William's succession, that he would place a garrison of the duke's knights at Dover castle, and at the duke's pleasure would maintain garrisons in other castles and make complete provision for their sustenance.[21] No castle of this date has been found at Dover. The statement is very much a polished *ex post facto* account. Nevertheless it is reasonably certain that an oath of fealty was given. What the oath involved may have meant very different things to different people. The *Vita Ædwardi* (which tells us incidentally that Harold was too free with his oaths) declares that King Edward himself on his accession attracted to him nobles of other kings, and also, through their ambassadors, powerful dukes, and princes who placed their fealty and service in his hands, receiving gifts in return.[22] It may well be that to the Normans who received the oath the obligation appeared more precise than to the Englishman who gave it. If William of Poitiers could be believed the crux might well rest in the phrase *vicarius*, a term which implied that Harold would act as virtual potential executor on William's behalf at the court of the dying king.[23]

Concern with the health of the king may have prompted the embassy though we must remember that even in late summer 1065 Edward was active enough, a man of about 60, hunting and playing an important role in the last political crisis of the reign, the northern rebellion against Tostig. The thegns of Northumbria turned against Tostig because of his excessive harshness (possibly because of his competence), killed his hearth-troop, elected Morcar, son of Aelfgar, as their earl, and advanced south in a raid which left the mark of devastation on eastern Mercia, and especially on Northamptonshire, a generation later. Tostig was with King Edward at Britford near Salisbury. The old king was forced to ratify the rebels' acts, a course of action which hastened his own death.

Harold played a dubious part as intermediary. Tostig was so enraged that he even accused Harold of stirring up the trouble in the northern earldom, a charge which Harold was led to deny with one of his too-free oaths. Tostig never forgave Harold. He went into exile to his wife's home in Flanders, and so started the train of events that was to lead to Hastings. King Edward's health rapidly failed in the late autumn of 1065. He was too ill to attend the consecration of his beloved Westminster Abbey on December 28th. He died on January 4th or 5th. On the 6th Harold was elected and crowned, some say by Stigand, others by Ealdred of York.[24]

Election and consecration had made Harold the successor in the English kingship to Edward the Confessor. Was Harold justified in his actions? The Normans' case against him was clear-cut. Harold was a usurper, an oath-breaker, a perjurer. William was the rightful heir, designated so by his cousin Edward. Was not William great-nephew to Edward's own mother? A similar self-righteous claim was put forward at the Danish court in 1070 when the Danish king asserted his right to the English throne. The Danish attempt was unsuccessful. Nothing was heard of the claim.[25] The victor is always well-placed to assert his legal right. Yet even some of the Normans were aware of fine qualities in Harold. The Bayeux Tapestry was made for them, and the Bayeux Tapestry could well be entitled the tragedy of Harold. Bravery, skill in war, powers of leadership are faithfully represented as dominant features. Harold's character reached its high point of development when he received arms from William and swore an oath of loyalty in return. Temptation appeared with the offer of a crown. Acceptance of the crown involved the breaking of his oath to William. Tragedy then advanced to its fatal resolution on the field of Hastings. Yet there was another side to the matter. The Tapestry suggests, and William of Poitiers admitted openly that Edward made a death-bed commendation of the kingdom to Harold.[26] Constitutionally Harold acted quickly but in proper form. There was plentiful precedent for legitimization of a change in dynasty, immediately in England with the Danish interlude of Canute and his sons, ultimately on the continent with the transfer of authority from Merovingian to Carolingian and, a bare three generations earlier, from Carolingian to Capetian. Parallels existed, and were appreciated, between the Capetians and Harold. The title given on the Bayeux Tapestry to Harold of *dux Anglorum* is an echo of the Capetian title *dux*

Francorum before they suceeded to the kingship. German examples also demonstrate that a change of dynasty does not necessarily involve a change of monarchy. Harold was not merely one of the earls. He was a very special person in the English realm in late 1065 and early 1066. Florence of Worcester caught the mood best when he referred to him as *subregulus Haroldus, Godwini ducis filius*—a *sub-regulus,* one who was truly next the king.[27]

Harold was careful to observe the formalities, election, consecration, the enlistment of active support from the energetic and well-regarded prelates, Wulfstan and Ealdred, the special pleas to the northern earls and above all to Northumbria. Politically it is hard to see how he could have acted differently or better. He was the strongest and wealthiest man in an England beset by enemies, facing the difficulties of a royal death at mid-winter. What other course was open to him? He could expect no great future in a Norman England. Historians would not hesitate to praise his speed and powers of taking decision, as they do in connection with Henry I and Stephen, if the outcome of Hastings had been different.

Harold's case, for all the rights of possession, was overshadowed in the early months of 1066 by the claims of William, helped no doubt by the intrigues of Tostig. William's diplomacy was effective. He carried with him his own tough-willed feudatories. He carried with him the support of a powerful element among the feudatories of North France. He earned the support or neutrality of his Capetian overlord, of the Empire, Flanders, and even Denmark. Most important of all he convinced the Papacy. Hildebrand became an influential adherent.[28] What was potentially a pirate venture was transformed into a Crusade.

Yet Harold remained in possession. For over nine months he was king of England, from January 6th to October 14th, 1066, though, as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle said, 'he had little peace in it'. Is there enough evidence to suggest what sort of ruler he was, and what sort of ruler he would have made? The balance of evidence seems to be in favour. He was Edward's successor, a national king in that sense. Northumbria was restive but, persuaded by Wulfstan and Harold himself, acquiesced in the situation. Only one writ has survived, but it is clear that continuity in administration was a feature of 1066, the year of three reigns. Charters and writs continued to be published in traditional form in the early years of King William's reign. Coins were issued in a fine series. A surprising number have survived from

more than forty mints, the proportion from war-centres such as Romney, Chester, and York, indicating the importance of preparation for war to the economy. In one respect the king was undoubtedly stronger than Edward. We face matters of some complexity. Our great source, Domesday Book, was concerned with matters in the time of King Edward, not in the time of King Harold. Only by accident is Harold referred to as king in the whole of Domesday Book. But one simple fact is plain. The bringing together of the bulk of the estates of King Edward and the vast territorial possessions of Harold left the new king immensely wealthy. From Domesday Book we know that earl Harold, *Heraldus comes,* had held directly in his own right lands in nearly every shire in England, mostly substantial estates, with a strong tendency to group wealth and influence in shires where he had exercised authority as an earl, Norfolk and Hereford, as well as Wessex proper. Add to these the possessions of the loyal brothers, Gyrth and Leofwine, of the womenfolk of the House of Godwin, and also the estates mentioned specifically as belonging to "a man of earl Harold", though at the time of the survey held of a different lord, and the overwhelming nature of the wealth of the kin of Godwin becomes apparent.[29]

Politically Harold's immediate problem on accession was to gain and to retain control in the earldoms of Mercia and Northumbria. He was wealthy and influential within both earldoms, but the personal situation was difficult. Edwin, son of Aelfgar, was Earl of Mercia. Morcar, Edwin's brother, was the new Earl of Northumbria. The young earls had to be appeased. Marriage seems to have been Harold's answer. At a date uncertain but probably early in 1066, Harold, the bachelor in his mid-forties, married Ealdgyth, widow of Gruffydd ap Llywelyn and sister of the young earls. It was not unusual for a prominent political figure to reserve Christian marriage for a decisive political moment. Such delay involved no vow of celibacy. To allow oneself a moment of historical fantasy, *if* Margaret (later of Scotland) had been older, or *if* Harold had had an acceptable eldest son and heir, or *if* the situation vis-à-vis the earls of the Mercian house had not been so delicate, a second union of the house of Godwin and the house of Cerdic could have had momentous consequences. As things were Edwin and Morcar did not betray their brother-in-law.

Harold's handling of the events of 1066 indicates his resourcefulness and good sense. The main outlines are familiar. William

prepared in Normandy, while Harold Hardrada and (to some extent) the Scottish king watched their opportunity. Tostig was the irritant, ravaging the coast from Kent to Yorkshire. His raids were successfully countered by West Saxon troops in the south, by the *fyrd* of Lindsey led by Earl Edwin in the north, by Morcar and the Northumbrians still further north. Harold kept his forces on the alert as long as he could. The prolonged threat had a serious consequence. Some of the *fyrd* had to be released at harvest time. Even so the late summer did not pass without its moment of English triumph.

The first of the great threats to materialize came from the North. Harold Hardrada, king of Norway, with 300 ships joined Tostig on one of the last of the Viking expeditions. The Northumbrians resisted stoutly at Gate Fulford but were forced to yield. At Stamford Bridge, on September 25th, Harold, after hastening north at top speed, inflicted a disastrous defeat on the pride of Norway. Hardrada and Tostig were killed. Victory rested with Godwinson, 'a small man though he stands well in his stirrups', as the saga-writer later described him.[30] The English king, some say, put an end to the Viking era.

Duke William, the ultimate victor, took his chance in the south. On September 28th-29th he crossed the Channel with his motley crew of supporters, Normans, Frenchmen, Bretons. Harold moved south, speedily, correctly. For some reason (one of the deepest mysteries) he chose not to rally his forces in London, but to hasten against the beach-heads. Fear for his own favourite stretch of country, fear for Winchester, perhaps personal fears of which record cannot now be found, prompted the fatal step. At the spot, seven miles from Hastings where Battle Abbey now stands, he fell towards the twilight hour. The biographer of Wulfstan of Worcester later wrote:

> "It was as though with Harold had fallen also the whole strength of the country."[31]

The precise nature of his death is still in doubt. The Abbot of Bourgeuil at the end of the century told how Harold had been wounded in the eye by an arrow. Recent opinion is inclined to say that the abbot's idea came from a mis-reading of the Bayeux Tapestry. The figure shown as wounded in the eye was probably one of the hearthtroop. King Harold is more likely to be represented by the figure falling to his death beneath the blows of

Norman knights. Guy of Amiens agrees with this interpretation, and names the slayers as Eustace of Boulogne, a son of Guy of Ponthieu, Walter Giffard, the younger, and Hugh of Montfort. Legends sprang up about the burial of his body, and about his survival as a hermit near Chester, living to a very ripe old age. Such stories are the stuff of political disaster.[32]

Finally can we say anything of Harold as a person? All sources agree on his physical courage, rescuing Normans from the quicksands in Brittany, confronting Hardrada, the giant of the North, fighting resolutely to the end at Hastings. Even his enemies admitted that during his reign his authority increased from day to day. Adaptability, the social graces, a gift for diplomacy, a capacity for government are among his proved virtues. He made a pilgrimage to Rome (probably in 1058) in the course of which he won a fine reputation for generosity. On the same expedition he spent some time in France, deliberately studying the political situation. The author of the *Vita Ædwardi*, our source for information about the pilgrimage, gives the fullest account of Harold's character, describing him as one who was mild of temper, capable of enduring fatigues, and of bearing contradictions. Carefully selected phrases give a picture of one who was adroit, intelligent, and prudent, a man who could wonderfully dissemble his purpose. He pressed on to his goal but enjoyed himself on his way. He passed through ambushes with mocking caution. He was, alas, too free with his oaths.

A contrast was drawn with Tostig. Both 'persevered with what they had begun; but Tostig vigorously, Harold prudently; the one in action aimed at success, the other also at happiness.'[33]

Evidence concerning his religious life is mixed. He lavished much care on Waltham Holy Cross, his collegiate church, built on estates granted to him by King Edward.[34] Some of the most responsible men in the English church, including Wulfstan of Worcester and Ealdred of York, were among his supporters. At least two abbots fought at his side at Hastings; his uncle, Aelfwig, the abbot of Newminster, Winchester, who died in the battle, and abbot Leofric of Peterborough who later died of the hardships of the campaign. Harold's reputation, however, suffered because of his closeness to Stigand—for 'he could not hate the man whom earlier he had loved'.[35] In some circles Harold (like his father before him) was notorious as a despoiler of church lands. Domesday Book contains many references to such encroachments. Wells, Hereford, Exeter,

Shaftesbury, and Amesbury preserved memories and records of his hostile acts against them. But it was easy to blame pre-Conquest losses on the loser at Hastings, and some of the charges against Harold may have been provoked by his necessary actions in a political capacity or by the actions of his subordinates.[36]

Harold's marital circumstances were odd. His attachment to Edith Swanneshals was long-lasting, and it is likely that the illegitimate sons of mature age who campaigned against William in 1068 were hers. Ordericus Vitalis tells of an engagement to Agatha, William's daughter, in 1064, who is said to have remembered Harold until the time of her death shortly before 1074.[37] Delay of Christian marriage for political reasons is the most likely explanation of Harold's actions.

We know that Harold was an active man, warrior and huntsman, typical of his class and age. He could be harsh as against the Welsh and in ravaging the West Country on his return from exile in 1052. Hunting was a special pleasure. He built a hunting-lodge at Portskewet near Chepstow in the aftermath of his last Welsh campaign. A twelfth-century treatise on falconry preserves a memory of Harold's possession of a number of books, including writings on hawks and the art of the falconer. Harold's interest in falconry is substantiated by the Bayeux Tapestry.[38]

Harold was a man who could win and keep loyalty. His only conspicuous, and perhaps fatal, failure in this respect lay with his brother Tostig, husband of Judith of Flanders, herself a kinswoman of Matilda, wife of William of Normandy. Many remembered him well. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (D) lamented concerning the battle of Hastings:

> Then King Harold was killed and Earl Leofwine, his brother, and Earl Gyrth, his brother, and many good men, and the French remained masters of the field, even as God granted it to them because of the sins of the people.[39]

The Conquest was a Judgement. In time the lesser figures of Hereward and Earl Waltheof attracted more English legend than Harold himself. Local loyalties accreted around their memory. But Harold deserves his fair share of praise. *Dom ær death,* glory before death, was the high ideal of the epic world. It would be churlish to deny Harold II, king of the English, victor of Stamford Bridge, his due measure of just glory.

FOOTNOTES

1. E. A. Freeman, The Norman Conquest, Vol. II, 3rd ed., revised, 1877, p. 359.
2. *Ibid.* Vol. III, 2nd ed., revised, 1875, pp. 520-1.
3. H. Ellis, *A General Introduction to Domesday Book,* London, 1833, Vol. II, p. 141 etc., for many references to lands held by Harold, Godwin, or their kin. D.B. i 38 refers to lands taken by Harold *quando regnum invasit* and *quando regnabat.*
4. *Vita Aedwardi,* ed. F. Barlow, Nelson's Medieval Texts, London, 1962, p. 54.
5. Harold's sons fade into legend after their unsuccessful attacks on the West Country in 1068, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* trs. and ed. D. Whitelock, London, 1961, (1068). For correspondence between Anselm and Harold's daughter, Gunhilda, see R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer,* C.U.P. 1963., pp. 185-93.
6. D. Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills,* C.U.P. 1930, XXXI, p. 82, and notes on pp. 192-3. The *terminus ad quem* depends on the date of the death of Abbot Leofsige of Ely, given as 1044 in the *Liber Eliensis.* See also *Liber Eliensis,* ed. E. O. Blake, London, 1962, p. 412.
7. A. J. Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters,* C.U.P. (2nd ed.) 1956, p. 463, quotes the Exeter charter printed in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association,* 1883, p. 294. Also a very valuable note by F. E. Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs, Manchester* U.P., 1952, p. 563.
8. *Vita Aedwardi,* p. 27.
9. D. C. Douglas, 'Edward the Confessor, Duke William of Normandy, and the English Succession', E.H.R., 1953, and *William the Conqueror,* London, 1964, p. 169. S. Körner, *The Battle of Hastings, England and Europe,* Lund, 1964, pp. 158-63 favours the view that Duke William himself visited England late in 1051.
10. Eadmer, *Historia Novorum in Anglia,* ed. M. Rule, Rolls Series, 1884, p. 6; trs. G. Bosanquet, London, 1964, p., 6. (Wulfnoth a son of Godwin, and Hakon, grandson of Godwin, son of Sweyn).
11. A full discussion is given in E. A. Freeman, *The Norman Conquest,* Vol. II, Note DD. *Jatvarthar Saga, Icelandic Sagas,* ed. G. Vigfusson, Vol. I, p. 394, Rolls Series, 1887.
12. *Vita Aedwardi,* p. 30.
13. P. Grierson, 'A Visit of Earl Harold to Flanders in 1056', *E.H.R.,* 1936, pp. 90-7.
14. Anglo-Saxon Chronicle D (1057). This is a late addition to MS.D. MS.E. simply records that Edward died soon after his arrival in this country. The recall may have been facilitated by political events within the Empire (Henry III died in 1056). An earlier embassy by bishop Ealdred in 1054 appears to have been unsuccessful.
15. *Vita Aedwardi,* p. 37.
16. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus,* ed. C. C. J. Webb, Oxford, 1909, ii. 19. John takes this as a sign of clemency on King Edward's part—*ex indulgentia iam dicti regis.* The *Vita Haroldi,* pp. 90-2, tells how Harold, surviving Hastings, stayed *as a penance* among the Welsh whom he had afflicted with such devastation in earlier years.
17. *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera,* ed. J. F. Dimock, Vol. VI, pp. 217-8, Rolls Series, 1868. Memorial stones inscribed *Hic fuit victor Haroldus* were erected on the battle-sites.
18. Florence of Worcester, *Chronicon ex Chroniciis,* ed. B. Thorpe, London, 1848, p. 213. Ralph the Timid is said to have ordered the English to fight *contra morem in equis.*

19. *Ibid.* p. 222. King Gruffydd's brothers were given *terram Walanorum* by King Edward, *cui et Haroldo comiti fidelitatem illi juraverunt, et ad imperium illorum mari terraque se fore paratos . . .*

20. The most likely date and occasion for the marriage, though it is possible that Harold's ambiguous actions in relation to the earldom of Northumbria in late 1065 may have been caused by an attachment to the kin of Aelfgar. *Ordericus Vitalis,* ed. Marjorie Chibnall, Oxford, 1969, pp. 138 and 216.

21. William of Poitiers (*Guillaume de Poitiers*) *Gesta Guillelmi,* ed. R. Foreville, Paris, 1952, p. 104.

22. *Vita Aedwardi,* p. 11. They made King Edward their *amicum et dominum,* and placed their *fidelitatem et servitium* in his hands.

23. For recent discussion see especially D. C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror,* London, 1964, pp. 175-8, F. Barlow, *William I and the Norman Conquest* London, 1966, pp. 59-65, and Mlle. R. Foreville, 'Aux Origines de la Renaissance Juridique', *Moyen Age,* 1953. Memory of the oath was preserved late. The author of the *Vita Haroldi,* ed. W. de Gray Birch, London, 1885, p. 50, was shown, 140 years after the event, a withered oak near Rouen, reputed to be the very tree under which the oath had been given.

24. Florence of Worcester, p. 224, expresses the strong Worcester (and York) belief that Harold was consecrated by Ealdred. The Norman Chroniclers, the Bayeux Tapestry (by implication), and the Waltham tradition state that Stigand performed the ceremony (see footnote 35 below).

25. F. Barlow, *William I and the Norman Conquest,* p. 18 and p. 94.

26. *The Bayeux Tapestry,* ed. Sir Frank Stenton, 2nd ed. 1965, Plate 33; William of Poitiers, p. 172. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 1066, declares that Edward committed the realm to Harold, and so does Florence of Worcester. Also the *Vita Aedwardi,* p. 79—*'Hanc', inquit, 'cum omni regno tutandam tibi commendo'.*

27. Florence of Worcester, p. 224, *subregulus Haroldus, Godwini ducis filius, quem rex (Edward) ante suam decessionem regni successorem elegerat.* His father, Godwin, had also held a special position *'totius pene regni . . . dux et baiulus', Vita Aedwardi,* p. 6.

28. Hildebrand complained later that his support had harmed his reputation among those conscious of the bloodshed caused by William's campaign: *Regesta* VII, 23.

29. There is need for a modern critical study of the holdings of the Godwin family in 1066. Harold was entered as a landowner in no fewer than twenty-nine of the thirty-four Domesday shires or chief territorial divisions. The main concentration of his personal wealth lay in Wiltshire, Devonshire, Sussex, Herefordshire, Somersetshire, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Essex (a special case, as royal demesne was entered under Harold's own name in this shire). The vast bulk of Harold's lands passed to King William and a small group of William's principal lay tenants-in-chief, the king taking the lion's share, Earl Hugh of Chester the second biggest (including almost all Harold's lands in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire) and William of Warenne the third (including most of the Sussex holdings). See further unpublished dissertation by R. H. Davies, *The lands and rights of Harold, son of Godwin, and their distribution by William I,* University College, Cardiff, 1967.

30. *Fagrskinna,* ed. F. Jonsson, Copenhagen, 1902, p. 289.

31. *Vita Wulfstani,* ed. R. R. Darlington, London, 1928, pp. 76-77.

32. The most elaborate account of his survival appears in the early thirteenth century *Vita Haroldi,* ed. W. de Gray Birch, London, 1885. For valuable modern discussion see Margaret Ashdown, 'An Icelandic Account of the Survival of Harold Godwinson', *The Anglo-Saxons,* ed. P. Clemoes, pp. 122-36.

33. *Vita Aedwardi,* pp. 31-3, and p. 53.

34. W. Stubbs, *The Foundation of Waltham Abbey,* the tract *De Inventione Sanctae Crucis nostrae,* Oxford and London, 1863. *Vita Haroldi,* especially chapter iii, pp. 22-7.

35. *The Foundation of Waltham Abbey,* p. 25: *rex igitur consecratus a Stigando Dorobernensi archipraesule, quod prius dilexerat non potuit odisse.*

36. E. A. Freeman, *The Norman Conquest,* Vol. II, Appendix E, 'The Alleged Spoliations of the Church by Godwine and Harold'. We are told that Godwin bore the complaints patiently, *Vita Aedwardi,* p. 19.

37. *Ordericus Vitalis* op. cit., p. 136, gives the Norman story that Harold convinced the dying Edward that William had given Harold his daughter in marriage, and had conceded the English throne to him *utpote genere suo.* This daughter, Agatha, resisted a later projected marriage to a Spanish prince, P.L. 188, col. 414, *Anglum viderat et dilexerat; sed ibero conjungi nimis metuit.*

38. *Bayeux Tapestry,* Plate 2. C. H. Haskins, *Studies in the History of Medieval Science,* 2nd ed., Oxford, 1927, especially p. 28 and pp. 346-8. Adelard refers to his modern authorities *et non minus que Haraoldi regis libris reperimus scripta* (p. 347). Adelard of Bath, *De Cura Accipitrum,* A. E. H. Swaen, 1937. Also C. H. Haskins, 'King Harold's Books', *E.H.R.,* 1922, pp. 398-400.

39. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (D), (1066), ed. D. Whitelock, p. 143.

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