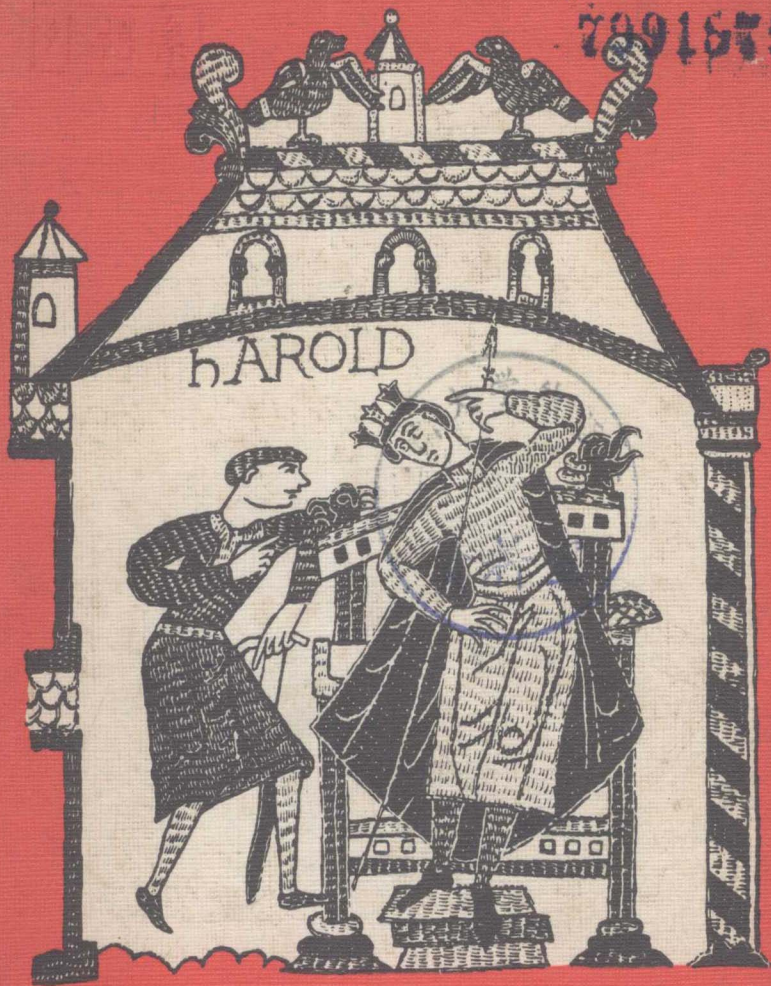


Then and There Series

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THE NORMAN CONQUEST

M. E. REEVES

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THEN AND THERE SERIES

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The Norman Conquest

MARJORIE REEVES

Illustrations drawn from contemporary sources by



H. SCHWARZ



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TO THE READER

ENGLAND has not often been conquered, but once at least she was invaded and beaten all in a few weeks. Who were these Normans who conquered England, and how did they manage to do it? Many people can tell you that William the Norman won the Battle of Hastings in 1066, but they do not know what really happened there and how William conquered and governed England after the battle. To answer these questions we have to read the *chronicles*¹ written while men still remembered what had happened and we have also to study a famous set of needlework pictures, called the BAYEUX TAPESTRY, which was made soon after 1066. In this book I have tried to tell you what the chroniclers said and to show you many of the pictures. It is always exciting to discover what really happened and I hope you will enjoy trying to find out about this famous battle and famous conqueror in English history.



Here sits Harold, King of the English

¹ You will find the meaning of words written like *this* in the Glossar on pages 59-60.

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The illustration on page 55 is reproduced by courtesy of the Public Record Office.

THE COMET

IT WAS the 24th of April in the year 1066. All over England that night little groups of men stood outside their homes pointing at the sky.

Some of them shrieked and all shivered and crept into their beds cold with fear. For what they saw was a great fiery star with streaming fiery hair that blazed through the inky-blue sky. We should call it a comet and learned astronomers in our newspapers would tell us a great deal about it. People in 1066 also called it a comet, but they did not know what it was and so they were afraid. Men whispered that it was a sign of dreadful troubles that were going to happen in England.



Here you can see some men pointing at and discussing the comet. One of them runs to tell Harold.

People were expecting trouble in April, 1066. A few months before, King Edward had died suddenly. He had been a gentle, holy king—that is why we call him Edward the Confessor—and all men mourned for him. But the great question was: Who would be king in his place? Edward had no son to succeed him and everyone feared that there would be fierce fighting for the Crown. So, very quietly, on the very day of Edward's funeral, Harold, the son of Godwin, had been chosen as king. He was a splendid leader in battle and so men hoped he would save England from wars.

But away on the other side of the English Channel, in the part of France called Normandy, there was another great fighter who meant to have England. This man was William the Norman.



England and Normandy

HAROLD AND WILLIAM

William pretended that the Crown of England was really his by right. He said that Edward the Confessor had promised it to him. He also told a strange story about Harold. He said that about two years before Harold had been ship-wrecked on the coast of France and would have been killed if William had not rescued him. Harold, said William, had then promised to help make William king of England when Edward was dead. Here is a picture which the Normans made to show that the promise (or *oath*) which Harold took was a very solemn one. Harold is touching with his finger some very holy things while he is making the promise:



Harold made an oath to Duke William

William was angry when he heard that Harold had broken his oath and had got himself crowned king. He called a council of all his chief men (they were called *barons*). After a good deal of arguing, he persuaded them to sail with him across the sea on an expedition to conquer England. As a bribe he promised them rich lands in England. Then he sent messengers round the neighbouring lands offering rewards to everyone who would come and fight for him. All the most warlike men came crowding in, eager for the adventure.

William began at once to build ships, to gather together horses and food, and to pile up bows and spears. There was a great deal of work to be done before he was ready to invade England.

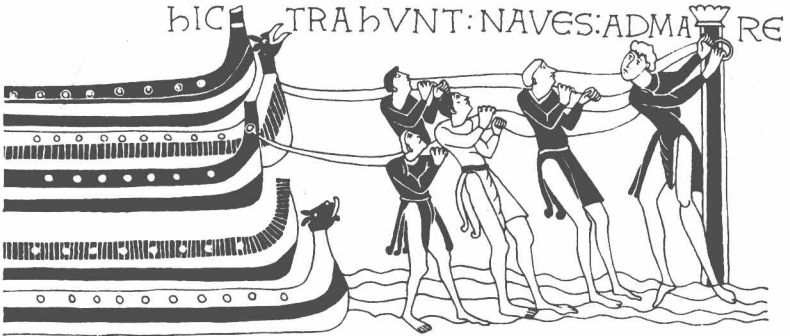


Here are some of his men chopping down trees as fast as they can.

They wanted
the timber
to build
ships.
Here they
are building
the ships.

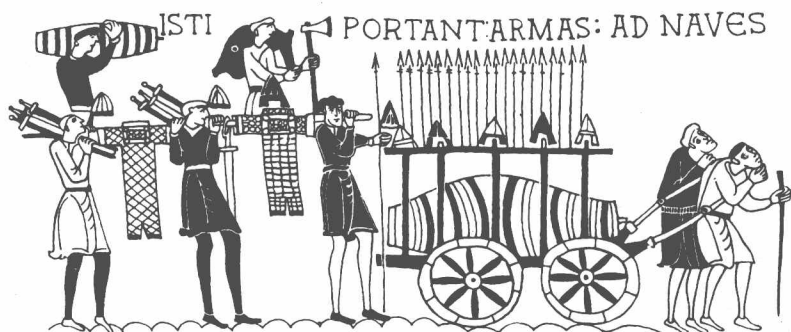


The work was done in all haste, and as soon as possible William's men were dragging the boats to the sea. Notice the fierce animal heads they have carved on the *prows*.



Here they drag the ships to the sea

Here the men are carrying armour to the ships. Can you see the coats of *chain-mail* (called *hauberks*)? They are so heavy that two men have to carry each one on a pole. There are swords, spears, and a battle-axe as well, while several men carry helmets:



These men carry arms to the ships

What was Harold doing all this time? Just what you would expect. He was gathering the largest army ever seen in England. His spies slipped across the Channel in little boats and hurried back to tell him about William's army and navy. But this was not Harold's only trouble. In early summer his bad brother and great enemy, Earl Tostig, came across the seas with many ships. He raided the Isle of Wight, burning and robbing, and then sailed along the coast to Sandwich and so up to the Humber, doing damage everywhere. Wherever Harold tried to catch him he slipped away. Poor King Harold did not know which way to turn! Every day he expected news

that William the Norman and his army were sailing across the Channel. If he turned his back on them and went north to chase Tostig there would be no one to stop the Normans landing. So all through the summer Harold kept his army and fleet at the Isle of Wight and along the south coast, watching for William's ships. But the weeks went by and no William appeared. When it came to the 8th day of September the men in the army had eaten up all their provisions and would not wait any longer. So they all began to go home and Harold gave up the watch for William.

Then suddenly terrible news came Another Harold—King of Norway—had come by surprise with a large navy to Tynemouth in the north and Earl Tostig had joined him.

On this map you can see the positions of all Harold's enemies.

The North Sea



Harold, King of England, dashed away north, riding night and day and trying to collect an army as he went. On September 24th he came to Tadcaster and heard that Tostig and the other Harold were in York. So on Monday, September 25th, he rode hard for York and clattered right through the city in chase of his enemies. He caught them by surprise and at Stamford Bridge a great battle was fought all day. At the end of it Harold, King of Norway, and Earl Tostig lay dead and very many men with them, both Norwegians and English. The rest of the Norwegians fled to their ships. Harold, King of England, was victor.

But what had William the Norman been doing all the summer with his army and navy all ready. Why had he not sailed for England? All his ships were ready, all the food and drink on board, all the soldiers assembled at the sea-port of St. Valery at the mouth of the river Somme, but day after day the wind blew the wrong way! You see, these were not steamships but sailing ships that needed a following wind to billow out their sails. If you look again at the map on p. 7, you can work out for yourself what kind of a wind they were waiting for. North, south, east or west wind?

William's men got impatient waiting and—as idle people so often do—began to get into mischief. But William was very firm with them. He forbade them to quarrel or fight with each other or ride away on adventures of their own. He would not let them steal eggs or poultry or meat, or trample on the corn, or do any other damage to the country folks' property. He gave them all enough to eat and kept them ready to board their ships at the first breath of the right wind.

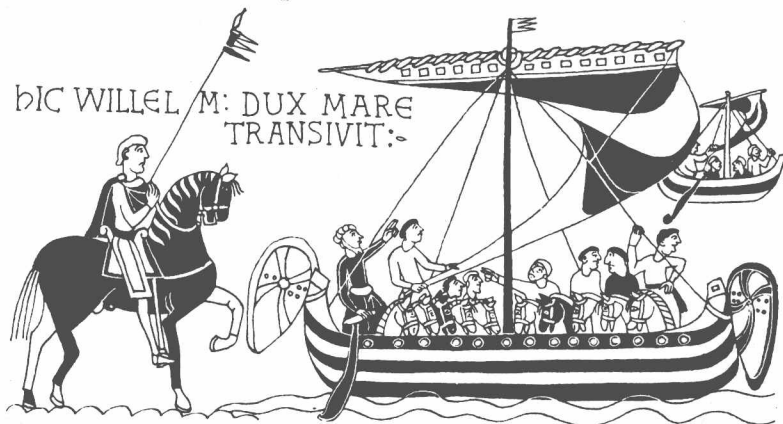


THE GREAT INVASION

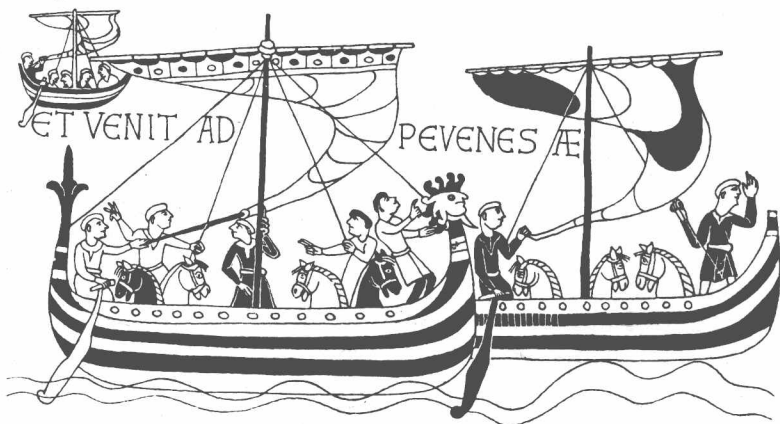
At last the right wind blew—but it was not until the 27th September. Then there was such a hurrying and scurrying to board the ships with all possible speed. Knights snatched up their helmets and bridled their horses, men called for their companions as they ran and would not stop for anyone, so eager were they not to be left behind. The Duke rode up and down spurring on the slow ones and urging all to make haste.

Many years after this great day, some ladies worked for many days and put the whole exciting story (as the fighters in the battle had told it to them) into pictures which they embroidered in a long strip called the Bayeux Tapestry. We still have this tapestry today. The pictures you have already seen in this book are taken from it. So now we will follow the story right through using the pictures the Norman ladies made. Remember that they found battle scenes difficult to draw and work in needlework—you would too, I expect—and so some of their pictures are rather curious. On each picture they embroidered Latin words to show what was happening. You can find out what these words mean by turning to page 56.

Here is William the Norman riding down to the sea on his horse. The ship in front of him, just ready to sail, is full of horses. Can you count how many there are? If William and his horse also embarked on this ship it must have been a tight squeeze.



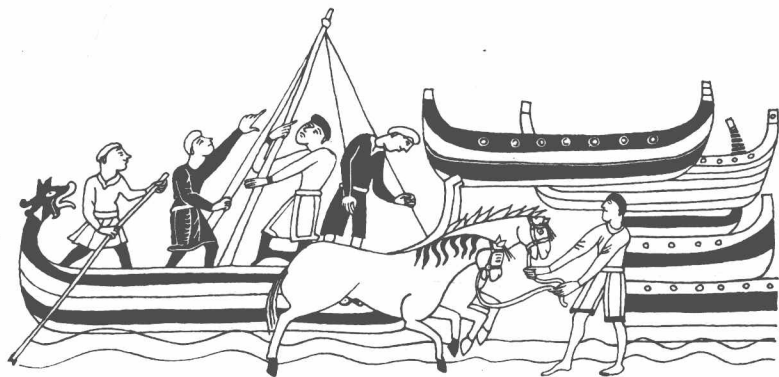
Here is the fleet in full sail across the Channel. Notice how the sails billow in the wind. In the prow of each ship a watchout man looks eagerly towards the coast of England.



Do you notice that the riders actually seem to be sitting on their horses in the ship? Do you think they would manage to stay on whilst crossing the sea?

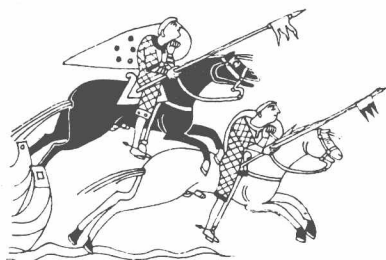
Before they set sail William ordered all the ships to keep together and not to try to land by themselves on the enemy shore.

At dawn, Duke William's ship was far ahead of all the rest. A sailor, sent up to the masthead to watch out, reported that he could see nothing but sea and sky. William's sailors were afraid, but he ordered everyone to have a large meal and a bumper of spiced wine just to show that he was not alarmed. Soon the sailor up the mast shouted down that he could see four ships. A little later he reported seeing many masts, clustered together like trees in a forest. So the whole fleet caught up with William and they sailed on merrily to a place on the English coast called Pevensey where there was a good safe beach.



Here you can see the Normans landing. The horses being led out of the ship look as if they do not like getting their feet wet!

Now was the time when Harold should have been on the shore with all his army! When men are anchoring their boats and wading ashore it is easy to attack and beat them. But where was Harold? The Battle of Stamford Bridge had been fought on the 25th September. It was now the 28th September, but Harold was still up north at York, about 250 miles away. There were no telephones or radio in those days, of course, so Harold only got news of William's landing when a messenger galloped night and day to tell him. How long do you think that rider took?



While the messenger was galloping north William's army had all landed on the beach. Here they are riding to the town of Hastings to get food. Notice that they have put on their heavy *hauberks* as a safeguard, but they do

not need their helmets yet because there is no fighting.



You can see them killing animals and carrying off meat.