

DOVER IN 1066

EXTRACTS, TRANSLATED BY GEOFFREY BOSANQUET, FROM THE GESTA
GUILLELMI DUCIS NORMANNORUM

By WILLIAM OF POICTOU, ARCHDEACON OF LISIEUX

THE story of William the Conqueror's expedition against Dover Castle is summarized in *V.C.H. Kent*, Vol. III (1932), p. 279.

We set out below a translation by our member Mr. Geoffrey C. Bosanquet of portions of the work in which William of Poitiers (Guilielmus Pictavensis) describes the deeds of his master, the Conqueror. Although it is well known, his work is not easy to consult in this country and many libraries have no copy. The standard authorities which include it are F. Michel in *Chroniques Anglo-Normandes* (Rouen, 1836-40), copy in the Reading Room of the British Museum under press-mark 2384 f. 12 and J. A. Giles in *Scriptores Rerum Gestarum Willelmi Conquestoris* (Caxton Society, London, 1845), British Museum press-mark R. Ac. 8114. But Mr. Bosanquet has worked from Francis Maseres' edition of Andre du Chesne's *Historiae Normannorum Scriptores Antiqui* . . . published in 1807 in London. The original edition was published in Paris in 1619; a copy is in the British Museum Reading Room under press-mark Circ. 7 b.

William of Poitiers was a Chaplain to the Conqueror and received the grant of a manor, perhaps part of Westcourt, at Shepherdswell. He writes as if he had been present at the events which he describes, and this may well have been the case. The translation keeps very close to the original, but in one or two instances it has seemed well to insert a few words of the Latin text in brackets, so that readers may form their own opinions. The Conqueror has usually been referred to as "the Duke" although the original text has merely the pronoun "he."—*Ed.*

(PAGE 137, LINE 15.)

When the English wished to collect their dead for burial the Duke gave them free leave to do so. Then after his own dead had been buried he posted a garrison at Hastings under an active commander and himself proceeded to Romney where he exacted such punishment as he thought right for the slaughter of a party of his men who having mistakenly put in there had been attacked and routed by the uncivilized folk of the place after very heavy loss on both sides.

Thence the Duke marched to Dover where he had heard that an immense number of people had gathered together, because the place seemed impregnable. At the Duke's approach, however, the English became panic-stricken and would not trust its natural strength or its fortifications nor yet the number of the defenders. Now, this castle is set upon a rock close to the sea which, naturally steep and for purposes of defence elaborately hewn all round, stands up on the side washed by the sea like a wall with sheer height of as much as an arrow's flight.

But when the defenders were preparing to surrender and sue for peace the soldiers of our army intent on booty threw in fire (*injecerunt ignem*). The flames flying lightly hither and thither caused much destruction. But the Duke not wishing that those who had begun to treat with him for surrender should suffer loss, gave them the cost of reinstating the buildings and paid compensation for other losses. He would have had those responsible for the incendiarism severely punished had they not escaped detection by their insignificance and their numbers. Having accepted the surrender of the castle he spent eight days in making additional fortifications where these were lacking. There at Dover, from eating fresh meat and drinking the water, many of the soldiers died of dysentery and still more were disabled and at death's door. Yet even these misfortunes did not break the Duke's courage. Leaving there a garrison and those that were sick with dysentery, he set forth to complete the subjugation of the people whom he had conquered. Then the men of Kent (*Cantuarii*) of their own accord met him not far from Dover, swore allegiance and gave hostages. Even the powerful capital city trembled with fear and lest any resistance should cause it to be razed to the ground hastened to secure its safety by submission. On the following day he came to the Broken Tower¹ and there pitched camp. Here his sickness of body was so serious as to cause his attendants to be troubled with no less sickness of mind. Yet, intent on the general good, he would not spare himself by delaying there lest the army should suffer from want of necessary provisions, and that although the restoration to health of so good a Duke was a matter of concern to all and a thing much to be desired.

Meanwhile Stigand Archbishop of Canterbury, who besides being pre-eminent in wealth and dignity was most influential among the English in their councils, was with the sons of Algar and other chiefs threatening to give battle. These had set up as King Edgar Atheling, who was of the noble lineage of King Edward but in years still a boy. For they were above all things determined that no-one should be their king who was not their fellow-countryman.

PRaises OF ODO TO WHOM DOVER CASTLE AND THE ADJOINING
TERRITORY OF KENT WAS COMMITTED.

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William committed Dover Castle to his brother Odo and with it the adjacent south coast which was then, and for long before that had been, called Kent. This territory is nearest to Gaul towards which it faces. Hence its inhabitants were more civilized. For they had been accustomed to trade with the Belgæ. Indeed it is said on the authority of a record of old time that this region bordering on the sea was at one

¹ The context gives no help in its identification.

time occupied by the Gauls, who having sailed across for raiding and booty were attracted by its rich lands.

Now this Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, was already well known for his outstanding ability in conducting business, ecclesiastical and secular alike. His goodness and sagacity were attested first of all by the Church of Bayeux which he had with much care singularly ordered and adorned, being at that time young in years but already in character more mature than the old. After that he proved of service to the whole of Normandy and added to its prestige. Whether in the Synods, where Christianity, or in the debates where secular affairs, were discussed, in both alike he shone in understanding and in eloquence. For liberality he had no equal in Gaul; such was the consensus of public opinion. No less praiseworthy was his love of justice. He neither waged wars nor wished them to be waged. Yet was he greatly to be feared by them that take up arms. For, when occasion required, he helped on the war with most effective counsel, so far as he could do so without detriment to religion. To the King, who was his own brother, whom he held in so great affection that he would not be parted from him even in warfare, and from whom he had received great honours and hoped for yet more to come, he shewed outstanding and unfailing loyalty. Normans and Britons alike followed him gladly as one whom they would rather have as lord than any other. Nor were the English so uncivilized as not to recognize at once that this Bishop, this Chief, while he might deserve their fear, deserved also their respect and their love.

THE UNSUCCESSFUL ATTACK OF EUSTACE, EARL OF BOULOGNE UPON DOVER CASTLE.

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At that time there rose up against the King, Earl Eustace of Boulogne, who before the war had given his son in Normandy as a hostage for his fidelity. He was strongly urged by the inhabitants of Kent to attack Dover Castle with their support. They held that if he possessed himself of this exceedingly strong position his power would be extended yet further and so the power of the Normans be lessened. Thus their hatred of the Normans drove them to make a pact with Eustace, who before had been their implacable enemy. In past encounters they had found him to be skilled in warfare and fortunate in battle. If they must needs serve a foreigner they deemed it better to serve one whom they knew and who was their neighbour. Now it so happened that an opportunity occurred which promised a successful issue to their project. The chief guardians of the fortification, the Bishop of Bayeux and Hugo de Montfort, had gone across to the other side of the river Thames and had taken the greater part of the soldiers with them. Thereupon Eustace, having received a message from the

English, crossed with his men in the early hours of the night that he might attack the garrison when they were least expecting it. He led forth his fleet manned with picked troops leaving behind his cavalry except a few only. The whole neighbourhood stood by ready armed ; a yet larger number from further afield would join them, should the siege last more than two days. However, they found the garrison less off their guard than they expected and from fear more strong in defence. The speed of their cavalry, their knowledge of the bye-ways and their better prepared shipping wrested the victory. And that splendid young soldier, Eustace's nephew, was taken. The English dispersed by many bye-ways the more easily that it was difficult for the defenders, being but few, to pursue them in several different directions. Now all this rightly brought disgrace and loss upon Eustace. Indeed, were I to set forth the considerations which tell against him, I should make it clear enough that he richly deserved to forfeit the King's favour and therewith the benefits which he had received as gifts from him. Nor was the judgment, expressed by both Gauls and English alike, astray from the truth when they held him guilty of no light offence. But we feel that we should spare a personage in many ways distinguished, bearing the title of Earl and one who having been taken back into favour is now honoured among those nearest to the King.