

AGNES STRICKLAND



**THE QUEENS
OF ENGLAND**

Agnes Strickland

The Queens of England

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PREFACE.

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Up to Queen Anne, this work is based upon Agnes Strickland's "Queens of England;" but subsequent to that period many authorities have been consulted, and only such matter used as would seem appropriate. My first care was to prepare a narrative which should interest young people, but I have endeavored also to produce a result that would prove a source, not only of pleasure, but of profit. The limits of the design make it evident that some eminent names and noteworthy events could receive slight mention, or none at all, and that politics could be introduced only when requisite for the comprehension of events that depended on them. It will be a satisfaction to hope that my readers may be prompted to independent inquiry.

CHAPTER I. MATILDA OF FLANDERS, WIFE OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR

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(1031-1083).



Matilda, wife of the great William, the Conqueror, was an exceedingly handsome woman, and as she had received the best education that was possible in her times, she was as celebrated for her learning as for her beauty. She was, besides, generous and religious, and had all the qualities necessary for the position she was called upon to fill.

She was famed for her fancy-work, which was looked upon as one of the most important and desirable occupations for ladies of rank; and any woman who could spin, weave and embroider was considered quite a treasure.

Matilda had three cousins who were such skilful needlewomen, that they were sought in marriage by the greatest princes of Europe. Their work has not been preserved, but Matilda's still remains and is called the Bayeux Tapestry. It is the most wonderful achievement in needlework ever accomplished by any woman. But we shall tell more about it, by-and-bye.

Matilda's father was Earl of Flanders, a rich, powerful prince, skilled in the arts of peace and war. He was, besides, such a popular man that all the rulers in his neighborhood were anxious to win the hand of his beautiful daughter.



Her cousin, William of Normandy, was the most accomplished of them all, and loved her devotedly. He was handsome, brave and talented, and so strong, that, it is said, no man could bend his bow but himself. And he was such a sure marksman, that even when riding at full speed, he seldom missed his aim. It is remarkable that although he

was the tallest man in his army, he passed through all his battles without the loss of a drop of blood, until towards the close of his career, when he was wounded by his own son.

Strange to say, this young man did not find favor in the eyes of his lady cousin at all; this mortified him so much, that he resolved to win her in spite of herself.

He had a rival in a young Saxon nobleman named Brihtric Meaw, who had come to Flanders as ambassador from Edward the Confessor, then on the British throne. This favored gentleman was so fair and light-haired that he was nicknamed "Snow." Matilda loved him in secret, which is probably the reason why she would not listen to her cousin William. But Brihtric Meaw does not seem to have cared particularly for her, and so did not find out what her sentiments were towards him. Thus, quite innocently, he never attempted to court her, and she could not forgive his indifference. Still her mind was filled with him, and this made her treat William coldly. He was not to be baffled, however, but courted her through seven long and tedious years.

At last he became impatient, so one day when Matilda was going home from church, he managed to meet her, as lovers will. Perhaps she was more unkind to him than usual and made him angry, otherwise I do not know how to account for his behavior on that occasion, but he seized hold of her, rolled her in the dirt, then actually beat her. Before she had time to call for help, after she had recovered from her surprise, he jumped on his horse, and rode off as fast as he could go.

Now, she might have been induced to forgive him for spoiling her good clothes, but how she could have had anything more to do with a fellow, no matter what his rank might be, who could dare to treat her so brutally, is hard to

understand. Perhaps the women were not so high spirited then as they are now, but certain it is that instead of getting into a rage, stamping her feet and forbidding him ever to approach her again, the princess was won. This remarkable style of love-making went straight to her heart, and brought matters to a crisis. It may be that she feared another beating, or that she was finally convinced of the greatness of his love; whatever it was, she consented to become his wife, forthwith.

The wedding was celebrated at William's Castle in Normandy, Matilda having gone there accompanied by her parents, and a large retinue of ladies and gentlemen. Her trousseau was magnificent, and on her wedding day she wore a superb velvet robe embroidered with gold and pearls. It was so rich and costly, that it was for a long time preserved in the treasury of the Cathedral of Bayeux with William's mantle and helmet, which were adorned with precious stones.

At the time of his marriage, William's affairs were in a most perilous condition, for he was surrounded by powerful neighbors who wanted to get possession of the rich fields of Normandy. They hoped to divide them among themselves and leave the duke nothing. He had enemies among his own subjects too, who would have been pleased to turn him off and have his cousin Guy of Burgundy to govern them, because they thought he had a better right to the dukedom of Normandy than William had. Perhaps this was so, but the latter had too determined a will to yield, and he had been a leader nearly all his life.

When he was only five years old, he formed a battalion of boys of his own age whom he drilled in military practice every day. It must have been a pretty sight, and no doubt the little fellows fancied themselves real warriors. Of course

disputes arose, all of which William settled with remarkable skill.

He was a good student too, for he knew enough of Latin at eight years of age, to read and explain Caesar's Commentaries.

When he was about seven, his father, Duke Robert, went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. But before he did so, he assembled all the nobles of his realm, and made them swear fealty to his bright, promising child, whom he hugged and kissed tenderly, then presented to his subjects as their future Sovereign, saying: "He is little, but he will grow."

Not long after this, Henry, King of France, invaded William's dominion, but he was defeated, because the young duke had such excellent advisers and assistants.



WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR.

The king was so indignant at this defeat, that he incited the Norman nobles to stir up an insurrection, hoping, no doubt, to punish the boy by depriving him of his title, altogether.



PICTURE OF WILLIAM, FROM
TAPESTRIES.

Once when William was out hunting, he passed the night at a remote castle without military escort. His cousin, Guy of Burgundy, hearing of it, laid a plot to kill him, but this was prevented by the Court fool, who accidentally found it out and travelled all night, at full speed, to warn the Duke of his danger. He managed to get into the castle at four o'clock in the morning, and knocked violently on William's chamber door with the handle of his whip, shouting: "get up! get up,

my lord!" William obeyed the summons, and mounting his swiftest horse, half dressed, rode with fiery speed for many hours before he was beyond danger. Even while making his escape, he might have been caught, for his horse was almost exhausted when he had the good fortune to meet a gentleman who supplied him with another.

Later, the young duke had a chance to turn the tables on his cousin, Guy, whom he captured in battle. But remembering that they had been friends in early childhood, William forgave the attempt his cousin had made on his life, and released him.

The King of France was just planning another attack on William's dominions when the young man married, and then Matilda's father became such a powerful ally that the king hesitated. Soon after he died. Relieved of this anxiety, the duke thought he might settle down and enjoy the society of his young wife; but, the Archbishop of Rouen, who had reasons of his own for trying to prevent the marriage, pronounced it unlawful, and the young couple were so distressed that they appealed to the Pope. He decided that if each would build and endow an Abbey, as well as a hospital for the blind, he would grant them dispensation. This was not difficult, so Matilda founded the Holy Trinity for Nuns, and William founded the Monastery of St. Stephen.

Then William set to work to erect a palace for his own dwelling very near the Monastery. Matilda had a great taste for architecture and took pleasure in superintending these buildings. The great hall of the palace was one of the finest apartments in all Europe and the edifice itself was superb.

This royal couple did everything to render their subjects happy and contented, and provided work for them by building ships and harbors, which promoted trade also.

Though we know that Matilda did not love her husband before marriage, she became a devoted wife afterwards, and William showed his entire confidence in her by leaving her to govern his country when he went over to England to obtain a promise from Edward the Confessor that he would adopt him as successor to the throne.

He was kindly received in England, and Edward gave him some fine hawks, hounds and other presents. Then Matilda had a little boy whose birth added considerably to her happiness. He was called Robert, after his grandpapa, and there was great rejoicing in Normandy over this event. If they could have foreseen how he would turn out, the feeling would have been very different. In course of time Matilda had eight other children, and during many years of peace and national prosperity, she and her husband devoted themselves to their care and education.

Now it happened that once, when *A.D. 1065*. Harold, Edward the Confessor's half brother, was out fishing in an open boat, he was overtaken by a storm and obliged to seek refuge in the territory of the Earl of Ponthieu, who seized him and shut him up in prison. William rescued him, treated him most kindly, and even promised him one of his daughters in marriage, though she was but seven years old.



Harold acted like a sneak, and pretended to be highly flattered; but it was not his intention ever to marry the girl at all.

He listened to William's narration of how Edward had adopted him as his successor to the British throne, and made a solemn promise to assist him to get it. Soon after

his return to England, he married the widow of the Prince of Wales, and at Edward's death he took no notice of his promise to William, but had himself proclaimed king.

Of course such conduct aroused William's wrath, and, with the aid of his wife's relations, he resolved to invade England.

This was the year 1066, and a *A.D. 1066.* memorable one on account of the appearance in the heavens of a splendid three-tailed comet. We are pleased to have such a visitor and to be able to gaze at it and study it with the aid of telescopes, but in that time the people were so superstitious that they thought it portended evil, and so it spread terror throughout the land. The death of the King, which occurred only a few days after its appearance, served to encourage the superstition. When the astrologers foretold its approach they announced it thus:

"In the year one thousand and sixty-six,
Comets to England's sons an end shall fix."

One of the largest and finest pieces of handiwork that Matilda accomplished, was the tapestry representing this comet in the heavens with its three fiery tails spread all across the canvas. A group of terror-stricken Saxon princes, priests and ladies have rushed out of their dwellings to look at it, and are pointing towards it, their faces expressing the utmost anxiety. To be sure the comet looked, when compared with the objects in the picture, a great deal larger than it could possibly have been, but probably, the size was suggested by the awe it inspired.

Matilda did not do all this work alone; if she had, Hood's Song of the Shirt might well apply to the hundreds and thousands of cross stitches that she would have made, and

we should pity her for having such a weary task. But she was assisted by all the ladies of her court, who laughed and chatted merrily while their hands were busily employed.

Well, William started on his expedition to England, leaving his wife to rule at home, and his son Robert, then only thirteen years of age, military chief of Normandy.

A large number of his subjects objected to this invasion, SO when the whole fleet was becalmed at St. Valleri, the



LANDING OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR.

“By the splendor of God, I have seized England with both hands.”

common soldiers complained and declared that God was their adversary, and had stopped the wind to keep them back. The king did not know what to say to this, but at last he hit upon something that he knew would impress them. He ordered the shrine of St. Valleri to be brought from the tomb and placed in an open field, then invited everybody to

pray to the saint to intercede with the Almighty for a breeze. Crowds of people far and near, as well as the Norman soldiers, brought offerings, and in a short time the shrine was buried in the gold, silver and other precious gifts that they placed upon it. The wind did not immediately change, but the malcontents had something to think about, and the delay gave Matilda time to carry out a pleasant surprise that she had planned for her husband. One day she appeared in the harbor on a splendid vessel of war that she had caused to be built as a present for William. She called it the Mora. At the prow of the vessel was a gold image of their youngest son. With one hand he held a trumpet to his lips, and with the other a bow with the arrow aimed towards England. Loud cheering and joyful exclamations greeted Matilda's appearance, and her husband was overcome by this mark of her affection.

The Mora carried a red flag at her mast-head by day; it was replaced at night by a bright light that served as a guide for the other vessels of the fleet. Scarcely was the duke well established on board than the long wished-for wind arose, every man was summoned to his post, and they set sail. Matilda went back home.

The Norman fleet met some very rough weather and lost two of their ships. On the 28th of September, 1066, they landed on the coast of Sussex.

The duke was the last person to step on shore. As he did so, he stumbled and fell. Probably he was still giddy from the motion of the vessel, but his followers thought it an evil omen and raised a great cry of distress. The duke's presence of mind did not desert him. He picked up two handfuls of sand, exclaiming: "See, Seigneurs! by the splendor of God, I have seized England with both hands!"

Then a meal was served on the beach, and afterwards the soldiers having selected a spot, began to put up the wooden fortress that they had brought in sections, from Normandy.

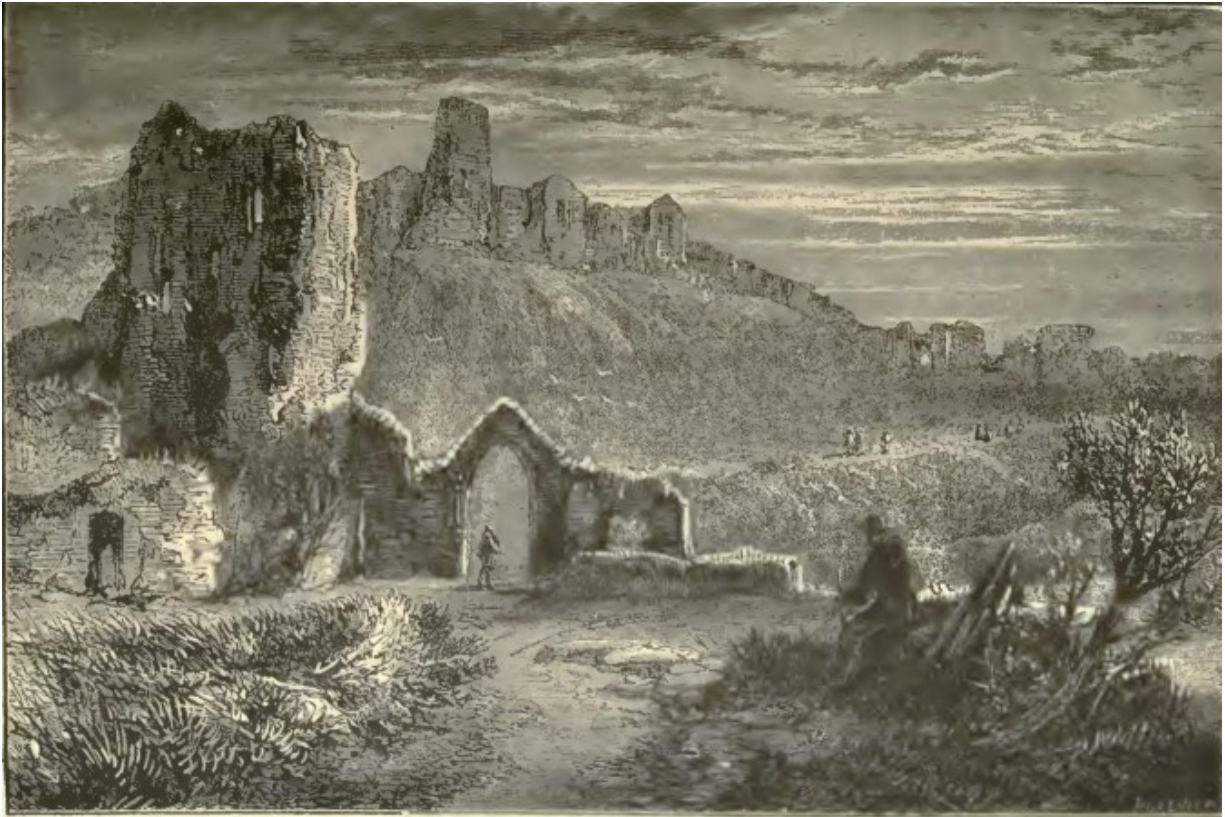
A piece of Matilda's tapestry represents the soldiers, assisting the carpenters and builders in this work.

The army tarried four days on the beach. But there were no telegraphs or newspapers in those days, so Harold knew nothing of the approach of his enemy until a knight arrived from Sussex, having ridden all the way without food or rest, and rushing into his presence shouted at the top of his voice: "The Normans have come! they have landed at Hastings and built up a fort! they will rend the land from thee and thine unless thou defend it well!" Harold sent a messenger offering to buy off the Normans, but William replied that he had not come for money, but to claim the realm that Edward the Confessor had given him.

"Nay; you ask too much of us, Sire," said the messenger. "Harold is willing to purchase your departure with silver, gold and fine garments, but if you refuse, he will give you battle on Saturday night."

The duke accepted the challenge. The night preceding the battle was passed by the English in dancing, singing and gambling; but the Normans prayed, fasted, and confessed their sins.

The battle was fought seven miles from Hastings. Taillefer, the warrior minstrel of Normandy, rode gallantly



RUINS OF HASTINGS.

at the head of the chivalry of his native land, singing the war songs of Rollo. William had three horses killed under him that day without receiving a single scratch himself. Harold was killed, and the victorious Duke William pitched his tent on the battle-field that night.

When Matilda received the joyful tidings of her husband's triumph, she was praying in a church, which, she ordered to be forever after called Notre Dame de Bonnes Nouvelles, in memory of the good news she had received there.

A celebrated piece of embroidery made by her after the victory represents her husband pointing towards his noble steed. He is dressed in a complete suit of armor, and the likeness is said to be as perfect as it could be, represented in cross stitch.

CHAPTER II.

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A.D. 1066.

On the Monday following the battle of Hastings, William rode into the city of London, on horseback, followed by a long train of the nobility of England and Normandy. He proceeded to Westminster Abbey, where he was crowned King of England.

Grand preparations had been made for this event, and such a brilliant coronation had never been seen. Crowds of people gathered in the streets, and the duke's fine presence and noble bearing won all hearts.

Holding the crown aloft the archbishop asked the nobles assembled, if they were willing to receive this duke for their king. They were so boisterous in their eager assent, that the Norman soldiers who had assembled outside the Abbey in case their protection should be needed, mistook the noise for the rising of the Saxons, and set fire to most of the buildings in the neighborhood. It required prompt action on the part of the more sober-minded of the Normans, to prevent the flames from destroying the Abbey itself. William was dismayed at this occurrence, and it was not until he showed himself in his coronation robes and crown, that his followers could be restored to order and quiet.

Now, one would naturally suppose that in those rude times, Matilda's neighbors would have taken advantage of her husband's absence to invade her dominion, but she governed with so much skill and prudence that they did not

venture to molest her, and she made herself universally beloved and respected.

Having recounted the good traits of this queen, it is only fair to present the bad ones too, because nobody is entirely without faults, yet it is painful to be obliged to refer to one very dark deed of which she was guilty.



OLD WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

She must have had a large share of vanity, for she never forgave Brihtric Meaw because he did not return her early affection, and fourteen years later she sought revenge in this wise: She persuaded her husband to deprive Meaw of all his lands and bestow them on her; then she had him put in prison where, after several months, he died. This was a very serious crime, and it is hard to understand how a woman with everything in the world to make her happy, and with qualities so fine and noble as Matilda's certainly were, could have been capable of it.

After an absence of six months, William returned to Normandy, accompanied by a number of Saxon noblemen. He brought a large quantity of costly spoils, among which were garments richly embroidered in silver and gold by the skilful hands of the Anglo-Saxon women, whose beautiful work was renowned all over the world.

The whole summer was spent by the royal couple in travelling and amusements until news was brought to William that his Saxon subjects were planning an insurrection, when he hastened back to England. He arrived before any very serious steps had been taken.

He now began to see that his position would be in every respect more agreeable, and his subjects would be better satisfied if he had his family at court, so he sent a numerous company over to Normandy to conduct them to England.

They proceeded at once to Winchester, *A.D. 1068*, where the queen's coronation took place with great pomp and ceremony. In order to render it still more imposing, William had himself crowned a second time, but on this occasion there was no such excitement as disturbed the first crowning. Everybody was charmed with the graceful, majestic appearance of the new queen, though some of the Saxons objected to her being called Regina, which is the Latin word, signifying Queen. However, William insisted upon this honor being conferred on his wife; though previous to his reign all the wives of the various kings had simply been termed "the lady, his companion." To be sure, few of the queens of England could claim more illustrious descent than Matilda; for Alfred, the best and noblest of their sovereigns, was one of her ancestors, and she was connected with most of the royal families in Europe.

After the coronation ceremony, a grand banquet was served, at which both the king and queen presided.

Now, Matilda had to be served by her new subjects, the English, because they would not have been satisfied if she had kept only her Norman ladies in attendance.

The king was so happy that he bestowed favors right and left in order to gain the affection of the nation. He also revived some of the old offices at court, which was a very popular act. Among these, was that of grand pannetier, whose duty it was to carry the salt and the carving-knives from the pantry to the king's dining-table on state occasions. His fees were the salt-cellars, spoons, knives, and bread-covers laid on the royal table. Forks were not among the luxuries of William the Conqueror's day, when people must have verified the proverb of later times, that "fingers were made before forks." The Manor of Addington was presented to the cook for preparing a kind of white soup that tickled his majesty's palate.

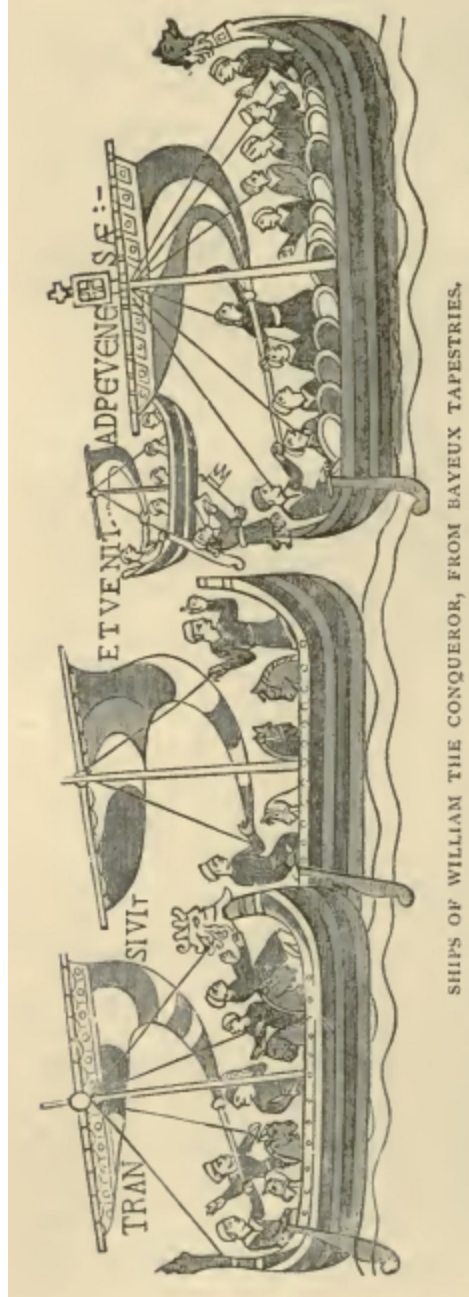
During the grand coronation banquet, a noble cavalier, named Marmion, rode into the hall on horseback, completely armed, and shouted out three times: "If anybody denies that our most gracious sovereign Lord William, and his spouse Matilda, are King and Queen of England, he is a false-hearted traitor and liar, and here I do challenge him to single combat."

Nobody accepted the challenge.

Under a glass case' at the Museum of Bayeux is preserved to this very day, a piece of canvas, nineteen inches broad and sixty-seven yards long, on which Queen Matilda embroidered the whole conquest of England by her husband. There are many hundred figures of men, horses, birds, beasts, houses, trees, castles, and churches, all done in their proper colors.

The designs were made by a dwarf artist named Tuold, who seems to have been farsighted enough to know that

the work would become celebrated, for he has curiously managed to introduce his own figure or name on the canvas wherever it was possible.

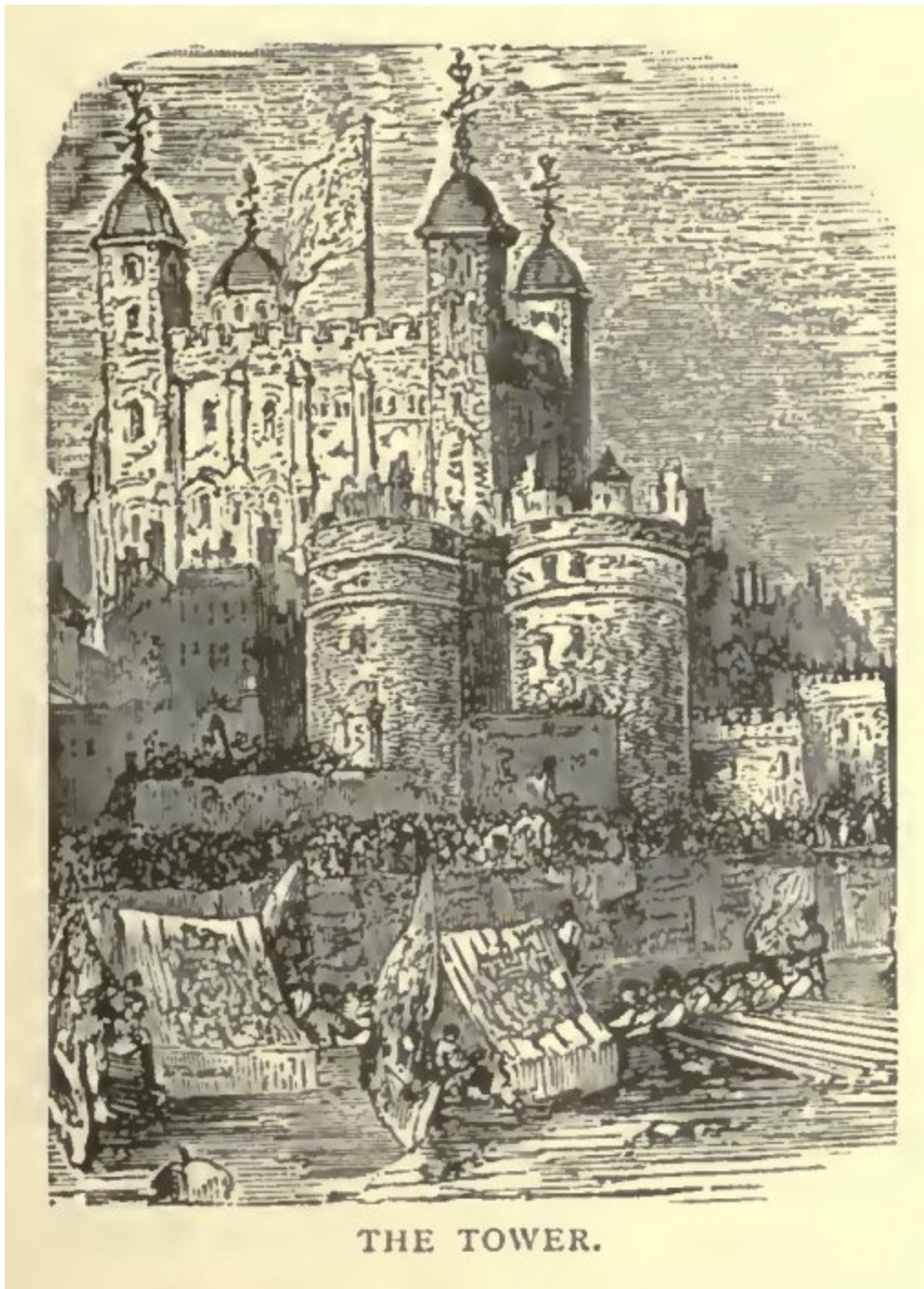


SHIPS OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR, FROM BAVEUX TAPESTRIES.

After William and his wife were seated on the throne, there was a season of tranquillity. Then the Conqueror laid the foundation for the great Tower of London, as well as

other strong fortresses. But revolts began again, and the Normans demanded the return of Matilda. She resolved to gratify them, but in so doing displeased the English, for they knew that during her absence there would be fewer celebrations at court, and they would thus be deprived of opportunities for disposing of their fine goods.

All the working people were affected, *A.D. 1069*, more or less, by her departure, and they got into a habit of gathering at each other's houses to discuss their wrongs and grievances. Fearing that they might stimulate one another to revolt, William instituted the Curfew, or the tolling of a bell, at eight o'clock every evening. This was a signal for all the lights and fires to be put out in the dwellings; the word was originally *couvre feu*, which means extinguishing fires.



THE TOWER.

Then William made war in the north of England and laid waste the whole country. In one of the battles a fair young Saxon, who was engaged to one of the king's daughters, was killed.