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William the Conqueror's March to London in 1066

IT has been generally agreed that William the Conqueror, on approaching London after the battle of Senlac, made no attempt to cross the Thames, but marched along its right bank and found a crossing at Wallingford nearly fifty miles above the city. A suggestion has recently been proposed that his movements were governed by military considerations, as 'a long sweep about a hostile city was favourite strategy of William's'.¹ In this essay I am chiefly concerned to show that William crossed the Thames at Kew, and to explain the reasons for his subsequent march to Wallingford.

Our direct sources of information about his movements are few and poor. First, there is the chronicle² of William of Poitiers, his chaplain, whose statements must be accepted as valuable on account of his official position, but used cautiously as coming from a man of foreign birth who probably knew little of English geography. No convincing reason has ever been cited for supposing that he was with the Conqueror at Senlac, or even shortly after the battle. He omits the names of the leaders of the army; he gives no description of the submission of any town of importance, except Dover, Canterbury, and London, and he records no incident which betrays curiosity or even personal observation. We have instead a meagre and colourless narrative, which reads as though it were based on what had been told him either by his master the Conqueror or by some of his master's servants.

Next we may notice the Latin song³ written soon after the

¹ G. B. Adams, *The Political History of England, 1066-1216*, p. 6.

² Printed in Migne's *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, tom. cxlix.

³ *De Bello Hastingsensi Carmen*, printed by Henry Petrie and John Sharpe in the *Momenta Historica Britannica*.

Conquest and ascribed to Guy, bishop of Amiens. It has the appearance of being in substance a truthful narrative, though statements in a song are more likely to be untrustworthy in point of detail than those in a prose chronicle. Guy has much to say on matters which the other chroniclers pass by in silence, such, for instance, as the preparations for the siege of London. These have been treated by modern critics as purely imaginary events on the ground that they are inconsistent with what William of Poitiers has said. Nevertheless, instead of rejecting Guy's statements, we ought to seek explanations by which they can be reconciled with those of other authorities.

The chronicle of Florence of Worcester, who died in or about 1118, and the version of the Saxon Chronicle, sometimes designated by the letter D and often called the Worcester chronicle, contain very brief accounts of the events which occurred between the battle of Senlac and the coronation of William. Florence gives the fuller narrative, but he says nothing which contradicts the statements in the Worcester chronicle. These authorities are valuable in that they supply some information about the doings of the English, which, coming from an English source, is at least presumptively trustworthy. William, the monk of Malmesbury, who died about 1142, gives an even briefer account than Florence's; and it is somewhat different. If we accept Florence of Worcester's account rather than William of Malmesbury's, it is partly because Florence has the better reputation for accuracy, and partly because his account is more consistent with what may be learnt from the other authorities.

Some indirect evidence was published by Mr. F. H. Baring in this Review in January 1898.⁴ He found from Domesday Book that certain manors in the counties round London were of considerably less value at the date when the Domesday tenant received them, than they had been in the reign of the Confessor, and were afterwards at the time of the survey. He assumed that they had been wasted by the Conqueror before his coronation, and he so constructed from Domesday an itinerary of the invaders. But it is unlikely that the main army laid waste the country wherever it marched. Its advance was rapid and almost certainly along good roads. Small forces sent to obtain supplies and secure the submission of the county towns are more likely to have burnt farms than the main army. We can believe that the Kentish peasantry allowed the victorious William to pass unmolested, and yet attacked small detachments of his army and so provoked reprisals. Again, many of the low valuations on which Mr. Baring relies might be explained otherwise. Famine, for instance, has her own tale of woe to tell, and often she wanders

⁴ *Ante*, xiii. 17-25.

far from the stricken field of battle. We know, too, that before Harold left London it had been proposed to lay waste the country between the city and the channel, so as to impede the march of the invaders.⁵ It is likely enough that many acts of wanton destruction were perpetrated by the English soldiers in their flight from Senlac. Moreover, if military considerations compelled William to burn some manors, prudence must have counselled him to leave others intact. In all probability his instructions were brief and general. His men were to encourage submission and punish resistance. Domesday is no easy document to interpret. The dates when the tenants received their lands varied; the three separate valuations are not always recorded; and there are other difficulties which make it impossible to construct from it the actual itinerary of the Conqueror and his army. Nevertheless, we may gather from Mr. Baring's interesting paper some useful information.

William's first move after the battle at Senlac was to Hastings, where, according to Guy of Amiens, he stayed five days.⁶ He then marched to Dover, stopping on his way at Romney to avenge the slaughter of some of his men who had landed there in error.⁷ This done, he took possession of the town and castle of Dover without fighting, and remained there eight days, which he occupied in strengthening the fortifications.⁸ On his withdrawal the citizens of Canterbury came to meet him, swore fealty to him, and gave him hostages.⁹ The next day he arrived at the Broken Tower, where he pitched his camp.¹⁰ Where was this Broken Tower, or *Turris Fracta*? There is no town or village in Kent bearing a name which could be correctly so rendered in Latin. Either the name is a blunder, or it must be used of some small stronghold which ceased to exist soon after the Conquest. The chronicler is most emphatic in stating that his master pitched his camp the next day at the Broken Tower and then fell ill. But the Conqueror is not likely to have marched from Dover to some obscure and insignificant place for his next halt. Wherever the Broken Tower may have been, it was at or near some town capable of supporting an army for a short time. I believe that *Turris Fracta* is either a blunder, which cannot now be explained, for Sandwich, or else some small fortress in or adjoining

⁵ Wacc, *Le Roman de Rou*, ed. Frédéric Pluquet, ii. 166.

⁶ 'Hastinge portus castris tunc quinque diebus mansit,' l. 597.

⁷ 'poenam exigit pro clade suorum, quos illic errore appulsos:' William of Poitiers, p. 1257.

⁸ 'Recepto castro, que minus erant per dies octo addidit firmamenta:' *ibid.* p. 1257.

⁹ 'Occurrunt ultro Cantuarii haud procul a Douera, iurant fidelitatem, dant obsides:' *ibid.* p. 1258.

¹⁰ 'Veniens postero die ad Fractam Turrim castra metatus est, quo in loco grauisima sui corporis ualetudine animos familiarium pari conturbauit aegritudine:' *ibid.*

that town.¹¹ The Conqueror was already in possession of Pevensey, Hastings, Romney, and Dover. Moreover, as Winchelsea and Rye lie between Hastings and Romney, and Hythe between Romney and Dover, we may regard it as certain that he seized these three towns on his march. Only the occupation of Sandwich was needed for him to be in possession of the eight chief seaports of east Sussex and Kent. He was bound to seize these ports promptly in order to prevent their inhabitants from equipping fleets with which to intercept reinforcements. The ships which had brought the Norman army to England were now needed to bring yet more soldiers from Normandy, and the invaders, we must assume, having for a while no navy at their disposal, were compelled to seize the seaports from the land.¹² It is highly probable that at this time a detachment of the army was also sent to seize Seaford, Shoreham, and Bosham, the three chief seaports of Sussex which lay to the west of Pevensey.

From Sandwich the Conqueror marched to Canterbury, where, according to Guy of Amiens, he stayed a month.¹³ Too much stress must not be laid on Guy's precise words, for he wrote in Latin elegiacs, and it possibly suited his metre to speak of a month's stay when the true period was really less. If the Conqueror's subsequent movements be considered he can scarcely have stayed at Canterbury more than three weeks, and probably left there about 21 November.

While William was at Canterbury he sent to Winchester and demanded tribute from its citizens. Edith, the widow of the Confessor, who held the city in dower, after taking counsel of her chief men, decided to comply with the demand.

Guincestram misit, mandat primatibus urbis,
Vt faciunt alii, ferre tributa sibi.
Hanc regina tenet . . .
Solum uectigal postulat, atque fidem.
Vna primates reginae consuluerunt
Illaque concedens ferre petita iubet.¹⁴

If we may trust Guy of Amiens the tribute was paid before the Conqueror left Canterbury, for he says,

Rex sic pacatus tentoria fixa resoluit.¹⁵

It is probable that William made arrangements for the occupation of the city by a Norman garrison, and we may suspect

¹¹ Possibly the Conqueror lodged at Richborough. W. Boys, in his *History of Sandwich*, p. 835, gives Ruppecester as one of the variant names of Richborough. A blundering writer might render Ruppecester or some similar form by *Turris Fracta*.

¹² Reinforcements actually came, but where they landed is not known. See below, p. 221.

¹³ 'Per spatium mensis cum gente perendinat illic : ' l. 623.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* ll. 625-32.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* l. 635.

that he gave directions that reinforcements from Normandy should disembark at Bosham or one of the neighbouring ports and proceed without delay to Winchester.

From Canterbury the Conqueror advanced towards London. Mr. Baring contends that he marched through various small towns and villages, leaving Rochester and even Maidstone on his right. As his advance was rapid, it is much more likely that he kept to the old Roman road through Rochester, a place of strategic importance. Neither William of Poitiers nor Guy of Amiens has recorded any resistance at Rochester, and probably none was offered. A battle or siege after the ready submission of Dover and Canterbury would have been noteworthy, whereas the surrender of another city would scarcely have appeared worth recording. Indeed, it may be that Rochester had already surrendered before William left Canterbury, for Guy of Amiens states that after the surrender of that city other towns and boroughs offered him gifts, and that from all sides men came to bend their knees and kiss the Conqueror's feet.¹⁶ But whether Rochester had already surrendered or not, the Conqueror is not likely to have left the city in the possession of the English before he marched onwards to London.

Meanwhile the great men of the realm were busy in the metropolis. Aldred, archbishop of York, the earls Edwin and Morkere, and the citizens and the butsecarls wished to elect Edgar Atheling, the grandson of Edmund Ironside, as their king, and promised that they would fight for him; but when all warlike preparations had been made, the earls withdrew their support and went home with their army. This is Florence of Worcester's account; ¹⁷ that of the monk of Malmesbury reads a little differently. He tells us that when news of the death of Harold reached London the two earls tried to arrange that one or other of them should be made king, but that when they found that their efforts were in vain they withdrew to Northumbria in the belief that the Conqueror would never visit that part of the island.¹⁸ Then the monk goes on to say that the rest of the magnates would have chosen Edgar as their king if they had had the bishops as their supporters. It looks very much as if, while the magnates were in the midst of their preparations for the coronation, messengers came from the pope forbidding the bishops to take part in the ceremony, and ordering them to submit to the Conqueror.¹⁹

Perhaps the most significant feature of these accounts is that

¹⁶ *Ibid.* II. 611-22.

¹⁷ ii. 307, ed. W. Stubbs.

¹⁸ It will be remembered that the pope had sent William a consecrated banner: William of Poitiers, p. 1240.

¹⁹ Ed. B. Thorpe, i. 228.

they say nothing of Stigand, the archbishop of Canterbury; and yet we may gather from William of Poitiers that if Stigand was not among the English magnates in London, he was at least in correspondence²⁰ with Edwin and Morkere about this time. Yet, as Mr. Baring has observed, in the general devastation of the manors in the south of Kent Stigand's remained conspicuously intact. We may perhaps infer from this that he surrendered by letter or deputy when the Conqueror first entered Kent. May it not be that the men who surrendered at Canterbury were eagerly following the example of Stigand, chief among the Kentish magnates?²¹ The submission of Winchester, a see which he held with his archbishopric, would have induced him, if further inducement were needed, to adhere to his new lord. If he was, as I think, among the first of the magnates to submit, the Conqueror may have seen in him a useful ally. The bishops as a body may have mistrusted their metropolitan as a heretic, but he was in a position to secure the support of a large part of the clergy in the important dioceses of Canterbury and Winchester; and his brother Ethelmar was bishop of the important diocese of Elmham. Stigand's early submission would explain his name not appearing in the English chronicles as one of the magnates who wished to have Edgar Atheling as their king. But if Edgar had been chosen it would in the ordinary course of events have fallen to the lot of Stigand to crown him; and if the pope's messengers had, as I have suggested, forbidden the bishops to take part in the coronation, the magnates would naturally have begged the heretic Stigand, in spite of his surrender, to perform the ceremony. There was a chance of his deserting his new lord, and an archbishop who had received his pall from an anti-pope might be expected to pay little attention to the orders and prohibitions of the true pope. Many a strong man in Stigand's place would have vacillated, and we may well believe that Stigand vacillated. In Matthew Paris's *Gesta Abbatum*²² we read of the archbishop, 'Ipse similis arundini uentis agitate nunc regi nunc Anglis uidebatur inclinari.' It is likely enough that when the Conqueror reached the south bank of the Thames he learnt that Stigand was in friendly communication with the earls Edwin and Morkere, and forthwith determined to lay waste such of his manors as were then near at hand.

A body of citizens was sent across London bridge to attack William as he drew near to the city.²³ They were driven back

²⁰ See the passage quoted on p. 215 below.

²¹ It is possible that Stigand was himself responsible for the submission.

²² L. 45, Rolls Series.

²³ 'Præmissi illo equites Northmanni quingenti, egressam contra se aciem refugere intra moenia impigre compellunt, terga cedentes.' William of Poitiers, p. 1258. The continuation is quoted in the text below, p. 216.

with much slaughter by an advance-guard of five hundred Norman knights, who then burnt all the houses they could find on the south side of the Thames. It was probably then that Edwin and Morkere withdrew 'with their army' to the north. Perhaps as soldiers of experience with an army at their disposal they had their own ideas of the best method of resisting the invaders. If the Londoners declined to follow their advice they are likely to have refused all further assistance. Some such quarrel between them and the intimates of the Atheling might explain the discrepancy between the accounts of what happened in London given by Florence of Worcester and William of Malmesbury respectively. A claim to exercise military authority might easily have been misrepresented as a claim to the throne. But the simpler explanation of the earls' conduct may be the true one, that they saw the impossibility of maintaining the claims of the Atheling, and were already willing to surrender on the most favourable terms they could obtain. It is not clear where the two earls went on leaving London. Florence of Worcester says that they went home,²⁴ William of Malmesbury that they departed for Northumbria.²⁵ There can be no doubt that they went northward, and, having regard to the fact that immediately after the battle at Senlac they had sent their sister Ealdgyth to Chester, it is likely enough that they marched towards that city along Watling Street.²⁶

Here we may pause to consider what William of Poitiers²⁷ says of Stigand and the proposed coronation of Edgar.

Interea Stigandus Cantuariensis archipraesul, qui sicut excellabat opibus atque dignitate, ita consultis plurimum apud Anglos poterat, cum filiis Algardi aliisque praepotentibus praelium minatur. Regem statuerunt Edgarum Adelinum ex Edwardi nobilitate annis puerum.

The word *interea* refers to the period between the Conqueror's departure from Canterbury and the defeat of the Londoners near Southwark. We may without difficulty suppose that when the Conqueror reached the banks of the Thames and moved westwards he came to Stigand's manor of Mortlake, and there learned that the archbishop had been making plans with the earls Edwin and Morkere for resisting the invaders. It is significant that though the archbishop's manors in the south of Kent appear to have been spared in the general devastation of that part of the county, the Domesday Book suggests that his manor of

²⁴ 'Cum suo exercitu domum redierunt : ' p. 228.

²⁵ 'Northanhimbriam discesserant ex suo coniectantes ingenio nunquam illud Willelmum esse uenturum : ' ii. 307.

²⁶ 'Et sororem suam Aldgitham reginam sumptam ad ciuitatem Legionum misere : ' Florence of Worcester, p. 228.

²⁷ p. 1258.

Mortlake on Thames was wasted by the invaders.²⁸ But whether the Conqueror first learnt of Stigand's duplicity when he reached Mortlake or some time earlier, we have in William of Poitiers's account evidence that the archbishop was at this time the political associate of the earls Edwin and Morkere. This is a fact which throws some light on subsequent events.

According to the received opinion the Conqueror, after burning Southwark, marched to Wallingford without crossing the Thames. The only authority which has been cited in its support is a passage in the chronicle²⁹ of William of Poitiers, which appears to me to have been seriously misinterpreted.

Multae stragi addunt incendium, cremantes quidquid aedificiorum citra flumen inuenere ut malo duplici superba ferocia contundatur. Dux progrediens dein quoque uersus placuit transmeato flumine Tamesi uadē simul atque ponte ad oppidum Guarenfort peruenit.

The chronicler here states distinctly that William reached Wallingford after he had crossed the river. As the town is on the Berkshire side of the Thames, the received opinion supposes that the chronicler's account is inaccurate, but it fails entirely to explain the inaccuracy. It is, however, quite easy to believe that William crossed the river twice before he reached Wallingford, the first time from south to north (as I hold, at Kew), the second time in the reverse direction. The second crossing being further from London would have been less worthy of notice than the first, where the river was broader. There is, therefore, nothing remarkable in William of Poitiers mentioning one crossing only, and in that crossing being the one nearer London; more especially if the first crossing was difficult and the second easy.

The Conqueror was now master of Dover, the chief port of the kingdom, Canterbury, its ecclesiastical capital, and Winchester, its second city in political importance. He had repulsed the men whom the citizens of London had sent to oppose him, and he was now, so we are told, free to go where he would. Without doubt his next object was to secure the submission of London with as little delay as possible. To do this he had no need to march some fifty miles to the west of the city. There were several fords much nearer London than Wallingford, by which he could have crossed the river, had he chosen to do so. There was no strategic advantage in occupying Wallingford rather than several other towns on the banks of the Thames.

The nearest ford to London was between Lambeth and Westminster, where in ancient times Watling Street crossed the Thames. The Conqueror almost certainly made no serious

²⁸ 'Totum manerium T.R.E. ualebat xxxii lib. et post x lib. Modo xxxviii lib. : ' D.B. f. 31'.

²⁹ p. 1258.

attempt to cross here. There is some reason for thinking that the ford was no longer used ; but if it were in use, no prudent general would have ventured to pass through a ford more than a quarter of a mile long, and not two miles distant from a strong and populous city like London. If the Conqueror had crossed here, William of Poitiers would have given some account of his successful landing at Westminster, which would have been a military exploit well worth recording.

The next ford³⁰ of military importance up the river was between Kew and Brentford. Just fifty years earlier Edmund Ironside had led an army across the Thames at Brentford.³¹ The story of that exploit, then still lingering in the neighbourhood, would have reached the Conqueror's ears, who was likely to have attempted what Edmund had achieved. Kew is situate on the south bank of the Thames at a distance of nearly nine miles from London Bridge and five miles from Kingston, at this time a place of no military importance, but perhaps, after Southwark and Guildford, politically the chief town in Surrey. Kingston seems to have surrendered without a fight ; at any rate the chroniclers say nothing of a siege, and Domesday³² suggests that it had suffered no waste when it came into the king's hands. The Conqueror might have been content to send a detachment of his troops to accept the surrender of Kingston, while he busied himself with the ford at Kew ; and if there was a bridge at Kingston at this date the detachment may have been directed to cross the river by the bridge and then proceed to Brentford. This at first sight might be taken to be the explanation of the words '*transmeato flumine Tamesi uado simul atque ponte*'. A part of the army crossed at Kingston by bridge, the rest by ford at Kew. This is not the best explanation. The existence of the bridge at Kingston is very doubtful, and the distance of Kew from Kingston is too great for the words *simul atque* to refer to such a double crossing. We may therefore turn to what is, I contend, the true explanation of the words of William of Poitiers.

In the middle ages Old Brentford was a small town consisting of one long street lying along the north bank of the Thames. Not being of sufficient importance to form a parish of itself, it was ecclesiastically a part of Ealing. A chain of three islands called 'aits', or 'eyots', nearer Brentford than Kew, lies in the bed of the river, stretching almost from one end of the town

³⁰ There were ferries at Chelsea and Fulham in the middle ages. Perhaps at the time of the Norman Conquest fords were in use in these places, but there is no reason for supposing that they were considered important from a military point of view.

³¹ *Two Saxon Chronicles*, ed. C. Plummer, i. 150.

³² 'T.R.E. et post et modo ualuit xxx libre : ' D.B. f. 30'.

to the other.³³ To-day when the channel lies on the Surrey side of the aits, the other passage is at low tide choked with mud. In former days it was not so : there was a narrow but navigable channel between the aits and Brentford, and the Surrey passage was broad and shallow.³⁴ So much importance was attached to the maintenance of the ancient channel that when, in 1757, one Robert Tunstall obtained an act of parliament³⁵ for constructing a bridge across the river, a section was inserted prohibiting gravel, sand, or mud from being taken from the river bed between Kew and the aits ; the intention, no doubt, being that nothing should be done by which the ancient channel might be diverted from the Brentford side of the aits to the Surrey side.

The situation of the ford across the Thames can be identified without difficulty. From the main street of Brentford a steep lane, now called Smith Hill, running southwards to the water's edge, serves as the chief approach from the street to the river. If the lane were continued southwards it would pass over the topmost ait before reaching the Surrey bank. Continued northwards it crosses the main street at right angles and leads to Ealing, in which parish, as already mentioned, Old Brentford formerly lay. Next to the main street this lane, which is still called Ealing Lane, was until recently the most important road in Old Brentford.³⁶ But if Smith Hill were continued across the river, passing over the topmost ait, it would reach the Surrey bank at a place where another lane formerly ran into the river. This lane, which, in 1748, was called Love Lane and then separated Kew Gardens from Richmond Gardens, led to Sheen.³⁷ There can be no reasonable doubt that the ancient ford connected

³³ The two lower aits almost join one another, and they probably once formed a single island which was called Brentford Ait. On the official map sold at Kew Gardens these two aits are called Kew Aits ; and the upper ait is called Lot's Ait.

³⁴ The aits, though nearer Brentford than Kew, were in the county of Surrey. (T. Faulkner, *Brentford, Ealing, and Chiswick*, p. 163.) In the earliest ordnance maps the channel is represented as lying between Lot's Ait and the Brentford Aits, and between the Brentford Aits and Brentford. At an earlier date, however, the channel probably lay between Lot's Ait and the Brentford shore. Possibly it was diverted when the Grand Junction Canal, which joins the Thames just above Lot's Ait, was constructed.

³⁵ 30 Geo. II, c. 63.

³⁶ Even now an omnibus plies between Ealing and Old Brentford along this road.

³⁷ This lane is called Love Lane on the two plans of Richmond Gardens by John Roque, which are dated 1734 and 1748 respectively, and are now in Museum iii at Kew. It will also be found clearly marked on a manuscript map at the British Museum, by Thomas Richardson, made in 1771 ; but it is there called Kew Foot-lane. This map is described as 'The Royal Gardens of Richmond and Kew. . . Taken under the direction of Peter Burrell Esq. . . by Thomas Richardson'. In Museum iii there is another map by Peter Burrell, also dated 1771, of the Manor of Richmond, which includes Kew. In this map Lot's Ait is marked as lying outside the manor ; but it should not on that account be assumed that this ait was then in Middlesex, and not in Surrey.

Smith Hill and Love Lane. It was along this line of connexion that Robert Tunstall proposed to construct the bridge for which he obtained the act of parliament already mentioned. It was to begin at Smith Hill in Brentford and pass over the topmost ait.

In these geographical facts we may see the best explanation of the words of William of Poitiers, 'transmeato flumine Tamesi uado simul atque ponte.' The invaders crossed the broad and shallow passage from Kew to the island by the ford, and the narrow and deeper channel from the island to Old Brentford by a bridge. If the river were swollen, as is likely, by the winter floods, it would have been difficult, perhaps impossible, to pass through the deeper channel by the ford, and a bridge of boats or some other military bridge would have been a necessity. The crossing would have been especially difficult at neap tides, which occurred in the last days of November.³⁸

Let us now assume that the Conqueror crossed the Thames at Kew. Having marched up Smith Hill he found himself in the principal street of Old Brentford, which was then part of the main road from London to Winchester. His first business was to make preparations for the siege of London. If we may believe Guy of Amiens this was precisely the course which the Conqueror adopted.

Paruit extemplo, celeri uelocius aura
 Agmen belligerum castra locare sibi:
 Densatis castris a laeua moenia cinxit,
 Et bellis hostes esse dedit uigiles.

Aedificat moles, ueruecis cornua ferro,
 Fabricat et talpas, urbis et excidium.³⁹

Guy's statements have been doubted; but it is most improbable that, writing very soon after the Conquest, he would give a detailed account of what never happened merely for the sake, as has been suggested, of glorifying his master. If his story were a string of falsehoods it would have deceived nobody, and it is much more likely that he wrote what was substantially the truth. His account, too, is quite consistent with that given by William of Poitiers. Guy tells the story as he heard it from one who took part in the siege, while William bases his narrative on the statements of the Conqueror or some of his companions on the march, who took no part in the siege.

The whole of the Norman army was not needed for the siege, and as William of Poitiers says nothing of the preparations, we may suppose that the Conqueror marched with the remainder

³⁸ I assume that the ford could only have been crossed when the tide was low.

³⁹ ll. 661-73.

along the road to Winchester. It was important to secure the submission of the country between the two cities. It may be that the reinforcements which had come from 'over the sea'⁴⁰, or some of them, were at Winchester, and that with these the Conqueror wished to strengthen his well-worn troops. In any case it was almost a political necessity that he should lose no time in personally visiting the second, and in some respects the first, city of the island. This is an explanation which seems to me to be consistent both with the account of the siege of London given by Guy of Amiens and with the statement of William of Poitiers, which we must next consider. From the time, however, when William reached Brentford the narrative is necessarily in a large measure conjectural.

There seems to have been no direct road from London to Winchester during the Roman occupation. There was a straight road westwards to Silchester passing through Brentford and crossing the Thames, probably by a bridge, at Staines; and there was another almost straight road southwards from Silchester to Winchester which passed through Worting, a village adjoining Basingstoke on its west side. If the Roman road were still in use as far as Silchester, the Conqueror probably marched along it to that town. In modern times, however, the main road has deviated from the Roman road near what is now Virginia Water to pass through Bagshot, Hartford Bridge, and Basingstoke. If, then, the Conqueror marched along this newer road (which may have existed in his day) he found himself on reaching Basingstoke just off the ancient road from Winchester to Silchester which led northwards to Pangbourne on Thames,⁴¹ whence another road led to Wallingford, the chief military centre of Berkshire, and the town to which William of Poitiers says that the Conqueror marched after leaving the neighbourhood of Southwark. The chronicler, however, gives no information either of the route or the object of the march to Wallingford. I suggest, and nothing but suggestion is possible, that on his arrival at Silchester or Basingstoke the Conqueror received a message from Stigand not only offering to surrender but also to mediate with the English magnates. As William of Poitiers is the only chronicler who speaks of the Conqueror being at Wallingford, his words⁴² should be carefully noted: 'Adueniens eodem Stigandus pontifex metropolitanus manibus ei sese dedit, fidem sacramento confirmavit, abrogans Adelinum quem leuiter elegerat.' Stigand, as bishop of Winchester, held the manor of Harwell, situate

⁴⁰ See p. 221 below.

⁴¹ At this date, however, there may have been a more direct road connecting Winchester and Wallingford.

⁴² p. 1258.

scarcely eight miles from Wallingford, and also several 'haws' in the borough itself.⁴³ His presence at Wallingford therefore needs no special explanation.

For long periods during the middle ages Oxfordshire and Berkshire had a sheriff in common; and in the eleventh and twelfth centuries Wallingford was as important a place as any in these counties. It is likely enough that when Stigand decided to surrender at the great Berkshire stronghold the magnates of both these counties met and resolved to follow his example. The mere fact that, after the defeat of the Londoners, Stigand's surrender is the only incident of the march (except the crossing of the Thames) which William of Poitiers mentions, suggests its supreme importance. But his surrender is suggestive of something more than this. In an earlier passage the same chronicler especially mentions Stigand as acting in concert with Edwin and Morkere; so that we may perhaps see in the impending surrender of the two earls one of the causes of the Conqueror turning away from Winchester and marching from Basingstoke or Silchester northwards to Wallingford. With his new allies the surrender of London might well seem imminent, and an immediate visit to Winchester be considered as of secondary importance. And here we should remember that from a military point of view these two Mercian earls were still the chief obstacles to the Conqueror's success. Of royal birth, their names counted for much in that large part of England which lay beyond the boundaries of Wessex, and though they had been defeated at Fulford Gate, scarcely three months before, they still commanded the soldiery of Northumbria and of many of the counties of Mercia which had taken no part in the disastrous battle at Senlac. If the Conqueror's army had been reinforced from Normandy, it must also have been weakened by detachments assigned for special duties in the southern counties. Edwin and Morkere were still foes whose submission was to be desired.

We next hear of the Conqueror at Berkhamsted. Our authority is the Worcester chronicle,⁴⁴ which says, after describing the battle of 14 October:

And Count William went afterwards again to Hastings, and there awaited whether the nation would submit to him; but when he perceived that they would not come to him, he went up with all his army which was left to him, and what had afterwards come over sea to him, and harried all that part which he passed over, until he came to Berkhamsted. And there came to meet him archbishop Ealdred, and Eadgar child, and earl Eadwine, and earl Morkere, and all the best men of London.

⁴³ 'Walohelinus episcopus habet xxvii hagas de xxv solidis, et sunt appreciatæ in Bricsteuuelle manerio eius: ' D.B. i. 56'. 'In Walingoford iii hagam de xy denariis: ' D.B. i. 58'.

⁴⁴ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ii. 168, Rolls Series.

Some scholars have in recent years held that the place here mentioned was not Great Berkhamsted, but Little Berkhamsted, a small village, never of any importance, in the south-east of Hertfordshire. But where the names of two places are distinguished from one another by the addition of the adjectives Great and Little, the place-name, when standing by itself without an adjective, must obviously refer to the greater place. The identification of Berkhamsted with Little Berkhamsted rests solely on the itinerary compiled by Mr. Baring, which ought not, for the reasons already stated, to be accepted as established.

If the Conqueror on receiving the submission of Stigand had intended to march forthwith on London, he would almost certainly have chosen some route other than the one by which he had come. He would have preferred that his army should be provisioned by districts which had not already suffered in this way. He would also have welcomed the opportunity of establishing his authority in other parts of the country. Actually the distance from Wallingford to London through Tring, Berkhamsted, and Stanmore was rather shorter than through Pangbourne, Silchester, and along the Roman road eastwards to the city, and it was considerably shorter than through Pangbourne, Basingstoke, Staines, and Brentford. If, then, the Conqueror was expecting the surrender of Edwin and Morkere, it is not surprising that he decided to meet them at Berkhamsted on his way to London, rather than to wait for them at Wallingford and so waste valuable time. To reach Berkhamsted he would have marched along the Upper Icknield Way⁴⁵ in a north-easterly direction as far as Tring, when he would have turned to the right and found Berkhamsted four miles to the south-east on the direct road from Tring to London. But if Edwin and Morkere had, as is not unlikely, retired to Chester, and on Stigand's recommendation had decided to come and surrender to the Conqueror at Wallingford, they would have journeyed towards London along Watling Street as far as Dunstable and then have turned to the right along the Upper Icknield Way. Thus, if time was important to the Conqueror, Berkhamsted, just four miles off the road between Wallingford and Dunstable, was an excellent place of meeting. It is also likely to have been a stronghold which the Conqueror would have been glad to occupy.

On the way from Wallingford to Berkhamsted the Norman army passed through the village of Monk's Risborough. The manor there belonged to one Esegar the staller, who held it of Christ Church, Canterbury, so that Esegar had done homage,

⁴⁵ The Icknield Way actually crosses the Thames a little below Wallingford, but it lay within easy reach of that town.

if not to Stigand, at least to the prior of Christ Church.⁴⁶ These are most significant facts, for Guy of Amiens states that one Ansgar, who is no doubt the same person as Esegar, not only directed the military operations of the citizens during the siege of London, but also received messengers from the Conqueror about the surrender of the city.⁴⁷ Now Esegar, as one of the Christ Church knights, would at any time have found it well to pay special attention to the archbishop's wishes, but if the latter ever counselled him to surrender, Esegar would never have been less unwilling to oblige him than just when the Conqueror was marching with fire and sword towards his manor of Monk's Risborough.

Florence of Worcester's story⁴⁸ of the march on London is in substantial agreement with the Worcester chronicle :

Meanwhile Count William devastated Sussex, Kent, Hampshire, Surrey, Middlesex, Hertfordshire, and never ceased burning towns and slaying men until he came to the town which is called Beorcham; and there Aldred the archbishop, Wulstan, bishop of Worcester, and Walter, bishop of Hereford, Edgar child, the earls Edwin and Morcar and all the most noble men from London with many others came to him; and when they had given hostages they surrendered to him and swore fealty to him.

Apart from the fact that one account is fuller than the other, the only point on which they disagree is that the town, which in the Worcester chronicle is described as Berkhamsted, Florence describes as 'the town which is called Beorcham'. Having regard to the ancient spelling, we can have little doubt that Great Berkhamsted is the town Florence intended to designate. For the rest his account is noteworthy because it mentions some of the counties through which the Conqueror passed on his way to London. They are obviously not written in the correct order, and Berkshire, Oxfordshire, and Buckinghamshire are omitted entirely. It is not unlikely that he marched rapidly through these three counties, and that, owing to the influence of Stigand, their inhabitants offered no resistance. Domesday Book suggests that they suffered little from burning and slaughter, and this may perhaps be taken as a sufficient explanation of the omission of these counties from Florence of Worcester's list.

⁴⁶ 'Hoc manerium tenuit Ansgarus Stalre de ecclesia Cristi Cantuarie ita quod non poterat separari ab ecclesia T.R.E. : ' D.B. i. 143'.

⁴⁷ 'Omnibus ille tamen primatibus imperat urbis,
Eius et auxilio publica res agitur.
Huic per legatum clam rex potiora reuelat
Secreti, poscens quatinus his faueat : ' ll. 685-8.

⁴⁸ ii. 228.

We may now return to William of Poitiers, who writes thus :

Hinc procedenti, statim ut Lundonia conspectui patebat, obuiam exeunt principes ciuitatis, sese cunctamque ciuitatem in obsequium illius, quemadmodum ante Cantuarii tradunt, obsides quos et quot imperat adducunt.⁴⁹

Now if the words 'statim ut Lundonia conspectui patebat' are taken literally, the place where the chief men of London surrendered to the Conqueror can scarcely be Berkhamsted, which is some twenty-seven miles distant from that city. But if, as I think, William of Poitiers was not with the Norman army, we may take it that the words mean little more than 'when he was drawing near to London'. Vague words such as these certainly offer no sufficient ground for doubting the precise statement of the Worcester chronicle that the surrender took place at Berkhamsted. A later passage,⁵⁰ which reads thus :

Praemisit ergo Lundoniam qui munitionem in ipsa construerent urbe et pleraque competentia regia magnificentia praepararent, moraturus interim per uicina. Aduersitas omnis procul fuit, adeo ut uenatui et auium ludo, si forte libuit, secure uacaret,

certainly suggests that William of Poitiers thought that the place of surrender was at some distance from London.

A more serious difficulty is to be found in a still later passage.⁵¹ After describing the coronation William of Poitiers proceeds thus :

Egressus e Lundonia, dies aliquot in propinquo loco morabatur Bercingis, dum firmamenta quaedam in urbe contra mobilitatem ingentis ac feri populi perficerentur. Uidit enim in primis necessarium magnopere Lundonienses coerceri. Ibi ueniunt ad obsequium eius Eduinus et Morcardus, maximi fere omnium Anglorum genere ac potentia Algardi illius nominatissimi filii, deprecantur ueniam, si qua in se contra eum senserant, tradunt se cunctaque sua eius clementiae; item alii complures nobiles et opibus ampli.

Here we have statements which directly contradict Florence of Worcester and the Worcester chronicle. Edwin and Morkere are here represented as having surrendered not before but after the coronation, and not at Berkhamsted in Hertfordshire but at Barking in Essex, just seven miles from the city of London. The statements of the English chroniclers seem to me to be almost certainly correct. They agree better with the rest of the story, and the foreign writer is more likely to have blundered through the similarity of the names Berkhamsted and Barking than the Worcester chronicler. Indeed, it is quite possible that the Conqueror never stayed at Barking at all. It was an insignificant place in the middle ages, remarkable only for its convent of

⁴⁹ p. 1258.

⁵⁰ p. 1259.

⁵¹ p. 1262.

Benedictine nuns, whom it is difficult to picture as the hostesses of the newly crowned king. Freeman said that William of Poitiers was capable of any disregard of chronology, but without concurring in this hostile judgement we may believe that the chronicler has repeated the substance of an earlier paragraph, which is printed above, and inserted it out of chronological order. In that case the few days which the Conqueror spent 'at Barking while certain fortifications were being completed in the city' were the same days as those which he spent at Berkhamsted after he had sent men to construct a fortress in the city and make preparations for the coronation. But even if the Conqueror really stayed for a few days at Barking after the coronation, the similarity of the names Barking and Berkhamsted would be quite sufficient to account for William of Poitiers attributing the surrender of the earls Edwin and Morkere to the former place instead of the latter. It will be remembered that Florence of Worcester, an Englishman, speaks of the surrender having taken place at Beorcham (by which Berkhamsted is no doubt meant), and William of Poitiers, a man of foreign birth, might easily confuse Berkhamsted with Barking, more especially if (as I think) he was not one of the companions of the Conqueror on his march from Senlac to London.

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