

the world, for Edgar, the Atheling, although acknowledged to be the nearest in blood, was but the grand-son of King Edward Ironside, *natural son* of Ethelred II., and the Atheling, himself, was all but an idiot, besides. The sovereignty of England, therefore, was open to the person who could achieve it. The law of legitimacy was a dead letter in the eyes of William, who, himself a bastard successor, could point to numerous instances in his own period, of singular cases; and, as many a hero both before and since has declared, he conceived that "might makes right," and he determined to make himself master of the "scargit" England. He did make a conquest of it, and, under a cool consideration of all the bearings of the case, it is probable that a conclusion will be induced, that although neither of the conflicting parties could fairly vindicate its own cause, yet, on the whole, that of William bore quite as plausible a face as the pretension of Harold. So that here, at least, the character of King William was not deeply reproachable, particularly when the fierce and warlike dispositions of both the claimants and their followers are considered, and still further when we remember that the greatest virtue of the period was valor, and its most appropriate reward was acquisition.

William was "an iron man," such as the martial and semi-barbarous spirit of his age was calculated to produce. Constitutionally courageous, called to command at a period of early boyhood, and almost incessantly in arms, it is hardly to be wondered at that he should have become a man of decision and of energy. It is not improbable that he sincerely believed the promise, followed up by the will of Edward, the Confessor, as conveying something like a *right* to the throne of England, that he was, at least, conscious of as good a claim in right of blood as Harold could set up, and that he was justified by the usage of the times, in strengthening himself by artifice and imposition, such as he applied to Harold when the latter was thrown upon his coast during the Confessor's life-time. But there was one great consideration which either seems never to have occurred to William, or else seems to have been disregarded as unworthy his ambitious spirit. This was, the affectionate regard which the English people had for their Saxon monarchs and for the Saxon race.

That race had now been settled in the island six hundred years; and, except from the incursions of the Danes within the last two centuries of that period, they had enjoyed undis-

puted possession and authority. England had become essentially and entirely Anglo-Saxon, and her history of that time, although it be the history of a barbarous people, is that of unvarying love and loyalty toward her native monarchs. And although they were obliged for a while to succumb to Danish prowess and numbers, while they were under the government of the weak and worthless Ethelred, she continued impatiently to bend under Danish rule for the space of thirty years, yet the accession of a native prince once more, in the person of Edward, the Confessor, was greeted with such ardent expressions of satisfaction as must have convinced the world of their attachment to native blood. For two hundred years had the Northmen been as thorns in the sides of Saxons, it might therefore well be judged what would be their feelings on the probability of a Norman rule, the Normans being in direct descent from that hated people from whose dominion they had so recently become emancipated. Nor were their feelings softened by the deportment of those foreigners at the English court, to which they had flocked in such numbers, at the invitation, and through the misjudging gratitude of Edward.

The recollection of all these circumstances, though it might not control his ambition, did not prevent his carrying into effect his determination to make a conquest of England and to sway the English sceptre, should at least have had effect enough to render him merciful and magnanimous towards a people whose fidelity deserved admiration; and good policy might have taught him that under judicious training he might gradually turn that fidelity and affection towards himself and his government. But William was a *hard* man. Prompt and decided in his determinations, constant and immovable in carrying them out, reckless of blood, irascible in temper, impracticable of contradiction, arbitrary in command, impatient against remonstrance, and furious against active opposition. This was the man who at once controlled the destinies of the subdued English, punished the refractory nobles and adventurers of his native Normandy, and minated his thunders against the power and force of the French monarchy, and kept check even the Papal authority, which everywhere else was becoming all but despotic. One cause for the course of action pursued by this prince, might possibly be the idea that was the madness of the Danish kings of England which had partly tended to the termination of that line; and that he was thereby sti-