

the Conqueror, and Philip of France; but these were under peaceable discussion and might have been peaceably adjusted, had it not been for a jest! Philip has had his *jest*. A biting one! It has thrown his rival into a towering passion, it has caused him to call up his barons and their vassals, a numerous host, to cross the sea, and endure all the hardships of war; it has cost both the contending parties the entire loss of the town in dispute between them, together with that of thousands of lives, and of much private property, it has inflicted distress, privation, and dishonour, among those who were neither the jest nor its foundation, and has produced a wide extent of grief, mingled with execration of the heartless princes who thus trifle with the property, happiness, and lives, of those whom it is their duty to protect. And the king of France and his courtiers laugh heartily at the excitement produced by so biting a jest,—*which is so fearfully avenged.*

And the Avenger,—where is he? William, the Conqueror of England, the terror and scourge of France, how does he enjoy the punishment which he has inflicted upon his haughty and insolent rival? Does he fill high the wine-cup, and celebrate, with his warriors, the glorious exploit which he has just achieved? Does he threaten to advance onward with his victorious arms, and crush the arrogant King, who has dared thus to jest at his expense?—Does he revel in the foretaste of enlarged dominion, and in anticipated vengeance for his outraged feelings?—Is he in the bustle of preparation for another attack on his army?—*He is on his death-bed!*

On that bed from which he was never to be removed in life, lay the most powerful monarch of his time; and—there is good historical authority for adding—with all the principal actions of his eventful life in full array before him; producing the opposed sensations of exultation for sacred vengeance, remorse for crime and cruelty, pride for the extent of his conquest and dominion, and a humiliating sense of the vanity of all earthly greatness. A whole life, spent in quelling faction, in humbling his enemies, in increasing his power, and in rewarding his adherents, now produced in him no consolations to set against his deep compunction and his humbled pride; and there he lay, writhing in agonies fully as great as he had that day been the means of pouring forth on the thousands near him, and a monumental proof of the impotence of kings, when it pleases the King of kings to lay his almighty hand upon them!

But the train of events in which William had so conspicuously figured, and which now caused such conflicting emotions within him, must be traced considerably back, to be fully understood; and indeed, without this, it will be impossible fairly to contemplate the awful lesson presented by the last hours of the expiring monarch.

The Anglo-Saxon government had become distracted and corrupted; partly through the Danish influence which had been gradually infused in it, and from which it had just become disenthralled by the accession of Edward, the Confessor; partly through the all-but-extinct state of the Saxon royal blood; and partly through the accumulated wealth and power of a very few Saxon nobles. Edward was the nephew, and William the natural son, of Robert, Duke of Normandy. Edward had been educated at the ducal court of his uncle, where his family were refugees from the Anglo-Danish power, and had acquired its language and manners; he was, moreover,—and hence the pivot upon which the future Norman conquest turned—deeply prepossessed in favor of that people. In the course of time, the Norman power greatly tended to establish Edward on the throne of his ancestors, and he filled his court and the land with Normans, to the prejudice of the native Anglo-Saxons. William, who was usually styled "The Bastard," possessed the ducal throne of Normandy at the period of Edward's elevation; it is believed that gratitude towards a house which had protected himself and his family during the many years of their adversity, determined him to make the Duke of Normandy his successor, and that hence was the reason for the introduction of so many Normans into the British court during his reign. If this were so, it was managed with much impolicy, inasmuch as the insolence and arrogance of the foreigners stirred up the indignation of the Saxon nobles; and the strangers were at one time nearly all driven out of the country by Goodwin and his sons, powerful earls, of the Saxon race.—These, and a few others of the old blood, evinced a strong determination to keep out all foreign dominion; in which resolution patriotism had probably some share, and their own ambitious hopes still more.

At the death of Edward, the candidates for the crown were William, the Norman, and Harold, the Saxon; neither of whom, if the now-existing law of succession had been then of much force, had the slightest legal claim to it; nor, in fact, was there a legal claimant in