PAGES OF BRITISH HISTORY.

Historical Battles—Noteworthy Events in the Story of the Creation of the British Empire.

(Continued from our last.)

CHAPTER VII.

Agincourt, 1455.

The empty title of "King of France" was claimed until recent years by our monarch; but Harry of Monmouth was the only English sovereign who ever really deserved the name. Taking advantage of the civil war which convulsed France, after his accession he revived the claim of Edward the III., and demanded the fulfilment of the Treaty of Bretigny. In derision of this, there came from the Dauphin for answer a bale of tennis-balls, as a gentle hint that the young King of England was more fitted for such sports than the rougher game of war. Stung by this insult, Henry V. prepared for battle. The Duke of Bedford was appointed Regent; the royal jewels were pawned, loans were raised, and the great barons were called to arms; and though some delays arose in consequence of a plot in favour of the Earl of March—a plot for which Lord Scroop and Richard of Cambridge had to die—a fleet bore Henry with an army 30,000 strong (6,000 were horse) from Southampton to the mouth of the Seine. In five weeks he reduced the strong fortress of Harfleur, on the right bank of the river; and then, with an army reduced to nearly half its original number by sickness, wounds, and desertion, he formed the bold resolution of cutting a passage to Calais by the same route as that pursued by Edward III. when he marched his troops to victory. This daring march of a hundred miles, through every species of opposition and danger, began on the 8th of October. The English moved in three columns, with cavalry on their flanks. But Henry found the bridges of the Somme broken down, and the fords rendered perilous by lines of pointed stakes, till, after some delay, one undefended place was discovered near St. Quentin. He crossed rapidly, and marched upon Calais; while the Constable of France quietly awaited his approach at the village of Agincourt, on the road from Abbeville to St. Omer.

The night before Agincourt was dark and rainy, and to the toil-worn English it was one of hope and fear, for 100,000 French lay there before them; thus the odds against them were as seven to one. Amid the darkness of the October night, and the sheets of descending rain, they could see the whole landscape glittering with the watch-fires of the French; and frequent bursts of their laughter and merriment were borne on the passing wind, from those who were grouped about these fires or their banners, as they fixed the ransom of the English king and his wealthy barons. As for the common soldiers, they were all to be put to the sword, without mercy. Confident in their overwhelming numbers, yet could they forget that they were posted within but a few miles of Cressy?

As men who had staked their lives and the war-like honour of England on the issue of the coming day, the soldiers of Henry spent the night in repose, in making their wills and confessions, and preparing for battle with that gravity, order, and decorm which have ever been characteristic of British troops. The king himself took but little repose. He visited the different quarters of the army, and during a brief season of moonlight sent certain captains of skill to examine the ground; and, to keep the hearts of the men cheerful, he ordered the trumpets, drums, and fifes to play at intervals during the night; but history fails to record the airs by which he sought to recall the memory of their homes, or the deeds of other days. So the night passed away; the French watch-fires died out, and the dawn stole on—the dawn of the great Feast of St. Crispin, the 25th of October, 1415. After solemn prayer, he formed his army in three great divisions, with two wings.

The archers, on whom he rested his principal hope, he posted in front of the men-at-arms," says Lingard, tersely, "and their savage appearance on this day, struck terror into their enemies. Many had stripped themselves naked; the others had bared their arms and breasts, that they might exercise their limbs with more ease and execution. Besides his bow and arrows, battle-axe and sword, each bore a large, strong stake on his shoulder, which he was instructed to fix obliquely before him in the ground and thus oppose a rampart to the charge of the French cavalry."

The French order of battle resembled the English, save that in some parts where the latter were but four files deep the former were thirty.

The Constable of France, Charles de'Albert, Comte de Dreux, led the first line; the Dukes of Bar and D'Alencon led the second; the Lords of Marle and Falconberg led the third. The distance between the two armies at first was about a quarter of a mile, and the ground between them was marshy with the rain of the past night.

With the French army were 5000 heavily-mailed men-at-arms and a body of crossbow-men, sent by John of Nevers, the Duke of Burgundy. Thus the disproportion between the armies was enormous; indeed. so small was the force of the English, that in opposing the three lines of the enemy Henry had literally three battles to fight.

Henry could only form two lines. Edward, Duke of Kent, led the first, aided by the Lords Beaumont and Willoughby and Sir John Cornwall, afterwards Baron Fanhope. Henry in person led the second, mounted on a white horse; near him floated the standard of England, and he was assisted by his brother, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester; Mowbray, the Earl Marshal; and the Earls of Oxford and Suffolk. The men, who were armed with spears, bills, and halberds closed the rear, under Thomas, Earl of Dorset, afterwards Duke of Exeter.

Prior to all this, and while the morning was dusk, the king had secretly detached a body of 400 lances, who concealed themselves in a wood on the enemy's left, while 200 archers were posted in a low meadow and hidden by bushes on their right. Aware that the enemy far exceeded him in cavalry, and that his infantry, the chief strength of his army would probably be broken by the first charge, he had commanded some archers who were in the van to plant their stakes in front; but as the French did not advance, on the signal being made as described by Erpinging, the king cried, "Let us break through them, in the name of the Holy Trinity!" On this, the archers in front, under the Duke of York, began to pour their volleys upon the French; and being all chosen men, of great strength and dexterity, they did terrible execution, all the more so that the array of the enemy was so close or dense—being thirty files deep—that men could scarcely move. Spurring on their horses, and shouting their war cries, the French men-at-arms came thundering on, with flashing lance and sword, to cut to pieces the archers; but the latter retreated quickly to the rear of their stakes, "a wonderful discipline, in which the king had exercised them himself for some days." Floundering amid the wet clayed soil, the mailed cavalry came on, only to recoil from the pointed stakes and that withering shower of arrows; while at the same moment the archers among the bushes on their flank now rose suddenly and opened upon them. The wounded men and horses discomposed the ranks; the narrow ground in which they were compelled to act hindered them from recovering order, and over all the French front began to reign confusion and dismay. Many of their horses sank to their knees in the mud.

As they began to recoil, the archers slung their bows, and rushed among them with hatchets and halberds, swords and mallets, and all were now engaged in what the battles of those days always became—a wild and mingled mass of all arms, fighting men and horses. Henry, who had now dismounted and fought on foot, conspicuous alike by his valour, his glittering armour, and golden crown, in attempting to pierce the second line of French, under the Duke d'Alencon, was exposed to no ordinary danger. The Duke of Gloucester was beaten to the ground by the battle-axe of the Duke d'Alencon, but Henry drove back all about him, and saved his kinsman. Animated by rage and despair, the French prince now turned his weapon on Henry, and clove the gold crown on his helmet. Henry struck him to the gronnd, slew two of his attendants, and would have slain him, had not he called out—

"Hold, I yield; I am Alencon!"

On this the king held forth his hand, but the duke was instantly killed. Eighteen French knights had registered a solemn vow to slay the former, and some of these who fought their way to where they saw the royal standard flying actually beat Henry down upon his knees—the chief of these were Brunelet de Masinguehem, and Ganio de Bornenville—but in a few minutes all of them perished to a man. "The French fell in heaps," says a writer, "some of these frightful piles reaching to the height of a man, from the top or the sides of which the two parties alternately fought, as if these mounds of carnage had been common ramparts." It was a miracle that Henry escaped, as he was a mark for the weapon of every Frenchman who could reach him. The death of Alencon so utterly discouraged the French troops that, despite all the exertions of the Constable d'Albert, they began to take flight.

Their third line, being still fresh and in good order, might certainly have restored for France the failing fortune of the day; but their hearts were already sinking, and when they saw the 400 English lances advancing at a rapid trot from the wood upon their left flank they gave way, and, without striking a blow, left to the mercy of an almost victorious enemy the broken troops of the second line, which it was their duty to cover and support.

In this battle, so memorable alike to England and to France, the French lost the Constable d'Albert, the Dukes of Alencon and Brabant, the Count of de Nevers, the Duke of Bar, the Counts of Vaudemont, Marle, Roussi, and Falconberg, more than a hundred of different ranks who had banners borne before them, 1,500 knights, and 7,000 soldiers. Of the English there were slain only the Duke of York, the young Earl of Suffolk, and, if we are to believe certain English historians, four knights, one squire, and twenty-four soldiers. De Mezeray reckons the loss at 1,600 men, and Monstrelet at one hundred more than that number.

To be Continued.

A Proposal, and a Refusal.

The "Proposal" may be found at p. 460 of the August number of the *Century Magazine*, under the title of "A Love Song," and is as follows:

A Love Song.

O Canada, sweet Canada,
Thou maiden of the frost,
From Flattery Cape to Sable Cape
With love for thee we're crossed.
We could not love the less nor more,
We love thee clear to Labrador;
Why should we longer thus de vexed!
Consent, coy one, to be annexed.

O Canada, sweet Canada,
Our heart was always true;
You know we never really cared
For any one but you.
Your veins are of the purest gold
(We've mined them some, the truth be told)
True wheat are you, spite chaff and scorn,
And O, your dainty ears (of corn).

O Canada, sweet Canada,
John Bull is much too old
For such a winsome lass as you,—
Leave him to fuss and scold;
Tell him a sister you will be,
He loves you not so much as we;
Fair maiden, stand not thus preplexed,
Come, sweetheart, come and be annexed.

—*Charles Henry Phelps.*

The "Refusal" is written by a Montrealer, and is entitled

An Answer to a Love Song.

O Uncle Sam! poor Uncle Sam!
Your courtship is in vain;
I'm quite contented as I am,
And so will long remain.
I'm not the least in love with you,
Then cease, at once, my charms to woo;
You ask my hand—I am not vexed—
But still—I will not be "annexed"!

O Uncle Sam! poor Uncle Sam!
Your love I cannot share;
Your passion seems to me a "flame,"
I candidly declare.
For, as your doggerel rhymes have told,
You want my wheat, you want my gold,
And therefore, sir, on no pretext
Whatever will I be "annexed"!

O Uncle Sam! poor Uncle Sam!
John Bull is not too old,
Or feeble, to protect each lamb
He rears within the fold.
At present, I am fancy-free,
And can't consent your bride to be;
Don't reckon that I "stand perplexed"—
I cannot, will not be "annexed"!

—*Geo. Murray.*

The Earldom of Ancaster.

The title of Ancaster, which it is understood will be in a few days revived, as an earldom for Lord Willoughby de Eresby and Aveland, existed as a dukedom in the family of Bertie, from its creation in 1715 in favour of Robert, Lord Willoughby de Eresby and fourth Farl of Lindsey, down to its extinction in 1809 in the person of Brownlow, the fifth duke. The barony of Willoughby was held along with it, as one of its inferior titles, down to 1779, when, on the death of the fourth Duke of Ancaster, unmarried, it passed into abeyance between his grace's two sisters, Priscilla Barbara Elizabeth, the wife of Peter Burrell, Esq., of Beckenham, Kent, afterwards by creation Lord Gwydyr, and Georgiana Charlotte, Marchioness of Cholmondeley. Out of this abeyance it was called in the following year by the Crown in favour of the elder sister, Lady Gwydyr, whose son, Peter Robert, second Baron Gwydyr and 19th Baron Willoughby de Eresby, was the father of Clementina Elizabeth, 20th holder of the latter title, who, marrying Gilbert, first Lord Aveland, became the mother of the present peer, who also, in right of his maternal descent, is Joint Great Chamberlain of England along with the Earl (designate) of Ancaster.

In consequence of the Earl of Rosebery having accepted office in the new Ministry, he has resigned the presidency of the Imperial Federation League, in accordance with the rules of that body. He is succeeded by Mr. Edward Stannope, the late Secretary of State for War, who has held the post of vicepresident for a number of years. The Earl of Rosebery has accepted the vice-presidency of the League.

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