

## PAGES OF BRITISH HISTORY.

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

(Continued from our last.)  
CHAPTER V.  
Cressy, 1346.

Edward III. landed at La Hague, in Normandy, on the 26th August, 1346, and his first act was to knight his son—a mere boy, the Prince of Wales—the future Black Prince of glorious memory. His army consisted of 4,000 men-at-arms, 10,000 archers, 12,000 Welsh and 4,000 Irish infantry. He divided it in three divisions, each marched separately in the day, but all formed one camp at night. They ravaged the country with great atrocity, and the towns of Valognes, St. Lo, Charenton, and Harfleur were plundered and partially destroyed.

Considerable alterations had now been made in the armour worn; a visored basinet was used by knights in the field, the crested helmet being reserved for the lists alone. The casing of the body in jointed armour was now nearly complete, and the adoption of breast and back-plates enabled soldiers to dispense with the ancient hauberk of rings. The use of plate-armour was a decided improvement, being lighter than the chain with its accompanying garments. The magnificent jupon, emblazoned with the wearer's arms, and the splendid knightly girdle, are both the testimonies of a warlike age; greaves, or jambis (steel boots), and solerets to cover the feet had been introduced. The backs of the gauntlets were furnished with overlapping plates, armed with knobs or spikes of iron. Those of Edward the Black Prince were of brass; and Camden, but without authority, says that he adopted the famous triple plume, or "Prince of Wales's feathers," by slaying John, King of Bohemia, who wore such a plume, at Cressy, but it is very unlikely that so gallant a prince would have slain with his own hand the aged and blind monarch referred to. He is also said to have worn at Cressy, as afterwards Henry V. did at Agincourt, a heart-shaped ruby, which is now in the new crown that was made for Queen Victoria. By this time cross-bows were in pretty general use among the English. These were of different kinds, such as the latch, the prodd, &c., but they all carried indifferently arrows, darts, quarreux or bolts of iron, and stone or leaden bullets. The common range of a point-blank shot was from forty to sixty yards with an elevation of 1:20. Cross-bow-men were dressed like other archers, but sometimes fought on horseback. But a new era in war was to be inaugurated, for with the army of Edward III. came five pieces of small cannon, a species of weapon supposed to be unknown in France, though cannon are spoken of in a sea engagement in the thirteenth century, between the King of Tunis and a Moorish King of Seville. By whom the five pieces of ordnance were made is uncertain; but Le Blond, in his "Treatise of Artillery," says that the earliest guns "were of a very clumsy and inconvenient make, being usually formed of several pieces of iron fitted together lengthwise, and hooped with iron rings; and as they were used for throwing stones of prodigious weight, in imitation of the ancient machines, they were of enormous bore. But the difficulty of conducting and managing these pieces, and the discovery that iron bullets of much less weight might be impelled by better powder, soon introduced the present fabric and matter of cannon."

Edward's Welsh and Irish were light and disorderly troops, more fitted for plunder and pursuit than a steady encounter with the well-armed soldiery of France, and even the best men of his army were but newly levied and unused to war; but they committed fearful ravages, in most instances sparing neither sex nor years. At length Philip advanced against Edward, at the head of 100,000 men; and the latter, afraid of being surrounded in an enemy's country, began a retreat towards Flanders. In this retrograde movement occurred the famous passage of the Somme, a ford of Blanchetaque, all the bridges being either strongly guarded or broken down. Under Godemar de Faye, 20,000 Frenchmen held the opposite bank; but Edward threw himself into the river sword in hand, at the head of his troops, and forced the passage, and reached in security the opposite bank with his whole force, just as Philip and his vast army reached the river and the tide was rising. Thus on a few moments depended the fate of Edward III. and, by his presence of mind and celerity, these moments

were turned from ruin to victory, for the justly infuriated French would have wreaked terrible vengeance on him and his army. He then continued his march, and took up a position at the village of Cressy, or Creci en Ponthieu, on advantageous ground, and there awaited the enemy. In Froissard we find a description of how the English army passed the night before Cressy, one of the most memorable battles of the age.

The king lay in the fields with his host, and made a supper to all his chief lords and knights. "And when they were all departed to take their rest, then the king entered into his oratory and kneeled down before the altar, praying God devoutly that if he fought the next day, he might achieve the journey to His honour. Then, about midnight, he laid him down to rest, and in the morning he rose betimes and heard mass; and his son, the Black Prince, with him, and the most of his company, were confessed and houseled. And after the mass he commanded every man to be armed and to draw to the field, to the place before appointed. Then the king caused a park to be made by the roadside behind his host, and there were set all the carts and carriages and within the park were all their horses, for every man was afoot; and into this park there was but one entry."

As far as we can calculate, it was now the morning of Saturday, the 6th of August, 1346, though some writers give a different date. The English army was formed in three divisions on the grassy slope, and all lay on the ground till they saw the French army moving across the plain towards them, rending the air with shouts, such as, "Down with them!" "Let us slay them!" Then the archers assumed their bows and salades (or helmets), and every man stood in his ranks. A great flock of ravens were seen to hover over the French army, and this, says De Mezeray, "was deemed a presage of their defeat." But there was a natural cause for their appearance, as the morning of the battle broke with storm and rain, thunder and lightning—"a fitting prelude for a day of blood."

The first line of the English was commanded by Edward the Black Prince, so called from the colour of his armour, and, as a French historian adds, also from his sable plumes. Under him were the Earls of Warwick, Oxford, and Harcourt; the Lords Chandos and Holland, and other nobles. The second line was led by the Earl of Arundel and Northampton, with the Lords Basset, Willoughby, and Roos, and Sir Lewis Tufton. The king in person led the third line with which he proposed to support, if needful, the two first, or secure a retreat for the whole in case of defeat. He formed trenches to protect his flanks and secure his baggage in the wood.

Philip had also divided his army into three great columns. The first consisted of 15,000 Genoese crossbowmen, led by Antonio Doria and Carlo Grimaldi. The second was led by the Count d'Alençon, brother to the king, who had on this occasion no less than three other crowned heads serving under his banner—John of Luxemburg, the aged King of Bohemia, who had lost one eye in battle against the pagans of Lithuania, and been rendered totally blind of the other by a Jewish quack; the King of the Romans, his son; and the King of Majorca, who had been driven from the Balearic Isles three years before, by Pedro IV., of Arragon. United with the force of Godemar de Faye, the French army now mustered 120,000 men all told, in their helmets. Hume asserts that Philip had cannon, but in his haste left them behind, a very unlikely circumstance if he possessed them at all. The "Dictionnaire Militaire" (1758) asserts that cannon "were known in France," according to some authors, in 1338, under Philip, but known of only. "Nevertheless," says Voltaire, "till the reign of Charles VIII. artillery continued in its infancy; such is the force of inveterate customs, and so slow the progress of human industry. They did not make use of artillery in sieges till the reign of Charles V., King of France; and the spear was their principal weapon till the reign of Henry IV."

The French, in their enthusiasm, had marched in great haste; and the heavily accoutred Genoese, weary after a march of six leagues, carrying their cross-bows, were already beginning to fail. When Philip said, "Make the Genoese go on in front, and begin the battle, in the name of God and St. Denis!" they muttered, and, in the words of Froissard, said to their constables, "We be not well ordered to fight this day; we be not in the case to do any great deed of arms, and have more need of rest." Then said the

Count d'Alençon, commander of the second line, with scorn, "Truly, a man is well at ease to be charged with these kind of reasons, who are faint and fail us now when most at need!"

Now the sun came forth brilliantly in rear of the English, but shone full into the eyes of the French. The Genoese continued to advance, whooping, yelling, and making many antics; "but the English stood still and stirred not." This whooping the Genoese continued, adds Froissard, whose description we chiefly follow, till they came within range; but the recent rains had relaxed the strings of their arblasts, so that the bolts fell short. The English archers drew their bows from their cases dry and serviceable—those splendid six foot bows, on which the glory of England so often depended.

"Then," says the knightly historian, "the English archers each stepped forth one pace (as he drew the bowstring to the ear), and let their arrows fly so wholly and so thick that it seemed as snow." The cloth-yard shafts soon quivered in the faces, breasts, and arms of the Genoese, who fell into immediate disorder; some cut the strings of their cross-bows, others cast them away, and the whole began to recoil upon the heavily-armed men-at-arms of the Count d'Alençon.

"Slay those rascals," cried Philip of France; "they do but hinder and trouble us without reason." Then their own cavalry dashed among them, and killed a great many, while the English arrows fell fast among both; and, to add to the general confusion, the cannon—now heard in battle for the first time—belched forth a storm of stones upon the wild mele. Then nothing was seen in that vast body but hurry and confusion, terror and dismay. The Welsh and Irish now began to creep forward, with great knives or daggers, and slew by stabs and gashes in the throats, great numbers of the dismounted French knights and men-at-arms, who were simply wounded, or rolling helplessly amid the press in their heavy armor. Then it was that the old blind King of Bohemia, when the state of affairs was explained to him, said to those about him, "Sirs, ye are my men, my friends, and companions; I require you to lead me so far, forward that I may strike one stroke with my sword."

Then two knights buckled the reins of their bridles to those of his horse, lest they should lose him in the press, and the three charged together. The aged king "struck a stroke with his sword, yea, and more than four, and fought valiantly, and so did all his company; but they adventured so far forward that they were all slain, and the next day were found in the place about the king, with their horses tied to each other."

This was about three in the afternoon.

The young Prince of Wales had presence of mind to take advantage of the confusion, and led his line to the charge. The French cavalry had by this time freed themselves of the Genoese run-aways, and, by superior numbers and steady hand-to-hand fighting, began to hem young Edward round. The Earls of Northampton and Arundel now advanced to his aid; and soon the battle became hot and terrible. From the summit of the hill of Cressy, the king, near a windmill, was looking on, when a messenger from Warwick came, clamouring for succour. Then said the king, "Is my son dead, or hurt, or on the earth felled?" No, sire," replied the knight; "but he is overmatched, and hath need of your aid." "Return to my son," said Edward, "and tell him that to him I reserve the honor of the day. I am confident he will show himself worthy of the honour of that knighthood which I so lately conferred upon him; and that, without my assistance, he will be able to repel the enemy."

This message added to the ardour of Warwick and the prince. A fresh charge with reboubled vigor was made upon the French, by which the whole line of cavalry was thrown into disorder, and the Count d'Alençon was killed; and then flight followed the confusion. Philip of France remained on the field till the last, when the evening was closing in, unwilling to believe that all was lost. When no more than three score knights remained about him, one, named Sir John of Heynault, who had remounted him after his horse had been killed by an arrow, said, "Sire, depart while there is yet time; lose not yourself wilfully. If this field is lost, you shall recover it again another season." They galloped away, and now the flight became general. The Welsh infantry rushed into the throng, and, with their long knives, cut the throats of all who had fallen; nor was any quarter given that day by the victors.

Philip rode to the castle of La Broyes, where he found the gates closed, for

the night was dark; but the captain came to the walls, and asked, "Who calleth there at this time of night?" "Open your gate quickly," cried Philip; "for this is the fortune of France."

The sorrowful captain recognized the king; he let down the bridge and opened the gate: and when Philip entered he had with him but Sir John of Heynault and five other barons.

On his return to camp the Black Prince, who had distinguished himself in a manner so remarkable, was embraced by the king his father.

"My brave son!" he exclaimed, "persevere in your honorable course. You are indeed my son, for valiantly have you acquitted yourself this day, and shown yourself worthy of empire."

The young prince then went on his knees and craved his father's blessing, and the night was spent in feasting and rejoicing. The recorded results of this battle would seem exaggeration, were they not so well authenticated. Won as it was chiefly by the bow, the English loss was so small that it has never been stated; but that of the French was terrible. Besides the Kings of Bohemia and Majorca and the Count d'Alençon, there fell the Duke of Lorraine; Lewis de Creci, Count of Flanders; and eight other counts, two archbishops, the Count de Blois, 1,200 knights, and 30,000 soldiers. Such was the cost to humanity of one day's proceedings, in the unjust endeavor to conquer France.

Eighty standards were taken. Among these was the beautiful banner of the king of Bohemia, embroidered in gold, charged with three ostrich feathers, and the German motto "Ich Dien," which, says Rapin (after Camden probably), was brought to the Prince of Wales, who assumed therefrom his well-known crest and motto. But this favourite tradition is unsupported by history; for on the seal appended to a grant of the prince's to his brother, John of Gaunt, dated 1370, twenty-four years after Cressy, he appears with a single feather, while the crest of John of Bohemia in that battle was a single eagle's pinion. The triple plume, now known as that of the Prince of Wales, was first adopted by Henry Stuart, the young and gallant son of James I. of England and VI. of Scotland, who, like the Black Prince, died before his father.

On the day subsequent to the battle, by displaying the captured French standards, many of the country people, who were ignorant of the general result, were lured towards the English camp, where a pitiful slaughter was made of them by 500 lances and 2,000 archers, dispatched for that special purpose. Edward remained for three days to bury the dead, some of whom he interred at Montreuil; and then he marched through the Boulonnais to lay siege to Calais, that he might always have an open gate into France. It may be interesting to give here a statement of the pay of the English troops in Normandy and before Calais at this time, as given in the Appendix to "Brady's History of England" (Vol II., p. 88). They consisted of 31,204 combatants, whose subsistence for 131 days amounted to £127,201 2s. 9d.

"To Edward Prince of Wales, being in the king's service, in Normandy, France, and before Calais, with his retinue, for his wages of war, 4s. a day; 102 knights, each 2s. a day; 264 esquires, each 12d. a day; 384 archers on horseback, each 6d. a day; 60 foot archers, each 3d. a day; 513 Welshmen, whereof one chaplain, at 6d. a day, one physician, one herald, 5 ensigns, 25 sergeants or officers over twenty men, each 4d. a day, 480 footmen, each 2d. a day.

"To Henry of Lancaster, being in the king's service before Calais, with his retinue and one other earl, each 6s. 8d. a day; eleven bannerets, each 4s. a day; 193 knights, each 2s. a day; 512 esquires, each 12d. a day; 46 men-at-arms and 612 archers on horseback, each 6d. a day.

"To William de Bohun, Earl of Northampton (K. G. in 1350), and his retinue, at the same rate.

"To Thomas Hatfield, Bishop of Durham, 6s. 8d. per day; 3 bannerets, 48 knights, 164 esquires, 81 archers on horseback, as above." And so forth.

Knights-bannerets were generally created on the field, and the form of creation was simply performed by the candidate presenting his pennon to the king or general, who cut off the train and made it square; hence they were sometimes known as knights of the square banner, marking authority over a troop capable of forming a solid square of from ten to fifteen men per face. Hence the term "squadron."

While Edward was pressing with famine and steel the siege of Calais, where John de Vienne held him at bay for nearly a year, there occurred an event at home, and only two months subsequent to the splendid victory at Cressy, which, like it, did singular honor to the English arms.

(To be continued.)

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