

EDWARD II OF WINDSOR—THE STORY OF THE BATTLE OF SLUYS

When Edward III. was made king in 1327 A.D., he was only fourteen. He was too young to rule, and the power was really in the hands of his mother, Queen Isabella, and of a man called Roger Mortimer, Earl of March. Both the Queen and the Earl were wicked, so it was a sad time for England. There was fighting with Scotland, fighting with France, sorrow and misery at home.

When Edward was eighteen he resolved that he would no longer be king in name only. He took the Earl of March prisoner, tried him for the wicked things he had done, and condemned him to death. Queen Isabella he shut up in a castle, and would not allow her to rule the kingdom any more. But he gave her money to spend, and he went once every year to see her. King Edward then really began to reign. He made peace with France, and, I am sorry to say, war again with Scotland. But after fighting there for some time he left Scotland, and began to fight again with France.

The war which now began is called the “Hundred Years” War,” because it lasted, with times of peace between, for a hundred years. It began because Edward said that he had a right to be King of France as well as King of England. He said this was so because his mother, Queen Isabella, was the sister of King Charles IV. of France, who had died, leaving no son to succeed him. But the French had a law by which women were not allowed to wear the crown, so Edward had really no right to it. He could not receive from his mother what had never been hers. King Philip VI., who now had the crown, would, of course, not give it up, so a fierce and bitter war began. The first great fight was at sea. Edward sailed from England with a fleet of about three hundred ships. As he came near to Sluys, a town in Flanders, he saw such a number of masts that it seemed as if a forest had come sailing out to sea. “What ships are these?” said King Edward to the captain of his vessel. “They are the ships of the King of France,” replied the captain. “They have oftentimes plundered your coasts. They lately burned the town of Southampton and took your good ship the Christopher.” “Ah, I have long wished to meet them,” replied the King. “Now, please God and St. George, we will fight them; for in truth they have done me so much mischief, I will be revenged upon them if possible.”

Edward's wife, Queen Philippa, was at Ghent, and Edward had many ladies on board who were going to join her there. So he arranged his vessels with great care, for he knew that the French had far more men and ships than he had. He put the ladies in the safest place, and guarded them carefully with a large body of archers and soldiers. As the sun and wind were both against Edward, he lowered his sails and moved round so that the sun should be behind him. The French seeing this thought that he was afraid, and that he was running away. They had been waiting for the English in strong battle array. All their ships were fastened together with heavy chains so as to make it impossible for the English ships to break through their lines. Seeing the English flee, as they thought, the French unfastened the chains and made ready to pursue. As the royal standard floated from the masthead the French knew that the King of England was with his fleet, and they hoped to take him prisoner. They filled the Christopher, the ship which they had taken from the English, with trumpeters and drummers and, to the sound of music and shouting, sent it to attack the English. But the English won their own ship back again, and amid great cheering manned it with Englishmen once more.

The battle was fierce and terrible. The English were often in great danger, for the French were much the stronger, but when the battle was over there were very few Frenchmen left, and most of their ships were sunk or destroyed. It was such a dreadful defeat that no one dared tell the King of France about it. At last his court fool told him. In those days great people always had some one near to amuse them by making jokes, and by laughing at everything. He was called a fool, although sometimes he was very wise and witty. But because he was called a fool he was allowed to say what he liked, and no one was angry with him. “The English are great cowards,” said the French king's

fool to him one day. "Why so?" asked the King. "Because they have not the courage to jump into the sea and be drowned, like the French at Sluys," replied the fool. In this way King Philip was told of the loss of all his ships, and his anger was so terrible that even his fool fled from him in fear.

EDWARD III OF WINDSOR—THE STORY OF THE BATTLE OF CRECY

Six years after the battle of Sluys another great battle was fought between the French and English at a place called Crecy. Edward had been marching through France for some time, when he heard that King Philip was close behind him with an army of one hundred and twenty thousand men. He himself had only twenty thousand men, but he resolved to camp where he was, on a rising ground near the little French village of Crecy, and there conquer or be conquered.

On Saturday, 26th August 1346 A.D., Edward rose very early. He divided his army into three parts. One part he gave in command of his young son Edward, the Black Prince. Prince Edward took his name from the black armour which he always wore, and at this time he was only seventeen years old. Having divided his army, King Edward, carrying a white wand in his hand and mounted upon a pony, rode slowly through the ranks, talking to the soldiers and encouraging them. He looked so cheerful and spoke so bravely, that the soldiers cheered him as he passed among them, and if any of them had felt afraid, they took heart again. Then Edward gave orders that the men should have breakfast sitting on the ground where they were, each man in his place. So the men took off their helmets and, laying their weapons down, ate and drank as they sat upon the ground.

The King himself went to a windmill near by, and there waited and watched for the French to arrive. When at last the French came in sight, it was about three o'clock in the afternoon. Then each man of the English rose, put on his helmet, took his weapon in his hand, and stood waiting. King Philip meanwhile told four knights to ride quickly forward and bring back news of the English army. The English saw these knights, and saw, too, that they had come to spy, but they took no notice of them, and let them return to King Philip. "My lords, what news?" said he, as they rode back to him. The knights looked at each other in silence, each waiting for the other to speak first. "Come, my lords, what news?" said the King again. Then the bravest of the knights said, "I speak, my lord King, as you desire, and I hope that my companions will tell you if they think that I say wrong. The English are encamped in a strong place. They are well-fed and rested, and are waiting for you. Our soldiers are hungry and weary with the long march. My advice is that you halt here, let the soldiers rest to-night, and tomorrow they will be fresh and able to conquer the English." "I thank you, my lord," replied Philip, "it is good advice and shall be followed." Then turning to his generals, "Go," he said, "command a halt."

Two generals rode off, one to the front, the other to the rear, calling out as they went, "Halt banners, in the name of God and St. Denis." The soldiers in front halted as they were commanded, but those behind would not do so. "We shall not halt until we are as far forward as the others," they said, and they marched on. When they overtook the soldiers in front, these, feeling themselves being pushed forward from behind, moved on too, and neither the King nor the generals could stop them. They marched on until they came close to the English. When the soldiers in front saw that they were near the English they fell back, but those behind still pressed forward so that the confusion was great. The roads behind the French army were filled with peasants and country people armed with sticks and stones. These peasants made a great noise, and shouting "kill, kill," were eager to be at the English. They mixed with the army, and made the confusion worse still. In a few minutes all order was lost, and King Philip, seeing that there was no help for it, decided to begin the battle at once. Beside, as soon as he saw the English, his anger against them rose so that he longed to be fighting them. "Forward, archers, and begin the battle, in the name of God and St. Denis," he cried.

The archers advanced, shouting fiercely, in order to frighten the English. But the English stood still.

Not a man moved so much as a finger. Again the French archers shouted. Still the English never moved. With a third fierce yell the French archers shot. Then the English archers made one step forward, raised their bows, and shot arrow after arrow till it seemed as if it snowed. When the French archers felt these terrible arrows pierce their arms, breast, head, and legs, even through the armour which they wore, they threw down their bows and fled.

These archers were not Frenchmen, but Italians, whom Philip had hired to help him in his war with the English, and when he saw them throw down their bows and run away he was dreadfully angry. "Kill these cowards," he shouted, "they do but stop the way and are of no use." So the French horsemen dashed upon the flying archers, who, having thrown down their bows, had no other weapon, and killed as many as they could, while the English poured arrows upon archers and horsemen alike. It was a terrible battle, and to make it seem still worse, there was an eclipse of the sun and a thunderstorm while it was going on. The sky became black, thunder roared, lightning flashed, and rain fell in torrents. Great flocks of crows flew over the field caw-cawing, in such a fearful manner, that even the bravest felt afraid, and thought something dreadful was going to happen.

At this battle, too, cannon were used for the first time. Gunpowder had been invented only a short time before, and people did not yet know what a terrible thing it would become in battle. The English had four cannon. They were made of wood bound round with iron, and although perhaps they did not kill many people, they at least frightened the French, who already had so much else to make them afraid.

Meanwhile the Black Prince was fighting gallantly with his part of the army. But the French about him were so fierce that his knights began to fear for his safety. So a messenger was sent to the King, who was watching the battle from the windmill. "Sire," said the messenger, "we entreat you to send help to the Prince, your son." "Is my son dead?" asked the King. "No, sire, thank God." "Is he wounded?" "No, sire, but he is in danger. The French are fierce about him and he is in need of help." "Then, sir," replied the King, "if my son is neither dead nor wounded, go back to those who sent you. Tell them not to send again to me this day. Tell them that if they do I shall neither come nor send help so long as my son is living. Tell them that I command them to let the boy win his spurs, for I wish the glory of the day to be his. God will guard him."

The knight returned and told the others what the King had said, and they were sorry that they had sent any such message, and resolved to fight to the last. Edward said that he wanted the Prince to win his spurs. By that he meant that he hoped he would do such brave deed that he might be made a knight. When any one was made a knight he received a pair of golden spurs. So when a man did a great deed worthy of a knight he was said to have "won his spurs."

The King of Bohemia was with the French army, and his son Charles was fighting for Philip. The King himself could not fight because he was blind. When he heard that the day was going against the French, he asked where his son was. "We know not," replied the knights who were round him. "Doubtless he is in the thickest of the fight." Really he had fled from the field, but these gallant knights would not grieve their brave old king by telling him so. "I, too, would strike a blow," said the blind king, "Lead me into the battle." The knights fastened their horses together with the King of Bohemia in the middle, so that they might not lose him in the crowd of soldiers, and dashed into the fight. When the day was over they were all found dead together, the King still in the middle of them, and their horses still bound to each other.

In those days a knight always had a crest and motto, called a device, painted upon his shield. The crest of the King of Bohemia was three feathers and his motto was *Ich dien*, which is German and means "I serve." The arms of a fallen foe belonged to the conqueror. So when after the battle the

Black Prince was made a knight, he took the motto and the crest of the King of Bohemia for his own. It has been borne ever since by the eldest son of the King of England. And that is why the Prince of Wales has a German motto.

When night fell and the terrible noise and clamour of fighting ceased, the French were beaten, and their king had fled from the field. The King of England came down from the windmill where he had remained watching the fight. He had not struck a blow, nor put on his helmet all day; not because he was a coward, but because he wanted the Black Prince to have all the praise of the victory. There, on the battle-field, he took his son in his arms and kissed him. "Dear son," he said, "God give you strength to go on as you have begun. Bravely and nobly have you fought, and you are worthy to be a king. The honour of the day is yours."

The King made the Black Prince a Knight of the Order of the Garter. The prince bowed before his father. "I do not deserve any praise," he said, "I have only done my duty." But he had shown himself so brave that his father made him a knight. He was one of the first knights of the Order of the Garter, a new Order which Edward III. founded, and the King can bestow upon any one. You shall hear why it was called by this name. King Edward III. loved the stories of Arthur and his knights of the Round Table. He made a new Round Table and tried to bring back those knightly days, and to make his knights and gentlemen courteous and gentle. One day, at a ball, Edward picked up a lady's garter. Some one laughed rudely, but Edward turned to him and said, "*Honi soit qui mal y pense*," which is French and means "Evil be to him who evil thinks." "Soon," he added, "you shall see this garter set so high that you will think it an honour to wear it." And so when he founded a new order of knighthood he made it the Order of the Garter, and to this day great men are proud to wear it. It was founded on St. George's day and the ornament which the knights of the Garter wear is called the George.

EDWARD III OF WINDSOR—THE STORY OF THE SIEGE OF CALAIS

Five days after the battle of Crecy, Edward began to besiege the town of Calais. He did not fight, for the fortifications were so strong that he knew it would be useless. He made his men build a ring of wooden houses round Calais, in which they could live until the people of the town were starved into giving in. When the Governor of Calais saw what Edward was doing, he gathered all the weak, poor, and old people, who were not able to fight, and sent them out of the town. He did this so that there would be fewer people to feed, and therefore the food they had in the town would last longer.

King Edward was surprised to see all these people leave the town, and he asked them what it meant, "We have no food nor money, and cannot fight," they replied, "so the Governor has sent us away." Then Edward, instead of making them return into the town, gave them a good dinner and some money, and allowed them to go safely through his camp, to the country beyond. For nearly a year Calais held out bravely. Day after day the people hoped that the King of France would come with his army to help them. But day after day passed and no one came. "We have eaten everything," wrote the Governor to Philip, "even the cats, and dogs, and horses, and there is nothing left for us but to die of hunger unless you come soon. You will get no more letters from me, but if you do not come, you will hear that the town is lost and all we who are in it also."

At last one morning, the watchman on the walls saw the gleam of spears, and heard the drums and trumpet-call of the French army. When the good news was told, the joy in Calais was great. Pale and thin from want of food, hardly able to walk or stand, the people yet crowded to the walls. Oh, what joy! At last they would be free! The king had not forgotten them. But the day passed. There was no movement in the French camp. No battle-cry was heard, no sounds of war. "Tomorrow," said the men of Calais sadly, "to-morrow the king will fight. To-morrow we will open our gates to our victorious army." But the next day and the next passed by, while the King of England

strengthened his camp, and the King of France talked of peace.

Then one morning the sun shone upon the army of Philip of France, with its gay banners and glittering spears, as it turned and marched away, without having struck one blow for the town and its brave defenders. Calais was left to misery and tears. All hope was lost. "Our king has forsaken us," said the people sadly.

When the Governor saw that there was indeed no hope, he mounted upon the walls, waving a white flag. King Edward saw the signal and sent two of his knights to talk with the Governor. "Are you willing to give up the town?" they asked. "Yes," replied the Governor, "we have kept the town well and truly for our king, but now we can hold out no longer. We have nothing more to eat, and we are all perishing of hunger. I will yield the town and castle, with all its riches and treasures, if King Edward will grant us our lives." "Nay," replied the knights, "our noble King will not accept these terms. You and your people have been too stubborn in resisting him, and have cost him too much. You must give yourselves up, freely and entirely. Whom he pleases he will set free, whom he pleases he will put to death." "These terms are too hard," replied the Governor, "we have only done our duty, we have fought for our King and master, as you have for yours. We know the King of England is noble and generous. It cannot be that he will deal so hardly with us. Go back, I entreat you, and beg him to have pity."

So the two knights rode back and told King Edward what the Governor had said. But Edward was stern. "I will listen to no conditions," he said. "What! am I to wait twelve months, and then have the saucy rascals make conditions? No, let them yield themselves entirely into my hands." But Edward's knights were so full of admiration for the noble men of Calais, and they begged their King so earnestly to be merciful, that at last he gave way. "My lords," he said, "I cannot hold out against you all. Go back to the Governor; tell him to send to me six of the chief men of Calais. They must come dressed in their shirts, with bare heads and feet, with ropes round their necks, and with the keys of the castle and town in their hands. These six shall be mine to do with what I will. The rest shall go free."

One of the knights who had before spoken to the Governor, now returned and told him what the King had said. "I beg of you," said the Governor, "to wait until I have spoken to the townspeople. It is they who must give the answer." "I will wait," said the knight. The Governor left the walls, and going to the marketplace told the bellman to ring the great bell. At the sound of it all the people of Calais, both men and women, hurried to the town hall. They were full of wonder and hope. They knew something great must have happened. "What is it?" they asked, "what is it?" When the people were all gathered together the Governor stood up among them and spoke. He told them of all that he had said and done, and what a hard answer the King of England had returned. When he had finished speaking, the men groaned and the women wept. They were all worn with suffering and hunger. For weeks and weeks they had not had enough to eat, and they could no longer bear the pain of it. But, where would six men be found brave enough to give their lives for the others? Even the Governor who, all through the terrible year, had encouraged and cheered the people, now lost heart. Hiding his face in his hands he, too, burst into tears. For a few minutes there was dreadful silence, broken only by low sobs.

Then a brave man called Eustace de St. Pierre stood up. He was one of the richest and most important men of the town. "Friends," he said, "it would be a great wrong to allow so many people to die if in any way it could be prevented. I have such faith and trust in God that I pray He will not forget me if I die to save my fellow townsmen. I offer myself as the first of the six."

When Eustace had finished speaking, the people crowded round him. They fell at his feet, they kissed his hands, they thanked and blessed him. Then, amidst the sobs and cries of the people,

another and another man rose, till six of the richest merchants of Calais stood together, ready to die for their friends. With ropes round their necks, with bare feet and heads, and carrying the keys of the town in their hands, these six brave men walked through the streets, followed by the townspeople, who wept and sobbed and blessed them as they went. The Governor, who was hardly able to walk, rode before them, mounted upon a poor, little thin pony. When they came to the gates of the town, he commanded them to be opened, and the gates, which for a whole year had opened neither to friend nor foe, now swung wide.

The Governor passed out and, with bent heads, the six men followed, feeling that they were saying farewell for ever to their beloved town. Then the heavy gates were closed again behind them. The Governor led the way to the outer wall where the English knight still waited. There he stopped.

“As Governor of Calais,” he said, “I deliver up to you these six citizens. I swear to you that they are no mean men, but the richest and greatest of our town. I beg of you, gentle sir, out of the goodness of your heart, to pray the King that he will not put them to death.” “I cannot answer for what the King will do,” replied the knight, “but this I swear to you, I will do all that is in my power to save them.” Then the barriers were opened, the six brave men passed out, and the Governor slowly and sadly returned to the town.

The knight at once brought the six men of Calais to the King's tent. There they fell upon their knees, presenting the keys of the city to him. “We are yours to do with what you will,” they said, “but, noble King, pity our misery and spare us.” The King looked at them darkly. He hated the people of Calais, not only because they had held out against him for so long, but because they often fought with his ships at sea and did them much damage. So, instead of listening to the prayers of the brave men, he ordered their heads to be cut off. All the lords and knights round him begged him to have mercy, but he would not hear. The knight who had brought the men from Calais, begged hardest. “All the world will say that you have acted cruelly, if you put these men to death,” he said. “They come of their own free will, and give themselves into your hands in order to save their fellows. Such a noble deed should be rewarded, not punished.” But the King only waved his hand, as if to say that he did not care what all the world said, and ordered the headsman to be sent for.

Then Queen Philippa fell upon her knees beside him, weeping. “Ah, my dear lord,” she said, “I have never before asked a favour from you, but now I beg you, by the love you have to me, let these men go.” The King looked at her in silence, and tried to raise her from her knees, but still she knelt, and still she begged for the lives of these brave men. “Ah, lady,” said Edward at last, “I would you were anywhere but here, for I can refuse you nothing. Take the men. They are yours. Do with them as you please.” Then there was rejoicing indeed. The Queen led the men away to her own rooms. She ordered clothes to be given to them, and made a great feast for them. They had not had such a dinner for many months. When they were clothed and fed Queen Philippa sent them away, each with a large sum of money. So ended the siege of Calais.

EDWARD III OF WINDSOR—THE STORY OF THE BATTLE OF POITIERS

Nine years passed and the quarrelling between France and England still went on, and in 1356 A.D. the English, under the Black Prince, gained another great victory over the French. Philip, the King of France, had died, and his son John now reigned. He came against the English with such a great army that the Black Prince, rather than fight, offered to set free all the prisoners he had made, to give up all the French towns which he had taken, and to promise not to fight against the French for seven years. But that did not satisfy King John. He demanded that the Prince and the whole English army should give themselves up as prisoners. The Black Prince refused even to think of such a thing. Then King John said that he would be satisfied if the Prince and one hundred of his best knights gave themselves up. Again the Black Prince refused, and he and his men prepared to fight, and to win or die. “My men,” said the Prince, “we are only a very small body compared with the

army of the French. But numbers do not always bring victory. Therefore fight manfully, and, if it please God and St. George, you shall see me this day act like a true English knight.”

The Prince posted his army very cleverly. Only narrow lanes led to the place he had chosen, behind the hedges of which his archers were hidden. As the French knights rode down the lanes, the English archers shot so fast and well that the knights knew not where to turn, and soon the lanes were filled with dead and dying men and horses. The English shouted “St. George,” the French “St. Denis,” and fiercely the battle raged. But, in spite of their bravery and their numbers, the French lost the day, and both King John and his son were taken prisoner.

They were led before the Black Prince, who received them very kindly, and treated them as friends rather than as prisoners. When the evening came, and supper was served, the Prince made the French king and his son take the most honoured places at table, and, instead of sitting down to eat with them, he himself waited upon them. King John begged the Black Prince to sit down to supper with him, but he would not. “It is honour enough for me,” he said, “to serve so great a king and so brave a soldier.”

After the battle of Poitiers, the Black Prince remained in France for some time, then he set out for England, taking King John with him. When King Edward heard that they were coming, he gave orders to the people of London to make the city bright and beautiful in honour of the King of France. So the houses were decked with flags and wreaths of flowers, and the people, dressed in their holiday clothes, marched through the streets in gay crowds, cheering the King of France and their own brave Prince. King John was mounted upon a beautiful white horse, and beside him rode the Black Prince on a little black pony. It seemed as if the Prince wanted to do everything in his power to make King John forget that he was a prisoner.

But, in spite of all the kindness shown to him by King Edward and the Black Prince, John found the months during which he was kept a prisoner and unable to go back to his own dear land long and weary. At last, after four years, Edward made peace with France for a time, and set King John free on condition that he paid a large sum of money. King John returned to his own land, but as he could not find enough money with which to pay Edward, he came back to prison, like an honourable man, and died in England.

All these wars in France had cost a great deal of money. The English people were proud of their King and Prince, and glad that they should win so many battles, and make the name of England famous; but the people had to pay for these wars. They had to pay tax after tax, and their poverty and misery grew greater year by year. It is true the King could no longer tax the people how and when he liked, for the power of Parliament grew stronger and stronger. It was only through Parliament that the King could now get the money he required, and whenever they gave it to him they made him promise something in return. In this way, as the power of Parliament grew, the power of the King became less, and the country became really more free. But the poor, who were robbed of nearly all their money, found it difficult to understand this. So many men had been killed in the wars that there were too few to do all the work of the land. There were still slaves in England at this time, and when these slaves saw that there were not enough people to do the work, they rebelled and refused to work without wages. Other people joined them, and so there was war between rich and poor.

Besides poverty, a terrible sickness called the Black Death fell upon the land. Thousands upon thousands died until there were not enough people left in the land to sow and reap and plough. The fields lay barren, no corn was grown, and the people starved. These were very unhappy times for England. King Edward's wars still went on, and it became more and more difficult to find money for them and, instead of always winning battles, he now often lost them. To the sorrow of every one the brave Black Prince died. His health had been broken by the terrible hardships of his long wars in

France. At last he became so ill that he could no longer sit upon his horse, nor lead his soldiers in battle, and he came home to England to die. He was buried with great pomp in Canterbury Cathedral. There his tomb is still to be seen, and over it there still hangs the black armour which he used to wear, and from which he took his name of the Black Prince. King Edward died shortly after his son, and his long reign, which had been so brilliant and glorious, ended in darkness and misery, for the people, instead of loving and admiring their King, had grown to hate him.

From H E Marshall *Our Island Story*