

HANLEY CASTLE

AN EPISODE OF
THE CIVIL WARS
AND
THE BATTLE OF WORCESTER

W.S. SYMONDS

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Chapter One

THE town of Upton-on-Severn is situated on the river Severn between Tewkesbury and Worcester. The Romans appear to have chosen it as a site for one of their martial camps, and Roman coins and relics have been found in the field that tradition has marked out as the Camp. In after years the Roman station became a Saxon 'ton', or village, and there is the Saxon's Lode across the Severn to this day. Uptonbury is now Buryfield.

The Saxons loved to create pastures round their villages, and to clear the forest glades of the hazel and the yellow gorse, while nothing attracted them more than a brook which would turn a mill, and whose waters cherished the silver trout and the lissom eel. Just such a place was situated a little more than a mile to the westward of Upton, and in early Saxon times a grange and a mill were erected by the banks of a brook flowing from the Malvern hills, and broad leys were made in the forest for pastures at Hanley, for such the place was called.

With its pleasant surroundings, on the borders of a great forest which stretched from Worcester to Gloucester, Hanley became the resort of the wealthier Saxon eorls. The hunting quarters were famous, and there was a good supply of fish from the Severn - the salmon and shad, the lamprey and lampern - all loved by eorls and ecclesiastics, while the wild woods ever furnished herbs for pottling, such as mints and pepper worts, or for surgery, as bloodworts.

Later on, at 'his manor of Hanley', there lived Brictric Meawe, a gallant Saxon, who was Lord of the Manor of Gloucester, and attached to the Court of Edward the Confessor. This Eorl had the misfortune to attract the affections of Matilda, daughter of the Earl of Flanders, to which he did not respond, a slight she determined to revenge if only she had the opportunity. In after years the opportunity arose. Matilda became the

wife of William the Conqueror, and on his conquest of England she caused the unhappy Brictric to be seized at Hanley and imprisoned at Winchester, where he died miserably.

In after times, when Henry the Third was king, the Saxon grange was converted by the de Clares into a Castle, and this became the residence of the Red Earl, Gilbert de Clare, and his wife the Princess Joan, daughter of Edward the First. This great king frequently visited Worcester, and we may be sure enjoyed hunting in that Malvern Chase which he granted to his son-in-law. Here also lived the last of the de Clares, who died in the prime of youth, fighting for Edward the Second on the fatal field of Bannockburn.

After this, Hanley Castle became a favourite residence of the Beauchamps. Here Isabel Despencer, herself of royal blood, presented her first husband, Richard Beauchamp, with a daughter in 1415, when Henry the Fifth was king. At Hanley Castle she married her second husband, that famous Earl of Warwick who took the standard of Owen Glendower on Shrewsbury field, and who was afterwards guardian of Henry the Sixth and Regent of France. He lies beneath his grand monument at Warwick; she lies by the chapel built to the memory of her first husband in the ancient Abbey of Tewkesbury.

At Hanley Castle died their son, who was made Duke of Warwick by Henry the Sixth, and here lived for years his sister Anne, who married Richard Neville the 'King-maker, the great commanding Warwick, the setter up and plucker down of kings'. Henry the Seventh appropriated the property of the Beauchamps, and in the days of James the First the Castle of Hanley belonged to the Crown, but was well-nigh deserted and neglected. From its situation it could be easily destroyed by cannon, and even the great Keep succumb in a short time to artillery acting from the broad leys which commanded the castle from the eastward.

Nevertheless it was a place the hunter still loved to visit, and King

James often declared that he would himself hunt a stag from his castle of Hanley in Malvern Chase. He never came, however, and it was rented from the Crown by my father, Miles Forester, who loved the locality on account of its connection with my mother's ancestors; for its sylvan beauty, its great moat filled with fishes, its keep in which we lived, the shattered turrets which formed the angles, and the connecting galleries now overgrown with ivy and polypody, tower cress, and pennywort.

My father was a younger son of those Foresters who for centuries had settled on the wolds of Shropshire and from whom was descended the famous Robin Hood. He was a well-educated gentleman, had more than a smattering of Greek, could translate easily Virgil and Horace, and was well read in the works of Chaucer, Holinshed, Churchyard, Bacon, and above all in the plays of Master Shakspeare. He was acquainted with Ben Jonson when he was poet laureate, and attended his funeral in Westminster Abbey. He was a Churchman and a royalist to the backbone.

My mother was related to the Earls of Westmoreland and a descendant of that Isabel Despencer who was the great, great grand-daughter of Edward the Third, so she was proud of Hanley Keep, which she declared to have been unjustly appropriated by Henry the Seventh. She was ever ready to discourse upon the daring deeds of Crecy or of Agincourt, or to summon in imagination the forms of knights, who had long since been dust, to the grass-grown tilt-yard in which I played, and where she would expatiate upon the changes that had passed over her kith and kin.