PART 3
THE VIKINGS

Chapter Eight
Swords in the Viking Period

The Viking period (roughly between A.D. 750 and 1100) is generally treated as a separate age on its own, for though it is the historical continuation of the legendary centuries, its political effects were profound. It saw a final life and death struggle between the Christianized Germanic peoples whose ancestors had migrated from their northern homelands, and the pagan descendants of those who had stayed at home. Though it is given its name by the terrible raiders from the north, its truest significance was the cultural and political growth of Europe, from Charlemagne at the beginning of the period to the Normans and the First Crusade at the end of it. The Normans were the descendants of Vikings, and chivalry was the offspring of a marriage between the old heroic ideals and the Christian ethos.

No one really knows what caused this great series of raids and invasions which went on without a break for 300 years; it began (so we are told) in 787 with three black ships sailing into Poole harbour and up to Wareham, disgorging a fearful band of heathen warriors who sacked the peaceful town, and then sailed away again; and it ended in 1066 on the field of Senlac when William the Norman

overcame the Saxon kingdom of England. Although the period of active roving and raiding had ended over a century before, the Norman invasion was, in a sense, the culminating adventure of Vikingdom.[1] Between these two events Iceland, the Shedands and Orkneys, the east coast of Ireland, the Western Isles, the Isle of Man and a great part of Scotland and northern England were conquered and occupied by the Vikings; France was raided again and again, until finally Normandy was won and settled by Rollo. From Sweden they penetrated far into the heart of Russia, founding many great towns like Kiev. They raided up and down the Mediterranean like their Vandal predecessors and became for centuries the pampered *corps d'élite* of the fighting forces of the Emperors of Constantinople, the famous Varangian Guard. They founded a colony in Greenland (then far more habitable than it is to-day) and another, we have reason to believe, in America.

Our knowledge of the first appearance in England of Vikings in 787 comes from the late tenth-century historian Aethelward and the author of an entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, who describes the raid as, "The first ships of the Danish-men which sought the land of the English nation." Even if this assertion is literally correct, we cannot entirely discount the evidence of the Sagas, which over and over again tell of Scandinavian connections with England, of a political, plunder-seeking and trading kind. This is supported by archaeological evidence from a period as early as the fifth century. We read, for instance, in Fornmanna Saga:

> When Sigurd Hring (late seventh century) father of Ragnar Lodbrok (Hairy Breeks) king of Sweden and Denmark had made peace in both . . . he bethought himself of the kingdom which Ns kinsman Harald Hilditonn (War-Tooth) had possessed in England, and before him Ivar Vidfadmi (Ivar of the Wide Embrace).

The outburst of Vikingdom seems to have been a final tremendous birth-giving by the vigorous and fertile genius of the north; for since then Scandinavia has produced no more Goths or Vandals or Vikings to shake the world and mould it to their own energetic and hard-headed pattern.

The Vikings used a great variety of sword-hilt types, though their

[1] R. E. M. Wheeler, *London and the Vikings*, 1927.

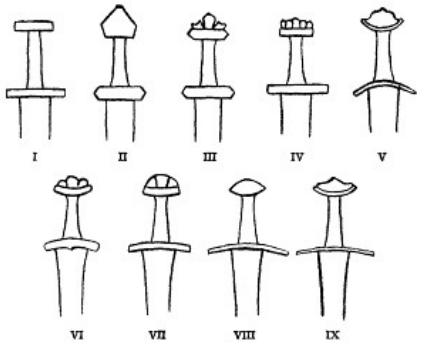

Fig. 57.
Viking sword types.

blades varied very little. These hilts have been most thoroughly classified into 26 types by Dr. Jan Petersen, but it will be more convenient if we use a simplified typology worked out by Sir Mortimer Wheeler in 1927. He reduced Petersen's 26 types and sub-types to 7 basic styles, to which I have added two more. This, much abbreviated, is adequate to cover the whole range of hilt styles in use during the period (fig. 57). All of these are logical developments of the styles of the preceding period; but they are more massive, to balance the larger blades which began to come into use during the eighth century. Two basic factors are common to all of them—the continuing use of the combined upper guard and pommel, and the extreme development of the latter. The most characteristic Viking pommel is made up of three lobes, upon which basic form there are an infinity of variations. Laking[1] worked out a quite untenable (but ingenious) theory as to the reason for this pommel-form's emergence; unfortunately he seems to have ignored any earlier hilt-types except such as were incomplete, or had only the upper guard without the pommel. Upon this simplified hilt-form (which seems to have been used extensively in Norway between about 750-950) he built up a fantastic theory: that the Vikings in their early days, having a liking for charms, fitted such charms into little bags, and

[1] Sir Guy Laking: *A Record of European Armour and Arms through Seven Ages*, 1921, Vol. 1.

tied them with strings on to the tops of the upper guards of their swords. This theory is, I believe, quite wrong; though it is logical, the more because several of these tri-lobed pommels have twisted wires like strings in the depressions separating the lobes. And of course there is literary evidence for the use of bags on hilts like the little one which covered the pommel of Sköfnung, though we are told dearly enough that it was to keep the sun off, not to keep charms in. (Incidentally, it is not illogical perhaps to wonder whether the beautiful and elaborate jewelled hilts of pre-Viking days were not as a matter of course covered up when at sea, or on the march.) The Vikings themselves had much more down-to-earth decorations upon their swords—inlays or platings of silver, bronze, tin, copper and brass—which must have been far more hard-wearing. They would have been easier and less expensive to make, too; gone are all the elaborate jewelled inlays and delicate goldsmith's work; swords in the Viking age were in much more common use, and though some are very splendid, many have hilts of plain unadorned iron.

Fig. 58.
Sword found in the River
Witham, ninth-tenth century
(British Museum).

Yet they are, as swords, far more beautiful as well as being stouter and more terrible. The marvellous swords of the Heroic Age, with both blade and hilt works of lovely craftsmanship, often look ugly and clumsy, but the swords of the Vikings mostly have that austere perfection of line and proportion which is the essence of beauty. Compare the drawing of the Klein Hunigen sword in fig. 40, for instance,

with fig. 58, a Viking sword of about A.D. 900 which was found in the River Witham near Lincoln. The one is garnished with gold and jewellery, but it is not beautiful; the other is plain, its only decoration being simple geometrical patterns, rather crudely executed, inlaid in copper and brass upon its hilt; yet it has a very splendour of beauty. It lives in your hand, too. As your fingers dose round its hilt you feel the character of the weapon; it seems positively to woo you to strike. There is no mistaking its message or its purpose, even after an immersion in mud and water and weeds of eight or so centuries. This sword is in the British Museum. Look at it when you go and see the Battersea shield and the Sutton Hoo treasure; I believe you will not be disappointed in it.

Fig. 59.
Norwegian Long Sax.

In this period we are able for the first time to assign certain styles of sword hilt to specific peoples by reason of the distribution of the specimens which have been found. Types I and II, for instance, we can assign with some certainty to the Norwegians. Over 330 examples of Type II have been found in Norway (most of them on one-edged swords (fig. 59), for which the Norwegians seem to have had a preference), some have been recorded from Sweden, and none at all from Denmark. In the British Isles they occur along the line of the early Norwegian raids—Orkney and the Western Isles (four examples in the Scottish National Museum in Edinburgh) and in Ireland— fifteen or more in the National Museum in Dublin—where they are characteristic of the Viking cemeteries. From England, which was attacked mostly by the Danes, only one example has been recorded, and that not for certain, from the River Lea at Enfield, near London; a single-edged blade from the Thames at Mortlake is

of Norwegian character and may have had one of these hilts. This type lasted from perhaps about 775 to about 900.

Type III has a three-lobed (occasionally five-lobed) pommel, often with zoomorphic ends, and straight guards. The central lobe is always the largest. It is the normal type in north-west Europe during the ninth and tenth centuries, where its main development seems to have taken place in north-western Germany and southern Scandinavia under the influence of the zoomorphic pommels which were characteristic of this region during the fifth and sixth centuries; it is, in fact, in all its forms simply an enlarged development of the cocked hat pommels of Type 4 of the Migration period (fig. 41). This type is rarely found in the British Isles, though it occurs in Scotland (on the island of Eigg) and in Dublin.

Type IV is perhaps rather a sub-type of III. It has an almost flat pommel with five lobes, generally all of the same size; the lower edges are usually straight, as are the guards, but occasionally both are slightly curved. The distribution of the type is wide; many were found in graves at Knin and elsewhere in Jugoslavia; some in Norway (one with curved pommel-base and guard) and others in Ireland, and one magnificently decorated pommel of nielloed silver was found in Fetter Lane in London. This is in the British Museum. Also in London (in the Wallace Collection in Manchester Square) is another, but it was acquired in France and was probably found there. This type is generally held to be Frankish, though the Fetter Lane example may suggest an English influence upon the development of a Viking type; it was in use between about 850 and 950.

Type V is a distinctive group, dating between about A.D. 875 and 950, with a very high peaked central lobe and sharply curved pommel-base and guards. One from the River Thames at Walling-ford (from which the type has been named) and others found in Norway bear English ornament (in the "Trewhiddle" style) of late ninth century date. This, combined with the fact that more have been found in England than anywhere else, suggests very strongly that it is a native English type.

Type VI may equally well be said to be a Danish type of the tenth and early eleventh centuries, for its greatest concentration of finds seems to be in Denmark and those parts of England where the Danes under Sweyn Forkbeard and Knut were concentrated upon London

and south-east England during the first quarter of the eleventh century. Most, in fact, have come out of the Thames. The type is lacking in Scotland and Ireland, and its main concentration in Europe is to the south and east of the Baltic.

Type VII has an almost semi-circular, flattish pommel in the shape of a tea-cosy. Most examples have grooves or beaded lines which divide the surface into three parts, vestiges of the threefold division characteristic of the pommels of Types III and VI, though many have only one horizontal groove, suggesting a division between pommel and upper guard, and some have none at all. It is found in fairly wide distribution, and its associations in Scandinavia suggest that it belongs mainly to the tenth century. Many examples have been found in rivers along the western coasts of France; there is a particularly fine one from the Scheldt in the Tower of London,[1] and another in the same collection from the Thames at Bray. There are two in the museum at York, found in the city—which was captured by the Danes in 867—and another in the British Museum from the River Lea at Edmonton in London, and others—one complete with its scabbard and grip—from the Seine at Paris, relics probably of the great siege of 885-86.

The two types which I have added to Wheeler's typology are transitional forms which link the Viking sword, with its generally short guard and lobated pommel, with the later mediaeval sword, the knightly weapon of the Age of Chivalry. Type VIII has a pommel which is, I believe, nothing but a much simplified development of Type VI. The divisions between the upper and lower parts have vanished as well as the lobes, leaving a form just like a brazil nut. Nearly all swords with this form of pommel have slender guards, much longer than the usual Viking ones and generally curved towards the blade. The earliest swords with these hilts have been found in Norwegian burials of about A.D. 950, and its latest forms belong to the thirteenth century. Its distribution (in its earlier form within the Viking period) tended to be confined to northern and central Europe, with isolated examples in Norway. So far none has been found in the western parts of Europe, with the exception of one which just possibly may have been found in England. This is in my own collection and has a story which I shall recount later.

[1] On loan from the collection of Sir James Mann.

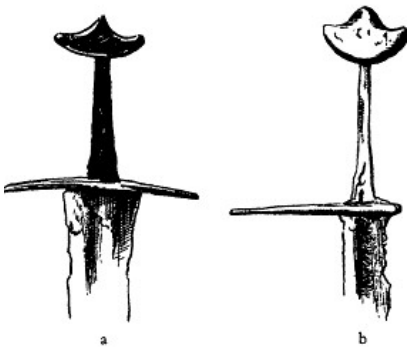

Fig. 60.
a. Sword from Flemma in Norway inscribed INGELRIIMEFECIT.
b. Thirteenth-century sword from Denmark with pattern-welded blade.

Type IX is, I believe, a bye-form of VIII. The general shape of the hilt is similar, but the pommel at first retains the division into upper and lower parts, the upper part taking on an exaggerated cocked-hat form. The one illustrated in fig. 60a was found in a Norwegian grave of about 1000. It is much less common than Type VIII, and one cannot say that it is found more in one locality than another, for only isolated examples have been found widely separated. Its greatest popularity, in a more massive form, was in Germany during the period 1250-1300 (fig. 60b).

There is one further pommel-type, which can be included in the latest of the Viking hilt-styles. This is in the form of a thick disc, sometimes with the edges bevelled off. Now in nearly every work in any language which discusses mediaeval swords, you will come across phrases such as: "The disc-shaped pommel did not come into use until the twelfth century." There is pictorial evidence to show that this is quite wrong; it was used in the eleventh and even in the tenth century, but archaeological support was lacking until about 1950, when a series of late Viking graves—dating between 1000-1100--was opened in Finland. In these graves were found a number of swords with disc pommels, a discovery which enables us to say with certainty that this, the most common type of mediaeval sword-

pommel, popular right up to about 1550, was in use by about 1050.[1]

The Viking swords give the impression that their decoration was wrought by the swordsmith, not by a jeweller. In nine cases out of ten it consists of simple designs applied to the iron in various ways; in the earlier part of the period a thick plating of silver, often covered all over with small punched dots, or crosses (fig. 61) or small geometrical figures, was popular; during the ninth and tenth centuries this plating was often engraved with running interlace patterns of the kind used in book decoration (the Lindisfarne Gospels, for instance) to which niello was sometimes applied (fig. 62). Towards the period's end we find geometrical patterns inlaid in brass on a background of tin, each figure outlined by a strip of copper wire. A simple and much-used decoration all through the

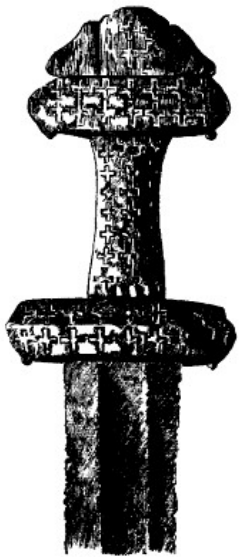

Fig. 61.
Sword with massive silver-covered hilt (Bergen Museum).

Fig. 62.
Sword of Type 3 with decorated silver hilt (Bergen Museum).

[1] I had this information in the course of correspondence with Dr. Jorma Leppaho of Helsinki, who was concerned in the clearing of these graves.

period consisted of the whole surface of guards and pommel being covered with closely placed vertical strips of copper and tin alternately, running from edge to edge (fig. 63) of each element. This was sometimes elaborated by little herringbone patterns inlaid between each vertical strip in a different metal. These decorations are often freely executed, works of real craftsmanship which give an effect of splendour which in its way is far more effective than the older jeweller's work, for the direct simplicity of the ornament is well-matched to the grim dignity of the sword's shape.

Fig. 63.
Sword of Type 2 with hilt decorated with vertical strips of silver. Found in Switzerland (Zurich, Landesmuseum).

The plating was applied to these hilts by hammering or burnishing thin sheets of gold, silver, copper, brass or tin foil on to the surface of the iron which was covered all over with a close network of free cuts; the softer metal of the plating was forced into these cuts and held securely. In some cases where plating was decorated with interlace or other patterns or by geometrical designs, the ground would be of tin or silver, the pattern itself of brass or gold, outlined with copper or bronze. Sometimes the pattern was not inlaid in metal but filled with black niello. Fig. 62 is an example of this sort of work, while the sword from the Witham in the British Museum (fig. 58) which I described earlier is decorated in the latter style, the motif being diamond-shaped insets of brass outlined with copper on a ground of tin. This sword's long immersion in the mud has worn away the pattern on the hilt so that we can see very clearly the method by which it was applied. There is another tenth-century sword hilt similarly decorated in the museum at Dorchester (Dorset)—and very many more all over Europe. This copper-brass-and-tin ornament seems mostly to have been used late

in the period (*c*. 950-1050), whereas the more elegant and often far richer interlace patterns often of gold-silver-bronze are earlier (*c*. 800-900).

The swords of Type V, which as we have said are probably Anglo-Saxon, have decoration applied in thick embossed or engraved plates of silver or bronze; one or two have been found with medallions like coins (but not actual coins) inlaid in the centre of the pommel. Some of the Type IV swords have a quite different sort of decoration, like sprays of foliage (fig. 64); this is a typically Frankish ornament of the ninth-tenth centuries, and strengthens the supposition that these swords are of a Frankish fashion.

Fig. 64.
Hilt of sword from Gravraak in
Norway, with Frankish decoration.

There are a few Viking hilts which bear the name of their maker. In the British Museum is a "lower guard" which was found near Exeter, upon which is written "LEOFRIC ME FEC". We might be tempted to think that this referred to the whole sword, not merely the hilt, were it not for two swords of Type IV which were found in Ireland. On the lower guard of one is the name HARTOLFR, but on its blade is another name, ULFBEHRT, that of the smith who made it. This sword was found at Kilmainham, and the other was found at Ballinderry Crannog in 1928; its guard is inscribed HILTIPREHT, while its blade also bears another name. In Norway is one signed HLITER, and in London (the Type IV sword in the Wallace Collection) is one where the guard has on one side of the blade the letters HLI, and on the other letters which are not clear, though they have been read as TR. From this we may assume that these names applied only to the makers of the hilts.

Yet it is by no means certain that all these" names" on hilts were

in fact names at all. "Hliter" for instance is extremely reminiscent of a word in Old Norse for protection, while "Hiltipreht" is more likely to be a compound of words meaning "hilt" and "ready". "Hartolfi" does at first glance seem like a name, and of course the Exeter guard with "Leofric me fec(it)" is not open to any doubt.

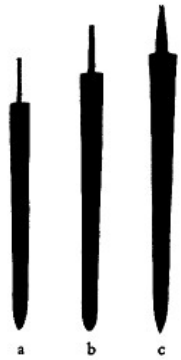

Fig. 65.
a. Roman Iron Age (first-fourth centuries A.D.).
b. Migration Period (fifth-ninth centuries.)
c. Viking Age (eighth-twelfth centuries).

At some time during the Viking Age the sword-makers evolved a new technique of bladesmithing. In the first part of it—say between A.D. 700 and 850—sword blades had tended to become larger and heavier than their: predecessors, but somewhere about 900 blades of a far handier shape began to appear (fig. 65). These were not pattern-welded, yet were tougher and lighter; they tapered more sharply away from the hilt so that the point of balance came nearer to it, thus making them swifter and more manageable in the hand than the older, almost parallel-sided blades with the point of balance well down towards the point. These swords are all right for making heavy, slashing blows, but with the newer type you can thrust as well, and make a far quicker recovery from a blow, or turn a forehand stroke to a back-hander without having to use nearly so much force. The first appearance of these swords seem to have coincided with the emergence of a new style of marking blades, and a new name, ULFBERHT. This name is inlaid in countless blades found in every part of Europe.[1] Philologists have stated that it is a mixture—Ulf is Scandinavian, while Berht or Bert is Frankish; the H in Behrt denotes an early period, before about 900. The name, in connection with the known centres of blade-making from which all these swords have emanated from the La Tène period onwards,

[1] Until 1959 it was not known whether any of these blades had been found in England. In March of that year I was able to identify, by means of an x-ray picture, that the blade of a Viking sword, found at Shifford in the Thames and now in the Museum at Reading, was inlaid with that name.

suggests the Ulfberht was a smith who lived in the later ninth century and worked in the region of the Rhineland where Solingen—a famous centre of sword-making up to this century—now is. There are so many blades bearing Ulfberht's name, and which cover so long a period (more than 200 years) that Ulfberht himself cannot have made all of them. The obvious inference is that he was the founder of a firm, probably a family affair like the great bladesmithing families of the later Middle Ages, which flourished for a very long time. Like the later smiths he seems to have his imitators. In the River Nene near Wisbech was found a sword of the late Viking period, upon one side of which appeared a mis-spelt form of the name Ulfberht, while upon the other is an even more garbled version of another great smith name of the tenth century, Ingelri.

Many swords by this firm have been found, though not in such numbers as the others nor covering so long a period. I shall have more to say about these later, but I must return to Ulfberht and the new fashion of inlaying the name in the blade. None of these blades is pattern-welded, for they relied for their toughness not upon the age-old, complicated structure afforded by that technique but upon the fact that they were of hard, elastic steel; steel all through, not iron stiffened and strengthened by countess twisted threads of steel woven (as it were) into the iron fabric of the blade. Tests were made as long ago as 1889 on three pattern-welded blades from Norway, which showed that they had 0·414%, 0·401% and o·520% of carbon content, whereas an Ulfberht sword from Norway had 0·75% of carbon. This is only an indication, for much wider testing will be needed before one can be dogmatic about it.

These smiths did not modestly stamp their names in tiny letters like Ranvic and Tasvit and the others of the fourth and fifth centuries; they inlaid them in large, untidy letters sprawling right across the middle of their blades, letters often an inch high. Even so, they were probably as unobtrusive as their predecessors, for they were made of iron inlaid in the steel of the blade. The smith, having finished his blade, would mark on its surface the letters he intended to inlay. Then he would follow his marks with strong cuts of a cold chisel. Little pieces of iron wire twisted like string would then be cut to fit into the chiselled grooves; the blade would be made white-hot, and the cold bits of iron hammered into the grooves;

after which the whole thing would be re-heated to welding-heat—say about 1,300ºC.—and the safety of the inlay insured by careful hammering. Finally it would be filed smooth, and the whole blade burnished like a mirror till the letters were scarcely visible. Yet all the potency of the name would be there, an integral part of the sword.

Fig. 66.

In every Ulfberht name so far identified a cross is incorporated with the name; occasionally there are two, one preceding the u and the other either between the R and the H, or between the H and the T (fig. 66). The second one is invariably present, even if the first is omitted.

The other side of each of Ulfberht's blades is inlaid similarly with a pattern, no two of which are identical. These patterns consisted of arrangements of upright strokes, diagonal crosses, interlaced bands and isolated letters. We have no clue as to their meaning, though there can be no doubt at all that they *had* meaning, for we must remember that at this period names and words and symbols had a great and god-like potency. Some of these symbols, particularly the ancient cross-within-a-circle and a diagonal cross with a small dot between each arm, are to be seen roughly hammered into granite kerbstones at the present day.

There were many other smiths of the period who marked their blades in this way, but their swords have only appeared in isolated examples. At first it was thought that the name *denoted* the sword's owner, but when so many Ulfberhts were identified it became obvious that this was impossible; some scholars believed that the name referred to the place or district where the blades were forged, but then a sword was found in Sweden marked INGELRIIMEFECIT. Another (see fig. 60a) was found in Norway with the same inscription; while in the region of Strassburg a sword was found which told

that Banto made it; so it became dear by analogy that Ulfberht also was the name of a maker. Even so, there were swords which bore the name of their owner. One of the best known of the early Viking swords, from Saebo in Norway, has runic characters (inlaid in these big iron letters) saying "Thormud possesses me"; and there is a little sax of the tenth century in the British Museum (it was found in the Thames) with a silver plate inlaid in its blade which reads + BIORTEL-MEPORTE (Bjortelm carries me), and on the other side, inlaid in silver letters in the blade itself, SIGEBERTMEAH, which seems to mean nothing except that Sigebert had a hand in the knife's being in some way or other, probably in its making. There are other cases in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of swords with owner's names on them which we shall discuss later.

Fig. 67.
Inscription on sword of
Type X from Dresden.

The sword which first gave the due that these inlaid names were those of smiths was found in the Sigridsholm lake in Sweden; it is of Type VI and dates about the middle of the tenth century. All the other Ingelrii blades (so far only about twenty have been identified) are of the later tenth and the eleventh centuries. They differ from the earlier Ulfberht blades in that their inscriptions are more nearly done, and are without crosses. For instance, a sword found near Dresden has the name INGELRII inlaid in big letters on one side, but on the other, in much smaller, neater letters of iron, appear the words "Homo Dei" (fig. 67). The men who went on Crusade in 1099 called themselves *Homines Dei*, Men of God, and here is an eleventh-century sword which we may presume was borne by one of them. There is an almost identical sword in my own collection; on one side it bears the name (or part of it, for the final letters are not visible), but on the other is an odd-looking pattern of lines and triangles which was inlaid in copper or latten, not in iron. This is thc sword I mentioned which had a story. Actually it has two, one quite unimportant, of how I came by it, and the other, far more significant, which its own fabric tells us.

It was bought by a friend of mine in 1936 in the Caledonian Market in London, where he saw it lying on the cobble-stones,

bundled together with two or three brass-hilted Waterloo-period swords. It still had upon it a lot of the hardened mud which had encased it when it was dug up, no one knows where, though the fact that this mud had not been chipped off suggests that it might have been found recently, and in England. He bought it (with the brass-hilted swords) for four-and-sixpence. When he took some of the mud off, he found clear traces of a diapered pattern inlaid on the cross-guard in a yellow metal, and some traces of yellow metal inlaid in the pattern on the blade. Not being particularly interested in mediaeval swords, he parted with it soon afterwards to a collector who unfortunately cleaned it with a rust-removing substance, with the inevitable result that all traces of the decoration were removed with the rust. In 1947 it was sold at Sotheby's, where I had the good fortune to get it (owing to a thick fog which prevented another friend of mine, who wanted it too and had far more money than I had, from reaching the sale-room in time to examine it).

Since I have had it, some very interesting facts about it have been revealed. Firs fly, I was able to dear and read the letters INGEL . . . which told of its origin. Then the pattern on the back was identified as a rather crude representation of the "Caroccium", a type of war-standard on a wheeled car used by the free cities of the Rhine and of northern Italy. This standard consisted of a tall flag-pole set upon a car, with the banners of the wards of the city, or of the leaders of the host, hung upon it from gaff-like poles projecting from the main staff; at the top was a spherical container wherein the Holy Sacrament was placed before going into battle, and a large cross surmounted the whole. Here upon this sword-blade is the whole thing (fig. 68). This type of standard appears to have been invented by Heribert, Archbishop of Milan, in 1035. The inlays on these two blades (the Dresden one and my own) are interesting because they help us with dating not only the swords themselves but others with inlays in similar technique. For instance, the small neat letters of the Homo Dei inscription are of a style which seems to have become popular during the twelfth century,

Fig. 68.
The "Caroccium" mark on
the blade of a sword of Type X
in the author's collection.

for many blades which date before about 1150 have similar inscriptions (a most beautiful sword, in nearly perfect condition, lies upon my writing table at this moment with an inscription of this style on each side of its blade; this will be described fully later). The fact that a sword which can be dated by its form and its maker's name to the eleventh century has upon it an inscription in a style popular in the twelfth only gives evidence that the new style came in before the old one went out, but the words of the second inscription gave us a date showing that the new style was probably in use before 1100.

The other sword shows two separate styles of inlay in use on the same blade, the old iron-inlaid smith-name on one side and a copper or latten inlaid pictograph on the other. This style of inlaying "pictorial" designs on blades in fine lines of copper, latten, silver or pewter was much used during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but here we have it on a sword of the eleventh. It is unlikely to have been applied to the blade before 1035, for we are told that the "Carrocium" was not used before then, while the style of the sword is such that it is very unlikely that it was made after 1100. So the inlay helps to date the sword, and the sword helps to date a style of inlay. Actually inlays of yellow metal, gold or copper, were used (though not often) all through the Roman and Migration periods. There is a blade from the Nydam bog with runic letters inlaid in gold, and there are many saxes inlaid with designs of copper or brass (or latten).

Further facts about this sword of mine came to light when the Ancient Monuments department of the Ministry of Works became interested in it. I have said that the last letters of the name are obliterated. This is because a small patch has been welded into the blade at this point. It is obvious from the patination of the blade that this patch was put in in antiquity; it is no modem repair. The question was, why was it there at all? An x-ray photograph of the blade gave us the answer. A severe blow on the sword's edge about four inches below the hilt had caused two fractures to run into the centre of the blade. These are not visible on the surface, but they must have caused the inlaid iron of the final letters to fall out, leaving a weak patch in the blade. Now a good sword was a costly thing; one would not discard it unless it was quite unusable.

Presumably the damage did not seem too bad, for the patch was put in—not very well, certainly not by a swordsmith. The inference must be that the damage was done on campaign (what would be more likely?) and that a hasty repair was made by the nearest armourer. The mark of the blow which caused the damage is still deafly visible on the edge of the sword—a gently curving depression about

3 in. long—with the metal of the edge burred over on either side. Presumably this curving dent would fit the curved surface of some long-perished helmet—only a helmet would have been hard enough or would have presented a large enough surface to make such a mark on a sword's edge, for at this period no other plate armour was worn.

The introduction of these new-fashioned blades in the early tenth century did not mean that the older styles of pattern-welded ones were abandoned, for we find many of them mounted in hilts which are unmistakably of the tenth and eleventh centuries—indeed, in Copenhagen there is a sword which cannot be earlier than 1250, with a free pattern-welded (though broken) blade in it (see fig. sob); and in Zurich there is a "Landsknecht" sword of the last years of the fifteenth century which has one. These, of course, were old blades re-hilted. There seems to be no doubt that the making of these blades had ceased by A.D. 1000. The Zurich sword is particularly interesting, for the hilt is of a most distinctive form (see plate 20, D) which was only used for a very short time between about 1490 and 1530, and there can be no doubt that the ancient blade was fitted with a modem hilt in 1500-odd; it is no nineteenth century collector's pastiche.

The sax underwent a complete change during the Viking period. No more do we find the stout, broad-bladed weapons of the fifth century; instead, we have two kinds of sax; a long, single-edged sword—one much favoured by the Norwegians—and a shorter, more slender weapon like a knife, used extensively by Anglo-Saxons and Franks and called nowadays a Scramasax. Some of these scramasaxes were quite long (one in the British Museum from the Thames

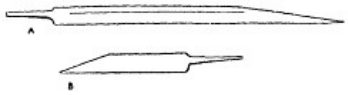

Fig. 69.
Scramasax blades, eighth-tenth century.

in London is 28 in. long) but most are short—"Handsaxes", the Saxons called them. Fig. 69 shows types of sax-blade in use during the ninth and tenth centuries. They are unlike their large fifth-century predecessors for the tangs are always straight, springing from the middle of the blade, and do not show the shape of the hilt itself. It is curious to note that the Sinhalese for the last three centuries or so have been producing very beautifully decorated little knives remarkably like these handsaxes.

Chapter Nine
The Vikings at War

Norse literature is full of poetic allusions to arms, most of which were held to be pure fancy until the archaeological evidence of the weapons themselves became available. There are, for instance, four words meaning "sword", but each denotes a different type. "Svaerd" is the most common, and refers to what we nowadays would call the broadsword—a two-edged blade without much of a point, meant mainly for slashing. "Maekir" is a slightly less common term, and seems to refer to a weapon similar to the sword, but with a more slender and acutely tapering blade ending in a sharp point. The two swords from the Kragehul bog illustrated in plate 3 are admirable examples of *svaerd* and *maekir*. Then, of course, there is the sax, and one of its varieties, the *skolm*, a short one-edged sword like a knife (fig. 69b is probably a skolm.)

The word "hilt" (Hjalt) denoting the whole of the handle of the sword was used in its modem sense by the Saxons, but in old Norse it denotes only the cross-pieces, the upper hilt (Fremir Hjaltit) and the lower hilt (Efra Hjaltit).[1] The grip was called the middle piece, Medalkafli. The metal fillets which we see on the grips of so many swords of the Migration and Viking periods were the Vettrim (meaning "lid-formed rim"), and we may suppose, though this is by no means certain, that the leather or vellum or linen covering

[1] For this reason I always refer to a sword as flit is looked at point downwards, for it is evident from this and many other literary allusions that it was so regarded and described in antiquity. Modem writers tend to refer to it as if it was seen point upward, which would make nonsense of the Viking's references to upper and lower hilts.

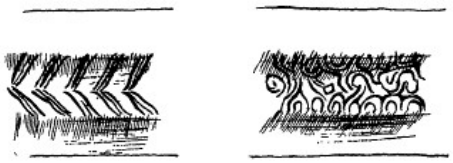

Fig. 70.
Blade-patterns which may equate with
the descriptive terms "Ann" and "Blodida".

of the grips was called the Valbost. This means literally "foreign covering", but originally it denoted any thin membrane covering any object. In one of the Edda poems direction is given to cut runes *a vettrimum ok a valbostum*; *in* another, the Helgakvida, there is a reference to a sword with a serpent sign on the valbost. The long slender guards—or lower hilts—which occur on many late Viking swords of Type VIII were called "Gaddhjalt" spike hilt, for Gaddr means a spike.

The decoration is called Mal or Moel, but it was really used far more often in describing the blade of a sword—one of the things which baffled scholars a good deal before the identification of pattern-welding. There is frequent mention of the wave-sword (Vaegir in Old Norse and Waegsweord in Old English), but even more obscure seemed the descriptive terms for certain blade-patterns: "Blood-eddy", for instance (Bloida *), or Ann, which is an old Norse word for swathes of mown corn (the same word as the Middle High German Jan). Both these terms are perfectly apt when we apply them to the patterns shown in fig. 70 a and b. Of a more robust character are two other terms occurring in a poem as features or parts of a sword: Blodvarp and Idvarp. This could (and probably does) refer to a style of pattern-welding where the pattern is made up of long parallel stripes running lengthwise down the blade. Varp means a warp in weaving, and the long lines down the blade are likened to the warp of a web which is completed when the blade is imbrued with blood or vitals. (Blod is blood, and Idr means intestines.)

Many and picturesque are the descriptive phrases used for swords: Odin's Flame, the Ice of Battle, Serpent of the Wound, the Dog of the Helmet, Battle-snake, The Fire of the Shields, The Battle-Fire,

Torch of the Blood, The Snake of the Byrnie, The Sea-King's Fire, Tongue of the Scabbard, The Byrnie's Fear, Harmer of War-Knittings. Similar colourful expressions were applied to other arms as well; the byrnie (which in the Viking Age was a garment of the same cut as in the *preceding* Migration period) was *called* The Grey Clothes of Odin, the Weft of Spears, Blue-Shirt and Battle Cloak, Cloak of Kings and War-Net, and, as we have seen, War-Knitting. In view of this constant reference to nets and webs and knitting it seems quite extraordinary that even now it is a commonly held belief that mail was unknown in the West until "the Crusaders brought it from Palestine in the twelfth century".

Some of these byrnies the Vikings wore were very short, only covering the upper half of the torso, while there is a reference to another type called Spanga-Brynja which means a byrnie with plates. This may possibly be a garment like the mail-shirt with gold plates which was found in the Thorsbjerg bog.

Shields were much the same as in the preceding period, and the description on p. 120 of the Sutton Hoo shield would in the main hold good for those of the following four centuries. That they were often as large may be inferred from references such as "Then the king . . . selected a resting-place for the night where all his men came together and lay in the open under their shields" (St. Olaf's Saga, Ch. 219) and "When Olaf was in the Syllingar (Scilly Isles) a hermit prophesied to him 'that he would get severely wounded in a fight and be carried on a shield on board his ship'." (Olaf Tryggvason's Saga, Heimskringla, Ch. 32). Shields seem to have more poetic phrases bestowed upon them even than swords: The Sun of Battle, The Sun of Odin, (or the Moon of either), the Net of Spears (spears being referred to as the Fish of the Shield), Board of Victory, The War-Linden, The Wheel of Hild (a Valkyrie) and Hild's Wall, The Sun of the Sea-Kings, The Land of the Arrows, The Spears' Path, Battle-Shelterer, the Hall-Roof of Odin, the Burgh of Swords, and so on.

Helmets, on the other hand, do not seem to have been favoured with such specific allusive phrases. Sometimes we read of them having names, like king Adils' helmet which he called Hildigölt (War-Boar); as we can see from the few bits of *Beowulf* which I quoted in chapter VII, the boar usually figured prominently on

helmets as crest or decoration, with a strong protective symbolism, and allusions to boars generally indicate helmets. From the Viking period there are practically no helmets surviving. In Laxdaela Saga (Ch. 63) we read:

> He had a spanga-brynja (q.v.) and a steel cap, the brim of which was as wide as a hand's breadth, and a shining axe on his shoulder, the edge of which seemed to be two feet long. He had black eyes, and was very Viking-like in appearance.

Fig. 71.
Carolingian helmet, from
"Vivians Bible", c. 850
(Paris, Bib. Nat. Cod. Lat. 1)

Here is a type of helmet which was very popular all through the Middle Ages. Illustrations of these war-hats abound, and in many Frankish manuscripts of the Carolingian period we see brimmed iron hats. A particularly good example is shown in fig. 71 from a manuscript of about 850 now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. These helmets, probably derived from a Roman type of cavalry helmet, are remarkably like the late sixteenth-century morions which are so familiar.[1] It is possible that the reference to the steel cap with its wide brim told of one of these, for though we only find pictures of them in Frankish manuscripts, it does not follow that they were not worn elsewhere than in Frankland (we cannot speak of France or Germany at this period, for the two were at that time united). Indeed, it seems extremely likely that most of the Vikings' helmets—like all the sword-blades they used—were made in "Valland", as they called the countries of the Franks, for over and over again we find in the Sagas such comments as

> He has on his ship one hundred men, and they had on coats of mail and foreign helmets.
> *St. Olaf's Saga*, Ch. 47.

Generally on the front of helmets was painted a "War-Mark"

[1] Some of the war hats illustrated in these Carolingian manuscripts are so close to those shown in late Roman art that one wonders whether they were not debased copies of these, and not of actual contemporary helmets—yet most other arms such as swords, spears, shields, saddles, stirrups and byrnies are clearly not Roman at all, but ninth-century Frankish.

(Herkumbl), a badge whereby men following one leader could recognize their comrades, a sort of Viking regimental cap badge.

During the Viking period axes became far more popular and were held in greater respect than formerly. We read of costly decorated axes being bestowed as gifts, in the same manner as swords:

> As they parted, the Jarl gave Olaf Hoskuldsson a most costly gold-ornamented axe.
> *Laxdaela Saga, Ch.* 29.

These axes were far more effective weapons than the ones which belong to the earlier centuries. You have just read of the very Viking-like warrior who wore the iron cap and carried an axe whose "edge seemed to be about two feet long". He who made that comment was a herdsman, warning Helgi Hardbeinsson of a band of men who were out to kill him; it may well have seemed to him that this weapon really was as formidable as he said it was, for these Viking axes (there are many such from the Thames, in the British *Museum* and the London Museum) are enormous and terrible weapons (fig. 72) whose edges are often as much as 12 in. long. These were indeed battle-axes; we cannot confuse them, like the earlier ones, with domestic axes. They had their poetic names, too: the Fiend of the Shield, Battle-Witch, the Wound's Wolf— but "Fiend" and "Witch" were applied to them almost exclusively, as "Witch" of the Shield, of the armour, of the byrnies, of the helmet, and so on. The great two-handed axes which Harold's Huscarles wielded at Senlac were of this type, as we can see most plainly in the Bayeux tapestry.

Fig. 72.
Viking axe head from the
Thames (London Museum).

In the same way as axes were usually called witch, spears were "Serpent", Serpent of Blood, or of anything else the poet fancied; sometimes, as we have seen, a spear was called the Fish of the Shield, or of the war-net; at other times we find it called—an excellent name this, nearly as good as Homer's "long-shadowed spear" —"the flying dragon of the fight". The actual spears used seem to have been hardly different from those found in the great bog-

deposits, except that in the later part of the period they tended, like the later swords, to have a fairly simple kind of decoration in the form of narrow bands of alternate white and yellow metal running (like a cord binding) round and round the socket, often with little herringbone insets between each band.

The Vikings (and there is no doubt their forbears also) had as strict a code of rules governing duelling as did the French in the 1720s. There were two sorts of duel, a more informal "single-fight" (Einvigi), and a most punctilious formal one called Holmgang. This means literally "going on an island", and wherever possible such duels were fought on small islets, but where this was not possible a space (like a boxing ring and of much the same size) was marked out on the ground. These Holmgang duels were often used as a legal method of settling disputes about property or women, in the same way as the mediaeval trial by combat. Unfortunately they were much abused by tough individuals like professional duellists and Berserks to get possession of someone's wife or land, though occasionally such men would challenge another to a Holmgang merely to get his loose property; or sometimes, like Holmganga Bersi of whom we read in Kormac's Saga (see ch. 6), p. 105, just for the fun of it. It is in this Saga that we find one of the best descriptions of the Holmganga law. You remember how Kormac borrowed Sköfnung from Skeggi of Midfirth for his duel. Here is what happened:

> A cloak was spread under their feet. Bersi said: "You, Kormac, challenged me to Holmganga; but instead of it I offer you Einvigi. You are young and inexperienced, and at Holmganga there are difficult rules, but none whatever at Einvigi!" Kormac answered, "I shan't fight better at Einvigi, and I'll risk it, and be on equal footing with you in everything." "You shall have your way, then," said Bersi.
>
> This was the Holmganga law: that the cloak should be ten feet from one end to the other, with loops in the corners, and through these loops should be put pegs with a head at the top. These were called Tjosnur. Then three squares, their sides each a foot beyond the other, must be marked round the cloak. Outside the squares must be placed four poles called Hoslur (hazel-poles). It was called a Hazelled Field when it was prepared thus (fig. 73). Each man must have three shields, and when these where made useless he must stand upon the cloak, even if he had moved out of it before, and defend himself with his weapons.

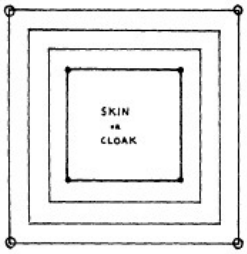

Fig. 73.
Diagram of the Hoslur, or Hazelled Field.

He who had been challenged must strike first. If either was wounded so that blood came upon the cloak he was not obliged to fight any longer. If either stepped with one of his feet outside the hazel poles he was held to have retreated; if he stepped outside with both feet he was held to have fled. One man was to hold the shield before each of the combatants. The one who received most wounds was to pay as Holmslausn (indemnity for being released from the fight) three marks of silver.

Thorgils held the shield for his brother, and Thord Arndisaron that of Bersi, who struck the first blow and cleft Kormac's shield. Kormac struck at Bersi in the same way. Each of them spoiled three shields for the other. Then Kormac had to strike; he struck, and Bersi parried with Hviting. Sköfnung cut off its point, and it fell on Kormac's hand and wounded him in the thumb, whose joint was rent so that blood fell on the cloak. Thereupon the others intervened and did not want them to go on fighting. Kormac said, "It's not much of a victory Bersi has got from my accident, though we part now."
Kormac's Saga, Ch. 10.

That particular Holmgang was a tame affair, but in most of them far more blood was spilt than the drops from Kormac's cut thumb—this, for instance:

There was a fine field not far from the sea, where the Holmganga was to be. There the place was marked out by a ring of stones. Ljot came thither with his men, prepared for the Holmganga with shield and sword. He was very large and strong, and when he arrived on the field at the Holmgang place the Berserk frenzy came upon him, and he howled fiercely and bit the rim of his shield.

Egil made ready for the Holmganga, having his old shield, with his sword Nadr girt to his side and with Dragvandil (his other sword) in his hand. He went inside the marks of the duelling place (i.e. the squares marked out round the cloak) but Ljot was not ready. Egil raised his sword and sang.

> After the song Ljot came forward and pronounced the laws of the Holmganga, that whoever stepped outside the stones which are set around the place of Holmganga should ever afterwards be called Nithing (coward).
>
> Then they rushed at each other, and Egil struck at Ljot, who covered himself with his shield while Egil dealt blow after blow so that Ljot could not strike back. He drew back to get room to swing his sword, but Egil went just as fast after him and smote most violently. Ljot went out beyond the mark-stones and to and fro on the field. Thus went the first attack. Then Ljot asked to be allowed to rest, which Egil granted.
>
> Egil bade Ljot make himself ready; "I want this fought out," he said. Ljot sprang to his feet, and Egil ran forward and at once struck him; he went so close that Ljot stepped back, and his shield did not cover him. Then Egil smote him above the knee and cut off his leg. Ljot fell, and at once died.
> *Egil's Saga*, Ch. 17.

There are a number of interesting points here which are worth noting. Egil came to the fight with two swords, one at his side and another, his famous Dragvandil, in his hand. In just such a fashion did men arm themselves in the fifteenth century when engaging upon a judicial duel. In the actual attack we see firstly that they fought alone, without the seemingly impossible necessity of each having another man—his second—to hold his shield. Egil had the first blow, but (and this seems a little unfair) he did not, having struck, wait for Ljot to have his turn but pressed his attack until he pushed Ljot back on to the ropes and clean out of the ring. Nor did he give him a chance in the second round: undoubtedly the most effective way of dealing with a Berserk. (You noted the curious way in which we are told that Ljot behaved, howling and gnawing his shield rim? This seems to have been the usual Berserk practice before a fight, to work themselves up into that sort of psychopathic frenzy which makes men quite impervious to caution or pain or any thought at all save the will to flay. Very terrifying it must have been, and very effective.) It must have taken some doing, to rain blows thus without giving time for an opponent to reply. These swords were quite heavy, weighing two and a half to three pounds —but they are not, as so many people seem to think, so heavy "that a man to-day could scarcely lift one from the ground, let alone wield it". That—a view widely held and often expressed—is utter

nonsense; as I say, they weigh comparatively little and with practice could be wielded easily enough. A Viking of the tenth century would have been used to wielding a sword every day of his life from the time he was about seven, and there is nothing extraordinary in the statement that Egil cut off Ljot's leg above the knee with one blow. By a similar stroke was Harold's life ended at Senlac (the arrow in his eye did not kill him); if we are to believe the chronicler, it was Duke William himself who dealt the blow.

Most people are to some extent familiar with sword-play—stage sword-play. In these clays this is usually well enough done, but all of it is based more upon modem fencing practice than upon the realities even of eighteenth-century rapier fighting. When it comes to combats between mediaeval warriors we see a tremendous dashing of sword against sword and not much else. The real thing was, I believe, quite different. If we carefully read and correctly interpret what we are told in the Sagas about sword-fighting, and co-relate that with the archaeological evidence plus—and this is essential—a practical knowledge of the "feel" of the swords themselves, we may arrive at some reasonable conclusions as to how it was done. To begin with, one combatant would strike at the other. As we have seen, in formal duels this first blow was the privilege of the man who was challenged, but in the rule-less Einvigi either could strike first. In such fights we may take it that, as in modem wrestling or boxing, a good deal of preliminary manœuvring and feinting took place before one combatant or the other saw his opportunity and smote. The other would then defend himself either by taking the blow on his shield, or by evasive action such as ducking or dodging or leaping aside—often he would leap right over the stroke, for it was always a good idea to go for your opponent's leg below his shield. Then came the turn of the second man, while the first was recovering from his stroke and preparing for the next. This blow would be parried or evaded in the same way, and so on. It was very important to be able to change the direction of your stroke at the instant you saw that it was going to miss its target, even if this meant turning a downward blow into an upward one, or a forehand to a backhand. It was their great mobility and handiness which made the "new" style of blades produced in Ulfberht's time so much better than their predecessors; an Ulfberht

was to an eighth-century blade what in 1940 a Spitfire was to a Gladiator—it combined greater speed and mobility with greater striking power. Naturally enough, there would be many occasions in a fight of this kind when both combatants would strike at the same moment, and there would probably be quite long spells while both jockeyed for position and neither smote at all. It was only when the shield had been so cut up that it was useless that one used one's sword to parry with, and then one would try only to use the flat of it, for if sword-edge clashed with edge much damage resulted. This is in fact what happened to Kormac, for he parried the stroke of Bersi's Hviting with Sköfnung's edge; Hviting's point broke off, and Sköfnung got a bad nick in the blade, which caused Kormac a deal of worry (because it was Skeggi's sword) and greatly annoyed Skeggi.

Even pitched battles between armies were often conducted with much of the punctilio of the Holmgang—at their beginning, anyhow. In the Saga of Egil Skallagrimsson we read a very full account of the great battle fought in 938 at Brunanburgh in northern England, where King Aethelstan, Alfred the Great's grandson, defeated a great host of Scots and Welsh who came down from the north to invade and overrun England. They seem to have had much initial success, and we are told that while Aethelstan was raising men in the south of England, he left Egil and his brother Thorolf and an earl called Alfgeir in charge of his forces in the north. A little later on:

> They sent men to Olaf (the Scottish King) with the message that Aethelstan would fence a field with hazels to offer it as a battlefield to him on Vinheidi (Vin Heath); that he did not want them to ravage in his land, and that the one who gained the battle should rule over the land of England; they were to meet there in the course of one week, and he who should arrive there first was to wait one week for the other. It was customary then, after a battlefield had been enhazelled, to consider it a disgrace for a king to plunder until after the battle. Olaf therefore stopped his host, and did not ravage, but waked until the appointed day and then moved his host up to Vinheidi.

Then Aethelstan arrived with his host, and a good deal of negotiation went on in the hope of averting a great slaughter. However, Olaf's requirements were too much for Aethelstan, and the

negotiations were broken off. Then the Scots king planned a preliminary surprise attack, sending part of his host (the Welsh contingent under its leaders Adils and Hring) to beat up the quarters of Alfgeir and Thorolf and their men in the early morning:

> When it became light Thorolf's sentries saw the host; a war-blast was blown, and the men got into their armour, and Thorolf began to array them in order of battle in two fylkings (what would have been called "Battles" in the later Middle Ages). Alfgeir commanded one of them, and had a standard carried in front of him. In this division was the force which had followed him; it was much larger than Thorolf's division. Thorolf had a wide and thick shield, a very strong helmet on his head and a sword which he called Lang (the Long One), a large and good weapon. He also had a spear in his hand, the blade of which was four feet long, the point four-sided, the upper part of the blade broad, and the socket long and thick. The handle was no longer than one could reach with the hand to the socket, but very thick; there was an iron peg in the socket, and the whole handle was wound with iron. Spears of this kind were called Brynthvari (Mail-Piercer). Egil had the same gear as Thorolf. He had a sword which he called Nadr (Viper) which he had got in Kurland; it was an excellent weapon. Neither of them wore a coat of mail. They set up their standard, and Thorfinn the Hard carried it. All their men had Northern shields, and their whole outfit was Norwegian. All the Northmen who were there were in their ranks.

Adils set forward against Alfgeir's division, which broke and fled. Alfgeir and his companions rode off to the south. He feared to face his king, so he pressed on southwards and took ship for France, where he had relatives, and "he never since came back to England".

> Adils first pursued the fleeing men, but not far. He returned to the battle and advanced to attack. As Thorolf saw this, he sent Egil against him and ordered the standard to go forward. He bade his men follow each other well, and stand closely together. "Let us move toward the forest," he said, "so that it can shelter our rear, so that they can't attack us from all sides." They did so, and a sharp fight followed. Egil advanced aghast Adils, and they had a hard encounter. The difference in numbers was very great, but even so more fell on Adil's side. Thorolf became so furious that he slung his shield over his back, and taking the spear in both hands rushed forward and struck and thrust on both sides; men turned away from him, but he killed many. Thus

> he cleared a way to the standard of Hring, and nothing could stand against him. He cut down the man who bore it and cut down the standard pole. Then he thrust his spear through the breast of Hring through the coat of mail and his body, so that it came out between his shoulders; he raised him on the spear over his head, and struck the shaft down into the ground. The Jarl expired on the spear, in sight of foes and friends. Then Thorolf drew his sword and dealt blows on both hands. His men also made an onset; many of the Welsh and Scots fell, and some fled. When Adils saw his brother's death, and the great fall and plight of his men, funding himself severely pushed he turned and fled, running into the forest as did his men.
> *Egil's Saga*, Ch. 51-56

Here is a vivid though entirely credible and reliable account of a skirmish preceding a great battle—in the same way as the Quatre-Bras affair preceded Waterloo—which is itself less vividly described because it did not so intimately concern Egil; though Thorolf was killed in the course of it, and Egil avenged himself by slaying Adils.

Another account of a battle which ought to be included here describes a much earlier affray, fought two centuries before Brunan-burgh in about A.D. 700. It was between Harald Hilditonn (War-Tooth) and Sigurd Hring, and was fought on Bravoll in Eastern Gotland. Harald Hilditonn was king over Sweden and Denmark and part of England and other lands, but he was old. Sigurd Hring was his nephew, and

> When old age was heavy upon the king, he made Hring king over Uppsala and gave into his power the whole of Sweden and West Gotland, but himself retained the rule over all Denmark and East Gotland.

Harald became very old indeed, so

> Some chiefs resolved when he was having his bath in a tub to cover it with timber and stones, intending to smother him in it. When he saw that they wanted to kill him, he asked to be allowed to get out of the bath. He said, "I know that you think I am too old. That is true, but I would rather die my fated death. I don't want to die in a bath tub, but in a much more kingly way." A little while after he sent word to his kinsman Hring in Sweden, that he should gather a host from all the lands he ruled over and meet him on the frontier and fight against him; and he told him all about the reason, that the Danes thought him too old.

Hring gathered men from his lands, and many came from Norway, while many warriors from Ireland and "Saxland" (Frisia) came to the aid of Harald, as well as some from Koenugard (which was Kiev). There follows a long list of the champions who followed the two kings. Among those of Harald we find'

> There were the shield-maidens Visma and Heid, each of whom had come with a numerous host. Visma carried Harald's standard. . .. Another shield-maiden was Vebjorg who came from the south from Gotland and many champions followed her.

These formidable ladies, the shield-maidens, are a striking feature of Norse military life. What induced them to be the ferocious warriors they were is never clearly stated, but their deeds match those of their brothers. The names of some of the champions of Hring are worth noting for their vivid and interesting variety: Erling the Snake, Hrut the Rambler, Odd the Wide-Travelling, Egil the Squinting, Hrolf the Woman-Loving, Dag the Stout, Gerdar the Glad, and Glismak the Good.

Harald sent Herlief with the Saxon force to King Hring "in order to stake out the field chosen for the battle and declare the truce and peace broken". When these formalities had been concluded, the two hosts drew up on Bravoll.

> When these hosts were ready for battle, both had the war-horns sounded and raised the war-cry. The arrays met, and the battle was so severe that it is said in all old Sagas that no battle in the Northern lands was ever fought with so many or so valiant picked men.

The battle raged for a while, and Ubbi, one of Harald's champions, began to take a terrible toll of Hring's leading men:

> When Hring saw this, he urged the host not to let one man overcome all, such proud men as they were. He shouted: "Where is Storkud who till now has always borne the highest shield ?" Storkud answered, "We have plenty to do, Sir, but we will try to gain a victory if we can, though were Ubbi is a man may be fully tried." At the urging of the king he rushed to the front against Ubbi, and there was a great fight between them with heavy blows; each of them was fearless. After a while, Storkud gave him a large wound, and himself received six, all of them severe, and he thought he had rarely been so hard pushed by a single man. As the arrays were dense they were torn apart

> and so their hand-to-hand fight ended. Then Ubbi slew the champion Agnar and cleared a patch in front of himself, dealing blows on both hands; his arms were bloody up to his shoulders. Thereupon he attacked the men from Telemark. When they saw him they said, "Now we need not go elsewhere, but let us shoot arrows at this man for a while, and as everybody thinks little of us let us do the more and show that we are valiant men." The most skilled of the Telemarkians began to shoot at him, namely Hadd the Hard and Hroald Toe. These men were excellent archers and they shot twenty-four arrows into his breast; this much was needed to destroy his life. These men slew him, but not before he had slain six champions and severely wounded eleven others, and killed sixteen Goths and Swedes who stood in the front of the ranks.
>
> Vebjorg, shield-maiden, made hard onsets on the Swedes and the Goths; she attacked the champion Soknarsoti; she had accustomed herself so well to the use of the helmet, mail-shirt and sword, that she was one of the foremost in Chivalry (the word used here is Riddaraskap, meaning literally equestrian exercises) as Storkud the old says: she dealt the champion heavy blows and attacked him for a long while, and with a blow at his cheek cut through his jaw and chin; he put his beard into his mouth and bit it, thus holding up his chin. She performed many great feats. A little later Thorkel the Stubborn, a champion of Hring, met her and they fiercely attacked each other. Finally with great courage she fell, covered with wounds.

And so on. Finally the aged Harald (who fought in the battle in a cart, as he could neither walk nor ride) was killed.

> When Hring saw Harald's wagon empty he knew that he had fallen. He had the horns blown and shouted that the hosts should stop fighting. When the Danes became aware of this the battle ceased, and Hring offered truce to the entire host of King Harald, which all accepted.
> *Sögubrot*, Ch. 9.

A good deal of this is remarkably similar to many of the mediaeval chronicles and Chansons de Geste. In very similar terms the chroniclers like De Joinville or Froissart record the fights of the champions of their own day.

Chapter Ten
From Charlemagne To the Normans

The accession of Charles the Great to the Frankish throne 771 marked the beginning of a new era, in the art of war s in all else. At the start of his reign each Teutonic nation had its own military customs; at its end he had welded all these peoples into a single state, with the exception of the English and the Visigothic remnant in Spain. Until the formation of this empire, these diverse peoples had little contact with one another, but after 800 all of them were directed towards the same political ends under the same rulers. The unity of purpose imposed by this long and triumphant reign was never quite lost by the countries of Western Europe. In spite of all national divergences, from that time on they developed according to the same pattern, which provides the unity of thought, of religion and art and letters and military usage which is such a striking and remarkable feature of the Middle Ages. And of course it explains why Charlemagne replaced the old battle tactics and arms of the Franks, so crude and inefficient, with the far better ones of the Longobards. There had been some movement towards a better way of fighting before Charles' accession; under the later Merovings and the great Mayors of the Palace the Franks had begun to build up, from the small mounted bodyguards of the earlier period, an aristocratic force of cavalry, clad in a certain amount of defensive armour. This process was stimulated by the sudden appearance of the Saracens in the south of France in 725-32. Charles Martel defeated them decisively at Poitiers in 732, but the extent of the danger can be appreciated by the distance to which they had penetrated into the heart of the Frankish kingdom. For forty years after this there were a series of aggressive wars against

the Saracens and Longobards as well as the Saxons in the north. Both Saracens and Longobards were horse-soldiery; in their wars against the Emirs of Spain and Aistulf the Longobard the Franks must have developed their cavalry arm in order to cope with such adversaries.

Charles the Great, however, undertook wars on a far bigger scale, and he began at once to increase the amount of mounted men in his hosts. His first military ordinance shows how anxious he was to keep as much war material as possible within his realm. In 779 he ordained that no merchant should dare to export byrnies. This order was repeated in the Capita Minora Cap. 7 and in the Aachen capitulary of 805. In this the trade in arms with the Wends and Avars is particularly denounced. Any merchant caught conveying a mail shirt outside the realm is threatened with forfeiture of all his property—more evidence that within his boundaries there were centres of armour-making whose wares were eagerly sought beyond them. Charles conquered the Lombards in 774, and immediately issued military legislation imposing upon them the Frankish regulations for compulsory military service, making for instance the fine for neglecting the king's "ban" sixty solidi, and the penalty for desertion in the face of the enemy death, or at least to be placed at the king's disposal both for life and property. It is interesting to find in the Lombardic capitulary of 786 that the Lombards who are to swear obedience to the royal mandate are one and all described as cavalry. They are:

> Those of the countryside, or the men of the Counts, Bishops and Abbots or tenants on royal demesne or on Church property, all who hold fiefs or serve as vassals under a lord, all those who come to the host with horse and arms, shield, lance, sword and dagger.

Thus the obligation to serve with armour becomes a matter of compulsion and ceases to be voluntary.

The possession of this great force of horsemen was of the greatest value to Charlemagne in his wars, particularly those against the Avars, a people of the same stock as the Huns, largely composed of descendants of the survivors of Attila's hosts who had settled down in Hungary. The comments of Paul the Deacon in the seventh century and Einhard in the eighth give us a clear picture of the

Lombardic warrior; it was his absorption into the Frankish Empire, of whose hosts he became the backbone, which made him the mould from which all the knights of the Middle Ages were cast.

As the reign went on, so was the organization of the war-machine extended and improved. It became statutory that all men owning certain amounts of land should serve with the host, each equipped according to his holding and status; the Feudal System was getting into its stride. There are many "capitularies" dealing with this organization. A clause in one (Capitulate Aquisgranense of 813) lays down that all the "men" (landed retainers) of Counts, Bishops and Abbots must have both helm and mail shirt; in another (section 10) we get a glimpse of the existence of a military train; on the wagons are to be picks, hatchets, iron-shod stakes, pavises, rams, and mechanical slings; the king's marshals are to provide stones to be cast from these *fundibuli*. Of all these documents, perhaps the most interesting is the one which calls Fulrad, abbot of Altaich, to the host in 806:

> You shall come to Stasfurt on the Boda by May 20th with your men prepared to go on warlike service to any part of our realm that we may point out; that is, you shall come with arms and gear and all warlike equipment of clothing and victuals. Every horseman shall have shield, lance, sword, dagger, a bow and a quiver. On your carts you shall have ready spades, axes, picks and iron-shod stakes and all other things needed for the host. The rations shall be for three months, the clothing must be able to hold out for six. On your way you shall do no damage to our subjects and touch nothing but water, wood and grass. Your men shall march along with the carts and the horses (it appears that this refers to remounts), and not leave them till you reach the muster-place, so that they may not scatter and do mischief. See that there be no neglect, as you prize our good grace.

Similar orders were to be sent out, almost word for word, by rulers all over Europe for the next seven centuries.

There is a vivid account of the entry of one of Charlemagne's hosts into Pavia in the Italian campaign of 773. Unfortunately it was not itself written by a contemporary, but by a monk of St. Gall who had it, he tells us, from those who remembered the Emperor and had served with him. Quoting these, and borrowing perhaps from a lost poem of Charles' day, he describes King Desiderius and

his henchman Ogier the Dane watching as the invading host approaches. As each column comes in sight the king asks if his rival Charles and the main body have not now appeared. Again and again Ogier replies that Charles has not yet come—the masses of warriors who have passed are only his vanguard. At last the plain is darkened with a column still mightier than the others.

> Then appeared the Iron King, crowned with his Iron Helm, with sleeves of iron mail on his arms, his broad breast protected by an iron byrnie, an iron lance in his left hand, his right free to grasp his unconquered sword. His thighs were guarded with iron mail, though other men are wont to leave them unprotected that they may spring the more lightly upon their steeds. And his legs, like those of all his host, were protected by iron greaves. His shield was of plain iron without device or colour. And round him and before him and behind him rode all his men, armed as nearly like him as they could fashion themselves; so iron filled the fields and the ways, and the sun's rays were from every quarter reflected from iron. "Iron, iron everywhere," cried in dismay the terrified citizens of Pavia.[1]

In the original Latin the words for the king's helm are *ferrea cristata galea*, which implies that the helmet was a crested one, perhaps like those in so many contemporary manuscript drawings, such as that shown in fig. 71, or maybe it was of an earlier pattern like the Morken helmet. The sleeve is spoken of as if it were a separate piece of armour; such mail sleeves were common in the later Middle Ages; they may in the eighth century have been long ones to supplement the usual elbow-length byrnie sleeve.[2] Greaves seem common, and remind us of the Valsgärde splints and the figure—almost contemporary with Charlemagne—on the Nagyszentmiklos vase, which shows a figure very like the monk's description of Charles' men (see fig. 52). A century later we have more evidence of the wearing of iron greaves.

And what of Charles' "unconquered sword"? Everyone has heard of the immortal Joyeuse, and most people have heard of the

[1] This translation is open to question in certain details; there is no corroborating evidence, for example, of shields made of (or even covered with) plain iron.

[2] We see in the Bayeux tapestry fight-fitting sleeves of mail under the loose byrnie sleeves.

sword in the Louvre, the Coronation sword of the Kings of France, which has always been called the Sword of Charlemagne. Until about fifty years ago it was accepted that this had indeed belonged to the great Emperor, until the niggling scepticism of some late nineteenth-century antiquaries set to work to prove that it was nothing of the kind, but a sword made in the twelfth century "to replace an earlier one". There can be few cases where the form and decorative treatment of an object so clearly point to a particular period; in this case it is the ninth century which is indicated, not the twelfth. Apart from this fact, there is no reason why this lovely weapon should not have been at least connected with Charlemagne in his lifetime or immediately after his death. The solid gold hilt was furnished with a new grip in 1803 when Napoleon had it clone up for his coronation—and the blade (a type quite consistent with a ninth-century date) has *been* polished and *rubbed* for so long that it has become very thin and much narrower than it originally would have been. It would be too much to try and persuade oneself that this is in fact Joyeuse; but there need be no doubt that it was made within a few decades of Charles' coronation in Rome on Christmas Day, A.D. 800.

There is another very splendid sword attributed to Charlemagne in Vienna. Tradition has it that it was a present to him from Haroun el Raschid, Caliph of Baghdad, but it is not an oriental weapon in spite of its curved blade and oddly shaped hilt, which are very reminiscent of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Persian or northern Indian swords; early oriental swords were invariably straight. It is of a type much used in Hungary during the ninth and tenth centuries, a fact proved by the finding of many similar ones in graves of that period. The most similar is from the grave at Tarczal in the Tokay Mountains; this had silver scabbard mounts similar to Charlemagne's, but it—or at least the grave—was of a later date (tenth century).

It has a slightly curved blade, double-edged to a point a little short of half its length; the cross is short with knobbed ends, made of hollow silver-grit embossed and chased with arabesque designs; the pommel, in the form of a slightly bulbous cap, is similarly made. The grip is covered with fish-skin and encircled with three jewelled gold bands, later mediaeval additions (fig. 74). This sword was used,

in a similar manner to the one in the Louvre, at the coronations of the Emperors.

In 814 the reign of Charlemagne ended, and immediately his tremendous presence withdrew from the scene his empire began to fall apart, and during the next century the separate states of France and Germany took shape.

In 936 a descendant of the German side of Charlemagne's line, Otto I, became King of Germany. In 962 he was crowned in Rome as Emperor of the West, and from that time until 1806 the title was held by a King of Germany. He also was deservedly called the Great, and founded a line which provided some of the most colourful and potent monarchs of the Middle Ages. Under his rule and that of his immediate successors Germany became the leading partner in the great family business that Charlemagne had founded. So much so that they have given their name to a cultural period—we speak of Ottonian art in the same way as we do of Carolingian art. And with reason. While the Vikings were providing Saga-material for the Skalds of the North, the lamps of Christianity as well as of the old pagan learning were kept alight in great monasteries like Fulda and Reichenau and St. Gall, deep in the heart of Germany, far from the seaborne ravagings of the Norsemen. To these retreats came scholars and artists driven from Iona and Lindisfarne, from Clonfert and Bangor and Clonmacnoise, from Liège, St. Trond, and Malmedy. They left their abbeys roaring red to heaven behind them, but many of the precious books went with them as they fled. In the scriptoria of these quiet places of refuge many artists worked alongside the scholars, illustrating the 169

Fig. 74.
The Sword of Charlemagne
(Imperial Treasury, Vienna).

manuscripts they wrote or copied. While Norwegian heroes fought Scots and Irishmen, and Dane battled with Saxon and Frank, they peacefully illustrated the wars of Saul and David and the Maccabees. By a blessed dispensation of providence they knew nothing of these ancient warriors other than was contained in the Old Testament, so they drew them in modern dress. Otto sits as a model for David, and his barons and knights for the hosts of the Philistines. So because the artists of Reichenau knew nothing of archaeology, they have been able to show us exactly how the warriors of the tenth century were dressed and armed.

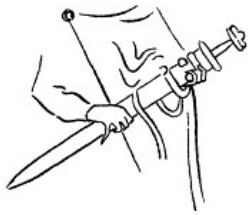

Fig. 75.
The Armour-bearer of
Charles the Bald (c. 870).

In the eyes of the Victorians these drawings seemed quaint and immature, as indeed they must if one judges them against the work of men like Millais or Holman Hunt. To-day they are easier to understand and appreciate, for we are much more inclined to see things as the tenth century did, and to the devil with perspective. The artists of St. Gall and Reichenau were flue draughtsmen and by no means immature; nor were they shut away from the world, seeing nothing beyond the abbey walls and knowing nothing of the captains and the kings. They knew their world very well, and what went on in it; they noted everything they saw, and down it went on to the vellum just as it was. This literal approach was characteristic of all the artists of the Middle Ages. We may be sure that what they drew was what they saw, and they saw things as they really were. True enough that some drawings are bad and unreliable, but there are so many extremely good ones of all periods from Charles the Great to Charles V that we are embarrassed by the choice offered for study. From this point on, nearly every piece of military equipment I shall describe can be seen in manuscript illustrations, many of which can be cross-checked for accuracy against surviving originals.

For example, look at fig. 75, from the Codex Aureus of St. Emmeran, written in 870 for Charles the Bald. It shows the figure of the royal armour-bearer from a full-page illustration of the king's

enthronement. The sword he holds is a very clearly-drawn example of Type III, and there on the scabbard are two large dome-shaped studs such as survive on the Sutton Hoo sword. From the way the belt is wrapped round the scabbard, it looks as if the bosses were buttons to hold each an end of a strap. In a MS. of St. Gall (the "Psalterium Aureum"), known to have been completed before 883, is a drawing which shows another, simpler form of the Frankish brimmed helmet (fig. 76). It is a figure of Saul, very lively and vigorous. He is about to hurl a long lance at David (who is dodging behind a tree on another part of the otherwise practically blank page); an interesting weapon, for its head is exactly like many "winged" spears found in the graves. His byrnie is tucked round his thighs, looking like short trousers. In other drawings in this MS. we see groups of warriors, some dismounted; they are not foot-soldiers, for they are standing by (or have fallen off) their horses; in every case their byrnies hang free to the knee, like skirts, so they were obviously not made like trousers. A different treatment was given to the Norman hauberks in the Bayeux Tapestry, as we shall see. In another St. Gall manuscript of the first half of the tenth century we find a very spirited drawing of a battle-scene from the Book of Maccabees. Here are swords of the kind we have found in the

Fig. 76.
Figure of Saul, from the "Psalterium Aureum" of St. Gall: before 883.

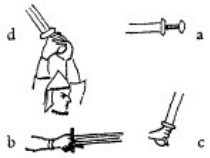

Fig. 77.
From a battle-scene in a
MS. of St. Gall, c. 900-950
(Cod. Perizoni 17, Leyden).

Viking graves, but seen in their proper milicu. Fig. 77a is a broken sword lying on the battlefield; b is wielded by a horseman (note how he puts his forefinger over the lower guard); c shows how instead of the forefinger over the lower guard, the warrior has his little finger over the pommel —a curiously awkward grip shown in very many of these tenth-century drawings; it is hard to see why, for if one tries to hold a sword of this kind thus it is most uncomfortable. All the same, a man with large hands would have to have one finger outside the grip itself, for generally this is too short (only about 3 ½ in. to 4 in. long) to accommodate four large fingers. The pommels of these swords are, however, generally very fiat, and fit quite snugly into the heel of one's hand. Another of these Maccabean warriors wields his sword with both hands (fig. 77d), one clasped over the other. He wears a helmet very similar to the sixth century one from the Morken grave, with the same sort of ear-flaps. In another picture from the same MS. are some warriors wearing similar though far less acutely pointed helmets; they are dome-shaped and the spaces *between* the bronze bands are coloured solid black. In the Swiss National Museum in Zurich is just such a helmet; the skull is made from a single plate of iron, unlike the earlier pointed "Spangenhelm". The bronze bands running crosswise over the skull are for reinforcement and decoration, not to hold separate plates (*spangen*) together. The bands are decorated with a simple running design of tendrils, which is very similar to the decorative motifs which began to appear in manuscripts during the ninth century—similar, too, to the decoration on the hilts of some of the Type IV swords (those from Gravraak in Norway and Kilmainham in Ireland particularly) which are thought to be Frankish. This helmet (it was found in Switzerland in 1927 at Chamoson) is regarded as being Saracenic by the museum authorities in Zurich, though so many things seem to point to a Frankish origin: its find-place, its similarity to the drawing in the St. Gall MS., and its very Frankish decoration. It seems to be a transitional style half-way between the

old Spangenhelm of many plates and the far better helmets of the eleventh century made from one piece of metal. There is a remarkably good Spangenhelm in the Tower of London. On loan from the Liverpool Museum, it was obtained in Prussia in 1854, and is similar to the Morken helmet without the cheek guards (see fig. 54).

The Sagas often tell of shields painted in different colours, either in halves or quarters of the shield. In this MS. of St. Gall are several shields with alternate light and dark quarters. They have very odd-looking bosses, long and acutely pointed, sticking out about 8 in. from the boards of the shield. Many such bosses have been found (fig. 78), though it is a rather rare type. In one of the battle pictures—still in the same MS.—there is a drawing of a riderless horse, its stirrups hanging free (fig. 79). Compare these with fig. 80, a stirrup of the ninth century found in London. We are doubly fortunate that while the Vikings could tell such lively stories of their heroes with so much circumstantial detail, in another part of Europe far away from them and their works there were artists who could draw the arms they so loved to talk about; and from the way the arms in the drawings tally with the descriptions in the stories, and both with the surviving pieces, we can be sure

Fig. 78.
Painted shield from MS.
of St. Gall, Cod. Perizoni 17,
c. 900-950, and shield boss.

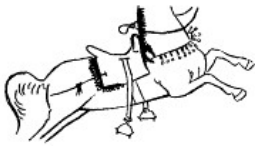

Fig. 79.
From a battle scene in
a MS. of St. Gall, c. 950.

Fig. 80.
Viking stirrup from London
(London Museum).

that even in the ninth and tenth centuries all European warriors were dad alike.

Little more than a century after the Northmen had settled down in the lands granted them in northern France by the treaty of 911, the old roving spirit asserted itself for the last time. In 1038 the sons of Tancred de Hautville led a war-band into southern Italy, where in a remarkably short time they made themselves masters of Apulia and Sicily, founding a kingdom that was to endure and flourish for 200 years. On a much larger scale was Duke William the Bastard's invasion of England in 1066. In chapter 10 I called this (in a phrase I could not resist borrowing from Sir Mortimer Wheeler) the culminating adventure of Vikingdom, though perhaps it should not be regarded in isolation as such, for there was the great raid of the Norwegian king Harald Hardrede, so valiantly broken by Harold and the English at Stamford Bridge only three weeks before Senlac. With these two expeditions, one such a disaster and the other so triumphant, the Viking Age comes to an end, but before we leave it, it will be appropriate to consider the arms and fighting methods of the Normans. We have two documents which provide ample information about these—the Bayeux Tapestry, and a long poem in Norman French, the "Roman de Rou", which is a sort of Frenchified Saga, for it tells the story of Hrolf (Rollo) and his successors in the Dukedom of Normandy, reaching its climax with the battle at Senlac. It was written ninety years after the battle, in badly rhymed verse which necessitated an inexact use of words, so it cannot be taken too literally, though it is very lively and picturesque.

The Bayeux Tapestry is known to everyone, and is in itself a most important object in the Archaeology of Weapons. It would be pedantic to call it by any other name, though in a literal sense it was not a tapestry at all; the figures are embroidered upon the material, not woven into it. It is embroidered on coarse linen in two kinds of woollen thread in eight colours—three shades of blue, one so dark as to be nearly black, a bright and dark green, red, yellow or buff, and grey. The design is very dose in style to contemporary (or slightly earlier) book illustration. It is the principal, though not the only or the best, source of information about the way men armed during the late eleventh century. It was probably made about twenty

years after the Conquest to the order of Bishop Odo of Bayeux for the new abbey he was building there, and all the indications are that it was made in England. It is the only thing of its kind which has survived, though we read of other instances of similar works—in Volsunga Saga, for instance, that Brynhild, in her bower at Hlymdale:

> sat, overlaying cloth with gold, and sewing therein the great deeds which Sigurd had wrought, the slaying of the Worm and the taking of his wealth, and the death of Regin.

An even closer parallel must have been the hanging presented to Ely Minster by Aethelflaed, the widow of Byrhtnoth, who fell in the battle at Maldon in 991 which inspired the last and noblest of Old English poems—the one which ends with the splendid couplet:

> Thought the harder, heart the bolder,
> Mood the more as our might lessens.

a sentiment which was equally true on the fields of Poitiers and Agincourt, as it was in the air over Kent in 1940.

The "Roman de Rou" was written by Robert Wace in about 1160. He was a prebendary of Bayeux, and may have used the Tapestry as one of his sources. Another source, he tells us, was his father, who was able to provide some first-hand information.

The armour worn by both Norman and Saxon is exactly the same as had been fashionable for a century before 1066 and was to remain in vogue for nearly another century after: the conical helmet, with or without the noseguard or nasal, the long kite-shaped shield, and the mail byrnie with elbow length sleeves, its skirt—divided fore and aft for convenience in riding—falling to the knee. In all the scenes of the Senlac battle, Duke William wears a garment we have not met with hitherto—the calves of his legs are protected by mail *chausses* instead of the hose or cross-gartered linen trews worn by all the others.

In the "Roman de Rou" the byrnie is called "haubert", and as the *hauberk* we shall refer to it from now on, for its French name became correct usage over most of Europe except Scandinavia after about 1100. Another garment, which has sometimes caused confusion, appears in the "Roman"—the "Haubergeon". Wace tells us that Duke William, arming for the battle, *son bon haubert fist*

demander, while his cousin Bishop Odo with *un haubergeon aveit vestu*. The Duke was armed with lance and sword (though once or twice in the Tapestry we see him armed with a club, but not in the poem) whereas the Bishop *un baston teneit en son poing* which suggests that he was lightly armed; and the poet makes specific mention of his white tunic appearing prominently under his haubergeon. This suggests that it was a short garment, reaching only to the waist and not to the knee like the hauberk. I would like to refer back again to the St. Gall MS. (Cod. Perizoni 17) of about 900, for in the battle scenes from the Maccabees are some warriors with long hauberks, and some with short haubergeons with white tunics falling to the knee below them. Some of the Vikings' byrnies, you will remember, were referred to as being very short. In mentioning the hauberks in the St. Gall MS. I said that when worn by dismounted men they ceased to look like trousers. Not so in the Tapestry: here they are shown as if they fitted quite tightly round the thighs, except where they are being stripped from the dead. In view of the almost overwhelming evidence that in the late tenth century there were no such mail combinations, we must assume that the ladies who worked these figures (or perhaps the artist—for an artist he was, and a good one, too—who drew the figures for the ladies to embroider) were uncertain as to the *best* way of depicting long hauberks divided up the *back* and front.

The Norman kite-shield was in use at the end of the tenth century, as we can see by a picture from a page in the Gospels of Otto III, which was made between 983 and 991 (fig. 81). Here is a warrior who might well be mistaken for one of about 1150; he wears the conical helmet, with a coif which appears to be of linen, a byrnie a little shorter than the Norman pattern, under which is a kilt of linen or some similar material; and a great kite-shaped shield covering him from his knee to his shoulder.[1] Behind him is another man holding a sword with a circular pommel,

Fig. 81.
Figure of one of Herod's guards, from the Gospels of Otto III (983-991).

[1] It is in a picture of the Visit of the Kings to Herod. The soldiers are part of Herod's bodyguard.

the centre of which is painted red—an instance, as I mentioned in chapter nine, of the early use of this sort of pommel. A warrior dressed almost exactly the same appears on a font of black marble at Liège, which can be dated about 1120.

The shield shaped like a kite is a horseman's shield, its form directly derived from the shape of the space between a horse's neck and its rider's thigh (fig. 82). It is plain that a circular shield would afford poor protection to the left side of a rider, particularly when the lance was used. The long shield fills the gap as well as protecting his leg.

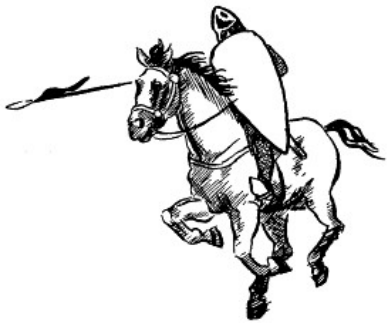

Fig. 82.
The shield adapted to fit the space
between a rider and his horse's neck.

In the Tapestry many of the English are shown fighting on foot with long shields, though some still use the old round pattern. One feels that if Ljot had had a shield like this he would not have died of the stroke Egil dealt him. It may have been this sort of shield which was spoken of in St. Olaf's Saga, where the king was warned that he would be carried aboard his ship on his shield; though it seems unlikely that kite shields would have been used at sea; one might think that a long shield would be as cumbersome and inconvenient aboard a ship as a round one would be ineffectual on a horse.

The great English axe, of which so many specimens have been recovered from the Thames, is well shown in the Tapestry; in every case we see that the haft is a good four to five feet long. In the "Roman" we read:

. . . un Engleiz vint acorant:
Hache noresche ont mult bele
Plus de plain pié ont l'alemele.

which reminds us of the herdsman who told Helgi Hardbeinsson of the axe blade which seemed to be two feet long. An objection to

Fig. 83.
Dragon standard. From the
"Psalterium Aureum"
of St. Gall. Before 883.

this great axe was that you need both hands to wield it, and must do without your shield. As Wace has it:

Hoem ki od hach: volt ferir
Od sez dous mainz l'estuet tenir
Ne pot entendre a sei covrir
S'il velt ferie de grant air.
Bien ferir e covrir ensemble
Ne pot l'en faire, ço me semble.

Both Norman and Saxon use the same arms—spear, sword, and—rarely—clubs and maces. Most of the charging Norman knights carry their spears at arms' length, either in an overarm position as if they were going to throw them like javelins, or with their arms held low. In only a few cases are they couched under the elbow as we should expect to find a lance being carried when charging.

In the MS. of St. Gall (the "Psalterium Aureum") to which I have already referred, we have a horseman (armed exactly like Saul in fig. 76) whose long winged spear is couched under his elbow. Perhaps the most interesting thing that this particular drawing shows, however, is that another horseman riding in front of him carries a standard—not a flag or a banner, but a flat figure of a dragon fixed upon a staff (fig. 83) in the immemorial manner of the Roman Eagles and the standards of the homes of Egypt and the regimental ensigns in the armies of the Pharaohs. Very like this dragon is Harold's standard in the Tapestry, the famous Dragon of Wessex. This use of a dragon is found among the Continental Saxons, too. Of Witikind (Charlemagne's adversary) we read:

Hic arripiens signum quod apud eo habebatur sacrum, leonis atque draconis desuper aquilae volantis insignitum effigie. . . .

The people of Burford in Oxfordshire used to carry a figure of a dragon each year "up and down the town in great Jollity, to which they added the picture of a Giant", until about a century and a half ago, in memory of a victory over Aethelbald, a king of Mercia, in

which he lost his "Banner, whereon was depicted a Golden Dragon".

In the description of the fight before the battle of Brunanburgh in Egil's Saga we have read how Thorolf caused the war horns to be sounded and the war-cry raised, and his *banner* advanced. We are not told what this war-cry was, and the Sagas as a whole tend to be silent on this point. Not so the "Roman de Rou". In his passage concerning the battle at Val-es-Dunes in 1047, Wace writes:

De la gent donc esteit emmie
Poinst li cheval criant "Tur aie"

Cil de France crient "Montjoie"
William crie "Dex aie"
C'est l'enseigne de Normandie
E Renouf crie o grant pooir
"Saint Sever, Sire Saint Sever"
E Dam as Denz va reclamant
"Saint Amant, Sire Saint Amant."

In the fight between Lothaire, King of France and Richard Duke of Normandy:

Franceiz crient "Montjoie" e Normanz "Dex Aie"
Flamenz crient "Azraz" e Angevin "Valie"
Et li Quens Thibaut "Chartres et passe avant" crie.

He who at Val-es-Dunes cried upon Thor to aid him was Raoul de Tesson, unhorsed and surrounded; so what was probably one of the most usual war-cries of the pagan Vikings still seems to have *been* used in moments of stress by their Christian descendants. The Saxons at Senlac took a very different style of cry at the start of the battle: "Holy Cross" they shouted, and "God Almighty", but as the fight grew hotter they simply cried "Out, out". Wace tells us of these cries:

"Olicrosse" sovent crioent
E "Godemite" reclamoient
Olicrosse est en Engleiz
Ke Sainte Croix est en Franceiz
E Godemite altretant
Com en Franceiz Dex tot poissant.

William's tactical use of the bow undoubtedly hastened the Saxon

defeat, for had Harold not been put out of action at a critical point of the battle when his steadiest troops were being galled beyond endurance by the rain of arrows falling from the sky, they might have held the shield-wall round the standard till nightfall, and maybe the end would have been different. But Harold was struck, and cut down by a Norman sword when William's knights burst through the Huscarles to trample down the Dragon standard and Harold's banner of the Fighting Man. As the evening drew on a few groups of Huscarles fought to the end around their dead king and his fallen standard. Their valour brought generous tribute from their opponents: "The valour of the English and all their glory raged", says the Draco Normarmicus, and William of Poitiers: "They were ever ready with their steel, these sons of the old Saxon race, the most dauntless of men." With the dusk of October 14, 1066, fell the twilight of that race, and the Age of the Vikings was ended. The Conqueror and his warriors were themselves Northmen, but it was not the arms and battle-tactics of their Viking grandfathers which gave them victory, but those of the Goths who had broken the power of Rome seven centuries before. From that moment on the hilltop at Senlac the armoured horseman was to be the supreme instrument of war for nearly 300 years. With the slaughter of Harald of Norway's host and the destruction of the army of England there was no disciplined force of foot soldiery in the old Norse tradition left anywhere in Europe; only in the East did such a force survive for a few years more—the Varangian Guard of the Emperors of Constantinople, and they were to be cut to pieces by Norman horse near Durazzo in 1096.

So the change in the pattern of war which first appeared at Adrianople had spread until it covered the whole tapestry. For seven centuries the power of the armoured horseman had been growing, and for three more he was to dominate every battlefield in Europe. By one of the ironies of history he was to be stripped of that dominance by the descendants of the Saxon ceorls he had cut down at Senlac, for after the chivalry of France had been mown down by English arrows on the field of Crecy in 1346 his real supremacy was at an end.