

This is a new translation of the Latin text in the *Gesta Henrici Quinti. The Deeds of Henry the Fifth*, ed. F. Taylor and J. S. Roskell (1975).

The two armies arrive at Agincourt

We left there on our march towards the River of Swords, leaving on the following Wednesday the walled town that was a league to the left. When on the next day, namely Thursday, we were descending the valley towards the said River of Swords, it was announced to the king by scouts and patrols on horseback that an enemy force many thousands strong was on the other side of the river, about a league away on our right.

Therefore we crossed the river as fast as we could, and when we reached the top of the hill on the other side, we saw emerging from further up the valley the grim ranks of Frenchmen, about half a mile from us. Being of an incomparable number in relation to us, they took up position in columns, ranks and squadrons somewhat more than half a mile opposite us, filling a very broad field, as if they were an innumerable multitude of locusts, and occupying the moderately sized valley that lay between them and us.

Meanwhile our king roused his army in a most civil and unperturbed manner, and positioned them in lines and wings, as if they were to enter battle immediately. Then each and every man who had not earlier cleansed his conscience by confession took up the arms of penitence. There was no shortage then of men except of priests.

Among the other things that I then noted as being said, Sir Walter Hungerford implored the king to have, with the small company that he had there, ten thousand of the best English archers, who would indeed have wanted to be there with him. To him the king said, 'You are talking foolishly, because by the God of heaven, on whose grace I have depended, and in whom I have the firm hope of victory, I would not want to have even one more man than I have, even if I could. For these are the people of God I have here, and it is an honour for me to have them at this time. Or do you not believe,' he said, 'that his omnipotence, with these His humble few, can overcome the pride of the French that opposes him, who boast of their great number and strength?', as if he were saying, He can if He wants to. And, in my opinion, nothing unfortunate could happen through the great justice of God to a son of His with such great faith, just as nothing happened to Judas Maccabeus until he fell into a lack of faith and then deservedly into ruin.

When for a while the opposing ranks had seen and considered our measure and smallness of number, they brought themselves to a field that lay beyond a wood, which was near on the left between us and them, where our route towards Calais was. Our king, supposing that the men would thus either encircle the wood, so that they could come upon him via that route, or else would go round through the more distant woods that neighboured it and surround us on every side, immediately removed his columns and positioned them in constant opposition to them.

When eventually after some delay we had almost reached sunset, the Frenchmen perhaps saw that war was not going to be waged – as this was not appropriate around nightfall – and entered the hamlets and shrubbery nearby, intending to rest until morning.

When it at last reached nightfall, and darkness had overcome us and them, and we were still standing on the field and listening to the enemy in their quarters, as each of them shouted, as is their custom, for their comrade, servant and friend, who had perhaps become separated from them in so great a crowd, and our men had similarly begun to do the same, the king ordered silence throughout the whole army, on the penalty of losing horse and harness, in the case of a nobleman who committed the offence, and of a right ear in the case of an archer and anyone of lower rank, without any hope of obtaining forgiveness for anyone who should presume to violate the king's edict. And immediately he retreated in silence to the hamlet nearby, where we had some houses, although very few in number, along with gardens and groves for our respite, and there was rain in abundance for almost the whole night.

While our enemy contemplated our quietude and silence, thinking that our small number had been seized by fear and had perhaps proposed flight in the night, they lit fires and manned watches throughout the fields and passes. And it was said that they thought themselves so safe from us that they played dice for our king and noblemen that night.

The morning of the battle

And on the following day, namely Friday on the Feast of St Crispin and Crispinian, 25 October, as dawn rose, the French positioned themselves in ranks, squadrons and wedges, and took their place in front of us on the field named Agincourt, across which was our route to Calais, and they were of a most terrifying number. Cohorts of cavalry stood in many hundreds on both sides of their vanguard in order to burst through our battle line and our force of archers. And that vanguard of soldiers on foot consisted of all the choicest noblemen: it was a forest of lances and a grave multitude of gleaming shields and cavalry at their sides, and was approximately thirty times greater than ours. But their rearguard and wings, squadrons and wedges were all on horseback, as if prepared for flight rather than to remain in place, and in respect to ours they were of an incomparable number.

While our king meanwhile readied himself for the field, after the praises of God and masses had been heard not far from our resting place, he set up one line of battle but with all of his small retinue, positioning the vanguard, which the duke of York commanded, as the wing on the right, and the rearguard, which Lord Camoys commanded, as the wing on the left, and mixed in wedges of archers into each battle line, and made them plant their stakes amidst them, as had been previously arranged to prevent the cavalry from bursting in. The astuteness of the enemy perceived this by means of scouts that went between them, and either on that account or for some other reason I know not (but God does), they kept themselves back from us opposite and did not march against us.

When they had spent much of the day in delays of this kind, and each army had stood still and not moved a step against each other, the king saw that the multitude were deferring the attack which he had expected from them, and thus stood across our route, either to break up our deployment or to instil our hearts with fear of their numbers, or as if to obstruct our movement and await more allies who chanced to be on their way, or at least, knowing the shortage of our victuals, to

defeat us with hunger, whom they did not dare to defeat with the sword. Our king decided to move against them, sending word for the army's baggage so that it would be at the rear of the battle and not fall prey to the enemy. He had previously decided that this baggage, together with the priests who were to celebrate rites and zealously pray for him and his men, should wait in the hamlet and closes where he had been the night before, until the end of the battle, and at which the French brigands were looking at from almost every side, intending to attack it as soon as they had seen the armies of both sides engage; and they fell on its tail, where because of the laziness of the king's servants the royal baggage was, as soon as the battle began, and plundered the king's valuable treasure, his sword and crown among other valuables, together with all his furniture.

Once the king thought that almost all the baggage had reached his rear, in the name of Jesus, at whom every knee bends of those in heaven, on earth and in hell, and in the name of the glorious Virgin and St George, he marched against the enemy and the enemy marched against him.

At that time, for as long as the conflict of battle lasted, I who write this was sitting on a horse amidst the baggage at the rear of the battle. With the other priests who were present we humbled our souls in the presence of God, and recalled [gap] which the church was reading at that time, and we said in our hearts, 'Remember us, Lord! Our enemies have congregated together and boast of their strength. Grind down their bravery and destroy them, so that they can know that there is no one else who fights for us except you, Lord.' We also exclaimed in fear and panic with our eyes raised to heaven that God would take pity on us and the crown of England and not allow the speeches and tears which the church of England had shed, and was very probably shedding for us as that hour in their customary processions, to perish, but to admit them to the bosom of His mercy, and not allow that devotion which our king had undertaken regarding divine worship, the extension of the church, and the peace of the kingdoms to be suppressed by his enemies, but rather to make Him more exalted in future by his manifest munificence, and mercifully free him from these dangerous events, as from others.

The fighting begins

Chapter 13

When the time came near for the enemy's offensive, the French cavalry that had been positioned on the sides made attacks against our archers who were on either side of our army. But soon, as God willed, they were compelled to retreat amidst the showers of arrows, and to flee to the rearguard, with the exception of a very small number of men who ran amidst the archers and the groves, not without slaughter and wounding; and indeed, with the exception of the many men whom stakes driven into the ground and the barrage of missiles aimed at both horses and knights held back from fleeing far away. Whereas the enemy missiles which were aimed at the rear of the armed men and on their sides, after the first but hasty movement, harmed very few people, they retreated at the strength of our bows.

When the armed men made an attack on both sides over about the same distance, the sides of both battle lines, namely ours and the enemy's, immersed

themselves into the groves that were on each side of the armies. But the French nobility, who had previously advanced with all of their front, so that they had nearly come into contact with us, either out of fear of the weapons whose force had passed through the sides and visors of the helmets, or to penetrate our strong points more quickly through to the standards, divided themselves into three squadrons, invading our battle line at the three places where the standards were; and in the first mingling of lances they marched against our men with such a ferocious attack that they forced them to retreat by almost the length of a lance.

Then indeed those of us who had been ascribed to the clerical militia and who were looking on fell upon our faces in prayer before the throne of God's utmost mercy, calling out in the bitterness of our spirit, so that God would still remember us and the crown of England, and save us from this iron furnace and the dire death that awaited us by the grace of His utmost liberality. But God did not forget the multitude of prayers and speeches of England, through which, as it is piously believed, our men quickly regained their strength and, by boldly resisting them, repelled them continually until they recovered the ground they had lost.

Then a most bitter battle raged, and our archers notched the ends of their arrows and sent them against their flanks, continually renewing battle. When their arrows had been used up, they took up axes, stakes, swords and the heads of lances that lay between them, and laid the enemy low, ruining and transfixing them. For the almighty and merciful God, who is always miraculous in His work, and who wanted to show his mercy to us, whom it pleased that the crown of England, which has long been invincible, to remain under the power of our gracious king, His soldier, and his small retinue, as soon as the battle lines had been joined together and the battle begun, increased our power that the shortage of our provisions had previously debilitated and weakened, removed the terror from them, and gave them a fearless heart. And it seemed to our elders that the English had never attacked their enemy more bravely, intrepidly or wilfully.

The same just judge himself, who wanted to transfix the proud multitude of the enemy with the thunderbolt of vengeance, turned them away from His face, and broke their powers: the bow, shield, sword and battle line. Nor had it ever been seen before, so far as any chronicle or history relates, that so many most chosen and strong soldiers had put up resistance so sluggishly, so disorderly and fearfully or in so unmanly a fashion. For fear and trepidation took hold of them, as was said among the army, since there were some of them, even of the more noble men, who surrendered themselves on that day more than ten times. But no one had time to take them as prisoners but almost all of them without discretion, as soon as they were laid low on the ground, were instantly consigned to death, either by those who laid them low or by those that followed them, by some hidden judgment of God, it is unknown.

For God transfixed them with another incurable blow. For when some of them were killed as battle was joined, and had fallen at the front, the undisciplined violence and pressure of the crowd at the rear was so great that the living fell upon the dead, and even those falling upon the living were killed, such that, in the three places where there was a strong force and the line of our standards, the heap of those who had been killed and those who lay crushed between them grew so great that our men climbed the piles which had grown higher than a man's height, and

slaughtered their adversaries at the rear with their swords, axes and other weapons. When at last after two or three hours their vanguard had been transfixed and broken up, and the remainder were forced into flight, our men began to disperse those heaps and to separate the living from the dead, intending to keep them to serve as slaves.

The killing of the prisoners

But then at once, for what wrath of God it is unknown, a shout arose that the rearguard of the enemy's cavalry was of an incomparable number and fresh, and that they had restored their position and battle line in order to overcome us in our small numbers and weary state. And the prisoners were killed at once, without any heed to the difference between people, excepting the dukes of Orleans and Bourbon and other illustrious men who were in the king's battle line, along with a very few others, by the swords of either their captors or others that followed them, lest they should be ruinous to us in the ensuing battle.

But after a short while, the enemy ranks, according to the will of God once they had tasted the bitterness of our weapons and our king had drawn close to them, abandoned to us a field of blood along with carriages and their draught-horses, many being filled with provisions, weapons, lances and bows. And thus when, on God's orders, the strength of that people had been dissipated and the rigours of the war had finished, we who had obtained victory returned through the masses, mounds and piles of dead men, and saw and inspected them, but not without the pain and tears of many, because so many outstanding and most powerful soldiers – had only God been with them – had sought their own deaths in such a manner from us, completely against our wishes, and had thus vainly destroyed and broken up the glory and honour of their own dwelling place. And if that was a site for compunction and piety in us as strangers passing by, how much more lamentation and wailing did it cause for the local people, who were watching and seeing the militia of their country being destroyed and despoiled in this manner! And I truly believe that there is not a heart of flesh or even one of stone that, if it had seen and considered the terrible deaths and bitter wounds of so many Christians, would not have broken itself and dissolved into tears out of grief. Indeed, however illustrious or respectable they were, the men, having been despoiled earlier by our English pillagers, did not have on our retreat any more covering, except only to cover their nature, than that which nature had woven for them on first entering the light.

Would that those Frenchmen would quickly attain peace and harmony with the English, and desist from their injustices and wicked ways, by which they have been abducted, confused and led astray, lest that saying of the prophet be a reproach to them: 'Does not God, who is a just, brave and patient judge, grow angry every day? Unless you are converted, He will brandish his sword, stretch and ready his bow, and in it he has prepared the vessels of death'. And if they do not come to their senses soon, let them experience what follows: "Behold, He is bringing justice to birth, He has conceived grief, He has given birth to iniquity, He has opened up a lake and dug it, and has fallen into the trap He made. His grief shall be turned onto

His head and His iniquity shall descend upon his crown'. For God is merciful and a long-suffering spectator, but once He has used up the remedies of His mercy and long suffering, He is a stern avenger, and many times takes away the powers of brave men whom justice does not attend. This is clear in the multitude of our men, all of whom indiscriminately He gave up to flight, capture or the sword by means of our small number who were striving for justice.

Aftermath of the battle

For there were among them in number more than sixty thousand men bearing the sword, whereas our own small number did not exceed six thousand fighting men. Among this multitude there perished the dukes of Bar, Brabant and Alençon, five counts, more than ninety barons and bannerets, whose names are described in the book of records, and more than one and half thousand knights by their own tally, and around four or five thousand other noblemen, almost the whole nobility of the French militia.

Among the remaining number there were captured the dukes of Orleans and Bourbon, the counts of Richemont, Vendôme and Eu, along with the most valiant knight Lord Boucicaut, Marshal of France, and a few other noblemen. But there was also great happiness in our people and great amazement, because out of so small a number as ours there were not to be found more than nine or ten persons slaughtered on the battlefield, except the illustrious and most wise prince, Lord Edward, duke of York, and Lord Michael, earl of Suffolk, a powerful youth, and two newly created knights who fell in the line of battle.

Also our duke of Gloucester, Humphrey, the king's youngest brother, a valiant prince, received a similar hand to that he dealt, and was gravely wounded in the king's battle line – and no wonder amidst so many violently brandished swords, lances and axes: yet he soon recovered after his arrival at Calais, praise God!

Therefore our England has good reason to rejoice and also to grieve: reason to rejoice about the victory achieved and the salvation of her people; reason to grieve about the suffering and ruin coming from the deaths of Christians. And far be it from our people to ascribe their triumph to their own glory or bravery, but to God alone, from whom all victory is obtained, lest the Lord grow angry at our ingratitude, and turn away from us (heaven forbid) His victorious hand.

And may our England strive to please God continuously, and extirpate any heresies and errors from herself along with other seditions and injustices, and to acknowledge and praise the Lord with hymns, confession and canticles more fully and perfectly than before, who did wonderful things in Israel and gave victory to Christ. And may she pour forth prayers, orations and tears before the sight of the utmost clemency of God, so that for our sake He may preserve, protect, watch over and defend our most victorious king, and his desire and devotion to extend the church and the peace of his kingdoms for evermore with His shield of omnipotence. And let us also sing that... which the church sings every year: 'Yours is the power, yours the kingdom, Lord: you are above all peoples. Give peace in our time, Lord'.

And when our said king had spent the night after the end of the battle in the same place where he had rested on the previous night, out of his humanity, on the following day he directed his march to Calais, by that heap of piety and blood, where

the might of the French had fallen. And on Tuesday, the day after the feast of Simon and Jude, he came to Calais. And on the Saturday after the feast of St Martin, when the said Lord Raoul de Gaucourt and the other captives at Harfleur, had come, as they were bound by covenant, he returned to England through the port of Dover along with his prisoners.

Our older men do not recall any prince that ever ruled his people more arduously, more strenuously or more humanely throughout an expedition, or who conducted himself with his own hand more manfully on the battlefield; indeed, there is not to be found in the chronicles or annals of kings of whom our histories make mention any king of England that ever achieved so many things in such a short time, and returned to his own land with so great and so glorious a triumph. Honour and glory be to God alone for ever and ever! Amen.