

# **THE SEA TRADERS**

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The sea traders by Archibald Hurd

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**ARCHIBALD HURD**

**THE SEA  
TRADERS**



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# The Sea Traders

By  
Archibald Hurd



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# THE SEA TRADERS

## CHAPTER I

### THE RIDDLE OF THE ISLAND EMPIRE

England under the Heel of Conquerors—The Coming of the Romans—The Saxon Ascendancy—The Heptarchy and the Invading Danes—Deliverance from Servitude—England Free.

**T**HAT the little island of Britain, harried by Saxon and Dane, and ground under the heel of conquerors for centuries, should have become at last the pivot of an empire embracing nearly one-quarter of the land surface of the earth, constitutes a riddle to which the historian offers no solution. The explanation is possibly to be found in the fact that the history of this great expansion has been written by landsmen. They have told us when king succeeded king; they have described innumerable battles on land; and they have explained the growth of our system of government; but being themselves without the sea-sense, they have not supplied us with the secret of the riddle which the British Empire presents when we glance at the map of the world and recall the record of earlier centuries.



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Great events are often concealed in trite phrases which spring to the lip without thought of their significance. Every child reads in his history at school of the landing of the Romans. "The Roman Conquest" means little or nothing to him, and the grown-up man or woman goes through life without realizing that this country was subject to the Romans for about four hundred and fifty years. They found the inhabitants little better than barbarians, who knew next to nothing of the culture which had flourished in past centuries in Asia and Africa, and which afterwards bloomed in Greece. By the Roman conquerors the natives were regarded with contempt; they lived amongst them, but mixed little with them. England was to the Romans their most distant colony, to be held by force and ruled with all the authority which flowed from the Imperial city of Rome. And thus it seemed that this small island, tossed like an afterthought out of the side of Europe, was destined to remain the despised dependent of one of the great empires of the continent. For after Boadicea's vain attempt to drive out the Romans, the conquerors remained absolute masters of the country until at last Rome herself began to decay. The distant legions were then called home, and the natives left to muddle on as best they could without the masters under whose yoke they had existed for so long that the memory of no man or woman held the recollection of the day when England had been free.

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The rude inhabitants did not know what use to make of the freedom which had come to them through no efforts of their own. The country was soon embroiled in internecine warfare and became the easy prey of marauders who swept across the North Sea. Jutes from the peninsula of Jutland, which the battle of 1016 has made for ever famous; Saxons from the regions between the Eider and the Weser, to-day the home of the Germans; and Angles from Schleswig, recently restored under the Peace Treaty to Denmark, overran a large part of England and at last became its masters. For another five hundred years and more Little England lived not its own life, but according to the habits of its invaders. The Jutes held Kent, Canterbury being the seat of their authority; from Chichester, Winchester and London the Saxons exercised their sway over Sussex, Essex and Wessex; and York was the capital of the Angles, who ruled Northumbria, East Anglia and Mercia.

These seven kingdoms were known as the Heptarchy, which only ceased to exist when the Danes, or Norsemen, began to harass the coast with piratical incursions. These strangers had learnt the secret of the strength which lies in the sea and the power which resides in the ship. Egbert, King of Wessex, was seized with the truth that success against the marauders was to be found in union, and thus it came about that the Heptarchy, which meant division and weakness,

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was dissolved, and Egbert became the first King of England. In that way the country passed under some sort of united rule, but for years a struggle for predominance continued between the Saxons and the Danes; at one time a Saxon king was on the throne, and at another the crown was worn by a Dane.

And then the Normans came. The ships which should have stayed the progress of William the Conqueror had been dispersed, and the invaders' progress across the Channel met with no resistance. A flat bit of beach was selected for the landing, and at Pevensey, near Hastings, the whole force disembarked *unopposed* on September 28, 1066. If the fleet entrusted with the guardianship of the English coast had been at its station off Sandwich, the whole course of English history might have been changed; for the Norman seamen were encumbered by many soldiers with their accoutrements, and the probability is that the nimble English ships would have sunk the Norman armada.

Thus it happened that England, having been conquered successively by the Romans, the Saxons and the Danes, passed under the rule of the Normans. Macaulay has declared that "During the century and a half which followed the Conquest there is, to speak strictly, no English history." For the Conqueror and his descendants to the fourth generation were not Englishmen; most of them were born in France; they spent the greater