WILHELM WÄGNER

EPICS AND ROMANCES OF THE MIDDLE AGES

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTION

Legend is not history; but in legend we find embodied historical truths, manners and customs of past ages, beliefs and superstitions otherwise long forgotten, of which history itself takes no account. Legend has preserved for us, maybe in romantic dress, maybe under altered names and circumstances, stirring pictures of heroes and heroines, who once have lived and suffered, fought and conquered, or have faced death with trustful courage; pictures, too, of men of equal prowess, as strong in evil as in might, who, victorious for a time, have yet ever met a stronger power than theirs, stronger in virtue, stronger in might.

As we write, the shadowy forms of terrific Alboin raising aloft his goblet fashioned from royal skull; the noble Siegfried with his loved Chriemhild and the jealous Brunhild; brave King Dietrich; the gentle, patient Gudrun and her beauteous mother Hilde, all flit before the mind, framing themselves into a vivid picture, such as must have lived in the imagination of our early forefathers, stirring them on to noble actions, restraining them from evil

working. Thus has good in all ages fought against ill, and all races of men have sung its victory in strains but slightly varying. And so will it ever fight, no matter how our more elaborate ideas of what is good or evil may vary: the nation always glorifies the great and noble according to its own unreasoning reason.

This volume contains the principal hero-lays of the six great epic cycles of the Teutonic Middle Ages, and to them we have added the great mythical Carolingian cycle, which centred round the persons of Charlemagne and his heroes. The latter is mostly of Romance origin, and was composed by court troubadours for the delight of the royal palace, wherefore it never became the true inheritance of the masses. Beside these French poems, stand the Breton ones of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, which later on took up the legend of the Holy Grail into their very heart, and at this period found their way to Germany, where they met with a more romantic and poetic treatment at the hands of the court minnesingers. But these foreign importations never found a true home amongst the German people; they never became *popular*. The native hero-lays on the other hand, even though less beautiful in conception and in form, lived on through centuries, and even to this day exist, though disguised and degraded. For in the market-places of Germany, and at the few old English fairs that yet remain, the pedlar bookseller gives in exchange for the farthing piece printed versions of many of these old legendary tales: Siegfried's battle with the Dragon, the Rose-garden, Alberic and Elbegast's adventures, and other

wondrous histories of Teutonic epical origin. But this literature is fast dying out, if, indeed, it may not by this time be said to be already dead. In Iceland, however, and in the Faroe Isles, tradition still holds her throne unconquered. She yet sings to the listening greybeards, to the men and women, and to the growing youth, of Odin and his mighty rule, of Hönir and the wicked Loki, of Thor and Frey, and Freya Queen of Heaven, of the Fenris-wolf and the Midgard-serpent. In the long winter nights she still tells of bold Sigurd's (Siegfried) deeds and battles, of Gudrun's faithful love and dumb grief beside the body of her lord, of Gunnar's marvellous harping in the garden of snakes, and the listeners hold it all in their memory, that they may sing and tell it to their children and their children's children. And so do they cherish the time-old legends of their fathers, that the ardent youth may still be heard to adjure his bride to love him "with the love of Gudrun," the master revile his dishonest workmen as "false as Regin" (the evil dwarf), and the old men to shake their heads and say of the daring lad, that he is "a true descendant of the Wolsings." At the dance, Sigurd-songs are yet sung, at Christmastide a grotesque Fafnir takes his part in the mummery. Thus old German tradition in her wane has found an asylum, perhaps a last resting-place, in the far North, driven from their first home by strangers, the myths of Greece and Rome. Every schoolboy can tell of Zeus and Hera, of Achilles and Odysseus, every schoolgirl of the golden apples of the Hesperides, of Helen, of Penelope; yet to how many of our older folks, even, are the

grand forms of Siegfried, Chriemhild, and Brunhild more than mere names?

It is true that a tendency is now springing up in England and in Germany once more to enquire into these old tales, nay beliefs, of our common ancestry. It is true that we have a Morris and they a Wagner; but we should wish to see the people of both nations take a more general interest in a subject of such intrinsic worth to them, their long-forgotten heritage. It is not the history of class-books that they will find in it—it is that of their fathers' manners and customs, of their joys and sufferings, their games and occupations, festivals and religious observances, battles, victories and defeats, their virtues and their crimes. Such is the golden field that lies beneath our feet, which, unheeded, we have let lie fallow, till it has almost faded from memory.

In a previous volume, *Asgard and the Gods, the Tales and Traditions of our Northern Ancestors*, we have endeavoured to give an account of the *religion* of our ancient Norse parents. In this volume we are occupied with their *legendary lore*.

To what extent these legends formed a part of their religion proper it is impossible for us now to say. Of later origin and more poetic treatment, they stood in a similar position toward the old Teutons as the later Greek heroic legend stood to the Greeks of history. Some say, and the learned Grimm amongst them,[1] that the heroes were historical men raised to the dignity of gods, others that they were humanized gods themselves; but may be

[1] "Teutonic Mythology," translated by J. S. Stallybrass. Vol. i. p. 315.

neither theory is exactly true, though both contain a portion of the truth. In the hero-legends we certainly find heroes possessed of the distinctive attributes of certain gods, and we are tempted to add others to their characters, but we consider that these divine qualities were looked upon rather as divine *gifts* of the gods and did not thereby exactly deify the recipients. It was similar with the Greeks, and perhaps with all nations at a stage when their heroes really formed an essential element in their belief. The gods were never human heroes, the heroes never became gods, though each approached the other so nearly that we are often misled into assuming that they were identical.

PART FIRST
THE AMELUNG AND KINDRED LEGENDS

LANGOBARDIAN LEGENDS

I
ALBOIN and ROSAMUND

Alboin

Untroubled by the conscientious scruples of the historian, the poet throws the glamour of his genius over the events he relates, when taking for his theme the great deeds of the past, he strives to make them live in the hearts of his hearers.

The story of Alboin and Rosamund has a strictly historical foundation, although many poetic liberties have been taken with it. For instance, it is contrary to fact that the heroes of this and the following tale were predecessors of Theoderic, for Alboin did not march into Italy at the head of his Langobards until the

year 568 A.D., whereas Theoderic died in 526, and his Gothic empire was destroyed in 553. Nevertheless we give the stories in their poetical order, as the natural connection between them is thus kept up.

The Germanic Gepidæ and Langobards and the Asiatic Avars were inhabitants of Pannonia (*i.e.* Hungary and the neighbouring provinces) at the time this story begins. War and hunting were the occupations of the freemen, while the serfs tended the flocks and herds, and cultivated the land.

Now it happened that Alboin, son of the Langobardian ruler Audoin, conquered and slew a son of Thurisind, king of the Gepidæ, in fair fight. He then took possession of the armour of his vanquished foe, and bore it in his arms to his father's hall, just as the warriors of his race were assembling there to hold high festival. He would have joined them, but his father forbade him, saying that it had always been held by the sages of the olden time, that no prince was worthy to sit at the table of heroes until he had been given a suit of mail by some foreign king. The young man snatched up his battle axe, but remembering in time that it was his father who stood before him, turned and left the hall. He mounted his charger, and set out with his train for the land of the Gepidæ. He arrived at the royal stronghold when King Thurisind was feasting with the princes of his people.

Alboin approached the king, and placing himself under protection of the laws of hospitality, begged that he might be furnished with a suit of armour forthwith. The Gepidæ

were displeased with the boldness of his manner, but Thurisind received him kindly, and gave him a seat at his side.

Many beakers were drunk, and the conversation at table grew more and more unfriendly, for Künemund, the king's eldest son, was angry and jealous at a stranger being given his place beside the king. To prevent further disagreement, Thurisind sent for the minstrels to come and enliven the company.

They came. They sang the glorious deeds of their forefathers, and especially those done by Aldarich, who destroyed the power of the Huns. Lastly, they called upon the young men before them to follow in the footsteps of their ancestors, careless whether Fortune rewarded their efforts or not.

"Yes," said Künemund when the song was ended, "Fortune is blind and throws her favours at the feet of mean-spirited creatures with white bands round their knees, that make them look for all the world like white-legged hacks, and every one knows it takes a deal of beating to make them go!"

The Langobards always wore the white bands alluded to, so they knew that the scornful words were directed against them. Alboin's blood was up in a moment. He started to his feet and told Künemund to go to the place where he had fought his brother, and there he would see how shrewdly the "white-legged hacks" could kick.

A tumult immediately arose, which was with difficulty calmed by the old king, who then gave Alboin the armour he had craved, and sent him away with his followers without loss of time, lest

worse should come of it, and the rights of hospitality be broken.

As Alboin rode away he passed Rosamund, Künemund's fair little daughter, who was playing at shuttlecock with her maidens, and as he passed he looked at her long and earnestly.

Rosamund

Peace lasted between the Langobards and Gepidæ while the old kings Audoin and Thurisind lived, but after their death a bloody feud broke out between the rival tribes. At length Künemund and many of the noblest Gepidæ fell under the axes of Alboin and his people. Upon which the Langobardian king had his enemy's skull set as a goblet in a silver rim, and used it for drinking solemn toasts at the great feasts. Then he married Rosamund, and she, poor soul, hated him as the murderer of her father. She had to feign love, though she would willingly have strangled her husband with her own hands. She bore her lot as well as might be, all the while nursing the secret hope that she might one day avenge her father's death.

Alboin had no idea of the thoughts that filled his wife's heart. Intent on conquest, he crossed the Alps into Italy at the head of his own people, of those Gepidæ who had followed the fortunes of their princess, and of other adventurers who had joined his train. This he did in response to an invitation from the Roman general Narses, victor over the Ostrogoths, who feeling himself slighted by the imperial court, had determined on vengeance.

Alboin carried all before him, and destroyed every town and fortress that did not at once open its gates to receive him. Pavia alone offered a long resistance. During his three years' siege of that city, the Langobardian king made raids into the neighbouring country and brought it under his rule. One warrior alone was equal to him in prowess, and that was Peredeus, a giant, who was said to possess the strength of twelve ordinary men. At last the gates of Pavia opened, and Alboin, who had sworn to put the inhabitants to fire and sword, rode in under the archway. Just then his horse stumbled, and a priest exclaimed that this was an omen that he should die a violent death if he kept his word. The king believed the warning, forgave, and spared the city.

The Regicide

Alboin gave a great feast to his warriors, at which much of the fiery wine of the south was consumed. The talk of the guests was of the great deeds of Wodan, the god of battles, and how he and Frigga had led their fathers to victory; then they spoke of their own conquest of the Gepidæ and their victories in Italy.

In the midst of this, Alboin, intoxicated with wine and pride, commanded that the goblet made out of Künemund's skull should be brought, and turning to queen Rosamund desired her to pledge him it. She hesitated. "Why," he cried, "know you not, Rosamund, that I love you more than aught in the world besides? Show me now your love and obedience by doing what I bid you."

She looked at him in silent entreaty, but her hesitation aroused his anger. He raised his hand to strike her—and then—she lifted her murdered father's skull to her lips. None could tell whether she drank or not, for, flinging the goblet on the table so violently that the wine ran out, she said, "I have obeyed you, but you have lost your wife." Having uttered these words, she rose and left the room.

A hoarse murmur of indignation passed from mouth to mouth, for no one approved of what the king had done. And he, suddenly sobered by his wife's words and action, got up and left the hall.

Alboin did not see Rosamund again until the following day, when she went about her usual duties quietly. The insult seemed to be forgiven and forgotten. But Rosamund could neither forgive nor forget. She dreamed of vengeance. At last she persuaded Helmigis, the king's shield-bearer, to murder his master; but when the moment for action came, he feared to do the deed. So the queen turned to Peredeus for help, and by means of flattery and sweet words brought him over to her side. One evening he slipt into the king's room and slew him. Before Alboin's death became known, the conspirators, of whom there were many, got possession of the royal treasure, and hid it away in a secret place. Soon after this, Rosamund announced her betrothal to Helmigis, and named him as Alboin's successor in royal power.

The nobles assembled to debate this point, and, after much discussion, it was agreed by a large majority that the murderer of the great Alboin was the last man who ought to succeed him; that

he should rather be punished for his crime. Hearing how matters were going on in the council, the conspirators fled.

The Retribution

Guarded by her faithful Gepidæ, Rosamund and her accomplices reached Ravenna in safety with the treasure they had carried away with them. There they placed themselves under the protection of Longinus, exarch or viceroy of the Eastern emperor. They had not been there long when Longinus, having fallen desperately in love with the fair widow, or with the wealth of which she was possessed, asked Rosamund to marry him, and she at once consented on condition that the viceroy freed her from Helmigis, to whom she was already bound. Longinus gave her a cup of wine mixed with a deadly poison, telling her to give it to Helmigis the next time he complained of thirst. This she did. Her victim drained half the goblet at a draught. The poison was so strong that he immediately felt he was doomed, and drawing his sword, forced her to finish what he had left. Thus the murderers died, and their great treasure fell into the hands of the Roman viceroy. But the story tells us that wealth did not make him happy, and that it was the ultimate cause of his death.

We have still to learn what became of Peredeus, the giant. He was so used to deeds of violence that he thought the murder of Alboin a mere nothing. Placing himself at the head of a band of Gepidæ, he set out for Constantinople and offered his services

to the emperor. His great strength gained him a high position at court, and raised him in his master's favour. As time went on he became discontented with the treatment he received, thinking it hardly consistent with the gratitude he deserved for his manifold services. Some of his angry words were repeated to his master, who determined to make him powerless to hurt the throne. One night, when Peredeus was snoring off the effects of a drunken orgy, a number of men crept into his room, chained him hand and foot, and put out his eyes. His howls of pain were so terrible that they made all in the palace and neighbourhood tremble.

The blind giant showed himself quiet and obedient, so that his guards ceased to fear him, but still they never took off his chains until one evening he begged to be allowed to wrestle before the emperor, maintaining that his strength was unabated. He was led into the great hall, and there, amid the general applause, proved himself as mighty an athlete as he had ever been. Suddenly he heard the emperor's voice, and dashing in that direction, plunged a knife he had concealed about his person into the hearts of two great officials of the court, whom he mistook for the emperor. A few minutes more and he had fallen under the spears of the body-guard.

So, one by one, the murderers of Alboin all came to a violent end, and the Langobards, for want of their leader, failed to gain full possession of the fair southern land they had come to regard as their own.

Occasionally their power was revived for a time by some able

king, such as Rotharis (636-52) the subject of the following legend, till it was finally broken by Charlemagne the Frank (774).

II
KING ROTHER (RUOTHER)

The Twelve Messengers

Bari is the name of an Italian town which, small and unimportant as it is now, was once a mighty sea-port. In those old days the harbour was deep and large and full of ships, while in the town itself were numerous palaces and houses surrounded by gardens and orange-groves.

Here it was that the great and glorious King Rother, the father of his people and the terror of his foes, held court amongst the dukes, counts and nobles of the land. The race-course was close to the sea, and there the young warriors were wont to congregate, to throw the spear and practise such sports as teach agility, while the women and maidens looked on and distributed prizes to the successful candidates for honour.

One day King Rother was seated on his throne surrounded by his counsellors, watching now the people, now the sports, and now the restless waves that were beating against the shore. There was a troubled look upon his face. Turning to his old and faithful banner-bearer, Duke Berchther of Meran, who sat beside him,

"Look," he said, "do you see how the waves raise their foam-crowned heads high in the air, dash forward, and then vanish without leaving a trace behind? The kings of the earth resemble them in this, so indeed do all men."

"What do you say?" cried the duke. "Do you not hear how many songs are sung in your praise? Know you not that such songs live on from generation to generation, and that your name and deeds will therefore be spoken of with admiration till the end of time?"

"That is poor comfort," replied the king. "What is the future to me, when the present is so tame and joyless? A happy home were better to me than the songs of which you speak. There go your seven sons, bold Leupold at their head, their helmets wreathed in token of victory. You live a second life in them, and their love will sustain you in your old age. What good is my throne to me? I have not wife nor child. I shall wither like an old tree, or become the laughing-stock of children in my age!"

"Then why do you not marry?" asked the duke, laughing heartily. "You are in your prime and a famous warrior. You might pick and choose any one you liked for a wife, no one would say you nay, from a simple maiden to a high-born princess."

"You say that I am free to choose," said Rother bitterly; "kings are more fettered in their choice than other men. They must marry in their own degree, or their children cannot succeed them, and may even live to curse them. I have travelled in many lands, but I have never yet seen the princess I could have wished to

make my wife."

"Nay then, sire, if you are so hard to please," returned Berchther after a deep and thoughtful silence; "I think I know of a lady who might suit you, if you are willing to risk your head for her sake."

The king desiring further information, Berchther showed him the portrait of a lovely girl, who, he said, was the daughter of the Emperor of Constantinople. Rother could not take his eyes off the picture, and exclaimed that she, and she alone, must be his wife.

"Very good, my lord," said Berchther; "but that is a more difficult matter to bring about than you think. I must explain what I mean. The Emperor Constantine is so devoted to his daughter that he will not part with her; and if any man—be he count, duke or king—is bold enough to go and ask for her hand, he at once orders his head to be cut off. And what is the good of a headless wooer?"

"I think," answered Rother, "that I shall meet with a better reception than that. The emperor of the East will know how to bear himself to the ruler of the West. But now call my counsellors together, that I may tell them what I intend to do."

When the council was assembled, the king told his ministers the whole story, adding in conclusion that he intended to do his wooing in person. They strongly dissuaded him from this, upon the plea, that the king, being the chief of the state, had no right to endanger its safety by risking his head unnecessarily. Rother at

last gave way, much against his will. The debate as to who should go to Constantinople lasted a long time, for each man felt that his head was of at least as much value to himself as the king's could possibly be to the state. Then Leupold, Berchther's brave son, rose with six of his brothers, and declared in their name and his own that they were ready to go as soon as the ships were fitted out for the journey; whereupon five noble counts, emulating the valour of these seven, announced their willingness to accompany them.

Preparations were made for the departure of the twelve ambassadors, and at last the day came on which they were to set sail. Just before the anchors were lifted, the king came down to the harbour, his gold-stringed harp in his hand, and sang them a farewell song, so strangely sweet and stirring that it moved them as Wodan's songs used to move the hearts of their fathers in the olden time. It seemed to them as though the god of battles were calling on them to be up and doing. The music ceased; and then Rother took leave of them, saying, "If ever you are in need, and you hear that song, you may know that I am near and will help you."

The hawsers were unloosed and the ship set sail. After a voyage that lasted for days and weeks, the travellers sighted the Golden Horn, the port of Constantinople; and as the sun was rising over the city, they landed at the wharf. They dressed themselves in velvet and heavy gold brocade, and cloaks trimmed with ermine. Every one turned to gaze after them as they passed

up the street towards the palace. None knew who they were or whence they came, but all thought they must be the ambassadors of some mighty prince.

The emperor was yet in bed, dreaming of the feasts and carousals in which his heart delighted, when the empress awoke him, and said, "Get up, Constantine; the messengers of a great king have come to see you. They bring tidings of vast importance. You must receive them with all due honour and respect."

When the emperor was ready, he desired the ambassadors to be brought to him in the throne-room, where he received them courteously. At first all went well. Constantine was pleased that his friendship and alliance should be sought by the ruler of the West, and expressed his delight in no scant terms; but when Leupold went on to say that his royal master had also commissioned him to ask in his name for the hand of the Princess Oda, the emperor's wrath knew no bounds, and he ordered his guards to seize the "foreign hounds" and cast them into prison.

When the guards had left the hall with the twelve ambassadors, Constantine began to pace the floor, rubbing his hands, and muttering, "Behead, drown, hang—which shall it be? Ah, it were best to hang them. It would be a grand sight! Twelve fine gentlemen in gorgeous raiment brought at once to the gallows. St. Maurice grant that the wondrous spectacle may bring us glory!"

"Constantine," said the kindly empress, "beware what you

do. Is our beautiful daughter never to marry? Would it not be a good thing to give her to King Rother, and let her rule the West with him, as we the East? If you slay the messengers he has sent, Rother will assuredly ally himself with the heathen king of Desert-Babylon, and, with his help, seek your destruction."

"St. Michael and his holy angels will protect us against the might of the godless host of infidels," replied the emperor sanctimoniously.

"Ah," said the prudent wife, "do not be too sure of that. He has other things to do. He has to fight for the conversion and salvation of the wild heathen tribes. Take my advice, and keep Rother's messengers as hostages, that our hands may be strengthened when their king comes over the western sea and demands them from us at the head of his army."

The counsel pleased the emperor, and he gave orders that the prisoners should be well guarded.

The Sailing of the Heroes

The weeks and months rolled into a year, and still the ambassadors did not return to Bari. Every heart was full of an undefined dread. Had they perished at sea, or at the hands of the cruel tyrant to whom they had been sent? None could answer.

Old Berchther one day went to the king, and said, "Sire, my heart is sad. I can bear my sorrow no longer. I had twelve goodly sons. Helfrich, the eldest, was slain fighting the barbarians near

the Elbe in the far north. Seven have gone to Constantinople in your service, and have never returned. I will go and see if I can find them."

"You must not go alone," returned the king. "I will call a meeting of the royal council, and ask my wise advisers what were best to be done."

After a stormy discussion, in which weighty arguments were often enforced with still weightier blows, it was determined to follow the advice of the eldest counsellors. These aged and reverend men were of opinion that it would be bad policy to send an army against Constantinople; for were the messengers still alive, the emperor would assuredly put them to death when he found that Rother had appeared in the guise of an enemy. It would be far better, they contended, to send a richly appointed embassage, composed of good men and true, to spy out the land, and see if it were not possible to save their friends, and gain the hand of the princess at the same time.

King Rother announced his intention of placing himself at the head of the expedition, and as Berchther refused to be left behind, Count Amelger of Tengeling was appointed regent.

Preparations for their departure went on apace. Noble warriors came from all parts of the kingdom to offer their services. Among those accepted were twelve men who were so tall and so heavy, that they could nowhere have found horses strong enough to bear their weight. King Rother alone knew who they were, and he received them as old and trusted friends. They

were Asprian (Osbern), chief of the Northern giants, and eleven of his tallest men.

At length all was ready, and the ship set sail amidst a blare of trumpets. A fair wind filled the sheets, which were edged with cloth of silver, and the vessels glided through the glassy deep as if drawn by swans. The king stood high on the deck of his galley: when he touched his harp and sang of woman's love and manly courage, the hearts of the heroes were fired to deeds of daring. And the mermaids and dolphins dipt their heads out of the waves, and played about the prows, and listened to the lay.

Then Rother called his chiefs about him, and told them that he intended to go cunningly to work when he got to Constantinople. He would introduce himself to the emperor as Dietrich, a noble of King Rother's country, who had been outlawed by his sovereign, and who now craved Constantine's protection. He further desired them to begin at once to call him by his assumed name, that they might make no mistakes on their arrival.

The voyage was uneventful, and the adventurers soon reached their destination.

The first to land were "Dietrich" and old Berchther, and then followed the flower of Rother's army. Lastly the giants appeared, inspiring awe and fear in every heart. All were clothed like princes in splendid attire and with jewelled armour.

The empress received the strangers with courtly grace, and even the emperor looked pleased to see them. "Strangers," he said, "we should like to know from whence you come, who you

are, and what brings you to our good city. Before granting you permission to remain here, we would fain know more about you."

"Mighty sovereign of Greece, Hungary and Bulgaria," answered Dietrich, "we come from the realm of King Rother, where I bore the title and power of duke. I helped my liege lord in all his battles; but as I was always victorious, he grew jealous of my good fortune, and I had to fly for my life. I have come here as a fugitive with my faithful vassals, and all the wealth I could carry, and now I entreat of you to grant me your protection, for which I will repay you by faithful service in the field."

"You are an honest man," replied the emperor, "and you shall receive a fitting welcome. I was afraid at first that you had come on the same errand as the ambassadors of King Rother, who asked me to give my daughter in marriage to their master. I have them safe under lock and key, where even the light of the sun cannot reach them. Had your request been the same as theirs, you and your men should have suffered the like fate."

On hearing these words the giant Asprian started forward, the whole room trembling beneath his mighty tread. "My lord," he cried, laying his hand upon his sword, "you might perhaps have found that a more difficult task than you imagine. Before you took us prisoners many of your guard would lie low, and who can tell whether you yourself would have escaped scatheless? *We* are not lambs to be slaughtered at the will of any man."

Constantine did not much like this address, and tried to smooth down the ruffled feelings of the giant. After some further

conversation he invited the strangers to dine at his table. While they were eating, a tame lion, of which the emperor was very fond, began to steal the food from under the hands of the guests. Asprian's wrath was roused by the tempting morsel being snatched away from him, and starting up he seized the beast in his powerful hands, and flung him with such force against the stone wall of the banqueting room, that he fell, never to rise again. Constantine desired the guards to turn the giant out of the hall, but the empress whispered, "Oh, take care what you do. That man is not to be defied with impunity. King Rother must be very powerful to have outlawed such men as these. Take my advice, and set his messengers free. Let them take our daughter home with them that she may be the wife of a great king, and that she may induce her husband to be our friend and ally."

Constantine listened in angry silence. At length he desired his wife to be silent, reminding her that when once he had made up his mind on any subject, he never changed.

Dietrich and his friends took up their abode in the lodging the emperor had assigned to them, and there they had their treasures borne by the sailors: a labour that lasted many days. Many were the gifts they showered on their new acquaintances, amongst others, on Lord Helme and a brave and somewhat poor warrior named Arnold. The latter was so touched by their kindness that he swore to help his benefactor whenever he could.

The Fair Oda

The story of Dietrich's wealth and generosity became known in the palace, and Princess Oda was seized with an intense curiosity to see the hero of so many tales. She took counsel with Herlind, her chief lady-in-waiting, as to how she might accomplish her purpose with most propriety. Then, acting on her advice, she begged her father to get up some races, and allow her and her ladies to watch the sport. The emperor consented, and on the appointed day a large assemblage of spectators appeared on the course. The crush of people who collected round Dietrich was so great that none of the ladies of the court were able to get so much as a glimpse of him. The next day Oda called Herlind into her room, and promised her five gold bracelets if she would contrive a secret meeting between her and the stranger. Herlind promised to do her best. She went to Dietrich's lodging, taking every precaution against being seen, and gave him her mistress's message. He refused to go and see the princess, lest the news of his having done so should leak out and come to the emperor's ears. But before dismissing Herlind, he gave her a golden and a silver shoe as a present. She hastened back to her lady and told her all.

"He is a noble man," said Oda, "and cares more for our honour than for his own safety. I will keep the shoes in remembrance of him, and will give you instead as many gold pieces as they will

hold."

Herlind was satisfied with the proposal and now tried to put the shoes on her lady's feet, but could not, for they were both made for the same foot.

"Go," cried the princess, "he is not true. I will have none of his gifts, and will think of him no more. Take back the shoes and throw them at his feet."

Wise Herlind understood how to interpret her mistress's command. She hastened to Dietrich, and told him that the princess was angry with him, but that her curiosity to see him was so great that she would no doubt pardon him if he took a proper pair of shoes with his own hand. Dietrich seized the first moment when he could reach the princess's apartments unobserved, and knocked at the door.

He stopped on the threshold in amazement at the wondrous beauty of the maiden who advanced to meet him. She was also struck by his stately bearing and the resolute expression of his handsome manly face. She had intended to show him her displeasure, but she could not; she could only listen to the grave and sensible explanation he gave of his conduct in not at once obeying her commands. And when he asked permission to put the shoes on her feet, she could not deny him. In course of conversation he mentioned Rother's offer for her hand, and then, little by little, told her his secret, and the reason that had brought him to Constantinople. He asked her for her love, and she promised to be his wife. He now showed her that her father's

sentiments being what they were, their only chance of happiness was to fly together, and explained that before they could attempt to make their escape his faithful servants, who were still confined in the emperor's dungeons, must be set at liberty. He begged Oda to try to get them set free. She promised to do her best, and pointed out the gloomy tower in which they were imprisoned.

Next day the princess appeared before her father, dressed in deep mourning, and told him that she had had a dreadful dream that night. Her room had seemed full of flames from the nethermost hell, and she had heard a voice call to her that if King Rother's twelve messengers were not brought out of their dungeons, and furnished with clothes, food and wine, she would fall under eternal condemnation.

"That was the devil's voice, not an angel's," answered Constantine, "and I will not, on such a command, give up the rights I possess by the grace of God. But if it will make you happier, Oda, I will allow the prisoners to have their liberty for a short time, on condition that some one will offer his life to me as bail for them that they will not try to make their escape."

Oda left her father's presence much comforted, for she had made up her mind what to do.

The Liberation of the Messengers

When the emperor, his guests and courtiers were seated at dinner that day, Princess Oda entered the hall, followed by her

ladies. She went round the table, and told all and sundry of her desire to liberate the twelve prisoners, and of the condition her father had made. “Now who” she asked, “will let his head be surety for the heads of these unhappy men?”

A dead silence reigned in the hall. At last Dietrich rose in his place, and in a loud clear voice offered himself as hostage for the men. Upon which the emperor ordered the twelve counts to be brought out of their prison, taken to the bath and provided with clothes suitable to their rank and condition. This was done, and while the poor fellows, scarcely able to believe their senses, were seated at the meal provided for them, some one outside began to play the harp. They listened intently, a deep flush dyeing their sunken cheeks, and a flash of joyful surprise brightening their sad eyes, for they recognised the air. “It is he! Our king is near. He has come to save us!” they whispered in awe-struck accents. Weeks passed, and light and food did their work in restoring the strength of the prisoners.

One day the door of their room opened, and Rother came in dressed in his full armour. “You are free,” he said joyously, but he had scarcely had time to greet them when Berchther rushed forward to embrace his sons, followed by Wolfrat, the hero of Tegeling, strong Asprian, and Widolt, his inseparable companion.

Rother told Leupold, and the rest, about their voyage, and that he was only known to the Greeks by the name of Dietrich. Then he told how he had won the love of fair Oda, and through

her help had gained their freedom at the risk of his own life. But the best was yet to come. Imelot, king of Desert-Babylon, had invaded Constantine's realm with a mighty army, and had demanded half the empire, and the hand of Princess Oda for his son Basilistum. "The emperor not knowing what to do," continued Rother, "I offered to help him if he would allow you to join me and my friends. He consented, and so you are free to become my comrades in battle. Your armour and weapons lie without."

Widolt was so delighted at the thought of fighting that he gave way to a stentorian burst of laughter, and nearly knocked the emperor down by accident when he came in to tell the prisoners that they were free.

War and Victory

Of all who followed Constantine into the field on that occasion, Dietrich and his men were most worthy of notice; not only because of the magnificence of their accoutrements, but from their noble appearance. Chief amongst them were brave Wolfrat of Tegeling in Bavaria, old Duke Berchther of Meran, his son Leupold of Milan, and other counts of the West, and lastly huge Asprian and his giants. These consulted together on the eve of the day fixed on for the great battle, and determined that when the Greek and Babylonian forces were asleep, they would quietly slip out of their own camp, and, if possible, into

that of the enemy. At midnight they set out on their dangerous enterprise. They passed the sentinels by means of the pass-word they had taken care to find out, and softly made their way to the king's tent. It was a warm, but dark summer night; not a star was visible; the king's body-guard were asleep at their post. They never awoke again on earth. Wolfrat stabbed them as they slept, to guard against surprise. Widolt entered the royal tent, and picking Imelot up in his arms as though he had been an infant, desired him to be silent as he valued his life. The giant's loud voice wakened some servants who slept near, and they rushed into the tent to save their master, but were speedily slain. The whole camp was now astir, but the efforts of the soldiery were in vain. Confused by the darkness and their sudden awakening, many were killed, while the greater number fled, and sought refuge in their ships.

Rother and his handful of followers had thus won a complete victory, and before daybreak had returned to their tents with Imelot and some other princes of Desert-Babylon whom they had taken prisoners. Thoroughly tired with their hard night's work, they threw themselves on their couches, and sought well-merited repose.

Not so the Emperor Constantine. Contrary to his usual habit, he was up and about at a very early hour, and ordered the horns to blow to rouse the camp. This done, he desired that his troops should pass before him in companies. All were present except Lord Dietrich and his companions.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the emperor scornfully, "so that fellow's high talk was all swagger. I will go and see what keeps him," and he trotted away to Dietrich's tent.

When he got there, he found that all was silent as the grave. Motioning to his attendants to help him from his horse, he advanced to wake the sleepers. In the first tent, he saw the grim giant Widolt stretched upon a panther skin, while in the background a man was tossing about on a bed of straw, bound hand and foot. The emperor did not dare to wake the sleeper. He stept over him carefully, and advanced close to the prisoner. Imelot, in deadly fear lest he should be murdered on the spot, shrieked out who he was, and offered the half of his kingdom in exchange for his life. The noise wakened the giant. He sprang to his feet, and seizing his club, shouted to Dietrich to come, for some treason was being hatched in their very tents. He would certainly have killed both monarchs on the spot, had his companions not hastened to his side and hindered him. When Constantine heard the occurrences of the previous night, he was filled with surprise and admiration. He gave a solemn feast in honour of the victory, which in public he ascribed to himself, for were not Dietrich and his companions in his pay at the time? In order that the empress and her ladies might not be kept in ignorance of what had happened, Constantine sent Dietrich and his men on in advance to bear the news to the capital.

Bringing Home the Bride

The Western heroes rode back to Constantinople light-hearted and happy, for Dietrich had told them that the hour of their return home was near. The first step, in his opinion, was to proclaim that Imelot had conquered and dispersed the Greek army, and was rapidly marching on the capital.

"All is lost," they cried, when the citizens came out to meet them, "fly, save yourselves while you may. Imelot's wild horde of savages will soon be upon you." Then galloping to the palace, Dietrich entreated the empress to come on board his galley with her daughter and her ladies, and to bring anything of value that she particularly cared for.

They soon reached the strand. Oda crossed the plank leading to the vessel, her hand resting trustfully on Dietrich's arm. Then the plank was withdrawn and the ship pushed from land. The empress wept and begged that she might be taken too, but Dietrich explained to her the true state of the case, and telling her who he was, assured her that Oda was going home with him to rule over the West as his beloved queen.

"Ah," said the mother, much comforted, "be kind to her, noble hero, and take my blessing on you both. Think of me sometimes, as I shall think of you."

After a pleasant voyage the travellers arrived at Bari, where the marriage of King Rother to the princess was celebrated with

all pomp.

When Constantine returned with his victorious army to Constantinople, and learnt what had happened, he was very angry. Had he not feared Rother and his gigantic allies, he would have sent an army to Bari to fetch back the princess. The whole city was in such confusion, that King Imelot had not much difficulty in effecting his escape and returning to his own land. The emperor did not fret much when he heard this news. He could think of nothing but the loss of his daughter. He cared not for the rich dishes in which he used to delight, nor for the delicate wines his steward brought to tempt his appetite. He grew thin and pale, and his clothes hung loose on his shrunken frame.

The Mountebank

One day when he was alone in his room, a chamberlain came to him and announced that a clever mountebank had come, who would be sure to amuse his Majesty and turn his thoughts into a pleasanter channel. The mountebank was admitted. The emperor watched him perform all his curious tricks without a smile. But when the man sang of a woman who had been stolen from her home, and whose friends had freed her by means of cunning, not strength, he listened with his whole soul in his eyes. When the song was finished, he signed to the man to approach him, and asked him if he could bring Oda home to Constantinople.

"Give me," answered the mountebank, "a goodly ship, well

filled with merchandise, and I promise to bring the lady back to you. You may send some of your soldiers with me if you like, that they may cut off my head if I fail to keep my promise."

Before long the ship was laden and ready for sea. It was a fast sailer, and there were many able seamen on board, to say nothing of the soldiers the emperor had sent to see that the player was true to his bargain.

All went well during the voyage, and the ship at last reached the port of Bari. The mountebank landed and set to work to find out all that he could about the royal family. He found that King Rother had gone to Riffland with his troops, leaving Leupold of Milan regent in his place. He congratulated himself on his good luck when he heard this, for he thought his plan would be easier of accomplishment during the king's absence. On his return to his ship he made ready to show off his conjuring tricks on board the vessel. Crowds came, tempted by the unusual sight. He then brought out his silks and precious stones and offered them for sale. Amongst his wares was a pebble. The people asked what good a wretched common pebble could do him.

"This stone," he said, taking it gently in his hand, "is worth a ton of gold, for if a queen should touch a lame or impotent man with it, he would at once become strong and well again."

"Ah," sighed one of the lords, "if that were only true! I would give half my county were it really so, for I have three children, all of whom have been lame from their birth."

"They would soon jump about and play like other children,"

replied the mountebank, “if your good queen would only come on board my ship and try the virtue of the pebble.”

The count hastened to Queen Oda and told her his story, and she, with her usual kindliness, said how willing she was to cure the children if she could. She at once set out for the vessel, but no sooner were she and her ladies on board than the landing plank was slipped, the hawsers were unloosed, and a fresh wind catching the sails, the ship was soon out of sight of land.

Rother to the Rescue

The citizens of Bari clustered about the harbour not knowing what to do, and Leupold vainly sought a ship that could be got ready immediately to pursue and overtake the robber’s vessel. At the same moment King Rother’s horns were heard proclaiming his return. As soon as the king was told what had happened, his decision was formed.

“We must take an army to Constantinople,” he cried. “My dear wife has been stolen from me by force and cunning, and by force and cunning I will win her back.”

Old Duke Berchther shook his grey head, but said that he and his men would follow the king. Leupold, Wolfrat and the other princes of the realm promised to do the same. Messengers were sent to bear the tidings to all parts of the kingdom, and soon a great army was assembled. Rother picked out the bravest warriors to accompany him, amongst whom were Asprian and

his giants; the rest he sent home. Meantime the ships that were to bear the little army had been got ready, and after a favourable voyage reached the neighbourhood of Constantinople. Rother gave orders that the vessels should be run ashore in a small bay, surrounded on all sides by a thick wood which stretched in the direction of the city, and which would serve to conceal both ships and men.

"We are safe here," said Rother to his nobles. "The populace have an unspeakable terror of this wood, which they believe to be peopled by monsters of all sorts. Let the men encamp here, and I will go to the city in a pilgrim's dress and see what is going on."

There was a general outcry at the idea of the king adventuring himself alone in the enemy's stronghold, and many of the princes offered to go with him. He, therefore, consented to take the Duke of Meran and his son Leupold. Before starting Wolfrat gave him a tiny horn, telling him the sound it made was so shrill that it could be heard for miles around.

"As soon as we hear it," said Asprian, "we shall come to your help with clubs and swords."

"Yes," laughed Widolt, "and then there will be many a broken head, I can promise you."

The three pilgrims set out on their way. After going some distance they saw a horseman coming towards them in shining armour. They asked him if there were good news in Constantinople.

"Not at all," he answered. "Look, King Rother gave me

this coat of mail, and my good sword, and a thousand gold pieces to boot, for I had lost both land and wealth at the hands of miscreants; and now I find that the Greeks have stolen away his fair wife, and are about to marry her to that cruel demon Basilistum, son of Imelot, King of Desert-Babylon. For, when Imelot escaped from here, he collected a great army, and marching into the Emperor Constantine's land, took him prisoner, and now demands the half of his empire and the Lady Oda for that unlicked cub, his son, who, according to the present arrangement, is to remain here after his marriage, that Constantine may not be deprived of his daughter's society. All the Christians in the place tremble to think of the persecutions that will follow. Oh that King Rother would only come! I would join him with all my men as sure as my name is Arnold."

"Truly," said Rother as they parted, "a kind action often brings unlooked-for reward."

The city was full of life and feasting. Imelot, Constantine, and their followers were hobnobbing together in the banqueting room in the greatest peace and concord, for Constantine was overjoyed at having settled the vexed question of his daughter's marriage without losing her altogether. The hunchbacked bridegroom sat between his father and his would-be father-in-law and close to sad Oda and her equally sorrowful mother. The doors were wide open, that the populace might come in and watch the proceedings. So the three pilgrims were able to enter unnoticed, with their hats pulled down low over their brows. They heard

Constantine, Imelot, and Basilistum boast of how they would scornfully entreat and hang King Rother and all his giants if they ventured to come within their reach. During the laughter and confusion caused by these speeches, Rother managed to slip a ring bearing his name into his wife's hand, and she, with a look of intense relief, showed it to her mother.

"Rother is here," cried the hunchbacked bridegroom suddenly. "He has just given my wife a ring with his name engraved on it. Seek him out and seize him."

Swords were drawn, tables overturned, and noisy shouts heard on every side. Rother and his companions came forward, and the former said clearly and distinctly—

"Yes, I am here. I have come to claim my wife, and if the king of Desert-Babylon or his hunchbacked son deny my right, I am ready to prove it on their bodies with my good sword."

Imelot laughed till the hall re-echoed. "Fight with *you*," he cried, "a poor little kinglet like *you*! No, no, you must be hung."

"He must be hung!" repeated the courtiers.

"To the gallows with him, and his comrades too," continued the Babylonish king, "seize them and bind them till the blood starts from their fingers."

The heroes had only their pilgrim's staves, and these were poor weapons wherewith to defend themselves against the swords and lances that were pointed at them. They were taken and bound. No hand was raised to help them, although many a hardy fellow in the crowd had cause to remember Dietrich's kindness.

"A king," said Rother proudly, "who has often looked death in the face on the battle-field, knows how to die when his time comes. Let the executioner do his work in the haunted wood, where Constantine has already had so many innocent men put to a shameful death."

"A good idea," quoth the emperor grimly. "There are gallows there that will just do to hang the stealer of women and his comrades on."

"That is right," laughed Imelot, "and then the monsters who inhabit the wood will come at night and play many a merry prank with their bones. If their friends the giants should come over the sea in search of Rother and his crew, we will hang them too, that they may find themselves in good company. The whole army shall see how great Imelot revenges himself upon his foes."

The preparations for the execution were finished in a few hours, and the prisoners were borne to the haunted wood amidst an immense crowd and the music of drums and trumpets. The populace were curious to see a king hanged.

"And so it is Dietrich, kind Dietrich," sighed one; while another laughed and answered, "What does that matter to us? It is all the same whether a man is a king or a beggar when he comes to be hung." "Ah yes," said a third, "the rope is an uncomfortable necktie for any man, but that it should be tried on a crowned head is a thing I never expected to see."

The procession arrived at its destination. The prisoners were led to the foot of the gallows.

"Be of good cheer, Sir King," said the executioner; "you once gave me a handful of gold pieces, and to show you my gratitude I have provided a silken rope for you, that will do the business very quickly. The other two gentlemen must put up with common hemp, I am sorry to say. By St. Michael, I never did a day's work before, that I liked so ill."

"Pray loose my hands for a moment, good fellow," asked Rother, "that I may say a prayer."

"A pious wish," replied the man. "I will also pray to my patron saint, and beg him to take you straight to heaven from the gallows-tree."

He loosed the king's hands as he spoke, and then began to pray. Meanwhile Rother drew out his horn from under the pilgrim's mantle, where it was concealed. Three times its wild call sounded over mountain and valley, like a cry for help to the faithful friends who were waiting fully armed in the depths of the wood. But King Imelot, growing impatient, commanded that the executioner should himself be hung if he delayed any further to do his duty. The man was frightened and began to bind Rother's hands again; but at that moment a loud noise was heard in the background.

It was Arnold, who, with his men, had joined Rother's other friends, and who now came with them to the rescue of his former benefactor. There was a fearful battle. Imelot and many more fell fighting desperately, while Basilistum was slain during the flight. The whole army of Desert-Babylon was scattered or destroyed.

After the victory King Rother asked for the emperor, but found that Constantine had thought "prudence the better part of valour," and had long before fled to the palace, where he had taken refuge in the women's apartments. His courage had all ebbed away, and he begged his wife and daughter to entreat Rother to save him out of the hand of the giants, those veritable children of the evil one. The ladies were soon ready to go out and meet the ruler of the West. They placed the timid emperor in their midst, and accompanied by a numerous train, set out for the wood. The first people they met were the giants. Asprian's falcon-eyes at once spied out the emperor, carefully as he tried to hide himself. Stretching his long arm over the empress, he seized him by the scruff of the neck and flung him on the ground. Widolt raised his club to put an end to him as he lay there senseless, but his master stopped him, saying—

"Not so, Widolt; away with the miserable wretch to the gallows."

The giant caught the emperor up as easily as if he had been a baby, and went dancing along the road to the gallows with him in his arms. But they soon came up with Rother and his heroes, and the king pardoned Constantine. He could not have done otherwise: his wife was once more in his arms, and where love rules, wrath and vengeance have no place. When they all met in the banqueting room that evening, the emperor found himself unusually hungry after the many and varied emotions he had gone through, and it is said that he devoured a whole leg of mutton,

and drank an immense quantity of wine.

King Rother left the whole of the Eastern empire, which he had just conquered, in the hands of his father-in-law, and then set sail for Bari accompanied by Queen Oda. Arrived there, they went on to Rome, where a second marriage was solemnized with great pomp. Rother and his wife lived long and happily together, and had many children. We shall hear pleasant things of their daughter Herka (or Herche, Helche), and their grand-daughter Herat, as time goes on.

III
ORTNIT

A great king once lived in Lombardy; he was richer and more powerful than any other monarch far or near. His name was Ortnit, and his dominions extended over the whole of Italy from the Alps to the sea, and even included Sicily. The neighbouring kings were all his vassals, for, possessing the strength of twelve ordinary men, he was, of course, victorious in every battle. And yet he was not contented. An inward unrest prevented him from enjoying his wealth and greatness. He often sat dreamily at table, tasting nothing, and deaf to all that was being said around him; deaf even to the minstrels, when they sang songs in his praise. He frequently wandered alone up in the mountains, seeking adventures, slaying robbers, and destroying the wild beasts that preyed upon the farmers' flocks and herds. But this did not satisfy

him; he sighed for something more.

One day when he was standing, as he often did, on the sea-shore, watching the waves that rose and fell, tinted by the light of the setting sun, a mist came up out of the water. A few minutes more, and it parted slowly like a veil, showing a wondrous sight. It was that of a castle with towers and barbican, and on the battlements stood a woman such as he had never seen before in all his travels. He could not take his eyes off her. The effect of her beauty on him was like enchantment. Then the mist gradually closed again, and lady and castle vanished as completely as if they had never been.

While Ortnit was still staring at the place where he had seen the lady, he heard a step behind him. "Ah, it is she!" he thought, and turning quickly, clasped and kissed—bearded Ylyas (Eligas, or Elias), prince of the wild Reussen, who was his uncle. The new comer returned the embrace heartily, and then said:

"You are a good lad to receive your mother's brother with as much transport as a lover his sweetheart, but you have been gazing at a bit of sorcery down there, and that accounts for a great deal. Try to forget what you have seen, or your royal head may soon be displayed from the towers of Muntabure, where the lovely witch lives with that old heathen, her father."

"She is a real person then," cried Ortnit quickly. "She must be mine. I would stake my life to win her."

"What is that you say?" answered Ylyas. "A king's head for a woman's curl! That would make a new song for the minstrels

to sing in Lombardy."

"How am I to find her?" asked the king. "Tell me the story, which I suppose some wandering fiddler has sung."

"Why, nephew," replied the elder man, "I have seen with my own eyes and have heard with my own ears what I am now going to tell you. It is no minstrel's tale I am going to amuse you with. Machorell is the name of the maiden's father, and he is ruler of Syria, Jerusalem, and other eastern lands. When I was returning from my pilgrimage to the holy sepulchre, I arrived one evening at the gates of Castle Muntabure, weary and footsore, and the Saracen porter had compassion on me, took me in, and showed me no little kindness. Then it was that I saw the wicked heathen king, whose skin is as black as that of a Moor, and also the beautiful princess Sidrat. I heard it said that he intended to marry his own daughter, when her sick mother was dead, and that was why he cut off the heads of all the wooers who came to ask for the princess's hand in marriage. Seventy-two skulls already grin from the towers of Castle Muntabure. Say, bold youth, do you intend to offer your head to the Moorish king as the seventy-third?"

"I have been through many a strange adventure before now," returned Ortnit, "and I shall try to get the better of the infidel."

On the following day the notables of the realm were summoned to a council. The king told them that he intended to make a campaign in Syria, and desired their help in calling together his army. After many attempts to dissuade Ortnit from

such a fantastic enterprise, all was at last settled as he wished, even to the appointment of the governors and deputy-governors in whose hands the country was to be left during his absence. The only person besides the king who carried his point was Ylyas, who insisted on his right to go to Syria or anywhere else he chose, and expressed his firm determination not to lose sight of his nephew.

As the council were separating, Zacharis appeared. He was Lord of Apulia and Sicily, a heathen, but a faithful comrade of the king. When he heard what they had settled, he at once announced his readiness to provide a ship to take the armament across the sea, for which offer the king thanked him warmly. On the advice of Ylyas, it was agreed to put off the expedition until spring, when the weather would be more favourable for a sea voyage.

So the king had to smother his impatience as best he might. He was very lonely, for he knew that no one quite sympathized with him. His mother, indeed, did her best to persuade him to give up the enterprise, by setting its dangers plainly before him, and telling him how ridiculous it was to be so much in love with a woman whom he had only seen in a vision, and about whose character and disposition he knew nothing. He fretted against the idleness and uniformity of the life he was leading, and determined to ride up into the mountains for something to do. When he went to take leave of his mother, she begged him not to go, for fear of some accident happening to him; but, finding

that he was not to be dissuaded, she took a ring from her finger, saying, "If you are determined to go, take this ring. The gold is thin, and the stone of little apparent value, but it possesses a magic power that could not be bought with a kingdom. Go where you like in the wild mountains, but first of all ride down the road to the left, that leads over the heights to the lake, then sideways under a wall of rock to the valley. Look about till you find a spring gushing out of a rock, and, close to it, a great lime-tree; there you will have a more wonderful experience than any you could imagine."

Her voice trembled with nervous excitement, and her tearful eyes seemed to entreat him to ask her no questions.

Dwarf Alberich (*Ælf-ric*)

Ortnit rode away. He forbade any of his serving-men to accompany him, saying that he wished to be alone. The cool fresh air blowing about his temples cheered him, and chased away the fumes that troubled him. The sun began to sink as he entered the wood, where he had to dismount and lead his horse, because of the low-growing branches of the trees. The night was so dark that he lost his way, and did not succeed in getting out of the wood again till daybreak. When he gained the open, he rested a short time to let his horse graze in the meadow, and to eat his own breakfast. After that he set out again for the mountains, and at length reached the wall of rock his mother had

mentioned. He rode along the foot of it, as she had told him, till he heard the gurgling of the spring, and, on turning a corner, saw the lime before him. It was an immense tree, and early as it was in the year, it was already covered with leaves and blossom. Ortnit found on looking around, that it was in a wide meadow, on which grass, clover, and many-coloured flowers grew in rich abundance, while the number of birds that nested in the lime-tree was quite unheard of. A curious feeling came over the king, it seemed as if he must have heard those birds' song of welcome in his childhood, and all at once he remembered a ditty his mother used to sing. He began to hum it softly.

It was a song about all the little birds, and the music each made after its kind, sweet as a summer day, and all in honour of Alberich, king of the wood.

"Alberich—king of the wood," Ortnit was sure that he had once heard more about him than that, but what it was he could not tell. Had he not played with a child of that name once? As he was puzzling over these confused memories of the past, he happened to glance at his mother's ring; the stone in it was shining like a fire, and lighting up the face of a lovely child, who lay asleep in the grass close by.

"Poor boy," said the royal hero, compassionately, "I wonder who brought you to this lonely place! How anxious your mother must be about you! I cannot leave you here to die of hunger or fall a defenceless prey to the wild beasts."

He had already fastened his horse to a branch, and stooping

down, he lifted the boy in his arms to carry him away; but to his intense surprise he received such a blow on the chest that he not only let the child fall, but himself tumbled on his back. He had scarcely recovered his footing, when he found the child holding him so tight that he had to exert all his strength not to be overthrown. It was a strange sight to see the tall king and the wonderful child, wrestling furiously together. Flowers and grass were trodden under foot, shrubs and low bushes broken and torn, when Ortnit at last flung his opponent on the ground, and drew his sword to slay him. But, angry as he was, he could not do it when the little thing gazed at him so entreatingly, and begged in such a sweet soft voice that he would not murder him when he was defenceless, but would accept, in exchange for the life he granted him, a valuable suit of armour, consisting of helmet, shield, and coat of mail of wrought gold and silver, and last not least, the sword called Rosen, whose blade had been rendered strong and durable in dragon's blood. When Ortnit demanded a hostage for his opponent's good faith, the little creature told him that hostages were impossible to find in that wild mountain country, but Ortnit might trust to his word, for he also was a king, and ruled over a far wider domain than Lombardy, though truly his realm lay beneath the earth instead of upon it, and his subjects were employed day and night in working in metals. Finding that no hostage was necessary, or indeed procurable, the hero allowed his prisoner to get up. But before the latter went to get the armour he had promised, he said that he would like to have the ring Ortnit

was wearing, and that he scrupled the less to ask for it, as it did not appear to be of great value.

"I cannot give it to you," replied Ortnit, "for it was a present from my dear mother, who would never forgive me if I parted with it."

"And you call yourself a hero," sneered the little creature, "*you* who fear your mother's blows! Tell me, what do you do when you are wounded in battle? Do you cry like a baby when you see the blood flow?"

"If you were to hew me in pieces," replied the Lombard, "painful as that would be, it would hurt me less than a tear or a sigh from my mother."

"Well, good squire of dames," continued the other, "it can at any rate do the ring no harm for me to look at it and touch it. I am in your power, am I not? Your sword is in your hand, and I am without a weapon."

After a little hesitation the king consented to let the boy draw the ring from his finger; but scarcely was this done, when he vanished from before his eyes, suddenly and without warning. Ortnit felt bewildered. He heard the boy's voice, now at a distance and now near, making sarcastic remarks on the beating his mother would give him when he went home, and finally announcing that he would pelt him with a few pebbles to show him how well he could do it. Ortnit defended himself for some time against the terrible storm of sharp stones that rained upon him, but at last, seeing that neither his great strength nor his

sword were of any avail, he turned to his horse and prepared to ride away.

On perceiving this the hobgoblin exclaimed: “Wait a bit, friend Goodman. I am sorry to think of the stripes your mother will give you. Listen to me. I have many important things to talk to you about. If you will give me your royal word of honour that you will not revenge yourself for the trick I played you, I will give you back your ring.”

“Very well,” answered Ortnit, “I promise on my honour.”

“And if I go on to talk ill of your mother?”

“No,” cried the king, “I will never forgive that. You may say what you like about me, but my mother is the purest and most perfect of women.”

“I quite agree with you,” said the little creature; “you may listen to me without fearing that I shall slander her, for I am Alberich (Ælf-ric) king of the Dwarfs, and you and I are more nearly related than you think. I will tell you the truth; but first take back your ring. I trust to your word of honour.”

The moment Ortnit felt the ring in his hand, he slipped it back on his finger, and immediately saw the boy standing before him.

“You must know, great king,” pursued Alberich, “that you have to thank me for your land and people, castles, towns and victories, and also for your marvellous strength. Your predecessor, whom you call father, married, when he was an elderly man, the youthful sister of the prince of the wild Reussen. The marriage was childless. Husband and wife in vain prayed

heaven for an heir. Your mother was the best and most virtuous woman in Lombardy, but she wore herself away with fretting about what would become of the country and herself when her husband died without an heir. She foresaw that the nation would be split into factions, that civil war would desolate the land, and that she herself might be chased from Lombardy, a homeless exile. I often heard her plaints when I entered her room unseen. The older the king grew, the more her anxiety increased; then —well, you must know it sooner or later—I became her second husband."

"Monster, you lie!" shouted Ortnit, drawing a dagger from his side, but he could not use it, for the smiling boy looked up at him so fearlessly.

"Your anger is bootless," he said. "You had better let me finish my story. Young as I look, I am five hundred years old; small as I am, and big and strong as you are, I am yet your father. I proposed to the king that he should secretly get a divorce from his wife and let her marry me. He consented, but she would not. She refused. She spent days and months in weeping, and only gave way at last when her husband insisted! She and I were married secretly by a priest. No one guessed what had happened, and when you were born you were supposed to be the old king's son. I did not win my wife's heart, however, until her first husband was dead. After that I used sometimes to bring her here; you and I played together among the flowers like two children, and I sang with the birds that wild song of theirs about the king of the wood, which

your mother often sung to you again at Castle Garden. When you grew to be a man and a hero, I was often at your side unseen, while the battle raged all round you, and on those occasions I have often turned aside the point of some murderous weapon that threatened your life. When you cross the wild ocean, and strive to win the Moorish maiden for your wife, I will be there to help you. So long as you wear that ring on your finger, you have only to wish for me and you will see me. Now wait a few minutes; I am going to fetch the armour that no weapon can pierce, and the sword Rosen, which can cut through steel and iron, and even dragon's scales."

Ortnit felt as though in a dream. While he was still thinking over all that he had just heard, the sound of heavy steps, and the clanking of armour startled him out of his reverie. Turning round he saw Alberich, who with the help of a sturdy dwarf was bringing his promised gift. On the top of the silver helmet with gold enwrought, was a priceless diamond. The whole suit of mail was of marvellously beautiful workmanship, and sparkled with gems wherever gems should be. The sword was in a golden sheath, its handle was a shining carbuncle, and on the sharp steel blade were golden figures and the letters forming the king's name.

Ortnit was amazed at the beauty of all he saw. He put on the armour, and it fitted him exactly. Then he picked his tiny father up in his strong arms and kissed him on his rosy mouth, and Alberich returned his embrace with much affection. As the

king rode away, the last words he heard were, “Do not forget the importance of that ring. Never give it away. If you turn it on your finger, I will at once be with you.”

When Ortnit got home, he was received with joy by all his retainers; and his mother, who was watching for his arrival, signed to him to come to her. He instantly ran up the steps, and whispered as he kissed her, “I have come from father Alberich.”

“You know?” she asked, hiding her face on his shoulder.

“I know,” he answered, “that I love and honour my dear mother.”

May came at last. The army assembled and marched south through Tuscany, Rome and Naples, whence they embarked for Sicily, Messina being the place fixed on for the general meeting of all the forces. Arrived there, they found faithful Zacharis ready with his ship, in which he had stowed away, not only enough provisions for the voyage, but also merchandise, in case it should be wanted. Soon every man was on board, a favourable wind swelled the sails, and experienced seamen steered the ship through the wild sea.

City of Suders (Tyre)

After they had journeyed a long time, the welcome cry of “land” was heard from the mast-head, and soon afterwards those on deck had a distinct view of the shore and the wharfs of Tyre. But at this moment the skipper came up to the king and said:

"Sire, we are all lost. There is no wind to carry us past this place. They have sighted us already in the town, and will soon send out their pirate ships to chase us."

"Come, nephew," said Ylyas, "throw the cowardly dog overboard to drink brotherhood with the fishes. Have we not swords enough to defend ourselves from the Moors?"

"Sir," replied the skipper, "the heathen will throw Greek fire on board. Neither sword nor shield can do aught against that. The ship will be burnt, and all the men either burnt therewith or drowned."

No one knew what to advise, so all stood silent about the king. Suddenly a voice was heard from the mast-head:

"All arms below! Bring up the merchandise, and let the sails be reefed, lest the enemy guess that we thought of flight."

"Hey-day! It is Alberich," said Ortnit; "how could I have forgotten him?"

He looked up and saw the king of the dwarfs slipping rapidly down the mast to the deck. In another moment he was at his side.

"You forgot both the ring and me," said Alberich, "but a father does not so soon forget his son. Now hasten and see that my commands are carried out."

Much ashamed of himself, Ortnit gave the necessary orders. All weapons of offence were stowed away below, and the costly wares Zacharis had provided were spread temptingly on deck. Meanwhile the dwarf climbed the mast again, and, as soon as he was aloft, shouted to the Moors:

"See here—we are peaceful merchants bringing wares from Italy. Give us free convoy into the harbour of Tyre."

Ylyas stared up open-mouthed at the top of the mast. The flag was flying there as usual, and no one was to be seen. What voice was that he had heard?

"Is the devil on board?" he asked, crossing himself, "or is it a good spirit? Whom did you speak to, nephew? Who called from the top-mast even now?"

"A good spirit," replied Ortnit, "a little dwarf who will, help us out of our difficulty. You shall see him with your own eyes."

With these words he slipped his magic ring on his uncle's finger, and the latter was much astonished to see the small childish figure descending the mast, still more when Ortnit gave him a hasty sketch of all that had taken place.

The Tyrian galleys had by this time come up with the ship. Their commander, who introduced himself as constable of the city, inquired whether the object of the strangers in coming to those seas was really to trade with them. Satisfied that they were what they appeared to be, because of the number and splendour of their wares, he at last gave them leave to enter the harbour, and even to land if they desired to do so. In the course of that afternoon the townsfolk bought many rich Italian stuffs at a very low price.

In the evening the two princes held counsel together as to what was now to be done. Ylyas advised that a sudden onslaught should be made on the castle, and that everybody there, young or old,

should be put to the sword. Before Ortnit could answer, Alberich broke into the conversation by saying that such conduct would not be fair, that no one who desired fame and glory would take his enemy unawares; but for fear any herald sent to the infidels should be murdered by them, he undertook to bear the message of defiance himself.

Alberich hastened to Muntabure by unfrequented roads. Arrived there, he saw King Machorell standing on the ramparts enjoying the cool evening air.

"Listen to me, Moorish king," cried the dwarf from the castle moat, "and mark what I tell you. My master, King Ortnit, desires that you will give him your daughter to be his wife, and queen of Lombardy. If you refuse your consent, he bids me declare war on you at once, and warn you that he will attack Tyre before daybreak to-morrow. After conquering it he will come on to Muntabure, punish you for your evil deeds, and marry your daughter."

"So, Goblin," cried Machorell angrily, "you want to arrange a marriage, do you? You will find both your own head and your master's adorning the battlements of my castle before long, if you persist in your foolish scheme. But where are you? I cannot see you."

"Down below you in the moat," was the answer.

The king flung a heavy stone down upon the place where he supposed Alberich to be, but missed his mark. He called out his guards and made them search the whole neighbourhood, but they

returned at nightfall baffled and disappointed.

That evening Ortnit made an onslaught on the city, and found it totally unprepared for any attack. However, the Tyrians soon got under arms and made a gallant defence; all in vain. Ortnit was victorious after a hard struggle in which many of his faithful followers were slain.

When he returned from pursuing the Tyrians, Ortnit went to the place where his uncle had fought, and found him lying on the ground surrounded by his people. Was he dead or only wounded? The king bent over him anxiously, and loosed his helmet to see if he were yet alive. His heart had not quite ceased to beat. As Ortnit was raising him in his arms, he happened to touch him with Alberich's ring, and in a moment Ylyas was on his feet, whole and sound, as though he had never been wounded. It was well for Ortnit that it was so, for in another instant he and his men were attacked by the train-bands of the city, who had rallied once more. At length they also were beaten back with immense loss, and Tyre was really in his hands. Those of the citizens that were left swore fealty to the king of Lombardy, who then gave orders to attend to the wants of the wounded, both friends and foes. He allowed his followers a few days' rest before leading them against Muntabure.

Castle Muntabure

After much consideration it was agreed between Ylyas and

the king that Alberich was the best person to be standard-bearer during the assault, and the dwarf at once consented. The warriors were filled with amazement when they saw a war-horse preceding them with the royal banner apparently floating by its side. “The invisible standard-bearer must be an angel,” they said in awe-struck tones. Nothing of importance happened during the march. All went well, for Alberich led the van.

At last Castle Muntabure loomed in sight: a grim fortress perched on the top of a beetling crag.

Machorell had heard of their approach, and was in readiness to receive them. He had strengthened the garrison very considerably, and was confident of victory. At first it seemed as if his confidence were well-founded; but at the very moment when the Saracens appeared to have success within their grasp, the tide of fortune turned. Alberich climbed the walls unseen, and by a great exertion of his marvellous strength, hurled one heavy catapult after another down from the walls into the moat below; while the men who had been working these engines of destruction were struck motionless with terror, when they saw the unwieldy machines disappear as though shoved from their places by invisible hands. Ortnit seized the right moment to push the advantage the dwarf had gained for him, and renewed the assault more vigorously than before.

Sidrat the Beautiful

Alberich now left the walls, and opening a side-door made his way to a tower-like building that rose above the battlements. This was the temple where the Moors kept their idols, Mahomet and Apollo; two enormous figures carved in stone. The queen and her daughter, beautiful Sidrat, knelt before the idols praying for protection from the invaders. Suddenly Sidrat felt her hand grasped gently by an invisible hand. At first she was frightened, and then comforted, for she took it as a sign that her prayers were heard. But the unseen friend was Alberich, and not a heathen god. He whispered, "Your gods are dust; I am a messenger from another world, and have come to save you and to teach you to worship the true God."

The girl started to her feet in terror, and hastened to her mother, who was kneeling at a little distance. Meanwhile the dwarf flung the idols down and broke them in pieces, and the women were more alarmed than ever, for they felt convinced that an evil spirit was at work within the temple.

Alberich went back to the princess, and drew her to the barbican, whispering, "See, there is the hero who desires to make you his wife, and queen of his realm."

Involuntarily she looked down, and saw Ortnit fighting valorously, driving all before him, and looking god-like in his grace and noble bearing. She could not turn away her eyes. He

was even now advancing to attack her father. They exchanged one or two blows, the last of which split Machorell's shield. Ortnit raised his sword to strike again, but Sidrat uttered a loud cry of agony, and he refrained, for at the same moment he saw her standing on the barbican, and knew that she was the maiden he had loved ever since he had seen her image in the magic castle on the sea.

"You see the royal hero?" asked the dwarf; but receiving no answer, he went on: "Go down to the moat to-morrow morning at day-break. Your father will allow you to do so, if you tell him you are going to call upon your gods to return to the castle. But when you reach the moat, you will find the king waiting to speak with you."

Knowing that his advice would be followed, he left the princess.

The battle had ceased to rage as furiously as before, and all were weary after their exertions. Ortnit's men retired to the river-side, where they were to encamp for the night, and the Moors shut themselves within the fortress.

All night long Ortnit dreamt of Sidrat, and then awoke and wondered whether she would come to the trysting-place. In the early morning, before the sun was up, the king mounted his horse and rode away alone to Muntabure. He concealed himself beneath the spreading boughs of a tamarind-tree, and waited and waited, doubting, fearing, would she come or would she not? At length a postern door opened, and a white figure came out.

"Sidrat," he cried, and clasped her in his arms.

"To horse, delay not a moment," whispered the dwarf; "go down that way, past the waterfall."

Ortnit at once obeyed, placed the maiden upon his horse, and mounted himself. It was high time. He had scarcely got beyond arrow-shot, when a watchman on the tower recognised him by his helmet, and sounded the alarm.

Machorell and his men-at-arms hurried down to the fight. Several times the fortune of the day changed sides; and when at length the battle was over, the besiegers were too much weakened in number to attempt to carry the castle by storm; while the besieged were also in woeful plight, and their sorrow was increased by the loss of the princess.

Ortnit began his retreat next morning. He found on his arrival at Tyre that his ship was in good order and ready for sea. So he gave orders for a speedy departure, and soon the gallant little army was speeding homewards with Princess Sidrat and much spoil. The Moorish girl proved a willing pupil when the Christian priests of Lombardy taught her their religion, so she was baptized, and received the name of Liebgart. Soon after that, she and Ortnit were married at Castle Garden, and the whole country rejoiced in the king's good fortune.

The Toad's Eggs

Ortnit and his wife were very happy together, and smiling

peace rested on the land. Honours were showered upon the hero of so glorious a campaign, and even the imperial crown of Rome was placed upon his head.

One day when Ortnit and his queen were seated in the banqueting hall, their warriors feasting around them, a stranger was announced, who said that he had come from the East, and was the bearer of rich presents to the royal pair. After a few minutes' delay, the ambassador was admitted. He was of gigantic height, wild of aspect, and said that his name was Welle. He announced that King Machorell had sent him to make friends with Ortnit in his name and for his fair daughter's sake; that the king, in token of his reconciliation with his son-in-law, had sent him the finest jewels to be found in all Syria. Having thus spoken, Welle called his wife, Ruotze. She at once appeared, and was even taller and more hideous than himself. She dragged four great coffers into the hall, the contents of which she unpacked and displayed before the king and queen and all the court. The first contained dresses and steel wares of every sort and kind; the second was full of silver bracelets and ornaments of wonderful workmanship; the third was the same, except that the ornaments were of gold instead of silver. The fourth case was opened by the man himself, who lifted out of it, very carefully, two enormous eggs of strange form and colour.

"These are the eggs of the Abrahamic magic toad," said the man. "When they are hatched, which my wife will see to, you will find in each the wondrous toad-stone, that shines like the sun in

a dark place, or else a marvellous creature that will defend your coasts against every invader if you only feed it well. I am King Machorell's chief huntsman, and understand how to bring up the beast, and feed, and teach it its duties. So, I pray you, appoint me and my wife a damp and quiet place amongst the mountains where we can watch over the eggs. Next year my royal master himself will cross the seas, make friends with you in person, and see the miraculous result of our care with his own eyes."

The queen's heart was filled with joy at these signs of her father's forgiveness, and throwing her arms round her husband's neck, she entreated that the proffered friendship should be accepted. The courtiers were quite of her opinion; but Zacharis, the faithful heathen, shook his head, and spoke his distrust both loudly and clearly. No one listened to him. The king gave orders that the giants should be well treated, and provided with food, and all they needed in the mountains, by the governor of the province in which the place most suitable for hatching the eggs was situated.

High up in the mountains near Trient was a marshy bit of ground, extending far within a cavern at the foot of a precipitous rock. Welle and his wife took up their abode there, and every day the governor sent them a supply of food. Ruotze brooded over the eggs untiringly. Before very long the shells cracked, and two little lind-worms (dragons) crept out. They were pretty creatures, dainty in all their movements and obedient to every command of the giant and his wife. The governor used sometimes to go and

see them, and delighted in their agility and funny ways. The worst of it was that they had enormous appetites, and the more they ate the faster they grew, and the more they wanted to eat. They were soon taller than their guardians when they raised themselves in the air, and began to show themselves malicious and bad-tempered. The governor hesitated to supply their wants when he found that they needed more than two oxen a day; the wrath of the creatures at what they considered semi-starvation was so great that Welle and Ruotze grew frightened, and took refuge in another cave. As soon as their guardians deserted them, the monsters crept out of their hole, and began to wander over the whole district, devouring men and cattle, and whatever came in their way. The people deserted their old homes and fled to the mountain fastnesses. All in vain: the lind-worms pursued them, and continued to devour all who fell into their clutches. The governor sent out large detachments of horse and foot against them, but hardly a man returned to tell the tale of defeat and misery. And with every hearty meal the monsters grew larger and stronger. Every one was in despair, for it seemed as if the whole kingdom would be devastated.

Ortnit's Fight with the Lind-worm

One day the Emperor Ortnit went to his wife and asked her to help him to put on his armour, for he had to go out and fight a hard battle. She could hardly pronounce the words "with whom?"

she trembled so.

"Well, Liebgart," he said, "you must know that the dragons which are doing so much harm to the country are the toad-stones your father sent me. I am the guardian of my people; and as they helped me when I went to Syria to win you, I must now help them in my turn by going out against these monsters to slay them,—or myself be slain, I know not which."

The empress wept and told her fears, but her husband comforted her by reminding her that he still had the good sword Rosen, that could cut through steel and iron, and even dragon's scales. "Should I not return," he continued, "an avenger will come. If any one brings you back this ring that you once gave me, you may know that he is my avenger, and give him your hand in marriage."

He then kissed her and tore himself away. She gazed after him with tearful eyes as long as he was in sight, thinking sadly how many noble warriors had preceded him in his quest, and how none of them had ever returned to home or friends.

Ortnit at length reached the rock where he expected to find the lind-worms. Seeing them nowhere, he dismounted, blew his horn, and loosed the faithful dog that he had taken with him to help him to hunt the monsters down. Suddenly a door in the rock opened, and the giant Welle came out, shouting to him to come on, and calling him opprobrious names; but the king cut his great club in two with one stroke of his sword. The giant sprang back, and in a moment had unsheathed a sword six yards long, whirled

it round his head, and struck Ortnit so hard a blow upon the helmet that he fell senseless to the ground.

"Well hit, old moon-calf," cried Ruotze, putting her head out at the door; "let me go to him now and wring his neck, and throw his body into the dragons' den."

At this moment the setter, which had disappeared in the wood, began to bark furiously, and Ruotze rushed away to see what was the matter. Upon this, Ortnit started to his feet, and with a swing of his sword cut off one of the giant's legs. The monster howled with pain, and defended himself resting against the rock, but his opponent immediately cut off his other leg. Hearing the noise, the giantess returned. Arming herself with an uprooted tree, she hit out at the hero with all her strength; but, blinded by passion, she miscalculated the distance, and brought the tree down so hard on her husband's head that she split it open. Ortnit then slew the giantess, after which he rested awhile from his labours; ate and drank some of the provisions he had brought with him, and let his steed graze at will on the short sweet grass of the upland meadow. Rested and refreshed, he once more set out on his quest. Riding through a wood, he came up with some charcoal-burners, and asked them where he should find the lind-worms. They tried to persuade him to turn back, but in vain. Then they told him that the monsters had set out to travel west; that one of them, having a nest of young ones, had stayed somewhere on the road hidden in a cave, while the other had gone deeper into the mountains, perhaps even into another land.

Unheeding the warning he had just received, Ortnit rode away towards the west. When evening came, he rested for a short time; but as his food was nearly finished, and he wanted to reach an inhabited spot as soon as possible, he set out again, and rode all night long. Next day he reached a meadow, and there he saw little Alberich seated under a tree. The dwarf looked very sad, and when Ortnit drew rein beside him, said:

"My dear son, you are going to your death. Return to Garden, for I have no power over the diabolical monsters you are seeking. I cannot help you."

"I need no help," replied the hero. "Have I not the sword Rosen? It will help me to conquer the powers of hell that are arrayed against my poor people."

"May you be successful!" said the little creature, and springing into the saddle he kissed his son. "May you be successful! and to that end, watch and slumber not. Remember that it is the last advice I can give you. Now give me back the ring you got from your mother. You shall have it again if you return to Garden safe and sound."

Scarcely had Ortnit returned the ring when he felt a kiss upon his lips, and the dwarf had disappeared.

The hero rode on unfalteringly over hill and dale, and through many a wild glen. At last he unexpectedly reached the very lime-tree under which he had had his first interview with Alberich. The birds were singing as before. All looked peaceful and still. Both Ortnit and his horse were worn out, so he dismounted, and

letting his steed graze, laid himself at full length on the soft grass, his faithful dog at his side. He thought over his project, and was strongly tempted to return home to Garden and sweet Liebgart; but he put the desire from him, "for," he reasoned within himself, "the prince and people are as one person, of which the people form the body and the prince the head; so the prince, to be worthy of his high calling, must as far as in him lies protect his people from all injury. And I have every right to trust to my strength, my sword and my good cause for victory." It seemed as though the birds in the linden-tree had read his thoughts, and were singing a pæan of joy and encouragement over him and them. He watched them quietly, but soon fatigue gained the upper hand—his eyelids closed, and he fell asleep.

All at once the birds ceased their song, the branches stopped their soft waving to and fro, and the flowers bent their heads as though a breath of poisoned air were passing over them. Crawling through the thicket, trees and bushes breaking with its weight, came the terrible lind-worm, its jaws wide open, showing its long pointed teeth. The faithful dog, with a howl of mingled fear and anger, pulled at his master, hoping to wake him; but in vain, for Ortnit was as though in a charmed sleep. The dog then sprang upon the dragon, but could not touch it because of the way it slashed about with its tail. At this moment the horrible creature caught sight of Ortnit, flung itself upon him, carried him into the thicket, and then broke all his bones by dashing him again and again upon the ground. But though his bones were broken, his

armour remained whole as at the first. Then taking the dead body up in its powerful jaws, the lind-worm bore it home to its nest in the noisome cave, where its young ones fell ravenously upon their favourite food, and devoured as much as they could get at through the steel rings of the coat of mail. The dog, which had followed the dragon home in hopes of saving his master, watched all night by the cave, but finding himself powerless to help, set out early next morning on his way back to Garden.

Sidrat the Sorrowful (Liebgart)

Meanwhile Liebgart and the old queen were very anxious. They hoped and feared alternately. On the fourth day, as they were sitting together, they heard something scratching at the door. Liebgart opened it, and saw the faithful dog, her husband's companion on his last journey. Instead of showing his usual joy at seeing her, the dog crept slowly in, and lay down at the old queen's feet with a low, moaning whine.

"He is dead—murdered by the monsters," cried the unhappy mother. These were the last words she ever spoke, for next moment she sank back dead in her chair.

The shrieks of the young queen brought her women into the room, and soon the sad news was known to all. There was now no king in Lombardy, no one to keep order in the land. The great nobles fought and quarrelled incessantly, and the country was split into factions. At last, tired of this state of anarchy, it

was agreed by the notables in council that the only thing that could save the kingdom was for Liebgart to choose a husband who had sufficient wisdom and power to make a good ruler. They went to the queen, each hoping in his secret heart that he would be chosen by her. But on hearing what was required of her, she answered with solemn earnestness that she would preserve her faith to Ortnit unbroken, and that none was worthy to succeed him unless he could slay the lind-worms and avenge his death. The nobles looked at each other in a shamefaced manner, and hastened to leave the royal presence; but avarice and ambition soon regained the upper hand, and civil war seemed imminent. Liebgart, deprived of all means of support,—for even the treasury had been despoiled by the nobles,—was forced, in company with a few women who were faithful to her, to make her own livelihood by spinning.

The Margrave of Tuscany was much distressed when he heard of the straits to which the queen was reduced. He offered her an asylum in his country; but she said that at Garden she had been happy with Ortnit, and there she also wished to sorrow for him. Touched by her faithfulness, the prince sent her food and wine, that she might no longer have to work for the necessaries of life. So she lived on, the Lombards trying to force her to seek refuge from the ills of life by a second marriage; but in vain; she bore all the miseries of her lot with quiet patience, for she strengthened herself with thoughts of her husband and of the avenger for whom she hoped.

This hope, which sometimes rose like a star on the cloudy night of sorrow in which she lived, was one day to be fulfilled, but not for a long time.

THE AMELUNGS

I
HUGDIETERICH AND WOLFDIETERICH

Hugdieterich and Fair Hildburg

While Ortnit's ancestors ruled over Lombardy, the great Emperor Anzius lived at Constantinople, and governed Greece, Bulgaria, and many other lands. When he died, he confided his son, Hugdieterich, to the care of his faithful friend, Berchtung, duke of Meran, whom he had himself brought up, and afterwards covered with honours.

Berchtung felt that his first duty was to choose a wife for his ward, and that only a princess of equal rank and great beauty and wisdom would be a suitable helpmeet for so mighty a prince. He had travelled far and wide, and amongst all the princesses he knew there was one and only one that he could propose as a wife for his liege lord. But there were many difficulties in the way. Berchtung confided his troubles to the prince, and told him how much he wished to bring about a marriage between him

and Hildburg, daughter of King Walgund of Thessalonica; but he feared it would be impossible, for Walgund loved the maiden so dearly that he had shut her up in a high tower, and permitted no one to speak to her except the old watchman, himself, her mother, and her maid. This he did, fearing lest she should marry and leave him.

Hugdieterich listened to the strange story with great interest, and determined to get a sight of the maiden if he could. So he set to work to learn all that he might of women's works and women's ways, even going so far as to dress himself in women's garments. After which he announced his intention of going to Thessalonica to make fair Hildburg's acquaintance.

He arrived in due course at Thessalonica, disguised as a great lady, with a numerous train of female servants. Hearing of the new arrival, the king and queen invited the stranger to visit them. She did so, and gave their majesties to understand that she was Hildgunde, sister of the emperor Hugdieterich, and that she had been outlawed by her brother. She begged the king to protect her, and to provide her with a lodging in his palace, and at the same time presented the queen with a costly piece of embroidery, as a sign of her good will. Her request was granted. The queen then begged her to teach her ladies to embroider as she did herself. After this all went so well that Berchtung and his men-at-arms were sent back to Constantinople, their protection being no longer needed.

Fair Hildburg heard what was going on, and begged her

father to allow her to see the embroideries, and the artist who worked them. No sooner had she done so than she wished to learn the art. Walgund gave his consent, thinking the stranger a very suitable companion for his daughter, and Hildburg found great pleasure in her company. It was not until weeks afterwards that she discovered who her teacher was, and when she did their friendship became stronger than before, until it grew into acknowledged love.

The fear lest their secret marriage should be discovered, one day reached a climax.

"What will become of us?" cried Hildburg. "My father will never forgive us. He will order us both to be slain."

"Then, at least, we shall die together," replied Hugdieterich, "but I hope for better things. The guards and your personal attendants are on our side, and I expect Berchtung very soon to come and take me home to Constantinople, on the plea that my brother has forgiven me. I shall then send an ambassador to ask for your hand in marriage; and when your father knows our secret, he will not refuse his consent."

Berchtung came as Hugdieterich had expected, and fetched him away; but the wooing had to be put off till a more convenient season, as war had broken out on the frontier, and the emperor was obliged to take the field. Meantime Hildburg was in greater danger at home than her husband in the midst of battle. She had a son. He was born quietly in the tower, without any one except the three faithful friends who guarded the princess there knowing

aught about it. It was not until months after this event that the queen, her mother, sent to say that she was coming to visit her daughter. She followed almost on the heels of the messenger. The porter pretended to have great difficulty in unlocking the door, and by the time he succeeded, the watchman had smuggled the child down to a safe hiding-place beside the moat. It was already evening, so the queen spent the night with her daughter. When she was gone next morning, the faithful servant hastened to where he had hidden the child, and it was not to be found. After long and anxious search, he returned to his mistress, and told her that he had taken the boy to a nurse, who had promised to bring him up carefully and well.

Soon after this, Berchtung arrived at Thessalonica to thank the king in his master's name for the reception he and his family had given the princess, his sister, and to ask for the hand of the Lady Hildburg, with whom the emperor had fallen in love from his sister's description. The king put off giving any immediate answer to this request, and asked Berchtung to a great hunt he intended to give in his honour on the following day.

It was a lovely morning when the hunters set out for the forest. They rode on cheerily, and had a good day's sport. At length chance led the king and Berchtung past the tower where sad Hildburg spent her weary days in waiting for the husband who came not. As they rode along, they discovered the fresh track of a wolf leading towards a spring. They followed the spoor, which led them to a den in a thicket close by, and in the den was a

strange sight.

In the centre of the nest, and surrounded by a litter of wolf-cubs so young as to be still blind, lay a beautiful child. He was playing with the little wolves, pulling their ears, and chatting in baby language such as only mothers and nurses can translate. But evidently his companions did not like his attentions, and the mother-wolf's ire was so roused against him, that it wanted very little more to make her spring upon the child, and put a sudden end to his play. The old wolf came up at the same moment, so that the danger was much increased. Seeing this, the two hunters flung their spears with so much skill as to kill both the old wolves on the spot. Then the king lifted the baby in his arms as gently as if it had been his own child.

"It's very strange," he said, "how much I feel drawn to this boy. But he must be hungry, poor little man. My daughter's tower is close to here; we shall find some fresh milk there, and she will be glad to see the little fellow; she is so fond of children, and seldom gets a chance of seeing them."

They walked on slowly, Berchtung carrying the child, while the king examined the wolf's track with great interest and attention.

"Look here," he said, "is it not strange? The tracks lead straight from the den to the moat; I wonder if the wolf stole the child from anywhere near this."

Fair Hildburg was not a little astonished when she heard her father's tale. She took the child in her arms, and at once

recognised him by a birth-mark on his arm in the shape of a red cross. She struggled to conceal her feelings, and offered as calmly as she could to take care of the child, and only begged her father to send a nurse as quickly as possible.

When he got home, the king told the queen of his adventure, and she was very curious to see the child. She sent for a nurse, and accompanied her to the tower. Arrived there, the queen sought her daughter, and found her busied with the child.

"How I wish," said the queen, taking it in her arms, "that I knew who the boy's mother is! She must be in such distress."

"Yes," answered Hildburg; "but look at his clothes, how fine they are! They show that he is of princely descent."

"Oh dear," sighed the queen, "what a lucky woman I should think myself if I had a grandson like that!"

Hildburg could keep her secret no longer. She threw herself into her mother's arms, and told her, with many tears, that she was secretly married to Hugdieterich, and that the child was theirs. The queen was startled, angry,—but—it was done, and could not be undone. It was at least a comfort to think that the child's father was a mighty emperor! She told her daughter she would say nothing; but would think what was best to be done.

Walgund felt strangely attracted by the child. He came to the tower almost every day to visit it and his daughter. On such occasions the queen would tell him how much she wished for a son-in-law and such a grandchild as this. She reminded him that they might in their old age fall a prey to the barbarous tribes in

the neighbourhood, if they had not some young, strong man to take their part, and added that in her opinion Hugdieterich would not be amiss. In short, the queen prepared the way so well that when Berchtung made his formal offer for the princess' hand, the king after slight hesitation gave his consent, on the sole condition that Hildburg was not averse to taking Hugdieterich as a husband. The queen then told her lord the whole story.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed, too much astonished to be angry.

Hugdieterich arrived soon afterwards, and was publicly married to the Lady Hildburg. After the wedding festivities were over, he set out for Constantinople, accompanied by his beautiful wife, and the little boy, who was named Wolfdieterich, in remembrance of his first adventure.

With the empress went Sabene, one of the notables of Thessalonica, as her father had much confidence in his wisdom, and wished him to be his daughter's counsellor in any matters of difficulty. He made himself so useful, that he soon became necessary to her, and at the same time won the confidence of honest Duke Berchtung so completely that he persuaded the emperor to make Sabene regent during their absence on a foreign campaign.

The high position he had gained through the duke's kindness, made the false-hearted man bolder and more self-confident than ever. One day he went so far as to speak unbecomingly to the empress. The noble lady reproved him severely, and he fell at her feet, begging her pardon, and entreating her not to tell the

emperor of his impertinence. She promised, but commanded him never more to appear in her presence.

When Hugdieterich returned victorious, Sabene was the first to meet him. He gave him an account of his stewardship, and at last remarked, as though by chance, that there was a great deal of dissatisfaction amongst the people regarding Wolfdieterich, the heir-apparent, who rumour said was not the king's child, but the son of an elf, or, worse still, of an alraun, who had been palmed off upon the royal family by a witch. Hugdieterich laughed at the story as at a nursery tale. The only effect it had on him was to make him take his son from under the charge of Sabene, and give him into the care of faithful Berchtung, that he might learn all knightly exercises with the duke's sixteen sons.

Time passed on, and the empress presented her husband with two other sons, named Bogen and Waxmuth, who were also sent to Berchtung to be educated. The old duke loved all his pupils dearly, but Wolfdieterich was his special favourite, for he showed himself full of every quality that makes a true knight and noble warrior. The busy emperor seldom found time to go to Lilienporte, the castle of Meran, and Hildburg was a still less frequent visitor, so that Wolfdieterich had grown accustomed to look upon Berchtung as his father, and the duchess as his mother. His brothers, Bogen and Waxmuth, had long since returned to Constantinople, where crafty Sabene did all that he could to gain their friendship and confidence. Their mother was sorry to see it; and fearing lest evil should come of it, she told her

husband all that had happened between them many years before. Hugdieterich's wrath blazed forth, and Sabene scarcely escaped alive. He fled from the country, and sought refuge amongst his kindred in the land of the Huns.

Hugdieterich, worn out by many anxieties and battles, grew old before his time. When he felt his end approach, he arranged all his affairs with the utmost care. He bequeathed to his eldest son Constantinople and the larger part of the empire, while the two younger sons were given kingdoms farther to the south, and the empress and Berchtung were to see the will carried out. But scarcely was the emperor laid in the grave, when the notables of the land met in council, and demanded the recall of Sabene, because otherwise they feared he might carry out his threat of bringing the wild Huns upon them. The empress did not feel herself strong enough to withstand the clamour of the nobles, so she sent for the traitor.

Wolfdieterich and his Eleven

No sooner had Sabene returned than he began to scheme again. He spread amongst the people his silly tales about the origin of Wolfdieterich. He said that the empress had been secretly wedded to an elf while she lived in that solitary tower; and that it was elfish spells that had prevented the wolves from tearing the child in pieces. The populace believed the story the more easily from its utter incredibility, and demanded that

Wolfdieterich should remain at Meran. Sabene even succeeded in making the royal brothers, Waxmuth and Bogen, believe his tale, and give him the power for which he hungered. Sure of his own position, he acted with the utmost harshness. He bade the empress leave the palace and go to her son at Meran. He only allowed her to take with her a maid-servant, a horse, and her clothes. Everything else that she possessed, whether through her father or her husband, had to be left behind. The two young kings did not interfere on her behalf, for Sabene had shown them that her treasures would be very useful to them in equipping an army, supposing Wolfdieterich and the Duke of Meran attacked them.

When Hildburg arrived at Hugelwarte, an outwork of Lilienporte, she was travel-stained and sorely spent. At first Duke Berchtung refused to admit her, because she had recalled Sabene contrary to his advice. But at last, filled with pity for the unhappy woman, he led her into the castle, and treated her there with royal honours. The duchess received her surrounded by seventeen young men, who all called her mother. The empress did not at once recognise her son, who was the tallest and stateliest amongst them; but as soon as each knew the other, Wolfdieterich, throwing himself into her arms, tried to comfort her by promising to restore her to her former rank and splendour.

Duke Berchtung at first counselled peace, because the position of the two kings seemed to him so strong and unassailable; but at length, carried away by his foster-son's enthusiasm, he not only gave his consent, but placed his sixteen

sons and their sixteen thousand followers at the disposal of the prince. It was settled, while the men were being called together, that the duke and Wolfdieterich should set out for Constantinople, and see whether they might not attain their end by peaceful means.

The day after their arrival, they met Sabene and the kings in council. Berchtung was received with all honour, while nobody seemed even to see his companion. When Wolfdieterich rose, and demanded his rightful share of the royal heritage, Bogen answered that a changeling had no right to any share; and Sabene added that he ought to apply to the alraun, his father, for a kingdom in the realms of hell. Wolfdieterich laid his hand on his sword; but his foster-father's words and looks of entreaty sufficed to calm him down and prevent any open expression of anger. The kings and Sabene did their utmost to persuade the duke to join their party, but in vain; and when the council broke up, the old man went away, hiding his displeasure as best he could. He and Wolfdieterich mounted their horses and returned to Lilienporte without loss of time.

After a few days' rest they set out again for Constantinople, but this time in battle array. On reaching the borders of Meran, they found the royal forces drawn up to meet them. As evening was closing in, they encamped in a wide valley surrounded on all sides by a forest. Next morning the troops rose refreshed, and each side made sure of victory.

The battle-song was now raised, and echoed amongst the

mountains like rolling thunder. Next instant the armies met. Wolfdieterich was always to be seen in front. All at once he turned to Berchtung, and said:

"Do you see Sabene and my brothers on yonder hill? I will go and see whether they or the alraun's son are the better men."

With these words, he set spurs to his horse and dashed through the enemy's ranks. Old Berchtung, who had vainly tried to restrain him, now followed with his sons and a small body of his men-at-arms.

As they neared the hill, they found themselves surrounded by the Greeks on every side. The carnage was terrible. Six of Berchtung's sixteen sons fell at his side, while a stone struck Wolfdieterich on the helmet, and stretched him senseless on the ground. But the old duke and his other sons picked him up, and brought him safely off the field. All night long they fled, and after resting only a few hours during the day, resumed their journey. On their arrival at Lilienporte, they found that many of their men had got there before them.

"We will await the traitors here," said Berchtung. "They may break their teeth on our stone walls, and then go away worse than they came. We have supplies enough to last four years, and can bid them defiance."

Soon after this, the enemy appeared before the fortress. Sabene demanded that the prince should be delivered up to them, and threatened that if this were refused he would burn the castle and all within it. The only answer made by the

besieged was a sortie, led by Wolfdieterich in person. He still was hopeful of victory, but numbers prevailed. He had to retreat, and with difficulty regained the fortress. From that day he lost the confidence and gaiety of youth, and became grave and silent; his trust in the sure success of a righteous cause was gone. He lost his faith in Divine justice, and said he had fallen a victim to the resistless power that men call Fate.

Sigeminne

The siege had already lasted three years, and yet there was no hope of an end. The food had grown scanty; and if the enemy chose to make famine their ally, the castle must finally capitulate. The duke vainly sought for some plan of deliverance. One day Wolfdieterich came to him, and said that he intended to slip out of the fortress by night, make his way through the enemy's camp, and go to Lombardy, there to ask the help of Ortnit, the powerful emperor of the West. The old man did his best to dissuade the lad, reminding him that their provisions would last yet a year, and that the enemy, already weakened by sickness, might raise the siege before long. The young hero was not to be held back: at midnight he took leave of his foster-father and his other faithful friends.

"May God protect you, my dear lord," said Berchtung, clasping him in his arms. "You will have to cross the deserts of Roumelia, which are uninhabited, save by wild beasts and

evil spirits. There you will find Rauch-Else, who lies in wait for young warriors. Beware of her, for she is a witch, cunning in enchantments. If you are fortunate enough to reach the emperor Ortnit, do not forget your trusty henchmen, me and my ten remaining sons."

So they parted. They arranged that the besieged should make a sally through the principal gate of the fortress, to draw off the enemy's attention to that quarter, while Wolfdieterich got away by a postern door at the back. He was nearly out of the enemy's camp when he was recognised. Immediately mounting his horse, he drew his sword and cut his way through their midst, and once in the dark forest beyond, he was safe from pursuit. All night long Wolfdieterich rode through the wood. He heard the were-wolves howling in the distance, but none came near to seek his life. As morning broke, he found himself by the side of a broad moorland lake. All sorts of strange creatures rose out of it, and sought to bar the road. Two of them he killed, but he let the others escape. He wandered three days in the wilderness, finding nothing for his horse or himself to eat. He shared the bread he had in his wallet with his steed. It was but a little at best; and the faithful creature was at last too exhausted to carry him farther, so he dismounted and led it by the bridle.

On the fourth evening, fatigue overpowered him so much that he was forced to rest. He lighted a fire with the brushwood scattered about. The warmth did him good, for a cold mist hung over the face of the earth. He and his horse quenched

their thirst at a neighbouring rill, after which he lay down, and making a pillow of his saddle, thought over his sad fate. Sleep was beginning to steal upon his senses, when he was suddenly roused by a noise in the dry grass. Something black, and horrible to look upon, crept nearer and nearer. It raised itself in the air; its height was appalling. It spoke to him, not with a human voice; the sound was more like the growling of an angry bear.

"How dare you rest here!" said the monster. "I am Rauch-Else (rough Alice), and this ground belongs to me; besides which, I have another and a wider realm. Get up, and go at once, or I will throw you into the quaking bog."

Wolfdieterich would willingly have obeyed, but he was too tired. He could not move. He therefore begged the bear-like queen to give him something to eat, telling her that his cruel brothers had deprived him of his inheritance, and that he was now starving in the desert.

"So you are Wolfdieterich," growled the bear-woman. "Well, Fate has marked you out to be my husband, so you may count upon my aid."

Upon which she gave him a juicy root, and scarcely had he eaten one mouthful when his courage returned, and his strength seemed tenfold what it had ever been before. It even came into his mind that he could conquer the Greek forces single-handed, and set his eleven faithful servants free. In obedience to Rauch-Else's command, he gave the rest of the root to his horse, which first smelt it carefully, and then ate eagerly. No sooner had it done

so, than it began to paw the ground, and neighed with eagerness to resume its journey.

"Speak, will you be my true love?" asked the bear-woman, coming up to the youth, and preparing to clutch him to her heart with her terrible claws.

"Keep back," he cried, drawing his sword. "Demon that you are, seek a husband in hell, where alone you will find a helpmeet worthy of you."

"Have I not fed and succoured you?" asked Rauch-Else; "was that done like a demon? I have long waited for you to come and free me from an evil spell. Love me, and save me."

It seemed to the warrior as if her voice had all at once grown soft and human in its tones.

"Yes, yes," he said, "if only you were not so rough and hairy."

He had hardly spoken, when the black fleece slowly slipped to her feet, and a beautiful woman stood before him, her brow encircled by a diadem, and her green silken garment confined at the waist by a jewelled belt. Her voice was sweet and thrilling as she repeated her former words.

"Speak, young hero, will you love me?"

His only answer was to clasp her in his arms and kiss her.

"You must know," she said, "that although Rauch-Else was my name here in the wilderness, I am really Sigeminne, queen of Old-Troja. Your 'yes' has set me free from the spell of the enchanter, so we can now set out for my country, of which you shall be king."

Full of joy and thankfulness, they started on their way, followed by Wolfdieterich's horse. At last they heard the sound of waves breaking upon the shore, to which they soon afterwards descended. There they found a curious vessel awaiting them. The prow was formed of a fish's head, large and pointed. At the helm stood a merman, whose outstretched arm was the handle by which the rudder, or fish's tail, was worked. Instead of sails, the vessel was rigged out with griffins' wings, the advantage of which was, that they enabled it to go against both wind and tide, when such a course was thought desirable. The merman was so marvellously fashioned out of cedar-wood from Mount Lebanon, that it could steer wherever the travellers wished without their help. There were other wonders on board the ship, such as a cap of darkness, a ring with a stone ensuring victory to the wearer, a shirt of palm-silk, and many other things. The shirt seemed as though it would only fit a little child; but when Sigeminne put it on her lover, it grew bigger and bigger, until it fitted him exactly.

"Take great care of it," she said, "and wear it whenever you are in any danger, for it will protect you alike from steel and stone, from fire and dragon's tooth."

Wafted by the griffins' wings, the vessel clove the western sea, swift as the wind, and soon brought the travellers to Old-Troja. There the people received their beloved queen with shouts of joy, and cheered loud and long when she introduced the stately warrior Wolfdieterich as her future husband. The marriage was solemnized with great festivities, and a life of joy began for the

new king. By the side of his fair wife he forgot all his misfortunes and sorrows, and, alas! even the Eleven Friends he had left in peril of their lives. Now and then, when he was alone, the memory of all that had come and gone would cross his mind like something he had dreamt, and then he would reproach himself with neglecting his duty; but Sigeminne had only to take his hand, and he once more forgot that honour and duty alike bade him be up and doing.

Once when he, his wife, and the whole court were out hunting, a wondrous stag with golden horns broke out of a neighbouring thicket. He did not seem to be afraid, but, after looking at the hunters, turned back to the wood.

"Up, good folk," cried Sigeminne. "Whoever kills that stag, and brings me the golden antlers, shall stand high in my favour, and receive a ring from my own hand."

A number of huntsmen started in pursuit, first among them Wolfdieterich. The stag led him by many devious paths, only to disappear at last. Wolfdieterich returned to the tents much disappointed. When he got there, he found all in confusion; for that terrible magician, Giant Drusian, followed by many armed dwarfs, had fallen on the camp during the absence of the king and his warriors, and had carried off the queen. No one knew where he had taken her to. Wolfdieterich was now as much alone in the world, and as wretched, as he had been that terrible day in the desert. One thought filled his mind—the thought of Sigeminne. He would seek her through the world; and if he could not find

her, he would die!

He exchanged his royal robes for a pilgrim's dress, and hid his sword in a hollow staff, which served to support him on his journey. Thus accoutred, he wandered through many lands, asking everywhere for the castle of Giant Drusian. At length he learnt from a tiny dwarf, that the man he sought lived in the lofty mountains far over the sea, and that many dwarfs owned him for their lord. He set out again, and journeyed on and on, till at length the castle came in sight. He sat down to rest by a spring, and gazed longingly at the place where, as he believed and hoped, he should find his wife. His fatigue was so great that he fell asleep, dreamt of her, and was happy in his dreams.

All at once he was wakened by a rough voice, and a blow on the ribs.

"What, ho! pilgrim," said the voice. "Have you snored long enough? Come home with me, and have some food. My wife wants to look at you."

Wolfdieterich sprang to his feet, and followed the giant who had wakened him so roughly, and who now strode before him to the castle. He knew that he had reached the end of his pilgrimage, and entered the wide hall with thanksgiving and joy.

There sat Sigeminne, her eyes red with weeping; and as she looked at him, he saw that she knew who he was. He pulled himself together with a violent effort not to betray his identity.

"There, wife," growled Drusian, "there's the priest you wanted to see, that he might speak to you about his religion. What a mite

he is, to be sure, and as dumb as a lizard into the bargain! There, bag-of-bones," he added, turning to the pilgrim, "sit down by the fire, and see if some of our good food will not warm your thin blood."

The pilgrim did as he was desired, for, anxious and excited as he felt, he was starving. Dwarfs brought in food and drink, and he ate till his hunger was satisfied. The giant questioned him up and down, and received short answers, some of them, it must be confessed, far enough from the truth!

As twilight deepened, Drusian seized the lady by the hand, and pulled her from her seat, saying, "There, you see the son of the alraun, who freed you from the bearskin, he will not succeed in freeing you from me a second time. He fears a broken skull too much. The term you asked for is over now, so come with me."

He would have dragged Sigeminne from the room, but the pilgrim had already thrown aside his disguise, and drawn his sword from the hollow staff.

"Back, monster," he shouted, "that is my wife." With these words he sprang upon the giant. The suddenness of the attack made the latter jump back, exclaiming, "Why, alraun, are *you* Wolfdieterich? If that is the case, we must have everything fair and in order. You must arm and fight with me—if you are brave enough, that is to say. Sigeminne shall be the wife of the conqueror."

The hero consented to fight the duel, and the dwarfs brought him three suits of armour to choose from. One was of gold, the

second of silver, and the third of iron, very heavy, but old and rusty. He chose the last, but kept his own sword. Drusian also put on his coat of mail, and caught up his battle-axe.

After some time, Wolfdieterich's shield was broken by a violent blow from his opponent's axe. The hero seemed lost; but avoiding the next blow, and grasping his sword with both hands, he struck so hard a stroke that the sharp blade cut deep down through neck and shoulder. Scarcely had the monster fallen, when the dwarfs swarmed round the victor with their small daggers and spears to avenge their master. The fine needle-points pierced the rings of his armour, but the palm-silk shirt protected the solitary warrior from every wound. At last he forced them back, and husband and wife were able to clasp each other's hands, and to assure one another of a love that would last till death.

"Let us away from this cursed house," cried the hero; "who can tell but the dwarfish rabble are spinning new toils for us."

They hastened out into the deserted court, and then sought a stable, in which they found two saddled horses. These they mounted, and rode away.

After a long and tiring journey, they reached Old-Troja, where the return of the queen and her brave husband was greeted with joy.

Sigeminne ruled her people with a gentle hand, but justly and firmly; no wonder, then, that they loved her. After her return, she was even sweeter and more thoughtful for others than she had ever been before; but she was pale and thin, and what was

worse, grew paler and thinner day by day. One evening, when she and her husband were sitting alone together, she raised her sweet face to his and said, "When I am gone, you must go back to your own country and people, for then you will be looked upon as a stranger and usurper here, and the land might be wasted by civil war."

The thought of her death cut him to the heart, but he strove to look cheerful for fear of distressing his wife. He redoubled his anxious care of her, but all in vain: her doom was sealed. He had been strong enough to conquer the giant and save his wife, but he was powerless to save her now. She died in his arms, and he laid her in her early grave.

The Knife Man

Once, when he was standing sadly by her last resting-place, he suddenly remembered that she had bidden him go back to his own country when she was dead; and then the thought of his mother and his Faithful Eleven rushed back into his mind. He also recollected that he had never carried out his plan of calling the Emperor Ortnit to their assistance.

"I shall never forget you, dear wife," he murmured, "but I should be unworthy of your great love for me if I did not at once set out to bring freedom to those who have been true to the death in their fidelity to me."

He turned away, and hastened to make ready for his journey.

He passed through many lands, rich and poor. One evening he saw a castle before him, and asked a passing traveller to whom it belonged.

"Sir," replied the man, crossing himself, "ride on quickly, if you be a Christian, for that stronghold is where the heathen king Beligan lives, with his daughter Marpilia, a maiden learned in magic arts. He slays every Christian he can catch, and sticks his head on a spike placed on the battlements for the purpose. Look, there is one place empty still; beware lest your head be sent to fill it."

The hero explained that he felt no fear of that, as his armour was good, and he must have sharp weapons who sought to pierce it. But the traveller assured him that the king so thoroughly understood the art of dagger-throwing, that none could escape from him alive.

Wolfdieterich and the man parted company. The former would have ridden past the castle, had not the owner come out to meet him, and invited him to spend the night with him; an invitation the hero was far too brave a man to decline. The daughter of his host, a young and beautiful girl, received him at the gate, and led him into the hall. While they supped together, Wolfdieterich, on being questioned, told them whence he came, and whither he was going; and Beligan saw from his answers that he was a Christian. The heathen king then informed his guest, with a diabolical smile, that he had come just in time to provide a head to make up the required number on the battlements.

Wolfdieterich understood what was meant, but shewing no signs of fear, he raised his goblet to his lips, and emptied it to the health of his host and his daughter.

Bedtime came, and Beligan, taking him aside, told him that he had found grace in the eyes of his daughter Marpilia, and that he might marry her if he liked, receiving both castle and kingdom as her dowry, on one condition—that he would worship Mahmet. Wolfdieterich asked for time to think over the proposal; but the heathen smiled, and said—

"You may have to-night to consider the plan; that is long enough."

He then offered him a goblet of wine, into which he had secretly thrown a powder.

"Drink, friend," he said, "and you will sleep long and soundly to-night."

The hero was on the point of obeying, when Marpilia, who had re-entered, snatched the goblet out of her father's hand, and emptying it on the floor, exclaimed,—

"Not so, father. I intend to teach the stranger better things to-night."

She led her guest to his room, and said,—

"I have saved you from a great danger. My father was about to give you a sleeping potion, that he might slip into your room in the night and cut off your head, as he has already done to many a Christian. I now offer you my hand and kingdom, if you will only pretend to follow our faith."

Wolfdieterich thought of Sigeminne, and turning to Marpilia did his best to convert her to his faith. They spent the whole night talking on these subjects.

The next morning Beligan came, and invited his guest to join him at breakfast, and after that, in a little game of throwing the dagger, explaining that such was their custom. As soon as breakfast was over, they went into the court, where the king's servants stood round them in a wide circle. The hero laid aside his armour and sword as he was desired, and received a buckler and three sharp and pointed daggers. The heathen took his stand opposite, armed in like manner. The latter flung the first dagger at his opponent's foot, and he avoided it by springing to one side.

"By the beard of the Prophet," cried the heathen, "who taught you that? Are you Wolfdieterich, from whom it is foretold that evil shall befall me?"

Wolfdieterich would not confess to his name, but stood ready again for the fight. The second dagger scratched his head, carrying off a bit of the scalp; the third he caught on his buckler.

It was now the hero's turn to throw. His first dagger pinned the heathen's left foot to the ground; the second scratched his side; but the third, which he flung with the cry, "I am Wolfdieterich!" struck him to the heart. He was now attacked on all sides, but succeeded in putting his opponents to flight. He then re-entered the castle, put on his armour, took his horse out of the stable, and was about to mount, when he suddenly saw that a wide lake surrounded the castle on every side, and a gale of wind was

blowing the great waves so high that there seemed no chance of escape. At the edge of the water stood Marpilia, describing circles in the air and on the ground with a magic wand, and murmuring to herself the while. Riding up to her, he caught her in his arms, and swung her before him on his horse.

"If I am to drown, witch, you shall not escape," he said.

With these words he spurred his horse into the wild waves, and saw that the waters stretched out farther and farther, until they seemed a sea. He looked around, and saw that only one chance was left him. He flung the witch-woman off his horse; instantly the storm ceased, the waters retired, and he was once more on dry land.

But Marpilia was not drowned. She appeared before him again in all her beauty, stretching out her arms as if to embrace him, but he threatened her with his drawn sword. Then she changed into a magpie, flew to the top of a high rock, and sought from thence to entangle him with new enchantments, each more terrible than the other. At last, thoroughly spent with fatigue, he exclaimed, "Help me, Thou Three in One, or I die."

Scarcely had he uttered the words when the witch vanished, the sun shone once more upon mount and vale, and before him lay the broad road that led to Lombardy.

After meeting with many adventures by land and water, he travelled through a wild mountain region, and there he fell in with a giantess, an old friend of his father, who received him very kindly, and told him, amongst other things, of the sad fate of

Ortnit and Liebgart. Although her tale diminished his hopes of help, he was yet determined to continue his journey. The giantess said it would take an eternity travelling as he did, horses were so slow! With that she picked up both horse and rider, and carried them pick-a-back on her broad shoulders three hundred and fifty miles in one day, over mountains, valleys and rivers, and set him down in the fair land of Lombardy.

The Lind-Worm

It was a beautiful moonlight night when Wolfdieterich reached Garden. He dismounted, and standing under the shadow of an olive-tree, he looked about him. He saw two women walking on the sea-shore. One of them was tall and stately. When she threw back her veil, he nearly uttered a cry of astonishment, she was so like Sigeminne. Had the grave given up its dead, or had some deceitful elf taken the beloved form to lead him into danger?

He stood breathless to listen, and heard Queen Liebgart, for it was she, complain to her serving-maid of the manifold sorrows and indignities she had been forced to endure.

"The cowardly vassals!" she said. "They have courage enough to frighten a weak woman, but no one dares to do the only thing that I desire on earth—to avenge the death of their king on the monster that killed him. And yet I have promised, although unwillingly, to give my hand to the true knight and hero that will do this thing!"

"There is only one man," said the maid, "who could do the deed, and that is the Greek Wolfdieterich, whose fame is spread abroad in every land."

"The avenger is come, great queen," said the hero, stepping out of the shade where he had stood. "I will venture my life to conquer the dragon."

The two women started back in alarm.

"It is Wolfdieterich!" cried the maid. "He once saved me from a band of robbers."

"Thanks, noble hero," said Liebgart, "and may Heaven protect you on your quest! But—the monster will take your life as it did my husband's. Nay, go your way in peace, and leave me to my fate."

But when the Greek showed her that his mind was firm, Liebgart gave him a ring which the dwarf had told her would bring good luck to the wearer, wished him all success, and then returned to Castle Garden.

Without more delay the hero turned his horse to the mountains, and made the best of his way to the lind-worm's hole, which at length he reached. He peeped into the dark cavern, and saw five dragons' heads staring and hissing at him. These were the young "worms"—the old one had gone out to seek for food. The hero was about to slay them there and then, but it suddenly occurred to him that it would be better if the old worm knew nothing of his coming, and it would be an easy task to kill the little ones when the mother was dead. So remounting his horse,

he set out in search of the monster. As he rode on slowly, he saw a beautiful child standing on a rock. It called to him,—

"You are come to revenge my son Ortnit; beware that you sleep not, for if you sleep my son will remain unrevenged, and you will fall a prey to the dragon."

"My good friend," laughed the hero, "you are too young to be a father. I advise you to look out for yourself. You would be a sweeter morsel for the monster than I!"

And setting spurs to his horse, he rode away laughing. Like Ortnit, he came first to the high cliffs, and then to the meadow, where clover grass and flowers grew in wonderful profusion. A linden-tree shaded part of it from the heat of the mid-day sun. The hero was tired after his long journey and wakeful night. He stretched himself in the shade to rest, while his horse grazed in the meadow. Fatigue, the fresh sweet air, and the song of the birds in the branches overhead, all combined to make him drowsy, so he gradually fell asleep.

Perfect peace reigned in the quiet spot. It seemed as though it might last for ever, but suddenly it was broken by a horrible hissing, a crashing of rocks and breaking of trees. The dreadful monster, the terror of the land, was drawing near. At the same moment Alberich exclaimed:

"Wake, noble hero; sleep no more; the lind-worm is upon you."

The dwarf repeated his warning several times in vain. The faithful horse galloped up to his master, and kicked him, but he

did not awake. It was not until the dragon gave utterance to a loud and hideous roar, that made the rocks crack and the mountains tremble, that the hero was at last aroused from his trance. He sprang to his feet and attacked the monster; but his weapons were all too weak for the work they had to do—they broke like reeds on the creature's hide, without doing it any injury. So he flung the handle of his broken sword in the monster's face, and commended his soul to God, for he was defenceless. The worm caught him up in the coils of its long tail, and at the same moment seized the horse in its great jaws. Then it bore its victims away to its den, and threw them down as food for its young. After which, it went away again in search of more food. The little dragons tried to devour Wolfdieterich, but could not, he was so well protected by his shirt of palm-silk, so they thrust him aside unconscious, and turned their attention to the horse, which they soon disposed of.

In the middle of the night Wolfdieterich came to himself, and began to look about him carefully. The moonlight penetrated the cavern, and showed him at a little distance something that shone bright red. He moved towards it cautiously for fear of waking the dragons, and found that the object which had attracted his eye was a huge carbuncle in a sword-hilt. He at once knew that this must be the sword Rosen, and took possession of it, as well as of the rest of Ortnit's armour that he found lying uninjured amongst other coats of mail, which however were all more or less broken. With the armour he found a ring. This he put upon his

finger. His preparations were no sooner completed than daybreak came, and with it the old lind-worm. He at once attacked her, and, thanks to the magic sword, slew her and all her brood after a hard struggle. Thoroughly exhausted, he threw himself under a tree, where he lay panting and breathless. There Alberich found him, and revived him with food and wine.

Before the victorious hero set out on his return to Garden, he went back into the dragon's den to get the heads of the monsters; but when he had cut them off, he found that they were much too heavy to carry, so he contented himself with taking their tongues. These he put in a leather bag that one of Alberich's dwarfs brought him for the purpose, and then began his journey, which was made longer and more wearisome by having to be done on foot. He often lost his way amongst the wild mountains, and did not reach his destination for many days.

When he got to Garden, he found the castle full of feasting and mirth. Wondering much, he went to a pious hermit who lived near, and asked him the meaning of what was going on. From him he learnt that the Burgrave Gerhart had slain the lind-worm, and was to be married to beautiful Liebgart that very evening. Wolfdieterich then begged the holy man to lend him priestly garments, and having received those that had formerly belonged to brother Martin, the hermit's predecessor, he put them on over the armour he had found in the dragon's cave, and repaired to the castle.

He entered the great hall, and saw Burgrave Gerhart,

nicknamed “Hawk’s Nose,” seated next to the pale queen, who, with her maidens, filled the glasses of the guests. Above the Burgrave’s chair were the dragons’ heads, symbols of his victory. When the queen saw the pretended hermit, she took him a cup of wine, which he emptied at a draught, and then gave back, after having slipped into it the ring she had given him on the evening he started on his quest. Liebgart did not notice the ring till she had returned to her seat by Gerhart’s side. Then she trembled violently, but forcing down her emotion, she desired the hermit to approach, and tell her from whom he got the ring.

“Lady, you gave it me yourself,” he said, throwing aside his disguise.

Every eye was fixed on him as he stood in the middle of the hall, clad in Ortnit’s wondrous armour, and looking more like a god than a mortal man. When, advancing to the queen, he laid her husband’s ring in her hand, and told her how and where he had found it, many voices cried, “Hail to the avenger of our king, the slayer of the dragon and its brood! Hail to the new king of Lombardy!”

Burgrave Gerhart was not to be put aside so easily. He pointed to the dragons’ heads as proofs of his right; but when Wolfdieterich produced the tongues from his wallet, there was no more to be said but for Burgrave Gerhart to beg the hero’s pardon. This he received on condition of swearing fealty.

Wolfdieterich was now proclaimed king of Lombardy, and was told that he was expected to marry the queen.

"My lords," he said, "as ruler of this kingdom, I am also the servant of my people, and am bound to labour for their welfare. But as regards personal matters, such as the choice of a wife, I must be free, and the queen must also be free to choose as she lists. She is yet mourning the loss of her first husband. But if she holds me worthy to succeed him, and thinks that my love and reverence will comfort her for his loss, I offer her my hand for life."

Liebgart, remembering what Ortnit had said to her, placed her hand in the hero's, and was married to him before long.

Wolfdieterich was no longer the impetuous boy who had left Lilienporte, but a man who could act with wisdom, prudence and forethought. He felt that his first duty was to restore peace and quiet to Lombardy, and that only after that was done would he be at liberty to consult his own wishes, and start to the assistance of his faithful servants. A year was spent in this labour, and then he told his wife that he must go to Lilienporte. She wept and said that she feared lest, like Ortnit, he should never return, but in the same breath confessed that he was right, and helped him to make ready for his journey and that of his army, which was to number sixty thousand men.

The Eleven

Winds and waves were in their favour, and the army landed at a short distance from Constantinople. Whilst the men encamped

in a wood, the king set out in peasant's clothes to pick up all the news he could learn. After spending hours wandering about the city, and hearing nothing that was of any use to him, he chanced to meet Ortwin, a gaoler, and a former acquaintance of his. The man carried a basket filled with black bread. The hero went to him and asked him to give him a loaf for Wolfdieterich's sake. The man looked at him keenly, and recognised him.

"Ah, sire," he said, "things have gone badly here with us. The good old empress died during the siege of Lilienporte. When the fortress capitulated, the noble duke Berchtung and his sons were put in irons and flung into a dark and dismal dungeon. Death soon put an end to the old man's pain, but the ten young lords are still kept in strict confinement, and I may bring them no better food than a daily supply of this black bread and water."

Wolfdieterich was miserable when he thought that he was not without guilt with respect to his mother and his old friend. He could do nothing for them now, but he might still do something for the ten faithful servants who yet remained. He arranged with Ortwin that they should have better food, and should be cheered by the hope of a speedy deliverance. The old gaoler went on his way, and the king returned to his people.

He found his men already under arms, for they told him that Sabene had discovered not only that they were there, but what had brought them.

The armies met, and the battle raged long and furiously, without either side getting the better of the other. But at last

the fortune of the day turned. The citizens of Constantinople rose in revolt against the tyranny that had ground them down so long, hastened to the prison, and set Berchtung's ten brave sons at liberty. Having done this, they put themselves under their command, and marched to the assistance of Wolfdieterich. It was a glorious victory. The hero was proclaimed emperor on the battle-field.

Soon after their return to the capital, Sabene and the royal brothers were brought before their judges. The first was sentenced to death, and was at once led away to instant execution; the death of the two latter was likewise demanded by both people and army, and Wolfdieterich knew that they were guilty of causing the death of their mother and that of old Berchtung, and had brought upon him all the troubles and difficulties of his early youth. Yet he could not decide what was best to be done, and reserved judgment until the following day.

That night, as the victor slept the sleep of the just, his mother appeared to him in a dream, saintlike and beautiful in aspect. She said: "Spare my children, and my blessing shall rest on thee."

And immediately Berchtung appeared at her side: "God has mercy upon His erring children; do not shed thy brothers' blood."

As the hero gazed at the apparitions in intense amazement, Liebgart joined them, and said gently: "Hast thou not gained kingdom, glory, and me, through the ill deeds of thy brothers? Return them, therefore, good for evil."

Morning broke—the figures vanished, leaving Wolfdieterich

resolved what he should do. He called the nobles together, and before them all pardoned Bogen and Waxmuth, restored them their dignities and lands, to be held thenceforth as great fiefs under him. At first no one approved of his clemency, but on hearing his explanation all were silenced.

As soon as his arrangements were completed, Wolfdieterich returned with his army to Lombardy, and was welcomed by Liebgart with the greatest joy. After resting there for awhile, he, his princes, and their followers went to Rome, where he was crowned emperor. At the feast which followed the coronation he appointed the ten sons of good Duke Berchtung to be rulers of great fiefs. Herbrand, the eldest, received Garden and its territory. Through his son Hildebrand, of whose valiant deeds we shall hear later on, he was the ancestor of the Wülfings. Hache was given Rhineland, with Breisach as his capital. His son Eckehart was the protector of the Harlungs, Imbreke, and Fritele. He is celebrated in song and story as the trusty Eckehart. Berchther, the third son, succeeded his father at Meran. The other sons were as well endowed, but not as famous as their brothers, so their names and possessions need not be told.

Wolfdieterich and Liebgart had a son, whom they named Hugdieterich after his grandfather. He grew up to be a mighty hero, and was the father of a valiant race.

II
KING SAMSON (SAMSING)

In the good old times a mighty yarl (earl) ruled over the rich town and district of Salern, which was one of the largest fiefs of a great kingdom. The yarl governed so strictly and justly that peace and plenty cheered the hearts of all that dwelt in the district. He kept up a large army to defend his coasts from the onslaught of the Vikings, who often descended on them in great numbers in hopes of plunder.

Amongst the followers of the yarl was the warrior Samson, nicknamed "The Black," because of his coal-black hair and beard. He was always the first in battle, and had even been known to disperse whole battalions with his single arm. He was terrible to look upon. His dark eyes flashed under heavy beetling brows. His bull-neck and powerful limbs bore witness to his remarkable strength. No one could withstand him in battle. He hewed men down, whether armed or unarmed, with as great ease as if they were made of touchwood. In private life, on the other hand, he was gentle and kindly, unless contradicted; then, indeed, he would keep silence, but would none the less carry out his own will, regardless of the cost to others. As can be readily imagined, few people ventured to oppose him without reason.

One day the yarl, who had just been made king, was sitting at a feast in celebration of a great victory. His warriors were round

him sharing in his joy, Samson in their midst. Suddenly he rose, and, taking a cup of wine in his hand, offered it to the king, and said, with all courtesy:

"Sire, many a victory have I helped to gain for you, and now I come to offer you this cup and to ask you to grant me a boon."

"Speak on, brave hero," answered the king, "and tell me what you desire. Hitherto you have asked no reward for your great deeds of valour. What you already have was given of my good will, unasked by you. So demand what you like, I can deny you nothing."

"Good, my lord," said Samson. "I do not want any more castles or lands, I am rich enough; but I am very solitary at home, now that my mother has grown old and cross. Your daughter Hildeswid is a sweet little thing, and I should much like to make her my wife. Now you know how you can pleasure me by granting this request."

Rodgeier was so astonished at this address that he nearly let the cup fall.

"You are a famous warrior," he said; "but the maiden is of royal birth, and only a king can lead her home. You are in her service as well as mine. So take this plate of sweetmeats and bear it to her in the women's house. Then come back here, and drown all memory of your strange request in a bowl of good wine."

Samson took up the sweetmeats silently, and bore them to the princess, who was busy embroidering with her maids. He placed the dish before her, saying,—

"Eat, sweet one, for I bring you good news. You are to follow me to my home, and live there as my good wife. Dress now, and bid one of your maidens come with you."

On seeing the girl's hesitation, he added,—

"If you do not go willingly, you will force me to kill the yarl, and burn the palace, with all that are in it."

He looked so fierce and grim as he spoke, that Hildeswid trembled with fear, and obeyed him without a word.

He took her by the hand and led her down to the court, where a groom was holding his horse in readiness. In the clear light of day, and in the presence of many watchmen, none of whom dared remonstrate, Samson placed the princess before him on the saddle, and rode away with her into the wood and towards his home. When he reached his dwelling the door was locked, and he knocked so thunderously that the sound was heard to a great distance. No answer. He knocked again and again. A hoarse voice at last was heard from within, proclaiming that the door should not be opened whilst the owner of the house was from home.

"Mother," cried Samson, "pull back the bolts, for it is I—your son—I have brought you a princess to be your daughter, and to tend you in your old age."

The door opened, creaking and groaning, as though unaccustomed to move on its hinges, and a thin old woman came out on the threshold, dressed in rags.

"What?" she cried. "Do you bring guests with you? That woman in her grand clothes, her maid, and an idle groom. How

could you do it, son? You know how poor we are;" and she looked up at her tall son with a cunning leer.

"But, mother," said the warrior, "where is the gold I sent you? Where are the servants I gave you? And what have you done with the gorgeous raiment I sent to clothe you?"

"I hid the gold away in my chest," answered the old woman; "for one never knows whether one may not become a pauper in one's old age. I dismissed the servants you gave me very soon, for I thought they would have eaten me out of house and home; and as for the clothes, I have laid them aside to wait for better times."

"Ah well, mother," said Samson, "if that sort of thing makes you happy, you can do as you like with your own; but now open the door and let us in. We are tired after our long ride, and would fain have a good dinner."

They went into the house and sat down. The old woman placed before them a hunch of rye bread and a jar of water. Samson would have made but a poor meal, had his groom not brought out a cut of venison and some wine, with which he had taken care to provide himself before leaving the palace. After he had stilled his hunger, Samson begged his lady's permission to go out and see if he could not find a stag to store the larder. The groom went down to the cellar, where he was fortunate enough to find a cask of ale; and the old mother withdrew to her own apartments, leaving the princess alone with her maid.

The wide hall was dark and eerie, and full of strange flickering shadows, that grew more mysterious and ghost-like as the

evening closed in, and the owls might be heard hooting in the pine-trees near. Hildeswid could bear it no longer. She sent her maid to ask the old woman to come back to the hall; but she did not, nor did the maid return. The poor child's terror was so great that she determined to go in search of her mother-in-law.

She wandered through one empty, dreary, dusty room after another, till at last she entered a large vaulted chamber, and there she saw the old woman crouching over a great chest full of gold and precious stones, muttering to herself. Approaching her, Hildeswid heard her gloating over her treasures, and saying how much they would be increased when she added the princess's ornaments to the number, which could so easily be done by strangling the girl. Hildeswid uttered a low cry of terror, and the old woman looked round. Then, with a shriek of "thief, robber, wretch!" she threw herself upon the unhappy child, and tried to throttle her; but at that moment Samson came in and stopped her.

"Mother," he said, "you cannot remain here. I will take you and your treasure to my other house on the edge of the wood. There you can live in peace."

Meanwhile King Rodgeier had discovered that his daughter had been carried off. He sent out one body of his men-at-arms after another to fetch her home; but they all failed, and he prepared to go himself.

Riding along towards Samson's grange, he and his men saw a little house by the side of a great wood. They entered, and asked the old woman they met in the house to tell them where Samson

lived. She denied that she had ever heard of such a man; but when the king offered her a handful of gold, she at once pointed out the path that led to his grange, and even went a bit of the way to see that they made no mistake.

The king and his fifteen companions had not gone very far when they met the hero. His helmet and armour were coal black, like his beard and hair; his steed was also black, but on his shield was emblazoned a lion on a golden field. There was a sharp, short fight in which Samson came off conqueror.

When the battle was over, he set out for his mother's house. On entering the hall he found her there busily counting the gold the king had given her.

"Mother," he said, "for the sake of that gold you betrayed your own son, and you richly deserve to die; but as you are my mother, I cannot punish your treachery."

The old woman went on counting her hoard as calmly as before.

"Mother," he began again, "you betrayed your son for gold, and you should die by my dagger; but you are my mother, and I cannot slay you. Now listen to me: take your gold and leave this place, lest harm befall you."

The old woman poured her treasures into a huge sack, and answered,—

"This should all have been yours, if you had not brought that little fool into the house. I will go, and take my wealth to the king."

"I have slain him and his men," said Samson quietly; but he looked so stern that his mother changed colour, and muttered,—

"Very well then, I will go and seek an heir who will give both me and my treasures house-room."

Three times Samson's hand sought sword and dagger, but he mastered his anger, and rode away through the dark pine forest to his home.

When he got there, he found Hildeswid hard at work with her maidens.

"Wife," he said, going up to her, "my mother betrayed me for love of gold—my sword and dagger both thirsted for her blood—but I would not, could not slay her. If *you* are false to me—then—they *must* do their work."

He looked terrible in his wrath, but she took off his helmet and coat of mail, kissed him and led him to his seat. And he at once grew gentle, and told her that he wanted to win glory and honour for her sake, and that he hoped soon to see her acknowledged queen of her father's realm.

When the death of Rodgeier was made known in Salern by the only one of his men who had escaped to tell the tale, a Thing was summoned in order that a new ruler might be chosen. The votes were all in favour of Brunstein, brother of the late king, a man of great wisdom in counsel, and a lover of justice. There would now have been peace in the realm, had it not been for Samson, who made raids into the land and carried off cattle and supplies. So Brunstein called together all the bravest warriors of his own

and other lands, and made them lay their hands in his and swear to take Samson alive or dead, or themselves die in the attempt. Then, led by the king, they set out and rode over mountains and plains and through the dark forest, and all without finding the object of their search. One evening they reached a strong fortress, and being very tired, rested there for the night. After supper they went to bed and slept. Every one slept, even the guards, when they had carefully locked and bolted the great gates.

That night Samson came. Finding he could not break the gates, he set fire to them, and while they were still burning, pulled them down, and leaped into the place. The watchmen awoke and blew their horns; but as there were many thatched roofs within the walls, all of which caught fire, the king and his men naturally thought a large army had broken in upon them, and were filled with terror. The gigantic figure of Black Samson appearing now here, now there, amongst the flames, added to their fear, and all that were left of them took refuge in flight.

The king, followed by six faithful attendants, made his way into the forest, and after riding a long time came in sight of a goodly grange. He entered, and found that the mistress of the house was his niece Hildeswid. He asked after Samson, but she said he was out. He then begged her to leave her husband and go with him; but she refused, advising him to go away as quickly as he could, lest he should fall into his enemy's hands.

Brunstein confessed that she was right, and took his departure, but it was even then too late. Samson had returned, and, seeing

them, at once set out in pursuit. No courage or strength, however great, could avail against his terrible arm. Brunstein and five of his warriors fell never to rise again, while the sixth got away with great difficulty and not without severe wounds. Samson started in pursuit. When he got out of the wood, he saw thirty horsemen galloping towards him. On their banner, a lion was displayed on a golden field.

"So, ho," cried the hero, "you are Amelungs. Welcome, Uncle Dietmar. I rejoice to see you and your men."

When they had rested and refreshed themselves in Samson's grange, Dietmar explained, that having heard that his nephew was outlawed and in need of help, he had come to visit him and see whether he could be of any use. Samson was much pleased, and announced his intention of taking the open field now that he was no longer alone in the world. So he and his companions set out next morning. No one ventured to oppose him, and he soon had so large a district under his command that he was able to take up the powers and dignity of duke. After that he made his way towards Salern, and sent on messengers to desire the citizens to elect him king, under pain of having their town and possessions burnt about their ears.

After much conferring together, the burghers came to the conclusion that they could not do better than obey; for while Samson had been their friend, their town had been more flourishing than at any other time. So they sent to beg him to come and rule over them.

When the hero found that all was going as he wished, he sent for his wife, and, side by side, they rode into Salern, where they were received with acclamation.

The new ruler governed with a strong hand, and administered justice equally to all, both high and low. He showed a grateful remembrance of every kindness he had met with in his adversity, and kept peace on his borders. He grew old in the punctual fulfilment of these duties; and when he felt that he was no longer strong enough to do the work alone, he appointed his eldest son to be his assistant and successor. But he did not like it to be supposed that he was too old and weak to be of use; and so when his second son asked him what share he was to have in the royal heritage, he answered him nothing, but called together the whole army and made them an address.

He told them that when he was young every one had sought to do great deeds, but now people had grown lazy. The long peace, that had brought material blessing on the realm, had also brought the curse of a love of ease and pleasure; and for fear this evil should increase, and the country become an easy prey to some greedy neighbour, he summoned every warrior to appear before him in three months' time, each accompanied by his men, and bearing a courageous heart within his breast, for he was going to lead them against a powerful foe.

The same day that Samson made this announcement to his army, he wrote a letter to the proud yarl Elsung of Bern (Verona), a man of about his own age, and with an equal love of great and

heroic deeds. In this letter he demanded that Elsung should pay him tribute as his liege lord, and should give his daughter, Odilia, to his second son. All this he demanded as a right, due from a vassal to his king.

When the yarl read the letter, he was very angry, and made immediate preparations for war. He began by ordering five of Samson's ambassadors to be hung on the spot, and the sixth to be sent back to his master with his tongue cut out.

No sooner were the three months over than King Samson started for Bern at the head of his men.

The armies met, and there was a great battle. The slaughter on either side was hideous. At length Samson's wondrous strength enabled him to slay the yarl, and gain the victory. The Bernese, seeing that their ruler was dead, thought it most prudent to choose Samson for their king, and thus put an end to all ill-feeling between the two nations.

When this business was settled, the victor sent for the yarl's daughter, Odilia, and told her that he intended her to be the wife of his second son, to whom he was going to make over her father's realm. The maiden wept, and said that she could not marry so soon after her father's death; but Samson's rage at meeting with contradiction was so terrible, that the girl in mortal fear consented to wed the prince. His berserker wrath appeased by her obedience, the king at once regained his usual genial manner, kissed her, and assured her of his protection.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.