

NORMAN MACLEOD

THE GOLD THREAD: A
STORY FOR THE YOUNG

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TO MY CHILDREN

I dedicate this story to you, because it was for you I first wrote it, and to you I first read it among the green hills of Moffat. It was afterwards printed in *Good Words*, and now you see it again appears as a little book for other children, who, I hope, will like it as much as you do.

I wish to help and encourage you, and all who read this story, to learn the great lesson which it is intended to teach; that lesson is, that we should always trust God and do what is right, and thus hold fast our gold thread in spite of every temptation and danger, being certain that in this way only will God lead us in safety and peace to His home.

Now, God gives each of you this gold thread to hold fast in your own house or in school, in the nursery or in the play-ground, on every day and in every place. His voice in your heart, and in His Word, will also tell you always what is right, if you only listen to it. You, too, will be constantly tempted in some way or other to give up your gold thread, and to be selfish, disobedient, lazy,

or untruthful. Many things, in short, will tempt you to do your own will rather than God's will.

You already know, and I hope you will always love and remember, those true stories in the Bible about the good men of the olden time, whose lives are there written. Now, what shewed that they were good? It was this, that *they trusted God, and did what was right*. If they ever let this their gold thread go, they lost their way and became unhappy; but when they held it fast, it led them in a way of peace and safety. To see how true this is, you have only to recall such stories as those of Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Job, Caleb and Joshua, Samuel, David and Jonathan, Elijah and Elisha, Hezekiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and his three companions, &c., &c., with those told you in the Book of Acts, not to mention the history of Jesus Christ, the perfect example for us all.

That you, my dear children, may be "followers of those who through faith and patience now inherit the promises," and thus be "followers of God as dear children," is the constant prayer of your mother, and of your father,

NORMAN MACLEOD.

CHAPTER I

THE WANDERER—WOLF THE SWINEHERD

ONCE upon a time, a boy lost his way in a vast forest that filled many a valley, and passed over many a hill, a rolling sea of leaves for miles and miles, further than the eye could reach. His name was Eric, son of the good King Magnus. He was dressed in a blue velvet dress, with a gold band round his waist, and his fair locks in silken curls waved from his beautiful head. But his hands and face were scratched, and his clothes torn with the briars, as he ran here and there like one much perplexed. Sometimes he made his way through tangled brushwood, or crossed the little grassy plains in the forest, now losing himself in dark ravines, then climbing up their steep sides, or crossing with difficulty the streams that hurried through them. For a long time he kept his heart up, and always said to himself, "I shall find it, I shall find it;" until, as the day advanced, he was wearied and hungry; and every now and then he cried, "Oh, my father! where is my father! I'm lost! I'm lost!" Or, "Where, oh, where is my gold thread!" All day the forest seemed to him to be very sad. He had never seen it so gloomy. There was a strange sadness in the rustle of the leaves, and a sadness in the noise of the streams. He did not

hear the birds sing as they used to do. But he heard the ravens croak with their hoarse voice, as their black forms swept along the precipices which here and there rose above the trees. The large hawks, too, always appeared to be wheeling over his head, pausing, and fluttering as if about to dart down upon him. Why was he so sad? Why was he so afraid?

But on Eric journeyed, in the hope of finding his way out of the boundless forest, or of meeting some one who would be his guide. At last, the sun appeared to be near its setting, and he could see the high branches of the trees, shining like gold, as its last rays fell upon them. But underneath, the foliage was getting darker and darker; the birds were preparing to sleep, and everything soon became so still that he could hear his steps echoing through the wood, and when he stopped, he heard his heart beating, or a leaf falling; but nowhere did he see a house, and no human being had he met since morning. Then the wind suddenly began to rise, and he heard it at first creeping along the tree-tops like a gentle whisper, and by and by to call louder and louder for the storm to come. Dark clouds gathered over the sky, and rushed along chased by the winds, that were soon to fight with the giant trees.

At last, he sat down at the root of a great old oak, burying his face in his hands, not knowing what to do. He then tried to climb the tree, in order to spend the night among its branches, in case wild beasts should attack him. But as he was climbing it, he heard some one singing with a loud voice. Listening attentively, and looking eagerly through the leaves, he saw a boy apparently older

than himself, dressed in rough shaggy clothes, made from skins of wild animals. His long matted hair escaped over his cheeks from under a black bearskin cap. With a short thick stick he was driving a herd of swine through the wood. "Hey there, you black porker!" cried the boy, as he threw a stone at some pig which was running away. "Get along, you lazy long-snout!" he shouted to another, as he came thump on its back with his cudgel. And then he sung this song with a loud voice which made the woods ring:—

"Oh, there's nothing half so fine,
As to drive a herd of swine,
And through the forest toddle,
With nothing in my noddle,
But rub-a-dub, rub-dub, hey-up, halloo!

"When I wish to have some fun,
Then I make the porkers run,
Till they gallop, snort, and wheeze,
Among the leafy trees;
Oh, rub-a-dub, rub-dub, hey-up, halloo!

"How their backs begin to bristle,
When I shout aloud and whistle!
How they kick at every lick
That I give them with my stick!
Oh, rub-a-dub, rub-dub, hey-up, halloo!"

"Get along, you rascals," cried the savage-looking herd, "or I'll kill and roast you before your time." But soon the herd, with his swine, were concealed from Eric's sight by the wood; though he still heard his "rub-a-dub" chorus, to which he beat time with a sort of rude drum, made with a dried skin and hoop. Eric determined to make his acquaintance, or at all events to follow him to some house; so he descended from the tree, and ran off in the direction from which he heard the song coming. He soon over-took him.

"Hollo!" said the wild-looking lad, with as much astonishment as if Eric had fallen from the clouds: "Who? where from? where to?" "I have lost my way in the wood," said Eric, "and want you to guide me." "To Ralph?" asked the swineherd. "Ralph! pray, who is he?" "Master, chief, captain, everything, everybody," replied the young savage. "I will go anywhere for shelter, as night is coming on; but I will reward you if you bring me to my father's home." "Who is your father, my fine fellow?" inquired the swineherd, leaning on his stick. "The king," replied Eric. "You lie, Sir Prince! Ralph is king." "I speak the truth, swineherd." The swineherd by this time was examining Eric's dress with an impudent look. "Pay me now," said he; "give me this gold band, and I will guide you." "I cannot give you this gold band, for my father gave it to me, and I have lost enough to-day. By the by, did you see a gold thread waving anywhere among the trees?" "A gold thread! what do you mean? I saw nothing but pigs until I saw you, and I shall treat you like a pig, d'ye hear? and lick you

too, for I have no time to put off. So give me your band. Come, be quick!" said he, with his fierce face, and holding up his stick as he came up to Eric. "Keep off, swineherd; don't touch me!" "Don't touch you! why shouldn't I touch you? Do you see this stick? How would you like to have it among your fine curls, as I drive it among the pigs' bristles?" And he began to flourish it over his head, and to press nearer and nearer. "Once, twice, when I say thrice, if you do not unbuckle, I shall save you the trouble, and leave you to the wild beasts, who would like a tender bit of prince's flesh better than pork. Come; once! twice!" Eric was on his guard, and said, "I shall fight you, you young robber, till death, rather than give you this band,—so keep off." "Thrice!" shouted the herd, and down came his thick cudgel, which he intended should fall on Eric's head. But Eric sprang aside, and before he could recover himself, dashed in upon him, tripped him up, and threw him on the grass, seizing him by the throat in a moment. The herd, in his efforts to get out of Eric's grasp, let go his cudgel, which Eric seized, and held over his head. "Unless you promise, Master Swineherd, to leave me alone, I may leave *you* alone with the wild beasts." "You are stronger than I thought," said the herd. "Let me up, or I shall be choked. Let me up, I say, and I promise to guide you." "I shall trust you," said Eric, "though you would not trust me. Rise!" So the herd rose, and picked up his cap, but Eric would not give him his stick until he guided him to some house. "Come along," said he, sulkily. "What is your name?" asked Eric. "They call me Wolf. I killed a wolf once with my boar-spear."

"Why, Wolf, did you try to kill me?" "Because I wanted your gold belt." "But it is a great sin to rob and kill." "Other people rob me, and would kill me too, if I did not take care of their pigs," said Wolf, carelessly. "You should fear God, Wolf." "I fear that name truly, for Ralph always swears by it when he is in a rage. But I do not know what it means." "Oh, Wolf, surely your father and mother told you about God, who made all things, and made you and me; God, who loves us, and wishes us to love Him, and to do what is right?" "I have no father or mother," replied Wolf, "nor brothers or sisters, and I do not know God. No one cares for me but my pigs, and so I sleep with them, and eat with them." "Poor fellow!" said Eric with a look of kindness, "I am sorry for you. Here is all the money I have. Take it. I wish to shew you that I have no ill-will to you;" and Eric gave him a gold coin. Wolf gave a grunt like one of his pigs, and began his song of "Rub-a-dub." "No one ever gave me money before," remarked Wolf almost to himself, as he examined the coin on his rough hand, which looked like tanned leather. "How much is this?" inquired Wolf. Eric explained its value. The herd was astonished, and began to think what he could purchase with it. "It would buy a large pig," he said. He seemed very anxious to conceal the coin, and so he hid it in the top of his hairy cap. "See that tall tower," said Wolf, "which looks like a rock above the trees; that is the only house near for twenty miles round. You can reach it soon; and when you do reach it," said Wolf, speaking low, as if some one might hear him, "take my advice, and get away as fast as you can from

my master Ralph, for"—and Wolf gave a number of winks, as much as to say, I know something. "What do you mean?" asked Eric. "Oh, nothing, nothing; but take Wolf's advice, and say to Ralph you are a beggar. Put the gold band in your pocket, and swear to remain with him, but run off when you can. Cheat him, that's my way." "It is not my way," replied Eric, "and, come what may, never can be, for a voice says to me,

"Better to die
Than ever to lie."

"Ha! ha!" said Wolf; "I wish you lived with Ralph. He would teach you another lesson, my lad." "I would rather that I had you, Wolf, to live in my house. I would be kind to you, and help you to be good, and tell you about God, who lives in the sky." "And is that He who is speaking? Listen!" Thunder began to mutter in the clouds. "Yes, it is He," replied Eric; "and if you will only listen, you can also hear Him often speak with a small, still voice in your heart." "I never heard Him," replied Wolf; "but I cannot stay longer with you, for my pigs will wander: there is a black rascal who always leads them astray. Now, king's son, give Wolf the stick; it is all he has." "Here it is to you, and I am sure you will not use it wrongly; you will try and be good, Wolf? for it will make you happy." "Humph," said Wolf, "I am happy when I get my pigs home, and Ralph does not strike me. But I must away, and see you don't tell any one you gave me money. They

would rob me." And away he ran among the trees in search of his pigs, while Eric heard his little drum, and his song of "Rub-a-dub, halloo!" die away in the distance. Another loud peal and flash of lightning made Eric start, and off he ran towards a light which now beamed from the tower. But he thought to himself, "I am much worse than that poor Wolf, for I knew what was right, and did not do it. I heard the voice, but did not attend to it. Oh, my father, why did I not obey you!"

CHAPTER II

THE ROBBER'S TOWER

Sometimes he lost sight of the light, and again he caught it, till it became brighter and brighter, and very soon he came to a high rock, on the top of which was perched a tall, dark tower. After groping about, he found a narrow path that led up to the tower, from one of the windows of which the light was brightly shining. He ascended a flight of steep steps till he reached a massive door covered with iron. He knocked as loud as he could, when a large dog began barking furiously inside, and springing up to the door, as if it would tear it down. Then a gruff voice called out of a window over the door, "Who is there? Who disturbs me in this way?" The little boy replied, "Please, sir, I am Eric, son of King Magnus, and I have lost my way in this wood." "The son of the king, are you?" asked the voice. "That is a grand joke! Let me have a sight of you." Then the window was shut, and he heard footsteps coming tramp, tramp, down the stairs, and the voice said to the dog, "Lie down, hound, and don't be greedy! You would not eat a young prince, would you? Lie down, Tuscar!" The door was then opened by a fierce-looking man, with a long beard. The man bid him enter, and examined him about himself

and his journey. Eric answered truly every question. Then the man rang a bell for an old woman who lived in the house, and bid her take the boy with her, and give him his supper. The old woman looked very ugly and very cross, and led him up, up, a great number of dark, gloomy stairs, until she reached a small room, with a bed and table in it, where she bade Eric wait till she brought him supper. The big hound followed them, and stayed in the room while the woman went away. Eric was at first afraid of the dog, he was so large and wild-looking, but he came and laid his head on his knee, and he scratched his ears, and patted him, and was very kind to him. The supper came, and the boy managed to keep a few bits of meat out of his own supper for the dog, and when the old woman went out of the room, he fed the hound, who seemed very hungry, and said to him, "Tuscar, old fellow, I like you very much. Take another bit, good dog, and be happy!" The dog wagged his tail, and looked up kindly with his large eyes, for he was thankful for his supper, and ate much more than Eric. "Now," said the old woman gruffly, when she took away the remains of the supper, "you have ate what would do me for a week. You won't starve, Master Prince. Go to bed." The old woman left him, but suddenly returning, she discovered Eric on his knees. As he rose, she scoffed and jeered him, and asked, "Do you always say your prayers?" "Yes, always," replied the boy. "Who taught you?" "My mother, who is dead." The old woman heaved a deep sigh, but the boy did not know why. Perhaps she used to pray when she was a little girl herself, and

had given up speaking to God, or even thinking of Him, and so had become wicked; or perhaps she thought of some child of her own whom she had never taught to pray. She soon went away without speaking a word more, and Eric was left in darkness. He looked out through the narrow window of his room, but could see nothing but black clouds rushing over the sky. Far down he heard a stream roaring, and the wind, which now blew a gale, came booming over the tree-tops, and howling round the tower. Every now and then a flash lighted up the forest, and the thunder crashed in the sky. It was a fearful night!

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