CHARLES KINGSLEY

HEREWARD, THE LAST OF THE ENGLISH

Charles Kingsley

Hereward, the Last of the English

Kingsley C.

Hereward, the Last of the English / C. Kingsley — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Charles Kingsley
Hereward, the Last of the English

PRELUDE

The heroic deeds of Highlanders, both in these islands and elsewhere, have been told in verse and prose, and not more often, nor more loudly, than they deserve. But we must remember, now and then, that there have been heroes likewise in the lowland and in the fen. Why, however, poets have so seldom sung of them; why no historian, save Mr. Motley in his "Rise of the Dutch Republic," has condescended to tell the tale of their doughty deeds, is a question not difficult to answer.

In the first place, they have been fewer in number. The lowlands of the world, being the richest spots, have been generally the soonest conquered, the soonest civilized, and therefore the soonest taken out of the sphere of romance and wild adventure, into that of order and law, hard work and common sense, as well as—too often—into the sphere of slavery, cowardice, luxury, and ignoble greed. The lowland populations, for the same reasons, have been generally the first to deteriorate, though not on account of the vices of civilization. The vices of incivilization are far worse, and far more destructive of human life; and it is just because they are so, that rude tribes deteriorate physically less than polished nations. In the savage struggle for life, none but the strongest, healthiest, cunningest, have a chance of living, prospering, and propagating their race. In the civilized state, on the contrary, the weakliest and the silliest, protected by law, religion, and humanity, have chance likewise, and transmit to their offspring their own weakliness or silliness. In these islands, for instance, at the time of the Norman Conquest, the average of man was doubtless superior, both in body and mind, to the average of man now, simply because the weaklings could not have lived at all; and the rich and delicate beauty, in which the women of the Eastern Counties still surpass all other races in these isles, was doubtless far more common in proportion to the numbers of the population.

Another reason—and one which every Scot will understand—why lowland heroes "carent vate sacro," is that the lowlands and those who live in them are wanting in the poetic and romantic elements. There is in the lowland none of that background of the unknown, fantastic, magical, terrible, perpetually feeding curiosity and wonder, which still remains in the Scottish highlands; which, when it disappears from thence, will remain embalmed forever in the pages of Walter Scott. Against that half-magical background his heroes stand out in vivid relief; and justly so. It was not put there by him for stage purposes; it was there as a fact; and the men of whom he wrote were conscious of it, were moulded by it, were not ashamed of its influence. Nature among the mountains is too fierce, too strong, for man. He cannot conquer her, and she awes him. He cannot dig down the cliffs, or chain the storm-blasts; and his fear of them takes bodily shape: he begins to people the weird places of the earth with weird beings, and sees nixes in the dark linns as he fishes by night, dwarfs in the caves where he digs, half-trembling, morsels of copper and iron for his weapons, witches and demons on the snow-blast which overwhelms his herd and his hut, and in the dark clouds which brood on the untrodden mountain-peak. He lives in fear: and yet, if he be a valiant-hearted man, his fears do him little harm. They may break out, at times, in witch-manias, with all their horrible suspicions, and thus breed cruelty, which is the child of fear; but on the whole they rather produce in man thoughtfulness, reverence, a sense, confused yet precious, of the boundless importance of the unseen world. His superstitions develop his imagination; the moving accidents of a wild life call out in him sympathy and pathos; and the mountaineer becomes instinctively a poet.

The lowlander, on the other hand, has his own strength, his own "virtues," or manfulnesses, in the good old sense of the word: but they are not for the most part picturesque or even poetical.

He finds out, soon enough for his weal and his bane, that he is stronger than Nature; and right tyrannously and irreverently he lords it over her, clearing, delving, diking, building, without fear or shame. He knows of no natural force greater than himself, save an occasional thunder-storm; and against that, as he grows more cunning, he insures his crops. Why should he reverence Nature? Let him use her, and eat. One cannot blame him. Man was sent into the world (so says the Scripture) to fill and subdue the earth. But he was sent into the world for other purposes, which the lowlander is but too apt to forget. With the awe of Nature, the awe of the unseen dies out in him. Meeting with no visible superior, he is apt to become not merely unpoetical and irreverent, but somewhat of a sensualist and an atheist. The sense of the beautiful dies out in him more and more. He has little or nothing around him to refine or lift up his soul, and unless he meet with a religion and with a civilization which can deliver him, he may sink into that dull brutality which is too common among the lowest classes of the English lowlands, and remain for generations gifted with the strength and industry of the ox, and with the courage of the lion, and, alas! with the intellect of the former, and the self-restraint of the latter.

But there may be a period in the history of a lowland race when they, too, become historic for a while. There was such a period for the men of the Eastern Counties; for they proved it by their deeds.

When the men of Wessex, the once conquering race of Britain, fell at Hastings once and for all, and struck no second blow, then the men of the Danelagh disdained to yield to the Norman invader. For seven long years they held their own, not knowing, like true Englishmen, when they were beaten; and fought on desperate, till there were none left to fight. Their bones lay white on every island in the fens; their corpses rotted on gallows beneath every Norman keep; their few survivors crawled into monasteries, with eyes picked out, or hands and feet cut off, or took to the wild wood as strong outlaws, like their successors and representatives, Robin Hood, Scarlet, and John, Adam Bell, and Clym of the Cleugh, and William of Cloudeslee. But they never really bent their necks to the Norman yoke; they kept alive in their hearts that proud spirit of personal independence, which they brought with them from the moors of Denmark and the dales of Norway; and they kept alive, too, though in abeyance for a while, those free institutions which were without a doubt the germs of our British liberty.

They were a changed folk since first they settled in that Danelagh;—since first in the days of King Beorhtric, “in the year 787, three ships of Northmen came from Haeretha land, and the King’s reeve rode to the place, and would have driven them up to the King’s town, for he knew not what men they were: but they slew him there and then”; and after the Saxons and Angles began to find out to their bitter bale what men they were, those fierce Vikings out of the dark northeast.

But they had long ceased to burn farms, sack convents, torture monks for gold, and slay every human being they met, in mere Berserker lust of blood. No Barnakill could now earn his nickname by entreating his comrades, as they tossed the children on their spear-points, to “Na kill the barns.” Gradually they had settled down on the land, intermarried with the Angles and Saxons, and colonized all England north and east of Watling Street (a rough line from London to Chester), and the eastern lowlands of Scotland likewise. Gradually they had deserted Thor and Odin for “the White Christ”; had their own priests and bishops, and built their own minsters. The convents which the fathers had destroyed, the sons, or at least the grandsons, rebuilt; and often, casting away sword and axe, they entered them as monks themselves; and Peterborough, Ely, and above all Crowland, destroyed by them in Alfred’s time with a horrible destruction, had become their holy places, where they decked the altars with gold and jewels, with silks from the far East, and furs from the far North; and where, as in sacred fortresses, they, and the liberty of England with them, made their last unavailing stand.

For a while they had been lords of all England. The Anglo-Saxon race was wearing out. The men of Wessex, priest-ridden, and enslaved by their own aristocracy, quailed before the free Norsemen, among whom was not a single serf. The God-descended line of Cerdic and Alfred was worn out. Vain, incapable, profligate kings, the tools of such prelates as Odo and Dunstan, were no match for such

wild heroes as Thorkill the tall, or Olaf Trygvasson, or Swend Forkbeard. The Danes had gradually colonized, not only their own Danelagh and Northumbria, but great part of Wessex. Vast sums of Danegelt were yearly sent out of the country to buy off the fresh invasions which were perpetually threatened. Then Ethelred the Unready, Ethelred Evil-counsel, advised himself to fulfil his name, and the curse which Dunstan had pronounced against him at the baptismal font. By his counsel the men of Wessex rose against the unsuspecting Danes, and on St. Brice's eve, A.D. 1002, murdered them all with tortures, man, woman, and child. It may be that they only did to the children as the fathers had done to them: but the deed was "worse than a crime; it was a mistake." The Danes of the Danelagh and of Northumbria, their brothers of Denmark and Norway, the Orkneys and the east coast of Ireland, remained unharmed. A mighty host of Vikings poured from thence into England the very next year, under Swend Forkbeard and the great Canute; and after thirteen fearful campaigns came the great battle of Assingdown in Essex, where "Canute had the victory; and all the English nation fought against him, and all the nobility of the English race was there destroyed."

That same year saw the mysterious death of Edmund Ironside, the last man of Cerdic's race worthy of the name. For the next twenty-five years, Danish kings ruled from the Forth to the Land's End.

A noble figure he was, that great and wise Canute, the friend of the famous Godiva, and Leofric, Godiva's husband, and Siward Biorn, the conqueror of Macbeth; trying to expiate by justice and mercy the dark deeds of his bloodstained youth; trying (and not in vain) to blend the two races over which he ruled; rebuilding the churches and monasteries which his father had destroyed; bringing back in state to Canterbury the body of Archbishop Elphege—not unjustly called by the Saxons martyr and saint—whom Tall Thorkill's men had murdered with beef bones and ox-skulls, because he would not give up to them the money destined for God's poor; rebuking, as every child has heard, his housecarles' flattery by setting his chair on the brink of the rising tide; and then laying his golden crown, in token of humility, on the high altar of Winchester, never to wear it more. In Winchester lie his bones unto this day, or what of them the civil wars have left: and by him lie the bones of his son Hardicanute, in whom, as in his half-brother Harold Harefoot before him, the Danish power fell to swift decay, by insolence and drink and civil war; and with the Danish power England fell to pieces likewise.

Canute had divided England into four great earldoms, each ruled, under him, by a jarl, or earl—a Danish, not a Saxon title.

At his death in 1036, the earldoms of Northumbria and East Anglia—the more strictly Danish parts—were held by a true Danish hero, Siward Biorn, alias *Digre* "the Stout", conqueror of Macbeth, and son of the Fairy Bear; proving his descent, men said, by his pointed and hairy ears.

Mercia, the great central plateau of England, was held by Earl Leofric, husband of the famous Lady Godiva.

Wessex, which Canute had at first kept in his own hands, had passed into those of the famous Earl Godwin, the then ablest man in England. Possessed of boundless tact and cunning, gifted with an eloquence which seems, from the accounts remaining of it, to have been rather that of a Greek than an Englishman; himself of high—perhaps of royal—Sussex blood (for the story of his low birth seems a mere fable of his French enemies), and married first to Canute's sister, and then to his niece, he was fitted, alike by fortunes and by talents, to be the king-maker which he became.

Such a system may have worked well as long as the brain of a hero was there to overlook it all. But when that brain was turned to dust, the history of England became, till the Norman Conquest, little more than the history of the rivalries of the two great houses of Godwin and Leofric.

Leofric had the first success in king-making. He, though bearing a Saxon name, was the champion of the Danish party and of Canute's son, or reputed son, Harold Harefoot; and he succeeded, by the help of the "Thanes north of Thames," and the "lithsmen of London," which city was more than half Danish in those days, in setting his puppet on the throne. But the blood of Canute

had exhausted itself. Within seven years Harold Harefoot and Hardicanute, who succeeded him, had died as foully as they lived; and Godwin's turn had come.

He, though married to a Danish princess, and acknowledging his Danish connection by the Norse names which were borne by his three most famous sons, Harold, Sweyn, and Tostig, constituted himself the champion of the men of Wessex and the house of Cerdic. He had murdered, or at least caused to be murdered, horribly, Alfred the Etheling, King Ethelred's son and heir-apparent, when it seemed his interest to support the claims of Hardicanute against Harefoot. He now found little difficulty in persuading his victim's younger brother to come to England, and become at once his king, his son-in-law and his puppet.

Edward the Confessor, if we are to believe the monks whom he pampered, was naught but virtue and piety, meekness and magnanimity,—a model ruler of men. Such a model ruler he was, doubtless, as monks would be glad to see on every throne; because while he rules his subjects, they rule him. No wonder, therefore, that (according to William of Malmesbury) the happiness of his times (famed as he was both for miracles and the spirit of prophecy) "was revealed in a dream to Brithwin, Bishop of Wilton, who made it public"; who, meditating in King Canute's time on "the near extinction of the royal race of the English," was "rapt up on high, and saw St. Peter consecrating Edward king. His chaste life also was pointed out, and the exact period of his reign (twenty-four years) determined; and, when inquiring about his posterity, it was answered, 'The kingdom of the English belongs to God. After you, He will provide a king according to his pleasure.'" But those who will look at the facts will see in the holy Confessor's character little but what is pitiable, and in his reign little but what is tragical.

Civil wars, invasions, outlawry of Godwin and his sons by the Danish party; then of Alfgar, Leofric's son, by the Saxon party; the outlaws on either side attacking and plundering the English shores by the help of Norsemen, Welshmen, Irish, and Danes,—any mercenaries who could be got together; and then,—"In the same year Bishop Aldred consecrated the minster at Gloucester to the glory of God and of St. Peter, and then went to Jerusalem with such splendor as no man had displayed before him"; and so forth. The sum and substance of what was done in those "happy times" may be well described in the words of the Anglo-Saxon chronicler for the year 1058. "This year Alfgar the earl was banished; but he came in again with violence, through aid of Griffin (the king of North Wales, his brother-in-law). And this year came a fleet from Norway. It is tedious to tell how these matters went." These were the normal phenomena of a reign which seemed, to the eyes of monks, a holy and a happy one; because the king refused, whether from spite or superstition, to have an heir to the house of Cerdic, and spent his time between prayer, hunting, the seeing of fancied visions, the uttering of fancied prophecies, and the performance of fancied miracles.

But there were excuses for him. An Englishman only in name,—a Norman, not only of his mother's descent (she was aunt of William the Conqueror), but by his early education on the Continent,—he loved the Norman better than the Englishman; Norman knights and clerks filled his court, and often the high dignities of his provinces, and returned as often as expelled; the Norman-French language became fashionable; Norman customs and manners the signs of civilization; and thus all was preparing steadily for the great catastrophe, by which, within a year of Edward's death, the Norman became master of the land.

Perhaps it ought to have been so. Perhaps by no other method could England, and, with England, Scotland, and in due time Ireland, have become partakers of that classic civilization and learning, the fount whereof, for good and for evil, was Rome and the Pope of Rome: but the method was at least wicked; the actors in it tyrannous, brutal, treacherous, hypocritical; and the conquest of England by William will remain to the end of time a mighty crime, abetted—one may almost say made possible, as too many such crimes have been before and since—by the intriguing ambition of the Pope of Rome.

Against that tyranny the free men of the Danelagh and of Northumbria rose. If Edward, the descendant of Cerdic, had been little to them, William, the descendant of Rollo, was still less. That

French-speaking knights should expel them from their homes, French-chanting monks from their convents, because Edward had promised the crown of England to William, his foreign cousin, or because Harold Godwinsson of Wessex had sworn on the relics of all the saints to be William's man, was contrary to their common-sense of right and reason.

So they rose and fought: too late, it may be, and without unity or purpose; and they were worsted by an enemy who had both unity and purpose; whom superstition, greed, and feudal discipline kept together, at least in England, in one compact body of unscrupulous and terrible confederates.

But theirs was a land worth fighting for,—a good land and large: from Humber mouth inland to the Trent and merry Sherwood, across to Chester and the Dee, round by Leicester and the five burghs of the Danes; eastward again to Huntingdon and Cambridge (then a poor village on the site of an old Roman town); and then northward again into the wide fens, the land of the Girvii and the Eormingas, "the children of the peat-bog," where the great central plateau of England slides into the sea, to form, from the rain and river washings of eight shires, lowlands of a fertility inexhaustible, because ever-growing to this day.

They have a beauty of their own, these great fens, even now, when they are diked and drained, tilled and fenced,—a beauty as of the sea, of boundless expanse and freedom. Much more had they that beauty eight hundred years ago, when they were still, for the most part, as God had made them, or rather was making them even then. The low rolling uplands were clothed in primeval forest: oak and ash, beech and elm, with here and there, perhaps, a group of ancient pines, ragged and decayed, and fast dying out in England even then; though lingering still in the forests of the Scotch highlands.

Between the forests were open wolds, dotted with white sheep and golden gorse; rolling plains of rich though ragged turf, whether cleared by the hand of man or by the wild fires which often swept over the hills. And between the wood and the wold stood many a Danish "town," with its clusters of low straggling buildings round the holder's house, stone or mud below, and wood above; its high dikes round tiny fields; its flocks of sheep ranging on the wold; its herds of swine in the forest; and below, a more precious possession still,—its herds of mares and colts, which fed with the cattle in the rich grass-fen.

For always, from the foot of the wolds, the green flat stretched away, illimitable, to an horizon where, from the roundness of the earth, the distant trees and islands were hulled down like ships at sea. The firm horse-fen lay, bright green, along the foot of the wold; beyond it, the browner peat, or deep fen; and among it, dark velvet alder beds, long lines of reed-rond, emerald in spring, and golden under the autumn sun; shining river-reaches; broad meres dotted with a million fowl, while the cattle waded along their edges after the rich sedge-grass, or wallowed in the mire through the hot summer's day. Here and there, too, upon the far horizon, rose a tall line of ashen trees, marking some island of firm rich soil. Here and there, too, as at Ramsey and Crowland, the huge ashes had disappeared before the axes of the monks, and a minster tower rose over the fen, amid orchards, gardens, cornfields, pastures, with here and there a tree left standing for shade. "Painted with flowers in the spring," with "pleasant shores embosomed in still lakes," as the monk-chronicler of Ramsey has it, those islands seemed to such as the monk terrestrial paradises.

Overhead the arch of heaven spread more ample than elsewhere, as over the open sea; and that vastness gave, and still gives, such "effects" of cloudland, of sunrise, and sunset, as can be seen nowhere else within these isles. They might well have been star worshippers, those Girvii, had their sky been as clear as that of the East: but they were like to have worshipped the clouds rather than the stars, according to the too universal law, that mankind worship the powers which do them harm, rather than the powers which do them good.

And therefore the Danelagh men, who feared not mortal sword, or axe, feared witches, ghosts, Pucks, Will-o'-the-Wisps, werewolves, spirits of the wells and of the trees, and all dark, capricious, and harmful beings whom their fancy conjured up out of the wild, wet, and unwholesome marshes, or the dark wolf-haunted woods. For that fair land, like all things on earth, had its darker aspect. The

foul exhalations of autumn called up fever and ague, crippling and enervating, and tempting, almost compelling, to that wild and desperate drinking which was the Scandinavian's special sin. Dark and sad were those short autumn days, when all the distances were shut off, and the air choked with foul brown fog and drenching rains from off the eastern sea; and pleasant the bursting forth of the keen north-east wind, with all its whirling snowstorms. For though it sent men hurrying out into the storm, to drive the cattle in from the fen, and lift the sheep out of the snow-wreaths, and now and then never to return, lost in mist and mire, in ice and snow;—yet all knew that after the snow would come the keen frost and the bright sun and cloudless blue sky, and the fenman's yearly holiday, when, work being impossible, all gave themselves up to play, and swarmed upon the ice on skates and sledges, and ran races, township against township, or visited old friends full forty miles away; and met everywhere faces as bright and ruddy as their own, cheered by the keen wine of that dry and bracing frost.

Such was the Fenland; hard, yet cheerful; rearing a race of hard and cheerful men; showing their power in old times in valiant fighting, and for many a century since in that valiant industry which has drained and embanked the land of the Girvii, till it has become a very "Garden of the Lord." And the Scotsman who may look from the promontory of Peterborough, the "golden borough" of old time; or from the tower of Crowland, while Hereward and Torfrida sleep in the ruined nave beneath; or from the heights of that Isle of Ely which was so long "the camp of refuge" for English freedom; over the labyrinth of dikes and lodes, the squares of rich corn and verdure,—will confess that the lowland, as well as the highland, can at times breed gallant men. [Footnote: The story of Hereward (often sung by minstrels and old-wives in succeeding generations) may be found in the "Metrical Chronicle of Geoffrey Gaimar," and in the prose "Life of Hereward" (paraphrased from that written by Leofric, his house-priest), and in the valuable fragment "Of the family of Hereward." These have all three been edited by Mr. T. Wright. The account of Hereward in Ingulf seems taken, and that carelessly, from the same source as the Latin prose, "De Gestis Herewardi." A few curious details may be found in Peter of Blois's continuation of Ingulf; and more, concerning the sack of Peterborough, in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. I have followed the contemporary authorities as closely as I could, introducing little but what was necessary to reconcile discrepancies, or to illustrate the history, manners, and sentiments of the time.—C. K.]

CHAPTER I. – HOW HEREWARD WAS OUTLAWED, AND WENT NORTH TO SEEK HIS FORTUNES

Known to all is Lady Godiva, the most beautiful as well as the most saintly woman of her day; who, “all her life, kept at her own expense thirteen poor folk wherever she went; who, throughout Lent, watched in the church at triple matins, namely, one for the Trinity, one for the Cross, and one for St. Mary; who every day read the Psalter through, and so persevered in good and holy works to her life’s end,”—the “devoted friend of St. Mary, ever a virgin,” who enriched monasteries without number, —Leominster, Wenlock, Chester, St. Mary’s Stow by Lincoln, Worcester, Evesham; and who, above all, founded the great monastery in that town of Coventry, which has made her name immortal for another and a far nobler deed; and enriched it so much “that no monastery in England possessed such abundance of gold, silver, jewels, and precious stones,” beside that most precious jewel of all, the arm of St. Augustine, which not Lady Godiva, but her friend, Archbishop Ethelnoth, presented to Coventry, “having bought it at Pavia for a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold.” [Footnote: William of Malmesbury.]

Less known, save to students, is her husband, Leofric the great Earl of Mercia and Chester, whose bones lie by those of Godiva in that same minster of Coventry; how “his counsel was as if one had opened the Divine oracles”; very “wise,” says the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, “for God and for the world, which was a blessing to all this nation”; the greatest man, save his still greater rival, Earl Godwin, in Edward the Confessor’s court.

Less known, again, are the children of that illustrious pair: Algar, or Alfgar, Earl of Mercia after his father, who died, after a short and stormy life, leaving two sons, Edwin and Morcar, the fair and hapless young earls, always spoken of together, as if they had been twins; a daughter, Aldytha, or Elfgiva, married first (according to some) to Griffin, King of North Wales, and certainly afterwards to Harold, King of England; and another, Lucia (as the Normans at least called her), whose fate was, if possible, more sad than that of her brothers.

Their second son was Hereward, whose history this tale sets forth; their third and youngest, a boy whose name is unknown.

They had, probably, another daughter beside; married, it may be, to some son of Leofric’s stanch friend old Siward Biorn, the Viking Earl of Northumberland, and conqueror of Macbeth; and the mother, may be, of the two young Siwards, the “white” and the “red,” who figure in chronicle and legend as the nephews of Hereward. But this pedigree is little more than a conjecture.

Be these things as they may, Godiva was the greatest lady in England, save two: Edith, Harold’s sister, the nominal wife of Edward the Confessor; and Githa, or Gyda, as her own Danes called her, Harold’s mother, niece of Canute the Great. Great was Godiva; and might have been proud enough, had she been inclined to that pleasant sin. And even then (for there is a skeleton, they say, in every house) she carried that about her which might well keep her humble; namely, shame at the misconduct of Hereward, her son.

Her favorite residence, among the many manors and “villas,” or farms which Leofric possessed, was neither the stately hall at Loughton by Bridgenorth, nor the statelier castle of Warwick, but the house of Bourne in South Lincolnshire, between the great woods of the Bruneswald and the great level of the fens. It may have been her own paternal dowry, and have come down to her in right of her Danish ancestors, and that great and “magnificent” Jarl Oslac, from whom she derived her all-but-royal blood. This is certain, that Leofric, her husband, went in East Anglia by the name of Leofric, Lord of Bourne; that, as Domesday Book testifies, his son Alfgar, and his grandson Morcar, held large lands there and thereabout. Alfgar’s name, indeed, still lives in the village of Algar-Kirk;

and Lady Godiva, and Algar after her, enriched with great gifts Crowland, the island sanctuary, and Peterborough, where Brand, either her brother or Leofric's, was a monk, and in due time an abbot.

The house of Bourne, as far as it can be reconstructed by imagination, was altogether unlike one of the tall and gloomy Norman castles which twenty years later reared their evil donjons over England. It was much more like a house in a Chinese painting; an irregular group of low buildings, almost all of one story, stone below and timber above, with high-peaked roofs,—at least in the more Danish country,—affording a separate room, or rather house, for each different need of the family. Such a one may be seen in the illuminations of the century. In the centre of the building is the hall, with door or doors opening out into the court; and sitting thereat, at the top of a flight of steps, the lord and lady, dealing clothes to the naked and bread to the hungry. On one side of the hall is a chapel; by it a large room or "bower" for the ladies; behind the hall a round tower, seemingly the strong place of the whole house; on the other side a kitchen; and stuck on to bower, kitchen, and every other principal building, lean-to after lean-to, the uses of which it is impossible now to discover. The house had grown with the wants of the family,—as many good old English houses have done to this day. Round it would be scattered barns and stables, in which grooms and herdsmen slept side by side with their own horses and cattle; and outside all, the "yard," "garth," or garden-fence, high earth-bank with palisades on top, which formed a strong defence in time of war. Such was most probably the "villa," "ton," or "town" of Earl Leofric, the Lord of Bourne, the favorite residence of Godiva,—once most beautiful, and still most holy, according to the holiness of those old times.

Now on a day—about the year 1054—while Earl Siward was helping to bring Birnam wood to Dunsinane, to avenge his murdered brother-in-law, Lady Godiva sat, not at her hall door, dealing food and clothing to her thirteen poor folk, but in her bower, with her youngest son, a two-years' boy, at her knee. She was listening with a face of shame and horror to the complaint of Herluin, Steward of Peterborough, who had fallen in that afternoon with Hereward and his crew of "housecarles."

To keep a following of stout housecarles, or men-at-arms, was the pride as well as the duty of an Anglo-Danish Lord, as it was, till lately, of a Scoto-Danish Highland Laird. And Hereward, in imitation of his father and his elder brother, must needs have his following from the time he was but fifteen years old. All the unruly youths of the neighborhood, sons of free "holders," who owed some sort of military service to Earl Leofric; Geri, his cousin; Winter, whom he called his brother-in-arms; the Wulfrics, the Wulfards, the Azers, and many another wild blade, had banded themselves round a young nobleman more unruly than themselves. Their names were already a terror to all decent folk, at wakes and fairs, alehouses and village sports. They atoned, be it remembered, for their early sins by making those names in after years a terror to the invaders of their native land: but as yet their prowess was limited to drunken brawls and faction-fights; to upsetting old women at their work, levying blackmail from quiet chapmen on the high road, or bringing back in triumph, sword in hand and club on shoulder, their leader Hereward from some duel which his insolence had provoked.

But this time, if the story of the sub-prior was to be believed, Hereward and his housecarles had taken an ugly stride forward toward the pit. They had met him riding along, intent upon his psalter, in a lonely path of the Bruneswald,—"Whereon your son, most gracious lady, bade me stand, saying that his men were thirsty and he had no money to buy ale withal, and none so likely to help him thereto as a fat priest,—for so he scandalously termed me, who, as your ladyship knows, am leaner than the minster bell-ropes, with fasting Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year, beside the vigils of the saints, and the former and latter Lents.

"But when he saw who I was, as if inspired by a malignant spirit, he shouted out my name, and bade his companions throw me to the ground."

"Throw you to the ground?" shuddered the Lady Godiva.

"In much mire, madam. After which he took my palfrey, saying that heaven's gate was too lowly for men on horseback to get in thereat; and then my marten's fur gloves and cape which your gracious self bestowed on me, alleging that the rules of my order allowed only one garment, and no

furs save catskins and such like. And lastly—I tremble while I relate, thinking not of the loss of my poor money, but the loss of an immortal soul—took from me a purse with sixteen silver pennies, which I had collected from our tenants for the use of the monastery, and said, blasphemously, that I and mine had swindled your ladyship, and therefore him, your son, out of many a fair manor ere now; and it was but fair that he should tithe the rents thereof, as he should never get the lands out of our claws again; with more of the like, which I blush to repeat,—and so left me to trudge hither in the mire."

"Wretched boy!" said the Lady Godiva, and hid her face in her hands; "and more wretched I, to have brought such a son into the world!"

The monk had hardly finished his doleful story, when there was a pattering of heavy feet, a noise of men shouting and laughing outside, and a voice, above all, calling for the monk by name, which made that good man crouch behind the curtain of Lady Godiva's bed. The next moment the door of the bower was thrown violently open, and in walked, or rather reeled, a noble lad eighteen years old. His face was of extraordinary beauty, save that the lower jaw was too long and heavy, and that his eyes wore a strange and almost sinister expression, from the fact that the one of them was gray and the other blue. He was short, but of immense breadth of chest and strength of limb; while his delicate hands and feet and long locks of golden hair marked him of most noble, and even, as he really was, of ancient royal race. He was dressed in a gaudy costume, resembling on the whole that of a Highland chieftain. His knees, wrists, and throat were tattoed in bright blue patterns; and he carried sword and dagger, a gold ring round his neck, and gold rings on his wrists. He was a lad to have gladdened the eyes of any mother: but there was no gladness in the Lady Godiva's eyes as she received him; nor had there been for many a year. She looked on him with sternness,—with all but horror; and he, his face flushed with wine, which he had tossed off as he passed through the hall to steady his nerves for the coming storm, looked at her with smiling defiance, the result of long estrangement between mother and son.

"Well, my lady," said he, ere she could speak, "I heard that this good fellow was here, and came home as fast as I could, to see that he told you as few lies as possible."

"He has told me," said she, "that you have robbed the Church of God."

"Robbed him, it may be, an old hoody crow, against whom I have a grudge of ten years' standing."

"Wretched, wretched boy! What wickedness next? Know you not, that he who robs the Church robs God himself?"

"And he who harms God's people," put in the monk from behind the chair, "harms his Maker."

"His Maker?" said the lad, with concentrated bitterness. "It would be a gay world, if the Maker thereof were in any way like unto you, who call yourselves his people. Do you remember who told them to set the peat-stack on fire under me ten years ago? Ah, ha, Sir Monk, you forget that I have been behind the screen,—that I have been a monk myself, or should have been one, if my pious lady mother here had had her will of me, as she may if she likes of that doll there at her knee. Do you forget why I left Peterborough Abbey, when Winter and I turned all your priest's books upside down in the choir, and they would have flogged us,—me, the Earl's son,—me, the Viking's son,—me, the champion, as I will be yet, and make all lands ring with the fame of my deeds, as they rung with the fame of my forefathers, before they became the slaves of monks; and how when Winter and I got hold of the kitchen spits, and up to the top of the peat-stack, and held you all at bay there, a whole abbeyful of cowards there, against two seven years' children? It was you bade set the peat-stack alight under us, and so bring us down; and would have done it, too, had it not been for my Uncle Brand, the only man that I care for in this wide world. Do you think I have not owed you a grudge ever since that day, monk? And do you think I will not pay it? Do you think I would not have burned Peterborough minster over your head before now, had it not been for Uncle Brand's sake? See that I do not do it yet.

See that when there is another Prior in Borough you do not find Hereward the Berserker smoking you out some dark night, as he would smoke a wasps' nest. And I will, by—"

"Hereward, Hereward!" cried his mother, "godless, god-forgotten boy, what words are these? Silence, before you burden your soul with an oath which the devils in hell will accept, and force you to keep!" and she sprung up, and, seizing his arm, laid her hand upon his mouth.

Hereward looked at her majestic face, once lovely, now careworn, and trembled for a moment. Had there been any tenderness in it, his history might have been a very different one; but alas! there was none. Not that she was in herself untender; but that her great piety (call it not superstition, for it was then the only form known or possible to pure and devout souls) was so outraged by this, or even by the slightest insult to that clergy whose willing slave she had become, that the only method of reclaiming the sinner had been long forgotten, in genuine horror at his sin. "Is it not enough," she went on, sternly, "that you should have become the bully and the ruffian of all the fens?—that Hereward the leaper, Hereward the wrestler, Hereward the thrower of the hammer—sports, after all, only fit for the sons of slaves—should be also Hereward the drunkard, Hereward the common fighter, Hereward the breaker of houses, Hereward the leader of mobs of boon companions which bring back to us, in shame and sorrow, the days when our heathen forefathers ravaged this land with fire and sword? Is it not enough for me that my son should be a common stabber—?"

"Whoever called me stabber to you, lies. If I have killed men, or had them killed, I have done it in fair fight."

But she went on unheeding,—"Is it not enough, that, after having squandered on your fellows all the money that you could wring from my bounty, or win at your brutal sports, you should have robbed your own father, collected his rents behind his back, taken money and goods from his tenants by threats and blows; but that, after outraging them, you must add to all this a worse sin likewise,—outraging God, and driving me—me who have borne with you, me who have concealed all for your sake—to tell your father that of which the very telling will turn my hair to gray?"

"So you will tell my father?" said Hereward, coolly.

"And if I should not, this monk himself is bound to do so, or his superior, your Uncle Brand."

"My Uncle Brand will not, and your monk dare not."

"Then I must. I have loved you long and well; but there is one thing which I must love better than you: and that is, my conscience and my Maker."

"Those are two things, my lady mother, and not one; so you had better not confound them. As for the latter, do you not think that He who made the world is well able to defend his own property,—if the lands and houses and cattle and money which these men wheedle and threaten and forge out of you and my father are really His property, and not merely their plunder? As for your conscience, my lady mother, really you have done so many good deeds in your life, that it might be beneficial to you to do a bad one once in a way, so as to keep your soul in a wholesome state of humility."

The monk groaned aloud. Lady Godiva groaned; but it was inwardly. There was silence for a moment. Both were abashed by the lad's utter shamelessness.

"And you will tell my father?" said he again. "He is at the old miracle-worker's court at Westminster. He will tell the miracle-worker, and I shall be outlawed."

"And if you be, wretched boy, whom have you to blame but yourself? Can you expect that the king, sainted even as he is before his death, dare pass over such an atrocity towards Holy Church?"

"Blame? I shall blame no one. Pass over? I hope he will not pass over it, I only want an excuse like that for turning kempery-man—knight-errant, as those Norman puppies call it,—like Regnar Lodbrog, or Frithiof, or Harold Hardraade; and try what man can do for himself in the world with nothing to help him in heaven and earth, with neither saint nor angel, friend or counsellor, to see to him, save his wits and his good sword. So send off the messenger, good mother mine: and I will promise you I will not have him ham-strung on the way, as some of my housecarles would do for me

if I but held up my hand; and let the miracle-monger fill up the measure of his folly, by making an enemy of one more bold fellow in the world."

And he swaggered out of the room.

And when he was gone, the Lady Godiva bowed her head into her lap and wept long and bitterly. Neither her maidens nor the priest dare speak to her for nigh an hour; but at the end of that time she lifted up her head, and settled her face again, till it was like that of a marble saint over a minster door; and called for ink and paper, and wrote her letter; and then asked for a trusty messenger who should carry it up to Westminster.

"None so swift or sure," said the house steward, "as Martin Lightfoot."

Lady Godiva shook her head. "I mistrust that man," she said. "He is too fond of my poor— of the Lord Hereward."

"He is a strange one, my lady, and no one knows whence he came, and, I sometimes fancy, whither he may go either; but ever since my lord threatened to hang him for talking with my young master, he has never spoken to him, nor scarcely, indeed, to living soul. And one thing there is makes him or any man sure, as long as he is well paid; and that is, that he cares for nothing in heaven or earth save himself and what he can get."

So Martin Lightfoot was sent for. He came in straight into the lady's bedchamber, after the simple fashion of those days. He was a tall, lean, bony man, as was to be expected from his nickname, with a long hooked nose, a scanty brown beard, and a high conical head. His only garment was a shabby gray woollen tunic, which served him both as coat and kilt, and laced brogues of untanned hide. He might have been any age from twenty to forty; but his face was disfigured with deep scars and long exposure to the weather. He dropped on one knee, holding his greasy cap in his hand, and looked, not at his lady's face, but at her feet, with a stupid and frightened expression. She knew very little of him, save that her husband had picked him up upon the road as a wanderer some five years since; and that he had been employed as a doer of odd jobs and runner of messages, and that he was supposed, from his taciturnity and strangeness, to have something uncanny about him.

"Martin," said the lady, "they tell me that you are a silent and a prudent man."

"That am I. 'Tongue speaketh bane,
Though she herself hath nane.'"

"I shall try you: do you know your way to London?"

"Yes."

"To your lord's lodgings in Westminster?"

"Yes."

"How long shall you be going there with this letter?"

"A day and a half."

"When shall you be back hither?"

"On the fourth day."

"And you will go to my lord and deliver this letter safely?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"Why do you call me Majesty? The King is Majesty."

"You are my Queen."

"What do you mean, man?"

"You can hang me."

"I hang thee, poor soul! Who did I ever hang, or hurt for a moment, if I could help it?"

"But the Earl may."

"He will neither hang nor hurt thee if thou wilt take this letter safely, and bring me back the answer safely."

"They will kill me."

"Who?"

"They," said Martin, pointing to the bower maidens,—young ladies of good family who stood round, chosen for their good looks, after the fashion of those times, to attend on great ladies. There was a cry of angry and contemptuous denial, not unmixed with something like laughter, which showed that Martin had but spoken the truth. Hereward, in spite of all his sins, was the darling of his mother's bower; and there was not one of the damsels but would have done anything short of murder to have prevented Martin carrying the letter.

"Silence, man!" said Lady Godiva, so sternly that Martin saw that he had gone too far. "How know'st such as thou what is in this letter?"

"Those others will know," said Martin, sullenly, without answering the last question.

"Who?"

"His housecarles outside there."

"He has promised that they shall not touch thee. But how knowest thou what is in this letter?"

"I will take it," said Martin: he held out his hand, took it and looked at it, but upside down, and without any attempt to read it.

"His own mother," said he, after a while.

"What is that to thee?" said Lady Godiva, blushing and kindling.

"Nothing: I had no mother. But God has one!"

"What meanest thou, knave? Wilt thou take the letter or no?"

"I will take it." And he again looked at it without rising off his knee. "His own father, too."

"What is that to thee, I say again?"

"Nothing: I have no father. But God's Son has one!"

"What wilt thou, thou strange man?" asked she, puzzled and half-frightened; "and how camest thou to know what is in this letter?"

"Who does not know? A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. On the fourth day from this I will be back."

And Martin rose, and putting the letter solemnly into the purse at his girdle, shot out of the door with clenched teeth, as a man upon a fixed purpose which it would lighten his heart to carry out. He ran rapidly through the large outer hall, past the long oak table, at which Hereward and his boon companions were drinking and roistering; and as he passed the young lord he cast on him a look so full of meaning, that though Hereward knew not what the meaning was, it startled him, and for a moment softened him. Did this man who had sullenly avoided him for more than two years, whom he had looked on as a clod or a post in the field beneath his notice, since he could be of no use to him,—did this man still care for him? Hereward had reason to know better than most that there was something strange and uncanny about the man. Did he mean him well? Or had he some grudge against him, which made him undertake this journey willingly and out of spite?—possibly with the will to make bad worse. For an instant Hereward's heart misgave him. He would stop the letter at all risks. "Hold him!" he cried to his comrades.

But Martin turned to him, laid his finger on his lips, smiled kindly, and saying "You promised!" caught up a loaf from the table, slipped from among them like an eel, and darted out of the door, and out of the close. They followed him to the great gate, and there stopped, some cursing, some laughing. To give Martin Lightfoot a yard advantage was never to come up with him again. Some called for bows to bring him down with a parting shot. But Hereward forbade them; and stood leaning against the gate-post, watching him trot on like a lean wolf over the lawn, till he was lost in the great elm-woods which fringed the southern fen.

"Now, lads," said Hereward, "home with you all, and make your peace with your fathers. In this house you never drink ale again."

They looked at him, surprised.

"You are disbanded, my gallant army. As long as I could cut long thongs out of other men's hides, I could feed you like earl's sons: but now I must feed myself; and a dog over his bone wants no company. Outlawed I shall be before the week is out; and unless you wish to be outlawed too, you will obey orders, and home."

"We will follow you to the world's end," cried some.

"To the rope's end, lads: that is all you will get in my company. Go home with you, and those who feel a calling, let them turn monks; and those who have not, let them learn

'For to plough and to sow,
And to reap and to mow,
And to be a farmer's boy.'

Good night."

And he went in, and shut the great gates after him, leaving them astonished.

To take his advice, and go home, was the simplest thing to be done. A few of them on their return were soundly thrashed, and deserved it; a few were hidden by their mothers for a week, in hay-lofts and hen-roosts, till their father's anger had passed away. But only one turned monk or clerk, and that was Leofric the Unlucky, godson of the great earl, and poet-in-ordinary to the band.

The next morning at dawn Hereward mounted his best horse, armed himself from head to foot, and rode over to Peterborough.

When he came to the abbey-gate, he smote thereon with his lance-but, till the porter's teeth rattled in his head for fear.

"Let me in!" he shouted. "I am Hereward Leofricsson. I must see my Uncle Brand."

"O my most gracious lord!" cried the porter, thrusting his head out of the wicket, "what is this that you have been doing to our Steward?"

"The tithe of what I will do, unless you open the gate!"

"O my lord!" said the porter, as he opened it, "if our Lady and St. Peter would but have mercy on your fair face, and convert your soul to the fear of God and man—"

"She would make me as good an old fool as you. Fetch my uncle, the Prior."

The porter obeyed. The son of Earl Leofric was as a young lion among the sheep in those parts; and few dare say him nay, certainly not the monks of Peterborough; moreover, the good porter could not help being strangely fond of Hereward—as was every one whom he did not insult, rob, or kill.

Out came Brand, a noble elder: more fit, from his eye and gait, to be a knight than a monk. He looked sadly at Hereward.

"'Dear is bought the honey that is licked off the thorn,' quoth Hending," said he.

"Hending bought his wisdom by experience, I suppose," said Hereward, "and so must I. So I am just starting out to see the world, uncle."

"Naughty, naughty boy! If we had thee safe here again for a week, we would take this hot blood out of thee, and send thee home in thy right mind."

"Bring a rod and whip me, then. Try, and you shall have your chance. Every one else has had, and this is the end of their labors."

"By the chains of St. Peter," quoth the monk, "that is just what thou needest. Hoist thee on such another fool's back, truss thee up, and lay it on lustily, till thou art ashamed. To treat thee as a man is only to make thee a more heady blown-up ass than thou art already."

"True, most wise uncle. And therefore my still wiser parents are going to treat me like a man indeed, and send me out into the world to seek my fortunes!"

"Eh?"

"They are going to prove how thoroughly they trust me to take care of myself, by outlawing me. Eh? say I in return. Is not that an honor, and a proof that I have not shown myself a fool, though I may have a madman?"

"Outlaw you? O my boy, my darling, my pride! Get off your horse, and don't sit there, hand on hip, like a turbaned Saracen, defying God and man; but come down and talk reason to me, for the sake of St. Peter and all saints."

Hereward threw himself off his horse, and threw his arms round his uncle's neck.

"Pish! Now, uncle, don't cry, do what you will, lest I cry too. Help me to be a man while I live, even if I go to the black place when I die."

"It shall not be!" .... and the monk swore by all the relics in Peterborough minster.

"It must be. It shall be. I like to be outlawed. I want to be outlawed. It makes one feel like a man. There is not an earl in England, save my father, who has not been outlawed in his time. My brother Alfgar will be outlawed before he dies, if he has the spirit of a man in him. It is the fashion, my uncle, and I must follow it. So hey for the merry greenwood, and the long ships, and the swan's bath, and all the rest of it. Uncle, you will lend me fifty silver pennies?"

"I? I would not lend thee one, if I had it, which I have not. And yet, old fool that I am, I believe I would."

"I would pay thee back honestly. I shall go down to Constantinople to the Varangers, get my Polotaswarf [Footnote: See "The Heimskringla," Harold Hardraade's Saga, for the meaning of this word.] out of the Kaiser's treasure, and pay thee back five to one."

"What does this son of Belial here?" asked an austere voice.

"Ah! Abbot Leofric, my very good lord. I have come to ask hospitality of you for some three days. By that time I shall be a wolf's head, and out of the law: and then, if you will give me ten minutes' start, you may put your bloodhounds on my track, and see which runs fastest, they or I. You are a gentleman, and a man of honor; so I trust to you to feed my horse fairly the meanwhile, and not to let your monks poison me."

The Abbot's face relaxed. He tried to look as solemn as he could; but he ended in bursting into a very great laughter, and swearing likewise.

"The insolence of this lad passes the miracles of all saints. He robs St. Peter on the highway, breaks into his abbey, insults him to his face, and then asks him for hospitality; and—"

"And gets it," quoth Hereward.

"What is to be done with him, Brand, my friend? If we turn him out—"

"Which we cannot do," said Brand, looking at the well-mailed and armed lad, "without calling in half a dozen of our men-at-arms."

"In which case there would be blood shed, and scandal made in the holy precincts."

"And nothing gained; for yield he would not till he was killed outright, which God forbid!"

"Amen. And if he stay here, he may be persuaded to repentance."

"And restitution."

"As for that," quoth Hereward (who had remounted his horse from prudential motives, and set him athwart the gateway, so that there was no chance of the doors being slammed behind him), "if either of you will lend me sixteen pence, I will pay it back to you and St. Peter before I die, with interest enough to satisfy any Jew, on the word of a gentleman and an earl's son."

The Abbot burst again into a great laughter. "Come in, thou graceless renegade, and we will see to thee and thy horse; and I will pray to St. Peter; and I doubt not he will have patience with thee, for he is very merciful; and after all, thy parents have been exceeding good to us, and the righteousness of the father, like his sins, is sometimes visited on the children."

Now, why were the two ecclesiastics so uncanonically kind to this wicked youth?

Perhaps because both the old bachelors were wishing from their hearts that they had just such a son of their own. And beside, Earl Leofric was a very great man indeed; and the wind might change; for it is an unstable world.

"Only, mind, one thing," said the naughty boy, as he dismounted, and halloed to a lay-brother to see to his horse,—"don't let me see the face of that Herluin."

"And why? You have wronged him, and he will forgive you, doubtless, like a good Christian as he is."

"That is his concern. But if I see him, I cut off his head. And, as Uncle Brand knows, I always sleep with my sword under my pillow."

"O that such a mother should have borne such a son." groaned the Abbot, as they went in.

On the fifth day came Martin Lightfoot, and found Hereward in Prior Brand's private cell.

"Well?" asked Hereward coolly.

"Is he—? Is he—?" stammered Brand, and could not finish his sentence.

Martin nodded.

Hereward laughed,—a loud, swaggering, hysterical laugh.

"See what it is to be born of just and pious parents. Come, Master Trot-alone, speak out and tell us all about it. Thy lean wolf's legs have run to some purpose. Open thy lean wolf's mouth and speak for once, lest I ease thy legs for the rest of thy life by a cut across the hams. Find thy lost tongue, I say!"

"Walls have ears, as well as the wild-wood," said Martin.

"We are safe here," said the Prior; "so speak, and tell us the whole truth."

"Well, when the Earl read the letter, he turned red, and pale again, and then naught but, 'Men, follow me to the King at Westminster.' So we went, all with our weapons, twenty or more, along the Strand, and up into the King's new hall; and a grand hall it is, but not easy to get into, for the crowd of monks and beggars on the stairs, hindering honest folks' business. And there sat the King on a high settle, with his pink face and white hair, looking as royal as a bell-wether new washed; and on either side of him, on the same settle, sat the old fox and the young wolf."

"Godwin and Harold? And where was the Queen?"

"Sitting on a stool at his feet, with her hands together as if she were praying, and her eyes downcast, as demure as any cat. And so is fulfilled the story, how the sheep-dog went out to get married, and left the fox, the wolf, and the cat to guard the flock."

"If thou hast found thy tongue," said Brand, "thou art like enough to lose it again by slice of knife, talking such ribaldry of dignities. Dost not know"—and he sank his voice—"that Abbot Leofric is Earl Harold's man, and that Harold himself made him abbot?"

"I said, walls have ears. It was you who told me that we were safe. However, I will bridle the unruly one." And he went on. "And your father walked up the hall, his left hand on his sword-hilt, looking an earl all over, as he is."

"He is that," said Hereward, in a low voice.

"And he bowed; and the most magnificent, powerful, and virtuous Godwin would have beckoned him up to sit on the high settle; but he looked straight at the King, as if there were never a Godwin or a Godwinsson on earth, and cried as he stood,—

"'Justice, my Lord the King!'

"And at that the King turned pale, and said, 'Who? What? O miserable world! O last days drawing nearer and nearer! O earth, full of violence and blood! Who has wronged thee now, most dear and noble Earl?'

"'Justice against my own son.'

"At that the fox looked at the wolf, and the wolf at the fox; and if they did not smile it was not for want of will, I warrant. But your father went on, and told all his story; and when he came to your robbing master monk,—'O apostate!' cries the bell-wether, 'O spawn of Beelzebub! excommunicate

him, with bell, book, and candle. May he be thrust down with Korah, Balaam, and Iscariot, to the most Stygian pot of the sempiternal Tartarus.'

"And at that your father smiled. 'That is bishops' work,' says he; 'and I want king's work from you, Lord King. Outlaw me this young rebel's sinful body, as by law you can; and leave his sinful soul to the priests,—or to God's mercy, which is like to be more than theirs.'

"Then the Queen looked up. 'Your own son, noble Earl? Think of what you are doing, and one whom all say is so gallant and so fair. O persuade him, father,—persuade him, Harold my brother, —or, if you cannot persuade him, persuade the King at least, and save this poor youth from exile.'"

"Puss Velvet-paw knew well enough," said Hereward, in a low voice, "that the way to harden my father's heart was to set Godwin and Harold on softening it. They ask my pardon from the King? I would not take it at their asking, even if my father would."

"There spoke a true Leofricsson," said Brand, in spite of himself.

"'By the—'" (and Martin repeated a certain very solemn oath), "said your father, 'justice I will have, my Lord King. Who talks to me of my own son? You put me into my earldom to see justice done and law obeyed; and how shall I make others keep within bound if I am not to keep in my own flesh and blood? Here is this land running headlong to ruin, because every nobleman—ay, every churl who owns a manor, if he dares—must needs arm and saddle, and levy war on his own behalf, and harry and slay the king's lieges, if he have not garlic to his roast goose every time he chooses,'—and there your father did look at Godwin, once and for all;—'and shall I let my son follow the fashion, and do his best to leave the land open and weak for Norseman, or Dane, or Frenchman, or whoever else hopes next to mount the throne of a king who is too holy to leave an heir behind him?'"

"Ahoi! Martin the silent! Where learnt you so suddenly the trade of preaching? I thought you kept your wind for your running this two years past. You would make as good a talker among the Witan as Godwin himself. You give it us all, word for word, and voice and gesture withal, as if you were King Edward's French Chancellor."

Martin smiled. "I am like Falada the horse, my lords, who could only speak to his own true princess. Why I held my tongue of late was only lest they should cut my head off for talking, as they did poor Falada's."

"Thou art a very crafty knave," said Brand, "and hast had clerk-learning in thy time, I can see, and made bad use of it. I misdoubt very much that thou art some runaway monk."

"That am I not, by St. Peter's chains!" said Martin, in an eager, terrified voice. "Lord Hereward, I came hither as your father's messenger and servant. You will see me safe out of this abbey, like an honorable gentleman!"

"I will. All I know of him, uncle, is that he used to tell me stories, when I was a boy, of enchanters, and knights, and dragons, and such like, and got into trouble for filling my head with such fancies. Now let him tell his story in peace."

"He shall; but I misdoubt the fellow very much. He talks as if he knew Latin; and what business has a foot-running slave to do that?"

So Martin went on, somewhat abashed. "'And,' said your father, 'justice I will have, and leave injustice, and the overlooking of it, to those who wish to profit thereby.'

"And at that Godwin smiled, and said to the King, 'The Earl is wise, as usual, and speaks like a very Solomon. Your Majesty must, in spite of your own tenderness of heart, have these letters of outlawry made out.'

"Then all our men murmured,—and I as loud as any. But old Surturbrand the housecarle did more; for out he stepped to your father's side, and spoke right up before the King.

"'Bonny times,' he said, 'I have lived to see, when a lad of Earl Oslac's blood is sent out of the land, a beggar and a wolf's head, for playing a boy's trick or two, and upsetting a shaveling priest! We managed such wild young colts better, we Vikings who conquered the Danelagh. If Canute had had a son like Hereward—as would to God he had had!—he would have dealt with him as old Swend

Forkbeard (God grant I meet him in Valhalla, in spite of all priests!) did by Canute himself when he was young, and kicked and plunged awhile at being first bitted and saddled.'

"'What does the man say?' asked the King, for old Surturbrand was talking broad Danish.

"'He is a housecarle of mine, Lord King, a good man and true; but old age and rough Danish blood has made him forget that he stands before kings and earls.'

"'By –, Earl!' says Surturbrand, 'I have fought knee to knee beside a braver king than that there, and nobler earls than ever a one here; and was never afraid, like a free Dane, to speak my mind to them, by sea or land. And if the King, with his French ways, does not understand a plain man's talk, the two earls yonder do right well, and I say,—Deal by this lad in the good old fashion. Give him half a dozen long ships, and what crews he can get together, and send him out, as Canute would have done, to seek his fortune like a Viking; and if he comes home with plenty of wounds, and plenty of plunder, give him an earldom as he deserves. Do you ask your Countess, Earl Godwin:—she is of the right Danish blood, God bless her! though she is your wife,—and see if she does not know how to bring a naughty lad to his senses.'

"Then Harold the Earl said: 'The old man is right. King, listen to what he says.' And he told him all, quite eagerly."

"How did you know that? Can you understand French?"

"I am a poor idiot, give me a halfpenny," said Martin, in a doleful voice, as he threw into his face and whole figure a look of helpless stupidity and awkwardness, which set them both laughing.

But Hereward checked himself. "And you think he was in earnest?"

"As sure as there are holy crows in Crowland. But it was of no use. Your father got a parchment, with an outlandish Norman seal hanging to it, and sent me off with it that same night to give to the lawman. So wolf's head you are, my lord, and there is no use crying over spilt milk."

"And Harold spoke for me? It will be as well to tell Abbot Leofric that, in case he be inclined to turn traitor, and refuse to open the gates. Once outside them, I care not for mortal man."

"My poor boy, there will be many a one whom thou hast wronged only too ready to lie in wait for thee, now thy life is in every man's hand. If the outlawry is published, thou hadst best start to-night, and get past Lincoln before morning."

"I shall stay quietly here, and get a good night's rest; and then ride out to-morrow morning in the face of the whole shire. No, not a word! You would not have me sneak away like a coward?"

Brand smiled and shrugged his shoulders: being very much of the same mind.

"At least, go north."

"And why north?"

"You have no quarrel in Northumberland, and the King's writ runs very slowly there, if at all. Old Siward Digre may stand your friend."

"He? He is a fast friend of my father's."

"What of that? the old Viking will like you none the less for having shown a touch of his own temper. Go to him, I say, and tell him that I sent you."

"But he is fighting the Scots beyond the Forth."

"So much the better. There will be good work for you to do. And Gislebert of Ghent is up there too, I hear, trying to settle himself among the Scots. He is your mother's kinsman; and as for your being an outlaw, he wants hard hitters and hard riders, and all is fish that comes to his net. Find him out, too, and tell him I sent you."

"You are a good old uncle," said Hereward. "Why were you not a soldier?"

Brand laughed somewhat sadly.

"If I had been a soldier, lad, where would you have looked for a friend this day? No. God has done what was merciful with me and my sins. May he do the same by thee and thine."

Hereward made an impatient movement. He disliked any word which seemed likely to soften his own hardness of heart. But he kissed his uncle lovingly on both cheeks.

"By the by, Martin,—any message from my lady mother?"

"None!"

"Quite right and pious. I am an enemy to Holy Church and therefore to her. Good night, uncle."

"Hey?" asked Brand; "where is that footman,—Martin you call him? I must have another word with him."

But Martin was gone.

"No matter. I shall question him sharply enough to-morrow, I warrant."

And Hereward went out to his lodging; while the good Prior went to his prayers.

When Hereward entered his room, Martin started out of the darkness, and followed him in. Then he shut to the door carefully, and pulled out a bag.

"There was no message from my lady: but there was this."

The bag was full of money.

"Why did you not tell me of this before?"

"Never show money before a monk."

"Villain! would you mistrust my uncle?"

"Any man with a shaven crown. St. Peter is his God and Lord and conscience; and if he saw but the shine of a penny, for St. Peter he would want it."

"And he shall have it," quoth Hereward; and flung out of the room, and into his uncle's.

"Uncle, I have money. I am come to pay back what I took from the Steward, and as much more into the bargain." And he told out eight-and-thirty pieces.

"Thank God and all his saints!" cried Brand, weeping abundantly for joy; for he had acquired, by long devotion, the *donum lachrymarum*,—that lachrymose and somewhat hysterical temperament common among pious monks, and held to be a mark of grace.

"Blessed St. Peter, thou art repaid; and thou wilt be merciful!"

Brand believed, in common with all monks then, that Hereward had robbed, not merely the Abbey of Peterborough, but, what was more, St. Peter himself; thereby converting into an implacable and internecine foe the chief of the Apostles, the rock on which was founded the whole Church.

"Now, uncle," said Hereward, "do me one good deed in return. Promise me that, if you can help it, none of my poor housecarles shall suffer for my sins. I led them into trouble. I am punished. I have made restitution,—at least to St. Peter. See that my father and mother, if they be the Christians they call themselves, forgive and forget all offences except mine."

"I will; so help me all saints and our Lord. O my boy, my boy, thou shouldst have been a king's thane, and not an outlaw!"

And he hurried off with the news to the Abbot.

When Hereward returned to his room, Martin was gone.

"Farewell, good men of Peterborough," said Hereward, as he leapt into the saddle next morning. "I had made a vow against you, and came to try you; to see whether you would force me to fulfil it or not. But you have been so kind that I have half repented of it; and the evil shall not come in the days of Abbot Leofric, nor of Brand the Prior, though it may come in the days of Herluin the Steward, if he live long enough."

"What do you mean, you incarnate fiend, only fit to worship Thor and Odin?" asked Brand.

"That I would burn Goldenborough, and Herluin the Steward within it, ere I die. I fear I shall do it; I fear I must do it. Ten years ago come Lammas, Herluin bade light the peat-stack under me. Do you recollect?"

"And so he did, the hound!" quoth Brand. "I had forgotten that."

"Little Hereward never forgets foe or friend. Ever since, on Lammas night,—hold still, horse! —I dream of fire and flame, and of Goldenborough in the glare of it. If it is written in the big book, happen it must; if not, so much the better for Goldenborough, for it is a pretty place, and honest Englishmen in it. Only see that there be not too many Frenchmen crept in when I come back, beside

our French friend Herluin; and see, too, that there be not a peat-stack handy: a word is enough to wise men like you. Good by!"

"God help thee, thou sinful boy!" said the Abbot.

"Hereward, Hereward! Come back!" cried Brand.

But the boy had spurred his horse through the gateway, and was far down the road.

"Leofric, my friend," said Brand, sadly, "this is my sin, and no man's else. And heavy penance will I do for it, till that lad returns in peace."

"Your sin?"

"Mine, Abbot. I persuaded his mother to send him hither to be a monk. Alas! alas! How long will men try to be wiser than Him who maketh men?"

"I do not understand thee," quoth the Abbot. And no more he did.

It was four o'clock on a May morning, when Hereward set out to see the world, with good armor on his back, good weapon by his side, good horse between his knees, and good money in his purse. What could a lad of eighteen want more, who under the harsh family rule of those times had known nothing of a father's, and but too little of a mother's, love? He rode away northward through the Bruneswald, over the higher land of Lincolnshire, through primeval glades of mighty oak and ash, holly and thorn, swarming with game, which was as highly preserved then as now, under Canute's severe forest laws. The yellow roes stood and stared at him knee-deep in the young fern; the pheasant called his hens out to feed in the dewy grass; the blackbird and thrush sang out from every bough; the wood-lark trilled above the high oak-tops, and sank down on them as his song sank down. And Hereward rode on, rejoicing in it all. It was a fine world in the Bruneswald. What was it then outside? Not to him, as to us, a world circular, sailed round, circumscribed, mapped, botanized, zoologized; a tiny planet about which everybody knows, or thinks they know everything: but a world infinite, magical, supernatural,—because unknown; a vast flat plain reaching no one knew whence or where, save that the mountains stood on the four corners thereof to keep it steady, and the four winds of heaven blew out of them; and in the centre, which was to him the Bruneswald, such things as he saw; but beyond, things unspeakable,—dragons, giants, rocs, orcs, witch-whales, griffins, chimeras, satyrs, enchanters, Paynims, Saracen Emirs and Sultans, Kaisers of Constantinople, Kaisers of Ind and of Cathay, and beyond them again of lands as yet unknown. At the very least he could go to Brittany, to the forest of Brocheliaunde, where (so all men said) fairies might be seen bathing in the fountains, and possibly be won and wedded by a bold and dexterous knight after the fashion of Sir Gruelan. [Footnote: Wace, author of the "Roman de Rou," went to Brittany a generation later, to see those same fairies: but had no sport; and sang,—

"Fol i alai, fol m'en revins;
Folie quis, por fol me tins"]

What was there not to be seen and conquered? Where would he go? Where would he not go? For the spirit of Odin the Goer, the spirit which has sent his children round the world, was strong within him. He would go to Ireland, to the Ostmen, or Irish Danes men at Dublin, Waterford, or Cork, and marry some beautiful Irish Princess with gray eyes, and raven locks, and saffron smock, and great gold bracelets from her native hills. No; he would go off to the Orkneys, and join Bruce and Ranald, and the Vikings of the northern seas, and all the hot blood which had found even Norway too hot to hold it; and sail through witch-whales and icebergs to Iceland and Greenland, and the sunny lands which they said lay even beyond, across the all but unknown ocean. He would go up the Baltic to the Jomsburg Vikings, and fight against Lett and Esthonian heathen, and pierce inland, perhaps, through Puleyn and the bison forests, to the land from whence came the magic swords and the old Persian coins which he had seen so often in the halls of his forefathers. No; he would go South, to the

land of sun and wine; and see the magicians of Cordova and Seville; and beard Mussulman hounds worshipping their Mahomets; and perhaps bring home an Emir's daughter,—

"With more gay gold about her middle,
Than would buy half Northumberlee."

Or he would go up the Straits, and on to Constantinople and the great Kaiser of the Greeks, and join the Varanger Guard, and perhaps, like Harold Hardraade in his own days, after being cast to the lion for carrying off a fair Greek lady, tear out the monster's tongue with his own hands, and show the Easterns what a Viking's son could do. And as he dreamed of the infinite world and its infinite wonders, the enchanters he might meet, the jewels he might find, the adventures he might essay, he held that he must succeed in all, with hope and wit and a strong arm; and forgot altogether that, mixed up with the cosmogony of an infinite flat plain called the Earth, there was joined also the belief in a flat roof above called Heaven, on which (seen at times in visions through clouds and stars) sat saints, angels, and archangels, forevermore harping on their golden harps, and knowing neither vanity nor vexation of spirit, lust nor pride, murder nor war;—and underneath a floor, the name whereof was Hell; the mouths whereof (as all men knew) might be seen on Hecla and Aetna and Stromboli; and the fiends heard within, tormenting, amid fire, and smoke, and clanking chains, the souls of the eternally lost.

As he rode on slowly though cheerfully, as a man who will not tire his horse at the beginning of a long day's journey, and knows not where he shall pass the night, he was aware of a man on foot coming up behind him at a slow, steady, loping, wolf-like trot, which in spite of its slowness gained ground on him so fast, that he saw at once that the man could be no common runner.

The man came up; and behold, he was none other than Martin Lightfoot.

"What! art thou here?" asked Hereward, suspiciously, and half cross at seeing any visitor from the old world which he had just cast off. "How gottest thou out of St. Peter's last night?"

Martin's tongue was hanging out of his mouth like a running hound's, but he seemed, like a hound, to perspire through his mouth, for he answered without the least sign of distress, without even pulling in his tongue,—

"Over the wall, the moment the Prior's back was turned. I was not going to wait till I was chained up in some rat's-hole with a half-hundred of iron on my leg, and flogged till I confessed that I was what I am not,—a runaway monk."

"And why art here?"

"Because I am going with you."

"Going with me?" said Hereward; "what can I do for thee?"

"I can do for you," said Martin.

"What?"

"Groom your horse, wash your shirt, clean your weapons, find your inn, fight your enemies, cheat your friends,—anything and everything. You are going to see the world. I am going with you."

"Thou canst be my servant? A right slippery one, I expect," said Hereward, looking down on him with some suspicion.

"Some are not the rogues they seem. I can keep my secrets and yours too."

"Before I can trust thee with my secrets, I shall expect to know some of thine," said Hereward.

Martin Lightfoot looked up with a cunning smile. "A servant can always know his master's secrets if he likes. But that is no reason a master should know his servant's."

"Thou shalt tell me thine, man, or I shall ride off and leave thee."

"Not so easy, my lord. Where that heavy horse can go, Martin Lightfoot can follow. But I will tell you one secret, which I never told to living man. I can read and write like any clerk."

"Thou read and write?"

"Ay, good Latin enough, and Irish too, what is more. And now, because I love you, and because you I will serve, willy nilly, I will tell you all the secrets I have, as long as my breath lasts, for my tongue is rather stiff after that long story about the bell-wether. I was born in Ireland, in Waterford town. My mother was an English slave, one of those that Earl Godwin's wife—not this one that is now, Gyda, but the old one, King Canute's sister—used to sell out of England by the score, tied together with ropes, boys and girls from Bristol town. Her master, my father that was (I shall know him again), got tired of her, and wanted to give her away to one of his kernes. She would not have that; so he hung her up hand and foot, and beat her that she died. There was an abbey hard by, and the Church laid on him a penance,—all that they dared get out of him,—that he should give me to the monks, being then a seven-years' boy. Well, I grew up in that abbey; they taught me my fa fa mi fa: but I liked better conning of ballads and hearing stories of ghosts and enchanters, such as I used to tell you. I'll tell you plenty more whenever you're tired. Then they made me work; and that I never could abide at all. Then they beat me every day; and that I could abide still less; but always I stuck to my book, for one thing I saw,—that learning is power, my lord; and that the reason why the monks are masters of the land is, they are scholars, and you fighting men are none. Then I fell in love (as young blood will) with an Irish lass, when I was full seventeen years old; and when they found out that, they held me down on the floor and beat me till I was wellnigh dead. They put me in prison for a month; and between bread-and-water and darkness I went nigh foolish. They let me out, thinking I could do no more harm to man or lass; and when I found out how profitable folly was, foolish I remained, at least as foolish as seemed good to me. But one night I got into the abbey church, stole therefrom that which I have with me now, and which shall serve you and me in good stead yet,—out and away aboard a ship among the buscarles, and off into the Norway sea. But after a voyage or two, so it befell, I was wrecked in the Wash by Botulfston Deeps, and, begging my way inland, met with your father, and took service with him, as I have taken service now with you."

"Now, what has made thee take service with me?"

"Because you are you."

"Give me none of your parables and dark sayings, but speak out like a man. What canst see in me that thou shouldest share an outlaw's fortune with me?"

"I had run away from a monastery, so had you; I hated the monks, so did you; I liked to tell stories,—since I found good to shut my mouth I tell them to myself all day long, sometimes all night too. When I found out you liked to hear them, I loved you all the more. Then they told me not to speak to you; I held my tongue. I bided my time. I knew you would be outlawed some day. I knew you would turn Viking and kempery-man, and kill giants and enchanters, and win yourself honor and glory; and I knew I should have my share in it. I knew you would need me some day; and you need me now, and here I am; and if you try to cut me down with your sword, I will dodge you, and follow you, and dodge you again, till I force you to let me be your man, for with you I will live and die. And now I can talk no more."

"And with me thou shalt live and die," said Hereward, pulling up his horse, and frankly holding out his hand to his new friend.

Martin Lightfoot took his hand, kissed it, licked it almost as a dog would have done. "I am your man," he said, "amen; and true man I will prove to you, if you will prove true to me." And he dropped quietly back behind Hereward's horse, as if the business of his life was settled, and his mind utterly at rest.

"There is one more likeness between us," said Hereward, after a few minutes' thought. "If I have robbed a church, thou hast robbed one too. What is this precious spoil which is to serve me and thee in such mighty stead?"

Martin drew from inside his shirt and under his waistband a small battle-axe, and handed it up to Hereward. It was a tool the like of which in shape Hereward had seldom seen, and never its equal in beauty. The handle was some fifteen inches long, made of thick strips of black whalebone,

curiously bound with silver, and butted with narwhal ivory. This handle was evidently the work of some cunning Norseman of old. But who was the maker of the blade? It was some eight inches long, with a sharp edge on one side, a sharp crooked pick on the other; of the finest steel, inlaid with strange characters in gold, the work probably of some Circassian, Tartar, or Persian; such a battle-axe as Rustum or Zohrab may have wielded in fight upon the banks of Oxus; one of those magic weapons, brought, men knew not how, out of the magic East, which were hereditary in many a Norse family and sung of in many a Norse saga.

"Look at it," said Martin Lightfoot. "There is magic on it. It must bring us luck. Whoever holds that must kill his man. It will pick a lock of steel. It will crack a mail corslet as a nut-hatch cracks a nut. It will hew a lance in two at a single blow. Devils and spirits forged it,—I know that; Virgilius the Enchanter, perhaps, or Solomon the Great, or whosoever's name is on it, graven there in letters of gold. Handle it, feel its balance; but no,—do not handle it too much. There is a devil in it, who would make you kill me. Whenever I play with it I long to kill a man. It would be so easy,—so easy. Give it me back, my lord, give it me back, lest the devil come through the handle into your palm, and possess you."

Hereward laughed, and gave him back his battle-axe. But he had hardly less doubt of the magic virtues of such a blade than had Martin himself.

"Magical or not, thou wilt not have to hit a man twice with that, Martin, my lad. So we two outlaws are both well armed; and having neither wife nor child, land nor beeves to lose, ought to be a match for any six honest men who may have a grudge against us, and sound reasons at home for running away."

And so those two went northward through the green Bruneswald, and northward again through merry Sherwood, and were not seen in that land again for many a year.

CHAPTER II. – HOW HEREWARD SLEW THE BEAR

Of Hereward's doings for the next few months naught is known. He may very likely have joined Siward in the Scotch war. He may have looked, wondering, for the first time in his life, upon the bones of the old world, where they rise at Dunkeld out of the lowlands of the Tay; and have trembled lest the black crags of Birnam should topple on his head with all their pines. He may have marched down from that famous leaguer with the Gospatricks and Dolfins, and the rest of the kindred of Crinan (abthane or abbot,—let antiquaries decide),—of Dunkeld, and of Duncan, and of Siward, and of the outraged Sibilla. He may have helped himself to bring Birnam Wood to Dunsinane, "on the day of the Seven Sleepers," and heard Siward, when his son Asbiorn's corpse was carried into camp, [Footnote: Shakespeare makes young Siward his son. He, too, was slain in the battle: but he was Siward's nephew.] ask only, "Has he all his wounds in front?" He may have seen old Siward, after Macbeth's defeat (not death, as Shakespeare relates the story), go back to Northumbria "with such booty as no man had obtained before,"—a proof, if the fact be fact, that the Scotch lowlands were not, in the eleventh century, the poor and barbarous country which some have reported them to have been.

All this is not only possible, but probable enough, the dates considered: the chroniclers, however, are silent. They only say that Hereward was in those days beyond Northumberland with Gisebert of Ghent.

Gisebert, Gislebert, Gilbert, Guibert, Goisbricht, of Ghent, who afterwards owned, by chance of war, many a fair manor about Lincoln city, was one of those valiant Flemings who settled along the east and northeast coast of Scotland in the eleventh century. They fought with the Celtic princes, and then married with their daughters; got to themselves lands "by the title-deed of the sword"; and so became—the famous "Freskin the Fleming" especially—the ancestors of the finest aristocracy, both physically and intellectually, in the world. They had their connections, moreover, with the Norman court of Rouen, through the Duchess Matilda, daughter of their old Seigneur, Baldwin, Marquis of Flanders; their connections, too, with the English Court, through Countess Judith, wife of Earl Tosti Godwinsson, another daughter of Baldwin's. Their friendship was sought, their enmity feared, far and wide throughout the north. They seem to have been civilizers and cultivators and traders,—with the instinct of true Flemings,—as well as conquerors; they were in those very days bringing to order and tillage the rich lands of the north-east, from the Frith of Moray to that of Forth; and forming a rampart for Scotland against the invasions of Sweyn, Hardraade, and all the wild Vikings of the northern seas.

Amongst them, in those days, Gilbert of Ghent seems to have been a notable personage, to judge from the great house which he kept, and the *milites tyrones,* or squires in training for the honor of knighthood, who fed at his table. Where he lived, the chroniclers report not. To them the country "ultra Northumbriam," beyond the Forth, was as Russia or Cathay, where

"Geographers on pathless downs
Put elephants for want of towns."

As indeed it was to that French map-maker who, as late as the middle of the eighteenth century (not having been to Aberdeen or Elgin), leaves all the country north of the Tay a blank, with the inscription: "*Terre inculte et sauvage, habitée par les Higlanders.*"

Wherever Gilbert lived, however, he heard that Hereward was outlawed, and sent for him, says the story. And there he lived, doubtless happily enough, fighting Highlanders and hunting deer, so that as yet the pains and penalties of exile did not press very hardly upon him. The handsome, petulant, good-humored lad had become in a few weeks the darling of Gilbert's ladies, and the envy of all his knights and gentlemen. Hereward the singer, harp-player, dancer, Hereward the rider and hunter, was in all mouths; but he himself was discontented at having as yet fallen in with no adventure worthy of

a man, and looked curiously and longingly at the menagerie of wild beasts enclosed in strong wooden cages, which Gilbert kept in one corner of the great court-yard, not for any scientific purposes, but to try with them, at Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide, the mettle of the young gentlemen who were candidates for the honor of knighthood. But after looking over the bulls and stags, wolves and bears, Hereward settled it in his mind that there was none worthy of his steel, save one huge white bear, whom no man had yet dared to face, and whom Hereward, indeed, had never seen, hidden as he was all day within the old oven-shaped Pict's house of stone, which had been turned into his den. There was a mystery about the uncanny brute which charmed Hereward. He was said to be half-human, perhaps wholly human; to be the son of the Fairy Bear, near kinsman, if not uncle or cousin, of Siward Digre. He had, like his fairy father, iron claws; he had human intellect, and understood human speech, and the arts of war,—at least so all in the place believed, and not as absurdly as at first sight seems.

For the brown bear, and much more the white, was, among the Northern nations, in himself a creature magical and superhuman. "He is God's dog," whispered the Lapp, and called him "the old man in the fur cloak," afraid to use his right name, even inside the tent, for fear of his overhearing and avenging the insult. "He has twelve men's strength, and eleven men's wit," sang the Norseman, and prided himself accordingly, like a true Norseman, on outwitting and slaying the enchanted monster.

Terrible was the brown bear: but more terrible "the white sea-deer," as the Saxons called him; the hound of Hrymir, the whale's bane, the seal's dread, the rider of the iceberg, the sailor of the floe, who ranged for his prey under the six months' night, lighted by Surtur's fires, even to the gates of Muspelheim. To slay him was a feat worthy of Beowulf's self; and the greatest wonder, perhaps, among all the wealth of Crowland, was the twelve white bear-skins which lay before the altars, the gift of the great Canute. How Gilbert had obtained his white bear, and why he kept him there in durance vile, was a mystery over which men shook their heads. Again and again Hereward asked his host to let him try his strength against the monster of the North. Again and again the shrieks of the ladies, and Gilbert's own pity for the stripling youth, brought a refusal. But Hereward settled it in his heart, nevertheless, that somehow or other, when Christmas time came round, he would extract from Gilbert, drunk or sober, leave to fight that bear; and then either make himself a name, or die like a man.

Meanwhile Hereward made a friend. Among all the ladies of Gilbert's household, however kind they were inclined to be to him, he took a fancy but to one,—and that was to a little girl of eight years old. Alftruda was her name. He liked to amuse himself with this child, without, as he fancied, any danger of falling in love; for already his dreams of love were of the highest and most fantastic; and an Emir's daughter, or a Princess of Constantinople, were the very lowest game at which he meant to fly. Alftruda was beautiful, too, exceedingly, and precocious, and, it may be, vain enough to repay his attentions in good earnest. Moreover she was English as he was, and royal likewise; a relation of Elfgiva, daughter of Ethelred, once King of England, who, as all know, married Uchtred, prince of Northumberland and grandfather of Gospatrick, Earl of Northumberland, and ancestor of all the Dunbars. Between the English lad then and the English maiden grew up in a few weeks an innocent friendship, which had almost become more than friendship, through the intervention of the Fairy Bear.

For as Hereward was coming in one afternoon from hunting, hawk on fist, with Martin Lightfoot trotting behind, crane and heron, duck and hare, slung over his shoulder, on reaching the court-yard gates he was aware of screams and shouts within, tumult and terror among man and beast. Hereward tried to force his horse in at the gate. The beast stopped and turned, snorting with fear; and no wonder; for in the midst of the court-yard stood the Fairy Bear; his white mane bristled up till he seemed twice as big as any of the sober brown bears which Hereward yet had seen: his long snake neck and cruel visage wreathed about in search of prey. A dead horse, its back broken by a single blow of the paw, and two or three writhing dogs, showed that the beast had turned (like too many of his human kindred) "Berserker." The court-yard was utterly empty: but from the ladies' bower came shrieks

and shouts, not only of women, but of men; and knocking at the bower door, adding her screams to those inside, was a little white figure, which Hereward recognized as Alftruda's. They had barricaded themselves inside, leaving the child out; and now dared not open the door, as the bear swung and rolled towards it, looking savagely right and left for a fresh victim.

Hereward leaped from his horse, and, drawing his sword, rushed forward with a shout which made the bear turn round.

He looked once back at the child; then round again at Hereward: and, making up his mind to take the largest morsel first, made straight at him with a growl which there was no mistaking.

He was within two paces; then he rose on his hind legs, a head and shoulders taller than Hereward, and lifted the iron talons high in air. Hereward knew that there was but one spot at which to strike; and he struck true and strong, before the iron paw could fall, right on the muzzle of the monster.

He heard the dull crash of the steel; he felt the sword jammed tight. He shut his eyes for an instant, fearing lest, as in dreams, his blow had come to naught; lest his sword had turned aside, or melted like water in his hand, and the next moment would find him crushed to earth, blinded and stunned. Something tugged at his sword. He opened his eyes, and saw the huge carcass bend, reel, roll slowly over to one side dead, tearing out of his hand the sword, which was firmly fixed into the skull.

Hereward stood awhile staring at the beast like a man astonished at what he himself had done. He had had his first adventure, and he had conquered. He was now a champion in his own right, —a hero of the heroes,—one who might take rank, if he went on, beside Beowulf, Frotho, Ragnar Lodbrog, or Harald Hardraade. He had done this deed. What was there after this which he might not do? And he stood there in the fulness of his pride, defiant of earth and heaven, while in his heart arose the thought of that old Viking who cried, in the pride of his godlessness: "I never on earth met him whom I feared, and why should I fear Him in heaven? If I met Odin, I would fight with Odin. If Odin were the stronger, he would slay me; if I were the stronger, I would slay him." And there he stood, staring, and dreaming over renown to come,—a true pattern of the half-savage hero of those rough times, capable of all vices except cowardice, and capable, too, of all virtues save humility.

"Do you not see," said Martin Lightfoot's voice, close by, "that there is a fair lady trying to thank you, while you are so rude or so proud that you will not vouchsafe her one look?"

It was true. Little Alftruda had been clinging to him for five minutes past. He took the child up in his arms and kissed her with pure kisses, which for a moment softened his hard heart; then, setting her down, he turned to Martin.

"I have done it, Martin."

"Yes, you have done it; I spied you. What will the old folks at home say to this?"

"What care I?"

Martin Lightfoot shook his head, and drew out his knife.

"What is that for?" said Hereward.

"When the master kills the game, the knave can but skin it. We may sleep warm under this fur in many a cold night by sea and moor."

"Nay," said Hereward, laughing; "when the master kills the game he must first carry it home. Let us take him and set him up against the bower door there, to astonish the brave knights inside." And stooping down, he attempted to lift the huge carcass; but in vain. At last, with Martin's help, he got it fairly on his shoulders, and the two dragged their burden to the bower and dashed it against the door, shouting with all their might to those within to open it.

Windows, it must be remembered, were in those days so few and far between that the folks inside had remained quite unaware of what was going on without.

The door was opened cautiously enough; and out looked, to the shame of knighthood, be it said, two or three knights who had taken shelter in the bower with the ladies. Whatever they were going to say the ladies forestalled, for, rushing out across the prostrate bear, they overwhelmed Hereward with praises, thanks, and, after the straightforward custom of those days, with substantial kisses.

"You must be knighted at once," cried they. "You have knighted yourself by that single blow."

"A pity, then," said one of the knights to the others, "that he had not given that accolade to himself, instead of to the bear."

"Unless some means are found," said another, "of taking down this boy's conceit, life will soon be not worth having here."

"Either he must take ship," said a third, "and look for adventures elsewhere, or I must."

Martin Lightfoot heard those words; and knowing that envy and hatred, like all other vices in those rough-hewn times, were apt to take very startling and unmistakeable shapes, kept his eye accordingly on those three knights.

"He must be knighted,—he shall be knighted, as soon as Sir Gilbert comes home," said all the ladies in chorus.

"I should be sorry to think," said Hereward, with the blundering mock humility of a self-conceited boy, "that I had done anything worthy of such an honor. I hope to win my spurs by greater feats than these."

A burst of laughter from the knights and gentlemen followed.

"How loud the young bantam crows after his first little scuffle!"

"Hark to him! What will he do next? Eat a dragon? Fly to the moon? Marry the Sophy of Egypt's daughter?"

This last touched Hereward to the quick, for it was just what he thought of doing; and his blood, heated enough already, beat quicker, as some one cried, with the evident intent of picking a quarrel:

"That was meant for us. If the man who killed the bear has not earned knighthood, what must we be, who have not killed him? You understand his meaning, gentlemen,—don't forget it!"

Hereward looked down, and setting his foot on the bear's head, wrenched out of it the sword which he had left till now, with pardonable pride, fast set in the skull.

Martin Lightfoot, for his part, drew stealthily from his bosom the little magic axe, keeping his eye on the brain-pan of the last speaker.

The lady of the house cried "Shame!" and ordered the knights away with haughty words and gestures, which, because they were so well deserved, only made the quarrel more deadly.

Then she commanded Hereward to sheathe his sword.

He did so; and turning to the knights, said with all courtesy: "You mistake me, sirs. You were where brave knights should be, within the beleaguered fortress, defending the ladies. Had you remained outside, and been eaten by the bear, what must have befallen them, had he burst open the door? As for this little lass, whom you left outside, she is too young to requite knight's prowess by lady's love; and therefore beneath your attention, and only fit for the care of a boy like me." And taking up Alftruda in his arms, he carried her in and disappeared.

Who now but Hereward was in all men's mouths? The minstrels made ballads on him; the lasses sang his praises (says the chronicler) as they danced upon the green. Gilbert's lady would need give him the seat, and all the honors, of a belted knight, though knight he was none. And daily and weekly the valiant lad grew and hardened into a valiant man, and a courteous one withal, giving no offence himself, and not over-ready to take offence at other men.

The knights were civil enough to him, the ladies more than civil; he hunted, he wrestled, he tilted; he was promised a chance of fighting for glory, as soon as a Highland chief should declare war against Gilbert, or drive off his cattle,—an event which (and small blame to the Highland chiefs) happened every six months.

No one was so well content with himself as Hereward; and therefore he fancied that the world must be equally content with him, and he was much disconcerted when Martin drew him aside one day, and whispered: "If I were my lord, I should wear a mail shirt under my coat to-morrow out hunting."

"What?"

"The arrow that can go through a deer's bladebone can go through a man's."

"Who should harm me?"

"Any man of the dozen who eat at the same table."

"What have I done to them? If I had my laugh at them, they had their laugh at me; and we are quits."

"There is another score, my lord, which you have forgotten, and that is all on your side."

"Eh?"

"You killed the bear. Do you expect them to forgive you that, till they have repaid you with interest?"

"Pish!"

"You do not want for wit, my lord. Use it, and think. What right has a little boy like you to come here, killing bears which grown men cannot kill? What can you expect but just punishment for your insolence,—say, a lance between your shoulders while you stoop to drink, as Sigfried had for daring to tame Brunhild? And more, what right have you to come here, and so win the hearts of the ladies, that the lady of all the ladies should say, 'If aught happen to my poor boy,—and he cannot live long,—I would adopt Hereward for my own son, and show his mother what a fool some folks think her?' So, my lord, put on your mail shirt to-morrow, and take care of narrow ways, and sharp corners. For to-morrow it will be tried, that I know, before my Lord Gilbert comes back from the Highlands; but by whom I know not, and care little, seeing that there are half a dozen in the house who would be glad enough of the chance."

Hereward took his advice, and rode out with three or four knights the next morning into the fir-forest; not afraid, but angry and sad. He was not yet old enough to estimate the virulence of envy, to take ingratitude and treachery for granted. He was to learn the lesson then, as a wholesome chastener to the pride of success. He was to learn it again in later years, as an additional bitterness in the humiliation of defeat; and find out, as does many a man, that if he once fall, or seem to fall, a hundred curs spring up to bark at him, who dared not open their mouths while he was on his legs.

So they rode into the forest, and parted, each with his footman and his dogs, in search of boar and deer; and each had his sport without meeting again for some two hours or more.

Hereward and Martin came at last to a narrow gully, a murderous place enough. Huge fir-trees roofed it in, and made a night of noon. High banks of earth and great boulders walled it in right and left for twenty feet above. The track, what with pack-horses' feet, and what with the wear and tear of five hundred years' rain-fall, was a rut three feet deep and two feet broad, in which no horse could turn. Any other day Hereward would have cantered down it with merely a tightened rein. Today he turned to Martin and said,—

"A very fit and proper place for this same treason, unless you have been drinking beer and thinking beer."

But Martin was nowhere to be seen.

A pebble thrown from the right bank struck him, and he looked up. Martin's face was peering through the heather overhead, his finger on his lips. Then he pointed cautiously, first up the pass, then down.

Hereward felt that his sword was loose in the sheath, and then gripped his lance, with a heart beating, but not with fear.

The next moment he heard the rattle of a horse's hoofs behind him; looked back; and saw a knight charging desperately down the gully, his bow in hand, and arrow drawn to the head.

To turn was impossible. To stop, even to walk on, was to be ridden over and hurled to the ground helplessly. To gain the mouth of the gully, and then turn on his pursuer, was his only chance. For the first and almost the last time in his life, he struck spurs into his horse, and ran away. As he went, an arrow struck him sharply in the back, piercing the corslet, but hardly entering the flesh. As he neared the mouth, two other knights crashed their horses through the brushwood from right and

left, and stood awaiting him, their spears ready to strike. He was caught in a trap. A shield might have saved him; but he had none.

He did not flinch. Dropping his reins, and driving in the spurs once more, he met them in full shock. With his left hand he hurled aside the left-hand lance, with his right he hurled his own with all his force at the right-hand foe, and saw it pass clean through the felon's chest, while his lance-point dropped, and passed harmlessly behind his knee.

So much for lances in front. But the knight behind? Would not his sword the next moment be through his brain?

There was a clatter, a crash, and looking back Hereward saw horse and man rolling in the rut, and rolling with them Martin Lightfoot. He had already pinned the felon knight's head against the steep bank, and, with uplifted axe, was meditating a pick at his face which would have stopped alike his love-making and his fighting.

"Hold thy hand," shouted Hereward. "Let us see who he is; and remember that he is at least a knight."

"But one that will ride no more to-day. I finished his horse's going as I rolled down the bank."

It was true. He had broken the poor beast's leg with a blow of the axe, and they had to kill the horse out of pity ere they left.

Martin dragged his prisoner forward.

"You?" cried Hereward. "And I saved your life three days ago!"

The knight answered nothing.

"You will have to walk home. Let that be punishment enough for you," and he turned.

"He will have to ride in a woodman's cart, if he have the luck to find one."

The third knight had fled, and after him the dead man's horse. Hereward and his man rode home in peace, and the third knight, after trying vainly to walk a mile or two, fell and lay, and was fain to fulfil Martin's prophecy, and be brought home in a cart, to carry for years after, like Sir Lancelot, the nickname of the Chevalier de la Charette.

And so was Hereward avenged of his enemies. Judicial, even private, inquiry into the matter there was none. That gentlemen should meet in the forest and commit, or try to commit, murder on each other's bodies, was far too common a mishap in the ages of faith to stir up more than an extra gossiping and cackling among the women, and an extra cursing and threatening among the men; and as the former were all but unanimously on Hereward's side, his plain and honest story was taken as it stood.

"And now, fair lady," said Hereward to his hostess, "I must thank you for all your hospitality, and bid you farewell forever and a day."

She wept, and entreated him only to stay till her lord came back; but Hereward was firm.

"You, lady, and your good lord will I ever love; and at your service my sword shall ever be: but not here. Ill blood I will not make. Among traitors I will not dwell. I have killed two of them, and shall have to kill two of their kinsmen next, and then two more, till you have no knights left; and pity that would be. No; the world is wide, and there are plenty of good fellows in it who will welcome me without forcing me to wear mail under my coat out hunting."

And he armed himself *cap-à-pié*, and rode away. Great was the weeping in the bower, and great the chuckling in the hall: but never saw they Hereward again upon the Scottish shore.

CHAPTER III. – HOW HEREWARD SUCCORED A PRINCESS OF CORNWALL

The next place in which Hereward appeared was far away on the southwest, upon the Cornish shore. How he came there, or after how long, the chronicles do not say. All that shall be told is, that he went into port on board a merchant ship carrying wine, and intending to bring back tin. The merchants had told him of one Alef, a valiant *regulus* or kinglet of those parts, who was indeed a distant connection of Hereward himself, having married, as did so many of the Celtic princes, the daughter of a Danish sea-rover, of Siward's blood. They told him also that the kinglet increased his wealth, not only by the sale of tin and of red cattle, but by a certain amount of autumnal piracy in company with his Danish brothers-in-law from Dublin and Waterford; and Hereward, who believed, with most Englishmen of the East Country, that Cornwall still produced a fair crop of giants, some of them with two and even three heads, had hopes that Alef might show him some adventure worthy of his sword. He sailed in, therefore, over a rolling bar, between jagged points of black rock, and up a tide river which wandered away inland, like a land-locked lake, between high green walls of oak and ash, till they saw at the head of the tide Alef's town, nestling in a glen which sloped towards the southern sun. They discovered, besides, two ships drawn up upon the beach, whose long lines and snake-heads, beside the stoat carved on the beak-head of one and the adder on that of the other, bore witness to the piratical habits of their owner. The merchants, it seemed, were well known to the Cornishmen on shore, and Hereward went up with them unopposed; past the ugly dikes and muddy leats, where Alef's slaves were streaming the gravel for tin ore; through rich alluvial pastures spotted with red cattle, and up to Alef's town. Earthworks and stockades surrounded a little church of ancient stone, and a cluster of granite cabins thatched with turf, in which the slaves abode, and in the centre of all a vast stone barn, with low walls and high sloping roof, which contained Alef's family, treasures, fighting tail, horses, cattle, and pigs. They entered at one end between the pigsties, passed on through the cow-stalls, then through the stables, and saw before them, dim through the reek of thick peat-smoke, a long oaken table, at which sat huge dark-haired Cornishmen, with here and there among them the yellow head of a Norseman, who were Alef's following or fighting men. Boiled meat was there in plenty, barley cakes, and ale. At the head of the table, on a high-backed settle, was Alef himself, a jolly giant, who was just setting to work to drink himself stupid with mead made from narcotic heather honey. By his side sat a lovely dark-haired girl, with great gold torcs upon her throat and wrists, and a great gold brooch fastening a shawl which had plainly come from the looms of Spain or of the East, and next to her again, feeding her with titbits cut off with his own dagger, and laid on barley cake instead of a plate, sat a more gigantic personage even than Alef, the biggest man that Hereward had ever seen, with high cheek bones, and small ferret eyes, looking out from a greasy mass of bright red hair and beard.

No questions were asked of the new-comers. They set themselves down in silence in empty places, and, according to the laws of the good old Cornish hospitality, were allowed to eat and drink their fill before they spoke a word.

"Welcome here again, friend," said Alef at last, in good enough Danish, calling the eldest merchant by name. "Do you bring wine?"

The merchant nodded.

"And you want tin?"

The merchant nodded again, and lifting his cup drank Alef's health, following it up by a coarse joke in Cornish, which raised a laugh all round.

The Norse trader of those days, it must be remembered, was none of the cringing and effeminate chapmen who figure in the stories of the Middle Ages. A free Norse or Dane, himself

often of noble blood, he fought as willingly as he bought; and held his own as an equal, whether at the court of a Cornish kinglet or at that of the Great Kaiser of the Greeks.

"And you, fair sir," said Alef, looking keenly at Hereward, "by what name shall I call you, and what service can I do for you? You look more like an earl's son than a merchant, and are come here surely for other things besides tin."

"Health to King Alef," said Hereward, raising the cup. "Who I am I will tell to none but Alef's self; but an earl's son I am, though an outlaw and a rover. My lands are the breadth of my boot-sole. My plough is my sword. My treasure is my good right hand. Nothing I have, and nothing I need, save to serve noble kings and earls, and win me a champion's fame. If you have battles to fight, tell me, that I may fight them for you. If you have none, thank God for his peace; and let me eat and drink, and go in peace."

"King Alef needs neither man nor boy to fight his battle as long as Ironhook sits in his hall."

It was the red-bearded giant who spoke in a broken tongue, part Scotch, part Cornish, part Danish, which Hereward could hardly understand; but that the ogre intended to insult him he understood well enough.

Hereward had hoped to find giants in Cornwall: and behold he had found one at once; though rather, to judge from his looks, a Pictish than a Cornish giant; and, true to his reckless determination to defy and fight every man and beast who was willing to defy and fight him, he turned on his elbow and stared at Ironhook in scorn, meditating some speech which might provoke the hoped-for quarrel.

As he did so his eye happily caught that of the fair Princess. She was watching him with a strange look, admiring, warning, imploring; and when she saw that he noticed her, she laid her finger on her lip in token of silence, crossed herself devoutly, and then laid her finger on her lips again, as if beseeching him to be patient and silent in the name of Him who answered not again.

Hereward, as is well seen, wanted not for quick wit, or for chivalrous feeling. He had observed the rough devotion of the giant to the Lady. He had observed, too, that she shrank from it; that she turned away with loathing when he offered her his own cup, while he answered by a dark and deadly scowl.

Was there an adventure here? Was she in duress either from this Ironhook or from her father, or from both? Did she need Hereward's help? If so, she was so lovely that he could not refuse it. And on the chance, he swallowed down his high stomach, and answered blandly enough,—

"One could see without eyes, noble sir, that you were worth any ten common men; but as every one has not like you the luck of so lovely a lady by your side, I thought that perchance you might hand over some of your lesser quarrels to one like me, who has not yet seen so much good fighting as yourself, and enjoy yourself in pleasant company at home, as I should surely do in your place."

The Princess shuddered and turned pale; then looked at Hereward and smiled her thanks. Ironhook laughed a savage laugh.

Hereward's jest being translated into Cornish for the benefit of the company, was highly approved by all; and good humor being restored, every man got drunk save Hereward, who found the mead too sweet and sickening.

After which those who could go to bed went to bed, not as in England, [Footnote: Cornwall was not then considered part of England.] among the rushes on the floor, but in the bunks or berths of wattle which stood two or three tiers high along the wall.

The next morning as Hereward went out to wash his face and hands in the brook below (he being the only man in the house who did so), Martin Lightfoot followed him.

"What is it, Martin? Hast thou had too much of that sweet mead last night that thou must come out to cool thy head too?"

"I came out for two reasons,—first, to see fair play, in case that Ironhook should come to wash his ugly visage, and find you on all fours over the brook—you understand? And next, to tell you what I heard last night among the maids."

"And what did you hear?"

"Fine adventures, if we can but compass them. You saw that lady with the carrot-headed fellow?—I saw that you saw. Well, if you will believe me, that man has no more gentle blood than I have,—has no more right to sit on the settle than I. He is a No-man's son, a Pict from Galloway, who came down with a pirate crew and has made himself the master of this drunken old Prince, and the darling of all his housecarles, and now will needs be his son-in-law whether he will or not."

"I thought as much," said Hereward; "but how didst thou find out this?"

"I went out and sat with the knaves and the maids, and listened to their harp-playing, and harp they can, these Cornish, like very elves; and then I, too, sang songs and told them stories, for I can talk their tongue somewhat, till they all blest me for a right good fellow. And then I fell to praising up old Ironhook to the women."

"Praising him up, man?"

"Ay, just because I suspected him; for the women are so contrary, that if you speak evil of a man they will surely speak good of him; but if you will only speak good of him, then you will hear all the evil of him he ever has done, and more beside. And this I heard; that the King's daughter cannot abide him, and would as lief marry a seal."

"One did not need to be told that," said Hereward, "as long as one has eyes in one's head. I will kill the fellow, and carry her off, ere four-and-twenty hours be past."

"Softly, softly, my young master. You need to be told something that your eyes would not tell you, and that is, that the poor lass is betrothed already to a son of old King Ranald the Ostman, of Waterford, son of old King Sigtryg, who ruled there when I was a boy."

"He is a kinsman of mine, then," said Hereward. "All the more reason that I should kill this ruffian."

"If you can," said Martin Lightfoot.

"If I can?" retorted Hereward, fiercely.

"Well, well, wilful heart must have its way; only take my counsel: speak to the poor young lady first, and see what she will tell you, lest you only make bad worse, and bring down her father and his men on her as well as you."

Hereward agreed, and resolved to watch his opportunity of speaking to the princess.

As they went in to the morning meal they met Alef. He was in high good humor with Hereward; and all the more so when Hereward told him his name, and how he was the son of Leofric.

"I will warrant you are," he said, "by the gray head you carry on green shoulders. No discreeter man, they say, in these isles than the old earl."

"You speak truth, sir," said Hereward, "though he be no father of mine now; for of Leofric it is said in King Edward's court, that if a man ask counsel of him, it is as though he had asked it of the oracles of God."

"Then you are his true son, young man. I saw how you kept the peace with Ironhook, and I owe you thanks for it; for though he is my good friend, and will be my son-in-law erelong, yet a quarrel with him is more than I can abide just now, and I should not like to have seen my guest and my kinsman slain in my house."

Hereward would have said that he thought there was no fear of that; but he prudently held his tongue, and having an end to gain, listened instead of talking.

"Twenty years ago, of course, I could have thrashed him as easily as—; but now I am getting old and shaky, and the man has been a great help in need. Six kings of these parts has he killed for me, who drove off my cattle, and stopped my tin works, and plundered my monks' cells too, which is worse, while I was away sailing the seas; and he is a right good fellow at heart, though he be a little rough. So be friends with him as long as you stay here, and if I can do you a service I will."

They went in to their morning meal, at which Hereward resolved to keep the peace which he longed to break, and therefore, as was to be expected, broke.

For during the meal the fair lady, with no worse intention, perhaps, than that of teasing her tyrant, fell to open praises of Hereward's fair face and golden hair; and being insulted therefore by the Ironhook, retaliated by observations about his personal appearance, which were more common in the eleventh century than they happily are now. He, to comfort himself, drank deep of the French wine which had just been brought and broached, and then went out into the court-yard, where, in the midst of his admiring fellow-ruffians, he enacted a scene as ludicrous as it was pitiable. All the childish vanity of the savage boiled over. He strutted, he shouted, he tossed about his huge limbs, he called for a harper, and challenged all around to dance, sing, leap, fight, do anything against him: meeting with nothing but admiring silence, he danced himself out of breath, and then began boasting once more of his fights, his cruelties, his butcheries, his impossible escapes and victories; till at last, as luck would have it, he espied Hereward, and poured out a stream of abuse against Englishmen and English courage.

"Englishmen," he said, "were naught. Had he not slain three of them himself with one blow?"

"Of your mouth, I suppose," quoth Hereward, who saw that the quarrel must come, and was glad to have it done and over.

"Of my mouth?" roared Ironhook; "of my sword, man!"

"Of your mouth," said Hereward. "Of your brain were they begotten, of the breath of your mouth they were born, and by the breath of your mouth you can slay them again as often as you choose."

The joke, as it has been handed down to us by the old chroniclers, seems clumsy enough; but it sent the princess, say they, into shrieks of laughter.

"Were it not that my Lord Alef was here," shouted Ironhook, "I would kill you out of hand."

"Promise to fight fair, and do your worst. The more fairly you fight, the more honor you will win," said Hereward.

Whereupon the two were parted for the while.

Two hours afterwards, Hereward, completely armed with helmet and mail shirt, sword and javelin, hurried across the great court-yard, with Martin Lightfoot at his heels, towards the little church upon the knoll above. The two wild men entered into the cool darkness, and saw before them, by the light of a tiny lamp, the crucifix over the altar, and beneath it that which was then believed to be the body of Him who made heaven and earth. They stopped, trembling, for a moment, bowed themselves before that, to them, perpetual miracle, and then hurried on to a low doorway to the right, inside which dwelt Alef's chaplain, one of those good Celtic priests who were supposed to represent a Christianity more ancient than, and all but independent of, the then all-absorbing Church of Rome.

The cell was such a one as a convict would now disdain to inhabit. A low lean-to roof; the slates and rafters unceiled; the stone walls and floor unplastered; ill-lighted by a hand-broad window, unglazed, and closed with a shutter at night. A truss of straw and a rug, the priest's bed, lay in a corner. The only other furniture was a large oak chest, containing the holy vessels and vestments and a few old books. It stood directly under the window for the sake of light, for it served the good priest for both table and chair; and on it he was sitting reading in his book at that minute, the sunshine and the wind streaming in behind his head, doing no good to his rheumatism of thirty years' standing.

"Is there a priest here?" asked Hereward, hurriedly.

The old man looked up, shook his head, and answered in Cornish.

"Speak to him in Latin, Martin! Maybe he will understand that."

Martin spoke. "My lord, here, wants a priest to shrive him, and that quickly. He is going to fight the great tyrant Ironhook, as you call him."

"Ironhook?" answered the priest in good Latin enough. "And he so young! God help him, he is a dead man! What is this,—a fresh soul sent to its account by the hands of that man of Belial? Cannot he entreat him,—can he not make peace, and save his young life? He is but a stripling, and that man, like Goliath of old, a man of war from his youth up."

"And my master," said Martin Lightfoot, proudly, "is like young David,—one that can face a giant and kill him; for he has slain, like David, his lion and his bear ere now. At least, he is one that will neither make peace, nor entreat the face of living man. So shrive him quickly, Master Priest, and let him be gone to his work."

Poor Martin Lightfoot spoke thus bravely only to keep up his spirits and his young lord's; for, in spite of his confidence in Hereward's prowess, he had given him up for a lost man: and the tears ran down his rugged cheeks, as the old priest, rising up and seizing Hereward's two hands in his, besought him, with the passionate and graceful eloquence of his race, to have mercy upon his own youth.

Hereward understood his meaning, though not his words.

"Tell him," he said to Martin, "that fight I must, and tell him that shrive me he must, and that quickly. Tell him how the fellow met me in the wood below just now, and would have slain me there, unarmed as I was; and how, when I told him it was a shame to strike a naked man, he told me he would give me but one hour's grace to go back, on the faith of a gentleman, for my armor and weapons, and meet him there again, to die by his hand. So shrive me quick, Sir Priest."

Hereward knelt down. Martin Lightfoot knelt down by him, and with a trembling voice began to interpret for him.

"What does he say?" asked Hereward, as the priest murmured something to himself.

"He said," quoth Martin, now fairly blubbering, "that, fair and young as you are, your shrift should be as short and as clean as David's."

Hereward was touched. "Anything but that," said he, smiting on his breast, "Mea culpa,—mea culpa,—mea maxima culpa."

"Tell him how I robbed my father."

The priest groaned as Martin did so.

"And how I mocked at my mother, and left her in a rage, without ever a kind word between us. And how I have slain I know not how many men in battle, though that, I trust, need not lay heavily on my soul, seeing that I killed them all in fair fight."

Again the priest groaned.

"And how I robbed a certain priest of his money and gave it away to my housecarles."

Here the priest groaned more bitterly still.

"O my son! my son! where hast thou found time to lay all these burdens on thy young soul?"

"It will take less time," said Martin, bluntly, "for you to take the burdens off again."

"But I dare not absolve him for robbing a priest. Heaven Help him! He must go to the bishop for that. He is more fit to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem than to battle."

"He has no time," quoth Martin, "for bishops or Jerusalem."

"Tell him," says Hereward, "that in this purse is all I have, that in it he will find sixty silver pennies, beside two strange coins of gold."

"Sir Priest," said Martin Lightfoot, taking the purse from Hereward, and keeping it in his own hand, "there are in this bag moneys."

Martin had no mind to let the priest into the secret of the state of their finances.

"And tell him," continued Hereward, "that if I fall in this battle I give him all that money, that he may part it among the poor for the good of my soul."

"Pish!" said Martin to his lord; "that is paying him for having you killed. You should pay him for keeping you alive." And without waiting for the answer, he spoke in Latin,—

"And if he comes back safe from this battle, he will give you ten pennies for yourself and your church, Priest, and therefore expects you to pray your very loudest while he is gone."

"I will pray, I will pray," said the holy man; "I will wrestle in prayer. Ah that he could slay the wicked, and reward the proud according to his deservings! Ah that he could rid me and my master, and my young lady, of this son of Belial,—this devourer of widows and orphans,—this slayer of the poor and needy, who fills this place with innocent blood,—him of whom it is written, 'They stretch

forth their mouth unto the heaven, and their tongue goeth through the world. Therefore fall the people unto them, and thereout suck they no small advantage.' I will shrive him, shrive him of all save robbing the priest, and for that he must go to the bishop, if he live; and if not, the Lord have mercy on his soul."

And so, weeping and trembling, the good old man pronounced the words of absolution.

Hereward rose, thanked him, and then hurried out in silence.

"You will pray your very loudest, Priest," said Martin, as he followed his young lord.

"I will, I will," quoth he, and kneeling down began to chant that noble seventy-third Psalm, "Quam bonus Israel," which he had just so fitly quoted.

"Thou gavest him the bag, Martin?" said Hereward, as they hurried on.

"You are not dead yet. 'No pay, no play,' is as good a rule for priest as for layman."

"Now then, Martin Lightfoot, good-bye. Come not with me. It must never be said, even slanderously, that I brought two into the field against one; and if I die, Martin—"

"You won't die!" said Lightfoot, shutting his teeth.

"If I die, go back to my people somehow, and tell them that I died like a true earl's son."

Hereward held out his hand; Martin fell on his knees and kissed it; watched him with set teeth till he disappeared in the wood; and then started forward and entered the bushes at a different spot.

"I must be nigh at hand to see fair play," he muttered to himself, "in case any of his ruffians be hanging about. Fair play I'll see, and fair play I'll give, too, for the sake of my lord's honor, though I be bitterly loath to do it. So many times as I have been a villain when it was of no use, why mayn't I be one now, when it would serve the purpose indeed? Why did we ever come into this accursed place? But one thing I will do," said he, as he ensconced himself under a thick holly, whence he could see the meeting of the combatants upon an open lawn some twenty yards away; "if that big bull-calf kills my master, and I do not jump on his back and pick his brains out with this trusty steel of mine, may my right arm—"

And Martin Lightfoot swore a fearful oath, which need not here be written.

The priest had just finished his chant of the seventy-third Psalm, and had betaken himself in his spiritual warfare, as it was then called, to the equally apposite fifty-second, "Quid gloriaris?"

"Why boastest thou thyself, thou tyrant, that thou canst do mischief, whereas the goodness of God endureth yet daily?"

"Father! father!" cried a soft voice in the doorway, "where are you?"

And in hurried the Princess.

"Hide this," she said, breathless, drawing from beneath her mantle a huge sword; "hide it, where no one dare touch it, under the altar behind the holy rood: no place too secret."

"What is it?" asked the priest, springing up from his knees.

"His sword,—the Ogre's,—his magic sword, which kills whomsoever it strikes. I coaxed the wretch to let me have it last night when he was tipsy, for fear he should quarrel with the young stranger; and I have kept it from him ever since by one excuse or another; and now he has sent one of his ruffians in for it, saying, that if I do not give it up at once he will come back and kill me."

"He dare not do that," said the priest.

"What is there that he dare not?" said she. "Hide it at once; I know that he wants it to fight with this Hereward."

"If he wants it for that," said the priest, "it is too late; for half an hour is past since Hereward went to meet him."

"And you let him go? You did not persuade him, stop him? You let him go hence to his death?"

In vain the good man expostulated and explained that it was no fault of his.

"You must come with me this instant to my father,—to them; they must be parted. They shall be parted. If you dare not, I dare. I will throw myself between them, and he that strikes the other shall strike me."

And she hurried the priest out of the house, down the knoll, and across the yard. There they found others on the same errand. The news that a battle was toward had soon spread, and the men-at-arms were hurrying down to the fight; kept back, however, by Alef, who strode along at their head.

Alef was sorely perplexed in mind. He had taken, as all honest men did, a great liking to Hereward. Moreover, he was his kinsman and his guest. Save him he would if he could but how to save him without mortally offending his tyrant Ironhook he could not see. At least he would exert what little power he had, and prevent, if possible, his men-at-arms from helping their darling leader against the hapless lad.

Alef's perplexity was much increased when his daughter bounded towards him, seizing him by the arm, and hurried him on, showing by look and word which of the combatants she favored, so plainly that the ruffians behind broke into scornful murmurs. They burst through the bushes. Martin Lightfoot, happily, heard them coming, and had just time to slip away noiselessly, like a rabbit, to the other part of the cover.

The combat seemed at the first glance to be one between a grown man and a child, so unequal was the size of the combatants. But the second look showed that the advantage was by no means with Ironhook. Stumbling to and fro with the broken shaft of a javelin sticking in his thigh, he vainly tried to seize and crush Hereward in his enormous arms. Hereward, bleeding, but still active and upright, broke away, and sprang round him, watching for an opportunity to strike a deadly blow. The housecarles rushed forward with yells. Alef shouted to the combatants to desist; but ere the party could reach them, Hereward's opportunity had come. Ironhook, after a fruitless lunge, stumbled forward. Hereward leapt aside, and spying an unguarded spot below the corslet, drove his sword deep into the giant's body, and rolled him over upon the sward. Then arose shouts of fury.

"Foul play!" cried one.

And others taking up the cry, called out, "Sorcery!" and "Treason!"

Hereward stood over Ironhook as he lay writhing and foaming on the ground.

"Killed by a boy at last!" groaned he. "If I had but had my own sword,—my Brain-biter which that witch stole from me but last night!"—and amid foul curses and bitter tears of shame his mortal spirit fled to its doom.

The housecarles rushed in on Hereward, who had enough to do to keep them at arm's length by long sweeps of his sword.

Alef entreated, threatened, promised a fair trial if the men would give fair play; when, to complete the confusion, the Princess threw herself upon the corpse, shrieking and tearing her hair; and to Hereward's surprise and disgust, bewailed the prowess and the virtues of the dead, calling upon all present to avenge his murder.

Hereward vowed inwardly that he would never again trust woman's fancy or fight in woman's quarrel. He was now nigh at his wits' end; the housecarles had closed round him in a ring with the intention of seizing him; and however well he might defend his front, he might be crippled at any moment from behind: but in the very nick of time Martin Lightfoot burst through the crowd, set himself heel to heel with his master, and broke out, not with threats, but with a good-humored laugh.

"Here is a pretty coil about a red-headed brute of a Pict! Danes, Ostmen," he cried, "are you not ashamed to call such a fellow your lord, when you have such a true earl's son as this to lead you if you will?"

The Ostmen in the company looked at each other. Martin Lightfoot saw that his appeal to the antipathies of race had told, and followed it up by a string of witticisms upon the Pictish nation in general, of which the only two fit for modern ears to be set down were the two old stories, that the Picts had feet so large that they used to lie upon their backs and hold up their legs to shelter them from the sun; and that when killed, they could not fall down, but died as they were, all standing.

"So that the only foul play I can see is, that my master shoved the fellow over after he had stabbed him, instead of leaving him to stand upright there, like one of your Cornish Dolmens, till his flesh should fall off his bones."

Hereward saw the effect of Martin's words, and burst out in Danish likewise.

"Look at me!" he said; "I am Hereward the outlaw, I am the champion, I am the Berserker, I am the Viking, I am the land thief, the sea thief, the ravager of the world, the bear-slayer, the ogre-killer, the raven-fattener, the darling of the wolf, the curse of the widow. Touch me, and I will give you to the raven and to the wolf, as I have this ogre. Be my men, and follow me over the swan's road, over the whale's bath, over the long-snake's leap, to the land where the sea meets the sun, and golden apples hang on every tree; and we will freight our ships with Moorish maidens, and the gold of Cadiz and Algiers."

"Hark to the Viking! Hark to the right earl's son!" shouted some of the Danes, whose blood had been stirred many a time before by such wild words, and on whom Hereward's youth and beauty had their due effect. And now the counsels of the ruffians being divided, the old priest gained courage to step in. Let them deliver Hereward and his serving man into his custody. He would bring them forth on the morrow, and there should be full investigation and fair trial. And so Hereward and Martin, who both refused stoutly to give up their arms, were marched back into the town, locked in the little church, and left to their meditations.

Hereward sat down on the pavement and cursed the Princess. Martin Lightfoot took off his master's corslet, and, as well as the darkness would allow, bound up his wounds, which happily were not severe.

"Were I you," said he at last, "I should keep my curses till I saw the end of this adventure."

"Has not the girl betrayed me shamefully?"

"Not she. I saw her warn you, as far as looks could do, not to quarrel with the man."

"That was because she did not know me. Little she thought that I could—"

"Don't hollo till you are out of the wood. This is a night for praying rather than boasting."

"She cannot really love that wretch," said Hereward, after a pause. "You saw how she mocked him."

"Women are strange things, and often tease most where they love most."

"But such a misbegotten savage."

"Women are strange things, say I, and with some a big fellow is a pretty fellow, be he uglier than seven Ironhooks. Still, just because women are strange things, have patience, say I."

The lock creaked, and the old priest came in. Martin leapt to the open door; but it was slammed in his face by men outside with scornful laughter.

The priest took Hereward's head in his hands, wept over him, blessed him for having slain Goliath like young David, and then set food and drink before the two; but he answered Martin's questions only with sighs and shakings of the head.

"Let us eat and drink, then," said Martin, "and after that you, my lord, sleep off your wounds while I watch the door. I have no fancy for these fellows taking us unawares at night."

Martin lay quietly across the door till the small hours, listening to every sound, till the key creaked once more in the lock. He started at the sound, and seizing the person who entered round the neck, whispered, "One word, and you are dead."

"Do not hurt me," half shrieked a stifled voice; and Martin Lightfoot, to his surprise, found that he had grasped no armed man, but the slight frame of a young girl.

"I am the Princess," she whispered; "let me in."

"A very pretty hostage for us," thought Martin, and letting her go seized the key, locking the door in the inside.

"Take me to your master," she cried, and Martin led her up the church wondering, but half suspecting some further trap.

"You have a dagger in your hand," said he, holding her wrist.

"I have. If I had meant to use it, it would have been used first on you. Take it, if you like."

She hurried up to Hereward, who lay sleeping quietly on the altar-steps; knelt by him, wrung his hands, called him her champion, her deliverer.

"I am not well awake yet," said he, coldly, "and don't know whether this may not be a dream, as more that I have seen and heard seems to be."

"It is no dream. I am true. I was always true to you. Have I not put myself in your power? Am I not come here to deliver you, my deliverer?"

"The tears which you shed over your ogre's corpse seem to have dried quickly enough."

"Cruel! What else could I do? You heard him accuse me to those ruffians of having stolen his sword. My life, my father's life, were not safe a moment, had I not dissembled, and done the thing I loathed. Ah!" she went on, bitterly, "you men, who rule the world and us by cruel steel, you forget that we poor women have but one weapon left wherewith to hold our own, and that is cunning; and are driven by you day after day to tell the lie which we detest."

"Then you really stole his sword?"

"And hid it here, for your sake!" and she drew the weapon from behind the altar.

"Take it. It is yours now. It is magical. Whoever smites with it, need never smite again. Now, quick, you must be gone. But promise one thing before you go."

"If I leave this land safe, I will do it, be it what it may. Why not come with me, lady, and see it done?"

She laughed. "Vain boy, do you think that I love you well enough for that?"

"I have won you, and why should I not keep you?" said Hereward, sullenly.

"Do you not know that I am betrothed to your kinsman? And—though that you cannot know—that I love your kinsman?"

"So I have all the blows, and none of the spoil."

"Tush! you have the glory,-and the sword,—and the chance, if you will do my bidding, of being called by all ladies a true and gentle knight, who cared not for his own pleasure, but for deeds of chivalry. Go to my betrothed,—to Waterford over the sea. Take him this ring, and tell him by that token to come and claim me soon, lest he run the danger of losing me a second time, and lose me then forever; for I am in hard case here, and were it not for my father's sake, perhaps I might be weak enough, in spite of what men might say, to flee with you to your kinsman across the sea."

"Trust me and come," said Hereward, whose young blood kindled with a sudden nobleness, —"trust me, and I will treat you like my sister, like my queen. By the holy rood above I will swear to be true to you."

"I do trust you, but it cannot be. Here is money for you in plenty to hire a passage if you need: it is no shame to take it from me. And now one thing more. Here is a cord,—you must bind the hands and feet of the old priest inside, and then you must bind mine likewise."

"Never," quoth Hereward.

"It must be. How else can I explain your having got the key? I made them give me the key on the pretence that with one who had most cause to hate you, it would be safe; and when they come and find us in the morning I shall tell them how I came here to stab you with my own hands,—you must lay the dagger by me,—and how you and your man fell upon us and bound us, and you escaped. Ah! Mary Mother," continued the maiden with a sigh, "when shall we poor weak women have no more need of lying?"

She lay down, and Hereward, in spite of himself, gently bound her hands and feet, kissing them as he bound them.

"I shall do well here upon the altar steps," said she. "How can I spend my time better till the morning light than to lie here and pray?"

The old priest, who was plainly in the plot, submitted meekly to the same fate; and Hereward and Martin Lightfoot stole out, locking the door, but leaving the key in it outside. To scramble over the old earthwork was an easy matter; and in a few minutes they were hurrying down the valley to the sea, with a fresh breeze blowing behind them from the north.

"Did I not tell you, my lord," said Martin Lightfoot, "to keep your curses till you had seen the end of this adventure?"

Hereward was silent. His brain was still whirling from the adventures of the day, and his heart was very deeply touched. His shrift of the morning, hurried and formal as it had been, had softened him. His danger—for he felt how he had been face to face with death—had softened him likewise; and he repented somewhat of his vainglorious and bloodthirsty boasting over a fallen foe, as he began to see that there was a purpose more noble in life than ranging land and sea, a ruffian among ruffians, seeking for glory amid blood and flame. The idea of chivalry, of succoring the weak and the opprest, of keeping faith and honor not merely towards men who could avenge themselves, but towards women who could not; the dim dawn of purity, gentleness, and the conquest of his own fierce passions,—all these had taken root in his heart during his adventure with the fair Cornish girl. The seed was sown. Would it he cut down again by the bitter blasts of the rough fighting world, or would it grow and bear the noble fruit of "gentle very perfect knighthood"?

They reached the ship, clambered on hoard without ceremony, at the risk of being taken and killed as robbers, and told their case. The merchants had not completed their cargo of tin. Hereward offered to make up their loss to them if they would set sail at once; and they, feeling that the place would be for some time to come too hot to hold them, and being also in high delight, like honest Ostmen, with Hereward's prowess, agreed to sail straight for Waterford, and complete their cargo there. But the tide was out. It was three full hours before the ship could float; and for three full hours they waited in fear and trembling, expecting the Cornishmen to be down upon them in a body every moment, under which wholesome fear some on board prayed fervently who had never been known to pray before.

CHAPTER IV. – HOW HEREWARD TOOK SERVICE WITH RANALD, KING OF WATERFORD

The coasts of Ireland were in a state of comparative peace in the middle of the eleventh century. The ships of Loghlin, seen far out at sea, no longer drove the population shrieking inland. Heathen Danes, whether fair-haired Fiongall from Norway, or brown-haired Dubgall from Denmark proper, no longer burned convents, tortured monks for their gold, or (as at Clonmacnoise) set a heathen princess, Oda, wife of Thorgill, son of Harold Harfager, aloft on the high altar to receive the homage of the conquered. The Scandinavian invaders had become Christianized, and civilized also,—owing to their continual intercourse with foreign nations,—more highly than the Irish whom they had overcome. That was easy; for early Irish civilization seems to have existed only in the convents and for the religious; and when they were crushed, mere barbarism was left behind. And now the same process went on in the east of Ireland, which went on a generation or two later in the east of Scotland. The Danes began to settle down into peaceful colonists and traders. Ireland was poor; and the convents plundered once could not be plundered again. The Irish were desperately brave. Ill-armed and almost naked, they were as perfect in the arts of forest warfare as those modern Maories whom they so much resembled; and though their black skenes and light darts were no match for the Danish swords and battle-axes which they adopted during the middle age, or their plaid trousers and felt capes for the Danish helmet and chain corslet, still an Irishman was so ugly a foe, that it was not worth while to fight with him unless he could be robbed afterwards. The Danes, who, like their descendants of Northumbria, the Lowlands, and Ulster, were canny common-sense folk, with a shrewd eye to interest, found, somewhat to their regret, that there were trades even more profitable than robbery and murder. They therefore concentrated themselves round harbors and river mouths, and sent forth their ships to all the western seas, from Dublin, Waterford, Wexford, Cork, or Limerick. Every important seaport in Ireland owes its existence to those sturdy Vikings' sons. In each of these towns they had founded a petty kingdom, which endured until, and even in some cases after, the conquest of Ireland by Henry II. and Strongbow. They intermarried in the mean while with the native Irish. Brian Boru, for instance, was so connected with Danish royalty, that it is still a question whether he himself had not Danish blood in his veins. King Sigtryg Silkbeard, who fought against him at Clontarf, was actually his step-son,—and so too, according to another Irish chronicler, was King Olaff Kvaran, who even at the time of the battle of Clontarf was married to Brian Boru's daughter,—a marriage which (if a fact) was startlingly within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity. But the ancient Irish were sadly careless on such points; and as Giraldus Cambrensis says, "followed the example of men of old in their vices more willingly than in their virtues."

More than forty years had elapsed since that famous battle of Clontarf, and since Ragnvald, Reginald, or Ranald, son of Sigtryg the Norseman, had been slain therein by Brian Boru. On that one day, so the Irish sang, the Northern invaders were exterminated, once and for all, by the Milesian hero, who had craftily used the strangers to fight his battles, and then, the moment they became formidable to himself, crushed them, till "from Howth to Brandon in Kerry there was not a threshing-floor without a Danish slave threshing thereon, or a quern without a Danish woman grinding thereat."

Nevertheless, in spite of the total annihilation of the Danish power in the Emerald isle, Ranald seemed to the eyes of men to be still a hale old warrior, ruling constitutionally—that is, with a wholesome fear of being outlawed or murdered if he misbehaved—over the Danes in Waterford; with five hundred fair-haired warriors at his back, two-edged axe on shoulder and two-edged sword on thigh. His ships drove a thriving trade with France and Spain in Irish fish, butter, honey, and furs. His workmen coined money in the old round tower of Dundory, built by his predecessor and namesake about the year 1003, which stands as Reginald's tower to this day. He had fought many a bloody

battle since his death at Clontarf, by the side of his old leader Sigtryg Silkbeard. He had been many a time to Dublin to visit his even more prosperous and formidable friend; and was so delighted with the new church of the Holy Trinity, which Sigtryg and his bishop Donatus had just built, not in the Danish or Ostman town, but in the heart of ancient Celtic Dublin, (plain proof of the utter overthrow of the Danish power,) that he had determined to build a like church in honor of the Holy Trinity, in Waterford itself. A thriving, valiant old king he seemed, as he sat in his great house of pine logs under Reginald's Tower upon the quay, drinking French and Spanish wines out of horns of ivory and cups of gold; and over his head hanging, upon the wall, the huge doubled-edged axe with which, so his flatterers had whispered, Brian Boru had not slain him, but he Brian Boru.

Nevertheless, then as since, alas! the pleasant theory was preferred by the Milesian historians to the plain truth. And far away inland, monks wrote and harpers sung of the death of Ranald, the fair-haired Fiongall, and all his "mailed swarms."

One Teague MacMurrough, indeed, a famous bard of those parts, composed unto his harp a song of Clontarf, the fame whereof reached Ranald's ears, and so amused him that he rested not day or night till he had caught the hapless bard and brought him in triumph into Waterford. There he compelled him, at sword's point, to sing, to him and his housecarles the Milesian version of the great historical event: and when the harper, in fear and trembling, came to the story of Ranald's own death at Brian Boru's hands, then the jolly old Viking laughed till the tears ran down his face; and instead of cutting off Teague's head, gave him a cup of goodly wine, made him his own harper thenceforth, and bade him send for his wife and children, and sing to him every day, especially the song of Clontarf and his own death; treating him very much, in fact, as English royalty, during the last generation, treated another Irish bard whose song was even more sweet, and his notions of Irish history even more grotesque, than those of Teague MacMurrough.

It was to this old king, or rather to his son Sigtryg, godson of Sigtryg Silkbeard, and distant cousin of his own, that Hereward now took his way, and told his story, as the king sat in his hall, drinking "across the fire," after the old Norse fashion. The fire of pine logs was in the midst of the hall, and the smoke went out through a louver in the roof. On one side was a long bench, and in the middle of it the king's high arm-chair; right and left of him sat his kinsmen and the ladies, and his sea-captains and men of wealth. Opposite, on the other side of the fire, was another bench. In the middle of that sat his marshal, and right and left all his housecarles. There were other benches behind, on which sat more freemen, but of lesser rank.

And they were all drinking ale, which a servant poured out of a bucket into a great bull's horn, and the men handed round to each other.

Then Hereward came in, and sat down on the end of the hindermost bench, and Martin stood behind him, till one of the ladies said,—

"Who is that young stranger, who sits behind there so humbly, though, he looks like an earl's son, more fit to sit here with us on the high bench?"

"So he does," quoth King Ranald. "Come forward hither, young sir, and drink."

And when Hereward came forward, all the ladies agreed that he must be an earl's son; for he had a great gold torc round his neck, and gold rings on his wrists; and a new scarlet coat, bound with gold braid; and scarlet stockings, cross-laced with gold braid up to the knee; and shoes trimmed with martin's fur; and a short blue silk cloak over all, trimmed with martin's fur likewise; and by his side, in a broad belt with gold studs, was the Ogre's sword Brain-biter, with its ivory hilt and velvet sheath; and all agreed that if he had but been a head taller, they had never seen a properer man.

"Aha! such a gay young sea-cock does not come hither for naught. Drink first, man, and tell us thy business after," and he reached the horn to Hereward.

Hereward took it, and sang,—

"In this Braga-beaker,

Brave Ranald I pledge;
In good liquor, which lightens
Long labor on oar-bench;
Good liquor, which sweetens
The song of the scald."

"Thy voice is as fine as thy feathers, man. Nay, drink it all. We ourselves drink here by the peg at midday; but a stranger is welcome to fill his inside all hours of the day."

Whereon Hereward finished the horn duly; and at Ranald's bidding, sat him down on the high settle. He did not remark, that as he sat down two handsome youths rose and stood behind him.

"Now then, Sir Priest," quoth the king, "go on with your story."

A priest, Irish by his face and dress, who sat on the high bench, rose, and renewed an oration which Hereward's entrance had interrupted.

"So, O great King, as says Homerus, this wise king called his earls, knights, sea-captains, and housecarles, and said unto them, 'Which of these two kings is in the right, who can tell? But mind you, that this king of the Enchanters lives far away in India, and we never heard of him more than his name; but this king Ulixes and his Greeks live hard by; and which of the two is it wiser to quarrel with, him that lives hard by or him that lives far off? Therefore, King Ranald, says, by the mouth of my humility, the great O'Brodar, Lord of Ivark, 'Take example by Alcinous, the wise king of Fairy, and listen not to the ambassadors of those lying villains, O'Dea Lord of Slievardagh, Maccarthy King of Cashel, and O'Sullivan Lord of Knockraffin, who all three between them could not raise kernes enough to drive off one old widow's cow. Make friends with me, who live upon your borders; and you shall go peaceably through my lands, to conquer and destroy them, who live afar off; as they deserve, the sons of Belial and Judas.'"

And the priest crost himself, and sat down. At which speech Hereward was seen to laugh.

"Why do you laugh, young sir? The priest seems to talk like a wise man, and is my guest and an ambassador."

Then rose up Hereward, and bowed to the king. "King Ranald Sigtrygsson, it was not for rudeness that I laughed, for I learnt good manners long ere I came here, but because I find clerks alike all over the world."

"How?"

"Quick at hiding false counsel under learned speech. I know nothing of Ulixes, king, nor of this O'Brodar either; and I am but a lad, as you see: but I heard a bird once in my own country who gave a very different counsel from the priest's."

"Speak on, then. This lad is no fool, my merry men all."

"There were three copses, King, in our country, and each copse stood on a hill. In the first there built an eagle, in the second there built a sparhawk, in the third there built a crow.

"Now the sparhawk came to the eagle, and said, 'Go shares with me, and we will kill the crow, and have her wood to ourselves.'

"'Humph!' says the eagle, 'I could kill the crow without your help; however, I will think of it.'

"When the crow heard that, she came to the eagle herself. 'King Eagle,' says she, 'why do you want to kill me, who live ten miles from you, and never flew across your path in my life? Better kill that little rogue of a sparhawk who lives between us, and is always ready to poach on your marches whenever your back is turned. So you will have her wood as well as your own.'

"'You are a wise crow,' said the eagle; and he went out and killed the sparhawk, and took his wood."

Loud laughed King Ranald and his Vikings all. "Well spoken, young man! We will take the sparhawk, and let the crow bide."

"Nay, but," quoth Hereward, "hear the end of the story. After a while the eagle finds the crow beating about the edge of the sparhawk's wood.

"'Oho!' says he, 'so you can poach as well as that little hooknosed rogue?' and he killed her too.

"'Ah!' says the crow, when she lay a-dying, 'my blood is on my own head. If I had but left the sparhawk between me and this great tyrant!'

"And so the eagle got all three woods to himself."

At which the Vikings laughed more loudly than ever; and King Ranald, chuckling at the notion of eating up the hapless Irish princes one by one, sent back the priest (not without a present for his church, for Ranald was a pious man) to tell the great O'Brodar, that unless he sent into Waterford by that day week two hundred head of cattle, a hundred pigs, a hundredweight of clear honey, and as much of wax, Ranald would not leave so much as a sucking-pig alive in Ivark.

The cause of quarrel, of course, was too unimportant to be mentioned. Each had robbed and cheated the other half a dozen times in the last twenty years. As for the morality of the transaction, Ranald had this salve for his conscience,—that as he intended to do to O'Brodar, so would O'Brodar have gladly done to him, had he been living peaceably in Norway, and O'Brodar been strong enough to invade and rob him. Indeed, so had O'Brodar done already, ever since he wore beard, to every chieftain of his own race whom he was strong enough to ill-treat. Many a fair herd had he driven off, many a fair farm burnt, many a fair woman carried off a slave, after that inveterate fashion of lawless feuds which makes the history of Celtic Ireland from the earliest times one dull and aimless catalogue of murder and devastation, followed by famine and disease; and now, as he had done to others, so it was to be done to him.

"And now, young sir, who seem as witty as you are good looking, you may, if you will, tell us your name and your business. As for the name, however, if you wish to keep it to yourself, Ranald Sigtrygsson is not the man to demand it of an honest guest."

Hereward looked round and saw Teague MacMurrough standing close to him, harp in hand. He took it from him courteously enough, put a silver penny into the minstrel's hand, and running his fingers over the strings, rose and began,—

"Outlaw and free thief,
Landless and lawless
Through the world fare I,
Thoughtless of life.
Soft is my beard, but
Hard my Brain-biter.
Wake, men me call, whom
Warrior or watchman
Never caught sleeping,
Far in Northumberland
Slew I the witch-bear,
Cleaving his brain-pan,
At one stroke I felled him."

And so forth, chanting all his doughty deeds, with such a voice and spirit joined to that musical talent for which he was afterwards so famous, till the hearts of the wild Norsemen rejoiced, and "Skall to the stranger! Skall to the young Viking!" rang through the hall.

Then showing proudly the fresh wounds on his bare arms, he sang of his fight with the Cornish ogre, and his adventure with the Princess. But always, though he went into the most minute details, he concealed the name both of her and of her father, while he kept his eyes steadily fixed on Ranald's eldest son, Sigtryg, who sat at his father's right hand.

The young man grew uneasy, red, almost angry; till at last Hereward sang,—

"A gold ring she gave me
Right royally dwarf-worked,
To none will I pass it
For prayer or for sword-stroke,
Save to him who can claim it
By love and by troth plight,
Let that hero speak
If that hero be here."

Young Sigtryg half started from his feet: but when Hereward smiled at him, and laid his finger on his lips, he sat down again. Hereward felt his shoulder touched from behind. One of the youths who had risen when he sat down bent over him, and whispered in his ear,—

"Ah, Hereward, we know you. Do you not know us? We are the twins, the sons of your sister, Siward the White and Siward the Red, the orphans of Asbiorn Siwardsson, who fell at Dunsinane."

Hereward sprang up, struck the harp again, and sang,—

"Outlaw and free thief,
My kinsfolk have left me,
And no kinsfolk need I
Till kinsfolk shall need me.
My sword is my father,
My shield is my mother,
My ship is my sister,
My horse is my brother."

"Uncle, uncle," whispered one of them, sadly, "listen now or never, for we have bad news for you and us. Your father is dead, and Earl Algar, your brother, here in Ireland, outlawed a second time."

A flood of sorrow passed through Hereward's heart. He kept it down, and rising once more, harp in hand,—

"Hereward, king, hight I,
Holy Leofric my father,
In Westminster wiser
None walked with King Edward.
High minsters he builded,
Pale monks he maintained.
Dead is he, a bed-death,
A leech-death, a priest-death,
A straw-death, a cow's death.
Such doom I desire not.
To high heaven, all so softly,
The angels uphand him,
In meads of May flowers
Mild Mary will meet him.
Me, happier, the Valkyrs
Shall waft from the war-deck,
Shall hail from the holmgang

Or helmet-strewn moorland.
And sword-strokes my shrift be,
Sharp spears be my leeches,
With heroes' hot corpses
High heaped for my pillow."

"Skall to the Viking!" shouted the Danes once more, at this outburst of heathendom, common enough among their half-converted race, in times when monasticism made so utter a divorce between the life of the devotee and that of the worldling, that it seemed reasonable enough for either party to have their own heaven and their own hell. After all, Hereward was not original in his wish. He had but copied the death-song which his father's friend and compeer, Siward Digre, the victor of Dunsinane, had sung for himself some three years before.

All praised his poetry, and especially the quickness of his alliterations (then a note of the highest art); and the old king filling not this time the horn, but a golden goblet, bid him drain it and keep the goblet for his song.

Young Sigtryg leapt up, and took the cup to Hereward. "Such a scald," he said, "ought to have no meaner cup-bearer than a king's son."

Hereward drank it dry; and then fixing his eyes meaningly on the Prince, dropt the Princess's ring into the cup, and putting it back into Sigtryg's hand, sang,—

"The beaker I reach back
More rich than I took it.
No gold will I grasp
Of the king's, the ring-giver,
Till, by wit or by weapon,
I worthily win it.
When brained by my biter
O'Brodar lies gory,
While over the wolf's meal
Fair widows are wailing."

"Does he refuse my gift?" grumbled Ranald.

"He has given a fair reason," said the Prince, as he hid the ring in his bosom; "leave him to me; for my brother in arms he is henceforth."

After which, as was the custom of those parts, most of them drank too much liquor. But neither Sigtryg nor Hereward drank; and the two Siwards stood behind their young uncle's seat, watching him with that intense admiration which lads can feel for a young man.

That night, when the warriors were asleep, Sigtryg and Hereward talked out their plans. They would equip two ships; they would fight all the kinglets of Cornwall at once, if need was; they would carry off the Princess, and burn Alef's town over his head, if he said nay. Nothing could be more simple than the tactics required in an age when might was right.

Then Hereward turned to his two nephews who lingered near him, plainly big with news.

"And what brings you here, lads?" He had hardened his heart, and made up his mind to show no kindness to his own kin. The day might come when they might need him; then it would be his turn.

"Your father, as we told you, is dead."

"So much the better for him, and the worse for England. And Harold and the Godwinssons, of course, are lords and masters far and wide?"

"Tosti has our grandfather Siward's earldom."

"I know that. I know, too, that he will not keep it long, unless he learns that Northumbrians are free men, and not Wessex slaves."

"And Algar our uncle is outlawed again, after King Edward had given him peaceably your father's earldom."

"And why?"

"Why was he outlawed two years ago?"

"Because the Godwinssons hate him, I suppose."

"And Algar is gone to Griffin, the Welshman, and from him on to Dublin to get ships, just as he did two years ago; and has sent us here to get ships likewise."

"And what will he do with them when he has got them? He burnt Hereford last time he was outlawed, by way of a wise deed, minster and all, with St. Ethelbert's relics on board; and slew seven clergymen: but they were only honest canons with wives at home, and not shaveling monks, so I suppose that sin was easily shrived. Well, I robbed a priest of a few pence, and was outlawed; he plunders and burns a whole minster, and is made a great earl for it. One law for the weak and one for the strong, young lads, as you will know when you are as old as I. And now I suppose he will plunder and burn more minsters, and then patch up a peace with Harold again; which I advise him strongly to do; for I warn you, young lads, and you may carry that message from me to Dublin to my good brother your uncle, that Harold's little finger is thicker than his whole body; and that, false Godwinsson as he is, he is the only man with a head upon his shoulders left in England, now that his father, and my father, and dear old Siward, whom I loved better than my father, are dead and gone."

The lads stood silent, not a little awed, and indeed imposed on, by the cynical and worldly-wise tone which their renowned uncle had assumed.

At last one of them asked, falteringly, "Then you will do nothing for us?"

"For you, nothing. Against you, nothing. Why should I mix myself up in my brother's quarrels? Will he make that white-headed driveller at Westminster reverse my outlawry? And if he does, what shall I get thereby? A younger brother's portion; a dirty ox-gang of land in Kesteven. Let him leave me alone as I leave him, and see if I do not come back to him some day, for or against him as he chooses, with such a host of Vikings' sons as Harold Hardraade himself would be proud of. By Thor's hammer, boys, I have been an outlaw but five years now, and I find it so cheery a life, that I do not care if I am an outlaw for fifty more. The world is a fine place and a wide place; and it is a very little corner of it that I have seen yet; and if you were of my mettle, you would come along with me and see it throughout to the four corners of heaven, instead of mixing yourselves up in these paltry little quarrels with which our two families are tearing England in pieces, and being murdered perchance like dogs at last by treachery, as Sweyn Godwinsson murdered Biorn."

The boys listened, wide-eyed and wide-eared. Hereward knew to whom he was speaking; and he had not spoken in vain.

"What do you hope to get here?" he went on. "Ranald will give you no ships: he will have enough to do to fight O'Brodar; and he is too cunning to thrust his head into Algar's quarrels."

"We hoped to find Vikings here, who would go to any war on the hope of plunder."

"If there be any, I want them more than you; and, what is more, I will have them. They know that they will do finer deeds with me for their captain than burning a few English homesteads. And so may you. Come with me, lads. Once and for all, come. Help me to fight O'Brodar. Then help me to another little adventure which I have on hand,—as pretty a one as ever you heard a minstrel sing,—and then we will fit out a longship or two, and go where fate leads,—to Constantinople, if you like. What can you do better? You never will get that earldom from Tosti. Lucky for young Waltheof, your uncle, if he gets it,—if he, and you too, are not murdered within seven years; for I know Tosti's humor, when he has rivals in his way–"

"Algar will protect us," said one.

“I tell you, Algar is no match for the Godwinssons. If the monk-king died to-morrow, neither his earldom nor his life would be safe. When I saw your father Asbiorn lie dead at Dunsinane, I said, ‘There ends the glory of the house of the bear;’ and if you wish to make my words come false, then leave England to founder and rot and fall to pieces,—as all men say she is doing,—without your helping to hasten her ruin; and seek glory and wealth too with me around the world! The white bear’s blood is in your veins, lads. Take to the sea like your ancestor, and come over the swan’s bath with me!”

“That we will!” said the two lads. And well they kept their word.

CHAPTER V. – HOW HEREWARD SUCCORED THE PRINCESS OF CORNWALL A SECOND TIME

Fat was the feasting and loud was the harping in the halls of Alef the Cornishman, King of Gweek. Savory was the smell of fried pilchard and hake; more savory still that of roast porpoise; most savory of all that of fifty huge squab pies, built up of layers of apples, bacon, onions, and mutton, and at the bottom of each a squab, or young cormorant, which diffused both through the pie and through the ambient air a delicate odor of mingled guano and polecat. And the occasion was worthy alike of the smell and of the noise; for King Alef, finding that after the Ogre's death the neighboring kings were but too ready to make reprisals on him for his champion's murders and robberies, had made a treaty of alliance, offensive and defensive, with Hannibal the son of Gryll, King of Marazion, and had confirmed the same by bestowing on him the hand of his fair daughter. Whether she approved of the match or not, was asked neither by King Alef nor by King Hannibal.

To-night was the bridal-feast. To-morrow morning the church was to hallow the union, and after that Hannibal Grylls was to lead home his bride, among a gallant company.

And as they ate and drank, and harped and piped, there came into that hall four shabbily drest men,—one of them a short, broad fellow, with black elf-locks and a red beard,—and sat them down sneakingly at the very lowest end of all the benches.

In hospitable Cornwall, especially on such a day, every guest was welcome; and the strangers sat peaceably, but ate nothing, though there was both hake and pilchard within reach.

Next to them, by chance, sat a great lourdan of a Dane, as honest, brave, and stupid a fellow as ever tugged at oar; and after a while they fell talking, till the strangers had heard the reason of this great feast, and all the news of the country side.

"But whence did they come, not to know it already; for all Cornwall was talking thereof?"

"O, they came out of Devonshire, seeking service down west, with some merchant or rover, being seafaring men."

The stranger with the black hair had been, meanwhile, earnestly watching the Princess, who sat at the board's head. He saw her watching him in return, and with a face sad enough.

At last she burst into tears.

"What should the bride weep for, at such a merry wedding?" asked he of his companion.

"O, cause enough;" and he told bluntly enough the Princess's story. "And what is more," said he, "the King of Waterford sent a ship over last week, with forty proper lads on board, and two gallant Holders with them, to demand her; but for all answer, they were put into the strong house, and there they lie, chained to a log, at this minute. Pity it is and shame, I hold, for I am a Dane myself; and pity, too, that such a bonny lass should go to an unkempt Welshman like this, instead of a tight smart Viking's son, like the Waterford lad."

The stranger answered nothing, but kept his eyes upon the Princess, till she looked at him steadfastly in return.

She turned pale and red again; but after a while she spoke:—

"There is a stranger there; and what his rank may be I know not; but he has been thrust down to the lowest seat, in a house that used to honor strangers, instead of treating them like slaves. Let him take this dish from my hand, and eat joyfully, lest when he goes home he may speak scorn of bridegroom and bride, and our Cornish weddings."

The servant brought the dish down: he gave a look at the stranger's shabby dress, turned up his nose, and pretending to mistake, put the dish into the hand of the Dane.

"Hold, lads," quoth the stranger. "If I have ears, that was meant for me."

He seized the platter with both hands; and therewith the hands both of the Cornishman and of the Dane. There was a struggle; but so bitter was the stranger's grip, that (says the chronicler) the blood burst from the nails of both his opponents.

He was called a "savage," a "devil in man's shape," and other dainty names; but he was left to eat his squab pie in peace.

"Patience, lads," quoth he, as he filled his mouth. "Before I take my pleasure at this wedding, I will hand my own dish round as well as any of you."

Whereat men wondered, but held their tongues.

And when the eating was over and the drinking began, the Princess rose, and came round to drink the farewell health.

With her maids behind her, and her harper before her (so was the Cornish custom), she pledged one by one each of the guests, slave as well as free, while the harper played a tune.

She came down at last to the strangers. Her face was pale, and her eyes red with weeping.

She filled a cup of wine, and one of her maids offered it to the stranger.

He put it back, courteously, but firmly. "Not from your hand," said he.

A growl against his bad manners rose straightway; and the minstrel, who (as often happened in those days) was jester likewise, made merry at his expense, and advised the company to turn the wild beast out of the hall.

"Silence, fool!" said the Princess. "Why should he know our west-country ways? He may take it from my hand, if not from hers."

And she held out to him the cup herself.

He took it, looking her steadily in the face; and it seemed to the minstrel as if their hands lingered together round the cup-handle, and that he saw the glitter of a ring.

Like many another of his craft before and since, he was a vain, meddlesome vagabond, and must needs pry into a secret which certainly did not concern him.

So he could not leave the stranger in peace: and knowing that his privileged calling protected him from that formidable fist, he never passed him by without a sneer or a jest, as he wandered round the table, offering his harp, in the Cornish fashion, to any one who wished to play and sing.

"But not to you, Sir Elf-locks: he that is rude to a pretty girl when she offers him wine, is too great a boor to understand my trade."

"It is a fool's trick," answered the stranger at last, "to put off what you must do at last. If I had but the time, I would pay you for your tune with a better one than you ever heard."

"Take the harp, then, boor!" said the minstrel, with a laugh and a jest.

The stranger took it, and drew from it such music as made all heads turn toward him at once. Then he began to sing, sometimes by himself, and sometimes his comrades, "*more Girviorum tripliciter canentes*" joined their voices in a three-man-glee.

In vain the minstrel, jealous for his own credit, tried to snatch the harp away. The stranger sang on, till all hearts were softened; and the Princess, taking the rich shawl from her shoulders, threw it over those of the stranger, saying that it was a gift too poor for such a scald.

"Scald!" roared the bridegroom (now well in his cups) from the head of the table; "ask what thou wilt, short of my bride and my kingdom, and it is thine."

"Give me, then, Hannibal Grylls, King of Marazion, the Danes who came from Ranald, of Waterford."

"You shall have them! Pity that you have asked for nothing better than such tarry ruffians!"

A few minutes after, the minstrel, bursting with jealousy and rage, was whispering in Hannibal's ear.

The hot old Punic [Footnote: Hannibal, still a common name in Cornwall, is held—and not unlikely—to have been introduced there by the ancient Phoenician colonists.] blood flushed up in his cheeks, and his thin Punic lips curved into a snaky smile. Perhaps the old Punic treachery in his

heart; for all that he was heard to reply was, “We must not disturb the good-fellowship of a Cornish wedding.”

The stranger, nevertheless, and the Princess likewise, had seen that bitter smile.

Men drank hard and long that night; and when daylight came, the strangers were gone.

In the morning the marriage ceremony was performed; and then began the pageant of leading home the bride. The minstrels went first, harping and piping; then King Hannibal, carrying his bride behind him on a pillion; and after them a string of servants and men-at-arms, leading country ponies laden with the bride’s dower. Along with them, unarmed, sulky, and suspicious, walked the forty Danes, who were informed that they should go to Marazion, and there be shipped off for Ireland.

Now, as all men know, those parts of Cornwall, flat and open furze-downs aloft, are cut, for many miles inland, by long branches of tide river, walled in by woods and rocks, which rivers join at last in the great basin of Falmouth harbor; and by crossing one or more of these, the bridal party would save many a mile on their road towards the west.

So they had timed their journey by the tides: lest, finding low water in the rivers, they should have to wade to the ferry-boats waist deep in mud; and going down the steep hillside, through oak and ash and hazel copse, they entered, as many as could, a great flat-bottomed barge, and were rowed across some quarter of a mile, to land under a jutting crag, and go up again by a similar path into the woods.

So the first boat-load went up, the minstrels in front, harping and piping till the greenwood rang, King Hannibal next, with his bride, and behind him spear-men and axe-men, with a Dane between every two.

When they had risen some two hundred feet, and were in the heart of the forest, Hannibal turned, and made a sign to the men behind him.

Then each pair of them seized the Dane between them, and began to bind his hands behind his back. “What will you do with us?”

“Send you back to Ireland,—a king never breaks his word,—but pick out your right eyes first, to show your master how much I care for him. Lucky for you that I leave you an eye apiece, to find your friend the harper, whom if I catch, I flay alive.”

“You promised!” cried the Princess.

“And so did you, traitress!” and he gripped her arm, which was round his waist, till she screamed. “So did you promise: but not to me. And you shall pass your bridal night in my dog-kennel, after my dog-whip has taught you not to give rings again to wandering harpers.”

The wretched Princess shuddered; for she knew too well that such an atrocity was easy and common enough. She knew it well. Why should she not? The story of the Cid’s Daughters and the Knights of Carrion; the far more authentic one of Robert of Belesme; and many another ugly tale of the early middle age, will prove but too certainly that, before the days of chivalry began, neither youth, beauty, nor the sacred ties of matrimony, could protect women from the most horrible outrages, at the hands of those who should have been their protectors. It was reserved for monks and inquisitors, in the name of religion and the Gospel, to continue, through after centuries, those brutalities toward women of which gentlemen and knights had grown ashamed, save when (as in the case of the Albigense crusaders) monks and inquisitors bade them torture, mutilate, and burn, in the name of Him who died on the cross.

But the words had hardly passed the lips of Hannibal, ere he reeled in the saddle, and fell to the ground, a javelin through his heart.

A strong arm caught the Princess. A voice which she knew bade her have no fear.

“Bind your horse to a tree, for we shall want him; and wait!”

Three well-armed men rushed on the nearest Cornishmen, and hewed them down. A fourth unbound the Dane, and bade him catch up a weapon, and fight for his life.

A second pair were dispatched, a second Dane freed, ere a minute was over; the Cornishmen, struggling up the narrow path toward the shouts above, were overpowered in detail by continually increasing numbers; and ere half an hour was over, the whole party were freed, mounted on the ponies, and making their way over the downs toward the west.

"Noble, noble Hereward!" said the Princess, as she sat behind him on Hannibal's horse. "I knew you from the first moment; and my nurse knew you too. Is she here? Is she safe?"

"I have taken care of that. She has done us too good service to be left here, and be hanged."

"I knew you, in spite of your hair, by your eyes."

"Yes," said Hereward. "It is not every man who carries one gray eye and one blue. The more difficult for me to go mumming when I need."

"But how came you hither, of all places in the world?"

"When you sent your nurse to me last night, to warn me that treason was abroad, it was easy for me to ask your road to Marazion; and easier too, when I found that you would go home the very way we came, to know that I must make my stand here or nowhere."

"The way you came? Then where are we going now?"

"Beyond Marazion, to a little cove,—I cannot tell its name. There lies Sigtryg, your betrothed, and three good ships of war."

"There? Why did he not come for me himself?"

"Why? Because we knew nothing of what was toward. We meant to have sailed straight up your river to your father's town, and taken you out with a high hand. We had sworn an oath,—which, as you saw, I kept,—neither to eat nor drink in your house, save out of your own hands. But the easterly wind would not let us round the Lizard; so we put into that cove, and there I and these two lads, my nephews, offered to go forward as spies, while Sigtryg threw up an earthwork, and made a stand against the Cornish. We meant merely to go back to him, and give him news. But when I found you as good as wedded, I had to do what I could while I could; and I have done it."

"You have, my noble and true champion," said she, kissing him.

"Humph!" quoth Hereward, laughing. "Do not tempt me by being too grateful. It is hard enough to gather honey, like the bees, for other folks to eat. What if I kept you myself, now I have got you?"

"Hereward!"

"O, there is no fear, pretty lady. I have other things to think of than making love to you,—and one is, how we are to get to our ships, and moreover, past Marazion town."

And hard work they had to get thither. The country was soon roused and up in arms; and it was only by wandering a three days' circuit through bogs and moors, till the ponies were utterly tired out, and left behind (the bulkier part of the dowry being left behind with them), that they made their appearance on the shore of Mount's Bay, Hereward leading the Princess in triumph upon Hannibal's horse.

After which they all sailed away for Ireland, and there, like young Beichan,—

"Prepared another wedding,
With all their hearts so full of glee."

And this is the episode of the Cornish Princess, as told by Leofric of Bourne, the cunning minstrel and warlike priest.

CHAPTER VI. – HOW HEREWARD WAS WRECKED UPON THE FLANDERS SHORE

Hereward had drunk his share at Sigtryg's wedding. He had helped to harry the lands of O'Brodar till (as King Ranald had threatened) there was not a sucking-pig left in Ivark, and the poor folk died of famine, as they did about every seven years; he had burst (says the chronicler) through the Irish camp with a chosen band of Berserkers, slain O'Brodar in his tent, brought off his war-horn as a trophy, and cut his way back to the Danish army,—a feat in which the two Siwards were grievously wounded; and had in all things shown himself a daring and crafty captain, as careless of his own life as of other folks'.

Then a great home-sickness had seized him. He would go back and see the old house, and the cattle-pastures, and the meres and fens of his boyhood. He would see his widowed mother. Perhaps her heart was softened to him by now, as his was toward her; and if not, he could show her that he could do without her; that others thought him a fine fellow if she did not. Hereward knew that he had won honor and glory for himself; that his name was in the mouths of all warriors and sea-rovers round the coasts as the most likely young champion of the time, able to rival, if he had the opportunity, the prowess of Harold Hardraade himself. Yes, he would go and see his mother: he would be kind if she was kind; if she were not, he would boast and swagger, as he was but too apt to do. That he should go back at the risk of his life; that any one who found him on English ground might kill him; and that many would certainly try to kill him, he knew very well. But that only gave special zest to the adventure.

Martin Lightfoot heard this news with joy.

"I have no more to do here," said he. "I have searched and asked far and wide for the man I want, and he is not on the Irish shores. Some say he is gone to the Orkneys, some to Denmark. Never mind; I shall find him before I die."

"And for whom art looking?"

"For one Thord Gunlaugsson, my father."

"And what wantest with him?"

"To put this through his brain." And he showed his axe.

"Thy father's brain?"

"Look you, lord. A man owes his father naught, and his mother all. At least so hold I. 'Man that is of woman born,' say all the world; and they say right. Now, if any man hang up that mother by hands and feet, and flog her to death, is not he that is of that mother born bound to revenge her upon any man, and all the more if that man had first his wicked will of that poor mother? Considering that last, lord, I do not know but what I am bound to avenge my mother's shame upon the man, even if he had never killed her. No, lord, you need not try to talk this out of my head. It has been there nigh twenty years; and I say it over to myself every night before I sleep, lest I should forget the one thing which I must do before I die. Find him I will, and find him I shall, if there be justice in heaven above."

So Hereward asked Ranald for ships, and got at once two good vessels as payment for his doughty deeds.

One he christened the *Garpike*, from her narrow build and long beak, and the other the *Otter*, because, he said, whatever she grappled she would never let go till she heard the bones crack. They were excellent, new "snekrs," nearly eighty feet long each; with double banks for twelve oars a side in the waist, which was open, save a fighting gangway along the sides; with high poop and forecastle decks; and with one large sail apiece, embroidered by Sigtryg's Princess and the other ladies with a huge white bear, which Hereward had chosen as his ensign.

As for men, there were fifty fellows as desperate as Hereward himself, to take service with him for that or any other quest. So they ballasted their ships with great pebbles, stowed under the thwarts, to be used as ammunition in case of boarding; and over them the barrels of ale and pork and meal, well covered with tarpaulins. They stowed in the cabins, fore and aft, their weapons,—swords, spears, axes, bows, chests of arrow-heads, leather bags of bowstrings, mail-shirts, and helmets, and fine clothes for holidays and fighting days. They hung their shields, after the old fashion, out-board along the gunwale, and a right gay show they made; and so rowed out of Waterford harbor amid the tears of the ladies and the cheers of the men.

But, as it befell, the voyage did not prosper. Hereward found his vessels under-manned, and had to sail northward for fresh hands. He got none in Dublin, for they were all gone to the Welsh marches to help Earl Alfgar and King Griffin. So he went on through the Hebrides, intending, of course, to plunder as he went: but there he got but little booty, and lost several men. So he went on again to the Orkneys, to try for fresh hands from the Norse Earl Hereof; but there befell a fresh mishap. They were followed by a whale, which they made sure was a witch-whale, and boded more ill luck; and accordingly they were struck by a storm in the Pentland Frith, and the poor *Garpike* went on shore on Hoy, and was left there forever and a day, her crew being hardly saved, and very little of her cargo.

However, the *Otter* was now not only manned, but over manned; and Hereward had to leave a dozen stout fellows in Kirkwall, and sail southward again, singing cheerily to his men,—

"Lightly the long-snake
Leaps after tempests,
Gayly the sun-gleam
Glows after rain
In labor and daring
Lies luck for all mortals,
Foul winds and foul witch-wives
Fray women alone."

But their mishaps were not over yet. They were hardly out of Stronsay Frith when they saw the witch-whale again, following them up, rolling and spouting and breaching in most uncanny wise. Some said that they saw a gray woman on his back; and they knew—possibly from the look of the sky, but certainly from the whale's behavior—that there was more heavy weather yet coming from the northward.

From that day forward the whale never left them, nor the wild weather neither. They were beaten out of all reckoning. Once they thought they saw low land to the eastward, but what or where who could tell? and as for making it, the wind, which had blown hard from northeast, backed against the sun and blew from west; from which, as well as from the witch-whale, they expected another gale from north and round to northeast.

The men grew sulky and fearful. Some were for trying to run the witch down and break her back, as did Frithiof in like case, when hunted by a whale with two hags upon his back,—an excellent recipe in such cases, but somewhat difficult in a heavy sea. Others said that there was a doomed man on board, and proposed to cast lots till they found him out, and cast him into the sea, as a sacrifice to Aegir the wave-god. But Hereward scouted that as unmanly and cowardly, and sang,—

"With blood of my bold ones,
With bale of my comrades,
Thinks Aegir, brine-thirsty,
His throat he can slake?
Though salt spray, shrill-sounding,

Sweep in swan's-flights above us,
True heroes, troth-plighted,
Together we'll die."

At last, after many days, their strength was all but worn out. They had long since given over rowing, and contented themselves with running under a close-reefed canvas whithersoever the storm should choose. At night a sea broke over them, and would have swamped the *Otter*, had she not been the best of sea-boats. But she only rolled the lee shields into the water and out again, shook herself, and went on. Nevertheless, there were three men on the poop when the sea came in, who were not there when it went out.

Wet and wild dawned that morning, showing naught but gray sea and gray air. Then sang Hereward,—

"Cheerly, my sea-cocks
Crow for the day-dawn.
Weary and wet are we,
Water beladen.
Wetter our comrades,
Whelmed by the witch-whale.
Us Aegir granted
Grudging, to Gondul,
Doomed to die dry-shod,
Daring the foe."

Whereat the hearts of the men were much cheered.

All of a sudden, as is the wont of gales at dawn, the clouds rose, tore up into ribbons, and with a fierce black shower or two, blew clean away; disclosing a bright blue sky, a green rolling sea, and, a few miles off to leeward, a pale yellow line, seen only as they topped a wave, but seen only too well. To keep the ship off shore was impossible; and as they drifted nearer and nearer, the line of sand-hills rose, uglier and more formidable, through the gray spray of the surf.

"We shall die on shore, but not dry-shod," said Martin. "Do any of you knights of the tar-brush know whether we are going to be drowned in Christian waters? I should like a mass or two for my soul, and shall die the happier within sight of a church-tower."

"One Dune is as like another as one pea; we may be anywhere between the Texel and Cap Gris Nez, but I think nearer the latter than the former."

"So much the worse for us," said another. "If we had gone ashore among those Frieslanders, we should have been only knocked on the head outright; but if we fall among the Frenchmen, we shall be clapt in prison strong, and tortured till we find ransom."

"I don't see that," said Martin. "We can all be drowned if we like, I suppose?"

"Drowned we need not be, if we be men," said the old sailing-master to Hereward. "The tide is full high, and that gives us one chance for our lives. Keep her head straight, and row like fiends when we are once in the surf, and then beach her up high and dry, and take what befalls after."

And what was likely to befall was ugly enough. Then, as centuries after, all wrecks and wrecked men were public prey; shipwrecked mariners were liable to be sold as slaves; and the petty counts of the French and Flemish shores were but too likely to extract ransom by prison and torture, as Guy Earl of Penthieu would have done (so at least William Duke of Normandy hinted) by Harold Godwinsson, had not William, for his own politic ends, begged the release of the shipwrecked earl.

Already they had been seen from the beach. The country folk, who were prowling about the shore after the waifs of the storm, deserted "jetsom and lagend," and crowded to meet the richer prize which was coming in "flotsom," to become "jetsom" in its turn.

"Axe-men and bow-men, put on your harness, and be ready; but neither strike nor shoot till I give the word. We must land peaceably if we can; if not, we will die fighting."

So said Hereward, and took the rudder into his own hand. "Now then," as she rushed into the breakers, "pull together, rowers all, and with a will."

The men yelled, and sprang from the thwarts as they tugged at the oars. The sea boiled past them, surged into the waist, blinded them with spray. She grazed the sand once, twice, thrice, leaping forward gallantly each time; and then, pressed by a huge wave, drove high and dry upon the beach, as the oars snapt right and left, and the men tumbled over each other in heaps.

The peasants swarmed down like flies to a carcass; but they recoiled as there rose over the forecastle bulwarks, not the broad hats of peaceful buscarles, but peaked helmets, round red shields, and glittering axes. They drew back, and one or two arrows flew from the crowd into the ship. But at Hereward's command no arrows were shot in answer.

"Bale her out quietly; and let us show these fellows that we are not afraid of them. That is the best chance of peace."

At this moment a mounted party came down between the sandhills; it might be, some twenty strong. Before them rode a boy on a jennet, and by him a clerk, as he seemed, upon a mule. They stopped to talk with the peasants, and then to consult among themselves. Suddenly the boy turned from his party; and galloping down the shore, while the clerk called after him in vain, reined up his horse, fetlock deep in water, within ten yards of the ship's bows.

"Yield yourselves!" he shouted, in French, as he brandished a hunting spear. "Yield yourselves, or die!"

Hereward looked at him smiling, as he sat there, keeping the head of his frightened horse toward the ship with hand and heel, his long locks streaming in the wind, his face full of courage and command, and of honesty and sweetness withal; and thought that he had never seen so fair a lad.

"And who art thou, thou pretty, bold boy?" asked Hereward, in French.

"I," said he, haughtily enough, as resenting Hereward's familiar "thou," "am Arnulf, grandson and heir of Baldwin, Marquis of Flanders, and lord of this land. And to his grace I call on you to surrender yourselves."

Hereward looked, not only with interest, but respect, upon the grandson of one of the most famous and prosperous of northern potentates, the descendant of the mighty Charlemagne himself. He turned and told the men who the boy was.

"It would be a good trick," quoth one, "to catch that young whelp, and keep him as a hostage."

"Here is what will have him on board before he can turn," said another, as he made a running noose in a rope.

"Quiet, men! Am I master in this ship or you?"

Hereward saluted the lad courteously. "Verily the blood of Baldwin of the Iron Arm has not degenerated. I am happy to behold so noble a son of so noble a race."

"And who are you, who speak French so well, and yet by your dress are neither French nor Fleming?"

"I am Harold Naemansson, the Viking; and these my men. I am here, sailing peaceably for England; as for yielding,—mine yield to no living man, but die as we are, weapon in hand. I have heard of your grandfather, that he is a just man and a bountiful; therefore take this message to him, young sir. If he have wars toward, I and my men will fight for him with all our might, and earn hospitality and ransom with our only treasure, which is our swords. But if he be at peace, then let him bid us go in peace, for we are Vikings, and must fight, or rot and die."

"You are Vikings?" cried the boy, pressing his horse into the foam so eagerly, that the men, mistaking his intent, had to be represt again by Hereward. "You are Vikings! Then come on shore, and welcome. You shall be my friends. You shall be my brothers. I will answer to my grandfather. I have longed to see Vikings. I long to be a Viking myself."

"By the hammer of Thor," cried the old master, "and thou wouldst make a bonny one, my lad."

Hereward hesitated, delighted with the boy, but by no means sure of his power to protect them.

But the boy rode back to his companions, who had by this time ridden cautiously down to the sea, and talked and gesticulated eagerly.

Then the clerk rode down and talked with Hereward.

"Are you Christians?" shouted he, before he would adventure himself near the ship.

"Christians we are, Sir Clerk, and dare do no harm to a man of God."

The Clerk rode nearer; his handsome palfrey, furred cloak, rich gloves and boots, moreover his air of command, showed that he was no common man.

"I," said he, "am the Abbot of St. Bertin of Sithiu, and tutor of yonder prince. I can bring down, at a word, against you, the Châtelain of St. Omer, with all his knights, besides knights and men-at-arms of my own. But I am a man of peace, and not of war, and would have no blood shed if I can help it."

"Then make peace," said Hereward. "Your lord may kill us if he will, or have us for his guests if he will. If he does the first, we shall kill, each of us, a few of his men before we die; if the latter, we shall kill a few of his foes. If you be a man of God, you will counsel him accordingly."

"Alas! alas!" said the Abbot, with a shudder, "that, ever since Adam's fall, sinful man should talk of nothing but slaying and being slain; not knowing that his soul is slain already by sin, and that a worse death awaits him hereafter than that death of the body of which he makes so light!"

"A very good sermon, my Lord Abbot, to listen to next Sunday morning: but we are hungry and wet and desperate just now; and if you do not settle this matter for us, our blood will be on your head,—and maybe your own likewise."

The Abbot rode out of the water faster than he had ridden in, and a fresh consultation ensued, after which the boy, with a warning gesture to his companions, turned and galloped away through the sand-hills.

"He is gone to his grandfather himself, I verily believe," quoth Hereward.

They waited for some two hours, unmolested; and, true to their policy of seeming recklessness, shifted and dried themselves as well as they could, ate what provisions were unspoilt by the salt water, and, broaching the last barrel of ale, drank healths to each other and to the Flemings on shore.

At last down rode, with the boy, a noble-looking man, and behind him more knights and men-at-arms. He announced himself as Manasses, Châtelain of St. Omer, and repeated the demand to surrender.

"There is no need for it," said Hereward. "We are already that young prince's guests. He has said that we shall be his friends and brothers. He has said that he will answer to his grandfather, the great Marquis, whom I and mine shall be proud to serve. I claim the word of a descendant of Charlemagne."

"And you shall have it!" cried the boy. "Châtelain! Abbot! these men are mine. They shall come with me, and lodge in St. Bertin."

"Heaven forefend!" murmured the Abbot.

"They will be safe, at least, within your ramparts," whispered the Châtelain.

"And they shall tell me about the sea. Have I not told you how I long for Vikings; how I will have Vikings of my own, and sail the seas with them, like my Uncle Robert, and go to Spain and fight the Moors, and to Constantinople and marry the Kaiser's daughter? Come," he cried to Hereward, "come on shore, and he that touches you or your ship, touches me!"

"Sir Châtelain and my Lord Abbot," said Hereward, "you see that, Viking though I be, I am no barbarous heathen, but a French-speaking gentleman, like yourselves. It had been easy for me, had I not been a man of honor, to have cast a rope, as my sailors would have had me do, over that young boy's fair head, and haled him on board, to answer for my life with his own. But I loved him, and trusted him, as I would an angel out of heaven; and I trust him still. To him, and him only, will I yield myself, on condition that I and my men shall keep all our arms and treasure, and enter his service, to fight his foes, and his grandfather's, wheresoever they will, by land or sea."

"Fair sir," said the Abbot, "pirate though you call yourself, you speak so courtly and clerkly, that I, too, am inclined to trust you; and if my young lord will have it so, into St. Bertin I will receive you, till our lord, the Marquis, shall give orders about you and yours."

So promises were given all round; and Hereward explained the matter to the men, without whose advice (for they were all as free as himself) he could not act.

"Needs must," grunted they, as they packed up each his little valuables.

Then Hereward sheathed his sword, and leaping from the bow, came up to the boy.

"Put your hands between his, fair sir," said the Châtelain.

"That is not the manner of Vikings."

And he took the boy's right hand, and grasped it in the plain English fashion.

"There is the hand of an honest man. Come down, men, and take this young lord's hand, and serve him in the wars as I will do."

One, by one the men came down; and each took Arnulf's hand, and shook it till the lad's face grew red. But none of them bowed, or made obeisance. They looked the boy full in the face, and as they stepped back, stared round upon the ring of armed men with a smile and something of a swagger.

"These are they who bow to no man, and call no man master," whispered the Abbot.

And so they were: and so are their descendants of Scotland and Northumbria, unto this very day.

The boy sprang from his horse, and walked among them and round them in delight. He admired and handled their long-handled double axes; their short sea-bows of horn and deer-sinew; their red Danish jerkins; their blue sea-cloaks, fastened on the shoulder with rich brooches; and the gold and silver bracelets on their wrists. He wondered at their long shaggy beards, and still more at the blue patterns with which the English among them, Hereward especially, were tattooed on throat and arm and knee.

"Yes, you are Vikings,—just such as my Uncle Robert tells me of."

Hereward knew well the exploits of Robert le Frison in Spain and Greece. "I trust that your noble uncle," he asked, "is well? He was one of us poor sea-cocks, and sailed the swan's path gallantly, till he became a mighty prince. Here is a man here who was with your noble uncle in Byzant."

And he thrust forward the old master.

The boy's delight knew no bounds. He should tell him all about that in St. Bertin.

Then he rode back to the ship, and round and round her (for the tide by that time had left her high and dry), and wondered at her long snake-like lines, and carven stem and stern.

"Tell me about this ship. Let me go on board of her. I have never seen a ship inland at Mons there; and even here there are only heavy ugly busses, and little fishing-boats. No. You must be all hungry and tired. We will go to St. Bertin at once, and you shall be feasted royally. Hearken, villains!" shouted he to the peasants. "This ship belongs to the fair sir here,—my guest and friend; and if any man dares to steal from her a stave or a nail, I will have his thief's hand cut off."

"The ship, fair lord," said Hereward, "is yours, not mine. You should build twenty more after her pattern, and man them with such lads as these, and then go down to

'Miklagard and Spanialand,
That lie so far on the lee, O!'

as did your noble uncle before you."

And so they marched inland, after the boy had dismounted one of his men, and put Hereward on the horse.

"You gentlemen of the sea can ride as well as sail," said the châtelain, as he remarked with some surprise Hereward's perfect seat and hand.

"We should soon learn to fly likewise," laughed Hereward, "if there were any booty to be picked up in the clouds there overhead"; and he rode on by Arnulf's side, as the lad questioned him about the sea, and nothing else.

"Ah, my boy," said Hereward at last, "look there, and let those be Vikings who must."

And he pointed to the rich pastures, broken by strips of corn-land and snug farms, which stretched between the sea and the great forest of Flanders.

"What do you mean?"

But Hereward was silent. It was so like his own native fens. For a moment there came over him the longing for a home. To settle down in such a fair fat land, and call good acres his own; and marry and beget stalwart sons, to till the old estate when he could till no more. Might not that be a better life—at least a happier one—than restless, homeless, aimless adventure? And now, just as he had had a hope of peace,—a hope of seeing his own land, his own folk, perhaps of making peace with his mother and his king,—the very waves would not let him rest, but sped him forth, a storm-tossed waif, to begin life anew, fighting he cared not whom or why, in a strange land.

So he was silent and sad withal.

"What does he mean?" asked the boy of the Abbot.

"He seems a wise man: let him answer for himself."

The boy asked once more.

"Lad! lad!" said Hereward, waking as from a dream. "If you be heir to such a fair land as that, thank God for it, and pray to Him that you may rule it justly, and keep it in peace, as they say your grandfather and your father do; and leave glory and fame and the Vikings' bloody trade to those who have neither father nor mother, wife nor land, but live like the wolf of the wood, from one meal to the next."

"I thank you for those words, Sir Harold," said the good Abbot, while the boy went on abashed, and Hereward himself was startled at his own saying, and rode silent till they crossed the drawbridge of St. Bertin, and entered that ancient fortress, so strong that it was the hiding-place in war time for all the treasures of the country, and so sacred withal that no woman, dead or alive, was allowed to defile it by her presence; so that the wife of Baldwin the Bold, ancestor of Arnulf, wishing to lie by her husband, had to remove his corpse from St. Bertin to the Abbey of Blandigni, where the Counts of Flanders lay in glory for many a generation.

The pirates entered, not without gloomy distrust, the gates of that consecrated fortress; while the monks in their turn were (and with some reason) considerably frightened when they were asked to entertain as guests forty Norse rovers. Loudly did the elder among them bewail (in Latin, lest their guests should understand too much) the present weakness of their monastery, where St. Bertin was left to defend himself and his monks all alone against the wicked world outside. Far different had been their case some hundred and seventy years before. Then St. Valeri and St. Riquier of Ponthieu, transported thither from their own resting-places in France for fear of the invading Northmen, had joined their suffrages and merits to those of St. Bertin, with such success that the abbey had never been defiled by the foot of the heathen. But, alas! the saints, that is their bodies, after a while became homesick; and St. Valeri appearing in a dream to Hugh Capet, bade him bring them back to France in spite of Arnulf, Count of those parts, who wished much to retain so valuable an addition to his household gods.

But in vain. Hugh Capet was a man who took few denials. With knights and men-at-arms he came, and Count Arnulf had to send home the holy corpses with all humility, and leave St. Bertin all alone.

Whereon St. Valeri appeared in a dream to Hugh Capet, and said unto him, "Because thou hast zealously done what I commanded, thou and thy successors shall reign in the kingdom of France to everlasting generations." [Footnote: "Histoire des Comtes de Flandre," par E. le Glay. E. gestis SS. Richarii et Walerici.]

However, there was no refusing the grandson and heir of Count Baldwin; and the hearts of the monks were comforted by hearing that Hereward was a good Christian, and that most of his crew had been at least baptized. The Abbot therefore took courage, and admitted them into the hospice, with solemn warnings as to the doom which they might expect if they took the value of a horse-nail from the patrimony of the blessed saint. Was he less powerful or less careful of his own honor than St. Lieven of Holthem, who, not more than fifty years before, had struck stone-blind four soldiers of the Emperor Henry's, who had dared, after warning, to plunder the altar? [Footnote: Ibid.] Let them remember, too, the fate of their own forefathers, the heathens of the North, and the check which, one hundred and seventy years before, they had received under those very walls. They had exterminated the people of Walcheren; they had taken prisoner Count Regnier; they had burnt Ghent, Bruges, and St. Omer itself, close by; they had left naught between the Scheldt and the Somme, save stark corpses and blackened ruins. What could withstand them till they dared to lift audacious hands against the heavenly lord who sleeps there in Sithiu? Then they poured down in vain over the Heilig-Veld, innumerable as the locusts. Poor monks, strong in the protection of the holy Bertin, sallied out and smote them hip and thigh, singing their psalms the while. The ditches of the fortress were filled with unbaptized corpses; the piles of vine-twigs which they lighted to burn down the gates turned their flames into the Norsemen's faces at the bidding of St. Bertin; and they fled from that temporal fire to descend into that which is eternal, while the gates of the pit were too narrow for the multitude of their miscreant souls. [Footnote: This gallant feat was performed in the A.D. 891.]

So the Norsemen heard, and feared; and only cast longing eyes at the gold and tapestries of the altars, when they went in to mass.

For the good Abbot, gaining courage still further, had pointed out to Hereward and his men that it had been surely by the merits and suffrages of the blessed St. Bertin that they had escaped a watery grave.

Hereward and his men, for their part, were not inclined to deny the theory. That they had miraculously escaped, from the accident of the tide being high, they knew full well; and that St. Bertin should have done them the service was probable enough. He, of course, was lord and master in his own country, and very probably a few miles out to sea likewise.

So Hereward assured the Abbot that he had no mind to eat St. Bertin's bread, or accept his favors, without paying honestly for them; and after mass he took from his shoulders a handsome silk cloak (the only one he had), with a great Scotch Cairngorm brooch, and bade them buckle it on the shoulders of the great image of St. Bertin.

At which St. Bertin was so pleased (being, like many saints, male and female, somewhat proud after their death of the finery which they despised during life), that he appeared that night to a certain monk, and told him that if Hereward would continue duly to honor him, the blessed St. Bertin, and his monks at that place, he would, in his turn, insure him victory in all his battles by land and sea.

After which Hereward stayed quietly in the abbey certain days; and young Arnulf, in spite of all remonstrances from the Abbot, would never leave his side till he had heard from him and from his men as much of their adventures as they thought it prudent to relate.

CHAPTER VII. – HOW HEREWARD WENT TO THE WAR AT GUISNES

The dominion of Baldwin of Lille,—Baldwin the Debonair,—Marquis of Flanders, and just then the greatest potentate in Europe after the Kaiser of Germany and the Kaiser of Constantinople, extended from the Somme to the Scheldt, including thus much territory which now belongs to France. His forefathers had ruled there ever since the days of the "Foresters" of Charlemagne, who held the vast forests against the heathens of the fens; and of that famous Baldwin Bras-de-fer,—who, when the foul fiend rose out of the Scheldt, and tried to drag him down, tried cold steel upon him (being a practical man), and made his ghostly adversary feel so sorely the weight of the "iron arm," that he retired into his native mud,—or even lower still.

He, like a daring knight as he was, ran off with his (so some say) early love, Judith, daughter of Charles the Bald of France, a descendant of Charlemagne himself. Married up to Ethelwulf of England, and thus stepmother of Alfred the Great,—after his death behaving, alas for her! not over wisely or well, she had verified the saying:

"Nous revenons toujours
À nos premiers amours,"

and ran away with Baldwin.

Charles, furious that one of his earls, a mere lieutenant and creature, should dare to marry a daughter of Charlemagne's house, would have attacked him with horse and foot, fire and sword, had not Baldwin been the only man who could defend his northern frontier against the heathen Norsemen.

The Pope, as Charles was his good friend, fulminated against Baldwin the excommunication destined for him who stole a widow for his wife, and all his accomplices.

Baldwin and Judith went straight to Rome, and told their story to the Pope.

He, honest man, wrote to Charles the Bald a letter which still remains,—alike merciful, sentimental, and politic, with its usual ingrained element of what we now call (from the old monkish word "cantare") cant. Of Baldwin's horrible wickedness there is no doubt. Of his repentance (in all matters short of amendment of life, by giving up the fair Judith), still less. But the Pope has "another motive for so acting. He fears lest Baldwin, under the weight of Charles's wrath and indignation, should make alliance with the Normans, enemies of God and the holy Church; and thus an occasion arise of peril and scandal for the people of God, whom Charles ought to rule," &c., &c., which if it happened, it would be worse for them and for Charles's own soul.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.