

Stoddard William Osborn

Ned, the son of Webb: What he did.



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William O. Stoddard

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CHAPTER I. THE WAR SPIRIT

"She's grand!" exclaimed Ned, enthusiastically. "Uncle Jack, the *Kentucky* could knock any other ironclad in all the world!"

"Perhaps she could," growled Uncle Jack, somewhat thoughtfully. "I'm glad she is out of range of them, just now, though. I like her looks as she is. It is best for them, too."

They were standing near the head of Pier Number One, North River, gazing at the great line-of-battle ship as she steamed along slowly up the stream.

"Those double turrets make her as tall as a house," said Ned. "There's nothing else like her! See the long noses of those big guns!"

"That's what I came for," replied Uncle Jack. "I wanted to see her, and now I have seen her I am more opposed to war than ever. I'm going to join the Peace Society."

"I'd rather join the navy," said Ned. "But if a shell from one of those guns should burst inside of another ship it would blow her sky-high."

"No!" responded his uncle, with firmness. "She would not go up to the sky, she would go down to the bottom of the deep sea."

"She could do it, anyhow," said Ned, not explaining which of the two ships he referred to.

It was evident that Uncle Jack was too deeply interested in the *Kentucky* to care for general conversation. For fear, however, that he might not have read the papers, his somewhat excited nephew told him that the steel-clad wonder of the sea had at least twelve thousand horses in her steam engines. He also said that she was of twelve thousand tons burden, but did not say whether that was the load she could carry or whether it might be supposed to be her fighting weight.

"I wish I were captain of her," he declared, at last. "I'd like to conquer England."

"I felt just so once," responded Uncle Jack. "There is more in England that is worth capturing than there is anywhere else. You would need more than one ship, though. I tried the experiment, but the English beat me."

"Oh!" exclaimed Ned. "I know how you tried it. You went alone, though, and without any *Kentucky*."

"No," said his uncle, "I didn't go alone. Your aunt went with me. So did thousands of other brave Americans. They try it every year, and they always come home beaten."

"Yes, sir!" said Ned. "They spend all their money, and are glad to get back. They say the English can whip anything in all the world except Americans. I'm going there, some day. I don't believe there is any British ship that can whip the *Kentucky*."

"She certainly is magnificent," replied his uncle. "She is a tremendous war machine. What we are ever to do with her, however, I don't care to think of. I want her never to fire one of those guns. After all, Ned, if one of her great steel bottom plates should get shaken loose and drop out, that vast leviathan would sink, with all on board."

"I guess not," said Ned. "They would get away in the boats. Besides, she isn't going to fall to pieces right away."

"All right," said his uncle. "We've seen her. Now let's go home."

They turned away and walked on across what the people of New York call the Battery. They do so because here was a fort once. Part of it, nearest the water, was made there two centuries ago.

Another part, more like a modern fort, was made later, and it was distinguished for having been surrendered, back and forth, without firing one of its guns in defence, more times than any other military post in America. It was given up once by the Dutch, twice by the British, and once by the Americans. That was by General Washington, when the English troops drove him and his ragged rebels out of New York. None of the fighting that was done then was anywhere near the Battery.

Ned had something to say about that, as they went along, and about the other forts around the harbour, of which he seemed to be very proud.

"My boy," remarked his uncle, "almost all of our New York forts are back numbers. One steel canoe like the *Kentucky*, if she were English, for instance, and if we were conquering England, could knock all of those old-fashioned affairs about our ears."

"Well," said Ned, doubtfully, "so the *Kentucky* or the *Oregon* could do for any old fort in Europe. I say, Uncle Jack, right here is the lower end of all the elevated railways."

"Exactly," said his uncle; "and of the cable-cars that are hauled by a steel rope underground. Away up yonder is the suspension bridge from this city to Brooklyn. There will be a dozen of them, more or less, before long. All over the upper part of town the trolley-cars run by lightning on a string. I hate all these modern inventions and innovations – I do! I hate railways up in the air on stilts, and I hate express trains that go a mile a minute, and I hate these electric lights. Why, Ned, when I was a boy, we were able to get first-rate tallow-dip candles to read by. Nobody can have anything of that kind, nowadays. Now, just look at those forty-story-chimney buildings! Fellows who live at the top of those things have to be shot up. It's awful!"

"I went up four of them," said Ned. "I wanted to know how it felt."

"Well," said Uncle Jack, "how did you feel?"

"I held my breath," replied Ned, "and I held on to the seat. I was glad to get out, though, top and bottom. I suppose a fellow can get used to it –"

"Ned," interrupted his uncle, "wait here a minute. I want to have a little talk with a friend of mine in Chicago. What they won't do next, with electricity and some things, I don't know."

They were in front of a long-distance telephone office, and Uncle Jack went in. His conversation with his neighbour, a thousand miles away, turned out a long one, and it was half an hour before he and his nephew reached the patch of cleared land which still remains around the City Hall.

"There!" suddenly exclaimed Ned. "Hurrah! We're having first-rate luck, Uncle Jack! That's the very thing I've been wanting to see!"

It was not another building, this time, and it was not altogether an innovation. It was something warlike and terrible; for a battery of the Fourth Regular Artillery, guns, ammunition wagons, all, was passing through the city, down Broadway, on its journey to some new post of duty.

"Those are three-inch calibre, long range guns," said Uncle Jack. "They send shells ten miles or so, to split things. The gun-barrels are longer than a fence-rail. For my part, I don't like 'em. They shoot too far."

"They're the right thing to have," said Ned. "If I were going to conquer England I'd want plenty of those guns."

"They'd be of no use at all to you, if you had them," said Uncle Jack. "The London police wouldn't let you keep 'em. They'd take them right away from you, as soon as you landed. You would be fined, too. It's against English law for any fellow to carry such things around with him."

Ned was silenced by that, for the time, and they both got into a street-car, and went on uptown. There were plenty of things worth seeing, all along, but the car was so crowded with passengers that they were packed, as Uncle Jack complained, "like sardines in a box." So they stood still, and hardly saw anything.

When at last they stepped out, and walked over toward one of the gateways of Central Park, he growled again.

"There they go!" he exclaimed. "One – two – three – four of 'em. They are those automobile carriages, that go without any horses. I like a horse, myself. That is, if he's a good one, and pulls well in harness. I was kicked half to death by one of my horses, once. I think he had some kind of automobile in him. If you should ever happen to conquer England, you'd get fine horses."

"That's what mother says," replied Ned. "She's a good American now, but she was born in England. She says they have the best horses in the world."

"Not by any means equal to ours," snapped Uncle Jack. "Ours are so fine that we are going to preserve some of them for specimens, after we get so that all our riding and pulling is done by steam and electricity. We shall keep pictures of them, too, and statues, so that people who live in such times as are to come may know what sort of animals horses used to be."

Uncle Jack appeared to be in a bad state of mind, that day, for he went on to denounce vigorously a long list of things. He even went so far as to condemn the entire Anglo-Saxon race, English and American together.

"Look at it, Ned!" he said, with energy. "Not only do both of these wretched nations come down to this new state of things, themselves, including the newspapers and the magazines and the floods of books, but they are clubbing together to force innovations upon all the rest of the world. They are a partnership concern now, and which of them is the meanest I don't know. The British are choking their inventions down the throats of China, India, Africa, and a lot of other unlucky continents and islands. We Americans are working in the same way with Cuba and Porto Rico and the Philippines and Magatapatanglew."

"Where on earth is that?" asked Ned.

"Where is it?" sadly responded his uncle, shaking his head. "I really don't know. Nobody else knows where half of these new places are, with long-tail names. I've a kind of notion it's near the junction."

"What junction?" inquired his nephew.

"Why!" exclaimed Uncle Jack. "The junction? You don't know? It is at the corner where the Congo River crosses the Ganges. It is very near the point where the Ural Mountains pour down into the Red Sea."

Ned was not entirely caught and mystified, this time, for he promptly replied: "Oh, I know where that is! I've been to Grammar School Sixty-eight. I know! It's down near the custom house."

"I declare!" said his uncle. "Boys know too much, anyhow, nowadays. You would learn a great deal more, though, if you'd take an army and a steamer, and go and conquer England. Your mother has dozens of cousins there, too. But you had better buy return excursion tickets before you start. That's what I did, and it helped me to get back home. Let's go to dinner."

"It's about dinner-time," said Ned; and his uncle talked along as they went.

"I like the English for one thing," he said. "They cook good dinners. I hate 'em for another thing, though: if you go to an English dinner-party, you have to wait till the last man gets there before they will give you anything to eat. I conquered them a little on that, anyhow, for I always went two hours late, myself. So I generally had to wait only about half an hour or so."

Ned studied that matter until he thought he understood it. Afterward, however, he was glad to be an American, when his own dinner came to the table exactly on time. So did he and his uncle.

A long walk, and sightseeing, combined with plans for the conquest of England, will surely prepare a healthy sixteen-year-old boy for his dinner, especially if he is somewhat tall for his age and burly in build. Ned was not quite prepared, nevertheless, for some things which were coming upon him. He could not have expected, reasonably, that his entire family would set him up for a mark and shoot at him. That is what they did, and they fired at him from all around the table, hitting him.

"Ned," began Uncle Jack, "I heard you! Where on earth did you learn to speak Norwegian? Not at the grammar school."

"Why," said Ned, "I got it from old Erica. She has been in the house since before I was born. She began with me when I was doing my first words of any kind."

"Oh," said Uncle Jack, "that's it! I suppose even the Norway babies catch it that way."

"I see," said his father. "It is about the same way with your Latin. I used to talk Latin at you when you wore frocks. You are pretty well up in it, for a boy only just graduated from a public school. Perhaps it may be of use to you, some day; but I am afraid that your Norwegian never will."

"Not unless he should go there, if he ever travels," said his mother. "What he needs to do now is to get out into the country. He has been cooped up in the city and held down over his books long enough."

"He must spend a few weeks at his grandfather's house," remarked his Aunt Maria, with a severe expression. "He must go fishing. His health requires it."

So said his sisters and his older brothers, and then Uncle Jack gave him away entirely, telling of Ned's dealings with the *Kentucky*, and with the other wonders they had seen that morning.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed his father. "He wishes to conquer England! I know some English boys that could make him wish he were hiding on board the *Kentucky*."

"Well," responded Ned, rebelliously, "I'm not so sure about that! I'm captain of the baseball nine. I'm in on football, too. I can fence first-rate, and I've had Pat McCool for a boxing master."

"Oh!" remarked Aunt Maria. "Now I know! That is why you came home limping so horridly, a week ago Saturday. You had a pair of black eyes, too –"

"That's nothing, Aunt Maria," interrupted Ned. "That was Jimmy Finley. We were boxing barehanded. He got it as bad as I did, too."

"Edward," exclaimed his mother, "that is shocking! It is like fighting! And you have been talking slang, too!"

"Well, mother," said Ned, respectfully, "I didn't mean to; but Jim is a regular rusher to hit."

"Edward!" said his father. "Slang again? I must take you in hand, myself."

"He is dreadful!" whispered one of his sisters. "He called Sallie Hemans a bricktop. Her hair is red –"

"I see how it is," continued his father. "The sooner you are out in the country, the better. Football, indeed! Baseball, fencing, boxing! All that sort of thing! What you need is exercise. Fishing, I should say, and plenty of good, fresh country air. Something beside books and school."

"I'll tell you what, then," responded Ned. "I'll be glad enough to get there. All the colts I rode last summer'll be a year older now. I'm going to try 'em, and see if they can send me to grass, like they did then."

"Edward! What grammar!" groaned his aunt. "His Grandmother Webb will attend to that."

"I have my serious doubts," remarked Uncle Jack. "She has not altogether reformed her own neighbourhood. The country is the place for him, however. If he isn't sent away he may stir up a war with England, and it would be expensive."

From that the table talk drifted back to the terrible battle-ships and the new inventions.

"It is dreadful!" remarked Uncle Jack. "I used to think I knew, generally, what I was eating, but I have given it up. They have invented artificial eggs. The butter we get is a mystery; they make almost anything out of corn. The newspapers are printed on stuff that's made of cord-wood, and this new imitation silver is nothing but potter's clay, boiled down, somehow. It tires me out to think of it all."

"I don't care," said Ned. "Hurrah for the country, and for the colts, and for some fishing!"

CHAPTER II. NED WEBB'S OUTING

"Your grandmother is right, Edward. I agree with her entirely. She thinks that too much of your vacation time ought not to be spent in the woods, and it must not be. I wish, however, to say something more. Your education must continue without too great an interruption. There are ideas which I intend you to obtain while under my care."

"Why, grandfather!" exclaimed Ned, with a somewhat puzzled look on his face. "I think so, too. I don't care to be all the while in the woods. I want to do some fishing."

"Exactly," said his grandfather. "We both approve of that. You may have all the rods and lines you need, but you must not forget the wise saying of the immortal Franklin, that going fishing means only a rod and line with a worm at each end of it. There is not much to be caught in Green Lake."

"Well," said Ned, "I guess I'll pull in something better'n suckers and bullheads. There are trout and perch and bass and pickerel."

"Eels, too," suggested his grandfather. "What I mean is, practically, that you are to employ a part of each day among your books. I especially wish you to acquire a rudimentary acquaintance with the history of the world you live in."

"Yes, sir, I know what that is," said Ned. "They bored us with it, awfully, at School Number Sixty-eight. I had to be examined on it, too, and I didn't get turned down."

Ned had safely reached his grandfather's house in the country. It was a large and handsome mansion. They two were now in the library, on the morning after his arrival. One glance at the ranges of bookcases was enough to afford an indication of the old gentleman's hobby. He was a distinguished member of the Historical Society; of the Antediluvian Research Association; of the Paleontological; the Paleozoic, and of several other brilliant scientific corporations. He was a short, stocky old man, and very positive in his manners. Possibly he might now have responded even severely, but at this moment a tall, thin, gray-haired, benevolent-looking woman entered the library.

"Edward," she said, brushing a lot of dust from her dress, "I've been going over that fishing-tackle for you. You may pick out all you want of it, if you'll only let the guns alone. I can't let you play with gunpowder. Your grandfather mustn't make a bookworm of you, either."

"Oh," said Ned, "I was thinking of that. Worms! I guess I know where to dig 'em. What I'm going to go for, this morning, is the horses."

"That's what you may do," said his grandfather, somewhat as if he had been getting orders from his wife. "You'd better fight shy of that sorrel filly, though. She might pitch you over her head."

"Why, Edward," interposed his grandmother, "you rode that colt a good many times, last vacation. She's better broken in now. I've driven her, myself. She's as kind and gentle as a kitten, but she's playful."

"Humph!" remarked the old gentleman. "She kicked one buggy into the middle of next week. I won't drive her."

There was more to be said, but Ned escaped with his grandmother to go and take a look at the fishing-tackle. It was in a closet of one of the up-stairs rooms, and it was worth any boy's while to have the rummaging of that closet.

"It's a perfect curiosity shop," said Ned, as he stared into it. "Why, grandmother, he must have been a tremendous fisherman."

"So he was," she said, "when he was a younger man. That isn't all of it, though. This is his collection of all the implements employed by civilised and uncivilised tribes for catching fish. It isn't sorted very well, but that other side is packed with nets and spears. I'm afraid there isn't a really good boat for you on Green Lake. Clumsy things!"

"Anything'll do for me," said Ned. "I'm a sailor. Do you know, the other day, I went to see the *Kentucky*, the new line-o'-battle-ship. She's a giant."

"Oh, dear!" laughed the old lady. "If your grandfather could buy her at auction, he'd stow her away in this closet, for one of his specimens."

"I can see all I want," replied Ned. "I'll come and pick it out by and by. May I go to the barns now?"

"Go right along," she said. "Hadn't you better take a ride to Green Lake? It's only a mile or so, and horseback exercise'll do you good."

She kept him a few minutes, however, to explain the nature of some of the more remarkable antiquities in the closet. Then he was down-stairs again, but he was not a free boy yet, for his grandfather caught him and led him into the library again.

"Edward," he said, solemnly, as they passed the doorway, "if there is anything I disapprove of, more than another, it is what they are printing nowadays to occupy the empty minds of the young, – the things which they advertise as popular books for boys, for instance. I find that even where they are more or less historical in character, they are also perniciously imaginative, often presenting utter improbabilities as history. I will show you something, now, that will be worth your while. I suppose that you do not know anything of consequence concerning your Scandinavian forefathers."

"Yes, I do," said Ned. "Our old Erica's a Norway girl. I can talk with her in Norwegian."

"What!" exclaimed his grandfather. "Have you actually acquired the difficult tongue of the Vikings and Berserkers? That is wonderful! Then you will be doubly interested in the work you are about to peruse."

"I guess I can swallow it," said Ned. "Are you going to give me a look at it?"

The old gentleman walked over to a corner of the library and pulled out from one of the lower shelves an exceedingly promising or portentous volume. He was a strong man, and he lifted it to the centre-table, throwing it wide open as he did so, and remarking:

"There, now! That's a book for a boy!"

Ned drew a long breath, in spite of some dust that flew from the book, as he came to the table.

"Examine it," said his grandfather.

Ned turned first to the title-page, of course, to see what it was.

HISTORY OF THE NORMANS

By

PROFESSOR SCHWEINFURTH BFJORNNSSEN

Translated by

BARON FRITZ VON PLOKINWICZ

475 Illustrations

Published by

DRONTHEIM & WESTMINSTER

Boston and Copenhagen

1900

A pencilled memorandum added:

5,000 pp. \$50

"This is just the thing!" exclaimed Ned. "I can look at every picture in it while I'm here. I guess not many of 'em are photos, though. They are splendid!"

"They are works of art, all of 'em," said his grandfather. "I believe them to be sufficiently accurate, and that you may depend upon their instructive value."

"I see," said Ned. "All about ever so many fights. I'll go right into it. Tell you what, grandfather, there isn't any school-book about this."

The old gentleman was evidently gratified by the eagerness with which Ned began to turn over the leaves, and he remarked, benevolently:

"It will give you a thorough knowledge of men and times whereof we have as yet discovered very little. The Vikings were a wonderful race of men."

"They'd fight like anything," said Ned. "Pirates, buccaneers, freebooters, – I'd like to see one of their battles. They blew horns all the while. Yelled. Sung songs. Yes, sir! It's the biggest kind of book."

"Go, now," said his grandfather, still more delighted with Ned's enthusiasm. "You may try the sorrel colt, but be careful."

The barns and stables of the Webb place were at some distance in the rear of the mansion. At the right of the largest barn was a four-acre paddock, but it did not seem to have many occupants. At this hour of the day all work-horses were away at their farm duties. The carriage-horses were in their stalls, waiting for orders. All that Ned saw, therefore, on his arrival, were a brace of very young colts, four Devon calves, as handsome as pictures, and one three-year-old sorrel filly. She was in the hands of a groom, and instead of a halter she was wearing a bridle, with a plain snaffle-bit. Just at this moment the groom was putting upon her back a pretty blue blanket with white borders. She was a large animal for her age, and Ned was already aware that she had earned a reputation as a racer.

"There's speed in her!" he remarked. "She'll show time, one of these days. Temper? Well, I don't care if there is. Good horses always have some."

Nanny's beautiful eyes looked gentle enough, and they were full of intelligence. She neighed inquiringly as he drew nearer.

"Hullo! How are ye, Masther Ned? Hark to the mare, now. She's askin' the name of ye. Come along, and spake to her."

"How are you, Pat McCarty?" called back Ned. "Nanny's looking fine! Grandfather says I may ride her."

"All right," said Pat. "She's ready. I was goin' to exercise her, meself."

A dozen more questions and answers followed rapidly, while Ned was caressing and admiring the perfectly shaped quadruped. She turned her pretty head to look at him, as he walked around her, and he was aware of a curious notion that she was now and then winking at him. She seemed, at the same time, a little impatient and restless, as if it irritated her to have to stand still.

"You'll do as well without a saddle," said Pat. "Sometimes she objects to a saddle. The blanket and surcingle is all the summer goods she wants to wear."

"Guess they're enough," laughed Ned.

He was getting wildly eager for his romp with Nanny. Whether or not she remembered him, she seemed to be disposed to treat him politely. She even craned out her neck and pulled off his hat for him, taking the brim in her teeth.

"She's friendly, the day," said Pat. "Put your fut in me hand and I'll give ye the lift to the back of her."

Ned was as nimble as a monkey. In a moment more he was on Nanny's back, bridle in hand, feeling splendidly.

"Aff wid ye," said Pat. "I'll open the gate for ye. Ave she wants to go, though, it's little good to thry an' hould her in."

"I won't," said Ned. "I'll just let her fly!"

He was thrilling all over with the excitement of being so well mounted, and he really knew how to ride. As for Nanny, she appeared to be set on springs, and her progress to the gate was a series of graceful curvetings, as easy for her rider as the motion of a rocking-chair.

They were now in the barnyard, and a lane from this led out into the road. Pat was no longer needed, for the yard gate was open, and Nanny pranced along through without any guiding.

"Luk at her!" shouted Pat. "She's out for fun the day. She's full o' life. Oh! but isn't she a beauty!"

"Whoop!" yelled Ned. "This is better than being shut up in a grammar school."

"It's the fine b'ye he is, ave they don't spile him entirely, among thim," remarked Pat, thoughtfully. "The ould grandmother'd give him the house and all, and the grandfather's been just a-waitin' for him till he kem. They're the right sort o' people, thim Webbs."

The highway was clear and Nanny went into it at her own gait, a kind of springing, elastic canter that was not at first very rapid.

"This is the road toward Green Lake," thought Ned. "It's just the one I meant to take. I'll get there, to-morrow or next day, and see if there's any fishing. Sometimes they didn't bite worth a cent, last year. I'll find a boat, somehow. I can take a book along, too. Then I won't have to sit still for an hour at a time, doing nothing."

Men and women in wagons and carriages, which he shortly met or passed, all turned for a look at Nanny, and it was quite apparent that she appreciated their admiration. Two or three times, indeed, she induced Ned to make a mild, restraining pull upon the bridle, but each time she resented his attempt at control by a shake of her head, followed by a vigorous bound forward.

"I'd better take Pat's advice," he thought. "If she wants to speed it, I'll let her go. I can stick on, anyhow."

He had no doubt whatever on that point, and was not at all nervous. At the end of less than three-quarters of a mile, however, there was a narrow lane that left the highway on the right, though not at right angles. This lane was bordered by rail fences, trees, bushes, and farther on it led through a patch of dense forest.

"Green Lake Lane," thought Ned. "I won't go there to-day."

On that point he should have first consulted the sorrel colt under him. The instant she came to the head of the lane she uttered a sharp exclamation and whirled gaily into it. Ned at once drew upon his bridle in an attempt to guide her back into the highway. Up went her heels a little viciously, and her easy gallop changed into something like a run. If she had now only a quarter-mile to go, she was determined to make short work of whatever errand was in her mind.

"She's going like lightning!" exclaimed Ned, clinging his best and pulling hard.

"This lane runs right on into the lake. Oh, my!"

Faster, faster, went the beautiful thoroughbred racer. The trees at the roadside seemed to go flashing by, and now the lake itself was in full view ahead.

It was a broad, placid, forest-bordered sheet of water, apparently somewhat irregular in shape. There were neither wharves nor piers nor boathouses to be seen.

The entire lake landscape was wildly picturesque, – if Ned could at that moment have considered at all any of the beauties of nature. He could not have done so, for it seemed to him that Nanny was not even giving him time to think. Long afterward, he remembered asking himself if it were possible that Nanny had any idea of going for a swim.

She had no such intentions, indeed. She had other plans and purposes, and she carried out her own conception of a grand morning romp with Ned to perfection.

The moderate slope to the water's edge was green with grass, and the little waves came rippling in smilingly. The water there was not very shallow, however.

On – on – sprang swiftly the sorrel colt, and it was plain that only the lake itself could stop her.

That is, the bridle and bit were of no account, but she could stop herself. Her round yellow fore hoofs came down side by side at the margin, and the water was only a few inches above her silken fetlocks when she suddenly, sharply braced herself as still as if she had been instantaneously cast in bronze for exhibition.

Ned did not sit still at all. He was cast clean over the gracefully bowing head of the playful Nanny, right into Green Lake, as far as she could throw him.

Beyond all doubt, she had accomplished her purposes remarkably well.

There was no actual harm done to her rider, either, for the water in which Ned landed, if a boy can correctly be said to land in water, was fully four feet deep. He went into it head first, heels up, hat flying, with a kind of astonished yell in his throat that was drowned before it could get away from him.

When he came to the surface again and struck out for the shore, recapturing his floating hat on the way, there stood Nanny entirely calm and as gentle as ever.

Now again he could almost have believed that she was winking at him. She neighed very kindly, drank some lake water, and then she lifted her head and gazed around the lake as if she enjoyed the scenery.

"I can mount her again," asserted Ned, as he stood still to drip. "Oh, but ain't I glad I lighted on something soft! It wasn't a fair throw, anyhow. I hadn't anything left to hold on with."

Whatever he meant by that, she had slung him over her head, and there was very little doubt but what she could do it again. She had a will of her own, too, as to being ridden, and she as much as said so when he went to get hold of her bridle, intending to lead her to a neighbouring log and remount. He did not succeed in putting a hand on the leather. Up went her heels, around she whirled, and away she went, neighing cheerfully as she galloped along the lane.

"Now, this is too bad!" groaned Ned. "I'm as wet as a drowned rat and I've got to foot it home. Nanny'll get there before I do, too, unless she runs away somewhere else, and they'll all wonder what's become of me."

He felt humiliated, discouraged, and not at all like the kind of fellow to command ironclads and lead armies.

There was nothing else to be done, nevertheless, and he began to trudge dolefully along on his homeward way. Walking in wet clothing is not very comfortable exercise, anyhow, and Ned was not now, by any means, the nobby-looking young man from the city that he had been when he rode away that morning. Even more than before, when he was so well mounted, did curious people turn in their carriages and wagons to stare at him. It was on his mind that every one of them had a good laugh and remarked:

"That chap's had a ducking!"

He plodded along, and succeeded in getting half-way before anything serious occurred. Then, indeed, he suddenly stood stock-still, and wished he had been farther.

"There they come!" he exclaimed. "There are grandfather and grandmother and Pat and old Mrs. Emmons and Uncle Jack. More people behind 'em. Oh, dear! They've seen me already, or I'd climb a fence."

It was altogether too late for any attempt at escape. In a few moments more they were in front of him, and all around him, saying all sorts of things so rapidly that he had to keep shut up till they gave him a chance.

"Oh, my blessed boy!" exclaimed Grandmother Webb. "If you wasn't so wet, I'd hug you! We thought the colt had thrown you; we were afraid you were killed!"

"No!" said Ned, with energy. "But she fired me over her head into the lake, and I swam ashore."

"I caught her," put in Pat McCarty. "Here she is, – the beauty! That was for thryin' to hould her in. You must niver do that ag'in."

"I didn't pull much," said Ned.

Uncle Jack had been looking him all over, critically, from head to foot.

"That lake is very wet," he remarked. "Ned, my boy, I'm glad the critter projected you into soft water. You've come out of it a fine-looking bird."

"I don't care," said Ned. "This blue flannel doesn't shrink with wetting. My hat'll be all right as soon as it's dry; so'll my shoes."

At that moment he heard a shrill, soft neigh close to his ear, and Nanny poked her head over his shoulder to gaze affectionately at the family gathering, as if she felt that she was entitled to some of the credit of the occasion.

"It's the fun of her," said Pat. "It's just the joke she played on the b'ye. She knows more'n half the min."

"Edward," commanded his grandfather, "come right back to the house."

"He can't ketch cold sech a day as this," said old Mrs. Emmons, "or I'd make him some pepper tea; but his mother mustn't hear of it. How it would skeer her!"

"No, it wouldn't," said Ned. "She knows I can swim. Father won't care, either, so long's I got ashore."

The procession set out for the house, Pat and Nanny marching ahead. It grew, too, as it went, for ever so many of the village boys came hurrying to join it, and to inquire how it was that Nanny made out to throw Ned into Green Lake. Then they all went forward to walk along with her, full of admiration for a colt that knew how to give a boy a ducking.

"She slung him," said one.

"Hove him clean over her head."

"She was goin' a mile a minute."

"If I'd ha' been Ned, I'd ha' braced back and stuck on."

"Then she'd ha' rolled over."

Not one of them offered to ride her, however; and the procession reached the house. When it did so, Nanny broke away from Pat, and cantered on to the barn-yard. The gate from that into the paddock was shut, and she went over it with a splendid leap, to begin a kind of dance around the Devon calves.

"It's mighty little good to fence in the like of her," remarked Pat. "I'm thinkin' I'd better give the b'ye wan o' thim other cowlts."

CHAPTER III.

A VERY WIDE LAKE

"This is the coolest place there is in the house," remarked Ned, as he looked around the library that hot June afternoon. "Grandmother and the rest of them have gone out to the Sewing Society. What a fuss they made! As if a bit of a swim could hurt me!"

The shelves and cases were crowded with books, and at first he did nothing but lie in a big wickerwork chair, and stare at them.

"No," he said, aloud, "I won't do any reading, not in such a sweltering day as this is. I can get out that Norway book, though, and look at the pictures."

He pulled it out, and lugged it to the table, with a strong impression upon his mind that it was a book to be carried around in January rather than in June.

"It never will be a popular book for boys," he remarked of it. "Not for small boys."

Open it came, and he began with a study of the abundant illustrations. They were fine, and they stirred him up, by degrees, until he began to feel a growing interest in the reading matter scattered along among them. It was all in large type, so that the pages might be conquered easily, one after another. Before long he found himself entirely absorbed in the narrative of the old Norse times.

"Curious lot of men they were," he remarked, "those Vikings. How they did seem to enjoy killing their enemies and cutting each other's heads off! They'd steal anything, too. Tell you what, though, if I'd been wearing one o' their coats of mail when Nanny pitched me into the lake, I'd ha' gone to the bottom like a stone. I wonder if any of 'em could swim in their armour? I don't believe they could. Most likely they took it off if they were going to be wrecked anywhere. A fellow in a steel shirt ought to have some life-preservers handy."

More and more intense became his interest as he went on, and at about tea-time his grandfather came in.

"What, Ned?" asked the old gentleman. "Are you at it yet? That's all right, but I can't let you do too much of it. You must spend all the time you can in the open air. You may read this evening, but to-morrow morning you must go fishing. You may take a book with you."

"I'll take along this one, then," said Ned. "I can read between bites."

"That's what I do sometimes," said his grandfather. "I think it averages about two books to each fish, but a pike pulled a dictionary overboard for me, once."

"What did he want of a dictionary?" asked Ned. "Did you hook him?"

"Yes, I pulled him in," said the old gentleman, "but the book went out of sight. It's going to be too warm for trolling for pike."

"I guess so," said Ned. "I'm going to find some grasshoppers."

"They're the right bait," said Grandfather Webb. "Better than worms. The lake is full of bullheads. So is the wide, wide world. I've been out there, just now, talking to one of 'em. He's an Englishman. He's been beating me out of ten dollars, and he won't understand my explanation of it. He insists on keeping the ten."

"That's like 'em," said Ned. "I'd like to conquer England. Uncle Jack says that if I did they'd lock me up in the station-house."

"That's what they'd do," said his grandfather. "Anybody that invaded England would be arrested at once. They'd convict him, too, and make him buy something of 'em."

"I don't care," said Ned, "I'm going there, some day. It's about the greatest country in the world. I'm going to see London, and the forts, and the ships. The English soldiers and sailors can fight like anything. They can whip anybody but Americans."

"Come to supper!" commanded his grandfather; "then you may go on with your book. I'm afraid, though, that if you were in command of the *Kentucky* you'd try to steam her all over England, across lots, without minding the fences."

At the supper-table Ned was compelled to hear quite a number of remarks about swimming in Green Lake.

"He'd better try that colt in a buggy, next time," said Mrs. Emmons. "She's skittish."

"She likes a buggy," remarked Uncle Jack. "Pat lent her to one of his best friends, last week, to drive her a mile or so for exercise. She didn't stop short of Centreville Four Corners. The buggy's there, now, in the wagon-shop getting mended, and Nanny came home alone, quiet as a lamb."

"I guess Edward may drive one of the other horses," said his grandmother. "Pat'll pick out a quiet one."

"I'd want a buggy, or something," said Ned, "if I was to take that big book of grandfather's with me. I never saw such pictures, though. Loads of 'em."

"Read it! Read it!" said his grandfather. "When you get through with it, you'll know more'n you do now."

They let him alone after that, and talked of other affairs. He was quite willing to keep still, and he got away from the table before anybody else. There was a growing fever upon him to dive into that folio and to find out how the story fitted the pictures. No one happened to go into the library until about eleven o'clock, and he was there alone. Then old Mrs. Emmons herself was hunting everywhere for a ball of yarn she had lost, and she tried the library. Ned was not reading when she came in. He was lying stretched half-way across the table, sound asleep, with his head on the open book, and the cat curled up beside it.

"I had to shake him awake," she reported afterward, "and the cat followed him when he went up-stairs to his room."

Nevertheless, he was awake again not long after sunrise, next morning, and hurried out on a bait hunt. Before breakfast he had done well as to angleworms, but not so well as to grasshoppers. Of these he had captured only six, shutting them up in a little tin match-box.

"Now, then," said his grandfather, when they came out of the house together, after breakfast, "here's your rod. Three good lines. Plenty of hooks and sinkers. The boat's down there at the landing."

"I saw it when I swam ashore," said Ned. "It's a scow-punt and it isn't much bigger'n a wash-tub."

"It's better than it looks," replied the old gentleman. "I saw four men in it once, and they went half-way across the lake before it upset with them."

"Did any of 'em get drowned?" asked Ned.

"No," said Mr. Webb, "not more'n half drowned. I was out in another boat with Pat McCarty, trolling, and we fished in all four of 'em. You needn't get upset unless you try to carry Nanny or some of the boys. I'd rather you'd not have any company. Safer!"

"I don't want any of 'em along," said Ned. "I'd rather be alone. Then I can read while I'm waiting for fish. You said I could take that big book."

"All right, you may," said his grandfather. "Put it into your bait-box. Be sure you bring it home with you."

Away went Ned, and his grandfather turned back into the house, laughing.

"He'll think twice," he said, "before he lugs that folio to Green Lake, this hot day. He won't take it."

He was only half right, for Ned had already thought twice, at least, and had decided what to do.

He had found a small, lightly made garden hand-cart, two-wheeled, and when he set out for Green Lake all his baggage was in the cart, including the book, the angleworms, and the grasshoppers. He succeeded in getting away quietly, too, without giving Pat or anybody else a chance to ask him if he expected to need a wagon to bring home his fish.

It was getting very warm before he was half a mile from the house, for June days always grow warmer, rapidly, if you are shoving a hand-cart.

"It was a good lift to get the book in," thought Ned. "I wish I'd greased the wheels."

The boat lay idly at the shore when he reached the landing-place. A pair of oars lay in it, but he saw also something which pleased him much more.

"Mast and sail!" he shouted. "Who'd ha' thought of that! Hurrah!"

There they lay, a short mast, truly, and a mere rag of sail, with a boom and sprit all ready for use.

"I know how," thought Ned. "I can step the mast and hoist the sail, myself. Then I can tack all over the lake, without any hard work a-rowing."

His first undertaking, however, was to get his huge folio volume into the boat and not into the water. He succeeded perfectly, with some effort. Then he stepped his bit of a mainmast, as he called it, through the hole bored for it in the forward seat of the punt. It was plain that he knew something about naval affairs, for he spoke of his snub-nosed cruiser as a "catboat," and regretted that she had no "tiller."

"She hasn't any anchor, either," he said, "except a rope and a crooked stone. She has a keel, though, and there are thole-pins in her bulwarks, starboard and port. She's higher at the stern than she is at the prow, and I'm afraid she'd be a little cranky in a ten-knot breeze. She isn't ballasted to speak of, and I'd better keep her well before the wind. That's a little nor'west by north, just now."

However that might be, he pushed his gallant bark out from the shore, sitting in the stern, and shoving the land away with the rudder, – that is to say, with one of the oars.

The sail was already up, but it was a question to be answered how he could have told the direction from which the wind was coming or where it was going. To any ordinary observer, not an old salt nor the commander of a line-of-battle ironclad, it looked as if the wind had not yet reached Green Lake. It had very likely paused somewhere, in the village or over among the woods.

"I'll have to row at first," he remarked. "I think I can see a ripple out yonder. Where there's a ripple, there's wind, or it may have been made by that pickerel when he jumped out after something. If he'll bite, I'll pull him in."

Rowing is, after all, easy enough work when there is no hurry and the boat is nearly empty. Ned pulled gently on his oars, and the boom and sail swung to and fro as she slipped along. Pretty soon she reached and went through the ripple made by the pickerel, leaving behind her others that were larger, but which did not indicate wind.

"I'd give something for a catspaw," he said, remembering another nautical term. "I needn't furl the mainsail. She can drift to looard, if she wants to, while I try for some fish. If it's true that this lake hasn't any bottom, it won't pay to cast anchor. There isn't cable enough in that coil to do any good."

He ceased rowing. He put his joint rod together, and fitted on his reel, ready for sport. The bait question was decided against worms and in favour of grasshoppers, with regret that he had so few.

"Now," he said, "I don't much care whether it's to be a bass or a pickerel."

No choice was given him, for in only a minute or so more a handsome yellow perch came over the side of the boat to account for one grasshopper.

"That fellow'll weigh a pound, more or less," he said. "I don't want any pumpkinseeds, though."

That, however, was the kind of fish he pulled in next. Shortly afterward he had the usual unpleasantness belonging to the unhooking of a large, fat, slippery-skinned bullhead. He was really making a very good beginning indeed, considering what was the established reputation of Green Lake.

"Uncle Jack said it was fished out," he said to himself. "I guess there are more shiners and pumpkinseeds than anything else. Hullo! Here comes a big one!"

What seemed to be a tremendous tug at his hook held on vigorously as he hauled in his line. The excitement of that strong bite made him tingle all over.

"Pickerel!" he shouted. "Or a big bass, or maybe it's a pike or a lake trout. What will Uncle Jack say, now?"

In a few moments more he was sadly replying, on behalf of his uncle, "Nothing but a cod-lamper eel!"

Soaked bush branches and pond weed are hard to pull in, and they are good for nothing in a frying-pan. A fisherman's gloomiest disappointments come to him in the landing of them.

Another grasshopper was put on, and another cast was made. The bullhead flopped discontentedly on the bottom of the boat. So did the perch, now and then, but there were no other signs of fish life during the next half-hour, with the sun all the while growing hotter.

"I'll stick my rod," thought Ned, "and throw out another line, with a worm. Then I'll read till I get a bite. I think it's coming on to blow a little. I can see signs of weather."

So he could, really. Hardly were his two hooks and lines in the water before what some people romantically term a zephyr came gently breathing along the placid lake. It soon grew even strong enough to make itself felt by the drooping sail, but Ned remarked, as he lifted his eyes from his book illustrations:

"That canvas doesn't bend worth a cent. I needn't take in any reef just now. Let her spin along. Hullo! The boat's beginning to move!"

He felt more and more sure of that while he again bent over the folio, opened out upon the middle seat, with an old starch box behind it for his accommodation. The breeze had come, what there was of it, but he shortly forgot all about winds and fishing, while he turned page after page of that book, and took in more and more of the meaning of the pictures. The sail was now filled well. There were larger and larger wavelets on the lake, but there came no fish-bites to interrupt Ned's reading. He had no idea for how long a time he had been sailing on, without noticing anything whatever around him. At last, however, the wind grew strong enough to turn one of his book-leaves for him, and he once more raised his head.

"I declare!" he exclaimed. "This bit of a gale is freshening. I'll haul on the main sheet, and bring her head to the wind. She's leaning over a little too much. If a gust or a squall should come on, she might turn turtle."

He evidently knew what it was best to do under such circumstances, and his next exclamation was uttered with even stronger emphasis. He was, of course, doing something in the steering line with his paddle-rudder, and he had taken occasion to look back along the wake of his dashing scow.

"What's this? Who ever knew that Green Lake was so wide? I can't see the other shore, toward our house. There isn't another boat in sight, either. If I expect to get home to-night, it's about time I went about, and headed southerly. This is a curious piece of business. I'll take in my lines, right away."

He shut up his book at once. There was even an anxious tone in his voice, and an exceedingly puzzled look upon his face. It was such, perhaps, as the captain of a line-of-battle-ship might wear upon finding his huge fighting machine in unknown or difficult navigation. Any experienced nautical man would have been able to comprehend Ned's unpleasant situation. That is, perhaps so, if it had been at all possible to know what was the precise nature of the circumstances.

The lines came in fast enough and Ned knew how to tack, if that were indeed the correct thing for him to do next. Now, however, came a second discovery, almost as perplexing as the first. Behind him was a wide waste of water without a visible shore, but he was by no means out of sight of land when he turned to look ahead. The northerly shore of the lake was near, and it was rapidly drawing nearer.

"This is tremendous!" he remarked, and he took a tin cup out of his tackle-box, expressing a hope that the lake water might not prove too warm to drink.

He leaned over the side of the boat, still gazing shoreward, scooped the cup full, and began to drink like a very thirsty fellow.

"Faugh! Phew!" he suddenly sputtered, and a vigorous, choking, coughing spell followed. "What's this? Salt water? How did Green Lake get salted!"

He tasted again, as if to make sure, and then he looked around him utterly bewildered. The shore was all the while drawing nearer, and the water in his cup was of the peculiar brackish flavour that belongs to the great seas.

"Mountains?" he murmured. "I knew there were high hills over this way, but I never was told of anything like this. Right along shore, too. Why, that cliff there's as high as a church steeple. Higher. That's an eagle, too, circling around over the top of it."

Was one side of Green Lake salt and the other fresh, or had it in some mysterious way broken through and become connected with the Atlantic? It even occurred to him to wonder, vaguely, if the lake had joined the ocean in such a way that ships, the *Kentucky*, for instance, could ever come steaming in, firing salutes and astonishing all the country people. His head was all a buzz of perplexing questions, but he managed to keep hold of his rudder, and speed onward toward the land. In fact, the wind was now very good, and the punt was running rapidly.

"Yonder," he remarked aloud, "is the mouth of a kind of inlet. Those cliffs on each side of it are awful. They're almost perpendicular. It makes a fellow think of some of those pictures of Norway fiords, in the book. The best thing I can do is to steer right in and find out what it is. Tell you what, though, I've sailed farther than I'd any idea of."

He still had some distance to go before reaching the opening between the tall cliffs, and his eyes were busy. He tried the water yet again, curiously.

"I know what sea water is," he thought. "I tried it once, out in New York Bay. This tastes saltier than that did. Hullo! Those are porpoises, tumbling around out yonder. I've seen porpoises before, off Long Island, when I went bluefishing with Uncle Jack. I wish he were here to tell me what all this amounts to. He knows a heap."

Perfectly stupendous were those beetling promontories between which the boat sailed in. They must have been several hundreds of feet in height. Here and there, in the clefts and crevices of their rugged sides and along their summits, grew gigantic pines and fir-trees.

"I'll put away the book," he said, "in the locker under the back seat. I'm going ashore. I want to find somebody that can tell me what this means. I won't go home till I know all about it. This isn't any kind of cove, though. It runs away in."

So it did, narrow and deep, and it wound around a rock corner, shortly, so that all view of Green Lake behind him was cut off. It was almost cool in there, as well as shadowy, and Ned felt a kind of shudder going over him. He was not exactly afraid, but his heart was beating more quickly than usual. He had put away the folio with great care, and all of its four hundred and seventy-five splendid illustrations seemed to be running through his memory like a river in a flood-time, after a rousing rain-storm.

"There!" he exclaimed, at last. "There's a landing-place! I can see boats and men and women. Away off yonder, up the slope, houses enough for a village. Hullo! That's a ship at anchor."

Beyond the village, as far as his eyes could search, were more mountains, covered half-way up with forests, but right here before him the fiord widened so as to make a small cliff-guarded harbour of the safest kind. It was really a very beautiful place to visit, if Ned had been at all able, just then, to admire scenery.

"Who would have thought," he exclaimed, "that a fellow could get to such a thing as this is, just by crossing Green Lake!"

CHAPTER IV. BEHIND THE TIMES

"I wish I had on a better rig," thought Ned, very naturally. "I look like anything."

He felt that he was going in among entire strangers, and that he was not by any means in company dress. He had come out fishing in a pair of blue flannel trousers and a blue woollen outing shirt, with canvas shoes, and wearing the low, brown felt hat he had dived in yesterday. It was dry now, but not handsome. He lowered his sail and began to paddle slowly along, thinking of all sorts of things, and watching sharply for whatever might turn up. He studied the sloop at anchor, as he went past it, and declared that it was a queer enough craft to look at. It was very long, and it was low amidships, with big thole-pins along the rails, as if it were planned to operate occasionally as a rowboat. The stern of it rose very high, so that it might contain a cabin, and so did the bow. Projecting from the latter was an iron-clad beak. It was chisel-edged, and Ned remarked:

"That's a ram, but she doesn't look much like a ship-of-war. Our ironclads have rams, but they never get near enough to other ships to strike with them. Our fighting has to be done with long-range guns. Well! I never saw her like before. Hullo! I see it! She is made like the Norse pirate pictures in that book! She is one of them!"

He was eager enough to go forward now, and he rowed with his eyes at work in all directions. The landing-place was now not far ahead of him. It was provided with a pretty substantial wharf, made of logs and stones. From this a pier of similar construction ran out about fifty feet into the harbour. Upon the deck of the pier, and on the wharf, and along the beach, were scattered men and women, and there were a number of stout-looking rowboats hitched here and there, or pulled up on the shore.

Ned ceased rowing for a full half-minute to stare intensely at the people, and then he exclaimed:

"I guess I'm right about it. These chaps are out and out Norsemen! That biggest man wears an iron topknot, too, and he carries a spear. Every man of 'em has a short sword at his belt, and those are all what the book calls seaxes. I know where I am now. I'm in for it! But how on earth am I ever to get home again in time for supper?"

That particular anxiety, and almost everything else, was speedily driven out of his head as he paddled his punt in among the fishing-boats at the pier. It came very near astonishing him, however, that not a soul among them seemed to be at all surprised at seeing him. They paid him no especial attention after they had hailed him, and after he had replied to them in the language which he had learned at home from old Erica. She herself had told him that her speech was not exactly the Norwegian of the printed books. She could not even read them very well, for she had been born up among the mountains and fiords, where the country people still talked the ancient Norse dialect, which could sometimes hardly be understood by town folk.

That is, he knew already that Norway, in that particular, was very much like parts of England, Scotland, Ireland, and several other countries.

As for the manner in which he was received, it was possible that his rig, which had made him nervous, was in his favour. He was really very much better dressed than were any of these fisher people. They all bowed to him politely, and he heard them say something about his being a young jarl. He had some idea of the meaning of that term, but he did not just now feel like a highly aristocratic boy.

The man who wore the long-nosed steel cap and carried the spear was very busy giving directions to the others, and was evidently some sort of captain among them. Just as Ned stepped from the pier to the wharf, however, he saw something that almost took his breath away, and he paid no more attention to anything else.

"Isn't he splendid!" he exclaimed. "It's the first time I ever saw a man in armour."

Not many paces away, and coming slowly and with dignity, was a tall, gray-bearded, powerful-looking Norseman. He carried no shield, but he wore a coat of link-mail that glittered in the sunshine. The spear in his hand was long, with a straight blade that was broad and brightly polished. His helmet was open in front, and was ornamented on top by a small pair of gilded wings. His face was handsome, and he smiled very good-humouredly as Ned stepped forward to meet him.

"I am Vebba, son of Bjorn," he said. "Thou art welcome. Who art thou?"

"I am Ned Webb. I went out fishing, and I came in by the fiord."

"Ned, son of Webb?" replied the Viking. "Thou art of the south haven men. I know them not well. Come thou to my house. I will meet thy father when he cometh to the gathering."

"I shall be glad to come," said Ned, with his best manners, but he was thinking, "Meet my father? Well! I don't believe he will. I've a pretty clear notion that father won't be there."

"All mine have been fishing also," said Vebba, as he turned to walk away, Ned following with him. "Thou must know that we are salting and smoking every fin we can pull in, that the ships of Harold Hardrada's fleet may not sail without plentiful provisions when he and Tostig Godwinson harness the steeds of the sea to bear the heroes of the North to the conquest of England."

Ned's heart gave a great thump, and Vebba must have noticed how his face flushed with sudden delight, for he laughed loudly and said to him:

"Thou art but young to join in a feast of swords, but we will arm thee and thou shalt sail with us to the shore of Britain. There will be grand fighting when we close with the Saxon host that will meet us under Harold the King."

"That's just what I'd like to see!" exclaimed Ned. "Of all things! I've always wanted to conquer England, and now I'm to have a tip-top chance. When do you all expect to go?"

"It hath taken long to build ships," replied Vebba. "The keels of Hardrada will be fifteen score, and Tostig hath already as many as three score with him at Bruges. We wait, now, only for the outfitting. Let us walk on to the house."

Ned had noticed that, with the exception of Vebba, all whom he had yet seen were barefooted. The chief, however, – for there could be no doubt about his rank, – wore sandals that were strapped to his feet and ankles by broad thongs of leather. Most of the other men wore leathern blouses, which reminded Ned of some buckskin hunting-shirts he had seen pictures of. The women were supplied with gowns, some of which were of coarse woollen stuff and some of leather. All of the garments were more or less fish-soiled, and not a few were ragged. "No style here," thought Ned. "I wonder, though, if a steel cap feels heavy on a fellow's head. Perhaps it doesn't when one gets used to it. Oh, but I'm glad I can understand them. I'd be in the worst kind of fix if I couldn't."

The fish which had been brought to the shore in the boats were very fine. Ned saw cod, haddock, herring, salmon, and some that he was not familiar with. Heaviest of all was a great porpoise they had speared and that lay on the sand ready for cutting up for war purposes. He had never before heard of sea-pigs being eaten.

The village lay somewhat farther from the landing than it had at first appeared, looking at it from the water. It was in a narrow valley between two rugged, mountainous ridges, and all around it were broad fields of cultivated land. Most of the houses were low-roofed and small, constructed of logs and stones and tempered clay that was used to stop chinks and holes with. Three or four of a better sort were built, in part at least, of hewn logs and planks and pretty fair-looking stone-work, but all were irregular in plan and as if they had been builded at random. Of these larger dwellings, the roofs were high-pitched, differing altogether from the mere cabins. Ned did not see any chimneys, and he knew why, after his armoured guide had led him into the most extensive house, at the upper end of the village. It was more like a collection of houses around one huge affair in the middle, and this, when he entered it, seemed to be all one room or hall.

"Hullo!" thought Ned. "There's their fireplace, in the middle of the floor, and the smoke gets out at that hole in the roof, if it can. Well, no, there isn't any floor but the earth except at the end, away there at the left. There's a pretty wide plank platform there."

On this "dais," raised about a foot above the hard beaten earth of the rest of the level, he saw a long table, around which were benches and chairs of various kinds. In the middle, behind the table, was one very high-backed chair of oak, that was covered with grotesque carving.

"That's the dinner-table," he said to himself. "It's big enough for a New York hotel. There are benches and bunks all around the sides of the room. Six windows, too, and not a sash in one of them. That's good enough for summer, but what do they do in winter?"

He had to leave that question unsettled, so many others were coming along. The earth floor seemed to be as hard as stone, but it could not have been swept recently. There were neither carpets nor rugs, but in one corner he saw a spinning-wheel and what looked like a hand-loom for weaving. In another corner was a strong stone-work, at the side of which was an anvil, against which a large bellows was leaning. The clothing he had seen had told him that these people knew what to do with wool and flax.

He was quickly compelled to cut off his observations, for now a tall, handsome, yellow-haired woman came forward and shook hands with him, telling him that she was Wiltna, the wife of Vebba. Following her were other women, and at least a dozen of boys and girls, whose several names he had a great deal of difficulty in catching. He did best of all with one tall, red-haired youngster of about his own age.

"I am Lars, son of Vebba," he said, loudly. "Come with me, and see the hawks and hounds. Let us get away from so many women. I am glad thou art come."

In an instant Ned began to feel at home. What would he have done in a country where there were no boys! – if there ever was such a forlorn land as that.

He and Lars were like old friends in a minute, but they had only to get out of the house to see some of the dogs. A pair of tall, ferocious-looking wolf-hounds came bounding toward them, not barking, but uttering strange, short howls of greeting, and showing dangerous rows of sharp, white teeth. Lars wrestled for a moment with one of them, boxing the animal's ears fearlessly, and Ned made friends with the other. On they all went, then, to a low building behind the house, from which a chorus of howls arose as they drew near.

"Pups that are only half trained," said Lars. "We have to keep 'em shut up. If they and some of the older savages got out, we might never see 'em again. They'd go hunting on their own account, or they'd get among the sheep; then they'd be worse than wolves, for the shepherd dogs wouldn't fight them."

It was hardly necessary for Ned to ask questions, so eager was Lars to entertain him, and to tell him the name and character of all the dogs in all the kennels, older and younger. They went to the stables, after that, and to a paddock.

"Horses enough," thought Ned, "but only a very few of them are large ones. Nanny could run out of sight of anything I've seen here. They're a clumsy-looking lot, and the carts and the harness are all the roughest kind. They don't seem to know what a buckle is, and the wheels are a sight to see. They make pretty good saddles, though. Now for the hawks. I want to see 'em."

On went Lars to his bird-cages, beyond the stables, and here was what Ned called "the biggest kind of poultry show."

There were more than twenty falcons, of all sorts, in Vebba's falconry. All of them were leading dull and tedious lives, sitting on perches, and several of them were not only fettered but hooded. Lars transferred one of these from its perch to his own wrist, over which he wore a thick leather guard to protect the skin from the sharp talons of the bird.

"Come on!" he said. "I'll show thee. There won't be any game in sight, but I'll fly him, and call him. I trained him myself. He's a gerfalcon. Hardrada's brother gave him to father after the fight with

the pirates at Croning's Fiord. Father killed five of them, and took one of their boats. It was almost big enough for a ship. It got sunk, though, last winter, by the ice."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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