

THE COLLECTED WORKS
OF WILLIAM MORRIS

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY
HIS DAUGHTER MAY MORRIS

VOLUME XIV
THE HOUSE OF THE WOLFINGS
THE STORY OF
THE GLITTERING PLAIN

LONGMANS GREEN AND COMPANY
PATERNOSTER ROW LONDON
NEW YORK BOMBAY CALCUTTA
MDCCCXII

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	page xv
Bibliographical Note to The House of the Wolfings and The Story of the Glittering Plain	xxxj
A TALE OF THE HOUSE OF THE WOLFINGS AND ALL THE KINDREDS OF THE MARK	
Chapter I. The Dwellings of Mid-mark	3
Chapter II. The Flitting of the War-arrow	8
Chapter III. Thiodolf talketh with the Wood-Sun	14
Chapter IV. The House fareth to the War	24
Chapter V. Concerning the Hall-Sun	31
Chapter VI. They talk on the Way to the Folk-thing	42
Chapter VII. They gather to the Folk-mote	50
Chapter VIII. The Folk-mote of the Markmen	58
Chapter IX. The Ancient Man of the Daylings	72
Chapter X. That Carline cometh to the Roof of the Wolfings	74
Chapter XI. The Hall-Sun speaketh	77
Chapter XII. Tidings of the Battle in Mirkwood	81
Chapter XIII. The Hall-Sun saith another Word	86
Chapter XIV. The Hall-Sun is careful concerning the Passes of the Wood	89
Chapter XV. They hear tell of the Battle on the Ridge	93
Chapter XVI. How the Dwarf-wrought Hauberk was brought away from the Hall of the Daylings	102
Chapter XVII. The Wood-Sun speaketh with Thio- dolf	105
Chapter XVIII. Tidings brought to the Wain-burg	113
Chapter XIX. Those Messengers come to Thiodolf	119
Chapter XX. Otter and his Folk come into Mid-mark	126
Chapter XXI. They bicker about the Ford	135
Chapter XXII. Otter falls on against his Will	140
Chapter XXIII. Thiodolf meeteth the Romans in the Wolfing Meadow	146
Chapter XXIV. The Goths are overthrown by the Romans	151

Chapter XXV. The Host of the Markmen cometh into the Wild-wood	156
Chapter XXVI. Thiodolf talketh with the Wood-Sun	163
Chapter XXVII. They wend to the Morning Battle	173
Chapter XXVIII. Of the Storm of Dawning	178
Chapter XXIX. Of Thiodolf's Storm	185
Chapter XXX. Thiodolf is borne out of the Hall and Otter is laid beside him	195
Chapter XXXI. Old Asmund speaketh over the War- dukes; the Dead are laid in Mound	201

THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN, OR THE LAND OF LIVING MEN

Chapter I. Of those Three who came to the House of the Raven	211
Chapter II. Evil tidings come to hand at Cleveland	213
Chapter III. The Warriors of the Raven search the Seas	216
Chapter IV. How Hallblithe taketh the Sea	217
Chapter V. They come unto the Isle of Ransom	219
Chapter VI. Of a Dwelling of Man on the Isle of Ran- som	227
Chapter VII. A Feast in the Isle of Ransom	233
Chapter VIII. Hallblithe taketh Ship again away from the Isle of Ransom	241
Chapter IX. They come to the Land of the Glittering Plain	244
Chapter X. They hold converse with Folk of the Glit- tering Plain	251
Chapter XI. The Sea-eagle reneweth his Life	255
Chapter XII. They look on the King of the Glittering Plain	258
Chapter XIII. Hallblithe beholdeth the Woman who loveth him	262
Chapter XIV. Hallblithe has speech with the King again	267
Chapter XV. Yet Hallblithe speaketh with the King	271

Chapter XVI. Those Three go their ways to the edge of the Glittering Plain	274
Chapter XVII. Hallblithe amongst the Mountains	279
Chapter XVIII. Hallblithe dwelleth in the Wood alone	287
Chapter XIX. Hallblithe builds him a Skiff	292
Chapter XX. So now saileth Hallblithe away from the Glittering Plain	297
Chapter XXI. Of the Fight of the Champions in the Hall of the Ravagers	306
Chapter XXII. They go from the Isle of Ransom and come to Cleveland by the Sea	318

ILLUSTRATIONS

William Morris, from a photograph by Frederick Hollyer done in 1887	Frontispiece
Cabinet, the marriage gift of Edward Burne-Jones to William Morris and his Wife	to face p. xxviii

INTRODUCTION

MY notes on Socialist doings and the Arts and Crafts movement are more appropriately reserved for another volume, and if, in matter of time, I may now and then seem to go over the same ground twice, it is to distinguish different memories in the many-coloured story, and to fit them in with the more vivid glimpses supplied by snatches of my father's letters.

Still, I should like it to be borne in mind that all through these years his zeal for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings never slackened: he may have been lecturing for a branch of the Socialist League in Bradford on Wednesday night, but Thursday afternoon would see him turning up as a matter of course at the Anti-Scrape committee; and when required, he would cheerily sandwich a journey to a village church in need of attention between a business-visit to some historic country-house and a Socialist campaign in unexplored wilds of London. I should think few men took upon themselves such varied occupations and duties, or went serenely into such fantastically diverse circles. The Thursday committee meeting every week ended for a few of the more intimate friends in an evening meal at Gatti's in the Strand, where the quips and sallies of Philip Webb and my father were the delight of the other men. It was a circle of friends who understood each other and were working hard (in the teeth of considerable obstruction and misunderstanding in those days) for an object they had very much at heart, and this weekly custom of eating together after the business was through, was a relaxation none of them would willingly forgo. Philip Webb, W. R. Lethaby, Emery Walker, S. C. Cockerell, these are the names that occur to me of those who sat at one of the narrow tables in a now abandoned transept of the clattering restaurant, seasoning their chops or macaroni with much merriment and eager talk. One evening there was an amusing discussion, Mr. Cockerell says, "between W.M. and P.W. on the merits and demerits of

St. Paul's Cathedral;" at another Saxon architecture and its origin was discussed, at another, my father aired his views racy on the Laureateship. Some of the brief notes in Mr. S. C. Cockerell's diaries of the time give a better impression of these delightful hours than I can hope to do by any narrative: I prefer to quote them as they stand, for they have all the value of the word written in the warmth of the moment. These are a few entries from 1891:

"Jan: 15th. W.M. at S.P.A.B. and Gatti's. W.M. had with him Veldener's *Speculum humanae salvationis* which he thought of buying.

"Jan: 22. W.M. at S.P.A.B. and Gatti's. W.M. had with him a design just completed for a border to be used in the *Glittering Plain*."*

Then one July evening they talked about genius, and another time about French towns, and after a visit to the North of France with my sister he had to show them "photographs of Noyon, Laon, Beauvais, Abbeville, Soissons, etc., and was full of interesting talk about the places in France that he had just visited. He said that Verona (apropos of our approaching trip) † is a glorious town, though he prefers the northern architecture, but that he was at first disappointed with Venice, feeling as though he was looking from the top story of a submerged town. The squalor of it also very painful to him."

The following entries are of 1892:

"Jan: 14th. W.M. at S.P.A.B. and Gatti's. He had trial proofs of pages of prose and verse set up in his new black letter type. ‡

"March 17. W.M. at S.P.A.B. Supper afterwards at Gatti's with him, Webb and Wilson. W.M. very jovial, showed us his book of K.P. bloomers.

"March 24th. W.M. at S.P.A.B. and Gatti's. He declared

* This was the border for the first book printed at the Kelmscott Press.

† The first expedition of the Art-Workers' Guild.

‡ The Troy Type.

his willingness to print 'Unto this Last' at the K.P., and told good stories of Jowett.

"May 5th. He had B-J.'s finished drawing for The Heavenly Ramparts for the 'Golden Legend,' and the design for the border which is to go round it.

"May 12th. . . . He had a beautiful MS. which he bought yesterday at the Lawrence sale. Lord Dillon joined us and there was a great discussion about English longbows."

One day next spring "he had with him the first copy of 'Godefrey of Boloyne,' and one or two old books;" and another evening in the summer "he came with a fine old 13th century psalter."

In the early eighties, just before my father gave his formal allegiance to the Socialist party, he had been much concerned with the condition of Iceland, then threatened with famine after bad winters and failure of the fishing season, and organized a relief fund to go to their assistance. I remember how terribly moved he was by the news from the North and how deeply he felt the inadequacy of what small effort would be made here. However, something had to be attempted, and a committee was formed under the wing of the Mansion House. Among others who responded cordially to his personal appeals were such diverse personalities as Cardinal Manning, Henry Fawcett, the American Ambassador—James Russell Lowell, and our present Ambassador at Washington, the Right Hon. James Bryce.

"Of course you may," is the reply of the author of the "Biglow Papers," "if only to help the Icelanders repay the debt which they and I and all of us owe you for turning their old saws into modern instances." And there is a kind simply-worded note from James Bryce, between whom and my father there was a strong mutual feeling of sympathy.

Mr. Magnússon went out with the English fund in August 1882: I think a further glimpse of Jón Saddlesmith may interest the readers of the Iceland Journals, and with it another

glimpse of that terrible beautiful land that formed part of the background of the poet's life. Jón wrote the following year to tell him how folk were doing there: (translated)

My good friend Morris

I am now on my way to the fishing and therefore write you a line. The first to tell you is concerning the turn of the year [what sort of year we had] until winter set in. The summer was the worst that any record is left of in the annals of the country, by reason of grasslessness and undrought [wet] in the west, north, and east, but we Southlanders had grass enough, but the rains spoilt the hay, especially the homefield grass which goes for the cows, for dry weather obtained for only 9 days in the latter part of August so that the relief from you English people has really been a godsend as also that from the Danes and other foreign contributors. Had it not come, in all probability there would have been "man-fall" and famine, and though matters have not gone so far, the struggle for life is hard enough. . . . The state of things now is most dangerous in western Skaptafellssysla between Mýrdalssand and Lómagnúpsand, where it is said that the poorish people have slaughtered already most of their livestock in order to save their own lives . . . and a considerable portion of the relief grain sent to them lies still out in the Westman Islands, unless they may have managed to get at it these last days . . .

Much have I begun to hope that you would make a new journey to this country. It is quite safe for you to come next summer ; there is always something to be found in summer to support life by, although the season may be hard enough, and we who are acquainted with the people, can always manage to select the homesteads which are best off, and pass those by where poverty is under roof

Haldor his fellow-guide, he tells him, is leaving for America, and he himself thinks of departing for the West,

. . . but I begin to be old and "one knows what one slips,
xvüj

but knows not what one grips” and know not which is the best place to go to . . .

After more entreaties that my father should come out and detailed information he finishes with

Now I say farewell to you, beloved friend, with a friendly salutation and would be found thy friend while my name is
Jón.

In the middle of all this business he wrote to me:

Kelmscott House, Upper Mall,
Hammersmith.

August 3 1st, 1882.

Dearest May

Thank you kindly for your letter: now I have to write to you I feel the undutifulness and unreasonableness of asking my daughters for tales, for I have none to tell *you*: I had a queer day or two with the Faulkners in Wiltshire, pleasant enough on the whole: one really gets astonished at the vast stretches of downs there; no end to them almost, one place we came to with groves of yew and Scotch-fir on the fine turf was very specially beautiful: I wasn't down there quite long enough to taste the country fully, but I felt a little disappointed at the villages which are very inferior to *ours*: the materials not being good, and there being many great lords thereaway, Pembrokes, Heytesburys, Somersets, and the rest.

Yesterday we went to Merton together meeting Stanley at the station; a beautiful day but windy; work going pretty well there, lots of carpets out for us to look at; so we enjoyed ourselves very much only I developed a budding gout in the afternoon, which however to-day don't threaten to be very serious.

Jenny and I (but especially Jenny) have been hard at work over the Icelandic matter which is now going on well; but I foresee quicksands in the way when we come to the distribution of what we are likely to get.

I hear from Aunt Georgie that you have been very good,
so I hope you have been enjoying yourself, as is like to be the
case.

We shall all be very glad to see you my dear, and we will
go down to Kelmscott like angels (fat one I). The De Ms.
have promised to come. . . .

Your loving father
William Morris.

I feel that these notes, to give the true impression of things,
must always have their 'undertone' of Kelmscott life: for
year by year, Father slips away more and more often from
London work to the small quiet river and the fragrant gar-
den; either to join us summering there, or for a few days'
stay of solitary work and rest. One August (1888) he wrote
from Kelmscott to Jenny about the various simple pleasures
of the country. I do not think I have mentioned before that
he was a born cook (according to the well known proverb),
and that it was only lack of opportunity that prevented him
from developing this accomplishment into an art. And cook-
ing in a country kitchen, with the garden-scents coming in
through the lattice windows, and a daughter hovering round
as audience and willing kitchen-maid, is assuredly a pleasant
distraction. Jenny received the following report:

"The fishing is pretty much as it was when Ellis and you
were here; the river higher and the weeds uncut, though not
very visible at the first glance because the water is high. Al-
together a very pleasant river to travel on, the bank being
still very beautiful with flowers; the long-purples and willow-
herb, and that strong-coloured yellow flower [he draws it],
very close and buttony are the great show; but there is a
very pretty dark blue flower, I think mug-wort; mixed with
all that besides the purple blossom of the horse-mint and
mouse-ear, and here and there a bit of meadow-sweet be-
lated. On Wednesday your mother went with me (walking)
and my fishing-rod to the infallible hole near Buscot and sure
enough I got 3 perch there. Story, too sleepy in the evenings,

a little Oxford St. work. Further I have done some cooking, my dear . . . ” Then he told her all about it, and like all artists who cannot trifle with their art, was frank and said it was not a success; a tough fowl was made tougher, and the morning’s catch of perch though eatable were not crisp. “You see,” he added, “I am out of practice, my dear: also I have come to the conclusion that cookery takes a very long time to do, and I can better understand why the British working-man’s family is so bad at it—and I look with respectful wonder on the French ditto who is so good at it.

“As to the garden it seems to me its chief fruit is—black-birds. However, they have left us some gooseberries and I shall set to work this morning and get some before their next sit-down meal.”

Here are a few more letters of the end of this year. The firm had some decorating to do on one of the big ships; “we sometimes get an order for miles and miles of carpeting,” he said carelessly one day, “and that suits Smith down to the ground.”

Sep. 14th, 1888.

My own dearest Jenny

. . . I went straight to Tilbury Docks to see about things for a ship for a customer of ours. It was a curious ride by rail down the Essex coast from Fenchurch St. when you clear London somewhat; the country would be both pretty and interesting if it were not for the blotches of commerce. Queer farmhouses on wooded knolls and some curious little towns on the landward side, and riverward great stretches of marsh land are what you would see, but for paper works, cement works, etc., with their attendant yellow brick hovels. Near Barking one comes near a beautiful old house (Elizabethan) of red brick and plaster, Eastbury House, quite a fine place. As to the docks they were desolation itself: the ships of the “Orient line” go to Australia through the Suez Canal, they are longer than anything you can imagine—and uglier. Inside a mere floating hotel for the 1st and 2nd class passengers, and pretty much a workhouse for the 3rd. . . .

The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society was formed in the autumn of 1888, of which more hereafter. Father was to lecture in the New Gallery on November 1st and told Jenny about it in a sprightly chronicle of his doings whence I gather the following. He had been to see a friend then living in a house decorated by a well-known artist, and of the scraps of decoration left about the place he said: "I don't admire them: they appear to me too much made up of goose giblets and umbrellas." After telling her about the Arts and Crafts lecture on Tapestry, he goes on to Hindhead, a place I have heard him speak of with some eloquence, partly because it was sand soil, and partly because it was so "gentlemanly:" "On Monday I went on an Oxford Street journey down into the wilds of Surrey: our client lives on the top of Hind-head; so what Cobbett would have said to him I am sure I don't know. The view *from* there is certainly beautiful: curious to note the sand hills which it is the centre of lying like islands between the great chalk ranges of the Guildford Hills and the South Downs. But the place itself is quite a desert: brake, whortleberries, Scotch fir, nothing else will grow: it is well as a desert but when you complicate the matter by sticking horrible cockney villas about it and attempting gardens, apparently for the sake of exhibiting specimens of the mange: and rail in your acres of whortleberries with iron railings of singular hideousness—Why then indeed you *are* a fool. . . ."

The last letter this year to Jenny was written in the middle of a lecturing bout—fairly typical of the amount of exhausting work he took upon himself, though by no means so strenuous as some of his campaigns. He wrote from Manchester on December 4: "I lectured for Mr. Rowley's Sunday Society* on Sunday afternoon, and spoke to a branch of the S.D.F. afterwards in the evening. Last night I lectured at Bolton to a fairly good audience, to-night I go to Black-

* The Ancoats Brotherhood, still, under the tireless encouragement of our old friend Charles Rowley, a large and healthy organization.

burn, to-morrow to the Art Congress at Liverpool and on Thursday at Rochdale, going home Friday."

Years before, in 1881, a historic figure had left the scene—of whom a short while previously my father said in a lecture, he "still lives to be the glory of England." When we visited Cheyne Row and the De Morgans after Carlyle's death, we were conscious of some withdrawal . . . a curious sense of changelay upon the quiet corner of the river: though we young people had never come under his eye, and I do not think my father had met him. He wrote a few grave homely words to Mother about the old man's departure . . . "So Carlyle is off to learn the great secret at last: though his work was over, it is a kind of a miss of him . . ." Later he read the *Life*, and found it "deeply interesting in spite of Mr. Froude." He disliked biographies and as a rule did not read them, "but in this book is a man speaking who can say what he thinks even in a letter (I wish I could)."*

The misgivings about his shortcoming as a letter-writer, which are expressed more than once, remind one that for some years now he had been forcing himself "to say what he thought"—writing it mostly, indeed, as he was for a long time no ready orator on a platform—but writing it in simple and forcible language that should get him into touch with his listeners as quickly and as directly as might be. I doubt not that this self-discipline, the constant recitation of his thoughts—to put it that way—was one of the factors that went to develop his new narrative style.

It was many years since my father had withdrawn for any long spell of time into that magic country which all poets own (and others who do not tell of their wanderings), but now the impulse came upon him, and the first of the prose tales, the short story of John Ball, appeared in the *Commonweal* in the winter of 1886-1887. The *House of the Wolfings*, which followed, was written in the midst of

* *Life*, II, 76.

Socialist agitation, after the particularly hard years of 1886 and 1887, during which time the *Odyssey* had been his chief solace. As ever, his capacity of finding relief in mere change of work, however strenuous, and that other capacity of simply shutting the door on material surroundings for a while, stood him in good stead, and made it possible for him to go on—writing, lecturing, editing and settling small quarrels—always at high pressure, yet always at the service of his friends.

The pure, musical prose that, as I have suggested, is partly the outcome of those years of speaking and lecturing in public, and that can be recited or spoken aloud after his own manner of intoning his verse, was at once welcomed by experienced critics as striking a new note in English poetic prose. Mr. Watts-Dunton, who wrote with enthusiasm on *John Ball* in the *Athenæum*, speaks of “the poetic atmosphere, as simple and as clear as the air of a May morning,” and of the music of the cadence, “a music that plays about the heart more sweetly than any verse save the very highest;” while he keenly appreciates the vivid presentation “of how his actors really did the things and said the things vouched for by his own imagination.”

My father's period of romance-writing has been spoken of as if it were one unvaried stream of placid creation, but one cannot so consider it, as the work distinctly falls into four groups, represented by *John Ball*, *The House of the Wolfings*, *The Roots of the Mountains*, and the later romances. Each time I come fresh to the reading of *John Ball*, I wonder over it, over the simplicity and purity of the language, the sort of passion in which the writer identifies himself with the time of which he tells the tale. I think few people who read it for the first time simply and unpreoccupied by a search for doctrinaire pronouncements or symbolism, can fail to be themselves affected by the very emotion which inspired such strange and vivid experience, or to feel some kinship with the living man who stands yearning between two dreams, one of the past, one of the future, he to

whom the gift has been given of imparting to us his dreaming in words of love and pity for the troubled world.

In *The House of the Wolfings* and in *The Roots of the Mountains* my father seems to have got back to the atmosphere of the Sagas. In that it is part metrical, part prose, the *Wolfings* may be held experimental, but in this tale of imaginary tribal life on the verge of Roman conquest*—a period which had a great fascination for the writer, who read with critical enjoyment the more important modern studies of it as they came out—the personages have more of the severity and reticence of the early world, more of the Saga-born impression of Fate moving the pieces on the board. The place too of the Wolfing tribes and of the Burgdalers and Silverdalers—the wonderful land about the foot of the Italian Alps—had a great hold on his imagination and many a time when the talk turned upon it, has he carried his listeners with him to the “enchanted country” so longingly described, so vividly imagined . . . “Can’t you get out to the Mountain Spurs?” he asked Mother, writing to her in Florence many years before the romances were written; “I used to long for them so when I went to Florence. And now I am a London bird . . .” *The Roots of the Mountains* in its delicate poetic detail and the measure of unconcealed emotion that is allowed to its personages, does no doubt verge on the methods of the later romances; but his earlier tales are seen historically, while these lead us straight into the radiance of fairy-land, where sufferings are not overwhelming and scarcely bitter, and all adventures end in serenity and peace.

The House of the Wolfings was begun early in 1888, and by June my father was well launched in it: “I have been getting on pretty well with my tale, and have at last sketched

*I am reminded here, by the by, of the German professor who, after the *Wolfings* came out, wrote and asked learned questions about the Mark, expecting, I fear, equally learned answers from our Poet who sometimes dreamed realities without having documentary evidence of them.

out what should be the progress and ending of it," he says. By July he writes "in a hurry as I am busy over my tale and am in a crisis;" while on September 2, we at Kelmscott hear that "the book goes on merrily and I think will be out in due time."

"I think I shall be rather melancholy when my book is finished. What is the next job to be?" he adds.

This is always the refrain, spoken or unspoken, which follows the ending of every prolonged task. Active-minded men do not, I suppose, ever sit down and contemplate the work just finished—the "next job" is, like enough, only waiting its turn to come to the light of day. Anyhow Father at least gave himself no time to sit down and think about past achievements, for from the time we moved into Kelmscott House, his tale of work seemed to increase, almost automatically, until the inevitable moment when his strength began to fail.

A little while after the publication of *The House of the Wolfings*, my father received the following letter from Ford Madox Brown:

1 St Edmunds Terrace
Regent's Park, N.W.

Dear Morris

Jan. 18. 89.

You must think me ungrateful in not writing to thank you for your Christmas present—your beautiful book of *The Home of the Wolfings*. The fact is I looked into it the moment I got it and found it so tremendously interesting that every spare moment I had I went on reading it, till it was done; and then feeling satisfied I forgot to write. I quite agree with the *Athenæum*, that this and *The Dream of John Ball* are your two finest books. I have, at least, been told the *Athenæum* says so. Both stories equally convey the impression of your having lived in the time to describe what you have seen. *Best and ever so many thanks.*

I hope we may see something of each other again before long.

Sincerely and affectionately y^{rs}

F. Madox B.

It needs no apology to show the whole letter in its pleasant vagueness and mis-spelling of the title of the book he had eagerly read, so characteristic of this erratic and lovable being. Swinburne had a copy too, and it pleases me to compare the different way the two men thank their old friend:

The Pines

Putney Hill, S. W.

February 12. 89.

My dear Morris

Thank you most heartily for my ballad-book (MS.). I am very glad to see it again tho' I daresay I shall find a good deal of it very raw stuff (I mean of course my own share in the work). And now I must apologize for my delay in thanking you for your last delightful and wonderful book. I am reading it with so much pleasure that I am not in a hurry to get to the end, so I can only say how singularly beautiful all the earlier part—much of which I have read twice over, instead of going straight on—seems to me, as of course it must seem to any creature above the intellectual level of a baboon . . .

I have just sent off to the printers the MS. of a new volume of miscellaneous poems, and am awaiting in anguish the inundation of proofs to come.

Yours ever sincerely

A. C. Swinburne.

I have to say a few words about the printing of proper names and place-names in *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains*. We know that my father did not attach much importance to uniformity, and that he was not very exact in proof-reading; but after going carefully through the manuscripts of these tales, I have come to the conclusion to leave most of the irregularities shown there. No doubt it is sometimes sheer oversight that "Felon" is written "felon," that he sometimes speaks of the "Roman Host," sometimes of the "host," and so forth, but I am certain that often there was a more or less uncon-

scious idea of emphasis or of avoiding emphasis in his use now of capitals, now of lower case letters. At any rate I venture to think that these and various little irregularities if they have no other effect give a certain liveliness to the page, and I feel that in leaving them (as in the first edition they were left) the reader comes all the nearer to the mood in which the tales were written—with the slight hurry and inattention to unessential things, and a sure touch and deliberation in the graver moments.

The painted wardrobe, of which Mr. Walker has made us such an admirably clear engraving, was the wedding-gift of Burne-Jones, his contribution to the beautifying of Red House, where it stood in Mother's bedroom. It was a treasure-house of colour and incident to the children at Queen Square, and many a time, one or other of them, standing on a chair, would follow the fortunes of little Hugh of Lincoln, listening to the grown-up story, and pointing with fat finger to the gaily dressed children going to school, the little boy at his lessons, with the ribbon coming from his mouth to show his constant song of praise—O Alma Redemptoris*—the evil figures of the Jew and Jewess with their victim between them, the townspeople gathered at the well, the armed men riding through the town to take the ill-doers, and in the distance the dreadful gallows, dim and blurred: beyond everything the glory of the golden sunset. Then Holy Mary and her angels and her shining Dove were gazed at with love and wonder, and Master Chaucer's face was stroked, as it might be one of the family. The inside

* This litel child, his litel book lernynge,
As he sat in the scole at his prymer,
He Alma redemptoris herde synge,
As children lerned hire anthiphoner;
And, as he dorste, he drough hym ner and ner,
And herkned ay the wordes and the noote,
Til he the firste vers koude al by rote.

decoration is not finished. It represented a lady at her toilet in different scenes; in one panel she is brushing her hair, in another she stands a stately figure fully dressed trimming her nails with a rather large pair of scissors. To those who knew it in the Kelmscott House drawing-room, it looks now somewhat pathetic and forlorn in the Oxford Galleries, bereft of its background of blue hangings, as indeed any piece of domestic furniture must do that one has known or imagined in its own place.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE TO THE HOUSE OF THE WOLFINGS

First Edition, square crown octavo, Reeves and Turner, December 1888, with 100 large paper copies on hand-made paper in crown quarto.

Reprinted 1890.

Printed by Roberts of Boston, U.S.A., 1890.

Transferred to Longmans, Green and Co., June 1896.

Reprinted June 1904 and August 1909.

Volume I of the Golden Type Edition, January 1901.

Included in Volume XIV of the Collected Works of William Morris, July 1912.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE TO THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

First printed in the English Illustrated Magazine Vol. VII. 1890.

First Edition in book form, 200 copies printed at the Kelm-scott Press in the Golden Type, quarto, April 1891, Reeves and Turner, with six copies on vellum.

Printed at the Kelm-scott Press in the Troy Type, with wood-engravings from designs by Walter Crane, 250 copies and seven on vellum, January 1894.

Printed September 1891, in imperial 16mo.

Transferred to Longmans, Green and Co., June 1896.

Reprinted February 1898 and August 1904.

Included in Volume XIV of the Collected Works of William Morris, July 1912.

A TALE OF THE HOUSE OF THE WOLF-
INGS AND ALL THE KINDREDS OF THE
MARK WRITTEN IN PROSE AND IN
VERSE BY WILLIAM MORRIS

WHILES IN THE EARLY WINTER EVE
WE PASS AMID THE GATHERING NIGHT
SOME HOMESTEAD THAT WE HAD TO LEAVE
YEARS PAST; AND SEE ITS CANDLES BRIGHT
SHINE IN THE ROOM BESIDE THE DOOR
WHERE WE WERE MERRY YEARS AGONE
BUT NOW MUST NEVER ENTER MORE,
AS STILL THE DARK ROAD DRIVES US ON.
E'EN SO THE WORLD OF MEN MAY TURN
AT EVEN OF SOME HURRIED DAY
AND SEE THE ANCIENT GLIMMER BURN
ACROSS THE WASTE THAT HATH NO WAY;
THEN WITH THAT FAINT LIGHT IN ITS EYES
A WHILE I BID IT LINGER NEAR
AND NURSE IN WAVERING MEMORIES
THE BITTER-SWEET OF DAYS THAT WERE.

CHAPTER I. THE DWELLINGS OF MID-MARK.

THE tale tells that in times long past there was a dwelling of men beside a great wood. Before it lay a plain, not very great, but which was, as it were, an isle in the sea of woodland, since even when you stood on the flat ground, you could see trees everywhere in the offing, though as for hills, you could scarce say that there were any; only swellings-up of the earth here and there, like the upheavings of the water that one sees at whiles going on amidst the eddies of a swift but deep stream.

On either side, to right and left the tree-girdle reached out toward the blue distance, thick close and unsundered, save where it and the plain which it begirdled was cleft amidmost by a river about as wide as the Thames at Sheene when the flood-tide is at its highest, but so swift and full of eddies, that it gave token of mountains not so far distant, though they were hidden. On each side moreover of the stream of this river was a wide space of stones, great and little, and in most places above this stony waste were banks of a few feet high, showing where the yearly winter flood was most commonly stayed.

You must know that this great clearing in the woodland was not a matter of haphazard; though the river had driven a road whereby men might fare on each side of its hurrying stream. It was men who had made that isle in the woodland.

For many generations the folk that now dwelt there had learned the craft of iron-founding, so that they had no lack of wares of iron and steel, whether they were tools of handicraft or weapons for hunting and for war. It was the men of the Folk, who coming adown by the river-side had made that clearing. The tale tells not whence they came, but belike from the dales of the distant mountains, and from dales and mountains and plains further aloof and yet further.

Anyhow they came adown the river; on its waters on rafts, by its shores in wains or bestriding their horses or their kine, or afoot, till they had a mind to abide; and there as it fell they stayed their travel, and spread from each side of the river, and fought with the wood and its wild things, that they might make to themselves a dwelling-place on the face of the earth.

So they cut down the trees, and burned their stumps that the grass might grow sweet for their kine and sheep and horses; and they diked the river where need was all through the plain, and far up into the wild-wood to bridle the winter floods: and they made them boats to ferry them over, and to float down stream and track up-stream: they fished the river's eddies also with net and with line; and drew drift from out of it of far-travelled wood and other matters; and the gravel of its shallows they washed for gold; and it became their friend, and they loved it, and gave it a name, and called it the Dusky, and the Glassy, and the Mirkwood-water; for the names of it changed with the generations of man.

There then in the clearing of the wood that for many years grew greater yearly they drave their beasts to pasture in the new-made meadows, where year by year the grass grew sweeter as the sun shone on it and the standing waters went from it; and now in the year whereof the tale telleth it was a fair and smiling plain, and no folk might have a better meadow.

But long before that had they learned the craft of tillage and taken heed to the acres and begun to grow wheat and rye thereon round about their roofs; the spade came into their hands, and they bethought them of the plough-share, and the tillage spread and grew, and there was no lack of bread.

In such wise that Folk had made an island amidst of the Mirkwood, and established a home there, and upheld it with manifold toil too long to tell of. And from the beginning this clearing in the wood they called the Mid-mark: for you shall know that men might journey up and down the Mirkwood-water, and half a day's ride up or down they would come on another clearing or island in the woods, and these were the Upper-mark and the Nether-mark: and all these three were inhabited by men of one folk and one kindred, which was called the Markmen, though of many branches was that stem of folk, who bore divers signs in battle and at the council whereby they might be known.

Now in the Mid-mark itself were many Houses of men; for by that word had they called for generations those who dwelt together under one token of kinship. The river ran from South to North, and both on the East side and on the West were there Houses of the Folk, and their habitations were shouldered up nigh unto the

wood, so that ever betwixt them and the river was there a space of tillage and pasture.

Tells the tale of one such House, whose habitations were on the west side of the water, on a gentle slope of land, so that no flood higher than common might reach them. It was straight down to the river mostly that the land fell off, and on its downward-reaching slopes was the tillage, "the Acres," as the men of that time always called tilled land; and beyond that was the meadow going fair and smooth, though with here and there a rising in it, down to the lips of the stony waste of the winter river.

Now the name of this House was the Wolfings, and they bore a Wolf on their banners, and their warriors were marked on the breast with the image of the Wolf, that they might be known for what they were if they fell in battle, and were stripped.

The house, that is to say the Roof, of the Wolfings of the Mid-mark stood on the topmost of the slope aforesaid with its back to the wild-wood and its face to the acres and the water. But you must know that in those days the men of one branch of kindred dwelt under one roof together, and had therein their place and dignity; nor were there many degrees amongst them as hath befallen afterwards, but all they of one blood were brethren and of equal dignity. Howbeit they had servants or thralls, men taken in battle, men of alien blood, though true it is that from time to time were some of such men taken into the House, and hailed as brethren of the blood.

Also (to make an end at once of these matters of kinship and affinity) the men of one House might not wed the women of their own House: to the Wolfing men all Wolfing women were as sisters: they must needs wed with the Hartings or the Elkings or the Bearings, or other such Houses of the Mark as were not so close akin to the blood of the Wolf; and this was a law that none dreamed of breaking. Thus then dwelt this folk and such was their Custom.

As to the Roof of the Wolfings, it was a great hall and goodly, after the fashion of their folk and their day; not built of stone and lime, but framed of the goodliest trees of the wild-wood squared with the adze, and betwixt the framing filled with clay wattled with reeds. Long was that house, and at one end anigh the gable was the Man's-door, not so high that a man might stand on the

threshold and his helmcrest clear the lintel; for such was the custom, that a tall man must bow himself as he came into the hall; which custom maybe was a memory of the days of onslaught when the foemen were mostly wont to beset the hall; whereas in the days whereof the tale tells they drew out into the fields and fought unfenced; unless at whiles when the odds were over great, and then they drew their wains about them and were fenced by the wainburg. At least it was from no niggardry that the door was made thus low, as might be seen by the fair and manifold carving of knots and dragons that was wrought above the lintel of the door for some three foot's space. But a like door was there anigh the other gable-end, whereby the women entered, and it was called the Woman's-door.

Near to the house on all sides except toward the wood were there many bowers and cots round about the penfolds and the byres: and these were booths for the stowage of wares, and for crafts and smithying that were unhandy to do in the house; and withal they were the dwelling-places of the thralls. And the lads and young men often abode there many days and were cherished there of the thralls that loved them, since at whiles they shunned the Great Roof that they might be the freer to come and go at their pleasure, and deal as they would. Thus was there a clustering on the slopes and bents betwixt the acres of the Wolfings and the wild-wood wherein dwelt the wolves.

As to the house within, two rows of pillars went down it endlong, fashioned of the mightiest trees that might be found, and each one fairly wrought with base and chapter, and wreaths and knots, and fighting men and dragons; so that it was like a church of later days that has a nave and aisles; windows there were above the aisles, and a passage underneath the said windows in their roofs. In the aisles were the sleeping-places of the Folk, and down the nave under the crown of the roof were three hearths for the fires, and above each hearth a luffer or smoke-bearer to draw the smoke up when the fires were lighted. Forsooth on a bright winter afternoon it was strange to see the three columns of smoke going wavering up to the dimness of the mighty roof, and one maybe smitten athwart by the sunbeams. As for the timber of the roof itself and its framing, so exceeding great and high it was, that the tale

tells how that none might see the fashion of it from the hall-floor unless he were to raise aloft a blazing faggot on a long pole: since no lack of timber was there among the men of the Mark.

At the end of the hall anigh the Man's-door was the dais, and a table thereon set thwartwise of the hall; and in front of the dais was the noblest and greatest of the hearths; (but of the others one was in the very midmost, and another in the Woman's Chamber) and round about the dais, along the gable-wall, and hung from pillar to pillar were woven cloths pictured with images of ancient tales and the deeds of the Wolfings, and the deeds of the Gods from whence they came. And this was the fairest place of all the house and the best-beloved of the folk, and especially of the older and the mightier men: and there were tales told, and songs sung, especially if they were new: and thereto also were messengers brought if any tidings were abroad: there also would the elders talk together about matters concerning the House or the Mid-mark or the whole Folk of the Markmen.

Yet you must not think that their solemn councils were held there, the folk-motes whereat it must be determined what to do and what to forbear doing; for according as such councils, (which they called Things) were of the House or of the Mid-mark or of the whole Folk, were they held each at the due Thing-steads in the Wood aloof from either acre or meadow, (as was the custom of our forefathers for long after) and at such Things would all the men of the House or the Mid-mark or the Folk be present man by man. And in each of these steads was there a Doom-ring wherein Doom was given by the neighbours chosen, (whom now we call the Jury) in matters between man and man; and no such doom of neighbours was given, and no such voice of the Folk proclaimed in any house or under any roof, nor even as aforesaid on the tilled acres or the depastured meadows. This was the custom of our forefathers, in memory, belike, of the days when as yet there was neither house nor tillage, nor flocks and herds, but the Earth's face only and what freely grew thereon.

But over the dais there hung by chains and pulleys fastened to a tie-beam of the roof high aloft a wondrous lamp fashioned of glass; yet of no such glass as the folk made then and there, but of a fair and clear green like an emerald, and all done with figures and

knots in gold, and strange beasts, and a warrior slaying a dragon, and the sun rising on the earth: nor did any tale tell whence this lamp came, but it was held as an ancient and holy thing by all the Markmen, and the kindred of the Wolf had it in charge to keep a light burning in it night and day for ever; and they appointed a maiden of their own kindred to that office; which damsel must needs be unwedded, since no wedded woman dwelling under that roof could be a Wolfing woman, but would needs be of the houses wherein the Wolfings wedded.

This lamp which burned ever was called the Hall-Sun, and the woman who had charge of it, and who was the fairest that might be found was called after it the Hall-Sun also.

At the other end of the hall was the Woman's Chamber, and therein were the looms and other gear for the carding and spinning of wool and the weaving of cloth.

Such was the Roof under which dwelt the kindred of the Wolfings; and the other kindreds of the Mid-mark had roofs like to it; and of these the chiefest were the Elkings, the Vallings, the Alftings, the Beamings, the Galtings, and the Bearings; who bore on their banners the Elk, the Falcon, the Swan, the Tree, the Boar, and the Bear. But other lesser and newer kindreds there were than these: as for the Hartings above named, they were a kindred of the Upper-mark.

CHAPTER II. THE FLITTING OF THE WAR-ARROW.

TELLS the tale that it was an evening of summer, when the wheat was in the ear, but yet green; and the neat-herds were done driving the milch-kine to the byre, and the horseherds and the shepherds had made the night-shift, and the out-goers were riding two by two and one by one through the lanes between the wheat and the rye towards the meadow. Round the cots of the thralls were gathered knots of men and women both thralls and freemen, some talking together, some hearkening a song or a tale, some singing and some dancing together; and the children gambolling about from group to group with their shrill and tuneless voices, like young throstles who have not yet learned the song of their race. With these were mingled dogs, dun of colour, long of

limb, sharp-nosed, gaunt and great; they took little heed of the children as they pulled them about in their play, but lay down, or loitered about, as though they had forgotten the chase and the wild-wood.

Merry was the folk with that fair tide, and the promise of the harvest, and the joy of life, and there was no weapon among them so close to the houses, save here and there the boar-spear of some herdman or herdwoman late come from the meadow.

Tall and for the most part comely were both men and women; the most of them light-haired and grey-eyed, with cheek-bones somewhat high; white of skin but for the sun's burning, and the wind's parching, and whereas they were tanned of a very ruddy and cheerful hue. But the thralls were some of them of a shorter and darker breed, black-haired also and dark-eyed, lighter of limb; sometimes better knit, but sometimes crookeder of leg and knot-tier of arm. But some also were of build and hue not much unlike to the freemen; and these doubtless came of some other Folk of the Goths which had given way in battle before the Men of the Mark, either they or their fathers.

Moreover some of the freemen were unlike their fellows and kindred, being slenderer and closer-knit, and black-haired, but grey-eyed withal; and amongst these were one or two who exceeded in beauty all others of the House.

Now the sun wasset and the glooming was at point to begin and the shadowless twilight lay upon the earth. The nightingales on the borders of the wood sang ceaselessly from the scattered hazel-trees above the greensward where the grass was cropped down close by the nibbling of the rabbits; but in spite of their song and the divers voices of the men-folk about the houses, it was an evening on which sounds from aloof can be well heard, since noises carry far at such tides.

Suddenly they who were on the edges of those throngs and were the less noisy, held themselves as if to listen; and a group that had gathered about a minstrel to hear his story fell hearkening also round about the silenced and hearkening tale-teller: some of the dancers and singers noted them and in their turn stayed the dance and kept silence to hearken; and so from group to group spread the change, till all were straining their ears to hearken the tidings.

Already the men of the night-shift had heard it, and the shepherds of them had turned about, and were trottingsmartly back through the lanes of the tall wheat: but the horseherds were now scarce seen on the darkening meadow, as they galloped on fast toward their herds to drive home the stallions. For what they had heard was the tidings of war.

There was a sound in the air as of a humble-bee close to the ear of one lying on a grassy bank; or whiles as of a cow afar in the meadow lowing in the afternoon when milking-time draws nigh: but it was ever shriller than the one, and fuller than the other; for it changed at whiles, though after the first sound of it, it did not rise or fall, because the eve was windless. You might hear at once that for all it was afar, it was a great and mighty sound; nor did any that hearkened doubt what it was, but all knew it for the blast of the great war-horn of the Elkings, whose Roof lay up Mirkwood-water next to the Roof of the Wolfings.

So those little throngs broke up at once; and all the freemen, and of the thralls a good many, flocked, both men and women, to the Man's-door of the hall, and streamed in quietly and with little talk, as men knowing that they should hear all in due season.

Withⁱⁿ under the Hall-Sun, amidst the woven stories of time past, sat the elders and chief warriors on the dais, and amidst of all a big strong man of forty winters, his dark beard a little grizzled, his eyes big and grey. Before him on the board lay the great War-horn of the Wolfings carved out of the tusk of a sea-whale of the North and with many devices on it and the Wolf amidst them all; its golden mouth-piece and rim wrought finely with flowers. There it abode the blowing, until the spoken word of some messenger should set forth the tidings borne on the air by the horn of the Elkings.

But the name of the dark-haired chief was Thiodolf (to wit Folkwolf) and he was deemed the wisest man of the Wolfings, and the best man of his hands, and of heart most dauntless. Beside him sat the fair woman called the Hall-Sun; for she was his foster-daughter before men's eyes; and she was black-haired and grey-eyed like to her fosterer, and never was woman fashioned fairer: she was young of years, scarce twenty winters old.

There sat the chiefs and elders on the dais, and round about

stood the kindred intermingled with the thralls, and no man spake, for they were awaiting sure and certain tidings: and when all were come in who had a mind to, there was so great a silence in the hall, that the song of the nightingales on the wood-edge sounded clear and loud therein, and even the chink of the bats about the upper windows could be heard. Then amidst the hush of men-folk, and the sounds of the life of the earth came another sound that made all turn their eyes toward the door; and this was the pad-pad of one running on the trodden and summer-dried ground anigh the hall: it stopped for a moment at the Man's-door, and the door opened, and the throng parted, making way for the man that entered and came hastily up to the midst of the table that stood on the dais athwart the hall, and stood there panting, holding forth in his outstretched hand something which not all could see in the dimness of the hall-twilight, but which all knew nevertheless. The man was young, lithe and slender, and had no raiment but linen breeches round his middle, and skin shoes on his feet. As he stood there gathering his breath for speech, Thiodolf stood up, and poured mead into a drinking horn and held it out towards the new-comer, and spake, but in rhyme and measure:

“Welcome, thou evening-farer, and holy be thine head,
Since thou hast sought unto us in the heart of the Wolfings' stead;
Drink now of the horn of the mighty, and call a health if thou wilt
O'er the eddies of the mead-horn to the washing out of guilt.
For thou com'st to the peace of the Wolfings, and our very guest thou art,
And meseems as I behold thee, that I look on a child of the Hart.”

But the man put the horn from him with a hasty hand, and none said another word to him until he had gotten his breath again; and then he said:

“All hail ye Wood-Wolfs' children! nought may I drink the wine,
For the mouth and the maw that I carry this eve are nought of mine;
And my feet are the feet of the people, since the word went forth that tide,
'O Elf here of the Hartings, no longer shalt thou bide
In any house of the Markmen than to speak the word and wend,
Till all men know the tidings and thine errand hath an end.’

Behold, O Wolves, the token and say if it be true!
 I bear the shaft of battle that is four-wise cloven through,
 And its each end dipped in the blood-stream, both the iron and the horn,
 And its midmost scathed with the fire; and the word that I have borne
 Along with this war-token is, 'Wolfings of the Mark
 Whenso ye see the war-shaft, by the daylight or the dark,
 Busk ye to battle faring, and leave all work undone
 Save the gathering for the handplay at the rising of the sun.
 Three days hence is the hosting, and thither bear along
 Your wains and your kine for the slaughter lest the journey should be long.
 For great is the Folk, saith the tidings, that against the Markmen come;
 In a far off land is their dwelling, whenso they sit at home,
 And Welsh² is their tongue, and we wot not of the word that is in their
 mouth,
 As they march a many together from the cities of the South.'"

Therewith he held up yet for a minute the token of the war-
 arrow ragged and burnt and bloody; and turning about with it in
 his hand went his ways through the open door, none hindering; and
 when he was gone, it was as if the token were still in the air there
 against the heads of the living men, and the heads of the woven
 warriors, so intently had all gazed at it; and none doubted the
 tiding or the token. Then said Thiodolf:

"Forth will we Wolfing children, and cast a sound abroad:
 The mouth of the sea-beast's weapon shall speak the battle-word;
 And ye warriors hearken and hasten, and dight the weed of war,
 And then to acre and meadow wend ye adown no more,
 For this work shall be for the women to drive our neat from the mead,
 And to yoke the wains, and to load them as the men of war have need."

Out then they streamed from the hall, and no man was left there-
 in save the fair Hall-Sun sitting under the lamp whose name she
 bore. But to the highest of the slope they went, where was a
 mound made higher by man's handiwork; thereon stood Thiodolf
 and handled the horn, turning his face toward the downward

² Welsh with these men means Foreign, and is used for all people of
 Europe who are not of Gothic or Teutonic blood.

course of Mirkwood-water; and he set the horn to his lips, and blew a long blast, and then again, and yet again the third time; and all the sounds of the gathering night were hushed under the sound of the roaring of the war-horn of the Wolfings; and the Kin of the Beamings heard it as they sat in their hall, and they gat them ready to hearken to the bearer of the tidings who should follow on the sound of the war-blast.

But when the last sound of the horn had died away, then said Thiodolf:

“Now Wolfing children hearken, what the splintered War-shaft saith,
 The fire scathed blood-stained aspen! we shall ride for life or death,
 We warriors, a long journey with the herd and with the wain;
 But unto this our homestead shall we wend us back again,
 All the gleanings of the battle; and here for them that live
 Shall stand the Roof of the Wolfings, and for them shall the meadow thrive,
 And the acres give their increase in the harvest of the year;
 Now is no long departing since the Hall-Sun bideth here
 'Neath the holy Roof of the Fathers, and the place of the Wolfing kin,
 And the feast of our glad returning shall yet be held therein.
 Hear the bidding of the War-shaft! All men, both thralls and free,
 'Twixt twenty winters and sixty, beneath the shield shall be,
 And the hosting is at the Thing-stead, the Upper-mark anigh;
 And we wend away to-morrow ere the Sun is noon-tide high.”

Therewith he stepped down from the mound, and went his way back to the hall; and manifold talk arose among the folk; and of the warriors some were already dight for the journey, but most not, and a many went their ways to see to their weapons and horses, and the rest back again into the hall.

By this time night had fallen, and between then and the dawn would be no darker hour, for the moon was just rising; a many of the horseherds had done their business, and were now making their way back again through the lanes of the wheat, driving the stallions before them, who played together kicking, biting and squealing, paying but little heed to the standing corn on either side. Lights began to glitter now in the cots of the thralls, and brighter still in the stithies where already you might hear the ham-

mers clinking on the anvils, as men fell to looking to their battle gear.

But the chief men and the women sat under their Roof on the eve of departure: and the tuns of mead were broached, and the horns filled and borne round by young maidens, and men ate and drank and were merry; and from time to time as some one of the warriors had done with giving heed to his weapons, he entered into the hall and fell into the company of those whom he loved most and by whom he was best beloved; and whiles they talked, and whiles they sang to the harp up and down that long house; and the moon risen high shone in at the windows, and there was much laughter and merriment, and talk of deeds of arms of the old days on the eve of that departure: till little by little weariness fell on them, and they went their ways to slumber, and the hall was fallen silent.

CHAPTER III. THIODOLF TALKETH WITH THE WOOD-SUN.

BUT yet sat Thiodolf under the Hall-Sun for a while as one in deep thought; till at last as he stirred, his sword clattered on him; and then he lifted up his eyes and looked down the hall and saw no man stirring, so he stood up and settled his raiment on him, and went forth, and so took his ways through the hall-door, as one who hath an errand.

The moonlight lay in a great flood on the grass without, and the dew was falling in the coldest hour of the night, and the earth smelled sweetly: the whole habitation was asleep now, and there was no sound to be known as the sound of any creature, save that from the distant meadow came the lowing of a cow that had lost her calf, and that a white owl was flitting about near the eaves of the Roof with her wild cry that sounded like the mocking of merriment now silent.

Thiodolf turned toward the wood, and walked steadily through the scattered hazel-trees, and thereby into the thick of the beech-trees, whose boles grew smooth and silver-grey, high and close-set: and so on and on he went as one going by a well-known path, though there was no path, till all the moonlight was quenched

under the close roof of the beech-leaves, though yet for all the darkness, no man could go there and not feel that the roof was green above him. Still he went on in despite of the darkness, till at last there was a glimmer before him, that grew greater till he came unto a small wood-lawn whereon the turf grew again, though the grass was but thin, because little sunlight got to it, so close and thick were the tall trees round about it. In the heavens above it by now there was a light that was not all of the moon, though it might scarce be told whether that light were the memory of yesterday or the promise of to-morrow, since little of the heavens could be seen thence, save the crown of them, because of the tall tree-tops.

Nought looked Thiodolf either at the heavens above, or the trees, as he strode from off the husk-strewn floor of the beech wood on to the scanty grass of the lawn, but his eyes looked straight before him at that which was amidmost of the lawn: and little wonder was that; for there on a stone chair sat a woman exceeding fair, clad in glittering raiment, her hair lying as pale in the moonlight on the grey stone as the barley acres in the August night before the reaping-hook goes in amongst them. She sat there as though she were awaiting someone, and he made no stop nor stay, but went straight up to her, and took her in his arms, and kissed her mouth and her eyes, and she him again; and then he sat himself down beside her. But her eyes looked kindly on him as she said:

“O Thiodolf, hardy art thou, that thou hast no fear to take me in thine arms and to kiss me, as though thou hadst met in the meadow with a maiden of the Elkings: and I, who am a daughter of the Gods of thy kindred, and a Chooser of the Slain! Yea, and that upon the eve of battle and the dawn of thy departure to the stricken field!”

“O Wood-Sun,” he said “thou art the treasure of life that I found when I was young, and the love of life that I hold, now that my beard is grizzling. Since when did I fear thee, Wood-Sun? Did I fear thee when first I saw thee, and we stood amidst the hazelled field, we twain living amongst the slain? But my sword was red with the blood of the foe, and my raiment with mine own blood; and I was a-weary with the day’s work, and sick with many strokes, and methought I was fainting into death. And there thou

wert before me, full of life and ruddy and smiling both lips and eyes; thy raiment clean and clear, thine hands unstained with blood: then didst thou take me by my bloody and weary hand, and didst kiss my lips grown ashen pale, and thou saidst 'Come with me.' And I strove to go, and might not; so many and sore were my hurts. Then amidst my sickness and my weariness was I merry; for I said to myself, This is the death of the warrior, and it is exceeding sweet. What meaneth it? Folk said of me; he is over young to meet the foeman; yet am I not over young to die?"

Therewith he laughed out amid the wild-wood, and his speech became song, and he said:

"We wrought in the ring of the hazels, and the wine of war we drank:
From the tide when the sun stood highest to the hour wherein she sank:
And three kings came against me, the mightiest of the Huns,
The evil-eyed in battle, the swift-foot wily ones;
And they gnashed their teeth against me, and they gnawed on the shield-
rims there,

On that afternoon of summer, in the high-tide of the year.
Keen-eyed I gazed about me, and I saw the clouds draw up
Till the heavens were dark as the hollow of a wine-stained iron cup,
And the wild-deer lay unfeeding on the grass of the forest glades,
And all earth was scared with the thunder above our clashing blades.

"Then sank a King before me, and on fell the other twain,
And I tossed up the reddened sword-blade in the gathered rush of the rain
And the blood and the water blended, and fragrant grew the earth.

"There long I turned and twisted within the battle-girth
Before those bears of onset: while out from the grey world streamed
The broad red lash of the lightning and in our byrnies gleamed.
And long I leapt and laboured in that garland of the fight
'Mid the blue blades and the lightning; but ere the sky grew light
The second of the Hun-kings on the rain-drenched daisies lay;
And we twain with the battle blinded a little while made stay,
And leaning on our sword-hilts each on the other gazed.

"Then the rain grew less, and one corner of the veil of clouds was raised,
And as from the broidered covering gleams out the shoulder white

Of the bed-mate of the warrior when on his wedding night
 He layeth his hand to the linen; so, down there in the west
 Gleamed out the naked heaven: but the wrath rose up in my breast,
 And the sword in my hand rose with it, and I leaped and hewed at the Hun;
 And from him too flared the war-flame, and the blades danced bright in
 the sun
 Come back to the earth for a little before the ending of day.

“There then with all that was in him did the Hun play out the play,
 Till he fell, and left me tottering, and I turned my feet to wend
 To the place of the mound of the mighty, the gate of the way without end.
 And there thou wert. How was it, thou Chooser of the Slain,
 Did I die in thine arms, and thereafter did thy mouth-kiss wake me again?”

Ere the last sound of his voice was done she turned and kissed
 him; and then she said; “Never hadst thou a fear and thine heart
 is full of hardihood.”

Then he said:

“’Tis the hardy heart, beloved, that keepeth me alive,
 As the king-leek in the garden by the rain and the sun doth thrive,
 So I thrive by the praise of the people; it is blent with my drink and my
 meat;
 As I slumber in the night-tide it laps me soft and sweet;
 And through the chamber window when I waken in the morn
 With the wind of the sun’s arising from the meadow is it borne
 And biddeth me remember that yet I live on earth:
 Then I rise and my might is with me, and fills my heart with mirth,
 As I think of the praise of the people; and all this joy I win
 By the deeds that my heart commandeth and the hope that lieth therein.”

“Yea,” she said, “but day runneth ever on the heels of day, and
 there are many and many days; and betwixt them do they carry
 eld.”

“Yet art thou no older than in days bygone,” said he. “Is it so,
 O Daughter of the Gods, that thou wert never born, but wert from
 before the framing of the mountains, from the beginning of all
 things?”

But she said:

“Nay, nay; I began, I was born; although it may be indeed
 That not on the hills of the earth I sprang from the godhead’s seed.
 And e’en as my birth and my waxing shall be my waning and end.
 But thou on many an errand, to many a field dost wend
 Where the bow at adventure bended, or the fleeing dastard’s spear
 Oft lulleth the mirth of the mighty. Now me thou dost not fear,
 Yet fear with me, beloved, for the mighty Maid I fear;
 And Doom is her name, and full often she maketh me afraid
 And even now meseemeth on my life her hand is laid.”

But he laughed and said:

“In what land is she abiding? Is she near or far away?
 Will she draw up close beside me in the press of the battle play?
 And if then I may not smite her ’midst the warriors of the field
 With the pale blade of my fathers, will she bide the shove of my shield?”

But sadly she sang in answer:

“In many a stead Doom dwelleth, nor sleepeth day nor night:
 The rim of the bowl she kisseth, and beareth the chambering light
 When the kings of men wend happy to the bride-bed from the board.
 It is little to say that she wendeth the edge of the grinded sword,
 When about the house half builded she hangeth many a day;
 The ship from the strand she shoveth, and on his wonted way
 By the mountain-hunter fareth where his foot ne’er failed before:
 She is where the high bank crumbles at last on the river’s shore:
 The mower’s scythe she whetteth; and lulleth the shepherd to sleep
 Where the deadly ling-worm wakeneth in the desert of the sheep.
 Now we that come of the God-kin of her redes for ourselves we wot,
 But her will with the lives of men-folk and their ending know we not.
 So therefore I bid thee not fear for thyself of Doom and her deed,
 But for me: and I bid thee hearken to the helping of my need.
 Or else—Art thou happy in life, or lusteth thou to die
 In the flower of thy days, when thy glory and thy longing bloometh on
 high?”

But Thiodolf answered her:

“I have deemed, and long have I deemed that this is my second life,
That my first one waned with my wounding when thou cam’st to the ring
of strife.

For when in thine arms I wakened on the hazelled field of yore,
Meseemed I had newly arisen to a world I knew no more,
So much had all things brightened on that dewy dawn of day.
It was dark dull death that I looked for when my thought had died away.
It was lovely life that I woke to; and from that day henceforth
My joy of the life of man-folk was manifolded of worth.
Far fairer the fields of the morning than I had known them erst,
And the acres where I wended, and the corn with its half-slaked thirst;
And the noble Roof of the Wolfings, and the hawks that sat thereon;
And the bodies of my kindred whose deliverance I had won;
And the glimmering of the Hall-Sun in the dusky house of old;
And my name in the mouth of the maidens, and the praises of the bold,
As I sat in my battle-raiment, and the ruddy spear well steeled
Leaned ’gainst my side war-battered, and the wounds thine hand had
healed.

Yea, from that morn thenceforward has my life been good indeed,
The gain of to-day was goodly, and good to-morrow’s need,
And good the whirl of the battle, and the broil I wielded there,
Till I fashioned the ordered onset, and the unhopd victory fair.
And good were the days thereafter of utter deedless rest
And the prattle of thy daughter, and her hands on my unmailed breast.
Ah good is the life thou hast given, the life that mine hands have won.
And where shall be the ending till the world is all undone?
Here sit we twain together, and both we in Godhead clad,
We twain of the Wolfing kindred, and each of the other glad.”

But she answered, and her face grew darker withal:

“O mighty man and joyous, art thou of the Wolfing kin?
’Twas no evil deed when we mingled, nor lieth doom therein.
Thou lovely man, thou black-haired, thou shalt die and have done no ill.
Fame-crowned are the deeds of thy doing, and the mouths of men they fill.
Thou betterer of the Godfolk, enduring is thy fame:
Yet as a painted image of a dream is thy dreaded name.

Of an alien folk thou comest, that we twain might be one indeed.
Thou shalt die one day. So hearken, to help me at my need."

His face grew troubled and he said: "What is this word that I am no chief of the Wolfings?"

"Nay," she said, "but better than they. Look thou on the face of our daughter the Hall-Sun, thy daughter and mine: favoureth she at all of me?"

He laughed: "Yea, whereas she is fair, but not otherwise. This is a hard saying, that I dwell among an alien kindred, and it wot-teth not thereof. Why hast thou not told me hereof before?"

She said: "It needeth not to tell thee because thy day was waxing, as now it waneth. Once more I bid thee hearken and do my bidding though it be hard to thee."

He answered: "Even so will I as much as I may; and thus wise must thou look upon it, that I love life, and fear not death."

Then she spake, and again her words fell into rhyme:

"In forty fights hast thou foughten, and been worsted but in four;
And I looked on and was merry; and ever more and more
Wert thou dear to the heart of the Wood-Sun, and the Chooser of the
Slain.

But now whereas ye are wending with slaughter-herd and wain
To meet a folk that ye know not, a wonder, a peerless foe,
I fear for thy glory's waning, and I see thee lying alow."

Then he brake in: "Herein is little shame to be worsted by the
might of the mightiest: if this so mighty folk sheareth a limb off
the tree of my fame, yet shall it wax again."

But she sang:

"In forty fights hast thou foughten, and beside thee who but I
Beheld the wind-tossed banners, and saw the aspen fly?
But to-day to thy war I wend not, for Weird withholdeth me
And sore my heart forebodeth for the battle that shall be.
To-day with thee I wend not; so I feared, and lo my feet,
That are wont to the woodland girdle of the acres of the wheat,
For thee among strange people and the foeman's throng have trod,

And I tell thee their banner of battle is a wise and a mighty God.
For these are the folk of the cities, and in wondrous wise they dwell
Mid confusion of heaped houses, dim and black as the face of hell;
Though therefrom rise roofs most goodly, where their captains and their
kings

Dwell amidst the walls of marble in abundance of fair things;
And 'mid these, nor worsen nor better, but builded otherwise
Stand the Houses of the Fathers, and the hidden mysteries.
And as close as are the tree-trunks that within the beech-wood thrive
E'en so many are their pillars; and therein like men alive
Stand the images of godfolk in such raiment as they wore
In the years before the cities and the hidden days of yore.
Ah for the gold that I gazed on! and their store of battle gear,
And strange engines that I knew not, or the end for which they were.
Ah for the ordered wisdom of the war-array of these,
And the folks that are sitting about them in dumb down-trodden peace!
So I thought now fareth war-ward my well-beloved friend,
And the weird of the Gods hath doomed it that no more with him may I
wend!
Woe's me for the war of the Wolfings wherefrom I am sundered apart,
And the fruitless death of the war-wise, and the doom of the hardy heart!"

Then he answered, and his eyes grew kind as he looked on her:

"For thy fair love I thank thee, and thy faithful word, O friend!
But how might it otherwise happen but we twain must meet in the end,
The God of this mighty people and the Markmen and their kin?
Lo, this is the weird of the world, and what may we do herein?"

Then mirth came into her face again as she said:

"Who wotteth of Weird, and what she is till the weird is accomplished? Long hath it been my weird to love thee and to fashion deeds for thee as I may; nor will I depart from it now." And she sang:

"Keen-edged is the sword of the city, and bitter is its spear,
But thy breast in the battle, beloved, hath a wall of the stithy's gear.
What now is thy wont in the handplay with the helm and the hauberk of
rings?"

Farest thou as the thrall and the cot-carle, or clad in the raiment of kings?

He started, and his face reddened as he answered:

“O Wood-Sun, thou wottest our battle and the way wherein we fare:
That oft at the battle’s beginning the helm and the hauberk we bear;
Lest the shaft of the fleeing coward or the bow at adventure bent
Should slay us ere the need be, ere our might be given and spent.
Yet oft ere the fight is over, and Doom hath scattered the foe,
No leader of the people by his war-gear shall ye know,
But by his hurts the rather, from the cot-carle and the thrall:
For when all is done that a man may, ’tis the hour for a man to fall.”

She yet smiled as she said in answer:

“O Folk-wolf, heed and hearken; for when shall thy life be spent
And the Folk wherein thou dwellest with thy death be well content?
Whenso folk need the fire, do they hew the apple-tree,
And burn the Mother of Blossom and the fruit that is to be?
Or me wilt thou bid to thy grave-mound because thy battle-wrath
May nothing more be bridled than the whirl-wind on his path?
So hearken and do my bidding, for the hauberk shalt thou bear
E’en when the other warriors cast off their battle-gear.
So come thou, come unwounded from the war-field of the south,
And sit with me in the beech-wood, and kiss me, eyes and mouth.”

And she kissed him in very deed, and made much of him, and fawned on him, and laid her hand on his breast, and he was soft and blithe with her, but at last he laughed and said:

“God’s Daughter, long hast thou lived, and many a matter seen,
And men full often grieving for the deed that might have been;
But here my heart thou wheedlest as a maid of tender years
When first in the arms of her darling the horn of war she hears.
Thou knowest the axe to be heavy, and the sword, how keen it is;
But that Doom of which thou hast spoken, wilt thou not tell of this,
God’s Daughter, how it sheareth, and how it breaketh through
Each wall that the warrior buildeth, yea all deeds that he may do?”

What might in the hammer's leavings, in the fire's thrall shall abide
To turn that Folks' o'erwhelmer from the fated warrior's side?"

Then she laughed in her turn, and loudly; but so sweetly that the sound of her voice mingled with the first song of a newly awakened wood-thrush sitting on a rowan twig on the edge of the wood-lawn. But she said:

"Yea, I that am God's Daughter may tell thee never a whit
From what land cometh the hauberk nor what smith smithied it,
That thou shalt wear in the handplay from the first stroke to the last;
But this thereof I tell thee, that it holdeth firm and fast
The life of the body it lappeth, if the gift of the Godfolk it be.
Lo this is the yoke-mate of doom, and the gift of me unto thee."

Then she leaned down from the stone whereon they sat, and her hand was in the dewy grass for a little, and then it lifted up a dark grey rippling coat of rings; and she straightened herself in the seat again, and laid that hauberk on the knees of Thiodolf, and he put his hand to it, and turned it about, while he pondered long: then at last he said:

"What evil thing abideth with this warder of the strife,
This burg and treasure chamber for the hoarding of my life?
For this is the work of the dwarfs, and no kindly kin of the earth;
And all we fear the dwarf-kin and their anger and sorrow and mirth."

She cast her arms about him and fondled him, and her voice grew sweeter than the voice of any mortal thing as she answered:

"No ill for thee, beloved, or for me in the hauberk lies;
No sundering grief is in it, no lonely miseries.
But we shall abide together, and that new life I gave,
For a long while yet henceforward we twain its joy shall have.
Yea, if thou dost my bidding to wear my gift in the fight
No hunter of the wild-wood at the changing of the night
Shall see my shape on thy grave-mound or my tears in the morning find
With the dew of the morning mingled; nor with the evening wind

Shall my body pass the shepherd as he wandereth in the mead
 And fill him with forebodings on the eve of the Wolfings' need.
 Nor the horse-herd wake in the midnight and hear my fateful cry;
 Nor yet shall the Wolfing women hear words on the wind go by
 As they weave and spin the night down when the House is gone to the war,
 And weep for the swains they wedded and the children that they bore.
 Yea do my bidding, O Folk-wolf, lest a grief of the Gods should weigh
 On the ancient House of the Wolfings and my death o'ercloud its day."

And still she clung about him, while he spake no word of yea or nay: but at the last he let himself glide wholly into her arms, and the dwarf-wrought hauberk fell from his knees & lay on the grass.

So they abode together in that wood-lawn till the twilight was long gone, and the sun arisen for some while. And when Thiodolf stepped out of the beech-wood into the broad sunshine dappled with the shadow of the leaves of the hazels moving gently in the fresh morning air, he was covered from the neck to the knee by a hauberk of rings dark and grey and gleaming, fashioned by the dwarfs of ancient days.

CHAPTER IV. THE HOUSE FARETH TO THE WAR.

NOW when Thiodolf came back to the habitations of the kindred the whole House was astir, both thrall-men and women, and free women hurrying from cot to stithy, and from stithy to hall bearing the last of the war-gear or raiment for the fighting-men. But they for their part were some standing about anigh the Man's-door, some sitting gravely within the hall, some watching the hurry of the thralls and women from the midmost of the open space amidst of the habitations, whereon there stood yet certain wains which were belated: for the most of the wains were now standing with the oxen already yoked to them down in the meadow past the acres, encircled by a confused throng of kine and horses and thrall-folk, for thither had all the beasts for the slaughter, and the horses for the warriors been brought; and there were the horses tethered or held by the thralls; some indeed were already saddled and bridled, and on others were the thralls doing the harness.

But as for the wains of the Markmen, they were stoutly framed of ash-tree with panels of aspen, and they were broad-wheeled so that they might go over rough and smooth. They had high tilts over them well framed of willow-poles covered over with squares of black felt over-lapping like shingles; which felt they made of the rough of their fleeces, for they had many sheep. And these wains were to them for houses upon the way if need were, and therein as now were stored their meal and their war-store: and after fight they would flit their wounded men in them, such as were too sorely hurt to back a horse: nor must it be hidden that whiles they looked to bring back with them the treasure of the south. Moreover the folk if they were worsted in any battle, instead of fleeing without more done, would often draw back fighting into a garth made by these wains, and guarded by some of their thralls; and there would abide the onset of those who had thrust them back in the field. And this garth they called the Wain-burg.

So now stood three of these wains aforesaid belated amidst of the habitations of the House, their yoke-beasts standing or lying down unharnessed as yet to them: but in the very midst of that place was a wain unlike to them; smaller than they but higher; square of shape as to the floor of it; built lighter than they, yet far stronger; as the warrior is stronger than the big carle and trencher-licker that loiters about the hall; and from the midst of this wain arose a mast made of a tall straight fir-tree, and thereon hung the banner of the Wolfings, wherein was wrought the image of the Wolf, but red of hue as a token of war, and with his mouth open and gaping upon the foemen. Also whereas the other wains were drawn by mere oxen, and those of divers colours, as chance would have it, the wain of the banner was drawn by ten black bulls of the mightiest of the herd, deep-dewlapped, high-crested and curly-browed; and their harness was decked with gold, and so was the wain itself, and the woodwork of it painted red with vermilion. There then stood the Banner of the House of the Wolfings awaiting the departure of the warriors to the hosting.

So Thiodolf stood on the top of the bent beside that same mound wherefrom he had blown the War-horn yestereve, and which was called the Hill of Speech, and he shaded his eyes with his hand and looked around him; and even therewith the carles

fell to yoking the beasts to the belated wains, and the warriors gathered together from out of the mixed throngs, and came from the Roof and the Man's-door and all set their faces toward the Hill of Speech.

So Thiodolf knew that all was ready for departure, and it wanted but an hour of high-noon; so he turned about and went into the Hall, and there found his shield and his spear hanging in his sleeping place beside the hauberk he was wont to wear; then he looked, as one striving with thought, at his empty hauberk and his own body covered with the dwarf-wrought rings; nor did his face change as he took his shield and his spear and turned away. Then he went to the dais and there sat his foster-daughter (as men deemed her) sitting amidst of it as yestereve, and now arrayed in a garment of fine white wool, on the breast whereof were wrought in gold two beasts ramping up against a fire-altar whereon a flame flickered; and on the skirts and the hems were other devices, of wolves chasing deer, and men shooting with the bow; and that garment was an ancient treasure; but she had a broad girdle of gold and gems about her middle, and on her arms and neck she wore great gold-rings wrought delicately. By then there were few save the Hall-Sun under the Roof, and they but the oldest of the women, or a few very old men, and some who were ailing and might not go abroad. But before her on the thwart table lay the Great War-horn awaiting the coming of Thiodolf to give signal of departure.

Then went Thiodolf to the Hall-Sun and kissed and embraced her fondly, and she gave the horn into his hands, and he went forth and up on to the Hill of Speech, and blew thence a short blast on the horn, and then came all the Warriors flocking to the Hill of Speech, each man stark in his harness, alert and joyous.

Then presently through the Man's-door came the Hall-Sun in that ancient garment, which fell straight and stiff down to her ancles as she stepped lightly and slowly along, her head crowned with a garland of eglantine. In her right hand also she held a great torch of wax lighted, whose flame amidst the bright sunlight looked like a wavering leaf of vermilion.

The warriors saw her, and made a lane for her, and she made her way through it up to the Hill of Speech, and she went up to

THE FAREWELL FLAME QUENCHED 27

the top of it and stood there holding the lighted candle in her hand, so that all might see it. Then suddenly was there as great a silence as there may be on a forenoon of summer; for even the thralls down in the meadow had noted what was toward, and ceased their talking and shouting, for as far off as they were, since they could see that the Hall-Sun stood on the Hill of Speech, for the wood was dark behind her; so they knew the Farewell Flame was lighted, and that the maiden would speak; and to all men her speech was a boding of good or of ill.

So she began in a sweet voice yet clear and far-reaching:

“O Warriors of the Wolfings by the token of the flame
That here in my right hand flickers, come aback to the House of the Name!
For there yet burneth the Hall-Sun beneath the Wolfing roof,
And this flame is litten from it, nor as now shall it fare aloof
Till again it seeth the mighty and the men to be gleaned from the fight.
So wend ye as weird willeth and let your hearts be light;
For through your days of battle all the deeds of our days shall be fair.
To-morrow beginneth the haysel, as if every carle were here;
And who knoweth ere your returning but the hook shall smite the corn?
But the kine shall go down to the meadow as their wont is every morn,
And each eve shall come back to the byre; and the mares and foals afield
Shall ever be heeded duly; and all things shall their increase yield.
And if it shall befall us that hither cometh a foe
Here have we swains of the shepherds good players with the bow,
And old men battle-crafty whose might is nowise spent,
And women fell and fearless well wont to tread the bent
Amid the sheep and the oxen; and their hands are hard with the spear
And their arms are strong and stalwart the battle shield to bear;
And store of weapons have we and the mighty walls of the stead;
And the Roof shall abide you steadfast with the Hall-Sun overhead.
Lo here I quench this candle that is lit from the Hall-Sun’s flame
Which unto the wild-wood clearing with the kin of the Wolfings came,
And shall wend with their departure to the limits of the earth;
Nor again shall the torch be lighted till in sorrow or in mirth,
Overthrown or overthrowing, ye come aback once more,
And bid me bear the candle before the Wolf of War.”

As she spake the word she turned the candle downward, and thrust it against the grass and quenched it indeed ; but the whole throng of warriors turned about, for the bulls of the bannner-wain lowered their heads in the yokes and began to draw, lowing mightily ; and the wain creaked and moved on, and all the men-at-arms followed after, and down they went through the lanes of the corn, and a many women and children and old men went down into the mead with them.

In their hearts they all wondered what the Hall-Sun's words might signify ; for she had told them nought about the battles to be, saving that some should come back to the Mid-mark ; whereas aforetime somewhat would she foretell to them concerning the fortune of the fight, and now had she said to them nothing but what their own hearts told them. Nevertheless they bore their crests high as they followed the Wolf down into the meadow, where all was now ready for departure. There they arrayed themselves and went down to the lip of Mirkwood-water ; and such was their array that the banner went first, save that a band of fully-armed men went before it ; and behind it and about were the others as well arrayed as they. Then went the wains that bore their munition, with armed carles of the thrall-folk about them, who were ever the guard of the wains, and should never leave them night or day ; and lastly went the great band of the warriors and the rest of the thralls with them.

As to their war-gear, all the freemen had helms of some kind, but not all of iron or steel ; for some bore helms fashioned of horse-hide and bull-hide covered over with the similitude of a Wolf's muzzle ; nor were these ill-defence against a sword-stroke. Shields they all had, and all these had the image of the Wolf marked on them, but for many their thralls bore them on the journey. As to their body-armour some carried long byrnies of ring-mail, some coats of leather covered with splinters of horn laid like the shingles of a roof, and some skin-coats only : whereof indeed there were some of which tales went that they were better than the smith's hammer-work, because they had had spells sung over them to keep out steel or iron.

But for their weapons, they bore spears with shafts not very long, some eight feet of our measure ; and axes heavy and long-

THE FOREBODING OF THE STAY-AT-HOMES 29

shafted; and bills with great and broad heads; and some few, but not many of the kindred were bowmen, and every freeman was girt with a sword; but of the swords some were long and two-edged, some short and heavy, cutting on one edge, and these were of the kind which they and our forefathers long after called 'sax.' Thus were the freemen arrayed.

But for the thralls, there were many bows among them, especially among those who were of blood alien to the Goths; the others bore short spears, and feathered broad arrows, and clubs bound with iron, and knives and axes, but not every man of them had a sword. Few iron helms they had and no ringed byrnie, but most had a buckler at their backs with no sign or symbol on it.

Thus then set forth the fighting men of the House of the Wolf toward the Thing-stead of the Upper-mark where the hosting was to be, and by then they were moving up along the side of Mirkwood-water it was somewhat past high-noon.

But the stay-at-home people who had come down with them to the meadow lingered long in that place; and much foreboding there was among them of evil to come; and of the old folk, some remembered tales of the past days of the Markmen, and how they had come from the ends of the earth, and the mountains where none dwell now but the Gods of their kindreds; and many of these tales told of their woes and their wars as they went from river to river and from wild-wood to wild-wood before they had established their Houses in the Mark, and fallen to dwelling there season by season and year by year whether the days were good or ill. And it fell into their hearts that now at last may happen was their abiding wearing out to an end, and that the day should soon be when they should have to bear the Hall-Sun through the wild-wood, and seek a new dwelling-place afar from the troubling of these newly arisen Welsh foemen.

And so those of them who could not rid themselves of this foreboding were somewhat heavier of heart than their wont was when the House went to the War. For long had they abided there in the Mark, and the life was sweet to them which they knew, and the life which they knew not was bitter to them: and Mirkwood-water was become as a God to them no less than to their fathers of old time; nor lesser was the mead where fed the horses that they loved

and the kine that they had reared, and the sheep that they guarded from the Wolf of the Wild-wood: and they worshipped the kind acres which they themselves and their fathers had made fruitful, wedding them to the seasons of seed-time and harvest, that the birth that came from them might become a part of the kindred of the Wolf, and the joy and might of past springs and summers might run in the blood of the Wolfing children. And a dear God indeed to them was the Roof of the Kindred, that their fathers had built and that they yet warded against the fire and the lightening and the wind and the snow, and the passing of the days that devour and the years that heap the dust over the work of men. They thought of how it had stood, and seen so many generations of men come and go; how often it had welcomed the new-born babe, and given farewell to the old man: how many secrets of the past it knew; how many tales which men of the present had forgotten, but which yet mayhap men of times to come should learn of it; for to them yet living it had spoken time and again, and had told them what their fathers had not told them, and it held the memories of the generations and the very life of the Wolfings and their hopes for the days to be.

Thus these poor people thought of the Gods whom they worshipped, and the friends whom they loved, and could not choose but be heavy-hearted when they thought that the wild-wood was awaiting them to swallow all up, and take away from them their Gods and their friends and the mirth of their life, and burden them with hunger and thirst and weariness, that their children might begin once more to build the House and establish the dwelling, and call new places by old names, and worship new Gods with the ancient worship.

Such imaginations of trouble then were in the hearts of the stay-at-homes of the Wolfings; the tale tells not indeed that all had such forebodings, but chiefly the old folk who were nursing the end of their life-days amidst the cherishing Kindred of the House.

But now they were beginning to turn them back again to the habitations, and a thin stream was flowing through the acres, when they heard a confused sound drawing near blended of horns and the lowing of beasts and the shouting of men; and they looked and saw a throng of brightly clad men coming up stream alongside

of Mirkwood-water; and they were not afraid, for they knew that it must be some other company of the Markmen journeying to the hosting of the Folk: and presently they saw that it was the House of the Beamings following their banner on the way to the Thing-stead. But when the new-comers saw the throng out in the meads, some of their young men pricked on their horses and galloped on past the women and old men, to whom they threw a greeting, as they ran past to catch up with the bands of the Wolfings; for between the two houses was there affinity, and much good liking lay between them; and the stay-at-homes, many of them, lingered yet till the main body of the Beamings came with their banner: and their array was much like to that of the Wolfings, but gayer; for whereas it pleased the latter to darken all their wargear to the colour of the grey Wolf, the Beamings polished all their gear as bright as might be, and their raiment also was mostly bright green of hue and much beflowered; and the sign on their banner was a green leafy tree, and the wain was drawn by great white bulls.

So when their company drew anear to the throng of the stay-at-homes they went to meet and greet each other, and tell tidings to each other; but their banner held steadily onward amidst their converse, and in a little while they followed it, for the way was long to the Thing-stead of the Upper-mark.

So passed away the fighting men by the side of Mirkwood-water, and the throng of the stay-at-homes melted slowly from the meadow and trickled along through the acres to the habitations of the Wolfings, and there they fell to doing whatso of work or play came to their hands.

CHAPTER V. CONCERNING THE HALL-SUN.

WHEN the warriors and the others had gone down to the mead, the Hall-Sun was left standing on the Hill of Speech, and she stood there till she saw the host in due array going on its ways dark and bright and beautiful; then she made as if to turn back to the Great Roof; but all at once it seemed to her as if something held her back, as if her will to move had departed from her, and that she could not put one foot before the

other. So she lingered on the Hill, and the quenched candle fell from her hand, and presently she sank adown on the grass and sat there with the face of one thinking intently. Yet was it with her that a thousand thoughts were in her mind at once and no one of them uppermost, and images of what had been and what then was flickered about in her brain, and betwixt them were engendered images of things to be, but unstable and not to be trowed in. So sat the Hall-Sun on the Hill of Speech lost in a dream of the day, whose stories were as little clear as those of a night-dream.

But as she sat musing thus, came to her a woman exceeding old to look on, whom she knew not as one of the kindred or a thrall; and this carline greeted her by the name of Hall-Sun and said:

“Hail, Hall-Sun of the Markmen! how fares it now with thee
When the whelps of the Woodbeast wander with the Leafage of the Tree
All up the Mirkwood-water to seek what they shall find,
The oak-boles of the battle and the war-wood stark and blind?”

Then answered the maiden:

“It fares with me, O mother, that my soul would fain go forth
To behold the ways of the battle, and the praise of the warriors’ worth.
But yet is it held entangled in a maze of many a thing,
As the low-grown bramble holdeth the brake-shoots of the Spring.
I think of the thing that hath been, but no shape is in my thought;
I think of the day that passeth, and its story comes to nought.
I think of the days that shall be, nor shape I any tale.
I will hearken thee, O mother, if hearkening may avail.”

The carline gazed at her with dark eyes that shone brightly from amidst her brown wrinkled face: then she sat herself down beside her and spake:

“From a far folk have I wandered and I come of an alien blood,
But I know all tales of the Wolfings and their evil and their good;
And when I heard of thy fairness, thereof I heard it said,
That for thee should be never a bridal nor a place in the warrior’s bed.”

THE HALL-SUN TELLETH OF HER CHILDHOOD

The maiden neither reddened nor paled, but looking with calm steady eyes into the carline's face she answered:

“Yea true it is, I am wedded to the mighty ones of old,
And the fathers of the Wolfings ere the days of field and fold.”

Then a smile came into the eyes of the old woman and she said:

“How glad shall be thy mother of thy worship and thy worth,
And the father that begat thee if yet they dwell on earth!”

But the Hall-Sun answered in the same steady manner as before:

“None knoweth who is my mother, nor my very father's name;
But when to the House of the Wolfings a wild-wood waif I came,
They gave me a foster-mother an ancient dame and good,
And a glorious foster-father the best of all the blood.”

Spake the carline:

“Yea, I have heard the story, but scarce therein might I trow
That thou with all thy beauty wert born 'neath the oaken bough,
And hast crawled a naked baby o'er the rain-drenched autumn-grass;
Wilt thou tell the wandering woman what wise it cometh to pass
That thou art the Mid-mark's Hall-Sun, and the sign of the Wolfings' gain?
Thou shalt pleasure me much by the telling, and thereof shalt thou be fain.”

Then answered the Hall-Sun:

“Yea; thus much I remember for the first of my memories;
That I lay on the grass in the morning and above were the boughs of the
trees.

But nought naked was I as the wood-whelp, but clad in linen white,
And adown the glades of the oakwood the morning sun lay bright.
Then a hind came out of the thicket and stood on the sunlit glade,
And turned her head toward the oak tree and a step on toward me made.
Then stopped, and bounded aback, and away as if in fear,
That I saw her no more; then I wondered, though sitting close anear

Was a she-wolf great and grisly. But with her was I wont to play,
 And pull her ears, and belabour her rugged sides and grey,
 And hold her jaws together, while she whimpered, slobbering
 For the love of my love; and nowise I deemed her a fearsome thing.
 Thereshe sat as though she were watching, and o'er head a blue-winged jay
 Shrieked out from the topmost oak-twigs, and a squirrel ran his way
 Two tree-trunks off. But the she-wolf arose up suddenly
 And growled with her neck-fell bristling, as if danger drew anigh;
 And therewith I heard a footstep, for nice was my ear to catch
 All the noises of the wild-wood; so there did we sit at watch
 While the sound of feet grew nigher: then I clapped hand on hand
 And crowed for joy and gladness, for there out in the sun did stand
 A man, a glorious creature with a gleaming helm on his head,
 And gold rings on his arms, in raiment gold-broidered crimson-red.
 Straightway he strode up toward us nor heeded the wolf of the wood
 But sang as he went in the oak-glade, as a man whose thought is good,
 And nought she heeded the warrior, but tame as a sheep was grown,
 And trotted away through the wild-wood with her crest all laid adown.
 Then came the man and sat down by the oak-bole close unto me
 And took me up nought fearful and set me on his knee.
 And his face was kind and lovely, so my cheek to his cheek I laid
 And touched his cold bright war-helm and with his gold rings played,
 And hearkened his words, though I knew not what tale they had to tell,
 Yet fain was my heart of their music, and meseemed I loved him well.
 So we fared for a while and were fain, till he set down my feet on the grass,
 And kissed me and stood up himself, and away through the wood did he pass
 And then came back the she-wolf and with her I played and was fain.
 Lo the first thing I remember: wilt thou have me babble agan?"

Spake the carline and her face was soft and kind:

"Nay damsel, long would I hearken to thy voice this summer day.
 But how didst thou leave the wild-wood, what people brought thee away?"

Then said the Hall-Sun:

"I awoke on a time in the even, and voices I heard as I woke;
 And there was I in the wild-wood by the bole of the ancient oak,

And a ring of men was around me, and glad was I indeed
 As I looked upon their faces and the fashion of their weed.
 For I gazed on the red and the scarlet and the beaten silver and gold,
 And blithe were their noble faces and kindly to behold,
 And nought had I seen of such-like since that hour of the other day
 When that warrior came to the oak-glade with the little child to play.
 And forth now he came, with the face that my hands had fondled before,
 And a battle shield wrought fairly upon his arm he bore,
 And thereon the wood-wolf's image in ruddy gold was done.
 Then I stretched out my little arms towards the glorious shining one,
 And he took me up and set me on his shoulder for a while
 And turned about to his fellows with a blithe and joyous smile;
 And they shouted aloud about me and drew forth gleaming swords
 And clashed them on their bucklers; but nought I knew of the words
 Of their shouting and rejoicing. So thereafter was I laid
 And borne forth on the warrior's warshield, and our way through the
 wood we made
 'Midst the mirth and great contentment of those fair-clad shielded men.

"But no tale of the wolf and the wild-wood abides with me since then,
 And the next thing I remember is a huge and dusky hall,
 A world for my little body from ancient wall to wall;
 A world of many doings, and nought for me to do,
 A world of many noises, and known to me were few.

"Time wore, and I spoke with the Wolfings & knew the speech of the kin,
 And was strange 'neath the roof no longer, as a lonely waif therein;
 And I wrought as a child with my playmates and every hour looked on
 Unto the next hour's joyance till the happy day was done.
 And going and coming amidst us was a woman tall and thin
 With hair like the hoary barley and silver streaks therein.
 And kind and sad of visage, as now I remember me,
 And she sat and told us stories when we were aweary with glee,
 And many of us she fondled, but me the most of all.

"And once from my sleep she waked me and bore me down the hall,
 In the hush of the very midnight, and I was feared thereat.
 But she brought me unto the dais, and there the warrior sat,

Who took me up and kissed me, as erst within the wood;
 And meseems in his arms I slumbered: but I wakened again and stood
 Alone with the kindly woman, and gone was the goodly man,
 And athwart the hush of the Folk-hall the moon shone bright and wan,
 And the woman dealt with a lamp hung up by a chain aloft,
 And she trimmed it and fed it with oil, while she chanted sweet and soft
 A song whose words I knew not: then she ran it up again,
 And up in the darkness above us died the length of its wavering chain."

"Yea," said the carline, "this woman will have been the Hall-Sun that came before thee. What next dost thou remember?"

Said the maiden:

"Next I mind me of the hazels behind the People's Roof,
 And the children running thither and the magpie flitting aloof,
 And my hand in the hand of the Hall-Sun, as after the others we went,
 And she soberly hearkening my prattle and the words of my intent.
 And now would I call her 'Mother,' and indeed I loved her well.

"So I waxed; and now of my memories the tale were long to tell;
 But as the days passed over, and I fared to field and wood,
 Alone or with my playmates, still the days were fair and good.
 But the sad and kindly Hall-Sun for my fosterer now I knew,
 And the great and glorious warrior that my heart clung sorely to
 Was but my foster-father; and I knew that I had no kin
 In the ancient House of the Wolfings, though love was warm therein."

Then smiled the carline and said: "Yea, he is thy foster-father, and yet a fond one."

"Sooth is that," said the Hall-Sun. "But wise art thou by seeming. Hast thou come to tell me of what kindred I am, and who is my father and who is my mother?"

Said the carline: "Art thou not also wise? Is it not so that the Hall-Sun of the Wolfings seeth things that are to come?"

"Yea," she said, "yet have I seen waking or sleeping no other father save my foster-father; yet my very mother I have seen, as one who should meet her in the flesh one day."

"And good is that," said the carline; and as she spoke her face waxed kinder, and she said:

“Tell us more of thy days in the House of the Wolfings and how thou faredst there.”

Said the Hall-Sun:

“I waxed 'neath the Roof of the Wolfings, till now to look upon I was of sixteen winters, and the love of the Folk I won, And in lovely weed they clad me like the image of a God: And lonely now full often the wild-wood ways I trod, And I feared no wild-wood creature, and my presence scared them nought; And I fell to know of wisdom, and within me stirred my thought, So that oft anights would I wander through the mead and far away, And swim the Mirkwood-water, and amidst his eddies play When earth was dark in the dawn-tide; and over all the folk I knew of the beasts' desires, as though in words they spoke.

“So I saw of things that should be, were they mighty things or small. And upon a day as it happened came the war-word to the hall, And the House must wend to the warfield, and as they sang, and played With the strings of the harp that even, and the mirth of the war-eve made, Came the sight of the field to my eyes, and the words waxed hot in me, And I needs must show the picture of the end of the fight to be. Then I showed them the Red Wolf bristling o'er the broken fleeing foe; And the war-gear of the fleers, and their banner did I show, To wit the Ling-worm's image with the maiden in his mouth; There I saw my foster-father mid the pale blades of the South, Till aloof swept all the handplay and the hurry of the chase, And he lay along by an ash-tree, no helm about his face, No byrny on his body; and an arrow in his thigh, And a broken spear in his shoulder. Then I saw myself draw nigh To sing the song blood-staying. Then saw I how we twain Went 'midst of the host triumphant in the Wolfings' banner-wain, The black bulls lowing before us athwart the warriors' song, As up from Mirkwood-water we went our ways along To the Great Roof of the Wolfings, whence streamed the women out And the sound of their rejoicing blent with the warriors' shout.

“They heard me and saw the picture, and they wotted how wise I was grown, And they loved me, and glad were their hearts at the tale my lips had shown;

And my body clad as an image of a God to the field they bore,
 And I held by the mast of the banner as I looked upon their war,
 And endured to see unblenching on the wind-swept sunny plain
 All the picture of my vision by the menfolk done again.
 And over my foster-father I sang the staunching-song,
 Till the life-blood that was ebbing flowed back to his heart the strong,
 And we wended back in the war-wain midst the gleanings of the fight
 Unto the ancient dwelling and the Hall-Sun's glimmering light.

“So from that day henceforward folk hung upon my words,
 For the battle of the autumn, and the harvest of the swords;
 And e'en more was I loved than aforetime. So wore a year away,
 And heavy was the burden of the lore that on me lay.

“But my fosterer the Hall-Sun took sick at the birth of the year,
 And changed her life as the year changed, as summer drew anear.
 But she knew that her life was waning, and lying in her bed
 She taught me the lore of the Hall-Sun, and every word to be said
 At the trimming in the midnight and the feeding in the morn,
 And she laid her hands upon me ere unto the howe she was borne
 With the kindred gathered about us; and they wotted her weird and her
 will,
 And hailed me for the Hall-Sun when at last she lay there still.
 And they did on me the garment, the holy cloth of old,
 And the neck-chain wrought for the goddess, and the rings of the hallowed
 gold.
 So here am I abiding, and of things to be I tell,
 Yet know not what shall befall me nor why with the Wolfings I dwell.”

Then said the carline:

“What seest thou, O daughter, of the journey of to-day?
 And why wendest thou not with the war-host on the battle-echoing way?”

Said the Hall-Sun:

“O mother, here dwelleth the Hall-Sun while the kin hath a dwelling-place,
 Nor ever again shall I look on the onset or the chase,

Till the day when the Roof of the Wolfings looketh down on the girdle of
foes,
And the arrow singeth over the grass of the kindred's close ;
Till the pillars shake with the shouting and quivers the roof-tree dear,
When the Hall of the Wolfings garners the harvest of the spear.”

Therewith she stood on her feet and turned her face to the Great Roof, and gazed long at it, not heeding the crone by her side; and she muttered words of whose signification the other knew not, though she listened intently, and gazed ever at her as closely as might be.

Then fell the Hall-Sun utterly silent, and the lids closed over her eyes, and her hands were clenched, and her feet pressed hard on the daisies: her bosom heaved with sore sighs, and great tear-drops oozed from under her eyelids and fell on to her raiment and her feet and on to the flowery summer grass; and at the last her mouth opened and she spake, but in a voice that was marvellously changed from that she spake in before:

“Why went ye forth, O Wolfings, from the garth your fathers built,
And the House where sorrow dieth, and all unloosed is guilt?
Turn back, turn back, and behold it! lest your feet be over slow
When your shields are heavy-burdened with the arrows of the foe;
How ye totter, how ye stumble on the rough and corpse-strewn way!
And lo, how the eve is eating the afternoon of day!
O why are ye abiding till the sun is sunk in night
And the forest trees are ruddy with the battle-kindled light?
O rest not yet, ye Wolfings, lest void be your resting-place,
And into lands that ye know not the Wolf must turn his face,
And ye wander and ye wander till the land in the ocean cease,
And your battle bring no safety and your labour no increase.”

Then was she silent for a while, and her tears ceased to flow; but presently her eyes opened once more, and she lifted up her voice and cried aloud:

“I see, I see! O Godfolk behold it from aloof,
How the little flames steal flickering along the ridge of the Roof!

They are small and red 'gainst the heavens in the summer afternoon;
But when the day is dusking, white, high shall they wave to the moon.
Lo, the fire plays now on the windows like strips of scarlet cloth
Wind-waved! but look in the night-tide on the onset of its wrath,
How it wraps round the ancient timbers and hides the mighty roof
But lighteth little crannies, so lost and far aloof,
That no man yet of the kindred hath seen them ere to-night,
Since first the builder builded in loving and delight!"

Then again she stayed her speech with weeping and sobbing,
but after a while was still again, and then she spoke pointing
toward the roof with her right hand.

"I see the fire-raisers and iron-helmed they are,
Brown-faced about the banners that their hands have borne afar.
And who in the garth of the kindred shall bear adown their shield
Since the onrush of the Wolfings they caught in the open field,
As the might of the mountain lion falls dead in the hempen net?
O Wolfings, long have ye tarried, but the hour abideth yet.
What life for the life of the people shall be given once for all,
What sorrow shall stay sorrow in the half-burnt Wolfing Hall?
There is nought shall quench the fire save the tears of the Godfolk's kin,
And the heart of the life-delighter, and the life-blood cast therein."

Then once again she fell silent, and her eyes closed again, and
the slow tears gushed out from them, and she sank down sobbing
on the grass, and little by little the storm of grief sank and her head
fell back, and she was as one quietly asleep. Then the carline hung
over her and kissed her and embraced her; and then through her
closed eyes and her slumber did the Hall-Sun see a marvel; for she
who was kissing her was young in semblance and unwrinkled, and
lovely to look on, with plenteous long hair of the hue of ripe barley,
and clad in glistening raiment such as has been woven in no loom
on earth.

And indeed it was the Wood-Sun in the semblance of a crone,
who had come to gather wisdom of the coming time from the
foreseeing of the Hall-Sun; since now at last she herself foresaw
nothing of it, though she was of the kindred of the Gods and the

Fathers of the Goths. So when she had heard the Hall-Sun she deemed that she knew but too well what her words meant, and what for love, what for sorrow, she grew sick at heart as she heard them.

So at last she arose and turned to look at the Great Roof; and strong and straight, and cool and dark grey showed its ridge against the pale sky of the summer afternoon all quivering with the heat of many hours' sun: dark showed its windows as she gazed on it, and stark and stiff she knew were its pillars within.

Then she said aloud, but to herself: "What then if a merry and mighty life be given for it, and the sorrow of the people be redeemed; yet will not I give the life which is his; nay rather let him give the bliss which is mine. But oh! how may it be that he shall die joyous and I shall live unhappy!"

Then she went slowly down from the Hill of Speech, and who-so saw her deemed her but a gangrel carline. So she went her ways and let the wood cover her.

But in a little while the Hall-Sun awoke alone, and sat up with a sigh, and she remembered nothing concerning her sight of the flickering flame along the hall-roof, and the fire-tongues like strips of scarlet cloth blown by the wind, nor had she any memory of her words concerning the coming day. But the rest of her talk with the carline she remembered, and also the vision of the beautiful woman who had kissed and embraced her; and she knew that it was her very mother. Also she perceived that she had been weeping, therefore she knew that she had uttered words of wisdom. For so it fared with her at whiles, that she knew not her own words of foretelling, but spoke them out as if in a dream.

So now she went down from the Hill of Speech soberly, and turned toward the Woman's-door of the hall, and on her way she met the women and old men and youths coming back from the meadow with little mirth: and there were many of them who looked shyly at her as though they would gladly have asked her somewhat, and yet durst not. But for her, her sadness passed away when she came among them, and she looked kindly on this and that one of them, and entered with them into the Woman's Chamber, and did what came to her hand to do.

CHAPTER VI. THEY TALK ON THE WAY TO THE FOLK-THING.

ALL day long one standing on the Speech-hill of the Wolfings might have seen men in their war-array streaming along the side of Mirkwood-water, on both sides thereof; and the last comers from the Nether-mark came hastening all they might; for they would not be late at the trysting-place. But these were of a kindred called the Laxings, who bore a salmon on their banner; and they were somewhat few in number, for they had but of late years become a House of the Markmen. Their banner-wain was drawn by white horses, fleet and strong, and they were no great band, for they had but few thralls with them, and all, free men and thralls, were a-horseback; so they rode by hastily with their banner-wain, their few munition-wains following as they might.

Now tells the tale of the men-at-arms of the Wolfings and the Beamings, that soon they fell in with the Elking host, which was journeying but leisurely, so that the Wolfings might catch up with them: they were a very great kindred, the most numerous of all Mid-mark, and at this time they had affinity with the Wolfings. But old men of the House remembered how they had heard their grandsires and very old men tell that there had been a time when the Elking House had been established by men from out of the Wolfing kindred, and how they had wandered away from the Mark in the days when it had been first settled, and had abided aloof for many generations of men; and so at last had come back again to the Mark, and had taken up their habitation at a place in Mid-mark where was dwelling but a remnant of a House called the Thydings, who had once been exceeding mighty, but had by that time almost utterly perished in a great sickness which befell in those days. So then these two Houses, the wanderers come back and the remnant left by the sickness of the Gods, made one House together, and increased and throve after their coming together, and wedded with the Wolfings, and became a very great House.

Gallant and glorious was their array now, as they marched along with their banner of the Elk, which was drawn by the very beasts themselves tamed to draught to that end through many

generations; they were fatter and sleeker than their wild-wood brethren, but not so mighty.

So were the men of the three kindreds somewhat mingled together on the way. The Wolfings were the tallest and the biggest made; but of those dark-haired men aforesaid, were there fewest amongst the Beamings, and most among the Elkings, as though they had drawn to them more men of alien blood during their wanderings aforesaid. So they talked together and made each other good cheer, as is the wont of companions in arms on the eve of battle; and the talk ran, as may be deemed, on that journey and what was likely to come of it: and spake an Elking warrior to a Wolfing by whom he rode:

“O Wolfkettle, hath the Hall-Sun had any foresight of the day of battle?”

“Nay,” said the other, “when she lighted the farewell candle, she bade us come back again, and spoke of the day of our return; but that methinks, as thou and I would talk of it, thinking what would be likely to befall. Since we are a great host of valiant men, and these Welshmen² most valiant, and as the rumour runneth bigger-bodied men than the Hun-folk, and so well ordered as never folk have been. So then if we overthrow them we shall come back again; and if they overthrow us, the remnant of us shall fall back before them till we come to our habitations; for it is not to be looked for that they will fall in upon our rear and prevent us, since we have the thicket of the wild-wood on our flanks.”

“Sooth is that,” said the Elking; “and as to the mightiness of this folk and their customs, ye may gather somewhat from the songs which our House yet singeth, and which ye have heard wide about in the Mark; for this is the same folk of which a many of them tell, making up that story-lay which is called the South-Welsh Lay; which telleth how we have met this folk in times past when we were in fellowship with a folk of the Welsh of like customs to ourselves: for we of the Elkings were then but a feeble folk. So we marched with this folk of the Kymry and met the men of the cities, and whiles we overthrew and whiles were overthrown, but at last in a great battle were overthrown with so great a slaughter, that the red blood rose over the wheels of the wains,

² i. e. Foreigners: see note p. 12.

and the city-folk fainted with the work of the slaughter, as men who mow a match in the meadows when the swathes are dry and heavy and the afternoon of midsummer is hot; and there they stood and stared on the field of the slain, and knew not whether they were in Home or Hell, so fierce the fight had been."

Therewith a man of the Beamings, who was riding on the other side of the Elking, reached out over his horse's neck and said:

"Yea friend, but is there not some telling of a tale concerning how ye and your fellowship took the great city of the Welshmen of the South, and dwelt there long?"

"Yea," said the Elking, "Hearken how it is told in the South-Welsh Lay:

"Have ye not heard
Of the ways of Weird?
How the folk fared forth
Far away from the North?
And as light as one wendeth
Whereas the wood endeth
When of nought is our need,
And none telleth our deed,

So Rodgeir unwearied and Reidfari wan
The town where none tarried the shield-shaking man.
All lonely the street there, and void was the way
And nought hindered our feet but the dead men that lay
Under shield in the lanes of the houses heavens-high,
All the ring-bearing swains that abode there to die.

"Tells the Lay, that none abode the Goths and their fellowship, but such as were mighty enough to fall before them, and the rest, both man and woman, fled away before our folk and before the folk of the Kymry, and left their town for us to dwell in; as saith the Lay:

"Glistening of gold
Did men's eyen behold;
Shook the pale sword
O'er the unspoken word,
No man drew nigh us
With weapon to try us,

THE WORDS OF THE SOUTH-WELSH LAY 45

For the Welsh-wrought shield
Lay low on the field.

By man's hand unbuilt all seemed there to be,
The walls ruddy gilded, the pearls of the sea:
Yea all things were dead there save pillar and wall,
But *they* lived and *they* said us the song of the hall;
The dear hall left to perish by men of the land,
For the Goth-folk to cherish with gold gaining hand.'

"See ye how the Lay tells that the hall was bolder than the men, who fled from it, and left all for our fellowship to deal with in the days gone by?"

Said the Wolfing man:

"And as it was once, so shall it be again. Maybe we shall go far on this journey, and see at least one of the garths of the South-lands, even those which they call cities. For I have heard it said that they have more cities than one only, and that so great are their kindreds, that each liveth in a garth full of mighty houses, with a wall of stone and lime around it; and that in every one of these garths lieth wealth untold heaped up. And wherefore should not all this fall to the Markmen and their valiancy?"

Said the Elking:

"As to their many cities and the wealth of them, that is sooth; but as to each city being the habitation of each kindred, it is otherwise: for rather it may be said of them that they have forgotten kindred, and have none, nor do they heed whom they wed, and great is the confusion amongst them. And mighty men among them ordain where they shall dwell, and what shall be their meat, and how long they shall labour after they are weary, and in all wise what manner of life shall be amongst them; and though they be called free men who suffer this, yet may no house or kindred gainsay this rule and order. In sooth they are a people mighty, but unhappy."

Said Wolfkettle:

"And hast thou learned all this from the ancient story lays, O Hiarand? For some of them I know, though not all, and therein have I noted nothing of all this. Is there some new minstrel arisen in thine House of a memory excelling all those that have gone

before? If that be so, I bid him to the Roof of the Wolfings as soon as may be; for we lack new tales."

"Nay," said Hiarandi, "This that I tell thee is not a tale of past days, but a tale of to-day. For there came to us a man from out of the wild-wood, and prayed us peace, and we gave it him; and he told us that he was of a House of the Gael, and that his House had been in a great battle against these Welshmen, whom he calleth the Romans; and that he was taken in the battle, and sold as a thrall in one of their garths; and howbeit, it was not their master-garth, yet there he learned of their customs: and sore was the lesson! Hard was his life amongst them, for their thralls be not so well entreated as their draught-beasts, so many do they take in battle; for they are a mighty folk; and these thralls and those aforesaid unhappy freemen do all tilling and herding and all deeds of craftsmanship: and above these are men whom they call masters and lords who do nought, nay not so much as smithy their own edge-weapons, but linger out their days in their dwellings and out of their dwellings, lying about in the sun or the hall-cinders, like cur-dogs who have fallen away from kind.

"So this man made a shift to flee away from out of that garth, since it was not far from the great river; and being a valiant man, and young and mighty of body, he escaped all perils and came to us through the Mirkwood. But we saw that he was no liar, and had been very evilly handled, for upon his body was the mark of many a stripe, and of the shackles that had been soldered on to his limbs; also it was more than one of these accursed people whom he had slain when he fled. So he became our guest and we loved him, and he dwelt among us and yet dwelleth, for we have taken him into our House. But yesterday he was sick and might not ride with us; but may be he will follow on and catch up with us in a day or two. And if he come not, then will I bring him over to the Wolfings when the battle is done."

Then laughed the Beaming man, and spake:

"How then if yecome not back, nor Wolfkettle, nor the Welsh Guest, nor I myself? Meseemeth no one of these Southland Cities shall we behold, and no more of the Southlanders than their war-array."

"These are evil words," said Wolfkettle, "though such an outcome must be thought on. But why deemest thou this?"

Said the Beaming: "There is no Hall-Sun sitting under our Roof at home to tell true tales concerning the Kindred every day. Yet forsooth from time to time is a word said in our Folk-hall for good or for evil; and who can choose but hearken thereto? And yestereve was a woeful word spoken, and that by a man-child of ten winters."

Said the Elking: "Now that thou hast told us thus much, thou must tell us more, yea, all the word which was spoken; else belike we shall deem of it as worse than it was."

Said the Beaming: "Thus it was; this little lad brake out weeping yestereve, when the Hall was full and feasting; and he wailed, and roared out, as children do, and would not be pacified, and when he was asked why he made that to do, he said: 'Well away! Raven hath promised to make me a clay horse and to bake it in the kiln with the pots next week; and now he goeth to the war, and he shall never come back, and never shall my horse be made.' Thereat we all laughed as ye may well deem. But the lad made a sour countenance on us and said, 'Why do ye laugh? look yonder, what see ye?' 'Nay,' said one, 'nought but the Feast-hall wall and the hangings of the High-tide thereon.' Then said the lad sobbing: 'Ye see ill: further afield see I: I see a little plain, on a hill top, and fells beyond it far bigger than our speech-hill: and there on the plain lieth Raven as white as parchment; and none hath such hue save the dead.' Then said Raven, (and he was a young man, and was standing thereby): 'And well is that, swain, to die in harness! Yet hold up thine heart; here is Gunbert who shall come back and bake thine horse for thee.' 'Nay, never more,' quoth the child, 'For I see his pale head lying at Raven's feet; but his body with the green gold-broidered kirtle I see not.' Then was the laughter stilled, and man after man drew near to the child, and questioned him, and asked, 'dost thou see me?' 'dost thou see me?' And he failed to see but few of those that asked him. Therefore now meseemeth that not many of us shall see the cities of the South, and those few belike shall look on their own shackles therewithal."

"Nay," said Harandi, "What is all this? heard ye ever of a

company of fighting men that fared afield, and found the foe, and came back home leaving none behind them?"

Said the Beaming: "Yet seldom have I heard a child foretell the death of warriors. I tell thee that hadst thou been there, thou wouldst have thought of it as if the world were coming to an end."

"Well," said Wolfkettle, "let it be as it may! Yet at least I will not be led away from the field by the foemen. Oft may a man be hindered of victory, but never of death if he willet it."

Therewith he handled a knife that hung about his neck, and went on to say: "But indeed, I do much marvel that no word came into the mouth of the Hall-Sun yestereven or this morning, but such as any woman of the kindred might say."

Therewith fell their talk awhile, and as they rode they came to where the wood drew nigher to the river, and thus the Mid-mark had an end; for there was no House had a dwelling in the Mid-mark higher up the water than the Elkings, save one only, not right great, who mostly fared to war along with the Elkings: and this was the Oselings, whose banner bore the image of the Woodousel, the black bird with the yellow neb; and they had just fallen into the company of the greater House.

So now Mid-mark was over and past, and the serried trees of the wood came down like a wall but a little way from the lip of the water; and scattered trees, mostly quicken-trees, grew here and there on the very water side. But Mirkwood-water ran deep, swift and narrow between high clean-cloven banks, so that none could dream of fording, and not so many of swimming its dark green dangerous waters. And the day wore on towards evening and the glory of the western sky was unseen because of the wall of high trees. And still the host made on, and because of the narrowness of the space between river and wood it was strung out longer and looked a very great company of men. And moreover the men of the eastern-lying part of Mid-mark were now marching thick and close on the other side of the river but a little way from the Wolfings and their fellows; for nothing but the narrow river sundered them.

So night fell, and the stars shone, and the moon rose, and yet the Wolfings and their fellows stayed not, since they wotted that behind them followed a many of the men of the Mark, both the

Mid and the Nether, and they would by no means hinder their march.

So wended the Markmen between wood and stream on either side of Mirkwood-water, till now at last the night grew deep and the moon set, and it was hard on midnight, and they had kindled many torches to light them on either side of the water. So whereas they had come to a place where the trees gave back somewhat from the river, which was well-grassed for their horses and neat, and was called Baitmead, the companies on the western side made stay there till morning. And they drew the wains right up to the thick of the wood, and all men turned aside into the mead from the beaten road, so that those who were following after might hold on their way if so they would. There then they appointed watchers of the night, while the rest of them lay upon the sward by the side of the trees, and slept through the short summer night.

The tale tells not that any man dreamed of the fight to come in such wise that there was much to tell of his dream on the morrow; many dreamed of no fight or faring to war, but of matters little, and often laughable, mere mingled memories of bygone time that had no waking wits to marshal them.

But that man of the Beamings dreamed that he was at home watching a potter, a man of the thralls of the House, working at his wheel, and fashioning bowls and ewers: and he had a mind to take of his clay and fashion a horse for the lad that had bemoaned the promise of his toy. And he tried long and failed to fashion anything; for the clay fell to pieces in his hands; till at last it held together and grew suddenly, not into an image of a horse, but of the Great Yule Boar, the similitude of the Holy Beast of Frey. So he laughed in his sleep and was glad, and leaped up and drew his sword with his clay-stained hands that he might wave it over the Earth Boar, and swear a great oath of a doughty deed. And there-with he found himself standing on his feet indeed, just awakened in the cold dawn, and holding by his right hand to an ash-sapling that grew beside him. So he laughed again, and laid him down, and leaned back and slept his sleep out till the sun and the voices of his fellows stirring awakened him.

CHAPTER VII. THEY GATHER TO THE FOLK-MOTE.

WHEN it was the morning, all the host of the Markmen was astir on either side of the water, and when they had broken their fast, they got speedily into array, and were presently on the road again; and the host was now strung out longer yet, for the space between water and wood once more diminished till at last it was no wider than ten men might go abreast, and looking ahead it was as if the wild-wood swallowed up both river and road.

But the fighting-men hastened on merrily with their hearts raised high, since they knew that they would soon be falling in with more of their people, and the coming fight was growing a clearer picture to their eyes; so from side to side of the river they shouted out the cries of their Houses, or friend called to friend across the eddies of Mirkwood-water, and there was game and glee enough.

So they fared till the wood gave way before them, and lo, the beginning of another plain, somewhat like the Mid-mark. There also the water widened out before them, and there were eyots in it with stony shores crowned with willow or with alder, and aspens rising from the midst of them.

But as for the plain, it was thus much different from Mid-mark, that the wood which begirt it rose on the south into low hills, and away beyond them were other hills blue in the distance, for the most bare of wood, and not right high, the pastures of the wild-bull and the bison, whereas now dwelt a folk somewhat scattered and feeble; hunters and herdsmen, with little tillage about their abodes, a folk akin to the Markmen and allied to them. They had come into those parts later than the Markmen, as the old tales told; which said moreover that in days gone by a folk dwelt among those hills who were alien from the Goths, and great foes to the Markmen; and how that on a time they came down from their hills with a great host, together with new-comers of their own blood, and made their way through the wild-wood, and fell upon the Upper-mark; and how that there befell a fearful battle that endured for three days; and the first day the Aliens worsted the Markmen, who were but a few, since they were they

of the Upper-mark only. So the Aliens burned their houses and slew their old men, and drave off many of their women and children; and the remnant of the men of the Upper-mark with all that they had, which was now but little, took refuge in an island of Mirkwood-water, where they fenced themselves as well as they could for that night; for they expected the succour of their kindred of the Mid-mark and the Nether-mark, unto whom they had sped the war-arrow when they first had tidings of the onset of the Aliens.

So at the sun-rising they sacrificed to the Gods twenty chieftains of the Aliens whom they had taken, and therewithal a maiden of their own kindred, the daughter of their war-duke, that she might lead that mighty company to the House of the Gods; and thereto was she nothing loth, but went right willingly.

There then they awaited the onset. But the men of Mid-mark came up in the morning, when the battle was but just joined, and fell on so fiercely that the Aliens gave back, and then they of the Upper-mark stormed out of their eyot, and fell on over the ford, and fought till the water ran red with their blood, and the blood of the foemen. So the Aliens gave back before the onset of the Markmen all over the meads; but when they came to the hillocks and the tofts of the half-burned habitations, and the wood was on their flank, they made a stand again, and once more the battle waxed hot, for they were very many, and had many bow-men: there fell the War-duke of the Markmen, whose daughter had been offered up for victory, and his name was Agni, so that the tofts where he fell have since been called Agni's Tofts. So that day they fought all over the plain, and a great many died, both of the Aliens and the Markmen, and though these last were victorious, yet when the sun went down there still were the Aliens abiding in the Upper-mark, fenced by their wain-burg, beaten, and much diminished in number, but still a host of men: while of the Markmen many had fallen, and many more were hurt, because the Aliens were good bowmen.

But on the morrow again, as the old tale told, came up the men of the Nether-mark fresh and unwounded; and so the battle began again on the southern limit of the Upper-mark where the Aliens had made their wain-burg. But not long did it endure;

for the Markmen fell on so fiercely, that they stormed over the wain-burg, and slew all before them, and there was a very great slaughter of the Aliens; so great, tells the old tale, that never again durst they meet the Markmen in war.

Thus went forth the host of the Markmen, faring along both sides of the water into the Upper-mark; and on the west side, where went the Wolfings, the ground now rose by a long slope into a low hill, and when they came unto the brow thereof, they beheld before them the whole plain of the Upper-Mark, and the dwellings of the kindred therein all girdled about by the wild-wood; and beyond, the blue hills of the herdsmen, and beyond them still, a long way aloof, lying like a white cloud on the verge of the heavens, the snowy tops of the great mountains. And as they looked down on to the plain they saw it embroidered, as it were, round about the habitations which lay within ken by crowds of many people, and the banners of the kindreds and the arms of men; and many a place they saw named after the ancient battle and that great slaughter of the Aliens.

On their left hand lay the river, and as it now fairly entered with them into the Upper-mark, it spread out into wide rippling shallows beset with yet more sandy eyots, amongst which was one much greater, rising amidmost into a low hill, grassy and bare of tree or bush; and this was the island whereon the Markmen stood on the first day of the Great Battle, and it was now called the Island of the Gods.

Thereby was the ford, which was firm and good and changed little from year to year, so that all Markmen knew it well and it was called Battleford: thereover now crossed all the eastern companies, footmen and horsemen, freemen and thralls, wains and banners, with shouting and laughter, and the noise of horns and the lowing of neat, till all that plain's end was flooded with the host of the Markmen.

But when the eastern-abiders had crossed, they made no stay, but went duly ordered about their banners, winding on toward the first of the abodes on the western side of the water; because it was but a little way south-west of this that the Thing-stead of the Upper-mark lay; and the whole Folk was summoned thither when war threatened from the South, just as it was called to the Thing-

stead of the Nether-mark, when the threat of war came from the North. But the western companies stayed on the brow of that low hill till all the eastern men were over the river, and on their way to the Thing-stead, and then they moved on.

So came the Wolfings and their fellows up to the dwellings of the northernmost kindred, who were called the Daylings, and bore on their banner the image of the rising sun. Thereabout was the Mark somewhat more hilly and broken than in the Mid-mark, so that the Great Roof of the Daylings, which was a very big house, stood on a hillock whose sides had been cleft down sheer on all sides save one (which was left as a bridge) by the labour of men, and it was a very defensible place.

Thereon were now gathered round about the Roof all the stay-at-homes of the kindred, who greeted with joyous cries the men-at-arms as they passed. Albeit one very old man, who sat in a chair near to the edge of the sheer hill looking on the war array, when he saw the Wolfing banner draw near, stood up to gaze on it, and then shook his head sadly, and sank back again into his chair, and covered his face with his hands: and when the folk saw that, a silence bred of the coldness of fear fell on them, for that elder was deemed a foreseeing man.

But as those three fellows, of whose talk of yesterday the tale has told, drew near and beheld what the old carle did (for they were riding together this day also) the Beaming man laid his hand on Wolfkettle's rein and said:

"Lo you, neighbour, if thy Vala hath seen nought, yet hath this old man seen somewhat, and that somewhat even as the little lad saw it. Many a mother's son shall fall before the Welshmen."

But Wolfkettle shook his rein free, and his face reddened as of one who is angry, yet he kept silence, while the Elking said:

"Let be, Toti! for he that lives shall tell the tale to the fore-seers, and shall make them wiser than they are to-day."

Then laughed Toti, as one who would not be thought to be too heedful of the morrow. But Wolfkettle brake out into speech and rhyme, and said:

"O warriors, the Wolfing kindred shall live or it shall die;
And alive it shall be as the oak-tree when the summer storm goes by;

But dead it shall be as its bole, that they hew for the corner-post
Of some fair and mighty folk-hall, and the roof of a war-fain host.”

So therewith they rode their ways past the abode of the Daylings.

Straight to the wood went all the host, and so into it by a wide way cleft through the thicket, and in some thirty minutes they came thereby into a great wood-lawn cleared amidst of it by the work of men's hands. There already was much of the host gathered, sitting or standing in a great ring round about a space bare of men, where amidst rose a great mound raised by men's hands and wrought into steps to be the sitting-places of the chosen elders and chief men of the kindred; and atop the mound was flat and smooth save for a turf bench or seat that went athwart it whereon ten men might sit.

All the wains save the banner-wains had been left behind at the Dayling abode, nor was any beast there save the holy beasts who drew the banner-wains and twenty white horses, that stood wreathed about with flowers within the ring of warriors, and these were for the burnt offering to be given to the Gods for a happy day of battle. Even the war-horses of the host they must leave in the wood without the wood-lawn, and all men were afoot who were there.

For this was the Thing-stead of the Upper-mark, and the holiest place of the Markmen, and no beast, either neat, sheep, or horse might pasture there, but was straightway slain and burned if he wandered there; nor might any man eat therein save at the holy feasts when offerings were made to the Gods.

So the Wolfings took their place there in the ring of men with the Elkings on their right hand and the Beamings on their left. And in the midst of the Wolfing array stood Thiodolf clad in the dwarf-wrought hauberk: but his head was bare; for he had sworn over the Cup of Renown that he would fight unhelmed throughout all that trouble, and would bear no shield in any battle thereof however fierce the onset might be.

Short, and curling close to his head was his black hair, a little grizzled, so that it looked like rings of hard dark iron: his fore-

head was high and smooth, his lips full and red, his eyes steady and wide-open, and all his face joyous with the thought of the fame of his deeds, and the coming battle with a foeman whom the Markmen knew not yet.

He was tall and wide-shouldered, but so exceeding well fashioned of all his limbs and body that he looked no huge man. He was a man well beloved of women, and children would mostly run to him gladly and play with him. A most fell warrior was he, whose deeds no man of the Mark could equal, but blithe of speech even when he was sorrowful of mood, a man that knew not bitterness of heart: and for all his exceeding might and valiancy, he was proud and high to no man; so that the very thralls loved him.

He was not abounding in words in the field; nor did he use much the custom of those days in reviling and defying with words the foe that was to be smitten with swords.

There were those who had seen him in the field for the first time who deemed him slack at the work: for he would not always press on with the foremost, but would hold him a little aback, and while the battle was young he forebore to smite, and would do nothing but help a kinsman who was hard pressed, or succour the wounded. So that if men were dealing with no very hard matter, and their hearts were high and overweening, he would come home at whiles with unbloodied blade. But no man blamed him save those who knew him not: for his intent was that the younger men should win themselves fame, and so raise their courage, and become high-hearted and stout.

But when the stour was hard, and the battle was broken, and the hearts of men began to fail them, and doubt fell upon the Markmen, then was he another man to see: wise, but swift and dangerous, rushing on as if shot out by some mighty engine: heedful of all, on either side and in front; running hither and thither as the fight failed and the fire of battle faltered; his sword so swift and deadly that it was as if he wielded the very lightening of the heavens: for with the sword it was ever his wont to fight.

But it must be said that when the foemen turned their backs, and the chase began, then Thiodolf would nowise withhold his might as in the early battle, but ever led the chase, and smote on

the right hand and on the left, sparing none, and crying out to the men of the kindred not to weary in their work, but to fulfil all the hours of their day.

For thuswise would he say and this was a word of his:

“Let us rest to-morrow, fellows, since to-day we have fought amain! Let not these men we have smitten come aback on our hands again, And say ‘Ye Wolfing warriors, ye have done your work but ill, Fall to now and do it again, like the craftsman who learneth his skill.’”

Such then was Thiodolf, and ever was he the chosen leader of the Wolfings, and often the War-duke of the whole Folk.

By his side stood the other chosen leader, whose name was Heriulf; a man well stricken in years, but very mighty and valiant; wise in war and well renowned; of few words save in battle, and therein a singer of songs, a laughter, a joyous man, a merry companion. He was a much bigger man than Thiodolf; and indeed so huge was his stature, that he seemed to be of the kindred of the Mountain Giants; and his bodily might went with his stature, so that no one man might deal with him body to body. His face was big; his cheek-bones high; his nose like an eagle’s neb, his mouth wide, his chin square and big; his eyes light-grey and fierce under shaggy eyebrows: his hair white and long.

Such were his raiment and weapons, that he wore a coat of fence of dark iron scales sewn on to horse-hide, and a dark iron helm fashioned above his brow into the similitude of the Wolf’s head with gaping jaws; and this he had wrought for himself with his own hands, for he was a good smith. A round buckler he bore and a huge twibill, which no man of the kindred could well wield save himself; and it was done both blade and shaft with knots and runes in gold; and he loved that twibill well, and called it the Wolf’s Sister.

There then stood Heriulf, looking no less than one of the forefathers of the kindred come back again to the battle of the Wolfings.

He was well-beloved for his wondrous might, and he was no hard man, though so fell a warrior, and though of few words, as afore-said, was a blithe companion to old and young. In numberless

battles had he fought, and men deemed it a wonder that Odin had not taken to him a man so much after his own heart; and they said it was neighbourly done of the Father of the Slain to forbear his company so long, and showed how well he loved the Wolfing House.

For a good while yet came other bands of Markmen into the Thing-stead; but at last there was an end of their coming. Then the ring of men opened, and ten warriors of the Daylings made their way through it, and one of them, the oldest, bore in his hand the War-horn of the Daylings; for this kindred had charge of the Thing-stead, and of all appertaining to it. So while his nine fellows stood round about the Speech-Hill, the old warrior clomb up to the topmost of it, and blew a blast on the horn. Thereon they who were sitting rose up, and they who were talking each to each held their peace, and the whole ring drew nigher to the hill, so that there was a clear space behind them 'twixt them and the wood, and a space before them between them and the hill, wherein were those nine warriors, and the horses for the burnt-offering, and the altar of the Gods; and now were all well within ear-shot of a man speaking amidst the silence in a clear voice.

But there were gathered of the Markmen to that place some four thousand men, all chosen warriors and doughty men; and of the thralls and aliens dwelling with them they were leading two thousand. But not all of the freemen of the Upper-mark could be at the Thing; for needs must there be some guard to the passes of the wood toward the south and the hills of the herdsmen, whereas it was no wise impassable to a wisely led host: so five hundred men, what of freemen, what of thralls, abode there to guard the wild-wood; and these looked to have some helping from the hillmen.

Now came an ancient warrior into the space between the men and the wild-wood holding in his hand a kindled torch; and first he faced due south by the sun, then, turning, he slowly paced the whole circle going from east to west, and so on till he had reached the place he started from: then he dashed the torch to the ground and quenched the fire, and so went his ways to his own company again.

Then the old Dayling warrior on the mound-top drew his

sword, and waved it flashing in the sun toward the four quarters of the heavens; and thereafter blew again a blast on the War-horn. Then fell utter silence on the whole assembly, and the wood was still around them, save here and there the stamping of a war-horse or the sound of his tugging at the woodland grass; for there was little resort of birds to the depths of the thicket, and the summer morning was windless.

CHAPTER VIII. THE FOLK-MOTE OF THE MARKMEN.

SO the Dayling warrior lifted up his voice and said:
 “O kindreds of the Markmen, hearken the words I say;
 For no chancehap assembly is gathered here to-day.
 The fire hath gone around us in the hands of our very kin,
 And twice the horn hath sounded, and the Thing is hallowed in.
 Will ye hear or forbear to hearken the tale there is to tell?
 There are many mouths to tell it, and a many know it well.
 And the tale is this, that the foemen against our kindreds fare
 Who eat the meadows desert, and burn the desert bare.”

Then sat he down on the turf seat; but there arose a murmur in the assembly as of men eager to hearken; and without more ado came a man out of a company of the Upper-mark, and clomb up to the top of the Speech-Hill, and spoke in a loud voice:

“I am Bork, a man of the Geirings of the Upper-mark: two days ago I and five others were in the wild-wood a-hunting, and we wended through the thicket, and came into the land of the hill-folk; and after we had gone a while we came to a long dale with a brook running through it, and yew-trees scattered about it and a hazel copse at one end; and by the copse was a band of men who had women and children with them, and a few neat, and fewer horses; but sheep were feeding up and down the dale; and they had made them booths of turf and boughs, and were making ready their cooking-fires, for it was evening. So when they saw us, they ran to their arms, but we cried out to them in the tongue of the Goths and bade them peace. Then they came up the bent to us and spake to us in the Gothic tongue, albeit a little diversely from

us; and when we had told them what and whence we were, they were glad of us, and bade us to them, and we went, and they entreated us kindly, and made us such cheer as they might, and gave us mutton to eat, and we gave them venison of the wild-wood which we had taken, and we abode with them there that night.

“But they told us that they were a house of the folk of the herdsmen, and that there was war in the land, and that the people thereof were fleeing before the cruelty of a host of warriors, men of a mighty folk, such as the earth hath not heard of, who dwell in great cities far to the south; and how that this host had crossed the mountains, and the Great Water that runneth from them, and had fallen upon their kindred, and overcome their fighting-men, and burned their dwellings, slain their elders, and driven their neat and their sheep, yea, and their women and children in no better wise than their neat and sheep.

“And they said that they had fled away thus far from their old habitations, which were a long way to the south, and were now at point to build them dwellings there in that Dale of the Hazels, and to trust to it that these Welshmen, whom they called Romans, would not follow so far, and that if they did, they might betake them to the wild-wood, and let the thicket cover them, they being so nigh to it.

“Thus they told us; wherefore we sent back one of our fellowship, Birsti of the Geirings, to tell the tale; and one of the herdsmen folk went with him, but we ourselves went onward to hear more of these Romans; for the folk when we asked them, said that they had been in no battle against them, but had fled away for fear of their rumour only. Therefore we went on, and a young man of this kindred, who named themselves the Hrutings of the Fell-folk, went along with us. But the others were sore afeard, for all they had weapons.

“So as we went up the land we found they had told us the very sooth, and we met divers Houses, and bands, and broken men, who were fleeing from this trouble, and many of them poor and in misery, having lost their flocks and herds as well as their roofs; and this last be but little loss to them, as their dwellings are but poor, and for the most part they have no tillage. Now of these men, we met not a few who had been in battle with the Roman

host, and much they told us of their might not to be dealt with, and their mishandling of those whom they took, both men and women; and at the last we heard true tidings how they had raised them a garth, and made a stronghold in the midst of the land, as men who meant abiding there, so that neither might the winter drive them aback, and that they might be succoured by their people on the other side of the Great River; to which end they have made other garths, though not so great, on the road to that water, and all these well and wisely warded by tried men. For as to the Folks on the other side of the Water, all these lie under their hand already, what by fraud what by force, and their warriors go with them to the battle and help them; of whom we met bands now and again, and fought with them, and took men of them, who told us all this and much more, over long to tell of here."

He paused and turned about to look on the mighty assembly, and his ears drank in the long murmur that followed his speaking, and when it had died out he spake again, but in rhyme:

“Lo thus much of my tidings! But this too it behoveth to tell,
That these masterful men of the cities of the Markmen know full well:
And they wot of the well-grassed meadows, and the acres of the Mark,
And our life amidst of the wild-wood like a candle in the dark;
And they know of our young men’s valour and our women’s loveliness,
And our tree would they spoil with destruction if its fruit they may never
possess.

For their lust is without a limit, and nought may satiate
Their ravening maw; and their hunger if ye check it turneth to hate,
And the blood-fever burns in their bosoms, and torment and anguish and
woe

O’er the wide field ploughed by the sword-blade for the coming years they
sow;

And ruth is a thing forgotten and all hopes they trample down;

And whatso thing is steadfast, whatso of good renown,

Whatso is fair and lovely, whatso is ancient sooth

In the bloody marl shall they mingle as they laugh for lack of ruth.

Lo the curse of the world cometh hither; for the men that we took in the
land

Said thus, that their host is gathering with many an ordered band

To fall on the wild-wood passes and flood the lovely Mark,
 As the river over the meadows upriseth in the dark.
 Look to it, O ye kindred! availeth now no word
 But the voice of the clashing of iron, and the sword-blade on the sword.”

Therewith he made an end, and deeper and longer was the murmur of the host of freemen, amidst which Bork gat him down from the Speech-Hill, his weapons clattering about him, and mingled with the men of his kindred.

Then came forth a man of the kin of the Shieldings of the Upper-mark, and clomb the mound; and he spake in rhyme from beginning to end; for he was a minstrel of renown:

“Lo I am a man of the Shieldings and Geirmund is my name;
 A half-moon back from the wild-wood out into the hills I came,
 And I went alone in my war-gear; for we have affinity
 With the Hundings of the Fell-folk, and with them I fain would be;
 For I loved a maid of their kindred. Now their dwelling was not far
 From the outermost bounds of the Fell-folk, and bold in the battle they
 are,
 And have met a many people, and held their own abode.
 Gay then was the heart within me, as over the hills I rode
 And thought of the mirth of to-morrow and the sweet-mouthed Hunding
 maid,
 And their old men wise and merry and their young men unafraid,
 And the hall-gee of the Hundings and the healths o’er the guesting cup.
 But as I rode the valley, I saw a smoke go up
 O’er the crest of the last of the grass-hills ’twixt me and the Hunding roof,
 And that smoke was black and heavy: so a while I bided aloof,
 And drew my girths the tighter, and looked to the arms I bore
 And handled my spear for the casting; for my heart misgave me sore,
 For nought was that pillar of smoke like the guest-fain cooking-fire.
 I lingered in thought for a minute, then turned me to ride up higher,
 And as a man most wary up over the bent I rode,
 And nigh hid peered o’er the hill-crest adown on the Hunding abode;
 And forsooth ’twas the fire wavering all o’er the roof of old,
 And all in the garth and about it lay the bodies of the bold;
 And bound to a rope amidmost were the women fair and young,

And youths and little children, like the fish on a withy strung
 As they lie on the grass for the angler before the beginning of night.
 Then the rush of the wrath within me for a while nigh blinded my sight;
 Yet about the cowering war-thralls, short dark-faced men I saw,
 Men clad in iron armour, this way and that way draw,
 As warriors after the battle are ever wont to do.
 Then I knew them for the foemen and their deeds to be I knew,
 And I gathered the reins together to ride down the hill amain,
 To die with a good stroke stricken and slay ere I was slain.
 When lo, on the bent before me rose the head of a brown-faced man,
 Well helmed and iron-shielded, who some Welsh speech began
 And a short sword brandished against me; then my sight cleared and I saw
 Five others armed in likewise up hill and toward me draw,
 And I shook the spear and sped it and clattering on his shield
 He fell and rolled o'er smitten toward the garth and the Fell-folk's field.

"But my heart changed with his falling and the speeding of my stroke,
 And I turned my horse; for within me the love of life awoke,
 And I spurred, nor heeded the hill-side, but o'er rough and smooth I rode
 Till I heard no chase behind me; then I drew rein and abode.
 And down in a dell was I gotten with a thorn-brake in its throat,
 And heard but the plover's whistle and the blackbird's broken note
 Mid the thorns; when lo! from a thorn-twigg away the blackbird swept,
 And out from the brake and towards me a naked man there crept,
 And straight I rode up towards him, and knew his face for one
 I had seen in the hall of the Hundings ere its happy days were done.
 I asked him his tale, but he bade me forthright to bear him away;
 So I took him up behind me, and we rode till late in the day,
 Toward the cover of the wild-wood, and as swiftly as we might.
 But when yet aloof was the thicket and it now was moonless night,
 We stayed perforce for a little, and he told me all the tale:
 How the Aliens came against them, and they fought without avail
 Till the Roof o'er their heads was burning and they burst forth on the foe,
 And were hewn down there together; nor yet was the slaughter slow.
 But some they saved for thralldom, yea, e'en of the fighting men,
 Or to quell them with pains; so they stripped them; and this man espying
 just then
 Some chance, I mind not whatwise, from the garth fled out and away.

“Now many a thing noteworthy of these aliens did he say,
But this I bid you hearken, lest I wear the time for nought,
That still upon the Markmen and the Mark they set their thought;
For they questioned this man and others through a go-between in words
Of us, and our lands and our chattels, and the number of our swords;
Of the way and the wild-wood passes and the winter and his ways.
Now look to see them shortly; for worn are fifteen days.
Since in the garth of the Hundings I saw them dight for war,
And a hardy folk and ready and a swift-foot host they are.”

Therewith Geirmund went down clattering from the Hill and stood with his company. But a man came forth from the other side of the ring, and clomb the Hill: he was a red-haired man, rather big, clad in a skin coat, and bearing a bow in his hand and a quiver of arrows at his back, and a little axe hung by his side. He said:

“I dwell in the House of the Hrossings of the Mid-mark, and I am now made a man of the kindred: howbeit I was not born into it; for I am the son of a fair and mighty woman of a folk of the Kymry, who was taken in war while she went big with me; I am called Fox the Red.

“These Romans have I seen, and have not died: so hearken! for my tale shall be short for what there is in it.

“I am, as many know, a hunter of Mirkwood, and I know all its ways and the passes through the thicket somewhat better than most.

“A moon ago I fared afoot from Mid-mark through Upper-mark into the thicket of the south, and through it into the heath country; and I went over a neck and came in the early dawn into a little dale when somewhat of mist still hung over it. At the dale’s end I saw a man lying asleep on the grass under a quicken-tree, and his shield and sword hanging over his head to a bough thereof, and his horse feeding hopped higher up the dale.

“I crept up softly to him with a shaft nocked on the string, but when I drew near I saw him to be of the sons of the Goths. So I doubted nothing, but laid down my bow, and stood upright, and went to him and roused him, and he leapt up, and was wroth.

“I said to him, ‘Wilt thou be wroth with a brother of the kindred meeting him in unpeopled parts?’

“But he reached out for his weapons; but ere he could handle them I ran in on him so that he gat not his sword, and had scant time to smite at me with a knife which he drew from his waist.

“I gave way before him for he was a very big man, and he rushed past me, and I dealt him a blow on the side of the head with my little axe which is called the War-babe, and gave him a great wound: and he fell on the grass, and as it happened that was his bane.

“I was sorry that I had slain him, since he was a man of the Goths: albeit otherwise he had slain me, for he was very wroth and dazed with slumber.

“He died not for a while; and he bade me fetch him water; and there was a well hard by on the other side of the tree; so I fetched it him in a great shell that I carry, and he drank. I would have sung the blood-staunching song over him, for I know it well. But he said, ‘It availeth nought: I have enough: what man art thou?’

“I said, ‘I am a fosterling of the Hrossings, and my mother was taken in war: my name is Fox.’

“Said he: ‘O Fox, I have my due at thy hands, for I am a Markman of the Elkings, but a guest of the Burgundians beyond the Great River; and the Romans are their masters and they do their bidding: even so did I who was but their guest: and I a Markman to fight against the Markmen, and all for fear and for gold! And thou an alien-born hast slain their traitor and their dastard! This is my due. Give me to drink again.’

“So did I; and he said: ‘Wilt thou do an errand for me to thine own house?’ ‘Yea,’ said I.

“Said he, ‘I am a messenger to the garth of the Romans, that I may tell the road to the Mark, and lead them through the thicket; and other guides are coming after me: but not yet for three days or four. So till they come there will be no man in the Roman garth to know thee that thou art not even I myself. If thou art doughty, strip me when I am dead and do my raiment on thee, and take this ring from my neck, for that is my token, and when they ask thee for a word say, *no limit*; for that is the token-word. Go south-east over the dales keeping Broadshield-fell square with thy right hand, and let thy wisdom, O Fox, lead thee to the Garth of the Romans, and so back to thy kindred with all tidings thou hast

gathered—for indeed they come—a many of them. Give me to drink.’

“So he drank again, and said, ‘The bearer of this token is called Hrosstyr of the River Goths. He hath that name among dastards. Thou shalt lay a turf upon my head. Let my death pay for my life.’

“Therewith he fell back and died. So I did as he bade me and took his gear, worth six kine, and did it on me; I laid turf upon him in that dale, and hid my bow and my gear in a blackthorn brake hard by, and then took his horse and rode away.

“Day and night I rode till I came to the garth of the Romans; there I gave myself up to their watchers, and they brought me to their Duke, a grim man and hard. He said in a terrible voice, ‘Thy name?’ I said, ‘Hrosstyr of the River Goths.’ He said, ‘*What lums!*?’ I answered, ‘*No lums!*.’ ‘The token!’ said he, and held out his hand. I gave him the ring. ‘Thou art the man,’ said he.

“I thought in my heart, ‘thou liest, lord,’ and my heart danced for joy.

“Then he fell to asking me questions a many, and I answered every one glibly enough, and told him what I would, but no word of truth save for his hurt, and my soul laughed within me at my lies; thought I, the others, the traitors, shall come, and they shall tell him the truth, and he will not trow it, or at the worst he will doubt them. But me he doubted nothing, else had he called in the tormentors to have the truth of me by pains; as I well saw afterwards, when they questioned with torments a man and a woman of the hill-folk whom they had brought in captive.

“I went from him and went all about that garth espying everything, fearing nothing; albeit there were divers woful captives of the Goths, who cursed me for a dastard, when they saw by my attire that I was of their blood.

“I abode there three days, and learned all that I might of the garth and the host of them, and the fourth day in the morning I went out as if to hunt, and none hindered me, for they doubted me not.

“So I came my ways home to the Upper-mark, and was gusted with the Geirings. Will ye that I tell you somewhat of the ways of these Romans of the garth? The time presses, and my tale runneth longer than I would. What will ye?”

Then there arose a murmur, "Tell all, tell all." "Nay," said the Fox, "all I may not tell; so much did I behold there during the three days' stay; but this much it behoveth you to know: that these men have no other thought save to win the Mark and waste it, and slay the fighting men and the old carles, and enthrall such as they will, that is, all that be fair and young, and they long sorely for our women either to have or to sell.

"As for their garth, it is strongly walled about with a dyke newly dug; on the top thereof are they building a wall made of clay, and burned like pots into ashlar stones hard and red, and these are laid in lime.

"It is now the toil of the thralls of our blood whom they have taken, both men and women, to dig that clay and to work it, and bear it to kilns, and to have for reward scant meat and many stripes. For it is a grim folk, that laugheth to see others weep.

"Their men-at-arms are well dight and for the most part in one way: they are helmed with iron, and have iron on their breasts and reins, and bear long shields that cover them to the knees. They are girt with a sax and have a heavy casting-spear. They are dark-skinned and ugly of aspect, surly and of few words: they drink little, and eat not much.

"They have captains of tens and of hundreds over them, and that War-duke over all; he goeth to and fro with gold on his head and his breast, and commonly hath a cloak cast over him of the colour of the crane's-bill blossom.

"They have an altar in the midst of their burg, and thereon they sacrifice to their God, who is none other than their banner of war, which is an image of the ravening eagle with outspread wings; but yet another God they have, and look you! it is a wolf, as if they were of the kin of our brethren; a she-wolf and two man-children at her dugs; wonderful is this.

"I tell you that they are grim; and know it by this token: those captains of tens and of hundreds spare not to smite the warriors with staves even before all men, when all goeth not as they would; and yet, though they be free men, and mighty warriors, they endure it and smite not in turn. They are a most evil folk.

"As to their numbers, they of the burg are hard on three thou-

sand footmen of the best; and of horsemen five hundred, nowise good; and of bowmen and slingers six hundred or more: their bows weak; their slingers cunning beyond measure. And the talk is that when they come upon us they shall have with them some five hundred warriors of the Over River Goths, and others of their own folk."

Then he said:

"O men of the Mark, will ye meet them in the meadows and the field,
Or will ye flee before them and have the wood for a shield?
Or will ye wend to their war-burg with weapons cast away,
With your women and your children, a peace of them to pray?
So doing, not all shall perish; but most shall long to die
Ere in the garths of the Southland two moons have loitered by."

Then rose the rumour loud and angry mingled with the rattle of swords and the clash of spears on shields; but Fox said:

"Needs must ye follow one of these three ways. Nay, what say I? there are but two ways and not three; for if ye flee they shall follow you to the confines of the earth. Either these Welsh shall take all, and our lives to boot, or we shall hold to all that is ours, and live merrily. The sword doometh; and in three days it may be the courts shall be hallowed: small is the space between us."

Therewith he also got him down from the Hill, and joined his own house: and men said that he had spoken well and wisely. But there arose a noise of men talking together on these tidings; and amidst it an old warrior of the Nether-mark strode forth and up to the Hill-top. Gaunt and stark he was to look on; and all men knew him and he was well-beloved, so all held their peace as he said:

"I am Otter of the Laxings: now needeth but few words till the War-duke is chosen, and we get ready to wend our ways in arms. Here have ye heard three good men and true tell of our foes, and this last, Fox the Red, hath seen them and hath more to tell when we are on the way; nor is the way hard to find. It were scarce well to fall upon these men in their garth and war-burg; for hard is a wall to slay. Better it were to meet them in the Wild-

wood, which may well be a friend to us and a wall, but to them a net. O Agni of the Daylings, thou warder of the Thing-stead, bid men choose a War-duke if none gainsay it."

And without more words he clattered down the Hill, and went and stood with the Laxing band. But the old Dayling arose and blew the horn, and there was at once a great silence, amidst which he said:

"Children of Slains-father, doth the Folk go to the war?"

There was no voice but shouted "yea," and the white swords sprang aloft, and the westering sun swept along a half of them as they tossed to and fro, and the others showed dead-white and fireless against the dark wood.

Then again spake Agni:

"Will ye choose the War-duke now and once, or shall it be in a while, after others have spoken?"

And the voice of the Folk went up, "Choose! Choose!"

Said Agni: "Sayeth any aught against it?" But no voice of a gainsayer was heard, and Agni said:

"Children of Tyr, what man will ye have for a leader and a duke of war?"

Then a great shout sprang up from amidst the swords: "We will have Thiodolf; Thiodolf the Wolfing!"

Said Agni: "I hear no other name; are ye of one mind? hath any aught to say against it? If that be so, let him speak now, and not forbear to follow in the wheatfield of the spears. Speak, ye that will not follow Thiodolf!"

No voice gainsaid him: then said the Dayling: "Come forth thou War-duke of the Markmen! take up the gold ring from the horns of the altar, set it on thine arm and come up hither!"

Then came forth Thiodolf into the sun, and took up the gold ring from where it lay, and did it on his arm. And this was the ring of the leader of the folk whenso one should be chosen: it was ancient and daintily wrought, but not very heavy: so ancient it was that men said it had been wrought by the dwarfs.

So Thiodolf went up on to the Hill, and all men cried out on him for joy, for they knew his wisdom in war. Many wondered to see him unhelmed, but they had a deeming that he must have made oath to the Gods thereof and their hearts were glad of it. They

took note of the dwarf-wrought hauberck, and even from a good way off they could see what a treasure of smith's work it was, and they deemed it like enough that spells had been sung over it to make it sure against point and edge: for they knew that Thiodolf was well beloved of the Gods.

But when Thiodolf was on the Hill of Speech, he said:

“Men of the kindreds, I am your War-duke to-day; but it is oftenest the custom when ye go to war to choose you two dukes, and I would it were so now. No child's play is the work that lies before us; and if one leader chance to fall let there be another to take his place without stop or stay. Thou Agni of the Daylings, bid the Folk choose them another duke if so they will.”

Said Agni: “Good is this which our War-duke hath spoken; say then, men of the Mark, who shall stand with Thiodolf to lead you against the Aliens?”

Then was there a noise and a crying of names, and more than two names seemed to be cried out; but by far the greater part named either Otter of the Laxings, or Heriulf of the Wolfings. True it is that Otter was a very wise warrior, and well known to all the men of the Mark; yet so dear was Heriulf to them, that none would have named Otter, had it not been mostly their custom not to choose both War-dukes from one House.

Now spake Agni: “Children of Tyr, I hear you name more than one name: now let each man cry out clearly the name he nameth!”

So the Folk cried the names once more, but this time it was clear that none was named save Otter and Heriulf; so the Dayling was at point to speak again, but or ever a word left his lips, Heriulf the mighty, the ancient of days, stood forth: and when men saw that he would take up the word there was a great silence. So he spake:

“Hearken, children! I am old and war-wise; but my wisdom is the wisdom of the sword of the mighty warrior, that knoweth which way it should wend, and hath no thought of turning back till it lieth broken in the field. Such wisdom is good against Folks that we have met heretofore; as when we have fought with the Huns, who would sweep us away from the face of the earth, or with the Franks or the Burgundians, who would quell us into being

something worsen than they be. But here is a new foe, and new wisdom, and that right shifty, do we need to meet them. One wise duke have ye gotten, Thiodolf to wit; and he is young beside me and beside Otter of the Laxings. And now if ye must needs have an older man to stand beside him, (and that is not ill) take ye Otter; for old though his body be, the thought within him is keen and supple like the best of Welsh-wrought blades, and it liveth in the days that now are: whereas for me, meseemeth, my thoughts are in the days bygone. Yet look to it, that I shall not fail to lead as the sword of the valiant leadeth, or the shaft shot by the cunning archer. Choose ye Otter; I have spoken over long."

Then spoke Agni the Dayling, and laughed withal: "One man of the Folk hath spoken for Otter and against Heriulf—now let others speak if they will!"

So the cry came forth, "Otter let it be, we will have Otter!"

"Speaketh any against Otter?" said Agni. But there was no voice raised against him.

Then Agni said: "Come forth, Otter of the Laxings, and hold the ring with Thiodolf."

Then Otter went up on to the Hill and stood by Thiodolf, and they held the ring together; and then each thrust his hand and arm through the ring and clasped hands together, and stood thus awhile, and all the Folk shouted together.

Then spake Agni: "Now shall we hew the horses and give the gifts to the Gods."

Therewith he and the two War-dukes came down from the Hill; and stood before the altar; and the nine warriors of the Daylings stood forth with axes to hew the horses and with copper bowls wherein to catch the blood of them, and each hewed down his horse to the Gods, but the two War-dukes slew the tenth and fairest: and the blood was caught in the bowls, and Agni took a sprinkler and went round about the ring of men, and cast the blood of the Gods'-gifts over the Folk, as was the custom of those days.

Then they cut up the carcasses and burned on the altar the share of the Gods, and Agni and the War-dukes tasted thereof, and the rest they bore off to the Daylings' abode for the feast to be holden that night.

Then Otter and Thiodolf spake a part together for a while, and presently went up again on to the Speech-Hill, and Thiodolf said:

“O kindreds of the Markmen; to-morrow with the day
 We shall wend up Mirkwood-water to bar our foes the way;
 And there shall we make our wain-burg on the edges of the wood,
 Where in the days past ever at last the aliens stood,
 The Slaughter Tofts ye call it. There tidings shall we get
 If the curse of the world is awakened, and the serpent crawleth yet
 Amidst the Mirkwood thicket; and when the sooth we know,
 Then bearing battle with us through the thicket shall we go,
 The ancient Wood-wolf's children, and the People of the Shield,
 And the Spear-kin and the Horse-kin, while the others keep the field
 About the warded wain-burg; for not many need we there
 Where amidst of the thickets' tangle and the woodland net they fare,
 And the hearts of the aliens falter and they curse the fight ne'er done,
 And wonder who is fighting and which way is the sun.”

Thus he spoke; then Agni took up the war-horn again, and blew a blast, and then he cried out:

“Now sunder we the Folk-mote! and the feast is for to-night,
 And to-morrow the Wayfaring: But unnamed is the day of the fight;
 O warriors, look ye to it that not long we need abide
 'Twixt the hour of the word we have spoken, and our fair-fame's bloom-
 ing-tide!
 For then midst the toil and the turmoil shall we sow the seeds of peace,
 And the Kindreds' long endurance, and the Gothfolk's great increase.”

Then arose the last great shout, and soberly and in due order, kindred by kindred, they turned and departed from the Thingstead and went their way through the wood to the abode of the Daylings.

CHAPTER IX. THE ANCIENT MAN OF THE DAYLINGS.

THERE still hung the more part of the stay-at-homes round about the Roof. But on the plain beneath the tofts were all the wains of the host drawn up round about a square like the streets about a market-place; all these now had their tilts rigged over them, some white, some black, some red, some tawny of hue; and some, which were of the Beamings, green like the leafy tree.

The warriors of the host went down into this wain-town, which they had not fenced in any way, since they in no wise looked for any onset there; and there were their thralls dighting the feast for them, and a many of the Dayling kindred, both men and women, went with them; but some men did the Daylings bring into their Roof, for there was room for a good many besides their own folk. So they went over the Bridge of turf into the garth and into the Great Roof of the Daylings; and amongst these were the two War-dukes.

So when they came to the dais it was as fair all round about there as might well be; and there sat elders and ancient warriors to welcome the guests; and among them was the old carle who had sat on the edge of the burg to watch the faring of the host, and had shuddered back at the sight of the Wolfing Banner.

And when the old carle saw the guests, he fixed his eyes on Thiodolf, and presently came up and stood before him; and Thiodolf looked on the old man, and greeted him kindly and smiled on him; but the carle spake not till he had looked on him a while; and at last he fell a-trembling, and reached his hands out to Thiodolf's bare head, and handled his curls and caressed them, as a mother does with her son, even if he be a grizzled-haired man, when there is none by: and at last he said:

“How dear is the head of the mighty, and the apple of the tree
That blooms with the life of the people which is and yet shall be!
It is helmed with ancient wisdom, and the long remembered thought
That liveth when dead is the iron, and its very rust but nought.
Ah! were I but young as aforetime, I would fare to the battle-stead
And stand amidst of the spear-hail for the praise of the hand and the h

Then his hands left Thiodolf's head, and strayed down to his shoulders and his breast, and he felt the cold rings of the hauberk, and let his hands fall down to his side again; and the tears gushed out of his old eyes and again he spake:

“O house of the heart of the mighty, O breast of the battle-lord
Why art thou coldly hidden from the flickering flame of the sword?
I know thee not, nor see thee; thou art as the fells afar
Where the Fathers have their dwelling, and the halls of Godhome are:
The wind blows wild betwixt us, and the cloud-rack flies along,
And high aloft enfoldeth the dwelling of the strong;
They are, as of old they have been, but their hearths flame not for me;
And the kindness of their feast-halls mine eyes shall never see.”

Thiodolf's lips still smiled on the old man, but a shadow had come over his eyes and his brow; and the chief of the Daylings and their mighty guests stood by listening intently with the knit brows of anxious men; nor did any speak till the ancient man again betook him to words:

“I came to the house of the foeman when hunger made me a fool;
And the foeman said, ‘Thou art weary, lo, set thy foot on the stool;’
And I stretched out my feet,—and was shackled: and he spake with a
dastard's smile,
‘O guest, thine hands are heavy; now rest them for a while!’
So I stretched out my hands, and the hand-gyves lay cold on either wrist:
And the wood of the wolf had been better than that feast-hall, had I wist
That this was the ancient pitfall, and the long expected trap,
And that now for my heart's desire I had sold the world's goodhap.”

Therewith the ancient man turned slowly away from Thiodolf, and departed sadly to his own place. Thiodolf changed countenance but little, albeit those about him looked strangely on him, as though if they durst they would ask him what these words might be, and if he from his hidden knowledge might fit a meaning to them. For to many there was a word of warning in them, and to some an evil omen of the days soon to be; and scarce anyone heard those words but he had a misgiving in his heart, for the

ancient man was known to be foreseeing, and wild and strange his words seemed to them.

But Agni would make light of it, and he said : " Asmund the Old is of good will, and wise he is; but he hath great longings for the deeds of men, when he hath tidings of battle; for a great warrior and a red-hand hewer he hath been in times past; he loves the Kindred, and deems it ill if he may not fare afield with them; for the thought of dying in the straw is hateful to him."

"Yea," said another, "and moreover he hath seen sons whom he loved slain in battle; and when he seeth a warrior in his prime he becometh dear to him, and he feareth for him."

"Yet," said a third, "Asmund is foreseeing; and may be, Thiodolf, thou wilt wot of the drift of these words, and tell us thereof."

But Thiodolf spake nought of the matter, though in his heart he pondered it.

So the guests were led to table, and the feast began, within the hall and without it, and wide about the plain; and the Dayling maidens went in bands trimly decked out throughout all the host and served the warriors with meat and drink, and sang the overword to their lays, and smote the harp, and drew the bow over the fiddle till it laughed and wailed and chuckled, and were blithe and merry with all, and great was the glee on the eve of battle. And if Thiodolf's heart were overcast, his face showed it not, but he passed from hall to wain-burg and from wain-burg to hall again blithe and joyous with all men. And thereby he raised the hearts of men, and they deemed it good that they had gotten such a War-duke, meet to uphold all hearts of men both at the feast and in the fray.

CHAPTER X. THAT CARLINE COMETH TO THE ROOF OF THE WOLFINGS.

NOW it was three days after this that the women were gathering to the Women's Chamber of the Roof of the Wolfings a little before the afternoon changes into evening. The hearts of most were somewhat heavy, for the doubt wherewith they had watched the departure of the fighting-men still hung about them; nor had they any tidings from the host

(nor was it like that they should have). And as they were somewhat down-hearted, so it seemed by the aspect of all things that afternoon. It was not yet the evening, as is aforesaid, but the day was worn and worsened, and all things looked weary. The sky was a little clouded, but not much; yet was it murky down in the south-east, and there was a threat of storm in it, and in the air close round each man's head, and in the very waving of the leafy boughs. There was by this time little doing in field and fold (for the kine were milked), and the women were coming up from the acres and the meadow and over the open ground anigh the Roof; there was the grass worn and dusty, and the women that trod it, their feet were tanned and worn, and dusty also; skin-dry and weary they looked, with the sweat dried upon them; their girt-up gowns grey and lightless, their half-unbound hair blowing about them in the dry wind, which had in it no morning freshness, and no evening coolness.

It was a time when toil was well-nigh done, but had left its aching behind it; a time for folk to sleep and forget for a little while, till the low sun should make it evening, and make all things fair with his level rays; no time for anxious thoughts concerning deeds doing, wherein the anxious ones could do nought to help. Yet such thoughts those stay-at-homes needs must have in the hour of their toil scarce over, their rest and mirth not begun.

Slowly one by one the women went in by the Women's-door, and the Hall-Sun sat on a stone hard by, and watched them as they passed; and she looked keenly at all persons and all things. She had been working in the acres, and her hand was yet on the hoe she had been using, and but for her face her body was as of one resting after toil: her dark blue gown was ungirded, her dark hair loose and floating, the flowers that had wreathed it, now faded, lying strewn upon the grass before her: her feet bare for coolness' sake, her left hand lying loose and open upon her knee.

Yet though her body otherwise looked thus listless, in her face was no listlessness, nor rest: her eyes were alert and clear, shining like two stars in the heavens of dawn-tide; her lips were set close, her brow knit, as of one striving to shape thoughts hard to understand into words that all might understand.

So she sat noting all things, as woman by woman went past her

into the hall, till at last she slowly rose to her feet; for there came two young women leading between them that same old carline with whom she had talked on the Hill of Speech. She looked on the carline steadfastly, but gave no token of knowing her; but the ancient woman spoke when she came near to the Hall-Sun, and old as her semblance was, yet did her speech sound sweet to the Hall-Sun, and indeed to all those that heard it: and she said:

“May we be here to-night, O Hall-Sun, thou lovely Seeress of the mighty Wolfings? may a wandering woman sit amongst you and eat the meat of the Wolfings?”

Then spake the Hall-Sun in a sweet measured voice: “Surely, mother: all men who bring peace with them are welcome guests to the Wolfings: nor will any ask thine errand, but we will let thy tidings flow from thee as thou wilt. This is the custom of the Kindred, and no word of mine own; I speak to thee because thou hast spoken to me, but I have no authority here, being myself but an alien. Albeit I serve the House of the Wolfings, and I love it as the hound loveth his master who feedeth him, and his master’s children who play with him. Enter, mother, and be glad of heart, and put away care from thee.”

Then the old woman drew nigher to her and sat down in the dust at her feet, for she was now sitting down again, and took her hand and kissed it and fondled it, and seemed loth to leave handling the beauty of the Hall-Sun; but she looked kindly on the carline, and smiled on her, and leaned down to her, and kissed her mouth, and said:

“Damsels, take care of this poor woman, and make her good cheer; for she is wise of wit, and a friend of the Wolfings; and I have seen her before, and spoken with her; and she loveth us. But as for me I must needs be alone in the meads for a while; and it may be that when I come to you again, I shall have a word to tell you.”

Now indeed it was in a manner true that the Hall-Sun had no authority in the Wolfing House; yet was she so well beloved for her wisdom and beauty and her sweet speech, that all hastened to do her will in small matters and in great, and now as they looked at her after the old woman had caressed her, it seemed to them that her fairness grew under their eyes, and that they had never

seen her so fair; and the sight of her seemed so good to them, that the outworn day and its weariness changed to them, and it grew as pleasant as the first hours of the sunlight, when men arise happy from their rest, and look on the day that lieth hopeful before them with all its deeds to be.

So they grew merry, and they led the carline into the Hall with them, and set her down in the Women's Chamber, and washed her feet, and gave her meat and drink, and bade her rest and think of nothing troublous, and in all wise made her good cheer; and she was merry with them, and praised their fairness and their deftness, and asked them many questions about their weaving and spinning and carding; (howbeit the looms were idle as then because it was midsummer, and the men gone to the war). And this they deemed strange, as it seemed to them that all women should know of such things; but they thought it was a token that she came from far away.

But afterwards she sat among them, and told them pleasant tales of past times and far countries, and was blithe to them and they to her; and the time wore on toward nightfall in the Women's Chamber.

CHAPTER XI. THE HALL-SUN SPEAKETH.

BUT for the Hall-Sun; she sat long on that stone by the Women's-door; but when the evening was now come, she arose and went down through the cornfields and into the meadow, and wandered away as her feet took her.

Night was falling by then she reached that pool of Mirkwood-water, whose eddies she knew so well. There she let the water cover her in the deep stream, and she floated down and sported with the ripples where the river left that deep to race over the shallows; and the moon was casting shadows by then she came up the bank again by the shallow end bearing in her arms a bundle of the blue-flowering mouse-ear. Then she clad herself at once, and went straight as one with a set purpose toward the Great Roof, and entered by the Man's-door; and there were few men within and they but old and heavy with the burden of years and the coming of night-tide; but they wondered and looked to each other

and nodded their heads as she passed them by, as men who would say, There is something toward.

So she went to her sleeping-place, and did on fresh raiment, and came forth presently clad in white and shod with gold and having her hair wreathed about with the herb of wonder, the blue-flowering mouse-ear of Mirkwood-water. Thus she passed through the Hall, and those elders were stirred in their hearts when they beheld her beauty. But she opened the door of the Women's Chamber, and stood on the threshold; and lo, there sat the carline amidst a ring of the Wolfing women, and she telling them tales of old time such as they had not yet heard; and her eyes were glittering, and the sweet words were flowing from her mouth; but she sat straight up like a young woman; and at whiles it seemed to those who hearkened, that she was no old and outworn woman, but fair and strong, and of much avail. But when she heard the Hall-Sun she turned and saw her on the threshold, and her speech fell suddenly, and all that might and briskness faded from her, and she fixed her eyes on the Hall-Sun and looked wistfully and anxiously on her.

Then spake the Hall-Sun standing in the doorway:

“Hear ye a matter, maidens, and ye Wolfing women all,
And thou alien guest of the Wolfings! But come ye up the hall,
That the ancient men may hearken: for methinks I have a word
Of the battle of the Kindreds, and the harvest of the sword.”

Then all arose up with great joy, for they knew that the tidings were good, when they looked on the face of the Hall-Sun and beheld the pride of her beauty unmarred by doubt or pain.

She led them forth to the dais, and there were the sick and the elders gathered and some ancient men of the thralls: so she stepped lightly up to her place, and stood under her namesake, the wondrous lamp of ancient days. And thus she spake:

“On my soul there lies no burden, and no tangle of the fight
In plain or dale or wild-wood enmeshes now my sight.
I see the Markmen's wain-burg, and I see their warriors go
As men who wait for battle and the coming of the foe.

THE HALL-SUN FORETELLETH VICTORY 79

And they pass 'twixt the wood and the wain-burg within earshot of the horn,

But over the windy meadows no sound thereof is borne,
And all is well amongst them. To the burg I draw anigh
And I see all battle-banners in the breeze of morning fly,
But no Wolfings round their banner and no warrior of the Shield,
No Geiring and no Hrossing in the burg or on the field."

She held her peace for a little while, and no one dared to speak;
then she lifted up her head and spake:

"Now I go by the lip of the wild-wood and a sound withal I hear,
As of men in the paths of the thicket, and a many drawing anear.
Then, muffled yet by the tree-boles, I hear the Shielding song,
And warriors blithe and merry with the battle of the strong.
Give back a little, Markmen, make way for men to pass
To your ordered battle-dwelling o'er the trodden meadow-grass,
For alive with men is the wild-wood and shineth with the steel,
And hath a voice most merry to tell of the Kindreds' weal,
'Twixt each tree a warrior standeth come back from the spear-strewn way,
And forth they come from the wild-wood and a little band are they."

Then again was she silent; but her head sank not, as of one
thinking, as before it did, but she looked straight forward with
bright eyes and smiling, as she said:

"Lo, now the guests they are bringing that ye have not seen before;
Yet guests but ill-entreated; for they lack their shields of war,
No spear in the hand they carry and with no sax are girt.
Lo, these are the dreaded foemen, these once so strong to hurt;
The men that all folk fled from, the swift to drive the spoil,
The men that fashioned nothing but the trap to make men toil.
They drew the sword in the cities, they came and struck the stroke
And smote the shield of the Markmen, and point and edge they broke.
They drew the sword in the war-garth, they swore to bring aback
God's gifts from the Markmen houses where the tables never lack.
O Markmen, take the God-gifts that came on their own feet
O'er the hills through the Mirkwood thicket the Stone of Tyr to meet!"

Again she stayed her song, which had been loud and joyous, and they who heard her knew that the Kindreds had gained the day, and whilst the Hall-Sun was silent they fell to talking of this fair day of battle and the taking of captives. But presently she spread out her hands again and they held their peace, and she said:

“I see, O Wolfing women, and many a thing I see,
 But not all things, O elders, this eve shall ye learn of me,
 For another mouth there cometh: the thicket I behold
 And the Sons of Tyr amidst it, and I see the oak-trees old,
 And the war-shout ringing round them; and I see the battle-lord
 Unhelmed amidst of the mighty; and I see his leaping sword;
 Strokes struck and warriors falling, and the streaks of spears I see,
 But hereof shall the other tell you who speaketh after me.
 For none other than the Shieldings from out the wood have come,
 And they shift the turn with the Daylings to drive the folk-spear he
 And to follow with the Wolfings and thrust the war-beast forth.
 And so good men deem the tidings that they bid them journey north
 On the feet of a Shielding runner, that Gislí hath to name;
 And west of the water he wendeth by the way that the Wolfings can
 Now for sleep he tarries never, and no meat is in his mouth
 Till the first of the Houses hearkeneth the tidings of the south;
 Lo, he speaks, and the mead-sea sippeth, and the bread by the way do
 And over the Geiring threshold and outward pass his feet;
 And he breasts the Burg of the Daylings and saith his happy word,
 And stayeth to drink for a minute of the waves of Battle-ford.
 Lone then by the stream he runneth, and wendeth the wild-wood re
 And dasheth through the hazels of the Oselings’ fair abode,
 And the Elking women know it, and their hearts are glad once more
 And ye—yea, hearken, Wolfings, for his feet are at the door.”

CHAPTER XII. TIDINGS OF THE BATTLE IN MIRKWOOD.

AS the Hall-Sun made an end they heard in good sooth the feet of the runner on the hard ground without the hall, and presently the door opened and he came leaping over the threshold, and up to the table, and stood leaning on it with one hand, his breast heaving with his last swift run. Then he spake presently:

“I am Gisli of the Shieldings; Otter sendeth me to the Hall-Sun; but on the way I was to tell tidings to the Houses west of the Water: so have I done. Now is my journey ended; for Otter saith: ‘Let the Hall-Sun note the tidings and send word of them by four of the lightest limbed of the women, or by lads a-horseback, both west and east of the Water; let her send the word as it seemeth to her, whether she hath seen it or not. I will drink a short draught since my running is over.’”

Then a damsel brought him a horn of mead and let it come into his hand, and he drank sighing with pleasure, while the damsel for pleasure of him and his tidings laid her hand on his shoulder. Then he set down the horn and spake:

“We, the Shieldings, with the Geirings, the Hrossings, and the Wolfings, three hundred warriors and more, were led into the Wood by Thiodolf the War-duke, beside whom went Fox, who hath seen the Romans. We were all afoot; for there is no wide way through the Wood, nor would we have it otherwise, lest the foe find the thicket easy. But many of us know the thicket and its ways; so we made not the easy hard. I was near the War-duke, for I know the thicket and am lightfoot: I am a bowman. I saw Thiodolf that he was unhelmed and bore no shield, nor had he any coat of fence; nought but a deer-skin frock.”

As he said that word, the carline, who had drawn very near to him and was looking hard at his face, turned and looked on the Hall-Sun and stared at her till she reddened under those keen eyes: for in her heart began to gather some knowledge of the tale of her mother and what her will was.

But Gisli went on: “Yet by his side was his mighty sword, and we all knew it for Throng-plough, and were glad of it and of him

and the unfenced breast of the dauntless. Six hours we went spreading wide through the thicket, not always seeing one another, but knowing one another to be nigh; those that knew the thicket best led, the others followed on. So we went till it was high noon on the plain and glimmering dusk in the thicket, and we saw nought, save here and there a roe, and here and there a sounder of swine, and coneys where it was opener, and the sun shone and the grass grew for a little space. So came we unto where the thicket ended suddenly, and there was a long glade of the wild-wood, all set about with great oak-trees and grass thereunder, which I knew well; and thereof the tale tells that it was a holy place of the folk who abided in these parts before the Sons of the Goths. Now will I drink."

So he drank of the horn and said: "It seemeth that Fox had a deeming of the way the Romans should come; so now we abided in the thicket without that glade and lay quiet and hidden, spreading ourselves as much about that lawn of the oak-trees as we might, the while Fox and three others crept through the wood to espy what might be toward: not long had they been gone ere we heard a war-horn blow, and it was none of our horns: it was a long way off, but we looked to our weapons: for men are eager for the foe and the death that cometh, when they lie hidden in the thicket. A while passed, and again we heard the horn, and it was nigher and had a marvellous voice; then in a while was a little noise of men, not their voices, but footsteps going warily through the brake to the south, and twelve men came slowly and warily into that oak-lawn, and lo, one of them was Fox; but he was clad in the raiment of the dastard of the Goths whom he had slain. I tell you my heart beat, for I saw that the others were Roman men, and one of them seemed to be a man of authority, and he held Fox by the shoulder, and pointed to the thicket where we lay, and something he said to him, as we saw by his gesture and face, but his voice we heard not, for he spake soft.

"Then of those ten men of his he sent back two, and Fox going between them, as though he should be slain if he misled them; and he and the eight abided there wisely and warily, standing silently some six feet from each other, moving scarce at all, but looking like images fashioned of brown copper and iron; holding their

casting-spears (which be marvellous heavy weapons) and girt with the sax.

“As they stood there, not out of earshot of a man speaking in his wonted voice, our War-duke made a sign to those about him, and we spread very quietly to the right hand and the left of him once more, and we drew as close as might be to the thicket’s edge, and those who had bows the nighest thereto. Thus then we abided a while again; and again came the horn’s voice; for belike they had no mind to come their ways covertly because of their pride.

“Soon therewithal comes Fox creeping back to us, and I saw him whisper into the ear of the War-duke, but heard not the word he said. I saw that he had hanging to him two Roman saxes, so I deemed he had slain those two, and so escaped the Romans. Maidens, it were well that ye gave me to drink again, for I am weary and my journey is done.”

So again they brought him the horn, and made much of him; and he drank, and then spake on.

“Now heard we the horn’s voice again quite close, and it was sharp and shrill, and nothing like to the roar of our battle-horns: still was the wood and no wind abroad, not even down the oak-lawn; and we heard now the tramp of many men as they thrashed through the small wood and bracken of the thicket-way; and those eight men and their leader came forward, moving like one, close up to the thicket where I lay, just where the path passed into the thicket beset by the Sons of the Goths: so near they were that I could see the dints upon their armour, and the strands of the wire on their sax-handles. Down then bowed the tall bracken on the further side of the wood-lawn, the thicket crashed before the march of men, and on they strode into the lawn, a goodly band, wary, alert, and silent of cries.

“But when they came into the lawn they spread out somewhat to their left hands, that is to say on the west side, for that way was the clear glade; but on the east the thicket came close up to them and edged them away. Therein lay the Goths.

“There they stayed awhile, and spread out but a little, as men marching, not as men fighting. A while we let them be; and we saw their captain, no big man, but dight with very fair armour and weapons; and there drew up to him certain Goths armed, the

dastards of the folk, and another unarmed, an old man bound and bleeding. With these Goths had the captain some converse, and presently he cried out two or three words of Welsh in a loud voice, and the nine men who were ahead shifted them somewhat away from us to lead down the glade westward.

“The prey had come into the net, but they had turned their faces toward the mouth of it.

“Then turned Thiodolf swiftly to the man behind him who carried the war-horn, and every man handled his weapons: but that man understood, and set the little end to his mouth, and loud roared the horn of the Markmen, and neither friend nor foe mis-doubted the tale thereof. Then leaped every man to his feet, all bow-strings twanged and the cast-spears flew; no man forbore to shout; each as he might leapt out of the thicket and fell on with sword and axe and spear, for it was from the bowmen but one shaft and no more.

Then might you have seen Thiodolf as he bounded forward like the wild-cat on the hare, how he had no eyes for any save the Roman captain. Foemen enough he had round about him after the two first bounds from the thicket; for the Romans were doing their best to spread, that they might handle those heavy cast-spears, though they might scarce do it, just come out of the thicket as they were, and thrust together by that onslaught of the kindreds falling on from two sides and even somewhat from behind. To right and left flashed Throng-plough, while Thiodolf himself scarce seemed to guide it: men fell before him at once, and close at his heels poured the Wolfing kindred into the gap, and in a minute of time was he amidst of the throng and face to face with the gold-dight captain.

“What with the sweep of Throng-plough and the Wolfing on-rush, there was space about him for a great stroke; he gave a side-long stroke to his right and hewed down a tall Burgundian, and then up sprang the white blade, but ere its edge fell he turned his wrist, and drove the point through that Captain’s throat just above the ending of his hauberk, so that he fell dead amidst of his folk.

“All the four kindreds were on them now, and amidst them, and needs must they give way: but stoutly they fought; for surely no other warriors might have withstood that onslaught of the

Markmen for the twinkling of an eye: but had the Romans had but the space to have spread themselves out there, so as to handle their shot weapons, many a woman's son of us had fallen; for no man shielded himself in his eagerness, but let the swiftness of the onset of point-and-edge shield him; which, sooth to say, is often a good shield, as here was found.

“So those that were unslain and unhurt fled west along the glade, but not as dastards, and had not Thiodolf followed hard in the chase according to his wont, they might even yet have made a fresh stand and spread from oak-tree to oak-tree across the glade: but as it befell, they might not get a fair offing so as to disentangle themselves and array themselves in good order side by side; and whereas the Markmen were fleet of foot, and in the woods they knew, there were a many Aliens slain in the chase or taken alive unhurt or little hurt: but the rest fled this way and that way into the thicket, with whom were some of the Burgundians; so there they abide now as outcasts and men unholy, to be slain as wild-beasts one by one as we meet them.

“Such then was the battle in Mirkwood. Give me the mead-horn that I may drink to the living and the dead, and the memory of the dead, and the deeds of the living that are to be.”

So they brought him the horn, and he waved it over his head and drank again and spake:

“Sixty and three dead men of the Romans we counted there up and down that oak-glade; and we cast earth over them; and three dead dastards of the Goths, and we left them for the wolves to deal with. And twenty-five men of the Romans we took alive to be for hostages if need should be, and these did we Shielding men, who are not very many, bring aback to the Wain-burg; and the Daylings, who are a great company, were appointed to enter the wood and be with Thiodolf; and me did Otter bid to bear the tidings, even as I have told you. And I have not loitered by the way.”

Great then was the joy in the Hall; and they took Gisl, and made much of him, and led him to the bath, and clad him in fine raiment taken from the coffer which was but seldom opened, because the cloths it held were precious; and they set a garland of green wheat-ears on his head. Then they fell to and spread the feast in the hall; and they ate and drank and were merry.

But as for speeding the tidings, the Hall-Sun sent two women and two lads, all a-horseback, to bear the words: the women to remember the words which she taught them carefully, the lads to be handy with the horses, or in the ford, or the swimming of the deeps, or in the thicket. So they went their ways, down the water: one pair went on the western side, and the other crossed Mirkwood-water at the shallows (for being Midsummer the water was but small), and went along the east side, so that all the kindred might know of the tidings and rejoice.

Great was the glee in the Hall, though the warriors of the House were away, and many a song and lay they sang: but amidst the first of the singing they bethought them of the old woman, and would have bidden her tell them some tale of times past, since she was so wise in the ancient lore. But when they sought for her on all sides she was not to be found, nor could anyone remember seeing her depart from the Hall. But this had they no call to heed, and the feast ended, as it began, in great glee.

Albeit the Hall-Sun was troubled about the carline, both that she had come, and that she had gone: and she determined that the next time she met her she would strive to have of her a true tale of what she was, and of all that was toward.

CHAPTER XIII. THE HALL-SUN SAITH ANOTHER WORD.

IT was no later than the next night, and a many of what thralls were not with the host were about in the feast-hall with the elders and lads and weaklings of the House; for last night's tidings had drawn them thither. Gisli had gone back to his kindred and the wain-burg in the Upper-mark, and the women were sitting, most of them, in the Women's Chamber, some of them doing what little summer work needed doing about the looms, but more resting from their work in field and acre.

Then came the Hall-Sun forth from her room clad in glittering raiment, and summoned no one, but went straight to her place on the dais under her namesake the Lamp, and stood there a little without speaking. Her face was pale now, her lips a little open,

her eyes set and staring as if they saw nothing of all that was round about her.

Now went the word through the Hall and the Women's Chamber that the Hall-Sun would speak again, and that great tidings were toward; so all folk came flock-meal to the dais, both thralls and free; and scarce were all gathered there, ere the Hall-Sun began speaking, and said:

“The days of the world thrust onward, and men are born therein
 A many and a many, and divers deeds they win
 In the fashioning of stories for the kindreds of the earth,
 A garland interwoven of sorrow and of mirth.
 To the world a warrior cometh; from the world he passeth away,
 And no man then may sunder his good from his evil day.
 By the Gods hath he been tormented, and been smitten by the foe:
 He hath seen his maiden perish, he hath seen his speech-friend go:
 His heart hath conceived a joyance and hath brought it unto birth:
 But he hath not carried with him his sorrow or his mirth.
 He hath lived, and his life hath fashioned the outcome of the deed,
 For the blossom of the people, and the coming kindreds' seed.

“Thus-wise the world is fashioned, and the new sun of the morn
 Where earth last night was desert beholds a kindred born,
 That to-morrow and to-morrow blossoms all gloriously
 With many a man and maiden for the kindreds yet to be,
 And fair the Goth-folk groweth. And yet the story saith
 That the deeds that make the summer make too the winter's death,
 That summer-tides unceasing from out the grave may grow
 And the spring rise up unblemished from the bosom of the snow.

“Thus as to every kindred the day comes once for all
 When yesterday it was not, and to-day it builds the hall,
 So every kindred bideth the night-tide of the day,
 Whereof it knoweth nothing, e'en when noon is past away.
 E'en thus the House of the Wolfings 'twixt dusk and dark doth stand,
 And narrow is the pathway with the deep on either hand.
 On the left are the days forgotten, on the right the days to come,
 And another folk and their story in the stead of the Wolfing home.

Do the shadows darken about it, is the even here at last?
Or is this but a storm of the noon-tide that the wind is driving past?

“Unscathed as yet it standeth; it bears the stormy drift,
Nor bows to the lightening flashing adown from the cloudy lift.
I see the hail of battle and the onslaught of the strong,
And they go adown to the folk-mote that shall bide there over long.
I see the slain-heaps rising and the alien folk prevail,
And the Goths give back before them on the ridge o’er the treeless vale.
I see the ancient fallen, and the young man smitten dead,
And yet I see the War-duke shake Throng-plough o’er his head,
And stand unhelmed, unbyrned before the alien host,
And the hurt men rise around him to win back battle lost;
And the wood yield up her warriors, and the whole host rushing on,
And the swaying lines of battle until the lost is won.
Then forth goes the cry of triumph, as they ring the captives round
And cheat the crow of her portion and heap the warriors’ mound.
There are faces gone from our feast-hall not the least beloved nor worst,
But the wane of the House of the Wolfings not yet the world hath cursed.
The sun shall rise to-morrow on our cold and dewy roof,
For they that longed for slaughter were slaughtered far aloof.”

She ceased for a little, but her countenance, which had not changed during her song, changed not at all now: so they all kept silence although they were rejoicing in this new tale of victory; for they deemed that she was not yet at the end of her speaking. And in good sooth she spake again presently, and said:

“I wot not what hath befallen nor where my soul may be,
For confusion is within me and but dimly do I see,
As if the thing that I look on had happed a while ago.
They stand by the tofts of a war-garth, a captain of the foe,
And a man that is of the Gothfolk, and as friend and friend they speak,
But I hear no word they are saying, though for every word I seek.
And now the mist flows round me and blind I come aback
To the House-roof of the Wolfings and the hearth that hath no lack.”

Her voice grew weaker as she spake the last words, and she sank

backward on to her chair: her clenched hands opened, the lids fell down over her bright eyes, her breast heaved no more as it had done, and presently she fell asleep.

The folk were doubtful and somewhat heavy-hearted because of those last words of hers; but they would not ask her more, or rouse her from her sleep, lest they should grieve her; so they departed to their beds and slept for what was yet left of the night.

CHAPTER XIV. THE HALL-SUN IS CAREFUL CONCERNING THE PASSES OF THE WOOD.

IN the morning early folk arose; and the lads and women who were not of the night-shift got them ready to go to the mead and the acres; for the sunshine had been plenty these last days and the wheat was done blossoming, and all must be got ready for harvest. So they broke their fast, and got their tools into their hands: but they were somewhat heavy-hearted because of those last words of the Hall-Sun, and the doubt of last night still hung about them, and they were scarcely as merry as men are wont to be in the morning.

As for the Hall-Sun, she was afoot with the earliest, and was no less, but mayhap more merry than her wont was, and was blithe with all, both old and young.

But as they were at the point of going she called to them, and said:

“Tarry a little, come ye all to the dais and hearken to me.”

So they all gathered thereto, and she stood in her place and spake.

“Women and elders of the Wolfings, is it so that I spake somewhat of tidings last night?”

“Yea,” said they all.

She said, “And was it a word of victory?”

They answered “yea” again.

“Good is that,” she said; “doubt ye not! there is nought to unsay. But hearken! I am nothing wise in war like Thiodolf or Otter of the Laxings, or as Heriulf the Ancient was, though he was nought so wise as they be. Nevertheless ye shall do well to take me for your captain, while this House is bare of warriors.”

"Yea, yea," they said, "so will we."

And an old warrior, hight Sorli, who sat in his chair, no longer quite way-worthy, said:

"Hall-Sun, this we looked for of thee; since thy wisdom is not wholly the wisdom of a spae-wife, but rather is of the children of warriors: and we know thine heart to be high and proud, and that thy death seemeth to thee a small matter beside the life of the Wolfing House."

Then she smiled and said, "Will ye all do my bidding?"

And they all cried out heartily, "Yea, Hall-Sun, that will we."

She said: "Hearken then; ye all know that east of Mirkwood-water, when ye come to the tofts of the Bearings, and their Great Roof, the thicket behind them is close, but that there is a wide way cut through it; and often have I gone there: if ye go by that way, in a while ye come to the thicket's end and to bare places where the rocks crop up through the gravel and the woodland loam. There breed the coneys without number; and wild-cats haunt the place for that sake, and foxes; and the wood-wolf walketh there in summer-tide, and hard by the she-wolf hath her litter of whelps, and all these have enough; and the bald-head erne hangeth over it and the kite, and also the kestrel, for shrews and mice abound there. Of these things there is none that feareth me, and none that maketh me afraid. Beyond this place for a long way the wood is nowise thick, for first grow ash-trees about the clefts of the rock and also quicken-trees, but not many of either; and here and there a hazel brake easy to thrust through; then comes a space of oak-trees scattered about the lovely wood-lawn, and then at last the beech-wood close above but clear beneath. This I know well, because I myself have gone so far and further; and by this easy way have I gone so far to the south, that I have come out into the fell country, and seen afar off the snowy mountains beyond the Great Water.

"Now fear ye not, but pluck up a heart! For either I have seen it or dreamed it, or thought it, that by this road easy to wend the Romans should come into the Mark. For shall not those dastards and traitors that wear the raiment and bodies of the Goths over the hearts and the lives of foemen, tell them hereof? And will they not have heard of our Thiodolf, and this my holy namesake?

"Will they not therefore be saying to themselves, 'Go to now,

why should we wrench the hinges off the door with plenteous labour, when another door to the same chamber standeth open before us? This House of the Wolfings is the door to the treasure chamber of the Markmen; let us fall on that at once rather than have many battles for other lesser matters, and then at last have to fight for this also: for having this we have all, and they shall be our thralls, and we may slaughter what we will, and torment what we will and deflower what we will, and make our souls glad with their grief and anguish, and take aback with us to the cities what we will of the thralls, that their anguish and our joy may endure the longer.' Thus will they say: therefore is it my rede that the strongest and hardiest of you women take horse, a ten of you and one to lead besides, and ride the shallows to the Bearing House, and tell them of our rede; which is to watch diligently the ways of the wood; the outgate to the Mark, and the places where the wood is thin and easy to travel on: and ye shall bid them give you of their folk as many as they deem fittest thereto to join your company, so that ye may have a chain of watchers stretching far into the wilds; but two shall lie without the wood, their horses ready for them to leap on and ride on the spur to the Wain-burg in the Upper-mark if any tidings befall.

"Now of these eleven I ordain Hrosshild to be the leader and captain, and to choose for her fellows the stoutest-limbed and heaviest-handed of all the maidens here: art thou content, Hrosshild?"

Then stood Hrosshild forth and said nought, but nodded yea; and soon was her choice made amid jests and laughter, for this seemed no hard matter to them.

So the ten got together, and the others fell off from them, and there stood the ten maidens with Hrosshild, well nigh as strong as men, clean-limbed and tall, tanned with sun and wind; for all these were unwearied afield, and oft would lie out a-nights, since they loved the lark's song better than the mouse's squeak; but as their kirtles shifted at neck and wrist, you might see their skins as white as privet-flower where they were wont to be covered.

Then said the Hall-Sun: "Ye have heard the word, see ye to it, Hrosshild, and take this other word also: Bid the Bearing stay-at-homes bide not the sword and the torch at home if the Romans

come, but hie them over hither, to hold the Hall or live in the wild-wood with us, as need may be; for might bides with many.

“But ye maidens, take this counsel for yourselves; do ye each bear with you a little keen knife, and if ye be taken, and it seem to you that ye may not bear the smart of the Roman torments (for they be wise in tormenting), but will speak and bewray us under them, then thrust this little edge tool into the place of your bodies where the life lieth closest, and so go to the Gods with a good tale in your mouths: so may the Almighty God of Earth speed you, and the fathers of the kindred!”

So she spoke; and they made no delay but each one took what axe or spear or sword she liked best, and two had their bows and quivers of arrows; and so all folk went forth from the Hall.

Soon were the horses saddled and bridled, and the maidens bestrode them joyously and set forth on their way, going down the lanes of the wheat, and rode down speedily toward the shallows of the water, and all cried good speed after them. But the others would turn to their day's work, and would go about their divers errands. But even as they were at point to sunder, they saw a swift runner passing by those maidens just where the acres joined the meadow, and he waved his hand aloft and shouted to them, but stayed not his running for them, but came up the lanes of the wheat at his swiftest: so they knew at once that this was again a messenger from the host, and they stood together and awaited his coming; and as he drew near they knew him for Egil, the swiftest-footed of the Wolfings; and he gave a great shout as he came among them; and he was dusty and wayworn, but eager; and they received him with all love, and would have brought him to the Hall to wash him and give him meat and drink, and cherish him in all ways.

But he cried out, “To the Speech-Hill first, to the Speech-Hill first! But even before that, one word to thee, Hall-Sun! Saith Thiodolf, Send ye watchers to look to the entrance into Midmark, which is by the Bearing dwelling; and if aught untoward befalleth let one ride on the spur with the tidings to the Wainburg. For by that way also may peril come.”

Then smiled some of the bystanders, and the Hall-Sun said: “Good is it when the thought of a friend stirreth betimes in one's

own breast. The thing is done, Egil; or sawest thou not those ten women, and Hrosshild the eleventh, as thou camest up into the acres?"

Said Egil: "Fair fall thine hand, Hall-Sun! thou art the Wolfings' Ransom. Wend we now to the Speech-Hill."

So did they, and every thrall that was about the dwellings, man, woman and child, fared with them, and stood about the Speech-Hill: and the dogs went round about the edge of that assembly, wandering in and out, and sometimes looking hard on some one whom they knew best, if he cried out aloud.

But the men-folk gave all their ears to hearkening, and stood as close as they might.

Then Egil clomb the Speech-Hill, and said:

CHAPTER XV. THEY HEAR TELL OF THE BATTLE ON THE RIDGE.

"**Y**E have heard how the Daylings were appointed to go to help Thiodolf in driving the folk-spear home to the heart of the Roman host. So they went; but six hours thereafter comes one to Otter bidding him send a great part of the kindreds to him; for that he had had tidings that a great host of Romans were drawing near the wood-edge, but were not entered therein, and that fain would he meet them in the open field.

"So the kindreds drew lots, and the lot fell first to the Elkings, who are a great company, as ye know; and then to the Hartings, the Beamings, the Alftings, the Vallings (also a great company), the Galtings (and they no lesser), each in their turn; and last of all to the Laxings; and the Oselings prayed to go with the Elkings, and this Otter deemed good, whereas a many of them be bowmen.

"All these then to the number of a thousand or more entered the wood; and I was with them, for in sooth I was the messenger.

"No delay made we in the wood, nor went we over warily, trusting to the warding of the wood by Thiodolf; and there were men with us who knew the paths well, whereof I was one; so we speedily came through into the open country.

"Shortly we came upon our folk and the War-duke lying at the foot of a little hill that went up as a buttress to a long ridge high

above us, whereon we set a watch; and a little brook came down the dale for our drink.

“Night fell as we came thither; so we slept for a while, but abode not the morning, and we were afoot (for we had no horses with us) before the moon grew white. We took the road in good order, albeit our folk-banners we had left behind in the burg; so each kindred raised aloft a shield of its token to be for a banner. So we went forth, and some swift footmen, with Fox, who hath seen the Roman war-garth, had been sent on before to spy out the ways of the foemen.

“Two hours after sunrise cometh one of these, and telleth how he hath seen the Romans, and how that they are but a short mile hence breaking their fast, not looking for any onslaught; ‘but,’ saith he, ‘they are on a high ridge whence they can see wide about, and be in no danger of ambush, because the place is bare for the most part, nor is there any cover except here and there down in the dales a few hazels and blackthorn bushes, and the rushes of the becks in the marshy bottoms, wherein a snipe may hide, or a hare, but scarce a man; and note that there is no way up to that ridge but by a spur thereof as bare as my hand; so ye will be well seen as ye wend up thereto.’

“So spake he in my hearing. But Thiodolf bade him lead on to that spur, and old Herulf, who was standing nigh, laughed merrily and said: ‘Yea, lead on, and speedily, lest the day wane and nothing be done save the hunting of snipes.’

“So on we went, and coming to the hither side of that spur beheld those others and Fox with them; and he held in his hand an arrow of the Aliens, and his face was all astir with half-hidden laughter, and he breathed hard, and pointed to the ridge, and somewhat low down on it we saw a steel cap and three spear-heads showing white from out a little hollow in its side, but the men hidden by the hollow: so we knew that Fox had been chased, and that the Romans were warned and wary.

“No delay made the War-duke, but led us up that spur, which was somewhat steep; and as we rose higher we saw a band of men on the ridge, a little way down it, not a many; archers and slingers mostly, who abode us till we were within shot, and then sent a few shots at us, and so fled. But two men were hurt with the sling-

plummets, and one, and he not grievously, with an arrow, and not one slain.

“Thus we came up on to the ridge, so that there was nothing between us and the bare heavens; thence we looked south-east and saw the Romans wisely posted on the ridge not far from where it fell down steeply to the north; but on the south, that is to say on their left hands, and all along the ridge past where we were stayed, the ground sloped gently to the south-west for a good way, before it fell, somewhat steeply, into another long dale. Looking north we saw the outer edge of Mirkwood but a little way from us, and we were glad thereof; because ere we left our sleeping-place that morn Thiodolf had sent to Otter another messenger bidding him send yet more men on to us in case we should be hard-pressed in the battle; for he had had a late rumour that the Romans were many. And now when he had looked on the Roman array and noted how wise it was, he sent three swift-foot ones to take stand on a high knoll which we had passed on the way, that they might take heed where our folk came out from the wood and give signal to them by the horn, and lead them to where the battle should be.

“So we stood awhile and breathed us, and handled our weapons some half a furlong from the alien host. They had no earth rampart around them, for that ridge is waterless, and they could not abide there long, but they had pitched sharp pales in front of them and they stood in very good order, as if abiding an onslaught, and moved not when they saw us; for that band of shooters had joined themselves to them already. Taken one with another we deemed them to be more than we were; but their hauberked footmen with the heavy cast-spears not so many as we by a good deal.

“Now we were of mind to fall on them ere they should fall on us; so all such of us as had shot-weapons spread out from our company and went forth a little; and of the others Heriulf stood foremost along with the leaders of the Beamings and the Elkings; but as yet Thiodolf held aback and led the midmost company, as his wont was, and the more part of the Wolfings were with him.

“Thus we ordered ourselves, and waited a little while yet what the Aliens should do; and presently a war-horn blew amongst them, and from each flank of their mailed footmen came forth a many bowmen and slingers and a band of horsemen; and drew within

bowshot, the shooters in open array yet wisely, and so fell to on us, and the horsemen hung aback a little as yet.

“Their arrow-shot was of little avail, their bowmen fell fast before ours; but deadly was their sling-shot, and hurt and slew many and some even in our main battle; for they slung round leaden balls and not stones, and they aimed true and shot quick; and the men withal were so light and lithe, never still, but crouching and creeping and bounding here and there, that they were no easier to hit than coney amidst of the fern, unless they were very nigh.

“Howbeit when this storm had endured awhile, and we moved but little, and not an inch aback, and gave them shot for shot, then was another horn winded from amongst the Aliens; and thereat the bowmen cast down their bows, and the slingers wound their slings about their heads, and they all came on with swords and short spears and feathered darts, running and leaping lustily, making for our flanks, and the horsemen set spurs to their horses and fell on in the very front of our folk like good and valiant men-at-arms.

“That saw Heriulf and his men, and they set up the war-whoop, and ran forth to meet them, axe and sword aloft, terribly yet maybe somewhat unwarily. The archers and slingers never came within sword-stroke of them, but fell away before them on all sides; but the slingers fled not far, but began again with their shot, and slew a many. Then was a horn winded, as if to call back the horsemen, who, if they heard, heeded not, but rode hard on our kindred like valiant warriors who feared not death. Sooth to say, neither were the horses big or good, or the men fit for the work, saving for their hardihood; and their spears were short withal and their bucklers unhandy to wield.

“Now could it be seen how the Goths gave way before them to let them into the trap, and then closed around again, and the axes and edge weapons went awork hewing as in a wood; and Heriulf towered over all the press, and the Wolf’s-sister flashed over his head in the summer morning.

“Soon was that storm over, and we saw the Goths tossing up their spears over the slain, and horses running loose and masterless adown over the westward-lying slopes, and a few with their riders

still clinging to them. Yet some, sore hurt by seeming, galloping toward the main battle of the Romans.

“Unwarily then fared the children of Tyr that were with Heriulf; for by this time they were well nigh within shot of the spears of those mighty footmen of the Romans: and on their flanks were the slingers, and the bowmen, who had now gotten their bows again; and our bowmen, though they shot well and strong, were too few to quell them; and indeed some of them had cast by their bows to join in Heriulf's storm. Also the lie of the ground was against us, for it sloped up toward the Roman array at first very gently, but afterwards steeply enough to breathe a short-winded man. Also behind them were we of the other kindreds, whom Thiodolf had ordered into the wedge-array; and we were all ready to move forward, so that had they abided somewhat, all had been well and better.

“So did they not, but straightway set up the Victory-whoop and ran forward on the Roman host. And these were so ordered that, as aforesaid, they had before them sharp piles stuck into the earth and pointed against us, as we found afterwards to our cost; and within these piles stood the men some way apart from each other, so as to handle their casting spears, and in three ranks were they ordered and many spears could be cast at once, and if any in the front were slain, his fellow behind him took his place.

“So now the storm of war fell at once upon our folk, and swift and fierce as was their onslaught yet were a many slain and hurt or ever they came to the piles aforesaid. Then saw they death before them and heeded it nought, but tore up the piles and dashed through them, and fell in on those valiant footmen. Short is the tale to tell: wheresoever a sword or spear of the Goths was upraised there were three upon him, and saith Toti of the Beamings, who was hurt and crawled away and yet lives, that on Heriulf there were six at first and then more; and he took no thought of shielding himself, but raised up the Wolf's-sister and hewed as the woodman in the thicket, when night cometh and hunger is on him. There fell Heriulf the Ancient and many a man of the Beamings and the Elks with him, and many a Roman.

“But amidst the slain and the hurt our wedge-array moved forward slowly now, warily shielded against the plummet and

shafts on either side; and when the Romans saw our unbroken array, and Thiodolf the first with Throng-plough naked in his hand, they chased not such men of ours unhurt or little hurt, as drew aback from before them: so these we took amongst us, and when we had gotten all we might, and held a grim face to the foe, we drew aback little by little, still facing them till we were out of shot of their spears, though the shot of the arrows and the sling-plummets ceased not wholly from us. Thus ended Heriulf's Storm."

Then he rested from his speaking for a while, and none said aught, but they gazed on him as if he bore with him a picture of the battle, and many of the women wept silently for Heriulf, and yet more of the younger ones were wounded to the heart when they thought of the young men of the Elkings, and the Beamings, since with both those houses they had affinity; and they lamented the loves that they had lost, and would have asked concerning their own speech-friends had they durst. But they held their peace till the tale was told out to an end.

Then Egil spake again:

"No long while had worn by in Heriulf's Storm, and though men's hearts were nothing daunted, but rather angered by what had befallen, yet would Thiodolf wear away the time somewhat more, since he hoped for succour from the Wain-burg and the Wood; and he would not that any of these Romans should escape us, but would give them all to Tyr, and to be a following to Heriulf the Old and the Great.

"So there we abided a while moving nought, and Thiodolf stood with Throng-plough on his shoulder, unhelmed, unbyrned, as though he trusted to the kindred for all defence. Nor for their part did the Romans dare to leave their vantage-ground, when they beheld what grim countenance we made them.

"Albeit, when we had thrice made as if we would fall on, and yet they moved not, whereas it trieth a man sorely to stand long before the foeman, and do nought but endure, and whereas many of our bowmen were slain or hurt, and the rest too few to make head against the shot-weapons of the Aliens, then at last we began to draw nearer and a little nearer, not breaking the wedge-array; and at last, just before we were within shot of the cast-spears of

their main battle, loud roared our war-horn: then indeed we broke the wedge-array, but orderly as we knew how, spreading out from right and left of the War-duke till we were facing them in a long line: one minute we abode thus, and then ran forth through the spear-storm: and even therewith we heard, as it were, the echo of our own horn, and whoso had time to think betwixt the first of the storm and the handstrokes of the Romans deemed that now would be coming fresh kindreds for our helping.

“Not long endured the spear-rain, so swift we were, neither were we in one throng as betid in Herulf’s Storm, but spread abroad, each trusting in the other that none thought of the backward way.

“Though we had the ground against us we dashed like fresh men at their pales, and were under the weapons at once. Then was the battle grim; they could not thrust us back, nor did we break their array with our first storm; man hewed at man as if there were no foes in the world but they two: sword met sword, and sax met sax; it was thrusting and hewing with point and edge, and no long-shafted weapons were of any avail; there we fought hand to hand and no man knew by eyesight how the battle went two yards from where he fought, and each one put all his heart in the stroke he was then striking, and thought of nothing else.

“Yet at the last we felt that they were faltering and that our work was easier and our hope higher; then we cried our cries and pressed on harder, and in that very nick of time there arose close behind us the roar of the Markmen’s horn and the cries of the kindreds answering ours. Then such of the Romans as were not in the very act of smiting, or thrusting, or clinging or shielding, turned and fled, and the whoop of victory rang around us, and the earth shook, and past the place of the slaughter rushed the riders of the Goths; for they had sent horsemen to us, and the paths were grown easier for our much treading of them. Then I beheld Thiodolf, that he had just slain a foe, and clear was the space around him, and he rushed sideways and caught hold of the stirrup of Angantyr of the Bearings, and ran ten strides beside him, and then bounded on afoot swifter than the red horses of the Bearings, urging on the chase, as his wont was.

“But we who were wearier, when we had done our work, stood

still between the living and the dead, between the freemen of the Mark and their war-thralls. And in no long while there came back to us Thiodolf and the chasers, and we made a great ring on the field of the slain, and sang the Song of Triumph; and it was the Wolfing Song that we sang.

“Thus then ended Thiodolf’s Storm.”

When he held his peace there was but little noise among the stay-at-homes, for still were they thinking about the deaths of their kindred and their lovers. But Egil spoke again.

“Yet within that ring lay the sorrow of our hearts; for Odin had called a many home, and there lay their bodies; and the mightiest was Heriulf; and the Romans had taken him up from where he fell, and cast him down out of the way, but they had not stripped him, and his hand still gripped the Wolf’s-sister. His shield was full of shafts of arrows and spears; his byrny was rent in many places, his helm battered out of form. He had been grievously hurt in the side and in the thigh by cast-spears or ever he came to hand-blows with the Romans, but moreover he had three great wounds from the point of the sax, in the throat, in the side, in the belly, each enough for his bane. His face was yet fair to look on, and we deemed that he had died smiling.

“At his feet lay a young man of the Beamings in a gay green coat, and beside him was the head of another of his House, but his green-clad body lay some yards aloof. There lay of the Elkings a many. Well may ye weep, maidens, for them that loved you. Now fare they to the Gods a goodly company, but a goodly company is with them.

“Seventy and seven of the Sons of the Goths lay dead within the Roman battle, and fifty-four on the slope before it; and to boot there were twenty-four of us slain by the arrows and plummets of the shooters, and a many hurt withal.

“But there were no hurt men inside the Roman array or before it. All were slain outright, for the hurt men either dragged themselves back to our folk, or onward to the Roman ranks, that they might die with one more stroke smitten.

“Now of the Aliens the dead lay in heaps in that place, for grim was the slaughter when the riders of the Bearings and the Wormings fell on the Aliens; and a many of the foemen scorned

to flee, but died where they stood, craving no peace; and to few of them was peace given. There fell of the Roman footmen five hundred and eighty and five, and the remnant that fled was but little: but of the slingers and bowmen but eighty and six were slain, for they were there to shoot and not to stand; and they were nimble and fleet of foot, men round of limb, very dark-skinned, but not foul of favour."

Then he said:

"There are men through the dusk a-faring, our speech-friends and our kin,
No more shall they crave our helping, nor ask what work to win;
They have done their deeds and departed when they had holpen the House.
So high their heads are holden, and their hurts are glorious
With the story of strokes stricken, and new weapons to be met,
And new scowling of foes' faces, and new curses unknown yet.
Lo, they dight the feast in Godhome, and fair are the tables spread,
Late come, but well-belovèd is every war-worn head,
And the Godfolk and the Fathers, as these cross the tinkling bridge,
Crowd round and crave for stories of the Battle on the Ridge."

Therewith he came down from the Speech-Hill and the women-folk came round about him, and they brought him to the Hall, and washed him, and gave him meat and drink; and then would he sleep, for he was weary.

Howbeit some of the women could not refrain themselves, but must needs ask after their speech-friends who had been in the battle; and he answered as he could, and some he made glad, and some sorry; and as to some, he could not tell them whether their friends were alive or dead. So he went to his place and fell asleep and slept long, while the women went down to acre and meadow, or saw to the baking of bread or the sewing of garments, or went far afield to tend the neat and the sheep.

Howbeit the Hall-Sun went not with them; but she talked with that old warrior, Sorli, who was now halt and grown unmeet for the road, but was a wise man; and she and he together with some old carlines and a few young lads fell to work, and saw to many matters about the Hall and the garth that day; and they got together what weapons there were both for shot and for the hand-

play, and laid them where they were handy to come at, and they saw to the meal in the hall that there was provision for many days; and they carried up to a loft above the Women's Chamber many great vessels of water, lest the fire should take the Hall; and they looked everywhere to the entrances and windows and had fastenings and bolts and bars fashioned and fitted to them; and saw that all things were trim and stout. And so they abided the issue.

CHAPTER XVI. HOW THE DWARF-WROUGHT HAUBERK WAS BROUGHT AWAY FROM THE HALL OF THE DAYLINGS.

NOW it must be told that early in the morning, after the night when Gisl had brought to the Wolfing Stead the tidings of the Battle in the Wood, a man came riding from the south to the Dayling abode. It was just before sunrise, and but few folk were stirring about the dwellings. He rode up to the Hall and got off his black horse, and tied it to a ring in the wall by the Man's-door, and went in clashing, for he was in his battle-gear, and had a great wide-rimmed helm on his head.

Folk were but just astir in the Hall, and there came an old woman to him, and looked on him and saw by his attire that he was a man of the Goths and of the Wolfing kindred; so she greeted him kindly: but he said:

“Mother, I am come hither on an errand, and time presses.”

Said she: “Yea, my son, or what tidings bearest thou from the south? for by seeming thou art new-come from the host.”

Said he: “The tidings are as yesterday, save that Thiodolf will lead the host through the wild-wood to look for the Romans beyond it: therefore will there soon be battle again. See ye, mother, hast thou here one that knoweth this ring of Thiodolf's, if perchance men doubt me when I say that I am sent on my errand by him?”

“Yea,” she said, “Agni will know it; since he knoweth all the chief men of the Mark; but what is thine errand, and what is thy name?”

“It is soon told,” said he, “I am a Wolfing hight Thorkettle, and I come to have away for Thiodolf the Treasure of the World,

the Dwarf-wrought Hauberk, which he left with you when we fared hence to the south three days ago. Now let Agni come, that I may have it, for time presses sorely."

There were three or four gathered about them now, and a maiden of them said: "Shall I bring Agni hither, mother?"

"What needeth it?" said the carline, "he sleepeth, and shall be hard to awaken; and he is old, so let him sleep. I shall go fetch the hauberk, for I know where it is, and my hand may come on it as easily as on mine own girdle."

So she went her ways to the treasury where were the precious things of the kindred; the woven cloths were put away in fair coffers to keep them clean from the whirl of the Hall-dust and the reek; and the vessels of gold and some of silver were standing on the shelves of a cupboard before which hung a veil of needlework: but the weapons and war-gear hung upon pins along the wall, and many of them had much fair work on them, and were dight with gold and gems: but amidst them all was the wondrous hauberk clear to see, dark grey and thin, for it was so wondrously wrought that it hung in small compass. So the carline took it down from the pin, and handled it, and marvelled at it, and said:

"Strange are the hands that have passed over thee, sword-rampart, and in strange places of the earth have they dwelt! For no smith of the kindreds hath fashioned thee, unless he had for his friend either a God or a foe of the Gods. Well shalt thou wot of the tale of sword and spear ere thou comest back hither! For Thiodolf shall bring thee where the work is wild."

Then she went with the hauberk to the new-come warrior, and made no delay, but gave it to him, and said:

"When Agni awaketh, I shall tell him that Thorkettle of the Wolfings hath borne a back to Thiodolf the Treasure of the World, the Dwarf-wrought Hauberk."

Then Thorkettle took it and turned to go; but even therewith came old Asmund from out of his sleeping-place, and gazed around the Hall, and his eyes fell on the shape of the Wolfing as he was going out of the door, and he asked the carline,

"What doeth he here? What tidings is there from the host? For my soul was nought unquiet last night."

"It is a little matter," she said; "the War-duke hath sent for

the wondrous Byrny that he left in our treasury when he departed to meet the Romans. Belike there shall be a perilous battle, and few hearts need a stout sword-wall more than Thiodolf's."

As she spoke, Thorkettle had passed the door, and got into his saddle, and sat his black horse like a mighty man as he slowly rode down the turf bridge that led into the plain. And Asmund went to the door and stood watching him till he set spurs to his horse, and departed a great gallop to the south. Then said Asmund:

"What then are the Gods devising, what wonders do they will?
 What mighty need is on them to work the kindreds ill,
 That the seed of the Ancient Fathers and a woman of their kin
 With her all unfading beauty must blend herself therein?
 Are they fearing lest the kindreds should grow too fair and great,
 And climb the stairs of Godhome, and fashion all their fate,
 And make all earth so merry that it never wax the worse,
 Nor need a gift from any, nor prayers to quench the curse?
 Fear they that the Folk-wolf, growing as the fire from out the spark
 Into a very folk-god, shall lead the weaponed Mark
 From wood to field and mountain, to stand between the earth
 And the wrights that forge its thraldom and the sword to slay its mirth?
 Fear they that the sons of the wild-wood the Loathly Folk shall quell,
 And grow into Gods thereafter, and aloof in Godhome dwell?"

Therewith he turned back into the Hall, and was heavy-hearted and dreary of aspect; for he was somewhat foreseeing; and it may not be hidden that this seeming Thorkettle was no warrior of the Wolfings, but the Wood-Sun in his likeness; for she had the power and craft of shape-changing.

CHAPTER XVII. THE WOOD-SUN SPEAKETH WITH THIODOLF.

NOW the Markmen laid Heriulf in howe on the ridge-crest where he had fallen, and heaped a mighty howe over him that could be seen from far, and round about him they laid the other warriors of the kindreds. For they deemed it was fittest that they should lie on the place whose story they had fashioned. But they cast earth on the foemen lower down on the westward-lying bents.

The sun set amidst their work, and night came on; and Thiodolf was weary and would fain rest him and sleep: but he had many thoughts, and pondered whitherward he should lead the folk, so as to smite the Romans once again, and he had a mind to go apart and be alone for rest and slumber; so he spoke to a man of the kindred named Solvi in whom he put all trust, and then he went down from the ridge, and into a little dale on the south-west side thereof, a furlong from the place of the battle. A beck ran down that dale, and the further end of it was closed by a little wood of yew trees, low, but growing thick together, and great grey stones were scattered up and down on the short grass of the dale. Thiodolf went down to the brook-side, and to a place where it trickled into a pool, whence it ran again in a thin thread down the dale, turning aside before it reached the yew-wood to run its ways under low ledges of rock into a wider dale. He looked at the pool and smiled to himself as if he had thought of something that pleased him; then he drew a broad knife from his side, and fell to cutting up turfs till he had what he wanted; and then he brought stones to the place, and built a dam across the mouth of the pool, and sat by on a great stone to watch it filling.

As he sat he strove to think about the Roman host and how he should deal with it; but despite himself his thoughts wandered, and made for him pictures of his life that should be when this time of battle was over; so that he saw nothing of the troubles that were upon his hands that night, but rather he saw himself partaking in the deeds of the life of man. There he was between the plough-stilts in the acres of the kindred when the west wind was blowing over the promise of early spring; or smiting down the ripe wheat in the hot afternoon amidst the laughter and merry

talk of man and maid; or far away over Mirkwood-water watching the edges of the wood against the prowling wolf and lynx, the stars just beginning to shine over his head, as now they were; or wending the windless woods in the first frosts before the snow came, the hunter's bow or javelin in hand: or coming back from the wood with the quarry on the sledge across the snow, when winter was deep, through the biting icy wind and the whirl of the drifting snow, to the lights and music of the Great Roof, and the merry talk therein and the smiling of the faces glad to see the hunting-carles come back; and the full draughts of mead, and the sweet rest a night-tide when the north wind was moaning round the ancient home.

All seemed good and fair to him, and whiles he looked around him, and saw the long dale lying on his left hand and the dark yews in its jaws pressing up against the rock-ledges of the brook, and on his right its windings as the ground rose up to the buttresses of the great ridge. The moon was rising over it, and he heard the voice of the brook as it tinkled over the stones above him; and the whistle of the plover and the laugh of the whimbrel came down the dale sharp and clear in the calm evening; and sounding far away, because the great hill muffled them, were the voices of his fellows on the ridge, and the songs of the warriors and the high-pitched cries of the watch. And this also was a part of the sweet life which was, and was to be; and he smiled and was happy and loved the days that were coming, and longed for them, as the young man longs for the feet of his maiden at the trysting-place.

So as he sat there, the dreams wrapping him up from troublous thoughts, at last slumber overtook him, and the great warrior of the Wolfings sat nodding like an old carle in the chimney ingle, and he fell asleep, his dreams going with him, but all changed and turned to folly and emptiness.

He woke with a start in no long time; the night was deep, the wind had fallen utterly, and all sounds were stilled save the voice of the brook, and now and again the cry of the watchers of the Goths. The moon was high and bright, and the little pool beside him glittered with it in all its ripples; for it was full now and trickling over the lip of his dam. So he arose from the stone and did off his war-gear, casting Throng-plough down into the grass beside

him, for he had been minded to bathe him, but the slumber was still on him, and he stood musing while the stream grew stronger and pushed off first one of his turfs and then another, and rolled two or three of the stones over, and then softly thrust all away and ran with a gush down the dale, filling all the little bights by the way for a minute or two; he laughed softly thereat, and stayed the undoing of his kirtle, and so laid himself down on the grass beside the stone looking down the dale, and fell at once into a dreamless sleep.

When he awoke again, it was yet night, but the moon was getting lower and the first beginnings of dawn were showing in the sky over the ridge; he lay still a moment gathering his thoughts and striving to remember where he was, as is the wont of men waking from deep sleep; then he leapt to his feet, and lo, he was face to face with a woman, and she who but the Wood-Sun³ and he wondered not, but reached out his hand to touch her, though he had not yet wholly cast off the heaviness of slumber or remembered the tidings of yesterday.

She drew aback a little from him, and his eyes cleared of the slumber, and he saw her that she was scantily clad in black raiment, barefoot, with no gold ring on her arms or necklace on her neck, or crown about her head. But she looked so fair and lovely even in that end of the night-tide, that he remembered all her beauty of the day and the sunshine, and he laughed aloud for joy of the sight of her, and said:

“What aileth thee, O Wood-Sun, and is this a new custom of thy kindred and the folk of Godhome that their brides array themselves like thralls new-taken, and as women who have lost their kindred and are outcast? Who then hath won the Burg of the Anses, and clomb the rampart of Godhome?”

But she spoke from where she stood in a voice so sweet, that it thrilled to the very marrow of his bones.

“I have dwelt a while with sorrow since we met, we twain, in the wood: I have mourned, while thou hast been merry, who deemest the war-play good.

For I know the heart of the wilful and how thou wouldst cast away
The rampart of thy life-days, and the wall of my happy day.

Yea I am the thrall of Sorrow; she hath stripped my raiment off
 And laid sore stripes upon me with many a bitter scoff.
 Still bidding me remember that I come of the Godfolk's kin,
 And yet for all my godhead no love of thee may win."

Then she looked longingly at him a while and at last could no longer refrain her, but drew nigh him and took his hands in hers, and kissed his mouth, and said as she caressed him:

"O where are thy wounds, beloved? how turned the spear from thy breast,
 When the storm of war blew strongest, and the best men met the best?
 Lo, this is the tale of to-day: but what shall to-morrow tell?
 That Thiodolf the Mighty in the fight's beginning fell;
 That there came a stroke ill-stricken, there came an aimless thrust,
 And the life of the people's helper lay quenched in the summer dust."

He answered nothing, but smiled as though the sound of her voice and the touch of her hand were pleasant to him, for so much love there was in her, that her very grief was scarcely grievous. But she said again:

"Thou sayest it: I am outcast; for a God that lacketh mirth
 Hath no more place in Godhome and never a place on earth.
 A man grieves, and he gladdens, or he dies and his grief is gone;
 But what of the grief of the Gods, and the sorrow never undone?
 Yea verily I am the outcast. When first in thine arms I lay
 On the blossoms of the woodland my godhead passed away;
 Thenceforth unto thee was I looking for the light and the glory of life
 And the Gods' doors shut behind me till the day of the uttermost strife.
 And now thou hast taken my soul, thou wilt cast it into the night,
 And cover thine head with the darkness, and turn thine eyes from the light.
 Thou wouldst go to the empty country where never a seed is sown
 And never a deed is fashioned, and the place where each is alone;
 But I thy thrall shall follow, I shall come where thou seemest to lie,
 I shall sit on the howe that hides thee, and thou so dear and nigh!
 A few bones white in their war-gear that have no help or thought,
 Shall be Thiodolf the Mighty, so nigh, so dear—and nought."

THIODOLF'S DEEMING OF THE HAUBERK 109

His hands strayed over her shoulders and arms, caressing them,
and he said softly and lovingly:

“I am Thiodolf the Mighty: but as wise as I may be
No story of that grave-night mine eyes can ever see,
But rather the tale of the Wolfings through the coming days of earth,
And the young men in their triumph and the maidens in their mirth;
And morn's promise every evening, and each day the promised morn,
And I amidst it ever reborn and yet reborn.
This tale I know, who have seen it, who have felt the joy and pain,
Each fleeing, each pursuing, like the links of the draw-well's chain:
But that deedless tide of the grave-mound, and the dayless nightless day
E'en as I strive to see it, its image wanes away.
What say'st thou of the grave-mound? shall I be there at all
When they lift the Horn of Remembrance, and the shout goes down the
hall,
And they drink the Mighty War-duke and Thiodolf the Old?
Nay rather; there where the youngling that longeth to be bold
Sits gazing through the hall-reek and sees across the board
A vision of the reaping of the harvest of the sword,
There shall Thiodolf be sitting; e'en there shall the youngling be
That once in the ring of the hazels gave up his life to thee.”

She laughed as he ended, and her voice was sweet, but bitter was
her laugh. Then she said:

“Nay thou shalt be dead, O warrior, thou shalt not see the Hall
Nor the children of thy people 'twixt the dais and the wall.
And I, and I shall be living; still on thee shall waste my thought:
I shall long and lack thy longing; I shall pine for what is nought.”

But he smiled again, and said:

“Not on earth shall I learn this wisdom; and how shall I learn it then
When I lie alone in the grave-mound, and have no speech with men?
But for thee,—O doubt it nothing that my life shall live in thee,
And so shall we twain be loving in the days that yet shall be.”

It was as if she heard him not; and she fell aback from him a little and stood silently for a while as one in deep thought; and then turned and went a few paces from him, and stooped down and came back again with something in her arms (and it was the hauberk once more), and said suddenly:

“O Thiodolf, now tell me for what cause thou wouldst not bear
This grey wall of the hammer in the tempest of the spear?
Didst thou doubt my faith, O Folk-wolf, or the counsel of the Gods,
That thou needs must cast thee naked midst the flashing battle-rods,
Or is thy pride so mighty that it seemed to thee indeed
That death was a better guerdon than the love of the Godhead’s seed?”

But Thiodolf said: “O Wood-Sun, this thou hast a right to ask of me, why I have not worn in the battle thy gift, the Treasure of the World, the Dwarf-wrought Hauberk! And what is this that thou sayest? I doubt not thy faith towards me and thine abundant love: and as for the rede of the Gods, I know it not, nor may I know it, nor turn it this way nor that: and as for thy love and that I would choose death sooner, I know not what thou meanest; I will not say that I love thy love better than life itself; for these two, my life and my love, are blended together and may not be sundered.

“Hearken therefore as to the Hauberk: I wot well that it is for no light matter that thou wouldst have me bear thy gift, the wondrous hauberk, into battle; I deem that some doom is wrapped up in it; maybe that I shall fall before the foe if I wear it not; and that if I wear it, somewhat may betide me which is unmeet to betide a warrior of the Wolfings. Therefore will I tell thee why I have fought in two battles with the Romans with unmailed body, and why I left the hauberk, (which I see that thou bearest in thine arms) in the Roof of the Daylings. For when I entered therein, clad in the hauberk, there came to meet me an ancient man, one of the very valiant of days past, and he looked on me with the eyes of love, as though he had been the very father of our folk, and I the man that was to come after him to carry on the life thereof. But when he saw the hauberk and touched it, then was his love smitten cold with sadness and he spoke words of evil omen; so that putting this together with thy words about the gift, and that thou didst

in a manner compel me to wear it, I could not but deem that this mail is for the ransom of a man and the ruin of a folk.

“Wilt thou say that it is not so? then will I wear the hauberk, and live and die happy. But if thou sayest that I have deemed aright, and that a curse goeth with the hauberk, then either for the sake of the folk I will not wear the gift and the curse, and I shall die in great glory, and because of me the House shall live; or else for thy sake I shall bear it and live, and the House shall live or die as may be, but I not helping, nay I no longer of the House nor in it. How sayest thou?”

Then she said:

“Hail be thy mouth, beloved, for that last word of thine,
And the hope that thine heart conceiveth and the hope that is born in mine.
Yea, for a man’s deliverance was the hauberk born indeed
That once more the mighty warrior might help the folk at need.
And where is the curse’s dwelling if thy life be saved to dwell
Amidst the Wolfing warriors and the folk that loves thee well
And the house where the high Gods left thee to be cherished well therein?”

“Yea more: I have told thee, beloved, that thou art not of the kin;
The blood in thy body is blended of the wandering Elking race,
And one that I may not tell of, who in Godhome hath his place,
And who changed his shape to beget thee in the wild-wood’s leafy roof.
How then shall the doom of the Wolfings be woven in the woof
Which the Norns for thee have shuttled? or shall one man of war
Cast down the tree of the Wolfings on the roots that spread so far?
O friend, thou art wise and mighty, but other men have lived
Beneath the Wolfing roof-tree whereby the folk has thrived.”

He reddened at her word; but his eyes looked eagerly on her. She cast down the hauberk, and drew one step nigher to him. She knitted her brows, her face waxed terrible, and her stature seemed to grew greater, as she lifted up her gleaming right arm, and cried out in a great voice:

“Thou Thiodolf the Mighty! Hadst thou will to cast the net
And tangle the House in thy trouble, it is I would slay thee yet;

For 'tis I and I that love them, and my sorrow would I give,
And thy life, thou God of battle, that the Wolfing House might live."

Therewith she rushed forward, and cast herself upon him, and threw her arms about him, and strained him to her bosom, and kissed his face, and he her in likewise, for there was none to behold them, and nought but the naked heaven was the roof above their heads.

And now it was as if the touch of her face and her body, and the murmuring of her voice, changed and soft close to his ear, as she murmured mere words of love to him, drew him away from the life of deeds and doubts and made a new world for him, wherein he beheld all those fair pictures of the happy days that had been in his musings when first he left the field of the dead.

So they sat down on the grey stone together hand in hand, her head laid upon his shoulder, no otherwise than if they had been two lovers, young and without renown in days of deep peace.

So as they sat, her foot smote on the cold hilts of the sword, which Thiodolf had laid down in the grass; and she stooped and took it up, and laid it across her knees and his as they sat there; and she looked on Throng-plough as he lay still in the sheath, and smiled on him, and saw that the peace-strings were not yet wound about his hilts. So she drew him forth and raised him up in her hand, and he gleamed white and fearful in the growing dawn, for all things had now gotten their colours again, whereas amidst their talking had the night worn, and the moon low down was grown white and pale.

But she leaned aside, and laid her cheek against Thiodolf's, and he took the sword out of her hand and set it on his knees again, and laid his right hand on it, and said:

"Two things by these blue edges in the face of the dawning I swear;
And first this warrior's ransom in the coming fight to bear,
And evermore to love thee who hast given me second birth.
And by the sword I swear it, and by the Holy Earth,
To live for the House of the Wolfings, and at last to die for their need.
For though I trow thy saying that I am not one of their seed,
Nor yet by the hand have been taken and unto the Father shown

As a very son of the Fathers, yet mid them hath my body grown;
 And I am the guest of their Folk-Hall, and each one there is my friend.
 So with them is my joy and sorrow, and my life, and my death in the end.
 Now whatso doom hereafter my coming days shall bide,
 Thou speech-friend, thou deliverer, thine is this dawning-tide."

She spoke no word to him; but they rose up and went hand in hand down the dale, he still bearing his naked sword over his shoulder, and thus they went together into the yew-copse at the dale's end. There they abode till after the rising of the sun, and each to each spake many loving words at their departure; and the Wood-Sun went her ways at her will.

But Thiodolf went up the dale again, and set Throng-plough in his sheath, and wound the peace-strings round him. Then he took up the hauberk from the grass whereas the Wood-Sun had cast it, and did it on him, as it were of the attire he was wont to carry daily. So he girt Throng-plough to him, and went soberly up to the ridge-top to the folk, who were just stirring in the early morning.

CHAPTER XVIII. TIDINGS BROUGHT TO THE WAIN-BURG.

NOW it must be told of Otter and they of the Wain-burg how they had the tidings of the overthrow of the Romans on the Ridge, and that Egil had left them on his way to Wolfstead. They were joyful of the tale, as was like to be, but eager also to strike their stroke at the foemen, and in that mood they abode fresh tidings.

It has been told how Otter had sent the Bearings and the Wormings to the aid of Thiodolf and his folk, and these two were great kindreds, and they being gone, there abode with Otter, one man with another, thralls and freemen, scant three thousand men: of these many were bowmen good to fight from behind a wall or fence, or some such cover, but scarce meet to withstand a shock in the open field. However it was deemed at this time in the Wain-burg that Thiodolf and his men would soon return to them; and in any case, they said, he lay between the Romans and

the Mark, so that they had but little doubt; or rather they feared that the Romans might draw aback from the Mark before they could be met in battle again, for as aforesaid they were eager for the fray.

Now it was in the cool of the evening two days after the Battle on the Ridge, that the men, both freemen and thralls, had been disporting themselves in the plain ground without the Burg in casting the spear and putting the stone, and running races a-foot and a-horseback, and now close on sunset three young men, two of the Laxings and one of the Shieldings, and a grey old thrall of that same House, were shooting a match with the bow, driving their shafts at a rushen roundel hung on a pole which the old thrall had dight. Men were peaceful and happy, for the time was fair and calm, and, as aforesaid, they dreaded not the Roman Host any more than if they were Gods dwelling in Godhome. The shooters were deft men, and they of the Burg were curious to note their deftness, and many were breathed with the games wherein they had striven, and thought it good to rest, and look on the new sport: so they sat and stood on the grass about the shooters on three sides, and the mead-horn went briskly from man to man; for there was no lack of meat and drink in the Burg, whereas the kindreds that lay nighest to it had brought in abundant provision, and women of the kindreds had come to them, and not a few were there scattered up and down among the carles.

Now the Shielding man, Geirbald by name, had just loosed at the mark, and had shot straight and smitten the roundel in the midst, and a shout went up from the onlookers thereat; but that shout was, as it were, lined with another, and a cry that a messenger was riding toward the Burg: thereat most men looked round toward the wood, because their minds were set on fresh tidings from Thiodolf's company, but as it happened it was from the north and the side toward Mid-mark that they on the outside of the throng had seen the rider coming; and presently the word went from man to man that so it was, and that the new comer was a young man on a grey horse, and would speedily be amongst them; so they wondered what the tidings might be, but yet they did not break up the throng, but abode in their places that they might re-

ceive the messenger more orderly; and as the rider drew near, those who were nighest to him perceived that it was a woman.

So men made way before the grey horse, and its rider, and the horse was much spent and travel-worn. So the woman rode right into the ring of warriors, and drew rein there, and lighted down slowly and painfully, and when she was on the ground could scarce stand for stiffness; and two or three of the swains drew near her to help her, and knew her at once for Hrosshild of the Wolfings, for she was well-known as a doughty woman. Then she said: "Bring me to Otter the War-duke; or bring him hither to me, which were best, since so many men are gathered together; and meanwhile give me to drink; for I am thirsty and weary."

So while one went for Otter, another reached to her the mead-horn, and she had scarce done her draught, ere Otter was there, for they had found him at the gate of the Burg. He had many a time been in the Wolfing Hall, so he knew her at once and said:

"Hail, Hrosshild! how farest thou?"

She said: "I fare as the bearer of evil tidings. Bid thy folk do on their war-gear and saddle their horses, and make no delay; for now presently shall the Roman host be in Mid-mark!"

Then cried Otter: "Blow up the war-horn! get ye all to your weapons and be ready to leap on your horses, and come ye to the Thing in good order kindred by kindred: later on ye shall hear Hrosshild's story as she shall tell it to me!"

Therewith he led her to a grassy knoll that was hard by, and set her down thereon and himself beside her, and said:

"Speak now, damsel, and fear not! For now shall one fate go over us all, either to live together or die together as the free children of Tyr, and friends of the Almighty God of the Earth. How camest thou to meet the Romans and know of their ways and to live thereafter?"

She said: "Thus it was: the Hall-Sun bethought her how that the eastern ways into Mid-mark that bring a man to the thicket behind the Roof of the Bearings are nowise hard, even for an host; so she sent ten women, and me the eleventh to the Bearing dwelling and the road through the thicket aforesaid; and we were to take of the Bearing stay-at-homes whomso we would that were

handy, and then all we to watch the ways for fear of the Romans. And methinks she has had some vision of their ways, though mayhap not altogether clear.

“Anyhow we came to the Bearing dwellings, and they gave us of their folk eight doughty women and two light-foot lads, and so we were twenty and one in all.

“So then we did as the Hall-Sun bade us, and ordained a chain of watchers far up into the waste; and these were to sound a point of war upon their horns each to each till the sound thereof should come to us who lay with our horses hopped ready beside us in the fair plain of the Mark outside the thicket.

“To be short, the horns waked us up in the midst of yesternight, and of the watches also came to us the last, which had heard the sound amidst the thicket, and said that it was certainly the sound of the Goths’ horn, and the note agreed on. Therefore I sent a messenger at once to the Wolfing Roof to say what was toward; but to thee I would not ride until I had made surer of the tidings; so I waited awhile, and then rode into the wild-wood; and a long tale I might make both of the waiting and the riding, had I time thereto; but this is the end of it; that going warily a little past where the thicket thinneth and the road endeth, I came on three of those watches or links in the chain we had made, and half of another watch or link; that is to say six women, who were come together after having blown their horns and fled (though they should rather have abided in some lurking-place to espy whatever might come that way) and one other woman, who had been one of the watch much further off, and had spoken with the furthest of all, which one had seen the faring of the Roman Host, and that it was very great, and no mere band of pillagers or of scouts. And, said this fleer (who was indeed half wild with fear), that while they were talking together, came the Romans upon them, and saw them; and a band of Romans beat the wood for them when they fled, and she, the fleer, was at point to be taken, and saw two taken indeed, and haled off by the Roman scourers of the wood. But she escaped and so came to the others on the skirts of the thicket, having left of her skin and blood on many a thornbush and rock by the way.

“Now when I heard this, I bade this flier get her home to the Bearings as swiftly as she might, and tell her tale; and she went away trembling, and scarce knowing whether her feet were on earth or on water or on fire; but belike failed not to come there, as no Romans were before her.

“But for the others, I sent one to go straight to Wolfstead on the heels of the first messenger, to tell the Hall-Sun what had befallen, and other five I set to lurk in the thicket, whereas none could lightly lay hands on them, and when they had new tidings, to flee to Wolfstead as occasion might serve them; and for myself I tarried not, but rode on the spur to tell thee hereof.

“But my last word to thee, Otter, is that by the Hall-Sun’s bidding the Bearings will not abide fire and steel at their own stead, but when they hear true tidings of the Romans being hard at hand, will take with them all that is not too hot or too heavy to carry, and go their ways unto Wolfstead: and the tidings will go up and down the Mark on both sides of the water, so that whatever is of avail for defence will gather there at our dwelling, and if we fall, goodly shall be the howe heaped over us, even if ye come not in time.

“Now have I told thee what I needs must and there is no need to question me more, for thou hast it all—do thou what thou hast to do!”

With that word she cast herself down on the grass by the mound-side, and was presently asleep, for she was very weary.

But all the time she had been telling her tale had the horn been sounding, and there were now a many warriors gathered and more coming in every moment: so Otter stood up on the mound after he had bidden a man of his House to bring him his horse and war-gear, and abided a little, till, as might be said, the whole host was gathered: then he bade cry silence, and spake:

“Sons of Tyr, now hath an Host of the Romans gotten into the Mark; a mighty host, but not so mighty that it may not be met. Few words are best: let the Steerings, who are not many, but are men well-trying in war and wisdom abide in the Burg along with the fighting thralls: but let the Burg be broken up and moved from the place, and let its warders wend towards Mid-mark, but

warily and without haste, and each night let them make the wain-garth and keep good watch.

“But know ye that the Romans shall fall with all their power on the Wolfing dwellings, deeming that when they have that, they shall have all that is ours with ourselves also. For there is the Hall-Sun under the Great Roof, and there hath Thiodolf, our War-duke, his dwelling-place; therefore shall all of us, save those that abide with the wains, take horse, and ride without delay, and cross the water at Battleford, so that we may fall upon the foe before they come west of the water; for as ye know there is but one ford whereby a man wending straight from the Bearings may cross Mirkwood-water, and it is like that the foe will tarry at the Bearing stead long enough to burn and pillage it.

“So do ye order yourselves according to your kindreds, and let the Shieldings lead. Make no more delay! But for me I will now send a messenger to Thiodolf to tell him of the tidings, and then speedily shall he be with us. Geirbald, I see thee; come hither!”

Now Geirbald stood amidst the Shieldings, and when Otter had spoken, he came forth bestriding a white horse, and with his bow slung at his back. Said Otter: “Geirbald, thou shalt ride at once through the wood, and find Thiodolf; and tell him the tidings, and that in nowise he follow the Roman fleers away from the Mark, nor to heed anything but the trail of the foemen through the south-eastern heaths of Mirkwood, whether other Romans follow him or not: whatever happens let him lead the Goths by that road, which for him is the shortest, towards the defence of the Wolfing dwellings. Lo thou, my ring for a token! Take it and depart in haste. Yet first take thy fellow Viglund the Woodman with thee, lest if perchance one fall, the other may bear the message. Tarry not, nor rest till thy word be said!”

Then turned Geirbald to find Viglund who was anigh to him, and he took the ring, and the twain went their ways without more ado, and rode into the wild-wood.

But about the Wain-burg was there plenteous stir of men till all was ordered for the departure of the host, which was no long while, for there was nothing to do but on with the war-gear and up on to the horse.

Forth then they went duly ordered in their kindreds towards the head of the Upper-mark, riding as swiftly as they might without breaking their array.

CHAPTER XIX. THOSE MESSENGERS COME TO THIODOLF.

OF Geirbald and Viglund the tale tells that they rode the woodland paths as speedily as they might. They had not gone far, and were winding through a path amidst of a thicket mingled of the hornbeam and holly, betwixt the openings of which the bracken grew exceeding tall, when Viglund, who was very fine-eared, deemed that he heard a horse coming to meet them: so they lay as close as they might, and drew back their horses behind a great holly-bush lest it should be some one or more of the foes who had fled into the wood when the Romans were scattered in that first fight. But as the sound drew nearer, and it was clearly the footsteps of a great horse, they deemed it would be some messenger from Thiodolf, as indeed it turned out. For as the new-comer fared on, somewhat unwarily, they saw a bright helm after the fashion of the Goths amidst of the trees, and then presently they knew by his attire that he was of the Bearings, and so at last they knew him to be Asbiorn of the said House, a doughty man; so they came forth to meet him and he drew rein when he saw armed men, but presently beholding their faces he knew them and laughed on them, and said:

“Hail fellows! what tidings are toward?”

“These,” said Viglund, “that thou art well met, since now shalt thou turn back and bring us to Thiodolf as speedily as may be.”

But Asbiorn laughed and said: “Nay rather turn about with me; or why are ye so grim of countenance?”

“Our errand is no light one,” said Geirbald, “but thou, why art thou so merry?”

“I have seen the Romans fall,” said he, “and belike shall soon see more of that game: for I am on an errand to Otter from Thiodolf: the War-duke, when he had questioned some of those whom we took on the Day of the Ridge, began to have a deeming that the Romans had beguiled us, and will fall on the Mark by the way

of the south-east heaths: so now is he hastening to fetch a compass and follow that road either to overtake them or prevent them; and he biddeth Otter tarry not, but ride hard along the water to meet them if he may, or ever they have set their hands to the dwellings of my House. And belike when I have done mine errand to Otter I shall ride with him to look on these burners and slayers once more; therefore am I merry. Now for your tidings, fellows."

Said Geirbald: "Our tidings are that both our errands are prevented, and come to nought: for Otter hath not tarried, but hath ridden with all his folk toward the stead of thine House. So shalt thou indeed see these burners and slayers if thou ridest hard; since we have tidings that the Romans will by now be in Mid-mark. And as for our errand, it is to bid Thiodolf do even as he hath done. Hereby may we see how good a pair of War-dukes we have gotten, since each thinketh of the same wisdom. Now take we counsel together as to what we shall do; whether we shall go back to Otter with thee, or thou go back to Thiodolf with us; or else each go the road ordained for us."

Said Asbiorn: "To Otter will I ride as I was bidden, that I may look on the burning of our roof, and avenge me of the Romans afterwards; and I bid you, fellows, ride with me, since fewer men there are with Otter, and he must be the first to bide the brunt of battle."

"Nay," said Geirbald, "as for me ye must even lose a man's aid; for to Thiodolf was I sent, and to Thiodolf will I go: and bethink thee if this be not best, since Thiodolf hath but a deeming of the ways of the Romans and we wot surely of them. Our coming shall make him the speedier, and the less like to turn back if any alien band shall follow after him. What sayest thou, Viglund?"

Said Viglund: "Even as thou, Geirbald: but for myself I deem I may well turn back with Asbiorn. For I would serve the House in battle as soon as may be; and maybe we shall slaughter these kites of the cities, so that Thiodolf shall have no work to do when he cometh."

Said Asbiorn: "Geirbald, knowest thou right well the ways through the wood and on the other side thereof, to the place where Thiodolf abideth? for ye see that night is at hand."

"Nay, not over well," said Geirbald.

Said Asbiorn: "Then I rede thee take Viglund with thee; for he knoweth them yard by yard, and where they be hard and where they be soft. Moreover it were best indeed that ye meet Thiodolf betimes; for I deem not but that he wendeth leisurely, though always warily, because he deemeth not that Otter will ride before to-morrow morning. Hearken, Viglund! Thiodolf will rest to-night on the other side of the water, nigh to where the hills break off into the sheer cliffs that are called the Kite's Nest, and the water runneth under them, coming from the east: and before him lieth the easy ground of the eastern heaths where he is minded to wend to-morrow betimes in the morning: and if ye do your best ye shall be there before he is upon the road, and sure it is that your tidings shall hasten him."

"Thou sayest sooth," saith Geirbald, "tarry we no longer; here sunder our ways; farewell!"

"Farewell," said he, "and thou, Viglund, take this word in parting, that belike thou shalt yet see the Romans, and strike a stroke, and maybe be smitten. For indeed they be most mighty warriors."

Then made they no delay but rode their ways either side. And Geirbald and Viglund rode over rough and smooth all night, and were out of the thick wood by day-dawn: and whereas they rode hard, and Viglund knew the ways well, they came to Mirkwood-water before the day was old, and saw that the host was stirring, but not yet on the way. And or ever they came to the water's edge, they were met by Wolfkettle of the Wolfings, and Hiarandi of the Elkings, and three others who were but just come from the place where the hurt men lay down in a dale near the Great Ridge; there had Wolfkettle and Hiarandi been tending Toti of the Beamings, their fellow-in-arms, who had been sorely hurt in the battle, but was doing well, and was like to live. So when they saw the messengers, they came up to them and hailed them, and asked them if the tidings were good or evil.

"That is as it may be," said Geirbald, "but they are short to tell; the Romans are in Mid-mark, and Otter rideth on the spur to meet them, and sendeth us to bid Thiodolf wend the heaths to fall in on them also. Nor may we tarry one minute ere we have seen Thiodolf."

Said Wolfkettle, "We will lead you to him; he is on the east side of the water, with all his host, and they are hard on departing."

So they went down the ford, which was not very deep; and Wolfkettle rode the ford behind Geirbald, and another man behind Viglund; but Hiarandi went afoot with the others beside the horses, for he was a very tall man.

But as they rode amidst the clear water Wolfkettle lifted up his voice and sang:

"White horse, with what are ye laden as ye wade the shallows warm,
But with tidings of the battle, and the fear of the fateful storm?
What loureth now behind us, what pileth clouds before,
On either hand what gathereth save the stormy tide of war?
Now grows midsummer mirky, and fallow falls the morn,
And dusketh the Moon's Sister, and the trees look overworn;
God's Ash-tree shakes and shivers, and the sheer cliff standeth white
As the bones of the giants' father when the Gods first fared to fight."

And indeed the morning had grown mirky and grey and threatening, and from far away the thunder growled, and the face of the Kite's Nest showed pale and awful against a dark steely cloud; and a few drops of rain pattered into the smooth water before them from a rag of the cloud-flock right over head. They were in mid stream now, for the water was wide there; on the eastern bank were the warriors gathering, for they had beheld the faring of those men, and the voice of Wolfkettle came to them across the water, so they deemed that great tidings were toward, and would fain know on what errand those were come.

Then the waters of the ford deepened till Hiarandi was wading more than waist-deep, and the water flowed over Geirbald's saddle; then Wolfkettle laughed, and turning as he sat, dragged out his sword, and waved it from east to west and sang:

"O sun, pale up in heaven, shrink from us if thou wilt,
And turn thy face from beholding the shock of guilt with guilt!
Stand still, O blood of summer! and let the harvest fade,

Till there be nought but fallow where once was bloom and blade!
 O day, give out but a glimmer of all thy flood of light,
 If it be but enough for our eyen to see the road of fight!
 Forget all else and slumber, if still ye let us wake,
 And our mouths shall make the thunder, and our swords shall the lightening make,
 And we shall be the storm-wind and drive the ruddy rain,
 Till the joy of our hearts in battle bring back the day again."

As he spake that word they came up through the shallow water dripping on to the bank, and they and the men who abode them on the bank shouted together for joy of fellowship, and all tossed aloft their weapons. The man who had ridden behind Viglund slipped off on to the ground; but Wolfkettle abode in his place behind Geirbald.

So the messengers passed on, and the others closed up round about them, and all the throng went up to where Thiodolf was sitting on a rock beneath a sole ash-tree, the face of the Kite's Nest rising behind him on the other side of a bight of the river. There he sat unhelmed with the dwarf-wrought hauberk about him, holding Throng-plough in its sheath across his knees, while he gave word to this and that man concerning the order of the host.

So when they were come thither, the throng opened that the messengers might come forward; for by this time had many more drawn near to hearken what was toward. There they sat on their horses, the white and the grey, and Wolfkettle stood by Geirbald's bridle rein, for he had now lighted down; and a little behind him, his head towering over the others, stood Hiarand, great and gaunt. The ragged cloud had drifted down south-east now and the rain fell no more, but the sun was still pale and clouded.

Then Thiodolf looked gravely on them, and spake:

"What do ye sons of the War-shield? what tale is there to tell?
 Is the Kindred fallen tangled in the grasp of the fallow Hell?
 Crows the red cock over the homesteads, have we met the foe too late?
 For meseems your brows are heavy with the shadowing o'er of fate."

But Geirbald answered:

“Still cold with dew in the morning the Shielding Roof-ridge stands,
Nor yet hath grey Hell bounden the Shielding warriors’ hands;
But lo, the swords, O War-duke, how thick in the wind they shake,
Because we bear the message that the battle-road ye take,
Nor tarry for the thunder or the coming on of rain,
Or the windy cloudy night-tide, lest your battle be but vain.
And this is the word that Otter yestre’en hath set in my mouth;
Seek thou the trail of the Aliens of the Cities of the South,
And thou shalt find it leading o’er the heaths to the beechen-wood,
And thence to the stony places where the foxes find their food;
And thence to the tangled thicket where the folkway cleaves it through,
To the eastern edge of Mid-mark where the Bearings deal and do.”

Then said Thiodolf in a cold voice, “What then hath befallen Otter?”
Said Geirbald:

“When last I looked upon Otter, all armed he rode the plain,
With his whole host clattering round him like the rush of the summer rain;
To the right or the left they looked not but they rode through the dusk and
the dark,
Beholding nought before them but the dream of the foes in the Mark.
So he went; but his word fled from him and on my horse it rode,
And again it saith, O War-duke, seek thou the Bear’s abode,
And tarry never a moment for ought that seems of worth,
For there shall ye find the sword-edge and the flame of the foes of the
earth.

“Tarry not, Thiodolf, nor turn aback though a new foe follow-
eth on thine heels. No need to question me more; I have no more
to tell, save that a woman brought these tidings to us, whom the
Hall-Sun had sent with others to watch the ways: and some of
them had seen the Romans, who are a great host and no band steal-
ing forth to lift the herds.”

Now all those round about him heard his words, for he spake
with a loud voice; and they knew what the bidding of the War-
duke would be; so they loitered not, but each man went about his

business of looking to his war-gear and gathering to the appointed place of his kindred. And even while Geirbald had been speaking, had Hiarandi brought up the man who bore the great horn, who when Thiodolf leapt to his feet to find him, was close at hand. So he bade him blow the war-blast, and all men knew the meaning of that voice of the horn, and every man armed him in haste, and they who had horses (and these were but the Bearings and the Wormings), saddled them, and mounted, and from mouth to mouth went the word that the Romans were gotten into Mid-mark, and were burning the Bearing abodes. So speedily was the whole host ready for the way, the Wolfings at the head of all. Then came forth Thiodolf from the midst of his kindred, and they raised him upon a great war-shield upheld by many men, and he stood thereon and spake:

“O sons of Tyr, ye have vanquished, and sore hath been your pain;
 But he that smiteth in battle must ever smite again;
 And thus with you it fareth, and the day abideth yet
 When ye shall hold the Aliens as the fishes in the net.
 On the Ridge ye slew a many; but there came a many more
 From their strongholds by the water to their new-built garth of war,
 And all these have been led by dastards o'er the way our feet must tread
 Through the eastern heaths and the beechwood to the door of the Bearing
 stand,
 Now e'en yesterday I deemed it, but I durst not haste away
 Ere the word was borne to Otter and 'tis he bids haste to-day;
 So now by day and by night-tide it behoveth us to wend
 And wind the reel of battle and weave its web to end.
 Had ye deemed my eyes foreseeing, I would tell you of my sight,
 How I see the folk delivered and the Aliens turned to flight,
 While my own feet wend them onwards to the ancient Fathers' Home.
 But belike these are but the visions that to many a man shall come
 When he goeth adown to the battle, and before him riseth high
 The walls of valiant foemen to hide all things anigh.
 But indeed I know full surely that no work that we may win
 To-morrow or the next day shall quench the Markmen's kin.
 On many a day hereafter shall their warriors carry shield;
 On many a day their maidens shall drive the kine afield,

On many a day their reapers bear sickle in the wheat
 When the golden wind-wrought ripple stirs round the feast-hall's feet.
 Lo, now is the day's work easy—to live and overcome,
 Or to die and yet to conquer on the threshold of the Home."

And therewith he gat him down and went a-foot to the head of the Wolfing band, a great shout going with him, which was mingled with the voice of the war-horn that bade away.

So fell the whole host into due array, and they were somewhat over three thousand warriors, all good and tried men and meet to face the uttermost of battle in the open field; so they went their ways with all the speed that footmen may, and in fair order; and the sky cleared above their heads, but the distant thunder still growled about the world. Geirbald and Viglund joined themselves to the Wolfings and went a-foot along with Wolfkettle; but Hiarandi went with his kindred who were second in the array.

CHAPTER XX. OTTER AND HIS FOLK COME INTO MID-MARK.

OTTER and his folk rode their ways along Mirkwood-water, and made no stay, except now and again to breathe their horses, till they came to Battleford in the early morning; there they baited their horses, for the grass was good in the meadow, and the water easy to come at.

So after they had rested there a short hour, and had eaten what was easy for them to get, they crossed the ford, and wended along Mirkwood-water between the wood and the river, but went slower than before lest they should weary their horses; so that it was high-noon before they had come out of the woodland way into Mid-mark; and at once as soon as the whole plain of the Mark opened out before them, they saw what most of them looked to see (since none doubted Hrosshild's tale), and that was a column of smoke rising high and straight up into the air, for the afternoon was hot and windless. Great wrath rose in their hearts thereat, and many a strong man trembled for anger, though none for fear, as Otter raised his right hand and stretched it out towards that token of wrack and ruin; yet they made no stay, nor did they quicken their

pace much; because they knew that they should come to Bearham before night-fall, and they would not meet the Romans way-worn and haggard; but they rode on steadily, a terrible company of wrathful men.

They passed by the dwellings of the kindreds, though save for the Galtings the houses on the east side of the water between the Bearings and the wild-wood road were but small; for the thicket came somewhat near to the water and pinched the meadows. But the Galtings were great hunters and trackers of the wild-wood, and they of the Geddings, the Erings and the Withings, which were smaller Houses, lived somewhat on the take of fish from Mirkwood-water (as did the Laxings also of the Nether-mark), for thereabout were there goodly pools and eddies, and sun-warmed shallows therewithal for the spawning of the trouts; as there were eyots in the water, most of which tailed off into a gravelly shallow at their lower ends.

Now as the riders of the Goths came over against the dwellings of the Withings, they saw people, mostly women, driving up the beasts from the meadow towards the garth; but upon the tofts about their dwellings were gathered many folk, who had their eyes turned toward the token of ravage that hung in the sky above the fair plain; but when these beheld the riding of the host, they tossed up their arms to them and whatever they bore in them, and the sound of their shrill cry (for they were all women and young lads) came down the wind to the ears of the riders. But down by the river on a swell of the ground were some swains and a few thralls, and among them some men armed and a-horseback; and these, when they perceived the host coming on turned and rode to meet them; and as they drew near they shouted as men overjoyed to meet their kindred; and indeed the fighting-men of their own House were riding in the host. And the armed men were three old men, and one very old with marvellous long white hair, and four long lads of some fifteen winters, and four stout carles of the thralls bearing bows and bucklers, and these rode behind the swains; so they found their own kindred and rode amongst them.

But when they were all jingling and clashing on together, the dust arising from the sun-dried turf, the earth shaking with the

thunder of the horse-hoofs, then the heart of the long-hoary one stirred within him as he bethought him of the days of his youth, and to his old nostrils came the smell of the horses and the savour of the sweat of warriors riding close together knee to knee adown the meadow. So he lifted up his voice and sang:

“Rideth lovely along
 The strong by the strong;
 Soft under his breath
 Singeth sword in the sheath,
 And shield babbleth oft
 Unto helm-crest aloft;

How soon shall their words rise mid wrath of the battle
 Into wrangle unheeded of clanging and rattle,
 And no man shall note then the gold on the sword
 When the runes have no meaning, the mouth-cry no word,
 When all mingled together, the war-sea of men
 Shall toss up the steel-spray round fourscore and ten.

“Now as maids burn the weed
 Betwixt acre and mead,
 So the Bearings’ Roof
 Burneth little aloof,
 And red gloweth the hall
 Betwixt wall and fair wall,

Where often the mead-sea we sipped in old days,
 When our feet were a-weary with wending the ways;
 When the love of the lovely at even was born,
 And our hands felt fair hands as they fell on the horn.
 There round about standeth the ring of the foe
 Tossing babes on their spears like the weeds o’er the low.

“Ride, ride then! nor spare
 The red steeds as ye fare!
 Yet if daylight shall fail,
 By the fire-light of bale
 Shall we see the bleared eyes
 Of the war-learned, the wise.

In the acre of battle the work is to win,
 Let us live by the labour, sheaf-smiting therein;
 And as oft o'er the sickle we sang in time past
 When the crake that long mocked us fled light at the last,
 So sing o'er the sword, and the sword-hardened hand
 Bearing down to the reaping the wrath of the land."

So he sang; and a great shout went up from his kindred and those around him, and it was taken up all along the host, though many knew not why they shouted, and the whole host quickened its pace, and went a great trot over the smooth meadow.

So in no long while were they come over against the stead of the Erings, and thereabouts were no beasts a-field, and no women, for all the neat were driven into the garth of the House; but all they who were not war-fit were standing without doors looking down the Mark towards the reek of the Bearing dwellings, and these also sent a cry of welcome toward the host of their kindred. But along the river-bank came to meet the host an armed band of two old men, two youths who were their sons, and twelve thralls who were armed with long spears; and all these were a-horseback: so they fell in with their kindred and the host made no stay for them, but pressed on over-running the meadow. And still went up that column of smoke, and thicker and blacker it grew a-top, and ruddier amidmost.

So came they by the abode of the Geddings, and there also the neat and sheep were close in the home-garth: but armed men were lying or standing about the river bank, talking or singing merrily none otherwise than though deep peace were on the land; and when they saw the faring of the host they sprang to their feet with a shout and gat to their horses at once: they were more than the other bands had been, for the Geddings were a greater House; they were seven old men, and ten swains, and ten thralls bearing long spears like to those of the Erings; and no sooner had they fallen in with their kindred, than the men of the host espied a greater company yet coming to meet them: and these were of the folk of the Galtings; and amongst them were ten warriors in their prime, because they had but of late come back from the hunting in the wood and had been belated from the muster of the kin-

dreds; and with them were eight old men and fifteen lads, and eighteen thralls; and the swains and thralls all bore bows besides the swords that they were girt withal, and not all of them had horses, but they who had none rode behind the others: so they joined themselves to the host, shouting aloud; and they had with them a great horn that they blew on till they had taken their place in the array; and whereas their kindred was with Thiodolf, they followed along with the hinder men of the Shieldings.

So now all the host went on together, and when they had passed the Galting abodes, there was nothing between them and Bearham, nor need they look for any further help of men; there were no beasts afield nor any to herd them, and the stay-at-homes were within doors dighting them for departure into the wild-wood if need should be: but a little while after they had passed these dwellings came into the host two swains of about twenty winters, and a doughty maid, their sister, and they bore no weapons save short spears and knives; they were wet and dripping with the water, for they had just swum Mirkwood-water. They were of the Wolfing House, and had been shepherding a few sheep on the west side of the water, when they saw the host faring to battle, and might not refrain them, but swam their horses across the swift deeps to join their kindred to live and die with them. The tale tells that they three fought in the battles that followed after, and were not slain there, though they entered them unarmed, but lived long years afterwards: of them need no more be said.

Now, when the host was but a little past the Galting dwellings men began to see the flames mingled with the smoke of the burning, and the smoke itself growing thinner, as though the fire had over-mastered everything and was consuming itself with its own violence; and somewhat afterwards, the ground rising, they could see the Bearing meadow and the foemen thereon: yet a little further, and from the height of another swelling of the earth they could see the burning houses themselves and the array of the Romans; so there they stayed and breathed their horses a while. And they beheld how of the Romans a great company was gathered together in close array betwixt the ford and the Bearing Hall, but nigher unto the ford, and these were a short mile from them; but

others they saw streaming out from the burning dwellings, as if their work were done there, and they could not see that they had any captives with them. Other Romans there were, and amongst them men in the attire of the Goths, busied about the river banks, as though they were going to try the ford.

But a little while abode Otter in that place, and then waved his arm and rode on and all the host followed; and as they drew nigher, Otter, who was wise in war, beheld the Romans and deemed them a great host, and the very kernel and main body of them many more than all his company; and moreover they were duly and well arrayed as men waiting a foe; so he knew that he must be wary or he would lose himself and all his men.

So he stayed his company when they were about two furlongs from them, and the main body of the foe stirred not, but horsemen and slingers came forth from its sides and made on toward the Goths, and in three or four minutes were within bowshot of them. Then the bowmen of the Goths slipped down from their horses and bent their bows and nocked their arrows and let fly, and slew and hurt many of the horsemen, who endured their shot but for a minute or two and then turned rein and rode back slowly to their folk, and the slingers came not on very eagerly whereas they were dealing with men a-horseback, and the bowmen of the Goths also held them still.

Now turned Otter to his folk and made them a sign, which they knew well, that they should get down from their horses; and when they were afoot the leaders of tens and hundreds arrayed them, into the wedge-array, with the bowmen on either flank: and Otter smiled as he beheld this a-doing and that the Romans meddled not with them, belike because they looked to have them good cheap, since they were but a few wild men.

But when they were all arrayed he sat still on his horse and spake to them short and sharply, saying:

“Men of the Goths, will ye mount your horses again and ride into the wood and let it cover you, or will ye fight these Romans?” They answered him with a great shout and the clashing of their weapons on their shields. “That is well,” quoth Otter, “since we have come so far; for I perceive that the foe will come to meet us, so that we must either abide their shock or turn our backs. Yet

must we fight wisely or we are undone, and Thiodolf in risk of undoing; this have we to do if we may, to thrust in between them and the ford, and if we may do that, there let us fight it out, till we fall one over another. But if we may not do it, then will we not throw our lives away but do the foemen what hurt we may without mingling ourselves amongst them, and so abide the coming of Thiodolf; for if we get not betwixt them and the ford we may in no case hinder them from crossing. And all this I tell you that ye may follow me wisely, and refrain your wrath that ye may live yet to give it the rein when the time comes."

So he spake and got down from his horse and drew his sword and went to the head of the wedge-array and began slowly to lead forth; but the thralls and swains had heed of the horses, and they drew aback with them towards the wood which was but a little way from them.

But for Otter he led his men down towards the ford, and when the Romans saw that, their main body began to move forward, faring slantwise, as a crab, down toward the ford; then Otter hastened somewhat, as he well might, since his men were well learned in war and did not break their array; but now by this time were those burners of the Romans come up with the main battle, and the Roman captain sent them at once against the Goths, and they advanced boldly enough, a great cloud of men in loose array who fell to with arrows and slings on the wedge-array and slew and hurt many: yet did not Otter stay his folk; but it was ill going for them, for their unshielded sides were turned to the Romans, nor durst Otter scatter his bowmen out from the wedge-array, lest the Romans, who were more than they, should enter in amongst them. Ever he gazed earnestly on the main battle of the Romans, and what they were doing, and presently it became clear to him that they would outgo him and come to the ford, and then he wotted well that they would set on him just when their light-armed were on his flank and his rearward, and then it would go hard but they would break their array and all would be lost: therefore he slacked his pace and went very slowly and the Romans went none the slower for that; but their light-armed grew bolder and drew more together as they came nigher to the Goths, as though they would give them an onset; but just at that nick of time Otter

passed the word down the ranks, and, waving his sword, turned sharply to the right and fell with all the wedge-array on the clustering throng of the light-armed, and his bowmen spread out now from the right flank of the wedge-array, and shot sharp and swift and the bowmen on the left flank ran forward swiftly till they had cleared the wedge-array and were on the flank of the light-armed Romans; and they, what between the onset of the swordsmen and spearmen of the Goths, and their sharp arrows, knew not which way to turn, and a great slaughter befell amongst them, and they of them were the happiest who might save themselves by their feet.

Now after this storm, and after these men had been thrust away, Otter stayed not, but swept round about the field toward the horses; and indeed he looked to it that the main-battle of the Romans should follow him, but they did not, but stayed still to receive the fleers of their light-armed. And this indeed was the goodhap of the Goths; for they were somewhat disordered by their chase of the light-armed, and they smote and spared not, their hearts being full of bitter wrath, as might well be; for even as they turned on the Romans, they beheld the great roof of the Bearings fall in over the burned hall, and a great shower of sparks burst up from its fall, and there were the ragged gables left standing, licked by little tongues of flame which could not take hold of them because of the clay which filled the spaces between the great timbers and was daubed over them. And they saw that all the other houses were either alight or smouldering, down to the smallest cot of a thrall, and even the barns and booths both great and little.

Therefore, whereas the Markmen were far fewer in all than the Roman main-battle, and whereas this same host was in very good array, no doubt there was that the Markmen would have been grievously handled had the Romans fallen on; but the Roman Captain would not have it so: for though he was a bold man, yet was his boldness that of the wolf, that falleth on when he is hungry and skulketh when he is full. He was both young and very rich, and a mighty man among his townsmen, and well had he learned that ginger is hot in the mouth, and though he had come forth to the war for the increasing of his fame, he had no will to die among

the Markmen, either for the sake of the city of Rome, or of any folk whatsoever, but was liefer to live for his own sake. Therefore was he come out to vanquish easily, that by his fame won he might win more riches and dominion in Rome; and he was well content also to have for his own whatever was choice amongst the plunder of these wild-men (as he deemed them), if it were but a fair woman or two. So this man thought, It is my business to cross the ford and come to Wolfstead, and there take the treasure of the tribe, and have a stronghold there, whence we may slay so many of these beasts with little loss to us that we may march away easily and with our hands full, even if Mænius with his men come not to our aid, as full surely he will: therefore as to these angry men, who be not without might and conduct in battle, let us remember the old saw that saith 'a bridge of gold to a fleeing foe,' and let them depart with no more hurt of Romans, and seek us afterwards when we are fenced into their stead, which shall then be our stronghold: even so spake he to his Captains about him.

For it must be told that he had no tidings of the overthrow of the Romans on the Ridge; nor did he know surely how many fighting-men the Markmen might muster, except by the report of those dastards of the Goths; and though he had taken those two women in the wastes, yet had he got no word from them, for they did as the Hall-Sun bade them, when they knew that they would be questioned with torments, and smiting themselves each with a little sharp knife, so went their ways to the Gods.

Thus then the Roman Captain let the Markmen go their ways, and turned toward the ford, and the Markmen went slowly now toward their horses. Howbeit there were many of them who murmured against Otter, saying that it was ill done to have come so far and ridden so hard, and then to have done so little, and that were to-morrow come, they would not be led away so easily; but now they said it was ill; for the Romans would cross the water, and make their ways to Wolfstead, none hindering them, and would burn the dwellings and slay the old men and thralls, and have away the women and children and the Hall-Sun the treasure of the Markmen. In sooth, they knew not that a band of the Roman light-armed had already crossed the water, and had fallen upon the dwellings of the Wolfings; but that the old men and

younglings and thralls of the House had come upon them as they were entangled amidst the tofts and the garths, and had overcome them and slain many.

Thus went Otter and his men to their horses when it was now drawing toward sunset (for all this was some while a-doing), and betook them to a rising ground not far from the wood-side, and there made what sort of a garth they might, with their horses and the limbs of trees and long-shafted spears; and they set a watch and abode in the garth right warily, and lighted no fires when night fell, but ate what meat they had with them, which was but little, and so sleeping and watching abode the morning. But the main body of the Romans did not cross the ford that night, for they feared lest they might go astray therein, for it was an ill ford to those that knew not the water: so they abode on the bank nigh to the water's edge, with the mind to cross as soon as it was fairly daylight.

Now Otter had lost of his men some hundred and twenty slain or grievously hurt, and they had away with them the hurt men and the bodies of the slain. The tale tells not how many of the Romans were slain, but a many of their light-armed had fallen, since the Markmen had turned so hastily upon them, and they had with them many of the best bowmen of the Mark.

CHAPTER XXI. THEY BICKER ABOUT THE FORD.

IN the grey of the morning was Otter afoot with the watchers, and presently he got on his horse and peered over the plain, but the mist yet hung low on it, so that he might see nought for a while; but at last he seemed to note something coming toward the host from the upper water above the ford, so he rode forward to meet it, and lo, it was a lad of fifteen winters, naked save his breeches, and wet from the river; and Otter drew rein, and the lad said to him: "Art thou the War-duke?" "Yea," said Otter.

Said the lad, "I am Ali, the son of Grey, and the Hall-Sun hath sent me to thee with this word: 'Are ye coming? Is Thiodolf at hand? For I have seen the Roof-ridge red in the sunlight as if it were painted with cinnabar.'"

Said Otter, "Art thou going back to Wolfstead, son?"

“Yea, at once, my father,” said Ali.

“Then tell her,” said Otter, “that Thiodolf is at hand, and when he cometh we shall both together fall upon the Romans either in crossing the ford or in the Wolfing meadow; but tell her also that I am not strong enough to hinder the Romans from crossing.”

“Father,” said Ali, “the Hall-Sun saith: Thou art wise in war; now tell us, shall we hold the Hall against the Romans that ye may find us there? For we have discomfited their vanguard already, and we have folk who can fight; but belike the main battle of the Romans shall get the upper hand of us ere ye come to our helping: belike it were better to leave the Hall, and let the wood cover us.”

“Now is this well asked,” said Otter; “get thee back, my son, and bid the Hall-Sun trust not to warding of the Hall, for the Romans are a mighty host: and this day, even when Thiodolf cometh hither, shall be hard for the Gothfolk: let her hasten lest these thieves come upon her hastily; let her take the Hall-Sun her namesake, and the old men and children and the women, and let those fighting folk she hath be a guard to all this in the wood. And hearken moreover; it will, maybe, be six hours ere Thiodolf cometh; tell her I will cast the dice for life or death, and stir up these Romans now at once, that they may have other things to think of than burning old men and women and children in their dwellings; thus may she reach the wood unhindered. Hast thou all this in thine head? Then go thy ways.”

But the lad lingered, and he reddened and looked on the ground and then he said: “My father, I swam the deeps, and when I reached this bank, I crept along by the mist and the reeds toward where the Romans are, and I came near to them, and noted what they were doing; and I tell thee that they are already stirring to take the water at the ford. Now then do what thou wilt.”

Therewith he turned about, and went his way at once, running like a colt which has never felt halter or bit.

But Otter rode back hastily and roused certain men in whom he trusted, and bid them rouse the captains and all the host and bid men get to horse speedily and with as little noise as might be.

So did they, and there was little delay, for men were sleeping with one eye open, as folk say, and many were already astir. So in a little while they were all in the saddle, and the mist yet stretched low over the meadow; for the morning was cool and without wind. Then Otter bade the word be carried down the ranks that they should ride as quietly as may be and fare through the mist to do the Romans some hurt, but in nowise to get entangled in their ranks, and all men to heed well the signal of turning and drawing aback; and therewith they rode off down the meadow led by men who could have led them through the dark night.

But for the Romans, they were indeed getting ready to cross the ford when the mist should have risen; and on the bank it was thinning already and melting away; for a little air of wind was beginning to breathe from the north-east and the sunrise, which was just at hand; and the bank, moreover, was stonier and higher than the meadow's face, which fell away from it as a shallow dish from its rim: thereon yet lay the mist like a white wall.

So the Romans and their friends the dastards of the Goths had well nigh got all ready, and had driven stakes into the water from bank to bank to mark out the safe ford, and some of their light-armed and most of their Goths were by now in the water or up on the Wolfing meadow with the more part of their baggage and wains; and the rest of the host was drawn up in good order, band by band, waiting the word to take the water, and the captain was standing nigh to the river bank beside their God the chief banner of the Host.

Of a sudden one of the dastards of the Goths who was close to the Captain cried out that he heard horse coming; but because he spake in the Gothic tongue, few heeded; but even therewith an old leader of a hundred cried out the same tidings in the Roman tongue, and all men fell to handling their weapons; but before they could face duly toward the meadow, came rushing from out of the mist a storm of shafts that smote many men, and therewithal burst forth the sound of the Markmen's war-horn, like the roaring of a hundred bulls mingled with the thunder of horses at the gallop; and then dark over the wall of mist showed the crests of the riders of the Mark, though scarce were their horses seen till

their whole war-rank came dark and glittering into the space of the rising-ground where the mist was but a haze now, and now at last smitten athwart by the low sun just arisen.

Therewith came another storm of shafts, wherein javelins and spears cast by the hand were mingled with the arrows: but the Roman ranks had faced the meadow and the storm which it yielded, swiftly and steadily, and they stood fast and threw their spears, albeit not with such good aim as might have been, because of their haste, so that few were slain by them. And the Roman Captain, still loth to fight with the Goths in earnest for no reward, and still more and more believing that this was the only band of them that he had to look to, bade those who were nighest the ford not to tarry for the onset of a few wild riders, but to go their ways into the water; else by a sudden onrush might the Romans have entangled Otter's band in their ranks, and so destroyed all. As it was the horsemen fell not on the Roman ranks full in face, but passing like a storm athwart the ranks to the right, fell on there where they were in thinnest array (for they were gathered to the ford as aforesaid), and slew some and drave some into the deeps and troubled the whole Roman host.

So now the Roman Captain was forced to take new order, and gather all his men together, and array his men for a hard fight; and by now the mist was rolling off from the face of the whole meadow and the sun was bright and hot. His men serried their ranks, and the front rank cast their spears, and slew both men and horses of the Goths as those rode along their front casting their javelins, and shooting here and there from behind their horses if occasion served, or making a shift to send an arrow even as they sat a-horse-back; then the second rank of the Romans would take the place of the first, and cast in their turn, and they who had taken the water turned back and took their place behind the others, and many of the light-armed came with them, and all the mass of them flowed forward together, looking as if it might never be broken. But Otter would not abide the shock, since he had lost men and horses, and had no mind to be caught in the sweep of their net; so he made the sign, and his Company drew off to right and left, yet keeping within bow-shot, so that the bowmen still loosed at the Romans.

But they for their part might not follow afoot men on untired

horses, and their own horse was on the west side with the baggage, and had it been there would have been but of little avail, as the Roman Captain knew. So they stood awhile making grim countenance, and then slowly drew back to the ford under cover of their light-armed who shot at the Goths as they rode forward, but abode not their shock.

But Otter and his folk followed after the Romans again, and again did them some hurt, and at last drew so nigh, that once more the Romans stormed forth, and once more smote a stroke in the air; nor even so would the Markmen cease to meddle with them, though never would Otter suffer his men to be mingled with them. At the last the Romans, seeing that Otter would not walk into the open trap, and growing weary of this bickering, began to take the water little by little, while a strong Company kept face to the Markmen; and now Otter saw that they would not be hindered any longer, and he had lost many men, and even now feared lest he should be caught in the trap, and so lose all. And on the other hand it was high noon by now, so that he had given respite to the stay-at-homes of the Wolfings, so that they might get them into the wood. So he drew out of bowshot and bade his men breathe their horses and rest themselves and eat something; and they did so gladly, since they saw that they might not fall upon the Romans to live and die for it until Thiodolf was come, or until they knew that he was not coming. But the Romans crossed the ford in good earnest and were soon all gathered together on the western bank making them ready for the march to Wolfstead. And it must be told that the Roman Captain was the more deliberate about this because after the overthrow of his light-armed there the morning before, he thought that the Roof was held by warriors of the kindreds, and not by a few old men, and women, and lads. Therefore he had no fear of their escaping him. Moreover it was this imagination of his, to wit that a strong band of warriors was holding Wolfstead, that made him deem there were no more worth thinking about of the warriors of the Mark save Otter's Company and the men in the Hall of the Wolfings.

CHAPTER XXII. OTTER FALLS ON AGAINST HIS WILL.

IT was with the same imagination working in him belike that the Roman Captain set none to guard the ford on the westward side of Mirkwood-water. The Romans tarried there but a little hour, and then went their ways; but Otter sent a man on a swift horse to watch them, and when they were clean gone for half an hour, he bade his folk to horse, and they departed, all save a handful of the swains and elders, who were left to tell the tidings to Thiodolf when he should come into Mid-mark.

So Otter and his folk crossed the ford, and drew up in good order on the westward bank, and it was then somewhat more than three hours after noon. He had been there but a little while before he noted a stir in the Bearing meadow, and lo, it was the first of Thiodolf's folk, who had gotten out of the wood and had fallen in with the men whom he had left behind. And these first were the riders of the Bearings, and the Wormings, (for they had out-gone the others who were afoot). It may well be thought how fearful was their anger when they set eyes on the smouldering ashes of the dwellings; nor even when those folk of Otter had told them all they had to tell could some of them refrain them from riding off to the burnt houses to seek for the bodies of their kindred. But when they came there, and amidst the ashes could find no bones, their hearts were lightened, and yet so mad wroth they were, that some could scarce sit their horses, and great tears gushed from the eyes of some, and pattered down like hailstones, so eager were they to see the blood of the Romans. So they rode back to where they had left their folk talking with them of Otter; and the Bearings were sitting grim upon their horses and somewhat scowling on Otter's men. Then the foremost of those who had come back from the houses waved his hand toward the ford, but could say nought for a while; but the captain and chief of the Bearings, a grizzled man very big of body, whose name was Arinbiorn, spake to that man and said; "What aileth thee Sweinbiorn the Black? What hast thou seen?"

He said:

“Now red and grey is the pavement of the Bearings’ house of old:
Red yet is the floor of the dais, but the hearth all grey and cold.
I knew not the house of my fathers; I could not call to mind
The fashion of the building of that Warder of the Wind.
O wide were grown the windows, and the roof exceeding high!
For nought there was to look on ’twixt the pavement and the sky.
But the tie-beam lay on the dais, and methought its staining fair;
For rings of smoothest charcoal were round it here and there,
And the red flame flickered o’er it, and never a staining wight
Hath red earth in his coffer so clear and glittering bright,
And still the little smoke-wreaths curled o’er it pale and blue.
Yea, fair is our hall’s adorning for a feast that is strange and new.”

Said Arinbiorn: “What sawest thou therein, O Sweinbiorn,
where sat thy grandsire at the feast? Where were the bones of thy
mother lying?”

Said Sweinbiorn:

“We sought the feast-hall over, and nought we found therein
Of the bones of the ancient mothers, or the younglings of the kin.
The men are greedy, doubtless, to lose no whit of the prey,
And will try if the hoary elders may yet outlive the way
That leads to the southland cities, till at last they come to stand
With the younglings in the market to be sold in an alien land.”

Arinbiorn’s brow lightened somewhat; but ere he could speak
again an ancient thrall of the Galtings spake and said:

“True it is, O warriors of the Bearings, that we might not see
any war-thralls being led away by the Romans when they came
away from the burning dwellings; and we deem it certain that they
crossed the water before the coming of the Romans, and that they
are now with the stay-at-homes of the Wolfings in the wild-wood
behind the Wolfing dwellings, for we hear tell that the War-duke
would not that the Hall-Sun should hold the Hall against the
whole Roman host.”

Then Sweinbiorn tossed up his sword into the air and caught it
by the hilts as it fell, and cried out: “On, on to the meadow, where
these thieves abide us!” Arinbiorn spake no word, but turned his
horse and rode down to the ford, and all men followed him; and

of the Bearings there were an hundred warriors save one, and of the Wormings eighty and seven.

So rode they over the meadow and into the ford and over it, and Otter's company stood on the bank to meet them, and shouted to see them; but the others made little noise as they crossed the water.

So when they were on the western bank Arinbiorn came among them of Otter, and cried out: "Where then is Otter, where is the War-duke, is he alive or dead?"

And the throng opened to him and Otter stood facing him; and Arinbiorn spake and said: "Thou art alive and unhurt, War-duke, when many have been hurt and slain; and methinks thy company is little minished though the kindred of the Bearings lacketh a roof; and its elders and women and children are gone into captivity. What is this? Was it a light thing that gangrel thieves should burn and waste in Mid-mark and depart unhurt, that ye stand here with clean blades and cold bodies?"

Said Otter: "Thou grievest for the hurt of thine House, Arinbiorn; but this at least is good, that though ye have lost the timber of your house ye have not lost its flesh and blood; the shell is gone, but the kernel is saved: for thy folk are by this time in the wood with the Wolfing stay-at-homes, and among these are many who may fight on occasion, so they are safe as for this time: the Romans may not come at them to hurt them."

Said Arinbiorn: "Had ye time to learn all this, Otter, when ye fled so fast before the Romans, that the father tarried not for the son, nor the son for the father?"

He spoke in a loud voice so that many heard him, and some deemed it evil; for anger and dissension between friends seemed abroad; but some were so eager for battle, that the word of Arinbiorn seemed good to them, and they laughed for pride and anger.

Then Otter answered meekly, for he was a wise man and a bold: "We fled not, Arinbiorn, but as the sword fleeth, when it springeth up from the iron helm to fall on the woollen coat. Are we not now of more avail to you, O men of the Bearings, than our dead corpses would have been?"

Arinbiorn answered not, but his face waxed red, as if he were struggling with a weight hard to lift: then said Otter:

"But when will Thiodolf and the main battle be with us?"

Arinbiorn answered calmly: "Maybe in a little hour from now, or somewhat more."

Said Otter: "My rede is that we abide him here, and when we are all met and well ordered together, fall on the Romans at once: for then shall we be more than they; whereas now we are far fewer, and moreover we shall have to set on them in their ground of vantage."

Arinbiorn answered nothing; but an old man of the Bearings, one Thorbiorn, came up and spake:

"Warriors, here are we talking and taking counsel, though this is no Hallowed Thing to bid us what we shall do, and what we shall forbear; and to talk thus is less like warriors than old women wrangling over the why and wherefore of a broken crock. Let the War-duke rule here, as is but meet and right. Yet if I might speak and not break the peace of the Goths, then would I say this, that it might be better for us to fall on these Romans at once before they have cast up a dike about them, as Fox telleth is their wont, and that even in an hour they may do much."

As he spake there was a murmur of assent about him, but Otter spake sharply, for he was grieved.

"Thorbiorn, thou art old, and shouldest not be void of prudence. Now it had been better for thee to have been in the wood to-day to order the women and the swains according to thine ancient wisdom than to egg on my young warriors to fare unwarily. Here will I abide Thiodolf."

Then Thorbiorn reddened and was wroth; but Arinbiorn spake:

"What is this to-do? Let the War-duke rule as is but right: but I am now become a man of Thiodolf's company; and he bade me haste on before to help all I might. Do thou as thou wilt, Otter: for Thiodolf shall be here in an hour's space, and if much diking shall be done in an hour, yet little slaying, forsooth, shall be done, and that especially if the foe is all armed and slayeth women and children. Yea if the Bearing women be all slain, yet shall not Tyr make us new ones out of the stones of the waste to wed with the Galtings and the fish-eating Houses?—this is easy to be done forsooth. Yea, easier than fighting the Romans and overcoming them!"

And he was very wroth, and turned away; and again there was a murmur and a hum about him. But while these had been speaking

aloud, Sweinbiorn had been talking softly to some of the younger men, and now he shook his naked sword in the air and spake aloud and sang:

“Ye tarry, Bears of Battle! ye linger, Sons of the Worm!
Ye crouch adown, O kindreds, from the gathering of the storm!
Ye say, it shall soon pass over and we shall fare afield
And reap the wheat with the war-sword and winnow in the shield.
But where shall be the corner wherein ye then shall abide,
And where shall be the woodland where the whelps of the bears shall hide
When 'twixt the snowy mountains and the edges of the sea
These men have swept the wild-wood and the fields where men may be
Of every living sword-blade, and every quivering spear,
And in the southland cities the yoke of slaves ye bear?
Lo ye! whoever follows I fare to sow the seed
Of the days to be hereafter and the deed that comes of deed.”

Therewith he waved his sword over his head, and made as if he would spur onward. But Arinbiorn thrust through the press and outwent him and cried out:

“None goeth before Arinbiorn the Old when the battle is pitched in the meadows of the Kindred. Come, ye sons of the Bear, ye children of the Worm! And come ye, whosoever hath a will to see stout men die!”

Then on he rode nor looked behind him, and the riders of the Bearings and the Wormings drew themselves out of the throng, and followed him, and rode clattering over the meadow towards Wolfstead. A few of the others rode with them, and yet but a few. For they remembered the holy Folk-mote and the oath of the War-duke, and how they had chosen Otter to be their leader. Howbeit, man looked askance at man, as if in shame to be left behind.

But Otter bethought him in the flash of a moment, “If these men ride alone, they shall die and do nothing; and if we ride with them it may be that we shall overthrow the Romans, and if we be vanquished, it shall go hard but we shall slay many of them, so that it shall be the easier for Thiodolf to deal with them.”

Then he spake hastily, and bade certain men abide at the ford

for a guard; then he drew his sword and rode to the front of his folk, and cried out aloud to them:

“Now at last has come the time to die, and let them of the Markmen who live hereafter lay us in howe. Set on, Sons of Tyr, and give not your lives away, but let them be dearly earned of our foemen.”

Then all shouted loudly and gladly; nor were they otherwise than exceeding glad; for now had they forgotten all other joys of life save the joy of fighting for the kindred and the days to be.

So Otter led them forth, and when he heard the whole company clattering and thundering on the earth behind him and felt their might enter into him, his brow cleared, and the anxious lines in the face of the old man smoothed themselves out, and as he rode along the soul so stirred within him that he sang out aloud:

“Time was when hot was the summer and I was young on the earth,
And I grudged me every moment that lacked its share of mirth.
I woke in the morn and was merry and all the world methought
For me and my heart's deliverance that hour was newly wrought.
I have passed through the halls of manhood, I have reached the doors of eld,
And I have been glad and sorry, but ever have upheld
My heart against all trouble that none might call me sad,
But ne'er came such remembrance of how my heart was glad
In the afternoon of summer 'neath the still unwearied sun
Of the days when I was little and all deeds were hopes to be won,
As now at last it cometh when e'en in such-like tide,
For the freeing of my trouble o'er the Fathers' field I ride.”

Many men perceived that he sang, and saw that he was merry, howbeit few heard his very words, and yet all were glad of him.

Fast they rode, being wishful to catch up with the Bearings and the Wormings, and soon they came anigh them, and they, hearing the thunder of the horse-hoofs, looked and saw that it was the company of Otter, and so slacked their speed till they were all joined together with joyous shouting and laughter. So then they ordered the ranks anew and so set forward in great joy without haste or turmoil toward Wolfstead and the Romans. For now the bitterness of their fury and the sourness of their abiding wrath

were turned into the mere joy of battle; even as the clear red and sweet wine comes of the ugly ferment and rough trouble of the must.

CHAPTER XXIII. THIODOLF MEETETH THE ROMANS IN THE WOLFING MEADOW.

IT was scarce an hour after this that the footmen of Thiodolf came out of the thicket road on to the meadow of the Bearings; there saw they men gathered on a rising ground, and they came up to them and saw how some of them were looking with troubled faces towards the ford and what lay beyond it, and some toward the wood and the coming of Thiodolf. But these were they whom Otter had bidden abide Thiodolf there, and he had sent two messengers to them for Thiodolf's behoof that he might have due tidings so soon as he came out of the thicket: the first told how Otter had been compelled in a manner to fall on the Romans along with the riders of the Bearings and the Wormings, and the second who had but just then come, told how the Markmen had been worsted by the Romans, and had given back from the Wolfing dwellings, and were making a stand against the foemen in the meadow betwixt the ford and Wolfstead.

Now when Thiodolf heard of these tidings he stayed not to ask long questions, but led the whole host straightway down to the ford, lest the remnant of Otter's men should be driven down there, and the Romans should hold the western bank against him.

At the ford there was none to withstand them, nor indeed any man at all; for the men whom Otter had set there, when they heard that the battle had gone against their kindred, had ridden their ways to join them. So Thiodolf crossed over the ford, he and his in good order all afoot, he like to the others; but for him he was clad in the Dwarf-wrought Hauberk, but was unhelmeted and bare no shield. Throng-plough was naked in his hand as he came up all dripping on to the bank and stood in the meadow of the Wolfings; his face was stern and set as he gazed straight onward to the place of the fray, but he did not look as joyous as his wont was in going down to the battle.

Now they had gone but a short way from the ford before the

noise of the fight and the blowing of horns came down the wind to them, but it was a little way further before they saw the fray with their eyes; because the ground fell away from the river somewhat at first, and then rose and fell again before it went up in one slope toward the Wolfing dwellings. But when they were come to the top of the next swelling of the ground, they beheld from thence what they had to deal with; for there round about a ground of vantage was the field black with the Roman host, and in the midst of it was a tangle of struggling men and tossing spears, and glittering swords.

So when they beheld the battle of their kindred they gave a great shout and hastened onward the faster; and they were ordered into the wedge-array and Thiodolf led them, as meet it was. And now even as they who were on the outward edge of the array and could see what was toward were looking on the battle with eager eyes, there came an answering shout down the wind, which they knew for the voice of the Goths amid the foemen, and then they saw how the ring of the Romans shook and parted, and their array fell back, and lo the company of the Markmen standing stoutly together, though sorely minished; and sure it was that they had not fled or been scattered, but were ready to fall one over another in one band, for there were no men straggling towards the ford, though many masterless horses ran here and there about the meadow. Now, therefore, none doubted but that they would deliver their friends from the Romans, and overthrow the foemen.

But now befell a wonder, a strange thing to tell of. The Romans soon perceived what was a-doing, whereupon the half of them turned about to face the new comers, while the other half still withstood the company of Otter: the wedge-array of Thiodolf drew nearer and nearer till it was hard on the place where it should spread itself out to storm down on the foe, and the Goths beset by the Romans made them ready to fall on from their side. There was Thiodolf leading his host, and all men looking for the token and sign to fall on; but even as he lifted up Throng-plough to give that sign, a cloud came over his eyes and he saw nought of all that was before him, and he staggered back as one who hath gotten a deadly stroke, and so fell swooning to the earth, though none had smitten him. Then stayed was the wedge-array even at the very

point of onset, and the hearts of the Goths sank, for they deemed that their leader was slain, and those who were nearest to him raised him up and bore him hastily a back out of the battle; and the Romans also had beheld him fall, and they also deemed him dead or sore hurt, and shouted for joy and loitered not, but stormed forth on the wedge-array like valiant men; for it must be told that they, who erst out-numbered the company of Otter, were now much out-numbered, but they deemed it might well be that they could dismay the Goths since they had been stayed by the fall of their leader; and Otter's company were wearied with sore fighting against a great host. Nevertheless these last, who had not seen the fall of Thiodolf (for the Romans were thick between him and them) fell on with such exceeding fury that they drove the Romans who faced them back on those who had set on the wedge-array, which also stood fast undismayed; for he who stood next to Thiodolf, a man big of body, and stout of heart, hight Thorolf, hove up a great axe and cried out aloud:

“Here is the next man to Thiodolf! here is one who will not fall till some one thrusts him over, here is Thorolf of the Wolfings! Stand fast and shield you, and smite, though Thiodolf be gone untimely to the Gods!”

So none gave back a foot, and fierce was the fight about the wedge-array; and the men of Otter—but there was no Otter there, and many another man was gone, and Arinbiorn the Old led them—these stormed on so fiercely that they cleft their way through all and joined themselves to their kindred, and the battle was renewed in the Wolfing meadow. But the Romans had this gain, that Thiodolf's men had let go their occasion for falling on the Romans with their line spread out so that every man might use his weapons; yet were the Goths strong both in valiancy and in numbers, nor might the Romans break into their array, and as aforesaid the Romans were the fewer, for it was less than half of their host that had pursued the Goths when they had been thrust back from their fierce onset: nor did more than the half seem needed, so many of them had fallen along with Otter the War-duke and Sweinbiorn of the Bearings, that they seemed to the Romans but a feeble band easy to overcome.

So fought they in the Wolfing meadow in the fifth hour after

high-noon, and neither yielded to the other: but while these things were a-doing, men laid Thiodolf adown aloof from the battle under a doddered oak half a furlong from where the fight was a-doing, round whose bole clung flocks of wool from the sheep that drew around it in the hot summer-tide and rubbed themselves against it, and the ground was trodden bare of grass round the bole, and close to the trunk was worn into a kind of trench. There then they laid Thiodolf, and they wondered that no blood came from him, and that there was no sign of a shot-weapon in his body.

But as for him, when he fell, all memory of the battle and what had gone before it faded from his mind, and he passed into sweet and pleasant dreams wherein he was a lad again in the days before he had fought with the three Hun-Kings in the hazelled field. And in these dreams he was doing after the manner of young lads, sporting in the meadows, backing unbroken colts, swimming in the river, going a-hunting with the elder carles. And especially he deemed that he was in the company of one old man who had taught him both wood-craft and the handling of weapons: and fair at first was his dream of his doings with this man; he was with him in the forge smithying a sword-blade, and hammering into its steel the thin golden wires; and fishing with an angle along with him by the eddies of Mirkwood-water; and sitting with him in an ingle of the Hall, the old man telling a tale of an ancient warrior of the Wolfings hight Thiodolf also: then suddenly and without going there, they were in a little clearing of the woods resting after hunting, a roe-deer with an arrow in her lying at their feet, and the old man was talking, and telling Thiodolf in what wise it was best to go about to get the wind of a hart; but all the while there was going on the thunder of a great gale of wind through the woodland boughs, even as the drone of a bag-pipe cleaves to the tune. Presently Thiodolf arose and would go about his hunting again, and stooped to take up his spear, and even therewith the old man's speech stayed, and Thiodolf looked up, and lo, his face was white like stone, and he touched him, and he was hard as flint, and like the image of an ancient god as to his face and hands, though the wind stirred his hair and his raiment, as they did before. Therewith a great pang smote Thiodolf in his

dream, and he felt as if he also were stiffening into stone, and he strove and struggled, and lo, the wild-wood was gone, and a white light empty of all vision was before him, and as he moved his head this became the Wolfing meadow, as he had known it so long, and thereat a soft pleasure and joy took hold of him, till again he looked, and saw there no longer the kine and sheep, and the herd-women tending them, but the rush and turmoil of that fierce battle, the confused thundering noise of which was going up to the heavens; for indeed he was now fully awake again.

So he stood up and looked about; and around him was a ring of the sorrowful faces of the warriors, who had deemed that he was hurt deadly, though no hurt could they find upon him. But the Dwarf-wrought Hauberk lay upon the ground beside him; for they had taken it off him to look for his hurts.

So he looked into their faces and said: "What aileth you, ye men? I am alive and unhurt; what hath betided?"

And one said: "Art thou verily alive, or a man come back from the dead? We saw thee fall as thou wentest leading us against the foe as if thou hadst been smitten by a thunder-bolt, and we deemed thee dead or grievously hurt. Now the carles are fighting stoutly, and all is well since thou livest yet."

So he said: "Give me the point and edges that I know, that I may smite myself therewith and not the foemen; for I have feared and blenched from the battle."

Said an old warrior: "If that be so, Thiodolf, wilt thou blench twice? Is not once enough? Now let us go back to the hard hand-play, and if thou wilt, smite thyself after the battle, when we have once more had a man's help of thee."

Therewith he held out Throng-plough to him by the point, and Thiodolf took hold of the hilts and handled it and said: "Let us hasten, while the Gods will have it so, and while they are still suffering me to strike a stroke for the kindred."

And therewith he brandished Throng-plough, and went forth toward the battle, and the heart grew hot within him, and the joy of waking life came back to him, the joy which but erewhile he had given to a mere dream.

But the old man who had rebuked him stooped down and lifted the Hauberk from the ground, and cried out after him, "O Thio-

dolf, and wilt thou go naked into so strong a fight? and thou with this so goodly sword-rampart?"

Thiodolf stayed a moment, and even therewith they looked, and lo! the Romans giving back before the Goths and the Goths following up the chase, but slowly and steadily. Then Thiodolf heeded nothing save the battle, but ran forward hastily, and those warriors followed him, the old man last of all holding the Hauberk in his hand, and muttering:

“So fares hot blood to the glooming and the world beneath the grass;
And the fruit of the Wolfings’ orchard in a flash from the world must pass.
Men say that the tree shall blossom in the garden of the folk,
And the new twig thrust him forward from the place where the old one
broke,
And all be well as aforetime: but old and old I grow,
And I doubt me if such another the folk to come shall know.”

And he still hurried forward as fast as his old body might go, so that he might wrap the safeguard of the Hauberk round Thiodolf’s body.

CHAPTER XXIV. THE GOTHS ARE OVERTHROWN BY THE ROMANS.

NOW rose up a mighty shout when Thiodolf came back to the battle of the kindreds, for many thought he had been slain; and they gathered round about him, and cried out to him joyously out of their hearts of good-fellowship, and the old man who had rebuked Thiodolf, and who was Jorund of the Wolfings, came up to him and reached out to him the Hauberk, and he did it on scarce heeding; for all his heart and soul was turned toward the battle of the Romans and what they were a-doing; and he saw that they were falling back in good order, as men outnumbered, but undismayed. So he gathered all his men together and ordered them afresh; for they were somewhat disarrayed with the fray and the chase: and now he no longer ordered them in the wedge-array, but in a line here three deep, here five deep, or more, for the foes were hard at hand, and outnumbered, and so far over-

come, that he and all men deemed it a little matter to give these their last overthrow, and then onward to Wolfstead to storm on what was left there and purge the house of the foemen. Howbeit Thiodolf bethought him that succour might come to the Romans from their main-battle, as they needed not many men there, since there was nought to fear behind them: but the thought was dim within him, for once more since he had gotten the Hauberk on him the earth was wavering and dream-like: he looked about him, and nowise was he as in past days of battle when he saw nought but the foe before him, and hoped for nothing save the victory. But now indeed the Wood-Sun seemed to him to be beside him, and not against his will, as one besetting and hindering him, but as though his own longing had drawn her thither and would not let her depart; and while it seemed to him that her beauty was clearer to be seen than the bodies of the warriors round about him. For the rest he seemed to be in a dream indeed, and, as men do in dreams, to be for ever striving to be doing something of more moment than anything which he did, but which he must ever leave undone. And as the dream gathered and thickened about him the foe before him changed to his eyes, and seemed no longer the stern brown-skinned smooth-faced men under their crested iron helms with their iron-covered shields before them, but rather, big-headed men, small of stature, long-bearded, swart, crooked of body, exceeding foul of aspect. And he looked on and did nothing for a while, and his head whirled as though he had been grievously smitten.

Thus tarried the kindreds awhile, and they were bewildered and their hearts fell because Thiodolf did not fly on the foemen like a falcon on the quarry, as his wont was. But as for the Romans, they had now stayed, and were facing their foes again, and that on a vantage-ground, since the field sloped up toward the Wolfing dwelling; and they gathered heart when they saw that the Goths tarried and forbore them. But the sun was sinking, and the evening was hard at hand.

So at last Thiodolf led forward with Throng-plough held aloft in his right hand; but his left hand he held out by his side, as though he were leading someone along. And as he went, he mut-

tered: "When will these accursed sons of the nether earth leave the way clear to us, that we may be alone and take pleasure each in each amidst of the flowers and the sun?"

Now as the two hosts drew near to one another, again came the sound of trumpets afar off, and men knew that this would be succour coming to the Romans from their main-battle, and the Romans thereon shouted for joy, and the host of the kindreds might no longer forbear, but rushed on fiercely against them; and for Thiodolf it was now come to this, that so entangled was he in his dream that he rather went with his men than led them. Yet had he Throng-plough in his right hand, and he muttered in his beard as he went, "Smite before! smite behind! and smite on the right hand! but never on the left!"

Thus then they met, and as before, neither might the Goths sweep the Romans away, nor the Romans break the Goths into flight; yet were many of the kindred anxious and troubled, since they knew that aid was coming to the Romans, and they heard the trumpets sounding nearer and more joyous; and at last, as the men of the kindreds were growing a-wearied with fighting, they heard those horns as it were in their very ears, and the thunder of the tramp of footmen, and they knew that a fresh host of men was upon them; then those they had been fighting with opened before them, falling aside to the right and the left, and the fresh men passing between them, fell on the Goths like the waters of a river when a sluice-gate is opened. They came on in very good order, never breaking their ranks, but swift withal, smiting and pushing before them, and so brake through the array of the Goth-folk, and drave them this way and that way down the slopes.

Yet still fought the warriors of the kindred most valiantly, making stand and facing the foe again and again in knots of a score or two score, or maybe ten score; and though many a man was slain, yet scarce any one before he had slain or hurt a Roman; and some there were, and they the oldest, who fought as if they and the few about them were all the host that was left to the folk, and heeded not that others were driven back, or that the Romans gathered about them, cutting them off from all succour and aid, but went on smiting till they were felled with many strokes.

Howbeit the array of the Goths was broken and many were slain, and perforce they must give back, and it seemed as if they would be driven into the river and all be lost.

But for Thiodolf, this befell him: that at first, when those fresh men fell on, he seemed, as it were, to wake unto himself again, and he cried aloud the cry of the Wolf, and thrust into the thickest of the fray, and slew many and was hurt of none, and for a moment of time there was an empty space round about him, such fear he cast even into the valiant hearts of the foemen. But those who had time to see him as they stood by him noted that he was as pale as a dead man, and his eyes set and staring; and so of a sudden, while he stood thus threatening the ring of doubtful foemen, the weakness took him again, Throng-plough tumbled from his hand, and he fell to earth as one dead.

Then of those who saw him some deemed that he had been striving against some secret hurt till he could do no more; and some that there was a curse abroad that had fallen upon him and upon all the kindreds of the Mark; some thought him dead and some swooning. But, dead or alive, the warriors would not leave their War-duke among the foemen, so they lifted him, and gathered about him a goodly band that held its own against all comers, and fought through the turmoil stoutly and steadily; and others gathered to them, till they began to be something like a host again, and the Romans might not break them into knots of desperate men any more.

Thus they fought their way, Arinbiorn of the Bearings leading them now, with a mind to make a stand for life or death on some vantage-ground; and so, often turning upon the Romans, they came in array ever growing more solid to the rising ground looking one way over the ford and the other to the slopes where the battle had just been. There they faced the foe as men who may be slain, but will be driven no further; and what bowmen they had got spread out from their flanks and shot on the Romans, who had with them no light-armed, or slingers or bowmen, for they had left them at Wolfstead. So the Romans stood a while, and gave breathing-space to the Markmen, which indeed was the saving of them: for if they had fallen on hotly and held to it steadily, it is like that they would have passed over all the bodies

of the Markmen: for these had lost their leader, either slain, as some thought, or, as others thought, banned from leadership by the Gods; and their host was heavy-hearted; and though it is like that they would have stood there till each had fallen over other, yet was their hope grown dim, and the whole folk brought to a perilous and fearful pass, for if these were slain or scattered there were no more but they, and nought between fire and the sword and the people of the Mark.

But once again the faint-heart folly of the Roman Captain saved his foes: for whereas he once thought that the whole power of the Markmen lay in Otter and his company, and deemed them too little to meddle with, so now he ran his head into the other hedge, and deemed that Thiodolf's company was but a part of the succour that was at hand for the Goths, and that they were over-big for him to meddle with.

True it is also that now dark night was coming on, and the land was unknown to the Romans, who moreover trusted not wholly to the dastards of the Goths who were their guides and scouts: furthermore the wood was at hand, and they knew not what it held; and with all this and above it all, it is to be said that over them also had fallen a dread or some doom anear; for those habitations amidst of the wild-woods were terrible to them as they were dear to the Goths; and the Gods of their foemen seemed to be lying in wait to fall upon them, even if they should slay every man of the kindreds.

So now having driven back the Goths to that height over the ford, which indeed was no stronghold, no mountain, scarce a hill even, nought but a gentle swelling of the earth, they forebore them; and raising up the whoop of victory drew slowly aback, picking up their own dead and wounded, and slaying the wounded Markmen. They had with them also some few captives, but not many; for the fighting had been to the death between man and man on the Wolfing Meadow.

CHAPTER XXV. THE HOST OF THE MARKMEN COMETH INTO THE WILD-WOOD.

YET though the Romans were gone, the Gothfolk were very hard bested. They had been overthrown, not sorely maybe if they had been in an alien land, and free to come and go as they would; yet sorely as things were, because the foe-man was sitting in their own House, and they must needs drag him out of it or perish: and to many the days seemed evil, and the Gods fighting against them, and both the Wolfings and the other kindreds bethought them of the Hall-Sun and her wisdom and longed to hear of tidings concerning her.

But now the word ran through the host that Thiodolf was certainly not slain. Slowly he had come to himself, and yet was not himself, for he sat among his men gloomy and silent, clean contrary to his wont; for hitherto he had been a merry man, and a joyous fellow.

Amidst of the ridge whereon the Markmen now abode, there was a ring made of the chief warriors and captains and wise men who had not been slain or grievously hurt in the fray, and amidst them all sat Thiodolf on the ground, his chin sunken on his breast, looking more like a captive than the leader of a host amidst of his men; and that the more as his scabbard was empty; for when Throng-plough had fallen from his hand, it had been trodden under foot, and lost in the turmoil. There he sat, and the others in that ring of men looked sadly upon him; such as Arinbiorn of the Bearings, and Wolfkettle and Thorolf of his own House, and Harandi of the Elkings, and Geirbald the Shielding, the messenger of the woods, and Fox who had seen the Roman Garth, and many others. It was night now, and men had lighted fires about the host, for they said that the Romans knew where to find them if they listed to seek; and about those fires were men eating and drinking what they might come at, but amidmost of that ring was the biggest fire, and men turned them towards it for counsel and help, for elsewhere none said, "What do we?" for they were heavy-hearted and redeless, since the Gods had taken the victory out of their hands just when they seemed at point to win it.

But amidst all this there was a little stir outside that biggest

ring, and men parted, and through them came a swain amongst the chiefs, and said, "Who will lead me to the War-duke?"

Thiodolf, who was close beside the lad, answered never a word; but Arinbiorn said; "This man here sitting is the War-duke: speak to him, for he may hearken to thee: but first who art thou?"

Said the lad; "My name is Ali the son of Grey, and I come with a message from the Hall-Sun and the stay-at-homes who are in the Woodland."

Now when he named the Hall-Sun Thiodolf started and looked up, and turning to his left-hand said, "And what sayeth thy daughter?"

Men did not heed that he said *thy* daughter, but deemed that he said *my* daughter, since he was wont as her would-be foster-father to call her so. But Ali spake:

"War-duke and ye chieftains, thus saith the Hall-Sun: 'I know that by this time Otter hath been slain and many another, and ye have been overthrown and chased by the Romans, and that now there is little counsel in you except to abide the foe where ye are and there to die valiantly. But now do my bidding and as I am bidden, and then whosoever dieth or liveth, the kindreds shall vanquish that they may live and grow greater. Do ye thus: the Romans think no otherwise but to find you here to-morrow or else departed across the water as broken men, and they will fall upon you with their whole host, and then make a war-garth after their manner at Wolfstead and carry fire and the sword and the chains of thralldom into every House of the Mark. Now therefore fetch a compass and come into the wood on the north-west of the houses and make your way to the Thing-stead of the Mid-mark. For who knoweth but that to-morrow we may fall upon these thieves again? Of this shall ye hear more when we may speak together and take counsel face to face; for we stay-at-homes know somewhat closely of the ways of these Romans. Haste then! let not the grass grow over your feet!

"'But to thee, Thiodolf, have I a word to say when we meet; for I wot that as now thou canst not hearken to my word.' Thus saith the Hall-Sun."

"Wilt thou speak, War-duke?" said Arinbiorn. But Thiodolf

shook his head. Then said Arinbiorn; "Shall I speak for thee?" and Thiodolf nodded yea. Then said Arinbiorn: "Ali son of Grey, art thou going back to her that sent thee?"

"Yea," said the lad, "but in your company, for ye will be coming straightway and I know all the ways closely; and there is need for a guide through the dark night as ye will see presently."

Then stood up Arinbiorn and said: "Chiefs and captains, go ye speedily and array your men for departure: bid them leave all the fires burning and come their ways as silently as may be; for now will we wend this same hour before moonrise into the Wild-wood and the Thing-stead of Mid-mark; thus saith the War-duke."

But when they were gone, and Arinbiorn and Thiodolf were left alone, Thiodolf lifted up his head and spake slowly and painfully:

"Arinbiorn, I thank thee: and thou dost well to lead this folk: since as for me that is somewhat that weighs me down, and I know not whether it be life or death; therefore I may no longer be your captain, for twice now have I blenched from the battle. Yet command me, and I will obey, set a sword in my hand and I will smite, till the God snatches it out of my hand, as he did Throng-plough to-day."

"And that is well," said Arinbiorn, "it may be that ye shall meet that God to-morrow, and heave up sword against him, and either overcome him or go to thy fathers a proud and valiant man."

So they spake, and Thiodolf stood up and seemed of better cheer. But presently the whole host was afoot, and they went their ways warily with little noise, and wound little by little about the Wolfing meadow and about the acres towards the wood at the back of the Houses; and they met nothing by the way except an out-guard of the Romans, whom they slew there nigh silently, and bore away their bodies, twelve in number, lest the Romans when they sent to change the guard, should find the slain and have an inkling of the way the Goths were gone; but now they deemed that the Romans might think their guard fled, or perchance that they have been carried away by the Gods of the woodland folk.

So came they into the wood, and Arinbiorn and the chiefs were for striking the All-men's road to the Thing-stead and so coming thither; but the lad Ali when he heard it laughed and said:

“If ye would sleep to-night, ye shall wend another way. For the Hall-Sun hath had us at work cumbering it against the foe with great trees felled with limbs, branches, and all. And indeed ye shall find the Thing-stead fenced like a castle, and the in-gate hard to find; yet will I bring you thither.”

So did he without delay, and presently they came anigh the Thing-stead; and the place was fenced cunningly, so that if men would enter they must go by a narrow way that had a fence of tree-trunks on each side wending inward like the maze in a pleasance. Thereby now wended the host all afoot, since it was a holy place and no beast must set foot therein, so that the horses were left without it: so slowly and right quietly once more they came into the garth of the Thing-stead; and lo, a many folk there, of the Wolfings and the Bearings and other kindreds, who had gathered thereto; and albeit these were not warriors in their prime, yet were there none save the young children and the weaker of the women but had weapons of some kind; and they were well ordered, standing or sitting in ranks like folk awaiting battle. There were booths of boughs and rushes set up for shelter of the feebler women and the old men and children along the edges of the fence, for the Hall-Sun had bidden them keep the space clear round about the Doom-ring and the Hill of Speech as if for a mighty folk-mote, so that the warriors might have room to muster there and order their array. There were some cooking-fires lighted about the aforesaid booths, but neither many nor great, and they were screened with wattle from the side that lay toward the Romans; for the Hall-Sun would not that they should hold up lanterns for their foemen to find them by. Little noise there was in that stronghold, moreover, for the hearts of all who knew their right hands from their left were set on battle and the destruction of the foe that would destroy the kindreds.

Anigh the Speech-Hill, on its eastern side, had the bole of a slender beech tree been set up, and at the top of it a cross-beam was nailed on, and therefrom hung the wondrous lamp, the Hall-Sun, glimmering from on high, and though its light was but a glimmer amongst the mighty wood, yet was it also screened on three sides from the sight of the chance wanderer by wings of thin plank. But beneath her namesake as beforetime in the Hall sat the

Hall-Sun, the maiden, on a heap of faggots, and she was wrapped in a dark blue cloak from under which gleamed the folds of the fair golden-broidered gown she was wont to wear at folk-motes, and her right hand rested on a naked sword that lay across her knees: beside her sat the old man Sorli, the Wise in War, and about her were slim lads and sturdy maidens and old carles of the thralls or freedmen ready to bear the commands that came from her mouth; for she and Sorli were the captains of the stay-at-homes.

Now came Thiodolf and Arinbiorn and other leaders into the ring of men before her, and she greeted them kindly and said:

“Hail, Sons of Tyr! now that I behold you again it seemeth to me as if all were already won: the time of waiting hath been weary, and we have borne the burden of fear every day from morn till even, and in the waking hour we presently remembered it. But now ye are come, even if this Thing-stead werelighted by the flames of the Wolfing Roof instead of by these moonbeams; even if we had to begin again and seek new dwellings, and another water and other meadows, yet great should grow the kindreds of the Men who have dwelt in the Mark, and nought should overshadow them: and though the beasts and the Romans were dwelling in their old places, yet should these kindreds make new clearings in the Wild-wood; and they with their deeds should cause other waters to be famous, that as yet have known no deeds of man; and they should compel the Earth to bear increase round about their dwelling-places for the welfare of the kindreds. O Sons of Tyr, friendly are your faces, and undismayed, and the Terror of the Nations has not made you afraid any more than would the onrush of the bisons that feed adown the grass hills. Happy is the eve, O children of the Goths, yet shall to-morrow morn be happier.”

Many heard what she spake, and a murmur of joy ran through the ranks of men: for they deemed her words to forecast victory.

And now amidst her speaking, the moon, which had arisen on Mid-mark, when the host first entered into the wood, had overtopped the tall trees that stood like a green wall round about the Thing-stead, and shone down on that assembly, and flashed coldly back from the arms of the warriors. And the Hall-Sun cast off her dark blue cloak and stood up in her golden-broidered rai-

ment, which flashed back the grey light like as it had been an icicle hanging from the roof of some hall in the midnight of Yule, when the feast is high within, and without the world is silent with the night of the ten-weeks' frost.

Then she spake again: "O War-duke, thy mouth is silent; speak to this warrior of the Bearings that he bid the host what to do; for wise are ye both, and dear are the minutes of this night and should not be wasted; since they bring about the salvation of the Wolfings, and the vengeance of the Bearings, and the hope renewed of all the kindreds."

Then Thiodolf abode a while with his head down cast; his bosom heaved, and he set his left hand to his swordless scabbard, and his right to his throat, as though he were sore troubled with something he might not tell of: but at last he lifted up his head and spoke to Arinbiorn, but slowly and painfully, as he had spoken before:

"Chief of the Bearings, go up on to the Hill of Speech, and speak to the folk out of thy wisdom, and let them know that tomorrow early before the sun-rising those that may, and are not bound by the Gods against it, shall do deeds according to their might, and win rest for themselves, and new days of deeds for the kindreds."

Therewith he ceased, and let his head fall again, and the Hall-Sun looked at him askance. But Arinbiorn clomb the Speech-Hill and said:

"Men of the kindreds, it is now a few days since we first met the Romans and fought with them; and whiles we have had the better, and whiles the worse in our dealings, as oft in war befalleth: for they are men, and we no less than men. But now look to it what ye will do; for we may no longer endure these outlanders in our houses, and we must either die or get our own again: and that is not merely a few wares stored up for use, nor a few head of neat, nor certain timbers piled up into a dwelling, but the life we have made in the land we have made. I show you no choice, for no choice there is. Here are we bare of everything in the wild-wood: for the most part our children are crying for us at home, our wives are longing for us in our houses, and if we come not to them in kindness, the Romans shall come to them in grimness. Down

yonder in the plain, moreover, is our wain-burg slowly drawing near to us, and with it is much livelihood of ours, which is a little thing, for we may get more; but also there are our banners of battle and the tokens of the kindred, which is a great thing. And between all this and us there lieth but little; nought but a band of valiant men, and a few swords and spears, and a few wounds, and the hope of death amidst the praise of the people; and this ye have to set out to wend across within two or three hours. I will not ask if ye will do so, for I wot that even so ye will; therefore when I have done, shout not, nor clash sword on shield, for we are no great way off that house of ours wherein dwells the foe that would destroy us. Let each man rest as he may, and sleep if he may with his war-gear on him and his weapons by his side, and when he is next awakened by the captains and the leaders of hundreds and scores, let him not think that it is night, but let him betake himself to his place among his kindred and be ready to go through the wood with as little noise as may be. Now all is said that the War-duke would have me say, and to-morrow shall those see him who are foremost in falling upon the foemen, for he longeth sorely for his seat on the dais of the Wolfing Hall."

So he spake, and even as he bade them, they made no sound save a joyous murmur; and straightway the more part of them betook themselves to sleep as men who must busy themselves about a weighty matter; for they were wise in the ways of war. So sank all the host to the ground save those who were appointed as watchers of the night, and Arinbiorn and Thiodolf and the Hall-Sun; they three yet stood together; and Arinbiorn said:

"Now it seems to me not so much as if we had vanquished the foe and were safe and at rest, but rather as if we had no foemen and never have had. Deep peace is on me, though hitherto I have been deemed a wrathful man, and it is to me as if the kindreds that I love had filled the whole earth, and left no room for foemen: even so it may really be one day. To-night it is well, yet to-morrow it shall be better. What thine errand may be, Thiodolf, I scarce know; for something hath changed in thee, and thou art become strange to us. But as for mine errand, I will tell it thee; it is that I am seeking Otter of the Laxings, my friend and fellow, whose wisdom my foolishness drove under the point and edge of

the Romans, so that he is no longer here; I am seeking him, and to-morrow I think I shall find him, for he hath not had time to travel far, and we shall be blithe and merry together. And now will I sleep; for I have bidden the watchers awaken me if any need be. Sleep thou also, Thiodolf! and wake up thine old self when the moon is low." Therewith he laid himself down under the lee of the pile of faggots, and was presently asleep.

CHAPTER XXVI. THIODOLF TALKETH WITH THE WOOD-SUN.

NOW were Thiodolf and the Hall-Sun left alone together standing by the Speech-Hill; and the moon was risen high in the heavens above the tree-tops of the wild-wood. Thiodolf scarce stirred, and he still held his head bent down as one lost in thought.

Then said the Hall-Sun, speaking softly amidst the hush of the camp:

"I have said that the minutes of this night are dear, and they are passing swiftly; and it may be that thou wilt have much to say and to do before the host is astir with the dawning. So come thou with me a little way, that thou mayst hear of new tidings, and think what were best to do amidst them."

And without more ado she took him by the hand and led him forth, and he went as he was led, not saying a word. They passed out of the camp into the wood, none hindering, and went a long way where under the beech-leaves there was but a glimmer of the moonlight, and presently Thiodolf's feet went as it were of themselves; for they had hit a path that he knew well and over-well.

So came they to that little wood-lawn where first in this tale Thiodolf met the Wood-Sun; and the stone seat there was not empty now any more than it was then; for thereon sat the Wood-Sun, clad once more in her glittering raiment. Her head was sunken down, her face hidden by her hands; neither did she look up when she heard their feet on the grass, for she knew who they were.

Thiodolf lingered not; for a moment it was to him as if all that past time had never been, and its battles and hurry and hopes and

fears but mere shows, and the unspoken words of a dream. He went straight up to her and sat down by her side and put his arm about her shoulders, and strove to take her hand to caress it; but she moved but little, and it was as if she heeded him not. And the Hall-Sun stood before them and looked at them for a little while; and then she fell to speech; but at the first sound of her voice, it seemed that the Wood-Sun trembled, but still she hid her face. Said the Hall-Sun:

“Two griefs I see before me in mighty hearts grown great;
 And to change both these into gladness out-goes the power of fate.
 Yet I, a lonely maiden, have might to vanquish one
 Till it melt as the mist of the morning before the summer sun.
 O Wood-Sun, thou hast borne me, and I were fain indeed
 To give thee back thy gladness; but thou com'st of the Godhead's seed,
 And herein my might avails not; because I can but show
 Unto these wedded sorrows the truth that the heart should know
 Ere the will hath wielded the hand; and for thee, I can tell thee nought
 That thou hast not known this long while; thy will and thine hand have
 wrought,
 And the man that thou lovest shall live in despite of Gods and of men,
 If yet thy will endureth. But what shall it profit thee then
 That after the fashion of Godhead thou hast gotten thee a thrall
 To be thine and never another's, whatso in the world may befall?
 Lo! yesterday this was a man, and to-morrow it might have been
 The very joy of the people, though never again it were seen;
 Yet a part of all they hoped for through all the lapse of years,
 To make their laughter happy and dull the sting of tears;
 To quicken all remembrance of deeds that never die,
 And death that maketh eager to live as the days go by.
 Yea, many a deed had he done as he lay in the dark of the mound;
 As the seed-wheat plotteth of spring, laid under the face of the ground
 That the foot of the husbandman treadeth, that the wind of the winter
 wears,
 That the turbid cold flood hideth from the constant hope of the years.
 This man that should leave in his death his life unto many an one
 Wilt thou make him a God of the fearful who live lone under the sun?

THE HALL-SUN BIDS HER MOTHER SPEAK 165

And then shalt thou have what thou wouldest when amidst of the hazelled field

Thou kissed'st the mouth of the helper, and the hand of the people's shield,
Shalt thou have the thing that thou wouldest when thou broughtest me to birth,

And I, the soul of the Wolfings, began to look on earth?
Wilt thou play the God, O mother, and make a man anew,
A joyless thing and a fearful? Then I betwixt you two,
'Twixt your longing and your sorrow will cast the sundering word,
And tell out all the story of that rampart of the sword!
I shall bid my mighty father make choice of death in life,
Or life in death victorious and the crownèd end of strife."

Ere she had ended, the Wood-Sun let her hands fall down, and showed her face, which for all its unpaled beauty looked wearied and anxious; and she took Thiodolf's hand in hers, while she looked with eyes of love upon the Hall-Sun, and Thiodolf laid his cheek to her cheek, and though he smiled not, yet he seemed as one who is happy. At last the Wood-Sun spoke and said:

"Thou sayest sooth, O daughter: I am no God of might,
Yet I am of their race, and I think with their thoughts and see with their sight,
And the threat of the doom did I know of, and yet spared not to lie:
For I thought that the fâte foreboded might touch and pass us by,
As the sword that heweth the war-helm and cleaveth a cantle away,
And the cunning smith shall mend it and it goeth again to the fray;
If my hand might have held for a moment, yea, even against his will,
The life of my beloved! But Weird is the master still:
And this man's love of my body and his love of the ancient kin
Were matters o'er-mighty to deal with and the game withal to win.
Woe's me for the waning of all things, and my hope that needs must fade
As the fruitless sun of summer on the waste where nought is made!
And now farewell, O daughter, thou mayst not see the kiss
Of the hapless and the death-doomed when I have told of this;
Yet once again shalt thou see him, though I no more again,
Fair with the joy that hopeth and dieth not in vain."

Then came the Hall-Sun close to her, and knelt down by her, and laid her head upon her knees and wept for love of her mother, who kissed her oft and caressed her; and Thiodolf's hand strayed, as it were, on to his daughter's head, and he looked kindly on her, though scarce now as if he knew her. Then she arose when she had kissed her mother once more, and went her ways from that wood-lawn into the woods again, and so to the Folk-mote of her people.

But when those twain were all alone again, the Wood-Sun spoke: "O Thiodolf, canst thou hear me and understand?"

"Yea," he said, "when thou speakest of certain matters, as of our love together, and of our daughter that came of our love."

"Thiodolf," she said, "How long shall our love last?"

"As long as our life," he said.

"And if thou diest to-day, where then shall our love be?" said the Wood-Sun.

He said, "I must now say, I wot not; though time was I had said, It shall abide with the soul of the Wolfing Kindred."

She said: "And when that soul dieth, and the kindred is no more?"

"Time ago," quoth he, "I had said, it shall abide with the Kindreds of the Earth; but now again I say, I wot not."

"Will the Earth hide it," said she, "when thou diest and art borne to mound?"

"Even so didst thou say when we spake together that other night," said he; "and now I may say nought against thy word."

"Art thou happy, O Folk-wolf?" she said.

"Why dost thou ask me?" said he; "I know not; we were sundered and I longed for thee; thou art here; it is enough."

"And the people of thy Kindred?" she said, "dost thou not long for them?"

He said; "Didst thou not say that I was not of them? Yet were they my friends, and needed me, and I loved them: but by this evening they will need me no more, or but little; for they will be victorious over their foes: so hath the Hall-Sun foretold. What then! shall I take all from thee to give little to them?"

"Thou art wise," she said; "wilt thou go to battle to-day?"

"So it seemeth," said he.

She said: "And wilt thou bear the Dwarf-wrought Hauberk? for if thou dost, thou wilt live, and if thou dost not, thou wilt die."

"I will bear it," said he, "that I may live to love thee."

"Thinkest thou that any evil goes with it?" said she.

There came into his face a flash of his ancient boldness as he answered: "So it seemed to me yesterday, when I fought clad in it the first time; and I fell unsmitten on the meadow, and was shamed, and would have slain myself but for thee. And yet it is not so that any evil goes with it; for thou thyself didst say that past night that there was no evil weird in it."

She said: "How then if I lied that night?"

Said he: "It is the wont of the Gods to lie, and be unashamed, and men-folk must bear with it."

"Ah! how wise thou art!" she said; and was silent for a while, and drew away from him a little, and clasped her hands together and wrung them for grief and anger. Then she grew calm again, and said: "Wouldest thou die at my bidding?"

"Yea," said he, "not because thou art of the Gods, but because thou hast become a woman to me, and I love thee."

Then was she silent some while, and at last she said, "Thiodolf, wilt thou do off the Hauberk if I bid thee?"

"Yea, yea," said he, "and let us depart from the Wolfings, and their strife, for they need us not."

She was silent once more for a longer while still, and at last she said in a cold voice: "Thiodolf, I bid thee arise, and put off the Hauberk from thee."

He looked at her wondering, not at her words, but at the voice wherewith she spake them; but he arose from the stone nevertheless, and stood stark in the moonlight; he set his hand to the collar of the war-coat, and undid its clasps, which were of gold and blue stones, and presently he did the coat from off him and let it slide to the ground where it lay in a little grey heap that looked but a handful. Then he sat down on the stone again, and took her hand and kissed her and caressed her fondly, and she him again, and they spake no word for a while: but at the last hespake in measure and rhyme in a low voice, but so sweet and clear that it might have been heard far in the hush of the last hour of the night:

“Dear now are this dawn-dusk’s moments as is the last of the light
 When the foemen’s ranks are wavering, and the victory feareth night;
 And of all the time I have loved thee of these am I most fain,
 When I know not what shall betide me, nor what shall be my gain.
 But dear as they are, they are waning, and at last the time is come
 When no more shall I behold thee till I wend to Odin’s Home.
 Now is the time so little that once hath been so long
 That I fain would ask thee pardon wherein I have done thee wrong,
 That thy longing might be softer, and thy love more sweet to have.
 But in nothing have I wronged thee, there is nought that I may crave.
 Strange too! as the minutes fail me, so do my speech-words fail,
 Yet strong is the joy within me for this hour that crowns the tale.”

Therewith he clipped her and caressed her, and she spake nothing for a while; and he said: “Thy face is fair and bright; art thou not joyous of these minutes?”

She said: “Thy words are sweet; but they pierce my heart like a sharp knife; for they tell me of thy death and the ending of our love.”

Said he: “I tell thee nothing, beloved, that thou hast not known: is it not for this that we have met here once more?”

She answered after a while: “Yea, yea: yet mightest thou have lived.”

He laughed, but not scornfully or bitterly, and said:

“So thought I in time past: but hearken, beloved; if I fall to-day, shall there not yet be a minute after the stroke hath fallen on me, wherein I shall know that the day is won and see the foemen fleeing, and wherein I shall once again deem I shall never die, whatever may betide afterwards, and though the sword lieth deep in my breast? And shall I not see then and know that our love hath no end?”

Bitter grief was in her face as she heard him. But she spake and said: “Lo here the Hauberk which thou hast done off thee, that thy breast might be the nearer to mine! Wilt thou not wear it in the fight for my sake?”

He knit his brows somewhat, and said:

“Nay, it may not be: true it is that thou saidest that no evil weird went with it, but hearken! Yesterday I bore it in the fight,

and ere I mingled with the foe, before I might give the token of onset, a cloud came before my eyes and thick darkness wrapped me around, and I fell to the earth unsmitten; and so was I borne out of the fight, and evil dreams beset me of evil things, and the dwarfs that hate mankind. Then I came to myself, and the Hauberk was off me, and I rose up and beheld the battle, that the kindreds were pressing on the foe, and I thought not then of any past time, but of the minutes that were passing; and I ran into the fight straight-way: but one followed me with that Hauberk, and I did it on, thinking of nought but the battle. Fierce then was the fray, yet I faltered in it; till the fresh men of the Romans came in upon us and broke up our array. Then my heart almost broke within me, and I faltered no more, but rushed on as of old, and smote great strokes all round about: no hurt I got, but once more came that ugly mist over my eyes, and again I fell unsmitten, and they bore me out of battle: then the men of our folk gave back and were overcome; and when I awoke from my evil dreams, we had gotten away from the fight and the Wolfing dwellings, and were on the mounds above the ford cowering down like beaten men. There then I sat shamed among the men who had chosen me for their best man at the Holy Thing, and lo I was their worst! Then befell that which never till then had befallen me, that life seemed empty and worthless and I longed to die and be done with it, and but for the thought of thy love I had slain myself then and there.

“Thereafter I went with the host to the assembly of the stay-at-homes and fleers, and sat before the Hall-Sun our daughter, and said the words which were put into my mouth. But now must I tell thee a hard and evil thing; that I loved them not, and was not of them, and outside myself there was nothing: within me was the world and nought without me. Nay, as for thee, I was not sundered from thee, but thou wert a part of me; whereas for the others, yea, even for our daughter, thine and mine, they were but images and shows of men, and I longed to depart from them, and to see thy body and to feel thine heart beating. And by then so evil was I grown that my very shame had fallen from me, and my will to die: nay, I longed to live, thou and I, and death seemed hateful to me, and the deeds before death vain and foolish.

“Where then was my glory and my happy life, and the hope of

the days fresh born every day, though never dying? Where then was life, and Thiodolf that once had lived?

“But now all is changed once more; I loved thee never so well as now, and great is my grief that we must sunder, and the pain of farewell wrings my heart. Yet since I am once more Thiodolf the Mighty, in my heart there is room for joy also. Look at me, O Wood-Sun, look at me, O beloved! tell me, am I not fair with the fairness of the warrior and the helper of the folk? Is not my voice kind, do not my lips smile, and mine eyes shine? See how steady is mine hand, the friend of the folk! For mine eyes are cleared again, and I can see the kindreds as they are, and their desire of life and scorn of death, and this is what they have made me myself. Now therefore shall they and I together earn the merry days to come, the winter hunting and the spring sowing, the summer haysel, the ingathering of harvest, the happy rest of midwinter, and Yuletide with the memory of the Fathers, wedded to the hope of the days to be. Well may they bid me help them who have holpen me! Well may they bid me die who have made me live!

“For whereas thou sayest that I am not of their blood, nor of their adoption, once more I heed it not. For I have lived with them, and eaten and drunken with them, and toiled with them, and led them in battle and the place of wounds and slaughter; they are mine and I am theirs; and through them am I of the whole earth, and all the kindreds of it; yea, even of the foemen, whom this day the edges in mine hand shall smite.

“Therefore I will bear the Hauberk no more in battle; and be-like my body but once more: so shall I have lived and death shall not have undone me.

“Lo thou, is not this the Thiodolf whom thou hast loved? no changeling of the Gods, but the man in whom men have trusted, the friend of Earth, the giver of life, the vanquisher of death?”

And he cast himself upon her, and strained her to his bosom and kissed her, and caressed her, and awoke the bitter-sweet joy within her, as he cried out:

“O remember this, and this, when at last I am gone from thee!”

But when they sundered her face was bright, but the tears were on it, and she said: “O Thiodolf, thou wert fain hadst thou done

THE TALE OF THE HAUBERK

171

a wrong to me so that I might forgive thee; now wilt thou forgive me the wrong I have done thee?"

"Yea," he said, "Even so would I do, were we both to live, and how much more if this be the dawn of our sundering day! What hast thou done?"

She said: "I lied to thee concerning the Hauberk when I said that no evil weird went with it: and this I did for the saving of thy life."

He laid his hand fondly on her head, and spake smiling: "Such is the wont of the God-kin, because they know not the hearts of men. Tell me all the truth of it now at last."

She said:

"Here then the tale of the Hauberk and the truth there is to tell:
 There was a maid of the God-kin, and she loved a man right well,
 Who unto the battle was wending; and she of her wisdom knew
 That thence to the Folk-hall threshold should come back but a very few;
 And she feared for her love, for she doubted that of these he should not be;
 So she wended the wilds lamenting, as I have lamented for thee;
 And many wise she pondered, how to bring her will to pass
 (E'en as I for thee have pondered), as her feet led over the grass,
 Till she lifted her eyes in the wild-wood, and lo! she stood before
 The Hall of the Hollow-places; and the Dwarf-lord stood in the door
 And held in his hand the Hauberk, whereon the hammer's blow
 The last of all had been smitten, and the sword should be hammer now.
 Then the Dwarf beheld her fairness, and the wild-wood many-leaved
 Before his eyes was reeling at the hope his heart conceived;
 So sorely he longed for her body; and he laughed before her and cried,
 'O Lady of the Disir, thou farest wandering wide
 Lamenting thy beloved and the folkmote of the spear,
 But if amidst of the battle this child of the hammer he bear
 He shall laugh at the foemen's edges and come back to thy lily breast
 And of all the days of his life-time shall his coming years be best.'
 Then she bowed adown her godhead and sore for the Hauberk she prayed;
 But his greedy eyes devoured her as he stood in the door and said:
 'Come lie in mine arms! Come hither, and we twain the night to wake!
 And then as a gift of the morning the Hauberk shall ye take.'

So she humbled herself before him, and entered into the cave,
 The dusky, the deep-gleaming, the gem-strewn golden grave.
 But he saw not her girdle loosened, or her bosom gleam on his love,
 For she set the sleep-thorn in him, that he saw, but might not move,
 Though the bitter salt tears burned him for the anguish of his greed;
 And she took the hammer's offspring, her unearned morning meed,
 And went her ways from the rock-hall and was glad for her warrior's sake.
 But behind her dull speech followed, and the voice of the hollow spake:
 'Thou hast left me bound in anguish, and hast gained thine heart's desire;
 Now I would that the dewy night-grass might be to thy feet as the fire,
 And shrivel thy raiment about thee, and leave thee bare to the flame,
 And no way but a fiery furnace for the road whereby ye came!
 But since the folk of Godhome we may not slay nor smite,
 And that fool of the folk that thou lovest, thou hast saved in my despite,
 Take with thee, thief of Godhome, this other word I say:
 Since the safeguard wrought in the ring-mail I may not do away
 I lay this curse upon it, that whoso weareth the same,
 Shall save his life in the battle, and have the battle's shame;
 He shall live through wrack and ruin, and ever have the worse,
 And drag adown his kindred, and bear the people's curse.'

"Lo, this the tale of the Hauberck, and I knew it for the truth:
 And little I thought of the kindreds; of their day I had no ruth;
 For I said, They are doomed to departure; in a little while must they
 wane,
 And nought it helpeth or hindreth if I hold my hand or refrain.
 Yea, thou wert become the kindred, both thine and mine; and thy birth
 To me was the roofing of heaven, and the building up of earth.
 I have loved, and I must sorrow; thou hast lived, and thou must die;
 Ah, wherefore were there others in the world than thou and I?"

He turned round to her and clasped her strongly in his arms
 again, and kissed her many times and said:

"Lo, here art thou forgiven; and here I say farewell!
 Here the token of my wonder which my words may never tell;
 The wonder past all thinking, that my love and thine should blend;
 That thus our lives should mingle, and sunder in the end!

Lo, this, for the last remembrance of the mighty man I was,
 Of thy love and thy forbearing, and all that came to pass!
 Night wanes, and heaven dights her for the kiss of sun and earth;
 Look up, look last upon me on this morn of the kindreds' mirth!"

Therewith he arose and lingered no minute longer, but departed, going as straight towards the Thing-stead and the Folk-mote of his kindred as the swallow goes to her nest in the hall-porch. He looked not once behind him, though a bitter wailing rang through the woods and filled his heart with the bitterness of her woe and the anguish of the hour of sundering.

CHAPTER XXVII. THEY WEND TO THE MORNING BATTLE.

NOW when Thiodolf came back to the camp the signs of dawn were plain in the sky, the moon was low and sinking behind the trees, and he saw at once that the men were stirring and getting ready for departure. He looked gladly and blithely at the men he fell in with, and they at him, and scarce could they refrain a shout when they beheld his face and the brightness of it. He went straight up to where the Hall-Sun was yet sitting under her namesake, with Arinbiorn standing before her amidst of a ring of leaders of hundreds and scores: but old Sorli sat by her side clad in all his war-gear.

When Thiodolf first came into that ring of men they looked doubtfully at him, as if they dreaded somewhat, but when they had well beheld him their faces cleared, and they became joyous.

He went straight up to Arinbiorn and kissed the old warrior, and said to him, "I give thee good morrow, O leader of the Bearings! Here now is come the War-duke! and meseems that we should get to work as speedily as may be, for lo the dawning!"

"Hail to thine hand, War-duke!" said Arinbiorn joyously; "there is no more to do but to take thy word concerning the order wherein we shall wend; for all men are armed and ready."

Said Thiodolf; "Lo ye, I lack war-gear and weapons! Is there a good sword hereby, a helm, a byrny and a shield? For hard will be the battle, and we must fence ourselves all we may."

“Hard by,” said Arinbiorn, “is the war-gear of Ivar of our House, who is dead in the night of his hurts gotten in yesterday’s battle: thou and he are alike in stature, and with a good will doth he give them to thee, and they are goodly things, for he comes of smithyng blood. Yet it is a pity of Throng-plough that he lieth on the field of the slain.”

But Thiodolf smiled and said: “Nay, Ivar’s blade shall serve my turn to-day; and thereafter shall it be seen to, for then will be time for many things.”

So they went to fetch him the weapons; but he said to Arinbiorn, “Hast thou numbered the host? What are the gleanings of the Roman sword?”

Said Arinbiorn: “Here have we more than three thousand three hundred warriors of the host fit for battle: and besides this here are gathered eighteen hundred of the Wolfings and the Bearings, and of the other Houses, mostly from over the water, and of these nigh upon seven hundred may bear sword or shoot shaft; neither shall ye hinder them from so doing if the battle be joined.”

Then said Thiodolf: “We shall order us into three battles; the Wolfings and the Bearings to lead the first, for this is our business; but others of the smaller Houses this side the water to be with us; and the Elkings and Galtings and the other Houses of the Mid-mark on the further side of the water to be in the second, and with them the more part of the Nether-mark; but the men of Up-mark to be in the third, and the stay-at-homes to follow on with them: and this third battle to let the wood cover them till they be needed, which may not be till the day of fight draws to an end, when all shall be needed: for no Roman man must be left alive or untaken by this even, or else must we all go to the Gods together. Hearken, Arinbiorn, I am not called fore-sighted, and yet meseems I see somewhat how this day shall go; and it is not to be hidden that I shall not see another battle until the last of all battles is at hand. But be of good cheer, for I shall not die till the end of the fight, and once more I shall be a man’s help unto you. Now the first of the Romans we meet shall not be able to stand before us, for they shall be unready, and when their men are gotten ready and are fighting with us grimly, ye of the second battle

shall hear the war-token, and shall fall on, and they shall be dismayed when they see so many fresh men come into the fight; yet shall they stand stoutly; for they are valiant men, and shall not all be taken unawares. Then, if they withstand us long enough, shall the third battle come forth from the wood, and fall on either flank of them, and the day shall be won. But I think not that they shall withstand us so long, but that the men of Up-mark and the stay-at-homes shall have the chasing of them. Now get me my war-gear, and let the first battle get them to the outgate of the garth."

So they brought him his arms; and meanwhile the Hall-Sun spake to one of the Captains, and he turned and went away a little space, and then came back, having with him three strong warriors of the Wolfings, and he brought them before the Hall-Sun, who said to them:

"Ye three, Steinulf, Athalulf, and Grani the Grey, I have sent for you because ye are men both mighty in battle and deft woodwrights and house-smiths; ye shall follow Thiodolf closely, when he winneth into the Roman garth, yet shall ye fight wisely, so that ye be not slain, or at least not all; ye shall enter the Hall with Thiodolf, and when ye are therein, if need be, ye shall run down the Hall at your swiftest, and mount up into the loft betwixt the Middle-hearth and the Women's Chamber, and there shall ye find good store of water in vats and tubs, and this ye shall use for quenching the fire of the Hall if the foemen fire it, as is not unlike to be."

Then Grani spoke for the others and said he would pay all heed to her words, and they departed to join their company.

Now was Thiodolf armed; and Arinbiorn, turning about before he went to his place, beheld him and knit his brow, and said: "What is this, Thiodolf? Didst thou not swear to the Gods not to bear helm or shield in the battles of this strife? yet hast thou Ivar's helm on thine head and his shield ready beside thee: wilt thou forswear thyself? so doing shalt thou bring woe upon the House."

"Arinbiorn," said Thiodolf, "where didst thou hear tell of me that I had made myself the thrall of the Gods? The oath that I sware was sworn when mine heart was not whole towards our people; and now will I break it that I may keep what of good in-

tent there was in it, and cast away the rest. Long is the story; but if we journey together to-night I will tell it thee. Likewise I will tell it to the Gods if they look sourly upon me when I see them, and all shall be well."

He smiled as he spoke, and Arinbiorn smiled on him in turn and went his ways to array the host. But when he was gone Thiodolf was alone in that place with the Hall-Sun, and he turned to her, and kissed her, and caressed her fondly, and spake and said:

"So fare we, O my daughter, to the sundering of the ways;
Short is my journey henceforth to the door that ends my days,
And long the road that lieth as yet before thy feet.
How fain were I that thy journey from day to day were sweet
With peace to thee and pleasure; that a noble warrior's hand
In its early days might lead thee adown the flowery land,
And thy children in its noon-tide cling round about thy gown,
And the wise that thy womb has carried when the sun is going down,
Be thy happy fellow-farers to tell the tale of Earth!
But I wot that for no such sweetness did we bring thee unto birth,
But to be the soul of the Wolfings till the other days should come,
And the fruit of the kindreds' harvest with thee is garnered home.
Yet if for no blithe faring thy life-day is ordained,
Yet peace that long endureth maybe thy soul hath gained;
And thy sorrow of this even thy latest grief shall be,
The grief wherewith thou singest the death-song over me."

She looked up at him and smiled, though the tears were on her face; then she said:

"Though to-day the grief beginneth yet the bitterness is done.
Though my body wendeth barren 'neath the beams of the quickening sun,
Yet remembrance still abideth, and long after the days of my life
Shall I live in the tale of the morning, when they tell of the ending of strife;
And the deeds of this little hand, and the thought conceived in my heart,
And never again henceforward from the folk shall I fare apart.
And if of the Earth, my father, thou hast tidings in thy place
Thou shalt hear how they call me the Ransom and the Mother of happy
days."

Then she wept outright for a brief space, and thereafter she said:

“Keep this in thine heart, O father, that I shall remember all
Since thou liftedst the she-wolf’s nursling in the oak-tree’s leafy hall.
Yea, every time I remember when hand in hand we went
Amidst the shafts of the beech-trees, and down to the youngling bent
The Folk-wolf in his glory when the eve of fight drew nigh;
And every time I remember when we wandered joyfully
Adown the sunny meadow and lived a while of life
Midst the herbs and the beasts and the waters so free from fear and strife,
That thy years and thy might and thy wisdom, I had no part therein;
But thou wert as the twin-born brother of the maiden slim and thin,
The maiden shy in the feast-hall and blithe in wood and field.
Thus have we fared, my father; and e’en now when thou bearest shield,
On the last of thy days of mid-earth, ’twixt us ’tis even so
That the heart of my like-aged brother is the heart of thee that I know.”

Then the bitterness of tears stayed her speech, and he spake no word more, but took her in his arms a while and soothed her and fondled her, and then they parted, and he went with great strides towards the outgoing of the Thing-stead.

There he found the warriors of his House and of the Bearings and the lesser Houses of Mid-mark, all duly ordered for wending through the wood. The dawn was coming on apace, but the wood was yet dark. But whereas the Wolfings led, and each man of them knew the wood like his own hand, there was no straying or disarray, and in less than a half-hour’s space Thiodolf and the first battle were come to the wood behind the hazel-trees at the back of the hall, and before them was the dawning round about the Roof of the Kindred; the eastern heavens were brightening, and they could see all things clear without the wood.

CHAPTER XXVIII. OF THE STORM OF DAWNING.

THEN Thiodolf bade Fox and two others steal forward, and see what of foemen was before them; so they fell to creeping on towards the open: but scarcely had they started, before all men could hear the tramp of men drawing nigh; then Thiodolf himself took with him a score of his House and went quietly toward the wood-edge till they were barely within the shadow of the beechwood; and he looked forth and saw men coming straight towards their lurking-place. And those he saw were a good many, and they were mostly of the dastards of the Goths; but with them was a Captain of an Hundred of the Romans, and some others of his kindred; and Thiodolf deemed that the Goths had been bidden to gather up some of the night-watchers and enter the wood and fall on the stay-at-homes. So he bade his men get them aback, and he himself abode still at the very wood's edge listening intently with his sword bare in his hand. And he noted that those men of the foestayd in the day-light outside the wood, but a few yards from it, and, by command as it seemed, fell silent and spake no word; and the morn was very still, and when the sound of their tramp over the grass had ceased, Thiodolf could hear the tramp of more men behind them. And then he had another thought, to wit that the Romans had sent scouts to see if the Goths yet abided on the vantage-ground by the ford, and that when they had found them gone, they were minded to fall on them unawares in the refuge of the Thing-stead and were about to do so by the counsel and leading of the dastard Goths; and that this was one body of the host led by those dastards, who knew somewhat of the woods. So he drew aback speedily, and catching hold of Fox by the shoulder (for he had taken him alone with him) he bade him creep along through the wood toward the Thing-stead, and bring back speedy word whether there were any more foemen near the wood thereaway; and he himself came to his men, and ordered them for onset, drawing them up in a shallow half-moon, with the bowmen at the horns thereof, with the word to loose at the Romans as soon as they heard the war-horn blow: and all this was done speedily and with little noise, for they were well nigh so arrayed already.

Thus then they waited, and there was more than a glimmer of

light even under the beechen leaves, and the eastern sky was yellowing to sunrise. The other warriors were like hounds in the leash eager to be slipped; but Thiodolf stood calm and high-hearted turning over the memory of past days, and the time he thought of seemed long to him, but happy.

Scarce had a score of minutes passed, and the Romans before them, who were now gathered thick behind those dastards of the Goths, had not moved, when back comes Fox and tells how he has come upon a great company of the Romans led by their thralls of the Goths who were just entering the wood, away there towards the Thing-stead.

“But, War-duke,” says he, “I came also across our own folk of the second battle duly ordered in the wood ready to meet them; and they shall be well dealt with, and the sun shall rise for us and not for them.”

Then turns Thiodolf round to those nighest to him and says, but still softly:

“Hear ye a word, O people, of the wisdom of the toe!
Before us thick they gather, and unto the death they go.
They fare as lads with their cur-dogs who have stopped a fox’s earth,
And standing round the spinny, now chuckle in their mirth,
Till one puts by the leafage and trembling stands astare
At the sight of the Wood-wolf’s father arising in his lair—
They have come for our wives and our children, and our sword-edge
shall they meet;
And which of them is happy save he of the swiftest feet?”

Speedily then went that word along the ranks of the Kindred, and men were merry with the restless joy of battle: but scarce had two minutes passed ere suddenly the stillness of the dawn was broken by clamour and uproar; by shouts and shrieks, and the clashing of weapons from the wood on their left hand; and over all arose the roar of the Markmen’s horn, for the battle was joined with the second company of the Kindreds. But a rumour and murmur went from the foemen before Thiodolf’s men; and then sprang forth the loud sharp word of the captains commanding and rebuking, as if the men were doubtful which way they should take.

Amidst all which Thiodolf brandished his sword, and cried out in a great voice:

“Now, now, ye War-sons!
Now the Wolf waketh!
Lo how the Wood-beast
Wendeth in onset.
E'en as his feet fare
Fall on and follow!”

And he led forth joyously, and terrible rang the long refrained gathered shout of his battle as his folk rushed on together devouring the little space between their ambush and the hazel-beset green-sward.

In the twinkling of an eye the half-moon had lapped around the Roman-Goths and those that were with them; and the dastards made no stand but turned about at once, crying out that the Gods of the Kindreds were come to aid and none could withstand them. But these fleers thrust against the band of Romans who were next to them, and bore them aback, and great was the turmoil; and when Thiodolf's storm fell full upon them, as it failed not to do, so close were they driven together that scarce could any man raise his hand for a stroke. For behind them stood a great company of those valiant spearmen of the Romans, who would not give way if anywise they might hold it out: and their ranks were closely serried, shield nigh touching shield, and their faces turned toward the foe; and so arrayed, though they might die, they scarce knew how to flee. As they might these thrust and hewed at the fleers, and gave fierce words but few to the Roman-Goths, driving them back against their foemen: but the fleers had lost the cunning of their right hands, and they had cast away their shields and could not defend their very bodies against the wrath of the kindreds; and when they strove to flee to the right hand or to the left, they were met by the horns of the half-moon, and the arrows began to rain in upon them, and from so close were they shot at that no shaft failed to smite home.

There then were the dastards slain; and their bodies served for a rampart against the onrush of the Markmen to those Romans who had stood fast. To them were gathering more and more every

minute, and they faced the Goths steadily with their hard brown visages and gleaming eyes above their iron-plated shields; not casting their spears, but standing closely together, silent, but fierce. The light was spread now over all the earth; the eastern heavens were grown golden-red, flecked here and there with little crimson clouds: this battle was fallen near silent, but to the North was great uproar of shouts and cries, and the roaring of the war-horns, and the shrill blasts of the brazen trumpets.

Now Thiodolf, as his wont was when he saw that all was going well, had refrained himself of hand-strokes, but was here and there and everywhere giving heart to his folk, and keeping them in due order, and close array, lest the Romans should yet come among them. But he watched the ranks of the foe, and saw how presently they began to spread out beyond his, and might, if it were not looked to, take them in flank; and he was about to order his men anew to meet them, when he looked on his left hand and saw how Roman men were pouring thick from the wood out of all array, followed by a close throng of the kindreds: for on this side the Romans were outnumbered and had stumbled unawares into the ambush of the Markmen, who had fallen on them straightway and disarrayed them from the first. This flight of their folk the Romans saw also, and held their men together, refraining from the onset, as men who deem that they will have enough to do to stand fast.

But the second battle of the Markmen (who were of the Nether-mark, mingled with the Mid-mark) fought wisely, for they swept those fliers from before them, slaying many and driving the rest scattering, yet held the chase for no long way, but wheeling about came sidelong on toward the battle of the Romans and Thiodolf. And when Thiodolf saw that, he set up the whoop of victory, he and his, and fell fiercely on the Romans, casting everything that would fly, as they rushed on to the handplay; so that there was many a Roman slain with the Roman spears that those who had fallen had left among their foemen.

Now the Roman captains perceived that it availed not to tarry till the men of the Mid and Nether-marks fell upon their flank; so they gave command, and their ranks gave back little by little, facing their foes, and striving to draw themselves within the dike

and garth, which, after their custom, they had already cast up about the Wolfing Roof, their stronghold.

Now as fierce as was the onset of the Markmen, the main body of the Romans could not be hindered from doing this much before the men of the second battle were upon them; but Thiodolf and Arinbiorn with some of the mightiest brake their array in two places and entered in amongst them. And wrath so seized upon the soul of Arinbiorn for the slaying of Otter, and his own fault towards him, that he cast away his shield, and heeding no strokes, first brake his sword in the press, and then, getting hold of a great axe, smote at all before him as though none smote at him in turn; yea, as though he were smiting down tree-boles for a match against some other mighty man; and all the while amidst the hurry, strokes of swords and spears rained on him, some falling flatwise and some glancing sideways, but some true and square, so that his helm was smitten off and his hauberk rent adown, and point and edge reached his living flesh; and he had thrust himself so far amidst the foe that none could follow to shield him, so that at last he fell shattered and rent at the foot of the new clayey wall cast up by the Romans, even as Thiodolf and a band with him came cleaving the press, and the Romans closed the barriers against friend and foe, and cast great beams adown, and masses of iron and lead and copper taken from the smithying-booths of the Wolfings, to stay them if it were but a little.

Then Thiodolf bestrode the fallen warrior, and men of his House were close behind him, for wisely had he fought, cleaving the press like a wedge, helping his friends that they might help him, so that they all went forward together. But when he saw Arinbiorn fall he cried out:

“Woe’s me, Arinbiorn! that thou wouldest not wait for me; for the day is young yet, and over-young!”

There then they cleared the space outside the gate, and lifted up the Bearing Warrior, and bare him back from the rampart. Forso fierce had been the fight and so eager the storm of those that had followed after him that they must needs order their battle afresh, since Thiodolf’s wedge which he had driven into the Roman host was but of a few and the foe had been many and the

THEY RAISE THE SONG OF VICTORY 183

rampart and the shot-weapons were close anigh. Wise therefore it seemed to abide them of the second battle and join with them to swarm over the new-built slippery wall in the teeth of the Roman shot.

In this, the first onset of the Morning Battle, some of the Markmen had fallen, but not many, since but a few had entered outright into the Roman ranks; and when they first rushed on from the wood but three of them were slain, and the slaughter was all of the dastards and the Romans; and afterwards not a few of the Romans were slain, what by Arinbiorn, what by the others; for they were fighting fleeing, and before their eyes was the image of the garth-gate which was behind them; and they stumbled against each other as they were driven sideways against the onrush of the Goths, nor were they now standing fair and square to them, and they were hurried and confused with the dread of the onset of them of the two Marks.

As yet Thiodolf had gotten no great hurt, so that when he heard that Arinbiorn's soul had passed away he smiled and said:

“Yea, yea, Arinbiorn might have abided the end, for ere then shall the battle be hard.”

So now the Wolfings and the Bearings met joyously the kindreds of the Nether Mark and the others of the second battle, and they sang the song of victory arrayed in good order hard by the Roman rampart, while bowstrings twanged and arrows whistled, and sling-stones hummed from this side and from that.

And of their song of victory thus much the tale telleth:

“Now hearken and hear
Of the day-dawn of fear,
And how up rose the sun
On the battle begun.
All night lay a-hiding,
Our anger abiding,
Dark down in the wood
The sharp seekers of blood;

But ere red grew the heaven we bore them all bare,
For against us undriven the foemen must fare;

THE HOUSE OF THE WOLFINGS

They sought and they found us, and sorrowed to find,
 For the tree-boles around us the story shall mind,
 How fast from the glooming they fled to the light,
 Yeasaying the dooming of Tyr of the fight.

“Hearken yet and again
 How the night ’gan to wane,
 And the twilight stole on
 Till the world was well won!
 E’en in such wise was wending
 A great host for our ending;
 On our life-days e’en so
 Stole the host of the foe;

Till the heavens grew lighter, and light grew the world,
 And the storm of the fighter upon them was hurled,
 Then some fled the stroke, and some died and some stood,
 Till the worst of the storm broke right out from the wood,
 And the war-shafts were singing the carol of fear,
 The tale of the bringing the sharp swords anear.

“Come gather we now,
 For the day doth grow.
 Come, gather, ye bold,
 Lest the day wax old;
 Lest not till to-morrow
 We slake our sorrow,
 And heap the ground
 With many a mound.

Come, war-children, gather, and clear we the land!
 In the tide of War-father the deed is to hand.
 Clad in gear that we gilded they shrink from our sword;
 In the House that we builded they sit at the board;
 Come, war-children, gather, come swarm o’er the wall
 For the feast of War-father to sweep out the Hall!”

Now amidst of their singing the sun rose upon the earth, and
 gleamed in the arms of men, and lit the faces of the singing war-
 riors as they stood turned toward the east.

In this first onset of battle but twenty and three Markmen were slain in all, besides Arinbiorn; for, as aforesaid, they had the foe at a disadvantage. And this onset is called in the tale the Storm of Dawning.

CHAPTER XXIX. OF THIODOLF'S STORM.

THE Goths tarried not over their victory; they shot with all the bowmen that they had against the Romans on the wall, and therewith arrayed themselves to fall on once more. And Thiodolf, now that the foe were covered by a wall, though it was but a little one, sent a message to the men of the third battle, them of Up-mark to wit, to come forward in good array and help to make a ring around the Wolfing Stead, wherein they should now take the Romans as a beast is taken in a trap. Meanwhile, until they came, he sent other men to the wood to bring tree-boles to batter the gate, and to make bridges whereby to swarm over the wall, which was but breast-high on the Roman side, though they had worked at it ceaselessly since yesterday morning.

In a long half-hour, therefore, the horns of the men of Up-mark sounded, and they came forth from the wood a very great company, for with them also were the men of the stay-at-homes and the homeless, such of them as were fit to bear arms. Amongst these went the Hall-Sun surrounded by a band of the warriors of Up-mark; and before her was borne her namesake the Lamp as a sign of assured victory. But these stay-at-homes with the Hall-Sun were stayed by the command of Thiodolf on the crown of the slope above the dwellings, and stood round about the Speech-Hill, on the topmost of which stood the Hall-Sun, and the wondrous Lamp, and the men who warded her and it.

When the Romans saw the new host come forth from the wood, they might well think that they would have work enough to do that day; but when they saw the Hall-Sun take her stand on the Speech-Hill with the men-at-arms about her, and the Lamp before her, then dread of the Gods fell upon them, and they knew that the doom had gone forth against them. Nevertheless they were not men to faint and die because the Gods were become their

foes, but they were resolved rather to fight it out to the end against whatsoever might come against them, as was well seen afterwards.

Now they had made four gates to their garth according to their custom, and at each gate within was there a company of their mightiest men, and each was beset by the best of the Markmen. Thiodolf and his men beset the Western gate where they had made that fierce onset. And the Northern gate was beset by the Elkings and some of the kindreds of the Nether-mark; and the Eastern gate by the rest of the men of Nether-mark; and the Southern gate by the kindreds of Up-mark.

All this the Romans noted, and they saw how that the Markmen were now very many, and they knew that they were men no less valiant than themselves, and they perceived that Thiodolf was a wise Captain; and in less than two hours' space from the Storm of Dawning they saw those men coming from the wood with plenteous store of tree-trunks to bridge their ditch and rampart; and they considered how the day was yet very young, so that they might look for no shelter from the night-tide; and as for any aid from their own folk at the war-garth aforesaid, they hoped not for it, nor had they sent any messenger to the Captain of the garth; nor did they know as yet of his overthrow on the Ridge.

Now therefore there seemed to be but two choices before them; either to abide within the rampart they had cast up, or to break out like valiant men, and either die in the storm, or cleave a way through, whereby they might come to their kindred and their stronghold south-east of the Mark.

This last way then they chose; or, to say the truth, it was their chief captain who chose it for them, though they were nothing loth thereto: for this man was a mocker, yet hot-headed, unstable, and nought wise in war, and heretofore had his greed minished his courage; yet now, being driven into a corner, he had courage enough and to spare, but utterly lacked patience; for it had been better for the Romans to have abided one or two onsets from the Goths, whereby they who should make the onslaught would at the least have lost more men than they on whom they should fall, before they within stormed on them; but their pride took away from the Romans their last chance. But their captain, now that he

THE ROMANS MAKE READY FOR THE END 187

perceived, as he thought, that the game was lost and his life come to its last hour wherein he would have to leave his treasure and pleasure behind him, grew desperate and therewith most fierce and cruel. So all the captives whom they had taken (they were but two score and two, for the wounded men they had slain) he caused to be bound on the chairs of the high-seat clad in their war-gear with their swords or spears made fast to their right hands, and their shields to their left hands; and he said that the Goths should now hold a Thing wherein they should at last take counsel wisely, and abstain from folly. For he caused store of faggots and small wood smeared with grease and oil to be cast into the Hall that it might be fired, so that it and the captives should burn up altogether; "So," said he, "shall we have a fair torch for our funeral fire;" for it was the custom of the Romans to burn their dead.

Thus, then, he did; and then he caused men to do away the barriers and open all the four gates of the new-made garth, after he had manned the wall with the slingers and bowmen, and slain the horses, so that the woodland folk should have no gain of them. Then he arrayed his men at the gates and about them duly and wisely, and bade those valiant footmen fall on the Goths who were getting ready to fall on them, and to do their best. But he himself armed at all points took his stand at the Man's-door of the Hall, and swore by all the Gods of his kindred that he would not move a foot's length from thence either for fire or for steel.

So fiercely on that fair morning burned the hatred of men about the dwellings of the children of the Wolf of the Goths, wherein the children of the Wolf of Rome were shut up as in a penfold of slaughter.

Meanwhile the Hall-Sun standing on the Hill of Speech beheld it all, looking down into the garth of war; for the new wall was no hindrance to her sight, because the Speech-Hill was high and but a little way from the Great Roof; and indeed she was within shot of the Roman bowmen, though they were not very deft in shooting.

So now she lifted up her voice and sang so that many heard her; for at this moment of time there was a lull in the clamour of battle both within the garth and without; even as it happens when the thunder-storm is just about to break on the world, that the wind

drops dead, and the voice of the leaves is hushed before the first great and near flash of lightening glares over the fields.

So she sang:

“Now the latest hour cometh and the ending of the strife;
And to-morrow and to-morrow shall we take the hand of life,
And wend adown the meadows, and skirt the darkling wood,
And reap the waving acres, and gather in the good.
I see a wall before me built up of steel and fire,
And hurts and heart-sick striving, and the war-wright’s fierce desire;
But there-amidst a door is, and windows are therein;
And the fair sun-litten meadows and the Houses of the kin
Smile on me through the terror my trembling life to stay,
That at my mouth now flutters, as fain to flee away.
Lo e’en as the little hammer and the blow-pipe of the wright
About the flickering fire deals with the silver white,
And the cup and its beauty groweth that shall be for the people’s feast
And all men are glad to see it from the greatest to the least:
E’en so is the tale now fashioned, that many a time and oft
Shall be told on the acre’s edges, when the summer eve is soft;
Shall be hearkened round the hall-blaze when the mid-winter night
The kindreds’ mirth besetteth, and quickeneth man’s delight,
And we that have lived in the story shall be born again and again
As men feast on the bread of our earning, and praise the grief-born grai

As she made an end of singing, those about her understood her words, that she was foretelling victory, and the peace of the Mark, and for joy they raised a shrill cry; and the warriors who were nighest to her took it up, and it spread through the whole host round about the garth, and went up into the breath of the summer morning and went down the wind along the meadow of the Wolfings, so that they of the Wain-burg, who were now drawing somewhat near to Wolfstead heard it and were glad.

But the Romans when they heard it knew that the heart of the battle was reached, and they cast back that shout wrathfully and fiercely, and made toward the foe.

Therewithal those mighty men fell on each other in the narrow

passes of the garth; for fear was dead and buried in that Battle of the Morning.

On the North gate Hiarandi of the Elkings was the point of the Markmen's wedge, and first clave the Roman press. In the Eastern gate it was Valtyr, Otter's brother's son, a young man and most mighty. In the South gate it was Geirbald of the Shieldings, the Messenger.

In the West gate Thiodolf the War-duke gave one mighty cry like the roar of an angry lion, and cleared a space before him for the wielding of Ivar's blade; for at that moment he had looked up to the Roof of the Kindred and had beheld a little stream of smoke curling blue out of a window thereof, and he knew what had betided, and how short was the time before them. But his wrathful cry was taken up by some who had beheld that same sight, and by others who saw nought but the Roman press, and terribly it rang over the swaying struggling crowd.

Then fell the first rank of the Romans before those stark men and mighty warriors; and they fell even where they stood, for on neither side could any give back but for a little space, so close the press was, and the men so eager to smite. Neither did any crave peace if he were hurt or disarmed; for to the Goths it was but a little thing to fall in hot blood in that hour of love of the kindred, and longing for the days to be. And for the Romans, they had had no mercy, and now looked for none: and they remembered their dealings with the Goths, and saw before them, as it were, once more, yea, as in a picture, their slayings and quellings, and lashings, and cold mockings which they had dealt out to the conquered foemen without mercy, and now they longed sore for the quiet of the dark, when their hard lives should be over, and all these deeds forgotten, and they and their bitter foes should be at rest for ever.

Most valiantly they fought; but the fury of their despair could not deal with the fearless hope of the Goths, and as rank after rank of them took the place of those who were hewn down by Thiodolf and the Kindred, they fell in their turn, and slowly the Goths cleared a space within the gates, and then began to spread along the walls within, and grew thicker and thicker. Nor did they fight only at the gates; but made them bridges of those tree-trunks,

and fell to swarming over the rampart, till they had cleared it of the bowmen and slingers, and then they leaped down and fell upon the flanks of the Romans; and the host of the dead grew, and the host of the living lessened.

Moreover the stay-at-homes round about the Speech-Hill, and that band of the warriors of Up-mark who were with them, beheld the Great Roof and saw the smoke come gushing out of the windows, and at last saw the red flames creep out amidst it and waveround the window jambs like little banners of scarlet cloth. Then they could no longer refrain themselves, but ran down the Speech-Hill and the slope about it with great and fierce cries, and clomb the wall where it was unmanned, helping each other with hand and back, both stark warriors, and old men and lads and women: and thus they gat them into the garth and fell upon the lessening band of the Romans, who now began to give way hither and thither about the garth, as they best might.

Thus it befell at the West gate, but at the other gates it was no worser, for there was no diversity of valour between the Houses; nay, whereas the more part and the best part of the Romans faced the onset of Thiodolf, which seemed to them the main onset, they were somewhat easier to deal with elsewhere than at the West gate; and at the East gate was the place first won, so that Valtyr and his folk were the first to clear a space within the gate, and to tell the tale shortly (for can this that and the other sword-stroke be told of in such a medley?) they drew the death-ring around the Romans that were before them, and slew them all to the last man, and then fell fiercely on the rearward of them of the North gate, who still stood before Hiarandi's onset. There again was no long tale to tell of, for Hiarandi was just winning the gate, and the wall was cleared of the Roman shot-fighters, and the Markmen were standing on the top thereof, and casting down on the Romans spears and baulks of wood and whatsoever would fly. There again were the Romans all slain or put out of the fight, and the two bands of the kindred joined together, and with what voices the battle-rage had left them cried out for joy and fared on together to help to bind the sheaves of war which Thiodolf's sickle had reaped. And now it was mere slaying, and the Romans,

though they still fought in knots of less than a score, yet fought on and hewed and thrust without more thought or will than the stone has when it leaps adown the hill-side after it has first been set agoing.

But now the garth was fairly won and Thiodolf saw that there was no hope for the Romans drawing together again; so while the kindreds were busied in hewing down those knots of desperate men, he gathered to him some of the wisest of his warriors, amongst whom were Steinulf and Grani the Grey, the deft woodwrights (but Athalulf had been grievously hurt by a spear and was out of the battle), and drave a way through the confused turmoil which still boiled in the garth there, and made straight for the Man's-door of the Hall. Soon he was close thereto, having hewn away all fleers that hindered him, and the doorway was before him. But on the threshold, the fire and flames of the kindled hall behind him, stood the Roman Captain clad in gold-adorned armour and surcoat of sea-born purple; the man was cool and calm and proud, and a mocking smile was on his face: and he bore his bright blade unbloodied in his hand.

Thiodolf stayed a moment of time, and their eyes met; it had gone hard with the War-duke, and those eyes glittered in his pale face, and his teeth were close set together; though he had fought wisely, and for life, as he who is most valiant ever will do, till he is driven to bay like the lone wood-wolf by the hounds, yet had he been sore mishandled. His helm and shield were gone, his hauberk rent; for it was no dwarf-wrought coat, but the work of Ivar's hand: the blood was running down from his left arm, and he was hurt in many places: he had broken Ivar's sword in the medley, and now bore in his hand a strong Roman short-sword, and his feet stood bloody on the worn earth anigh the Man's-door.

He looked into the scornful eyes of the Roman lord for a little minute and then laughed aloud, and therewithal, leaping on him with one spring, turned sideways, and dealt him a great buffet on his ear with his unarmed left hand, just as the Roman thrust at him with his sword, so that the Captain staggered forward on to the next man following, which was Wolfkettle the eager warrior, who thrust him through with his sword and shoved him aside as

they all strode into the hall together. Howbeit no sword fell from the Roman Captain as he fell, for Thiodolf's side bore it into the Hall of the Wolfings.

Most wrathful were those men, and went hastily, for their Roof was full of smoke, and the flames flickered about the pillars and the wall here and there, and crept up to the windows aloft; yet was it not wholly or fiercely burning; for the Roman fire-raisers had been hurried and hasty in their work. Straightway then Steinulf and Gram led the others off at a run towards the loft and the water; but Thiodolf, who went slowly and painfully, looked and beheld on the dais those men bound for the burning, and he went quietly, and as a man who has been sick, and is weak, up on to the dais, and said:

“Be of good cheer, O brothers, for the kindreds have vanquished the foemen, and the end of strife is come.”

His voice sounded strange and sweet to them amidst the turmoil of the fight without; he laid down his sword on the table, and drew a little sharp knife from his girdle and cut their bonds one by one and loosed them with his blood-stained hands; and each one as he loosed him he kissed and said to him, “Brother, go help those who are quenching the fire; this is the bidding of the War- duke.”

But as he loosed one after other he was longer and longer about it, and his words were slower. At last he came to the man who was bound in his own high-seat close under the place of the wondrous Lamp, the Hall-Sun, and he was the only one left bound; that man was of the Wormings and was named Elfric; he loosed him and was long about it; and when he was done he smiled on him and kissed him, and said to him:

“Arise, brother! go help the quenchers of the fire, and leave to me this my chair, for I am weary: and if thou wilt, thou mayst bring me of that water to drink, for this morning men have forgotten the mead of the reapers!”

Then Elfric arose, and Thiodolf sat in his chair, and leaned back his head; but Elfric looked at him for a moment as one scared, and then ran his ways down the hall, which now was growing noisy with the hurry and bustle of the quenchers of the fire, to whom had divers others joined themselves.

There then from a bucket which was still for a moment he filled a wooden bowl, which he caught up from the base of one of the hall-pillars, and hastened up the Hall again; and there was no man nigh the dais, and Thiodolf yet sat in his chair, and the Hall was dim with the rolling smoke, and Elfric saw not well what the War- duke was doing. So he hastened on, and when he was close to Thiodolf he trod in something wet, and his heart sank for he knew that it was blood; his foot slipped therewith and as he put out his hand to save himself the more part of the water was spilled, and mingled with the blood. But he went up to Thiodolf and said to him, "Drink, War- duke! here hath come a mouthful of water."

But Thiodolf moved not for his word, and Elfric touched him, and he moved none the more.

Then Elfric's heart failed him and he laid his hand on the War- duke's hand, and looked closely into his face; and the hand was cold and the face ashen-pale; and Elfric laid his hand on his side, and he felt the short-sword of the Roman leader thrust deep therein, besides his many other hurts.

So Elfric knew that he was dead, and he cast the bowl to the earth, and lifted up his hands and wailed out aloud, like a woman who hath come suddenly on her dead child, and cried out in a great voice:

"Hither, hither, O men in this hall, for the War- duke of the Markmen is dead! O ye people, Hearken! Thiodolf the Mighty, the Wolfing is dead!"

And he was a young man, and weak with the binding and the waiting for death, and he bowed himself adown and crouched on the ground and wept aloud.

But even as he cried that cry, the sunlight outside the Man's- door was darkened, and the Hall-Sun came over the threshold in her ancient gold-embroidered raiment, holding in her hand her namesake the wondrous Lamp; and the spears and the war-gear of warriors gleamed behind her; but the men tarried on the thresh- old till she turned about and beckoned to them, and then they poured in through the Man's-door, their war-gear rent and they all befouled and disarrayed with the battle, but with proud and happy faces: as they entered she waved her hand to them to bid them go join the quenchers of the fire; so they went their ways.

But she went with unfaltering steps up to the dais, and the place where the chain of the Lamp hung down from amidst the smoke-cloud wavering a little in the gusts of the hall. Straightway she made the Lamp fast to its chain, and dealt with its pulleys with a deft hand often practised therein, and then let it run up toward the smoke-hidden Roof till it gleamed in its due place once more, a token of the salvation of the Wolfings and the welfare of all the kindreds.

Then she turned toward Thiodolf with a calm and solemn face, though it was very pale and looked as if she would not smile again. Elfric had risen up and was standing by the board speechless and the passion of sobs still struggling in his bosom. She put him aside gently, and went up to Thiodolf and stood above him, and looked down on his face a while: then she put forth her hand and closed his eyes, and stooped down and kissed his face. Then she stood up again and faced the Hall and looked and saw that many were streaming in, and that though the smoke was still eddying overhead, the fire was well nigh quenched within; and without the sound of battle had sunk and died away. For indeed the Markmen had ended their day's work before noontide that day, and the more part of the Romans were slain, and to the rest they had given peace till the Folk-mote should give Doom concerning them; for pity of these valiant men was growing in the hearts of the valiant men who had vanquished them, now that they feared them no more.

And this second part of the Morning Battle is called Thiodolf's Storm.

So now when the Hall-Sun looked and beheld that the battle was done and the fire quenched, and when she saw how every man that came into the Hall looked up and beheld the wondrous Lamp and his face quickened into joy at the sight of it; and how most looked up at the high-seat and Thiodolf lying leaned back therein, her heart nigh broke between the thought of her grief and of the grief of the Folk that their mighty friend was dead, and the thought of the joy of the days to be and all the glory that his latter days had won. But she gathered heart, and casting back the dark tresses of her hair, she lifted up her voice and cried out till its clear shrillness sounded throughout all the Roof:

“O men in this Hall, the War-duke is dead! O people hearken! for Thiodolf the Mighty hath changed his life: Come hither, O men, Come hither, for this is true, that Thiodolf is dead!”

CHAPTER XXX. THIODOLF IS BORNE OUT OF THE HALL AND OTTER IS LAID BESIDE HIM.

SO when they heard her voice they came thither flockmeal, and a great throng mingled of many kindreds was in the Hall, but with one consent they made way for the Children of the Wolf to stand nearest to the dais. So there they stood, the warriors mingled with the women, the swains with the old men, the freemen with the thralls: for now the stay-at-homes of the House were all gotten into the garth, and the more part of them had flowed into the feast-hall when they knew that the fire was slackening.

All these now had heard the clear voice of the Hall-Sun, or others had told them what had befallen; and the wave of grief had swept coldly over them amidst their joy of the recoverance of their dwelling-place; yet they would not wail nor cry aloud, even to ease their sorrow, till they had heard the words of the Hall-Sun, as she stood facing them beside their dead War-duke.

Then she spake: “O Sorli the Old, come up hither! thou hast been my fellow in arms this long while.”

So the old man came forth, and went slowly in his clashing war-gear up on to the dais. But his attire gleamed and glittered, since over-old was he to thrust deep into the press that day, howbeit he was wise in war. So he stood beside her on the dais holding his head high, and proud he looked, for all his thin white locks and sunken eyes.

But again said the Hall-Sun: “Canst thou hear me, Wolfkettle, when I bid thee stand beside me, or art thou, too, gone on the road to Valhall?”

Forth then strode that mighty warrior and went toward the dais: nought fair was his array to look on; for point and edge had rent it and stained it red, and the flaring of the hall-flames had blackened it; his face was streaked with black withal, and his hands were as the hands of a smith among the thralls who hath wrought

unwashed in the haste and hurry when men look to see the war-arrow abroad. But he went up on to the dais and held up his head proudly, and looked forth on to the hall-crowd with eyes that gleamed fiercely from his stained and blackened face.

Again the Hall-Sun said: "Art thou also alive, O Egil the messenger? Swift are thy feet, but not to flee from the foe: Come up and stand with us!"

Therewith Egil clave the throng; he was not so roughly dealt with as was Wolfkettle, for he was a bowman, and had this while past shot down on the Romans from aloof; and he yet held his bended bow in his hand. He also came up on to the dais and stood beside Wolfkettle glancing down on the hall-crowd, looking eagerly from side to side.

Yet again the Hall-Sun spake: "No aliens now are dwelling in the Mark; come hither, ye men of the kindreds! Come thou, our brother Hiarandi of the Elkings, for thy sisters, our wives, are fain of thee. Come thou, Valtyr of the Laxings, brother's son of Otter; do thou for the War-duke what thy father's brother had done, had he not been faring afar. Come thou, Geirbald of the Shieldings the messenger! Now know we the deeds of others and thy deeds. Come, stand beside us for a little!"

Forth then they came in their rent and battered war-gear: and the tall Hiarandi bore but the broken truncheon of his sword; and Valtyr a woodman's axe notched and dull with work; and Geirbald a Roman cast-spear, for his own weapons had been broken in the medley; and he came the last of the three, going as a belated reaper from the acres. There they stood by the others and gazed adown the hall-throng.

But the Hall-Sun spake again: "Agni of the Daylings, I see thee now. How camest thou into the hard hand-play, old man? Come hither and stand with us, for we love thee. Angantyr of the Bearings, fair was thy riding on the day of the Battle on the Ridge! Come thou, be with us. Shall the Beamings whose daughters we marry fail the House of the Wolf to-day? Geiróð, thou hast no longer a weapon, but the fight is over, and this hour thou needest it not. Come to us, brother! Gunbald of the Vallings, the Falcon on thy shield is dim with the dint of point and edge, but it hath

done its work to ward thy valiant heart: Come hither, friend! Come all ye and stand with us!"

As she named them so they came, and they went up on to the dais and stood altogether; and a terrible band of warriors they looked had the fight been to begin over again, and they to meet death once more. And again spake the Hall-Sun:

"Steinulf and Grani, deft are your hands! Take ye the stalks of the war-blossoms, the spears of the kindreds, and knit them together to make a bier for our War-duke, for he is weary and may not go afoot. Thou Ali, son of Grey; thou hast gone errands for me before; go forth now from the garth, and wend thy ways toward the water, and tell me when thou comest back what thou hast seen of the coming of the Wain-burg. For by this time it should be drawing anigh."

So Ali went forth, and there was silence of words for a while in the Hall; but there arose the sound of the wood-wrights busy with the wimble and the hammer about the bier. No long space had gone by when Ali came back into the Hall panting with his swift running; and he cried out:

"O Hall-Sun, they are coming; the last wain hath crossed the ford, and the first is hard at hand: bright are their banners in the sun."

Then said the Hall-Sun: "O warriors, it is fitting that we go to meet our banners returning from the field, and that we do the Gods to wit what deeds we have done; fitting is it also that Thiodolf our War-duke wend with us. Now get ye into your ordered bands, and go we forth from the fire-scorched hall, and out into the sunlight, that the very earth and the heavens may look upon the face of our War-duke, and bear witness that he hath played his part as a man."

Then without more words the folk began to stream out of the Hall, and within the garth which the Romans had made they arrayed their companies. But when they were all gone from the Hall save they who were on the dais, the Hall-Sun took the waxen torch which she had litten and quenched at the departure of the host to battle, and now she once more kindled it at the flame of the wondrous Lamp, the Hall-Sun. But the wood-wrights brought

the bier which they had made of the spear-shafts of the kindred, and they laid thereon a purple cloak gold-embroidered of the treasure of the Wolfings, and thereon was Thiodolf laid.

Then those men took him up; to wit, Sorli the Old, and Wolfkettle and Egil, all these were of the Wolfing House; Hiarandi of the Elkings also, and Valtyr of the Laxings, Geirbald of the Shieldings, Agni of the Daylings, Angantyr of the Bearings, Geirodd of the Beamings, Gunbald of the Vallings: all these, with the two valiant wood-wrights, Steinulf and Grani, laid hand to the bier.

So they bore it down from the dais, and out at the Man's-door into the sunlight, and the Hall-Sun followed close after it, holding in her hand the Candle of Returning. It was an hour after high-noon of a bright midsummer day when she came out into the garth; and the smoke from the fire-scorched hall yet hung about the trees of the wood-edge. She looked neither down towards her feet nor on the right side or the left, but straight before her. The ordered companies of the kindreds hid the sight of many fearful things from her eyes; though indeed the thralls and women had mostly gleaned the dead from the living both of friend and foe, and were tending the hurt of either host. Through an opening in the ranks moreover could they by the bier behold the scanty band of Roman captives, some standing up, looking dully around them, some sitting or lying on the grass talking quietly together, and it seemed by their faces that for them the bitterness of death was passed.

Forth then fared the host by the West gate, where Thiodolf had done so valiantly that day, and out on to the green amidst the booths and lesser dwellings. Sore then was the heart of the Hall-Sun, as she looked forth over dwelling and acre and meadow and the blue line of the woods beyond the water, and bethought her of all the familiar things that were within the compass of her eyesight, and remembered the many days of her father's loving-kindness, and the fair words wherewith he had solaced her life-days. But of the sorrow that wrung her heart nothing showed in her face, nor was she paler now than her wont was. For high was her courage, and she would in no wise mar that fair day and victory of the kindreds with grief for what was gone, whereas so much of what once was, yet abided and should abide for ever.

Then fared they down through the acres, where what was yet left of the wheat was yellowing toward harvest, and the rye hung grey and heavy; for bright and hot had the weather been all through these tidings. Howbeit much of the corn was spoiled by the trampling of the Roman bands.

So came they into the fair open meadow and saw before them the wains coming to meet them with their folk; to wit a throng of stout carles of the thrall-folk led by the war-wise and ripe men of the Steerings. Bright was the gleaming of the banner-wains, though for the lack of wind the banners hung down about their staves; the sound of the lowing of the bulls and the oxen, the neighing of horses and bleating of the flocks came up to the ears of the host as they wended over the meadow.

They made stay at last on the rising ground, all trampled and in parts bloody, where yesterday Thiodolf had come on the fight between the remnant of Otter's men and the Romans: there they opened their ranks, and made a ring round about a space, amid-most of which was a little mound whereon was set the bier of Thiodolf. The wains and their warders came up with them and drew a garth of the wains round about the ring of men with the banners of the kindreds in their due places.

There was the Wolf and the Elk, the Falcon, the Swan, the Boar, the Bear, and the Green-tree: the Willow-bush, the Gedd, the Water-bank and the Wood-Ousel, the Steer, the Mallard and the Roe-deer: all these were of the Mid-mark. But of the Upper-mark were the Horse and the Spear, and the Shield, and the Day-break, and the Dale, and the Mountain, and the Brook, and the Weasel, and the Cloud, and the Hart.

Of the Nether-mark were the Salmon, and the Lynx, and the Ling-worm, the Seal, the Stone, and the Sea-mew; the Buck-goat, the Apple-tree, the Bull, the Adder, and the Crane.

There they stood in the hot sunshine three hours after noon; and a little wind came out of the west and raised the pictured cloths upon the banner-staves, so that the men could now see the images of the tokens of their Houses and the Fathers of old time.

Now was there silence in the ring of men; but it opened presently and through it came all-armed warriors bearing another bier, and lo, Otter upon it, dead in his war-gear with many a grie-

vous wound upon his body. For men had found him in an angle of the wall of the Great Roof, where he had been laid yesterday by the Romans when his company and the Bearings with the Wormings made their onset: for the Romans had noted his exceeding valour, and when they had driven off the Goths some of them brought him dead inside their garth, for they would know the name and dignity of so valorous a man.

So now they bore him to the mound where Thiodolf lay and set the bier down beside Thiodolf's, and the two War-dukes of the Markmen lay there together: and when the warriors beheld that sight, they could not forbear, but some groaned aloud, and some wept great tears, and they clashed their swords on their shields and the sound of their sorrow and their praise went up to the summer heavens.

Now the Hall-Sun holding aloft the waxen torch lifted up her voice and said:

“O warriors of the Wolfings, by the token of the flame
 That herein my right hand flickers, ye are back at the House of the Name,
 And there yet burneth the Hall-Sun beneath the Wolfing Roof,
 And the flame that the foemen quickened hath died out far aloof.
 Ye gleanings of the battle, lift up your hearts on high,
 For the House of the War-wise Wolfings and the Folk undoomed to die.
 But ye kindreds of the Markmen, the Wolfing guests are ye,
 And to-night we hold the high-tide, and great shall the feasting be,
 For to-day by the road that we know not a many wend their ways
 To the Gods and the ancient Fathers, and the hope of the latter days.
 And how shall their feet be cumbered if we tangle them with woe,
 And the heavy rain of sorrow drift o'er the road they go?
 They have toiled, and their toil was troublous to make the days to come;
 Use ye their gifts in gladness, lest they grieve for the Ancient Home!
 Now are our maids arraying that fire-scorched Hall of ours
 With the treasure of the Wolfings and the wealth of summer flowers,
 And this eve the work before you will be the Hall to throng
 And purge its walls of sorrow and quench its scathe and wrong.”

She looked on the dead Thiodolf a moment, and then glanced from him to Otter and spake again:

"O kindreds, here before you two mighty bodies lie;
 Henceforth no man shall see them in house and field go by
 As we were used to behold them, familiar to us then
 As the wind beneath the heavens and the sun that shines on men;
 Now soon shall there be nothing of their dwelling-place to tell,
 Save the billow of the meadows, the flower-grown grassy swell!
 Now therefore, O ye kindreds, if amidst you there be one
 Who hath known the heart of the War-dukes, and the deeds their hands
 have done,
 Will not the word be with him, while yet your hearts are hot,
 Of our praise and long remembrance, and our love that dieth not?
 Then let him come up hither and speak the latest word
 O'er the limbs of the battle-weary and the hearts outworn with the sword."

She held her peace, and there was a stir in the ring of men: for they who were anigh the Dayling banner saw an old warrior sitting on a great black horse and fully armed. He got slowly off his horse and walked toward the ring of warriors, which opened before him; for all knew him for Asmund the Old, the war-wise warrior of the Daylings, even he who had lamented over the Hauberk of Thiodolf. He had taken horse the day before, and had ridden toward the battle, but was belated, and had come up with them of the Wain-burg just as they had crossed the water.

CHAPTER XXXI. OLD ASMUND SPEAKETH OVER THE WAR-DUKES: THE DEAD ARE LAID IN MOUND.

NOW while all looked on, he went to the place where lay the bodies of the War-dukes, and looked down on the face of Otter and said:

"O Otter, there thou liest! and thou that I knew of old,
 When my beard began to whiten, as the best of the keen and the bold,
 And thou wert as my youngest brother, and thou didst lead my sons
 When we fared forth over the mountains to meet the arrowy Huns,
 And I smiled to see thee teaching the lore that I learned thee erst.
 O Otter, dost thou remember how the Gothfolk came by the worst,
 And with thee in mine arms I waded the wide shaft-harrowed flood

That lapped the feet of the mountains with its water blent with blood;
 And how in the hollow places of the mountains hidden away
 We abode the kindreds' coming as the wet night bideth day?
 Dost thou remember, Otter, how many a joy we had,
 How many a grief remembered has made our high-tide glad?
 O fellow of the hall-glee! O fellow of the field!
 Why then hast thou departed and left me under shield?
 I the ancient, I the childless, while yet in the Laxing hall
 Are thy brother's sons abiding and their children on thee call.

“O kindreds of the people! the soul that dwelt herein,
 This goodly way-worn body, was keen for you to win
 Good days and long endurance. Who knoweth of his deed
 What things for you it hath fashioned from the flame of the fire of need?
 But of this at least well wot we, that forth from your hearts it came
 And back to your hearts returneth for the seed of thriving and fame.
 In the ground wherein ye lay it, the body of this man,
 No deed of his abideth, no glory that he wan,
 But evermore the Markmen shall bear his deeds o'er earth,
 With the joy of the deeds that are coming, the garland of his worth.”

He was silent a little as he stood looking down on Otter's face with grievous sorrow, for all that his words were stout. For indeed, as he had said, Otter had been his battle-fellow and his hall-fellow, though he was much younger than Asmund; and they had been standing foot to foot in that battle wherein old Asmund's sons were slain by his side.

After a while he turned slowly from looking at Otter to gaze upon Thiodolf, and his body trembled as he looked, and he opened his mouth to speak; but no word came from it; and he sat down upon the edge of the bier, and the tears began to gush out of his old eyes, and he wept aloud. Then they that saw him wondered; for all knew the stoutness of his heart, and how he had borne more burdens than that of eld, and had not cowered down under them. But at last he arose again, and stood firmly on his feet, and faced the Folk-mote, and in a voice more like the voice of a man in his prime than of an old man, he sang:

"Wild the storm is abroad
 Of the edge of the sword!
 Far on runneth the path
 Of the war-stride of wrath!
 The Gods hearken and hear
 The long rumour of fear
 From the meadows beneath
 Running fierce o'er the heath,
 Till it beats round their dwelling-place builded aloof
 And at last all up-swelling breaks wild o'er their roof,
 And quencheth their laughter and crieth on all,
 As it rolleth round rafter and beam of the Hall,
 Like the speech of the thunder-cloud tangled on high,
 When the mountain-halls sunder as dread goeth by.

"So they throw the door wide
 Of the Hall where they bide,
 And to murmuring song
 Turns that voice of the wrong,
 And the Gods wait a-gaze
 For that Wearer of Ways:
 For they know he hath gone
 A long journey alone.

Now his feet are they hearkening, and now is he come,
 With his battle-wounds darkening the door of his home,
 Unbyrned, unshielded, and lonely he stands,
 And the sword that he wielded is gone from his hands—
 Hands outstretched and bearing no spoil of the fight,
 As speechless, unfearing, he stands in their sight.

"War-father gleams
 Where the white light streams
 Round kings of old
 All red with gold,
 And the Gods of the name
 With joy aflame.
 All the ancient of men
 Grown glorious again:

THE HOUSE OF THE WOLFINGS

Till the Slains-father crieth aloud at the last:
 'Here is one that belieth no hope of the past!
 No weapon, no treasure of earth doth he bear,
 No gift for the pleasure of Godhome to share;
 But life his hand bringeth, well cherished, most sweet;
 And hark! the Hall singeth the Folk-wolf to greet!'

“As the rain of May
 On earth's happiest day,
 So the fair flowers fall
 On the sun-bright Hall
 As the Gods rise up
 With the greeting-cup,
 And the welcoming crowd
 Falls to murmur aloud

Then the God of Earth speaketh; sweet-worded he saith,
 'Lo, the Sun ever seeketh Life fashioned of death;
 And to-day as he turneth the wide world about
 On Wolfstead he yearneth; for there without doubt
 Dwells the death-fashioned story, the flower of all fame.
 Come hither new Glory, come Crown of the Name!''

All men's hearts rose high as he sang, and when he had ended arose the clang of sword and shield and went ringing down the meadow, and the mighty shout of the Markmen's joy rent the heavens: for in sooth at that moment they saw Thiodolf, their champion, sitting among the Gods on his golden chair, sweet savours around him, and sweet sound of singing, and he himself bright-faced and merry as no man on earth had seen him, for as joyous a man as he was.

But when the sound of their exultation sank down, the Hall-Sun spake again:

“Now wendeth the sun westward, and weary grows the Earth
 Of all the long day's doings in sorrow and in mirth;
 And as the great sun waneth, so doth my candle wane,
 And its flickering flame desireth to rest and die again.
 Therefore across the meadows wend we aback once more

THEY FEAST IN THE WOLFING HALL 205

To the holy Roof of the Wolfings, the shrine of peace and war.
And these that once have loved us, these warriors' images,
Shall sit amidst our feasting, and see, as the Father sees
The works that menfolk fashion and the rest of toiling hands,
When his eyes look down from the mountains and the heavens above all
lands,

And up from the flowery meadows and the rolling deeps of the sea.
There then at the feast with our champions familiar shall we be
As oft we are with the Godfolk, when in story-rhymes and lays
We laugh as we tell of their laughter, and their deeds of other days.

“Come then, ye sons of the kindreds who hither bore these twain!
Take up their beds of glory, and fare we home again,
And feast as men delivered from toil unmeet to bear,
Who through the night are looking to the dawn-tide fresh and fair
And the morn and the noon to follow, and the eve and its morrow morn,
All the life of our deliv'rance and the fair days yet unborn.”

So she spoke, and a murmur arose as those valiant men came forth again. But lo, now were they dight in fresh and fair raiment & gleaming war-array. For while all this was a-doing and a-saying, they had gotten them by the Hall-Sun's bidding unto the wains of their Houses, and had arrayed them from the store therein.

So now they took up the biers, and the Hall-Sun led them, and they went over the meadow before the throng of the kindreds, who followed them duly ordered, each House about its banner; and when they were come through the garth which the Romans had made to the Man's-door of the Hall, there were the women of the House freshly attired, who cast flowers on the living men of the host, and on the dead War-dukes, while they wept for pity of them. So went the freemen of the Houses into the Hall, following the Hall-Sun, and the bearers of the War-dukes; but the banners abode without in the garth made by the Romans; and the thralls arrayed a feast for themselves about the wains of the kindreds in the open place before their cots and the smithying booths and the byres. And as the Hall-Sun went into the Hall, she thrust down the candle against the threshold of the Man's-door, and so quenched it.

Long were the kindreds entering, and when they were under the Roof of the Wolfings, they looked and beheld Thiodolf set in his chair once more, and Otter set beside him; and the chiefs and leaders of the House took their places on the dais, those to whom it was due, and the Hall-Sun sat under the wondrous Lamp her namesake.

Now was the glooming falling upon the earth; but the Hall was bright within even as the Hall-Sun had promised. Therein was set forth the Treasure of the Wolfings; fair cloths were hung on the walls, goodly broidered garments on the pillars: goodly brazen cauldrons and fair-carven chests were set down in nooks where men could see them well, and vessels of gold and silver were set all up and down the tables of the feast. The pillars also were wreathed with flowers, and flowers hung garlanded from the walls over the precious hangings; sweet gums and spices were burning in fair-wrought censers of brass, and so many candles were alight under the Roof, that scarce had it looked more ablaze when the Romans had litten the faggots therein for its burning amidst the hurry of the Morning Battle.

There then they fell to feasting, hallowing in the high-tide of their return with victory in their hands: and the dead corpses of Thiodolf and Otter, clad in precious glistering raiment, looked down on them from the High-seat, and the kindreds worshipped them and were glad; and they drank the Cup to them before any others, were they Gods or men.

But before the feast was hallowed in, came Al the son of Grey up to the High-seat, bearing something in his hand: and lo! it was Throng-plough, which he had sought all over the field where the Markmen had been overcome by the Romans, and had found it at last. All men saw him how he held it in his hand now as he went up to the Hall-Sun and spake to her. But she kissed the lad on the forehead, and took Throng-plough, and wound the peace-strings round him and laid him on the board before Thiodolf; and then she spake softly as if to herself, yet so that some heard her:

“O father, no more shalt thou draw Throng-plough from the sheath till the battle is pitched in the last field of fight, and the sons of the fruitful Earth and the sons of Day meet Swart and his child-

ren at last, when the change of the World is at hand. Maybe I shall be with thee then: but now and in meanwhile, farewell, O mighty hand of my father! ”

Thus then the Houses of the Mark held their High-tide of Returning under the Wolfing Roof with none to blame them or make them afraid: and the moon rose and the summer night wore on towards dawn, and within the Roof and without was there feasting and singing and harping and the voice of abundant joyance: for without the Roof feasted the thralls and the strangers, and the Roman war-captives.

But on the morrow the kindreds laid their dead men in mound betwixt the Great Roof and the Wild-wood. In one mound they laid them with the War-dukes in their midst, and Arinbiorn by Otter's right side; and Thiodolf bore Throng-plough to mound with him.

But a little way from the mound of their own dead, toward the south they laid the Romans, a great company, with their Captain in the midst: and they heaped a long mound over them not right high; so that as years wore, and the feet of men and beasts trod it down, it seemed a mere swelling of the earth not made by men's hands; and belike men knew not how many bones of valiant men lay beneath; yet it had a name which endured for long, to wit, the Battle-toft.

But the mound whereunder the Markmen were laid was called Thiodolf's Howe for many generations of men, and many are the tales told of him; for men were loth to lose him and forget him: and in the latter days men deemed of him that he sits in that Howe not dead but sleeping, with Throng-plough laid before him on the board; and that when the sons of the Goths are at their sorest need and the falcons cease to sit on the ridge of the Great Roof of the Wolfings, he will wake and come forth from the Howe for their helping. But none have dared to break open that Howe and behold what is therein.

But that swelling of the meadow where the Goths had their overthrow at the hands of the Romans, and Thiodolf fell to earth unwounded, got a name also, and was called the Swooning Knowe; and it kept that name long after men had forgotten wherefore it was so called.

Now when all this was done, and the warriors of the kindreds were departed each to his own stead, the Wolfings gathered in wheat-harvest, and set themselves to make good all that the Romans had undone; and they cleansed and mended their Great Roof and made it fairer than before, and took from it all signs of the burning, save that they left the charring and marks of the flames on one tie-beam, the second from the dais, for a token of the past tidings. Also when Harvest was over, the Wolfings, the Beamings, the Galtings, and the Elkings, set to work with the Bearings to rebuild their Great Roof and the other dwellings and booths which the Romans had burned; and right fair was that house.

But the Wolfings throve in field and fold, and they begat children who grew up to be mighty men and deft of hand, and the House grew more glorious year by year.

The tale tells not that the Romans ever fell on the Mark again; for about this time they began to stay the spreading of their dominion, or even to draw in its boundaries somewhat.

AND THIS IS ALL THAT THE TALE HAS TO TELL
CONCERNING THE HOUSE OF THE WOLFINGS
AND THE KINDREDS OF THE MARK.

THE END

THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN
OR THE LAND OF LIVING MEN

THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN OR THE LAND OF LIVING MEN

CHAPTER I. OF THOSE THREE WHO CAME TO THE HOUSE OF THE RAVEN.

IT has been told that there was once a young man of free kindred and whose name was Hallblithe: he was fair, strong, and not untried in battle; he was of the House of the Raven of old time.

This man loved an exceeding fair damsel called the Hostage, who was of the House of the Rose, wherein it was right and due that the men of the Raven should wed.

She loved him no less, and no man of the kindred gainsaid their love, and they were to be wedded on Midsummer Night.

But one day of early spring, when the days were yet short and the nights long, Hallblithe sat before the porch of the house smoothing an ash stave for his spear, and he heard the sound of horse-hoofs drawing nigh, and he looked up and saw folk riding toward the house, and so presently they rode through the garth gate; and there was no man but he about the house, so he rose up and went to meet them, and he saw that they were but three in company: they had weapons with them, and their horses were of the best; but they were no fellowship for a man to be afraid of; for two of them were old and feeble, and the third was dark and sad, and drooping of aspect: it seemed as if they had ridden far and fast, for their spurs were bloody and their horses all a-sweat.

Hallblithe hailed them kindly and said: "Ye are way-worn, and maybe ye have to ride further; so light down and come into the house, and take bite and sup, and hay and corn also for your horses; and then if ye needs must ride on your way, depart when ye are rested; or else if ye may, then abide here night-long, and go your ways to-morrow, and meantime that which is ours shall be yours, and all shall be free to you."

Then spake the oldest of the elders in a high piping voice and said: "Young man, we thank thee; but though the days of the springtide are waxing, the hours of our lives are waning; nor may we abide unless thou canst truly tell us that this is the Land of the

212 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

Glittering Plain: and if that be so, then delay not, lead us to thy lord, and perhaps he will make us content."

Spake he who was somewhat less stricken in years than the first: "Thanks have thou! but we need something more than meat and drink, to wit the Land of Living Men. And Oh! but the time presses."

Spake the sad and sorry carle: "We seek the Land where the days are many: so many that he who hath forgotten how to laugh, may learn the craft again, and forget the days of Sorrow."

Then they all three cried aloud and said:

"Is this the Land? Is this the Land?"

But Hallblithe wondered, and he laughed and said: "Wayfarers, look under the sun down the plain which lieth betwixt the mountains and the sea, and ye shall behold the meadows all gleaming with the spring lilies; yet do we not call this the Glittering Plain, but Cleveland by the Sea. Here men die when their hour comes, nor know I if the days of their life be long enough for the forgetting of sorrow; for I am young and not yet a yokefellow of sorrow; but this I know, that they are long enough for the doing of deeds that shall not die. And as for Lord, I know not this word, for here dwell we, the sons of the Raven, in good fellowship, with our wives that we have wedded, and our mothers who have borne us, and our sisters who serve us. Again I bid you light down off your horses, and eat and drink, and be merry; and depart when ye will, to seek what land ye will."

They scarce looked on him, but cried out together mournfully:

"This is not the Land! This is not the Land!"

No more than that they said, but turned about their horses and rode out through the garth gate, and went clattering up the road that led to the pass of the mountains. But Hallblithe hearkened wondering, till the sound of their horse-hoofs died away, and then turned back to his work: and it was then two hours after high-noon.

CHAPTER II. EVIL TIDINGS COME TO HAND AT CLEVELAND.

NOT long had he worked ere he heard the sound of horse-hoofs once more, and he looked not up, but said to himself, "It is but the lads bringing back the teams from the acres, and riding fast and driving hard for joy of heart and in wantonness of youth."

But the sound grew nearer and he looked up and saw over the turf wall of the garth the flutter of white raiment; and he said:

"Nay, it is the maidens coming back from the sea-shore and the gathering of wrack."

So he set himself the harder to his work, and laughed, all alone as he was, and said. "She is with them: now I will not look up again till they have ridden into the garth, and she has come from among them, and leapt off her horse, and cast her arms about my neck as her wont is; and it will rejoice her then to mock me with hard words and kind voice and longing heart; and I shall long for her and kiss her, and sweet shall the coming days seem to us: and the daughters of our folk shall look on and be kind and blithe with us."

Therewith rode the maidens into the garth, but he heard no sound of laughter or merriment amongst them, which was contrary to their wont; and his heart fell, and it was as if instead of the maidens' laughter the voices of those wayfarers came back upon the wind crying out, "Is this the Land? Is this the Land?"

Then he looked up hastily, and saw the maidens drawing near, ten of the House of the Raven, and three of the House of the Rose; and he beheld them that their faces were pale and woe-begone, and their raiment rent, and there was no joy in them. Hall-blithe stood aghast while one who had gotten off her horse (and she was the daughter of his own mother) ran past him into the hall, looking not at him, as if she durst not: and another rode off swiftly to the horse-stalls. But the others, leaving their horses, drew round about him, and for a while none durst utter a word; and he stood gazing at them, with the spoke-shave in his hand, he also silent; for he saw that the Hostage was not with them, and he knew that now he was the yokefellow of sorrow.

At last he spoke gently and in a kind voice, and said: "Tell me,

sisters, what evil hath befallen us, even if it be the death of a dear friend, and the thing that may not be amended."

THEN spoke a fair woman of the Rose, whose name was Brightling, and said: "Hallblithe, it is not of death that we have to tell, but of sundering, which may yet be amended. We were on the sand of the sea nigh the Ship-stead and the Rollers of the Raven, and we were gathering the wrack and playing together; and we saw a round-ship nigh to shore lying with her sheet slack, and her sail beating the mast; but we deemed it to be none other than some bark of the Fish-biters, and thought no harm thereof, but went on running and playing amidst the little waves that fell on the sand, and the ripples that curled around our feet. At last there came a small boat from the side of the round-ship, and rowed in toward shore, and still we feared not, though we drew a little a back from the surf and let fall our gown-hems. But the crew of that boat beached her close to where we stood, and came hastily wading the surf towards us; and we saw that they were twelve weaponed men, great, and grim, and all clad in black raiment. Then indeed were we afraid, and we turned about and fled up the beach; but now it was too late, for the tide was at more than half ebb and long was the way over the sand to the place where we had left our horses tied among the tamarisk-bushes. Nevertheless we ran, and had gotten up to the pebble-beach before they ran in amongst us: and they caught us, and cast us down on to the hard stones.

"Then they made us sit in a row on a ridge of the pebbles; and we were sore afraid, yet more for defilement at their hands than for death; for they were evil-looking men exceeding foul of favour. Then said one of them: 'Which of all you maidens is the Hostage of the House of the Rose?'

"Then all we kept silence, for we would not betray her. But the evil man spake again: 'Choose ye then whether we shall take one, or all of you across the waters in our black ship.' Yet still we others spake not, till arose thy beloved, O Hallblithe, and said:

"'Let it be one then, and not all; for I am the Hostage.'

"'How shalt thou make us sure thereof?' said the evil carle.

"She looked on him proudly and said: 'Because I say it.'

"'Wilt thou swear it?' said he.

"'Yea,' said she, 'I swear it by the token of the House wherein

I shall wed; by the wings of the Fowl that seeketh the Field of Slaying.'

"'It is enough,' said the man, 'come thou with us. And ye maidens sit ye there, and move not till we have made way on our ship, unless ye would feel the point of the arrow. For ye are within bow-shot of the ship, and we have shot weapons aboard.'

"So the Hostage departed with them, and she unweeping, but we wept sorely. And we saw the small boat come up to the side of the round-ship, and the Hostage going over the gunwale along with those evil men, and we heard the hale and how of the mariners as they drew up the anchor and sheeted home; and then the sweeps came out and the ship began to move over the sea. And one of those evil-minded men bent his bow and shot a shaft at us, but it fell far short of where we sat, and the laugh of those runagates came over the sands to us. So we crept up the beach trembling, and then rose to our feet and got to our horses, and rode hither speedily, and our hearts are broken for thy sorrow."

At that word came Hallblithe's own sister out from the hall; and she bore weapons with her, to wit Hallblithe's sword and shield and helm and hauberk. As for him he turned back silently to his work, and set the steel of the spear on the new ashen shaft, and took the hammer and smote the nail in, and laid the weapon on a round pebble that was thereby, and clenched the nail on the other side. Then he looked about, and saw that the other damsel had brought him his coal-black war-horse ready saddled and bridled; then he did on his armour, and girt his sword to his side and leapt into the saddle, and took his new-shafted spear in hand and shook the rein. But none of all those damsels durst say a word to him or ask him whither he went, for they feared his face, and the sorrow of his heart. So he got him out of the garth and turned toward the sea-shore, and they saw the glitter of his spear-point a minute over the turf-wall, and heard the clatter of his horse-hoofs as he galloped over the hard way; and thus he departed.

CHAPTER III. THE WARRIORS OF THE RAVEN SEARCH THE SEAS.

THEN the women bethought them, and they spake a word or two together, and then they sundered and went one this way and one that, to gather together the warriors of the Raven who were a-field, or on the way, nigh unto the house, that they might follow Hallblithe down to the sea-shore and help him; after a while they came back again by one and two and three, bringing with them the wrathful young men; and when there was upward of a score gathered in the garth armed and horsed, they rode their ways to the sea, being minded to thrust a long-ship of the Ravens out over the Rollers into the sea, and follow the strong-thieves of the waters and bring a-back the Hostage, so that they might end the sorrow at once, and establish joy once more in the House of the Raven and the House of the Rose. But they had with them three lads of fifteen winters or thereabouts to lead their horses back home again, when they should have gone upon to the Horse of the Brine.

Thus then they departed, and the maidens stood in the garth-gate till they lost sight of them behind the sandhills, and then turned back sorrowfully into the house, and sat there talking low of their sorrow. And many a time they had to tell their tale anew, as folk came into the hall one after another from field and fell. But the young men came down to the sea, and found Hallblithe's black horse straying about amongst the tamarisk-bushes above the beach; and they looked thence over the sand, and saw neither Hallblithe nor any man: and they gazed out seaward, and saw neither ship nor sail on the barren brine. Then they went down on to the sand, and sundered their fellowship, and went half one way, half the other, betwixt the sandhills and the surf, where now the tide was flowing, till the nesses of the east and the west, the horns of the bay, stayed them. Then they met together again by the Rollers, when the sun was within an hour of setting. There and then they laid hand to that ship which is called the Seamew, and they ran her down over the Rollers into the waves, and leapt aboard and hoisted sail, and ran out the oars and put to sea; and a little wind was blowing seaward from the gates of the mountains behind them.

THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN 217

So they quartered the sea-plain, as the kestrel doth the water-meadows, till the night fell on them, and was cloudy, though whiles the wading moon shone out; and they had seen nothing, neither sail nor ship, nor aught else on the barren brine, save the washing of waves and the hovering of sea-fowl. So they lay-to outside the horns of the bay and awaited the dawning. And when morning was come they made way again, and searched the sea, and sailed to the out-skerries, and searched them with care; then they sailed into the main and fared hither and thither and up and down: and this they did for eight days, and in all that time they saw no ship nor sail, save three barks of the Fish-biters nigh to the Skerry which is called Mew-stone.

So they fared home to the Raven Bay, and laid their keel on the Rollers, and so went their ways sadly, home to the House of the Raven: and they deemed that for this time they could do no more in seeking their valiant kinsman and his fair damsel. And they were very sorry; for these two were well-beloved of all men. But since they might not amend it, they abode in peace, awaiting what the change of days might bring them.

CHAPTER IV. NOW HALLBLITHE TAKETH THE SEA.

NOW must it be told of Hallblithe that he rode fiercely down to the sea-shore, and from the top of the beach he gazed about him, and there below him was the Ship-stead and Rollers of his kindred, whereon lay the three long-ships, the Seamew, and the Osprey and the Erne. Heavy and huge they seemed to him as they lay there, black-sided, icy-cold with the washing of the March waves, their golden dragon-heads looking seaward wistfully. But first had he looked out into the offing, and it was only when he had let his eyes come back from where the sea and sky met, and they had beheld nothing but the waste of waters, that he beheld the Ship-stead closely; and therewith he saw where a little to the west of it lay a skiff, which the low wave of the tide lifted and let fall from time to time. It had a mast, and a black sail hoisted thereon and flapping with slackened sheet. A man sat in the boat clad in black raiment, and the sun smote a gleam from the

helm on his head. Then Hallblithe leapt off his horse, and strode down the sands shouldering his spear; and when he came near to the man in the boat he poised his spear and shook it and cried out: "Man, art thou friend or foe?"

Said the man: "Thou art a fair young man: but there is grief in thy voice along with wrath. Cast not till thou hast heard me, and mayst deem whether I may do aught to heal thy grief."

"What mayst thou do?" said Hallblithe; "art thou not a robber of the sea, a harrier of the folks that dwell in peace?"

The man laughed: "Yea," said he, "my craft is thieving and carrying off the daughters of folk, so that we may have a ransom for them. Wilt thou come over the waters with me?"

Hallblithe said wrathfully:

"Nay, rather, come thou ashore here! Thou seemest a big man, and belike shall be good of thine hands. Come and fight with me; and then he of us who is vanquished, if he be unslain, shall serve the other for a year, and then shalt thou do my business in the ransoming."

The man in the boat laughed again, and that so scornfully that he angered Hallblithe beyond measure: then he arose in the boat and stood on his feet swaying from side to side as he laughed. He was passing big, long-armed and big-headed, and long hair came from under his helm like the tail of a red horse; his eyes were gray and gleaming, and his mouth wide.

In a while he stayed his laughter and said: "O Warrior of the Raven, this were a simple game for thee to play; though it is not far from my mind, for fighting when I needs must win is no dull work. Look you, if I slay or vanquish thee, then all is said; and if by some chance stroke thou slayest me, then is thine only helper in this matter gone from thee. Now to be short, I bid thee come aboard to me if thou wouldst ever hear another word of thy damsel betrothed. And moreover this need not hinder thee to fight with me if thou hast a mind to it thereafter; for we shall soon come to a land big enough for two to stand on. Or if thou listest to fight in a boat rocking on the waves, I see not but there may be manhood in that also."

Now was the hot wrath somewhat run off Hallblithe, nor durst

he lose any chance to hear a word of his beloved; so he said: "Big man, I will come aboard. But look thou to it, if thou hast a mind to bewray me; for the sons of the Raven die hard."

"Well," said the big man, "I have heard that their minstrels are of many words, and think that they have tales to tell. Come aboard and loiter not." Then Hallblithe waded the surf and lightly strode over the gunwale of the skiff and sat him down. The big man thrust out into the deep and haled home the sheet; but there was but little wind.

Then said Hallblithe: "Wilt thou have me row, for I wot not whitherward to steer?"

Said the red carle: "Maybe thou art not in a hurry; I am not: do as thou wilt." So Hallblithe took the oars and rowed mightily, while the alien steered, and they went swiftly and lightly over the sea, and the waves were little.

CHAPTER V. THEY COME UNTO THE ISLE OF RAN-SOM.

SO the sun grew low, and it set; the stars and the moon shone a while and then it clouded over. Hallblithe still rowed and rested not, though he was weary; and the big man sat and steered, and held his peace. But when the night was grown old and it was not far from the dawn, the alien said: "Youngling of the Ravens, now shalt thou sleep and I will row."

Hallblithe was exceeding weary; so he gave the oars to the alien and lay down in the stern and slept. And in his sleep he dreamed that he was lying in the House of the Raven, and his sisters came to him and said, "Rise up now, Hallblithe! wilt thou be a sluggard on the day of thy wedding? Come thou with us to the House of the Rose that we may bear away the Hostage." Then he dreamed that they departed, and he arose and clad himself: but when he would have gone out of the hall, then was it no longer daylight, but moonlight, and he dreamed that he had dreamed: nevertheless he would have gone abroad, but might not find the door; so he said he would go out by a window; but the wall was high and smooth (quite other than in the House of the Raven, where were

low windows all along one aisle), nor was there any way to come at them. But he dreamed that he was so abashed thereat, and had such a weakness on him, that he wept for pity of himself: and he went to his bed to lie down; and lo! there was no bed and no hall; nought but a heath, wild and wide, and empty under the moon. And still he wept in his dream, and his manhood seemed departed from him, and he heard a voice crying out, "Is this the Land? Is this the Land?"

THEREWITHAL he awoke, and as his eyes cleared he beheld the big man rowing and the black sail flapping against the mast; for the wind had fallen dead and they were faring on over a long smooth swell of the sea. It was broad daylight, but round about them was a thick mist, which seemed none the less as if the sun were ready to shine through it.

As Hallblithe caught the red man's eye, he smiled and nodded on him and said: "Now has the time come for thee first to eat and then to row. But tell me what is that upon thy cheeks?"

Hallblithe, reddening somewhat, said: "The night dew hath fallen on me."

Quoth the sea-rover, "It is no shame for thee a youngling to remember thy betrothed in thy sleep, and to weep because thou lackest her. But now bestir thee, for it is later than thou mayest deem."

Therewith the big man drew in the oars and came to the after-part of the boat, and drew meat and drink out of a locker thereby; and they ate and drank together, and Hallblithe grew strong and somewhat less downcast; and he went forward and gat the oars into his hands.

Then the big red man stood up and looked over his left shoulder and said: "Soon shall we have a breeze and bright weather."

Then he looked into the midmost of the sail and fell a-whistling such a tune as the fiddles play to dancing men and maids at Yule-tide, and his eyes gleamed and glittered therewithal, and exceeding big he looked. Then Hallblithe felt a little air on his cheek, and the mist grew thinner, and the sail began to fill with wind till the sheet tightened: then, lo! the mist rising from the

face of the sea, and the sea's face rippling gaily under a bright sun. Then the wind increased, and the wall of mist departed and a few light clouds sped over the sky, and the sail swelled and the boat heeled over, and the seas fell white from the prow, and they sped fast over the face of the waters.

Then laughed the red-haired man, and said: "O croaker on the dead branch, now is the wind such that no rowing of thine may catch up with it: so in with the oars now, and turn about, and thou shalt see whitherward we are going."

Then Hallblithe turned about on the thwart and looked across the sea, and lo! before them the high cliffs and crags and mountains of a new land which seemed to be an isle, and they were deep blue under the sun, which now shone aloft in the mid heaven. He said nought at all, but sat looking and wondering what land it might be; but the big man said: "O tomb of warriors, is it not as if the blueness of the deep sea had heaved itself up aloft, and turned from coloured air into rock and stone, so wondrous blue it is? But that is because those crags and mountains are so far away, and as we draw nigher to them, thou shalt see them as they verily are, that they are coal-black; and yonder land is an isle, and is called the Isle of Ransom. Therein shall be the market for thee where thou mayst cheapen thy betrothed. There mayst thou take her by the hand and lead her away thence, when thou hast dealt with the chapman of maidens and hast pledged thee by the fowl of battle, and the edge of the fallow blade to pay that which he will have of thee."

As the big man spoke there was a mocking in his voice and his face and in his whole huge body, which made the sword of Hallblithe uneasy in his scabbard; but he refrained his wrath, and said: "Big man, the longer I look, the less I can think how we are to come up on to yonder island; for I can see nought but a huge cliff, and great mountains rising beyond it."

"Thou shalt the more wonder," said the alien, "the nigher thou drawest thereto; for it is not because we are far away that thou canst see no beach or strand, or sloping of the land seaward, but because there is nought of all these things. Yet fear not! am I not with thee? thou shalt come ashore on the Isle of Ransom."

Then Hallblithe held his peace, and the other spake not for a while, but gave a short laugh once or twice; and said at last in a big voice, "Little Carrion-biter, why dost thou not ask me of my name?"

Now Hallblithe was a tall man and a fell fighter; but he said: "Because I was thinking of other things and not of thee."

"Well," said the big man, in a voice still louder, "when I am at home men call me the Puny Fox."

Then Hallblithe said: "Art thou a Fox? It may well be that thou shalt beguile me as such beasts will; but look to it, that if thou dost I shall know how to avenge me."

Then rose up the big man from the helm, and straddled wide in the boat, and cried out in a great roaring voice: "Crag-nester, I am one of seven brethren, and the smallest and weakest of them. Art thou not afraid?"

"No," said Hallblithe, "for the six others are not here. Wilt thou fight here in boat, O Fox?"

"Nay," said Fox, "rather we will drink a cup of wine together."

So he opened the locker again and drew out thence a great horn of some huge neat of the outlands, which was girthed and stopped with silver, and also a golden cup, and he filled the cup from the horn and gave it into Hallblithe's hand and said: "Drink, O black-fledged nestling! But call a health over the cup if thou wilt." So Hallblithe raised the cup aloft and cried: "Health to the House of the Raven and to them that love it! an ill day to its foemen!" Then he set his lips to the cup and drank; and that wine seemed to him better and stronger than any he had ever tasted. But when he had given the cup back again to Fox, that red one filled it again, and cried over it, "The Treasure of the Seal and the King that dieth not!" Then he drank, and filled again for Hallblithe, and steered with his knees meanwhile; and thus they drank three cups each, and Fox smiled and was peaceful and said but little, but Hallblithe sat wondering how the world was changed for him since yesterday.

BUT now was the sky blown all clear of clouds and the wind piped shrill behind them, and the great waves rose and fell about them, and the sun glittered on them in many colours. Fast flew the boat before the wind as though it would never stop, and

the day was waning, and the wind still rising; and now the Isle of Ransom uphove huge before them, and coal-black, and no beach and no haven was to be seen therein; and still they ran before the wind towards that black cliff-wall, against which the sea washed for ever, and no keel ever built by man might live for one moment 'twixt the surf and the cliff of that grim land. The sun grew low, and sank red under the sea, and that world of stone swallowed up half the heavens before them, for they were now come very nigh thereto; nor could Hallblithe see aught for it, but that they must be dashed against the cliff and perish in a moment of time.

Still the boat flew on; but now when the twilight was come, and they had just opened up a long reach of the cliff that lay beyond a high ness, Hallblithe thought he saw down by the edge of the sea something darker than the face of the rock-wall, and he deemed it was a cave: they came a little nearer and he saw it was a great cave high enough to let a round-ship go in with all her sails set.

"Son of the Raven," quoth Fox, "hearken, for thy heart is not little. Yonder is the gate into the Isle of Ransom, and if thou wilt, thou mayst go through it. Yet it may be that if thou goest ashore on to the Isle something grievous shall befall thee, a trouble more than thou canst bear: a shame it may be. Now there are two choices for thee: either to go up on to the Isle and face all; or to die here by my hand having done nothing unmanly or shameful: What sayest thou?"

"Thou art of many words when time so presses, Fox," said Hallblithe. "Why should I not choose to go up on to the Island to deliver my trothplight maiden? For the rest, slay me if thou canst, if we come alive out of this cauldron of waters."

Said the big red man: "Look on then, and note Fox how he steereth, as it were through a needle's eye."

Now were they underneath the black shadow of the black cliff and amidst the twilight the surf was tossed about like white fire. In the lower heavens the stars were beginning to twinkle and the moon was bright and yellow, and aloft all was peaceful, for no cloud sullied the sky. One moment Hallblithe saw all this hanging above the turmoil of thundering water and dripping rock and the next he was in the darkness of the cave, the roaring wind and the waves still making thunder about him, though of a different voice from

the harsh hubbub without. Then he heard Fox say: "Sit down now and take the oars, for presently shall we be at home at the landing place."

So Hallblithe took the oars and rowed, and as they went up the cave the sea fell, and the wind died out into the aimless gustiness of hollow places; and for a little while was all as dark as dark might be. Then Hallblithe saw that the darkness grew a little greyer, and he looked over his shoulder and saw a star of light before the bows of the boat, and Fox cried out: "Yea, it is like day; bright will the moon be for such as needs must be wayfaring to-night! Cease rowing, O Son of the coal-blue fowl, for there is way enough on her."

Then Hallblithe lay on his oars, and in a minute the bows smote the land; then he turned about and saw a steep stair of stone, and up the sloping shaft thereof the moonlit sky and the bright stars. Then Fox arose and came forward and leapt out of the boat and moored her to a big stone: then he leapt back again and said: "Bear a hand with the victuals; we must bring them out of the boat unless thou wilt sleep supperless, as I will not. For to-night must we be guests to ourselves, since it is far to the dwelling of my people, and the old man is said to be a skin-changer, a flit-by-night. And as to this cave, it is deemed to be nowise safe to sleep therein, unless the sleeper have a double share of luck. And thy luck, meseemeth, O Son of the Raven, is as now somewhat less than a single share. So to-night we shall sleep under the naked heaven."

Hallblithe yea-said this, and they took the meat and drink, such as they needed, from out the boat, and climbed the steep stair no little way, and so came out on to a plain place, which seemed to Hallblithe bare and waste so far as he saw it by the moonlight; for the twilight was gone now, and nought was left of the light of day save a glimmer in the west.

This Hallblithe deemed wonderful, that no less out on the open heath and brow of the land than in the shut-in cave, all that tumult of the wind had fallen, and the cloudless night was calm, and with a little light air blowing from the south and the landward.

Therewithal was Fox done with his loud-voiced braggart mood, and spoke gently and peaceably like to a wayfarer, who hath busi-

ness of his to look to as other men. Now he pointed to certain rocks or low crags that a little way off rose like a reef out of the treeless plain; then said he: "Shipmate, underneath yonder rocks is our resting-place for to-night; and I pray thee not to deem me churlish that I give thee no better harbour. But I have a charge over thee to bring thee safe thus far on thy quest; and thou wouldst find it hard to live amongst such housemates as thou wouldst find up yonder amongst our folk to-night. But to-morrow shalt thou come to speech with him who will deal with thee concerning the ransom."

"It is enough," said Hallblithe, "and I thank thee for thy leading: and as for thy rough and uncomely words which thou hast given me, I pardon thee for them: for I am none the worse of them: forsooth, if I had been, my sword would have had a voice in the matter."

"I am well content as it is, Son of the Raven," quoth Fox; "I have done my bidding and all is well."

"Tell me then who it is hath bidden thee bring me hither?"

"I may not tell thee," said Fox; "thou art here, be content, as I am."

And he spake no more till they had come to the reef aforesaid, which was some two furlongs from the place where they had come from out of the cave. There then they set forth their supper on the stones, and ate what they would, and drank of that good strong wine while the horn bare out. And now was Fox of few words, and when Hallblithe asked him concerning that land, he had little to say. And at last when Hallblithe asked him of that so perilous house and those who manned it, he said to him:

"Son of the Raven, it avails not asking of these matters; for if I tell thee aught concerning them I shall tell thee lies. Once again let it be enough for thee that thou hast passed over the sea safely on thy quest; and a more perilous sea it is forsooth than thou deemest. But now let us have an end of vain words, and make our bed amidst these stones as best we may; for we should be stirring betimes in the morning." Hallblithe said little in answer, and they arrayed their sleeping places cunningly, as the hare doth her form, and like men well used to lying abroad.

HALLBLITHE was very weary and he soon fell asleep; and as he lay there, he dreamed a dream, or maybe saw a vision; whether he were asleep when he saw it, or between sleeping and waking, I know not. But this was his dream or his vision; that the Hostage was standing over him, and she as he had seen her but yesterday, bright-haired and ruddy-cheeked and white-skinned, kind of hand and soft of voice, and she said to him: "Hallblithe, look on me and hearken, for I have a message for thee." And he looked and longed for her, and his soul was ravished by the sweetness of his longing, and he would have leapt up and cast his arms about her, but sleep and the dream bound him, and he might not. Then the image smiled on him and said: "Nay, my love, lie still, for thou mayst not touch me: here is but the image of the body which thou desirest. Hearken then. I am in evil plight, in the hands of strong-thieves of the sea, nor know I what they will do with me, and I have no will to be shamed; to be sold for a price from one hand to another, yet to be bedded without a price, and to lie beside some foeman of our folk, and he to cast his arms about me, will I, will I not: this is a hard case. Therefore to-morrow morning at daybreak while men sleep, I think to steal forth to the gunwale of the black ship and give myself to the gods, that they and not these runagates may be masters of my life and my soul, and may do with me as they will: for indeed they know that I may not bear the strange kinless house, and the love and caressing of the alien house-master, and the mocking and stripes of the alien house-mistress. Therefore let the Hoary One of the sea take me and look to my matters, and carry me to life or death, which-so he will. Thin now grows the night, but lie still a little yet, while I speak another word.

"Maybe we shall meet alive again, and maybe not: and if not, though we have never yet lain in one bed together, yet I would have thee remember me: yet not so that my image shall come between thee and thy speech-friend and bed-fellow of the kindred, that shall lie where I was to have lain. Yet again, if I live and thou livest, I have been told and have heard that by one way or other I am like to come to the Glittering Plain, and the Land of Living Men. O my beloved, if by any way thou mightest come thither also, and we might meet there, and we two alive, how good it were! Seek that land then, beloved! seek it, whether or no we once more

behold the House of the Rose, or tread the floor of the Raven dwelling. And now must even this image of me sunder from thee. Farewell!"

Therewith was the dream done and the vision departed; and Hallblithe sat up full of anguish and longing; and he looked about him over the dreary land, and it was somewhat light and the sky was grown grey and cloudy, and he deemed that the dawn was come. So he leapt to his feet and stooped down over Fox, and took him by the shoulder, and shook him and said: "Faring-fellow, awake! the dawn is come, and we have much to do."

Fox sat up and growled like a dog, and rubbed his eyes and looked about him and said: "Thou hast waked me for nought: it is the false dawn of the moon that shineth now behind the clouds and casteth no shadow; it is but an hour after midnight. Go to sleep again, and let me be, else will I not be a guide to thee when the day comes." And he lay down and was asleep at once. Then Hallblithe went and lay down again full of sorrow: Yet so weary was he that he presently fell asleep, and dreamed no more.

CHAPTER VI. OF A DWELLING OF MAN ON THE ISLE OF RANSOM.

WHEN he awoke again the sun shone on him, and the morning was calm and windless. He sat up and looked about him, but could see no signs of Fox save the lair wherein he had lain. So he arose to his feet and sought for him about the crannies of the rocks, and found him not; and he shouted for him, and had no answer. Then he said, "Belike he has gone down to the boat to put a thing in, or take a thing out." So he went his ways to the stair down into the water-cave, and he called on Fox from the top of the stair, and had no answer.

So he went down that long stair with a misgiving in his heart, and when he came to the last step there was neither man nor boat, nor aught else save the water and the living rock. Then was he exceeding wroth, for he knew that he had been beguiled, and he was in an evil case, left alone on an Isle that he knew not, a waste and desolate land, where it seemed most like he should die of famine.

228 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

He wasted no breath or might now in crying out for Fox, or seeking him; for he said to himself: "I might well have known that he was false and a liar, whereas he could scarce refrain his joy at my folly and his guile. Now is it for me to strive for life against death."

Then he turned and went slowly up the stair, and came out on to the open face of that Isle, and he saw that it was waste indeed, and dreadful; a wilderness of black sand and stones and ice-borne rocks, with here and there a little grass growing in the hollows, and here and there a dreary mire where the white-tufted rushes shook in the wind, and here and there stretches of moss blended with red-blossomed sengreen; and otherwhere nought but the wind-bitten creeping willow clinging to the black sand, with a white bleached stick and a leaf or two, and again a stick and a leaf. In the offing looking landward were great mountains, some very great and snow-capped, some bare to the tops; and all that was far away, save the snow, was deep-blue in the sunny morning. But about him on the heath were scattered rocks like the reef beneath which he had slept the last night, and peaks, and hammers, and knolls of uncouth shapes.

Then he went to the edge of the cliffs and looked down on the sea which lay wrinkled and rippling on toward the shore far below him, and long he gazed thereon and all about, but could see neither ship nor sail, nor aught else save the washing of waves and the hovering of sea fowl.

Then he said: "Were it not well if I were to seek that house-master of whom Fox spake? Might he not flit me at least to the Land of the Glittering Plain? Woe is me! now am I of that woful company, and I also must needs cry out, Where is the land? Where is the land?"

THEREWITH he turned toward the reet above their lair, but as he went he thought and said: "Nay, but was not this Stead a lie like the rest of Fox's tale? and am I not alone in this sea-girt wilderness? Yea, and even that image of my Beloved which I saw in the dream, perchance that also was a mere beguiling; for now I see that the Puny Fox was in all ways wiser than is meet and comely." Yet again he said: "At least I will seek on, and

find out whether there be another man dwelling on this hapless Isle, and then the worst of it will be battle with him, and death by point and edge rather than by hunger; or at the best we may become friends and fellows and deliver each other." Therewith he came to the reef, and with much ado climbed to the topmost of its rocks and looked down thence landward: and betwixt him and the mountains, and by seeming not very far off, he saw smoke arising: but no house he saw, nor any other token of a dwelling. So he came down from the stone and turned his back upon the sea and went toward that smoke with his sword in its sheath, and his spear over his shoulder. Rough and toilsome was the way: three little dales he crossed amidst the mountain necks, each one narrow and bare, with a stream of water amidst, running seaward, and whether in dale or on ridge, he went ever amidst sand and stones, and the weeds of the wilderness, and saw no man, or man-tended beast.

At last, after he had been four hours on the way, but had not gone very far, he topped a stony bent, and from the brow thereof beheld a wide valley grass-grown for the more part, with a river running through it, and sheep and kine and horses feeding up and down it. And amidst this dale by the stream-side, was a dwelling of men, a long hall and other houses about it builded of stone.

Then was Hallblithe glad, and he strode down the bent speedily, his war-gear clashing upon him: and as he came to the foot thereof and on to the grass of the dale, he got amongst the pasturing horses, and passed close by the horse-herd and a woman that was with him. They scowled at him as he went by, but meddled not with him in any way. Although they were giant-like of stature and fierce of face, they were not ill-favoured: they were red-haired, and the woman as white as cream where the sun had not burned her skin; they had no weapons that Hallblithe might see save the goad in the hand of the carle.

SO Hallblithe passed on and came to the biggest house, the hall Saforesaid: it was very long, and low as for its length, not over shapely of fashion, a mere gabled heap of stones. Low and strait was the door thereinto, and as Hallblithe entered stooping lowly, and the fire of the steel of his spear that he held before him was

quenched in the mirk of the hall, he smiled and said to himself. "Now if there were one anigh who would not have me enter alive, and he with a weapon in his hand, soon were all the tale told." But he got into the hall unsmitten, and stood on the floor thereof, and spake: "The sele of the day to whomsoever is herein! Will any man speak to the new comer?"

But none answered or gave him greeting; and as his eyes got used to the dusk of the hall, he looked about him, and neither on the floor or the high seat nor in any ingle could he see a man; and there was silence there, save for the crackling of the flickering flame on the hearth amidmost, and the running of the rats behind the panelling of the walls.

On one side of the hall was a row of shut-beds, and Hallblithe deemed that there might be men therein; but since none greeted him he refrained him from searching them for fear of a trap, and he thought, "I will abide amidst the floor, and if there be any that would deal with me, friend or foe, let him come hither to me."

So he fell to walking up and down the hall from buttery to dais, and his war-gear rattled upon him. At last as he walked he thought he heard a small thin peevish voice, which yet was too husky for the squeak of a rat. So he stayed his walk and stood still, and said: "Will any man speak to Hallblithe, a new-comer, and a stranger in this Stead?"

THEN that small voice made a word and said: "Why paceth the fool up and down our hall, doing nothing, even as the Ravens flap croaking about the crags, abiding the war-mote and the clash of the fallow blades?"

Said Hallblithe, and his voice sounded big in the hall: "Who calleth Hallblithe a fool and mocketh at the sons of the Raven?"

Spake the voice: "Why cometh not the fool to the man that may not go to him?"

Then Hallblithe bent forward to hearken, and he deemed that the voice came from one of the shut-beds, so he leaned his spear against a pillar, and went into the shut-bed he had noted, and saw where there lay along in it a man exceeding old by seeming, sore wasted, with long hair as white as snow lying over the bed-clothes.

When the elder saw Hallblithe, he laughed a thin cracked laugh as if in mockery and said: "Hail new-comer! wilt thou eat?"

"Yea," said Hallblithe.

"Go thou into the buttery then," said the old carle, "and there shalt thou find on the cupboard cakes and curds and cheese: eat thy fill, and when thou hast done, look in the ingle, and thou shalt see a cask of mead exceeding good, and a stoup thereby, and two silver cups; fill the stoup and bring it hither with the cups; and then may we talk amidst of drinking, which is good for an old carle. Hasten thou! or I shall deem thee a double fool who will not fare to fetch his meat, though he be hungry."

Then Hallblithe laughed, and went down the hall into the buttery and found the meat, and ate his fill, and came away with the drink back to the Long-hoary man, who chuckled as he came and said: "Fill up now for thee and for me, and call a health to me and wish me somewhat."

"I wish thee luck," said Hallblithe, and drank. Said the elder: "And I wish thee more wits; is luck all that thou mayst wish me? What luck may an outworn elder have?"

"Well then," quoth Hallblithe, "what shall I wish thee? Wouldst thou have me wish thee youth?"

"Yea, certes," said the Long-hoary, "that and nought else."

"Youth then I wish thee, if it may avail thee aught," said Hallblithe, and he drank again therewith.

"Nay, nay," said the old carle peevishly, "take a third cup, and wish me youth with no idle words tacked thereto."

Said Hallblithe raising the cup: "Herewith I wish thee youth!" and he drank.

"Good is the wish," said the elder; "now ask thou the old carle whatso thou wilt."

Said Hallblithe: "What is this land called?"

"Son," said the other, "hast thou heard it called the Isle of Ransom?"

"Yea," said Hallblithe, "but what wilt thou call it?"

"By no other name," said the hoary carle.

"It is far from other lands?" said Hallblithe.

"Yea," said the carle, "when the light winds blow, and the ships sail slow."

"What do ye who live here?" said Hallblithe. "How do ye live, what work win ye?"

"We win diverse work," said the elder, "but the gainfullest is robbing men by the high hand."

"Is it ye who have stolen from me the Hostage of the Rose?" said Hallblithe.

Said the Long-hoary, "Maybe; I wot not; in diverse ways my kinsmen traffic, and they visit many lands. Why should they not have come to Cleveland also?"

"Is she in this Isle, thou old runagate?" said Hallblithe.

"She is not, thou young fool," said the elder.

Then Hallblithe flushed red and spake: "Knowest thou the Puny Fox?"

"How should I not?" said the carle, "since he is the son of one of my sons."

"Dost thou call him a liar and a rogue?" said Hallblithe.

The elder laughed; "Else were I a fool," said he; "there are few bigger liars or bigger rogues than the Puny Fox!"

"Is he here in this Isle?" said Hallblithe; "may I see him?"

The old man laughed again, and said: "Nay, he is not here, unless he hath turned fool since yesterday: why should he abide thy sword, since he hath done what he would and brought thee hither?"

Then he laughed, as a hen cackles a long while, and then said: "What more wilt thou ask me?"

But Hallblithe was very wroth: "It availeth nought to ask," he said; "and now I am in two minds whether I shall slay thee or not."

"That were a meet deed for a Raven, but not for a man," said the carle, "and thou that hast wished me luck! Ask, ask!"

But Hallblithe was silent a long while. Then the carle said, "Another cup for the longer after youth!"

Hallblithe filled, and gave to him, and the old man drank and said: "Thou deemest us all liars in the Isle of Ransom because of thy beguiling by the Puny Fox: but therein thou errest. The Puny Fox is our chiefest liar, and doth for us the more part of such work as we need: therefore, why should we others lie. Ask, ask!"

"Well then," said Hallblithe, "why did the Puny Fox bewray me, and at whose bidding?"

Said the elder: "I know, but I will not tell thee. Is this a lie?"

"Nay, I deem it not," said Hallblithe. "But, tell me, is it verily true that my trothplight is not here, that I may ransom her?"

Said the Long-hoary: "I swear it by the Treasure of the Sea, that she is not here: the tale was but a lie of the Puny Fox."

CHAPTER VII. A FEAST IN THE ISLE OF RANSOM.

HALLBLITHE pondered his answer awhile with down-cast eyes and said at last: "Have ye a mind to ransom me, now that I have walked into the trap?"

"There is no need to talk of ransom," said the elder; "thou mayst go out of this house when thou wilt, nor will any meddle with thee if thou strayest about the Isle, when I have set a mark on thee and given thee a token: nor wilt thou be hindered if thou hast a mind to leave the Isle, if thou canst find means thereto; moreover as long as thou art in the Isle, in this house mayst thou abide, eating and drinking and resting with us."

"How then may I leave this Isle," said Hallblithe.

The elder laughed: "In a ship," said he.

"And when," said Hallblithe, "shall I find a ship that shall carry me?"

Said the old carle, "Whither wouldest thou my son?"

Hallblithe was silent a while, thinking what answer he should make; then he said: "I would go to the land of the Glittering Plain."

"Son, a ship shall not be lacking thee for that voyage," said the elder. "Thou mayst go to-morrow morn. And I bid thee abide here to-night, and thy cheer shall not be ill. Yet if thou wilt believe my word, it will be well for thee to say as little as thou mayst to any man here, and that little as little proud as maybe: for our folk are short of temper and thou knowest there is no might against many. Indeed it is not unlike that they will not speak one word to thee, and if that be so, thou hast no need to open thy mouth to them. And now I will tell thee that it is good that thou hast chosen to go to the Glittering Plain. For if thou wert otherwise minded, I wot not how thou wouldest get thee a keel to carry thee, and the wings have not yet begun to sprout on thy shoulders, raven though

thou be. Now I am glad that thou art going thy ways to the Glittering Plain to-morrow; for thou wilt be good company to me on the way: and I deem that thou wilt be no churl when thou art glad."

"What," said Hallblithe, "art thou wending thither, thou old man?"

"Yea," said he, "nor shall any other be on the ship save thou and I, and the mariners that waft us; and they forsooth shall not go aland there. Why should not I go, since there are men to bear me aboard?"

Said Hallblithe, "And when thou art come aland there, what wilt thou do?"

"Thou shalt see, my son," said the Long-hoary. "It may be that thy good wishes shall be of avail to me. But now since all this may only be if I live through this night, and since my heart hath been warmed by the good mead, and thy fellowship, and whereas I am somewhat sleepy, and it is long past noon, go forth into the hall, and leave me to sleep, that I may be as sound as eld will let me to-morrow. And as for thee, folk, both men and women, shall presently come into the hall, and I deem not that any shall meddle with thee; but if so be that any challenge thee, whatsoever may be his words, answer thou to him, 'THE HOUSE OF THE UN-DYING,' and there will be an end of it. Only look thou to it that no naked steel cometh out of thy scabbard. Go now, and if thou wilt, go out of doors; yet art thou safer within doors and nigher unto me."

SO Hallblithe went back into the main hall, and the sun had gotten round now, and was shining into the hall, through the clerestory windows, so that he saw clearly all that was therein. And he deemed the hall fairer within than without; and especially over the shut-beds were many stories carven in the panelling, and Hallblithe beheld them gladly. But of one thing he marvelled, that whereas he was in an island of the strong-thieves of the waters, and in their very home and chiefest habitation, there were no ships or seas pictured in that imagery, but fair groves and gardens, with flowery grass and fruited trees all about. And there were fair women abiding therein, and lovely young men, and warriors, and strange beasts and many marvels, and the ending of wrath and be-

ginning of pleasure and the crowning of love. And amidst these was pictured oft and again a mighty king with a sword by his side and a crown on his head; and ever was he smiling and joyous, so that Hallblithe, when he looked on him, felt of better heart and smiled back on the carven image.

So while Hallblithe looked on these things, and pondered his case carefully, all alone as he was in that alien hall, he heard a noise without of talking and laughter, and presently the pattering of feet therewith, and then women came into the hall, a score or more, some young, some old, some fair enough, and some hard-featured and uncomely, but all above the stature of the women whom he had seen in his own land.

So he stood amidst the hall-floor and abided them; and they saw him and his shining war-gear, and ceased their talking and laughter, and drew round about him, and gazed at him; but none said aught till an old crone came forth from the ring, and said. "Who art thou, standing under weapons in our hall?"

He knew not what to answer, and held his peace, and she spake again: "Whither wouldest thou, what seekest thou?"

Then answered Hallblithe: "THE HOUSE OF THE UN-DYING."

None answered, and the other women all fell away from him at once, and went about their business hither and thither through the hall. But the old crone took him by the hand, and led him up to the dais, and set him next to the midmost high-seat. Then she made as if she would do off his war-gear, and he would not gain-say her, though he deemed that foes might be anear; for in sooth he trusted in the old carle that he would not bewray him, and moreover he deemed it would be unmanly not to take the risks of the guesting, according to the custom of that country.

So she took his armour and his weapons and bore them off to a shut-bed next to that wherein lay the ancient man, and she laid the gear within it, all save the spear, which she laid on the wall-pins above; and she made signs to him that therein he was to lie; but she spake no word to him. Then she brought him the hand-washing water in a basin of latten, and a goodly towel therewith, and when he had washed she went away from him, but not far.

This while the other women were busy about the hall; some

swept the floor down, and when it was swept strawed thereon rushes and handfuls of wild thyme: some went into the buttery and bore forth the boards and the trestles: some went to the chests and brought out the rich hangings, the goodly bankers and dorsars, and did them on the walls: some bore in the stoups and horns and beakers, and some went their ways and came not back a while, for they were busied about the cooking. But whatever they did, none hailed him, or heeded him more than if he had been an image, as he sat there looking on. None save the old woman who brought him the fore-supper, to wit a great horn of mead, and cakes and dried fish.

SO was the hall arrayed for the feast very fairly, and Hallblithe sat there while the sun westered and the house grew dim, and dark at last, and they lighted the candles up and down the hall. But a little after these were lit, a great horn was winded close without, and thereafter came the clatter of arms about the door, and exceeding tall weaponed men came in, one score and five, and strode two by two up to the foot of the dais, and stood there in a row. And Hallblithe deemed their war-gear exceeding good; they were all clad in ring-locked byrnie, and had steel helms on their heads with garlands of gold wrought about them and they bore spears in their hands, and white shields hung at their backs. Now came the women to them and unarmed them; and under their armour their raiment was black; but they had gold rings on their arms, and golden collars about their necks. So they strode up to the dais and took their places on the high-seat, not heeding Hallblithe any more than if he were an image of wood. Nevertheless that man sat next to him who was the chieftain of all and sat in the midmost high-seat; and he bore his sheathed sword in his hand and laid it on the board before him, and he was the only man of those chieftains who had a weapon.

But when these were set down there was again a noise without, and there came in a throng of men armed and unarmed who took their places on the endlong benches up and down the hall; with these came women also, who most of them sat amongst the men, but some busied them with the serving: all these men were great of stature, but none so big as the chieftains on the high-seat.

Now came the women in from the kitchen bearing the meat, whereof no little was flesh-meat, and all was of the best. Hallblithe was duly served like the others, but still none spake to him or even looked on him; though amongst themselves they spoke in big, rough voices so that the rafters of the hall rang again.

When they had eaten their fill the women filled round the cups and the horns to them, and those vessels were both great and goodly. But ere they fell to drinking uprose the chieftain who sat furthest from the midmost high-seat on the right and cried a health: "THE TREASURE OF THE SEA!" Then they all stood up and shouted, women as well as men, and emptied their horns and cups to that health. Then stood up the man furthest on the left and cried out, "Drink a health to the Undying King!" And again all men rose up and shouted ere they drank. Other healths they drank, as the "Cold Keel," the "Windworn Sail," the "Quivering Ash" and the "Furrowed Beach." And the wine and mead flowed like rivers in that hall of the Wild Men. As for Hallblithe, he drank what he would but stood not up, nor raised his cup to his lips when a health was drunk; for he knew not whether these men were his friends or his foes, and he deemed it would be little-minded to drink to their healths, lest he might be drinking death and confusion to his own kindred.

BUT when men had drunk a while, again a horn blew at the nether end of the hall, and straightway folk arose from the endlong tables, and took away the boards and trestles, and cleared the floor and stood against the wall; then the big chieftain beside Hallblithe arose and cried out: "Now let man dance with maid, and be we merry! Music, strike up!" Then flew the fiddle-bows and twanged the harps, and the carles and queens stood forth on the floor; and all the women were clad in black raiment, albeit embroidered with knots and wreaths of flowers. A while they danced and then suddenly the music fell, and they all went back to their places. Then the chieftain in the high-seat arose and took a horn from his side, and blew a great blast on it that filled the hall; then he cried in a loud voice: "Be we merry! Let the champions come forth!"

Men shouted gleefully thereat, and straightway ran into the

hall from out the screens three tall men clad all in black armour with naked swords in their hands, and stood amidst the hall-floor, somewhat on one side, and clashed their swords on their shields and cried out: "Come forth ye Champions of the Raven!"

Then leapt Hallblithe from his seat and set his hand to his left side, but no sword was there; so he sat down again, remembering the warning of the Elder, and none heeded him.

Then there came into the hall slowly and mournfully three men-at-arms, clad and weaponed like the warriors of his folk, with the image of the Raven on their helms and shields. So Hallblithe refrained him, for besides that this seemed like to be a fair battle of three against three, he doubted some snare, and he determined to look on and abide.

So the champions fell to laying on strokes that were no child's play, though Hallblithe doubted if the edges bit, and it was but a little while before the Champions of the Raven fell one after another before the Wild Men, and folk drew them by the heels out into the buttery. Then arose great laughter and jeering, and exceeding wrath was Hallblithe; howbeit he refrained him because he remembered all he had to do. But the three Champions of the Sea strode round the hall, tossing up their swords and catching them as they fell, while the horns blew up behind them.

AFTER a while the hall grew hushed, and the chieftain arose and cried: "Bring in now some sheaves of the harvest we win, we lads of the oar and the arrow!" Then was there a stir at the screen doors, and folk pressed forward to see, and, lo, there came forward a string of women, led in by two weaponed carles; and the women were a score in number, and they were barefoot and their hair hung loose and their gowns were ungirt, and they were chained together wrist to wrist; yet had they gold at arm and neck: there was silence in the hall when they stood amidst of the floor.

Then indeed Hallblithe could not refrain himself, and he leapt from his seat and on to the board, and over it, and ran down the hall, and came to those women and looked them in the face one by one, while no man spake in the hall. But the Hostage was not amongst them; nay forsooth, they none of them favoured of the daughters of his people, though they were comely and fair; so that

again Hallblithe doubted if this were aught but a feast-hall play done to anger him; whereas there was but little grief in the faces of those damsels, and more than one of them smiled wantonly in his face as he looked on them.

So he turned about and went back to his seat, having said no word, and behind him arose much mocking and jeering; but it angered him little now; for he remembered the rede of the elder and how that he had done according to his bidding, so that he deemed the gain was his. So sprang up talk in the hall betwixt man and man, and folk drank about and were merry, till the chieftain arose again and smote the board with the flat of his sword, and cried out in a loud and angry voice, so that all could hear: "Now let there be music and minstrelsy ere we wend bedward!"

Therewith fell the hubbub of voices, and there came forth three men with great harps, and a fourth man with them, who was the minstrel; and the harpers smote their harps so that the roof rang therewith, and the noise, though it was great, was tuneable, and when they had played thus a little while, they abated their loudness somewhat, and the minstrel lifted his voice and sang:

THE land lies black
With winter's lack,
The wind blows cold
Round field and fold;
All folk are within,
And but weaving they win.

Where from finger to finger the shuttle flies fast,
And the eyes of the singer look fain on the cast,
As he singeth the story of summer undone
And the barley sheaves hoary ripe under the sun.

THEN the maidens stay
The light-hung sley,
And the shuttles bide
By the blue web's side,
While hand in hand
With the carles they stand.

240 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

But ere to the measure the fiddles strike up,
And the elders yet treasure the last of the cup,
There stand they a-hearkening the blast from the lift,
And e'en night is a-darkening more under the drift.

THERE safe in the hall
They bless the wall,
And the roof o'er head,
Of the valiant stead;
And the hands they praise
Of the olden days.

Then through the storm's roaring the fiddles break out,
And they think not of warring, but cast away doubt,
And, man before maiden, their feet tread the floor,
And their hearts are unladen of all that they bore.

BUT what winds are o'er-cold
For the heart of the bold?
What seas are o'er-high
For the undoomed to die?
Dark night and dread wind,
But the haven we find.

Then ashore mid the flurry of stone-washing surf!
Cloud-hounds the moon worry, but light lies the turf;
Lo the long dale before us! the lights at the end,
Though the night darkens o'er us, bid whither to wend.

WHO beateth the door
By the foot-smitten floor?
What guests are these
From over the seas?
Take shield and sword
For their greeting-word.

Lo, lo, the dance ended! Lo, midst of the hall
The fallow blades blended! Lo, blood on the wall!
Who liveth, who dieth? O men of the sea,
For peace the folk crieth; our masters are ye.

NOW the dale lies grey
At the dawn of day;
And fair feet pass
O'er the wind-worn grass;
And they turn back to gaze
On the roof of old days.

Come tread ye the oaken-floored hall of the sea!
Be your hearts yet unbroken; so fair as ye be,
That kings are abiding unwedded to gain
The news of our riding the steeds of the main.

Much shouting and laughter arose at the song's end; and men sprang up and waved their swords above the cups, while Hallblithe sat scowling down on their merriment. Lastly arose the chieftain and called out loudly for the good-night cup, and it went round and all men drank. Then the horn blew for bed, and the chieftains went to their chambers, and the others went to the out-bowers or laid them down on the hall-floor, and in a little while none stood upright thereon. So Hallblithe arose, and went to the shut-bed appointed for him, and laid him down and slept dreamlessly till the morning.

CHAP. VIII. HALLBLITHE TAKETH SHIP AGAIN AWAY FROM THE ISLE OF RANSOM.

WHEN he awoke, the sun shone into the hall by the windows above the buttery, and there were but few folk left therein. But so soon as Hallblithe was clad, the old woman came to him, and took him by the hand, and led him to the board, and signed to him to eat of what was thereon; and he did so; and by then he was done, came folk who went into the shut-bed where lay the Long-hoary, and they brought him forth bed and all and bare him out a-doors. Then the crone brought Hallblithe his arms and he did on byrny and helm, girt his sword to his side, took his spear in his hand and went out a-doors; and there close by the porch lay the Long-hoary upon a horse-litter. So Hallblithe came up to him and gave him the sele of the day:

and the elder said: "Good morrow, son, I am glad to see thee. Did they try thee hard last night?"

And Hallblithe saw two of the carles that had borne out the elder, that they were talking together, and they looked on him and laughed mockingly; so he said to the elder: "Even fools may try a wise man, and so it befell last night. Yet, as thou seest, mumming hath not slain me."

Said the old man: "What thou sawest was not all mumming; it was done according to our customs; and well nigh all of it had been done, even hadst thou not been there. Nay, I will tell thee; at some of our feasts it is not lawful to eat either for the chieftains or the carles, till a champion hath given forth a challenge, and been answered and met, and the battle fought to an end. But ye men, what hindereth you to go to the horses' heads and speed on the road the chieftain who is no longer way-worthy?"

So they ran to the horses and set down the dale by the river-side, and just as Hallblithe was going to follow afoot, there came a swain from behind the house leading a red horse which he brought to Hallblithe as one who bids mount. So Hallblithe leapt into the saddle and at once caught up with the litter of the Long-hoary down along the river. They passed by no other house, save here and there a cot beside some fold or byre; they went easily, for the way was smooth by the river-side; so in less than two hours they came where the said river ran into the sea. There was no beach there, for the water was ten fathom deep close up to the lip of the land; but there was a great haven land-locked all but a narrow outgate betwixt the sheer black cliffs. Many a great ship might have lain in that haven; but as now there was but one lying there, a round-ship not very great, but exceeding trim and meet for the sea.

There without more ado the carles took the elder from the litter and bore him aboard, and Hallblithe followed him as if he had been so appointed. They laid the old man adown on the poop under a tilt of precious web, and so went aback by the way that they had come; and Hallblithe went and sat down beside the Long-hoary, who spake to him and said: "Seest thou, son, how easy it is for us twain to be shipped for the land whither we would

go? But as easy as it is for thee to go thither whereas we are going, just so hard had it been for thee to go elsewhere. Moreover I must tell thee that though many an one of the Isle of Ransom desireth to go this voyage, there shall none else go, till the world is a year older, and he who shall go then shall be likest to me in all ways, both in eld and in feebleness, and in gibing speech, and all else; and now that I am gone, his name shall be the same as that whereby ye may call me to-day, and that is Grandfather. Art thou glad or sorry, Hallblithe?"

"Grandfather," said Hallblithe, "I can scarce tell thee: I move as one who hath no will to wend one way or other. Meseems I am drawn to go thither whereas we are going; therefore I deem that I shall find my beloved on the Glittering Plain: and whatever, be-falleth afterward, let it be as it will!"

"Tell me, my son," said the Grandfather, "how many women are there in the world?"

"How may I tell thee?" said Hallblithe.

"Well, then," said the elder, "how many exceeding fair women are there?"

Said Hallblithe, "Indeed I wot not."

"How many of such hast thou seen?" said the Grandfather.

"Many," said Hallblithe; "the daughters of my folk are fair, and there will be many other such amongst the aliens."

Then laughed the elder, and said: "Yet, my son, he who had been thy fellow since thy sundering from thy beloved, would have said that in thy deeming there is but one woman in the world; or at least one fair woman: is it not so?"

Then Hallblithe reddened at first, as though he were angry; then he said: "Yea, it is so."

Said the Grandfather in a musing way: "I wonder if before long I shall think of it as thou dost."

Then Hallblithe gazed at him marvelling, and studied to see wherein lay the gibe against himself; and the Grandfather beheld him, and laughed as well as he might, and said: "Son, son, didst thou not wish me youth?"

"Yea," said Hallblithe, "but what ails thee to laugh so? What is it I have said or done?"

“Nought, nought,” said the elder, laughing still more, “only thou lookest so mazed. And who knoweth what thy wish may bring forth?”

Thereat was Hallblithe sore puzzled; but while he set himself to consider what the old carle might mean, uprose the hale and how of the mariners; they cast off the hawsers from the shore, ran out the sweeps, and drave the ship through the haven-gates. It was a bright sunny day; within, the green water was oily-smooth, without the rippling waves danced merrily under a light breeze, and Hallblithe deemed the wind to be fair; for the mariners shouted joyously and made all sail on the ship; and she lay over and sped through the waves, casting off the seas from her black bows. Soon were they clear of those swart cliffs, and it was but a little afterwards that the Isle of Ransom was grown deep blue behind them and far away.

CHAPTER IX. THEY COME TO THE LAND OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN.

AS in the hall, so in the ship, Hallblithe noted that the folk were merry and of many words one with another, while to him no man cast a word save the Grandfather. As to Hallblithe, though he wondered much what all this betokened, and what the land was whereto he was wending, he was no man to fear an unboded peril; and he said to himself that whatever else betid, he should meet the Hostage on the Glittering Plain; so his heart rose and he was of good cheer, and as the Grandfather had foretold, he was a merry faring-fellow to him. Many a gibe the old man cast at him, and whiles Hallblithe gave him back as good as he took, and whiles he laughed as the stroke went home and silenced him; and whiles he understood nought of what the elder said. So wore the day and still the wind held fair, though it was light; and the sun set in a sky nigh cloudless, and there was nowhere any forecast of peril. But when night was come, Hallblithe lay down on a fair bed, which was dight for him in the poop, and he soon fell asleep and dreamed not save such dreams as are but made up of bygone memories, and betoken nought, and are not remembered.

WHEN he awoke, day lay broad on the sea, and the waves were little, the sky had but few clouds, the sun shone bright, and the air was warm and sweet-breathed.

He looked aside and saw the old man sitting up in his bed, as ghastly as a dead man dug up again: his bushy eyebrows were wrinkled over his bleared old eyes, the long white hair dangled forlorn from his gaunt head. yet was his face smiling and he looked as happy as the soul within him could make the half-dead body. He turned now to Hallblithe and said: "Thou art late awake: hadst thou been waking earlier, the sooner had thine heart been gladdened. Go forward now, and gaze thy fill and come and tell me thereof."

"Thou art happy, Grandfather," said Hallblithe, "what good tidings hath morn brought us?"

"The Land! the Land!" said the Long-hoary; "there are no longer tears in this old body, else should I be weeping for joy."

Said Hallblithe: "Art thou going to meet some one who shall make thee glad before thou diest, old man?"

"Some one?" said the elder; "what one? Are they not all gone? burned, and drowned, and slain and died abed? Some one, young man? Yea, forsooth some one indeed! Yea, the great warrior of the Wasters of the Shore; the Sea-eagle who bore the sword and the torch and the terror of the Ravagers over the coal-blue sea. It is myself, MYSELF that I shall find on the Land of the Glittering Plain, O young lover!"

Hallblithe looked on him wondering as he raised his wasted arms towards the bows of the ship pitching down the slope of the sunlit sea, or climbing up it. Then again the old man fell back on his bed and muttered: "What fool's work is this! that thou wilt draw me on to talk loud, and waste my body with lack of patience. I will talk with thee no more, lest my heart swell and break, and quench the little spark of life within me."

Then Hallblithe arose to his feet, and stood looking at him, wondering so much at his words, that for a while he forgot the land which they were nearing, though he had caught glimpses of it, as the bows of the round-ship fell downward into the hollow of the sea. The wind was but light, as hath been said, and the waves little under it, but there was still a smooth swell of the sea which

came of breezes now dead, and the ship wallowed thereon and sailed but slowly.

IN a while the old man opened his eyes again, and said in a low peevish voice: "Whystandest thou staring at me? why hast thou not gone forward to look upon the land? True it is that ye Ravens are short of wits."

Said Hallblithe: "Be not wrath, chieftain; I was wondering at thy words, which are exceeding marvellous; tell me more of this land of the Glittering Plain."

Said the Grandfather: "Why should I tell it thee? ask of the mariners. They all know more than thou dost."

"Thou knowest," said Hallblithe, "that these men speak not to me, and take no more heed of me than if I were an image which they were carrying to sell to the next mighty man they may hap on. Or tell me, thou old man," said he fiercely, "is it perchance a thrall-market whereto they are bringing me? Have they sold her there, and will they sell me also in the same place, but into other hands?"

"Tush!" said the Grandfather somewhat feebly, "this last word of thine is folly; there is no buying or selling in the land whereto we are bound. As to thine other word, that these men have no fellowship with thee, it is true: thou art my fellow and the fellow of none else aboard. Therefore if I feel might in me, maybe I will tell thee somewhat."

Then he raised his head a little and said: "The sun grows hot, the wind faileth us, and slow and slow are we sailing."

EVEN as he spoke there was a stir amidships, and Hallblithe looked and beheld the mariners handling the sweeps, and settling themselves on the rowing-benches. Said the elder: "There is noise amidships, what are they doing?"

The old man raised himself a little again, and cried out in his shrill voice: "Good lads! brave lads! Thus would we do in the old time when we drew anear some shore, and the beacons were sending up smoke by day, and flame benights; and the shore-abiders did on their helms and trembled. Thrust her through lads! Thrust her along!" Then he fell back again, and said in a weak voice: "Make no more delay, guest, but go forward and

look upon the land, and come back and tell me thereof, and then the tale may flow from me. Haste, haste!" So Hallblithe went down from the poop, and into the waist, where now the rowers were bending to their oars, and crying out fiercely as they tugged at the quivering ash; and he clomb on to the forecastle and went forward right to the dragon-head, and gazed long upon the land, while the dashing of the oar-blades made the semblance of a gale about the ship's black sides. Then he came back again to the Sea-eagle, who said to him: "Son, what hast thou seen?"

"Right ahead lieth the land, and it is still a good way off. High rise the mountains there, but by seeming there is no snow on them; and though they be blue they are not blue like the mountains of the Isle of Ransom. Also it seemed to me as if fair slopes of woodland and meadow come down to the edge of the sea. But it is yet far away."

"Yea," said the elder, "is it so? Then will I not wear myself with making words for thee. I will rest rather, and gather might. Come again when an hour hath worn, and tell me what thou seest; and mayhappen then thou shalt have my tale!" And he laid him down therewith and seemed to be asleep at once. And Hallblithe might not amend it; so he waited patiently till the hour had worn, and then went forward again, and looked long and carefully, and came back and said to the Sea-eagle, "The hour is worn."

The old chieftain turned himself about and said: "What hast thou seen?"

Said Hallblithe: "The mountains are pale and high, and below them are hills dark with wood, and betwixt them and the sea is a fair space of meadow-land, and methought it was wide."

Said the old man: "Sawest thou a rocky skerry rising high out of the sea anigh the shore?"

"Nay," said Hallblithe, "If there be, it is all blended with the meadows and the hills."

Said the Sea-eagle: "Abide the wearing of another hour, and come and tell me again, and then I may have a gainful word for thee." And he fell asleep again. But Hallblithe abided, and when the hour was worn, he went forward and stood on the forecastle. And this was the third shift of the rowers, and the stoutest men in

the ship now held the oars in their hands, and the ship shook through all her length and breadth as they drave her over the waters.

SO Hallblithe came aft to the old man and found him asleep; so he took him by the shoulder, and shook him and said: "Awake, faring-fellow, for the land is a-nigh."

So the old man sat up and said: "What hast thou seen?"

Said Hallblithe: "I have seen the peaks and cliffs of the far-off mountains; and below them are hills green with grass and dark with woods, and thence stretch soft green meadows down to the sea-strand, which is fair and smooth, and yellow."

"Sawest thou the skerry?" said the Sea-eagle.

"Yea, I saw it," said Hallblithe, "and it rises sheer from out the sea about a mile from the yellow strand; but its rocks are black, like the rocks of the Isle of Ransom."

"Son," said the elder, "give me thine hands and raise me up a little." So Hallblithe took him and raised him up, so that he sat leaning against the pillows; and he looked not on Hallblithe, but on the bows of the ship, which now pitched but a little up and down, for the sea was laid quiet now. Then he cried in his shrill, piping voice: "It is the Land! It is the Land!"

But after a little while he turned to Hallblithe and spake: "Short is the tale to tell: thou hast wished me youth, and thy wish hath thriven; for to-day, ere the sun goes down thou shalt see me as I was in the days when I reaped the harvest of the sea with sharp sword and hardy heart. For this is the land of the Undying King, who is our lord and our gift-giver; and to some he giveth the gift of youth renewed, and life that shall abide here the Gloom of the Gods. But none of us all may come to the Glittering Plain and the King Undying without turning the back for the last time on the Isle of Ransom: nor may any men of the Isle come hither save those who are of the House of the Sea-eagle, and few of those, save the chieftains of the House, such as are they who sat by thee on the high-seat that even. Of these once in a while is chosen one of us, who is old and spent and past battle, and is borne to this land and the gift of the Undying. Forsooth some of us have no will to take the gift, for they say they are liefer to go to where they shall meet more of our kindred than dwell on the Glittering

Plain and the Acre of the Undying; but as for me I was ever an overbearing and masterful man, and meseemeth it is well that I meet as few of our kindred as may be: for they are a strifeful race."

Hereat Hallblithe marvelled exceedingly, and he said: "And what am I in all this story? Why am I come hither with thy furtherance?"

Said the Sea-eagle: "We had a charge from the Undying King concerning thee, that we should bring thee hither alive and well, if so be thou camest to the Isle of Ransom. For what cause we had the charge, I know not, nor do I greatly heed."

Said Hallblithe: "And shall I also have that gift of undying youth, and life while the world of men and gods endureth?"

"I must needs deem so," said the Sea-eagle, "so long as thou abidest on the Glittering Plain; and I see not how thou mayst ever escape thence."

Now Hallblithe heard him, how he said "escape," and thereat he was somewhat ill at ease, and stood and pondered a little. At last he said: "Is this then all that thou hast to tell me concerning the Glittering Plain?"

"By the Treasure of the Seal!" said the elder, "I know no more of it. The living shall learn. But I suppose that thou mayst seek thy troth-plight maiden there all thou wilt. Or thou mayst pray the Undying King to have her thither to thee. What know I? At least, it is like that there shall be no lack of fair women there: or else the promise of youth renewed is nought and vain. Shall this not be enough for thee?"

"Nay," said Hallblithe.

"What," said the elder, "must it be one woman only?"

"One only," said Hallblithe.

The old man laughed his thin mocking laugh, and said: "I will not assure thee but that the land of the Glittering Plain shall change all that for thee so soon as it touches the soles of thy feet."

Hallblithe looked at him steadily and smiled, and said: "Well is it then that I shall find the Hostage there; for then shall we be of one mind, either to sunder or to cleave together. It is well with me this day."

"And with me it shall be well ere long," said the Sea-eagle.

BUT now the rowers ceased rowing and lay on their oars, and the shipmen cast anchor; for they were but a bowshot from the shore, and the ship swung with the tide and lay side-long to the shore. Then said the Sea-eagle: "Look forth, shipmate, and tell me of the land."

And Hallblithe looked and said: "The yellow beach is sandy and shell-strewn, as I deem, and there is no great space of it betwixt the sea and the flowery grass; and a bowshot from the strand I see a little wood amidst which are fair trees blossoming."

"Seest thou any folk on the shore?" said the old man. "Yea," said Hallblithe, "close to the edge of the sea go four; and by seeming three are women, for their long gowns flutter in the wind. And one of these is clad in saffron colour, and another in white, and another in watchet; but the carle is clad in dark red; and their raiment is all glistening as with gold and gems; and by seeming they are looking at our ship as though they expected somewhat."

Said the Sea-eagle: "Why now do the shipmen tarry and have not made ready the skiff? Swillers and belly-gods they be; slothful swine that forget their chieftain."

But even as he spake came four of the shipmen, and without more ado took him up, bed and all, and bore him down into the waist of the ship, where under lay the skiff with four strong rowers lying on their oars. These men made no sign to Hallblithe, nor took any heed of him; but he caught up his spear, and followed them and stood by as they lowered the old man into the boat. Then he set his foot on the gunwale of the ship and leapt down lightly into the boat, and none hindered or helped him; and he stood upright in the boat, a goodly image of battle with the sun flashing back from his bright helm, his spear in his hand, his white shield at his back, and thereon the image of the Raven; but if he had been but a salt-boiling carle of the sea-side none would have heeded him less.

CHAPTER X. THEY HOLD CONVERSE WITH FOLK OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN.

NOW the rowers lifted the ash-blades, and fell to rowing towards shore: and almost with the first of their strokes, the Sea-eagle moaned out:

“Would we were there, oh, would we were there! Cold groweth eld about my heart. Raven’s Son, thou art standing up; tell me if thou canst see what these folk of the land are doing, and if any others have come thither?”

Said Hallblithe: “There are none others come, but kine and horses are feeding down the meadows. As to what those four are doing, the women are putting off their shoon, and girding up their raiment, as if they would wade the water toward us; and the carle, who was barefoot before, wendeth straight towards the sea, and there he standeth, for very little are the waves become.”

The old man answered nothing, and did but groan for lack of patience; but presently when the water was yet waist deep the rowers staid the skiff, and two of them slipped over the gunwale into the sea, and between them all they took up the chieftain on his bed and got him forth from the boat and went toward the strand with him; and the landsfolk met them where the water was shallower, and took him from their hands and bore him forth on to the yellow sand, and laid him down out of reach of the creeping ripple of the tide. Hallblithe withal slipped lightly out of the boat and waded the water after them. But the shipmen rowed back again to their ship, and presently Hallblithe heard the hale and how, as they got up their anchor.

But when Hallblithe was come ashore, and was drawn near the folk of the land, the women looked at him askance, and they laughed and said: “Welcome to thee also, O young man!” And he beheld them, and saw that they were of the stature of the maidens of his own land; they were exceeding fair of skin and shapely of fashion, so that the nakedness of their limbs under their girded gowns, and all glistening with the sea, was most lovely and dainty to behold. But Hallblithe knelt by the Sea-eagle to note how he fared, and said: “How is it with thee, O chieftain?”

The old man answered not a word, and he seemed to be asleep, and Hallblithe deemed that his cheeks were ruddier and his skin

less wasted and wrinkled than aforesaid. Then spake one of those women: "Fear not, young man; he is well and will soon be better." Her voice was as sweet as a spring bird in the morning; she was white-skinned and dark-haired, and full sweetly fashioned; and she laughed on Hallblithe, but not mockingly; and her fellows also laughed, as though it was strange for him to be there. Then they did on their shoon again, and with the carle laid their hands to the bed whereon the old man lay, and lifted him up, and bore him forth on to the grass, turning their faces toward the flowery wood aforesaid; and they went a little way and then laid him down again and rested; and so on little by little, till they had brought him to the edge of the wood, and still he seemed to be asleep. Then the damsel who had spoken before, she with the dark hair, said to Hallblithe, "Although we have gazed on thee as if with wonder, this is not because we did not look to meet thee, but because thou art so fair and goodly a man: so abide thou here till we come back to thee from out of the wood."

Therewith she stroked his hand, and with her fellows lifted the old man once more, and they bore him out of sight into the thicket.

But Hallblithe went to and fro a dozen paces from the wood, and looked across the flowery meads and deemed he had never seen any so fair. And afar off toward the hills he saw a great roof arising, and thought he could see men also; and nigher to him were kine pasturing, and horses also, whereof some drew anear him and stretched out their necks and gazed at him; and they were goodly after their kind; and a fair stream of water came round the corner out of the wood and down the meadows to the sea; and Hallblithe went thereto and could see that there was but little ebb and flow of the tide on that shore; for the water of the stream was clear as glass, and the grass and flowers grew right down to its water; so he put off his helm and drank of the stream and washed his face and his hands therein, and then did on his helm again and turned back again toward the wood, feeling very strong and merry; and he looked out seaward and saw the Ship of the Isle of Ransom lessening fast; for a little land wind had arisen and they had spread their sails to it; and he laid down on the grass till the four folk of the country came out of the wood again, after

they had been gone somewhat less than an hour, but the Seaeagle was not with them: and Hallblithe rose up and turned to them, and the carle saluted him and departed, going straight toward that far-away roof he had seen; and the women were left with Hallblithe, and they looked at him and he at them as he stood leaning on his spear.

Then said the black-haired damsel: "True it is, O Spearman, that if we did not know of thee, our wonder would be great that a man so young and lucky-looking should have sought hither."

"I wot not why thou shouldest wonder," said Hallblithe; "I will tell thee presently wherefore I come hither. But tell me, is this the Land of the Glittering Plain?"

"Even so," said the damsel, "dost thou not see how the sun shineth on it? Just so it shineth in the season that other folks call winter."

"Some such marvel I thought to hear of," said he; "for I have been told that the land is marvellous; and fair though these meadows be, they are not marvellous to look on now: they are like other lands, though it maybe, fairer."

"That may be," she said; "we have nought but hearsay of other lands. If we ever knew them we have forgotten them."

Said Hallblithe, "Is this land called also the Acre of the Undying?"

As he spake the words the smile faded from the damsel's face; she and her fellows grew pale, and she said: "Hold thy peace of such words! They are not lawful for any man to utter here. Yet mayst thou call it the Land of the Living."

He said: "I crave pardon for the rash word."

Then they smiled again, and drew near to him, and caressed him with their hands, and looked on him lovingly; but he drew a little aback from them and said: "I have come hither seeking something which I have lost, the lack whereof grieveth me."

Quoth the damsel, drawing nearer to him again, "Mayst thou find it, thou lovely man, and whatsoever else thou desirest."

Then he said: "Hath a woman named the Hostage been brought hither of late days? A fair woman, bright-haired and grey-eyed, kind of countenance, soft of speech, yet outspoken

254 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

and nought timorous; tall according to our stature, but very goodly of fashion; a woman of the House of the Rose, and my troth-plight maiden."

They looked on each other and shook their heads, and the black-haired damsel spake: "We know of no such a woman, nor of the kindred which thou namest."

Then his countenance fell, and became piteous with desire and grief, and he bent his brows upon them, for they seemed to him light-minded and careless, though they were lovely.

But they shrank from him trembling, and drew aback; for they had all been standing close to him, beholding him with love, and she who had spoken most had been holding his left hand fondly. But now she said: "Nay, look not on us so bitterly! If the woman be not in the land, this cometh not of our malice. Yet maybe she is here. For such as come hither keep not their old names, and soon forget them what they were. Thou shalt go with us to the King, and he shall do for thee what thou wilt; for he is exceeding mighty."

Then was Hallblithe appeased somewhat; and he said: "Are there many women in the land?"

"Yea, many," said that damsel.

"And many that are as fair as ye be?" said he. Then they laughed and were glad, and drew near to him again and took his hands and kissed them; and the black-haired damsel said: "Yea, yea, there be many as fair as we be, and some fairer," and she laughed.

"And that King of yours," said he, "how do ye name him?"

"He is the King," said the damsel.

"Hath he no other name?" said Hallblithe.

"We may not utter it," she said; "but thou shalt see him soon, that there is nought but good in him and mightiness."

CHAPTER XI. THE SEA-EAGLE RENEWETH HIS LIFE.

BUT while they spake together thus, came a man from out of the wood very tall of stature, red-bearded and black-haired, ruddy-cheeked, full-limbed, most joyous of aspect; a man by seeming of five and thirty winters. He strode straight up to Hallblithe, and cast his arms about him, and kissed his cheek, as if he had been an old and dear friend newly come from over seas.

Hallblithe wondered and laughed, and said: "Who art thou that deemest me so dear?"

Said the man: "Short is thy memory, Son of the Raven, that thou in so little space hast forgotten thy shipmate and thy faring-fellow; who gave thee meat and drink and good rede in the Hall of the Ravagers." Therewith he laughed joyously and turned about to the three maidens and took them by the hands and kissed their lips, while they fawned upon him lovingly.

Then said Hallblithe: "Hast thou verily gotten thy youth again, which thou badest me wish thee?"

"Yea, in good sooth," said the red-bearded man; "I am the Sea-eagle of old days; and I have gotten my youth, and love therewithal, and somewhat to love moreover."

Therewith he turned to the fairest of the damsels, and she was white-skinned and fragrant as the lily, rose-cheeked and slender, and the wind played with the long locks of her golden hair, which hung down below her knees; so he cast his arms about her and strained her to his bosom, and kissed her face many times, and she nothing loth, but caressing him with lips and hand. But the other two damsels stood by smiling and joyous: and they clapped their hands together and kissed each other for joy of the new lover; and at last fell to dancing and skipping about them like young lambs in the meadows of Spring-tide. But amongst them all, stood up Hallblithe leaning on his spear with smiling lips and knitted brow; for he was pondering in his mind in what wise he might further his quest.

But after they had danced a while the Sea-eagle left his love that he had chosen and took a hand of either of the two damsels, and led them tripping up to Hallblithe, and cried out: "Choose thou,

Raven's baby, which of these twain thou wilt have to thy mate; for scarcely shalt thou see better or fairer."

But Hallblithe looked on them proudly and sternly, and the black-haired damsel hung down her head before him and said softly: "Nay, nay, sea-warrior; this one is too lovely to be our mate. Sweeter love abides him, and lips more longed for."

THEN stirred Hallblithe's heart within him and he said: "O Eagle of the Sea, thou hast thy youth again: what then wilt thou do with it? Wilt thou not weary for the moonlit main, and the washing of waves and the dashing of spray, and thy fellows all glistening with the brine? Where now shall be the alien shores before thee, and the landing for fame, and departure for the gain of goods? Wilt thou forget the ship's black side, and the dripping of the windward oars, as the squall falleth on when the sun hath arisen, and the sail tuggeth hard on the sheet, and the ship lieth over and the lads shout against the whistle of the wind? Has the spear fallen from thine hand, and hast thou buried the sword of thy fathers in the grave from which thy body hath escaped? What art thou, O Warrior, in the land of the alien and the King? Who shall heed thee or tell the tale of thy glory, which thou hast covered over with the hand of a light woman, whom thy kindred knoweth not, and who was not born in a house wherefrom it hath been appointed thee from of old to take the pleasure of woman? Whose thrall art thou now, thou lifter of the spoil, thou scarer of the freeborn? The bidding of what lord or King wilt thou do, O Chieftain, that thou mayst eat thy meat in the morning and lie soft in thy bed in the evening?"

"O Warrior of the Ravagers, here stand I, Hallblithe of the Raven, and I am come into an alien land beset with marvels to seek mine own, and find that which is dearest to mine heart; to wit, my troth-plight maiden the Hostage of the Rose, the fair woman who shall lie in my bed, and bear me children, and stand by me in field and fold, by thwart and gunwale, before the bow and the spear, by the flickering of the cooking-fire, and amidst the blaze of the burning hall, and beside the bale-fire of the warrior of the Raven. O Sea-eagle, my guester amongst the foemen, my

fellow-farer and shipmate, say now once for all whether thou wilt help me in my quest, or fall off from me as a dastard?"

Again the maidens shrank before his clear and high-raised voice, and they trembled and grew pale.

But the Sea-eagle laughed from a countenance kind with joy, and said: "Child of the Raven, thy words are good and manly: but it availeth nought in this land, and I wot not how thou wilt fare, or why thou hast been sent amongst us. What wilt thou do? Hadst thou spoken these words to the Long-hoary, the Grandfather, yesterday, his ears would have been deaf to them; and now that thou speakest them to the Sea-eagle, this joyous man on the Glittering Plain, he cannot do according to them, for there is no other land than this which can hold him. Here he is strong and stark, and full of joy and love; but elsewhere he would be but a gibbering ghost drifting down the wind of night. Therefore in whatsoever thou mayst do within this land I will stand by thee and help thee; but not one inch beyond it may my foot go, whether it be down into the brine of the sea, or up into the clefts of the mountains which are the wall of this goodly land.

"Thou hast been my shipmate and I love thee, I am thy friend; but here in this land must needs be the love and the friendship. For no ghost can love thee, no ghost may help thee. And as to what thou sayest concerning the days gone past and our joys upon the tumbling sea, true it is that those days were good and lovely; but they are dead and gone like the lads who sat on the thwart beside us, and the maidens who took our hands in the hall to lead us to the chamber. Other days have come in their stead, and other friends shall cherish us. What then? Shall we wound the living to pleasure the dead, who cannot heed it? Shall we curse the Yuletide, and cast foul water on the Holy Hearth of the winter feast, because the summer once was fair and the days flit and the times change? Now let us be glad! For life liveth."

Therewith he turned about to his damsel and kissed her on the mouth. But Hallblithe's face was grown sad and stern, and he spake slowly and heavily: "So is it, shipmate, that whereas thou sayest that the days flit, for thee they shall flit no more; and the day may come for thee when thou shalt be weary, and know it, and long for

258 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

the lost which thou hast forgotten. But hereof it availeth nought for me to speak any longer, for thine ears are deaf to these words, and thou wilt not hear them. Therefore I say no more save that I thank thee for thy help whatsoever it may be; and I will take it, for the day's work lieth before me, and I begin to think that it may be heavy enough."

The women yet looked downcast, and as if they would be gone out of earshot; but the Sea-eagle laughed as one who is well content, and said: "Thou thyself wilt make it hard for thyself after the wont of thy proud and haughty race; but for me nothing is hard any longer; neither thy scorn nor thy forebodings of evil. Be thou my friend as much as thou canst, and I will be thine wholly. Now ye women, whither will ye lead us? For I am ready to see any new thing ye will show us."

Said his damsel: "We will take you to the King, that your hearts may be the more gladdened. And as for thy friend the Spearman, O Sea-warrior, let not his heart be downcast. Who wotteth but that these two desires, the desire of his heart, and the desire of a heart for him, may not be one and the same desire, so that he shall be fully satisfied?" As she spoke she looked sidelong at Hallblithe, with shy and wheedling eyes; and he wondered at her word, and a new hope sprang up in his heart that he was presently to be brought face to face with the Hostage, and that this was that love, sweeter than their love, which abode in him, and his heart became lighter, and his visage cleared.

CHAPTER XII. THEY LOOK ON THE KING OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN.

SO now the women led them along up the stream, and Hallblithe went side by side by the Sea-eagle; but the women had become altogether merry again, and played and ran about them as gamesome as young goats; and they waded the shallows of the clear bright stream barefoot to wash their limbs of the sea-brine, and strayed about the meadows, plucking the flowers and making them wreaths and chaplets, which they did upon themselves and the Sea-eagle; but Hallblithe they touched not, for still they feared him. They went on as the stream led them up toward

the hills, and ever were the meads about them as fair and flowery as might be. Folk they saw afar off, but fell in with none for a good while, saving a man and a maid clad lightly as for mid-summer days, who were wandering together lovingly and happily by the stream-side, and who gazed wonderingly on the stark Sea-eagle, and on Hallblithe with his glittering spear. The black-haired damsel greeted these twain and spake something to them, and they laughed merrily, and the man stooped down amongst the grasses and blossoms of the bank, and drew forth a basket, and spread dainty victuals on the grass under a willow-tree, and bade them be his guests that fair afternoon. So they sat down there above the glistening stream and ate and drank and were merry. Thereafter the newcomers and their way-leaders departed with kind words, and still set their faces towards the hills.

At last they saw before them a little wooded hill, and underneath it something red and shining, and other coloured things gleaming in the sun about it. Then said the Sea-eagle: "What have we yonder?"

Said his damsel: "That is the pavilion of the King; and about it are the tents and tilts of our folk who are of his fellowship: for oft he abideth in the fields with them, though he hath houses and halls as fair as the heart of man can conceive."

"Hath he no foemen to fear?" said the Sea-eagle.

"How should that be?" said the damsel. "If perchance any came into this land to bring war upon him, their battle-anger should depart when once the bliss of the Glittering Plain had entered into their souls, and they would ask for nought but leave to abide here and be happy. Yet I trow that if he had foemen he could crush them as easily as I set my foot on this daisy."

So as they went on they fell in with many folk, men and women, sporting and playing in the fields; and there was no semblance of eld on any of them, and no scar or blemish or feebleness of body or sadness of countenance; nor did any bear a weapon or any piece of armour. Now some of them gathered about the new-comers, and wondered at Hallblithe and his long spear and shining helm and dark grey byrny; but none asked concerning them, for all knew that they were folk new come to the bliss of the Glittering Plain. So they passed amidst these fair folk little hindered by

them, and into Hallblithe's thoughts it came how joyous the fellowship of such should be and how his heart should be raised by the sight of them, if only his troth-plight maiden were by his side.

THUS then they came to the King's pavilion, where it stood in a bight of the meadow-land at the foot of the hill, with the wood about it on three sides. So fair a house Hallblithe deemed he had never seen; for it was wrought all over with histories and flowers, and with hems sewn with gold, and with orphreys of gold and pearl and gems.

There in the door of it sat the King of the Land in an ivory chair; he was clad in a golden gown, girt with a girdle of gems, and had his crown on his head and his sword by his side. For this was the hour wherein he heard what any of his folk would say to him, and for that very end he sat there in the door of his tent, and folk were standing before him, and sitting and lying on the grass round about; and now one, now another, came up to him and spoke before him.

His face shone like a star; it was exceeding beauteous, and as kind as the even of May in the gardens of the happy, when the scent of the eglantine fills all the air. When he spoke his voice was so sweet that all hearts were ravished, and none might gainsay him.

But when Hallblithe set eyes on him, he knew at once that this was he whose carven image he had seen in the hall of the Ravagers, and his heart beat fast, and he said to himself: "Hold up thine head now, O Son of the Raven, strengthen thine heart, and let no man or god cow thee. For how can thine heart change, which bade thee go to the house wherefrom it was due to thee to take the pleasure of woman, and there to pledge thy faith and troth to her that loveth thee most, and hankereth for thee day by day and hour by hour, so that great is the love that we twain have builded up."

Now they drew nigh, for folk fell back before them to the right and left, as before men who are new come and have much to do; so that there was nought between them and the face of the King. But he smiled upon them so that he cheered their hearts with the hope of fulfilment of their desires, and he said: "Welcome, children! Who be these whom ye have brought hither for the increase

of our joy? Who is this tall, ruddy-faced, joyous man so meet for the bliss of the Glittering Plain? And who is this goodly and lovely young man, who beareth weapons amidst our peace, and whose face is sad and stern beneath the gleaming of his helm?"

Said the dark-haired damsel: "O King! O Gift-giver and assurer of joy! this tall one is he who was once oppressed by eld, and who hath come hither to thee from the Isle of Ransom, according to the custom of the land."

Said the King: "Tall man, it is well that thou art come. Now are thy days changed and thou yet alive. For thee battle is ended, and therewith the reward of battle, which the warrior remembereth not amidst the hard hand-play: peace hath begun, and thou needest not be careful for the endurance thereof: for in this land no man hath a lack which he may not satisfy without taking aught from any other. I deem not that thine heart may conceive a desire which I shall not fulfil for thee, or crave a gift which I shall not give thee."

Then the Sea-eagle laughed for joy, and turned his head this way and that, so that he might the better take to him the smiles of all those that stood around.

Then the King said to Hallblithe: "Thou also art welcome; I know thee who thou art: meseemeth great joy awaiteth thee, and I will fulfil thy desire to the uttermost."

Said Hallblithe: "O great King of a happy land, I ask of thee nought save that which none shall withhold from me uncursed."

"I will give it to thee," said the King, "and thou shalt bless me. But what is it which thou wouldst? What more canst thou have than the Gifts of the land?"

Said Hallblithe: "I came hither seeking no gifts, but to have mine own again; and that is the bodily love of my troth-plight maiden. They stole her from me, and me from her; for she loved me. I went down to the sea-side and found her not, nor the ship which had borne her away. I sailed from thence to the Isle of Ransom, for they told me that there I should buy her for a price; neither was her body there. But her image came to me in a dream of the night, and bade me seek to her hither. Therefore, O King, if she be here in the land, show me how I shall find her, and if she be not here, show me how I may depart to seek her elsewhere. This is all my asking."

Said the King: "Thy desire shall be satisfied; thou shalt have the woman who would have thee, and whom thou shouldst have."

Hallblithe was gladdened beyond measure by that word; and now did the King seem to him a comfort and a solace to every heart, even as he had deemed of his carven image in the Hall of the Ravagers; and he thanked him, and blessed him.

But the King bade him abide by him that night, and feast with him. "And on the morrow," said he, "thou shalt go thy ways to look on her whom thou oughtest to love."

Therewith was come the eventide and beginning of night, warm and fragrant and bright with the twinkling of stars, and they went into the King's pavilion, and there was the feast as fair and dainty as might be; and Hallblithe had meat from the King's own dish, and drink from his cup; but the meat had no savour to him and the drink no delight, because of the longing that possessed him.

And when the feast was done, the damsels led Hallblithe to his bed in a fair tent strewn with gold about his head like the starry night, and he lay down and slept for sheer weariness of body.

CHAPTER XIII. HALLBLITHE BEHOLDETH THE WOMAN WHO LOVETH HIM.

BUT on the morrow the men arose, and the Sea-eagle and his damsel came to Hallblithe; for the other two damsels were departed, and the Sea-eagle said to him: "Here am I well honoured and measurelessly happy; and I have a message for thee from the King."

"What is it?" said Hallblithe; but he deemed that he knew what it would be, and he reddened for the joy of his assured hope.

Said the Sea-eagle: "Joy to thee, O shipmate! I am to take thee to the place where thy beloved abideth, and there shalt thou see her, but not so as she can see thee; and thereafter shalt thou go to the King, that thou mayst tell him if she shall accomplish thy desire."

Then was Hallblithe glad beyond measure, and his heart danced within him, and he deemed it but meet that the others should be so joyous and blithe with him, for they led him along without any

delay, and were glad at his rejoicing; and words failed him to tell of his gladness.

But as he went, the thoughts of his coming converse with his beloved curled sweetly round his heart, so that scarce anything had seemed so sweet to him before; and he fell a-pondering what they twain, he and the Hostage, should do when they came together again; whether they should abide on the Glittering Plain, or go back again to Cleveland by the Sea and dwell in the House of the Kindred; and for his part he yearned to behold the roof of his fathers and to tread the meadow which his scythe had swept, and the acres where his hook had smitten the wheat. But he said to himself, "I will wait till I hear her desire hereon."

Now they went into the wood at the back of the King's pavilion and through it, and so over the hill, and beyond it came into a land of hills and dales exceeding fair and lovely; and a river wound about the dales, lapping in turn the feet of one hill-side or the other; and in each dale (for they passed through two) was a goodly house of men, and tillage about it, and vineyards and orchards. They went all day till the sun was near setting, and were not weary, for they turned into the houses by the way when they would, and had good welcome and meat and drink and what they would of the folk that dwelt there. Thus anigh sunset they came into a dale fairer than either of the others, and nigh to the end where they had entered it was an exceeding goodly house. Then said the damsel:

"We are nigh-hand to our journey's end; let us sit down on the grass by this river-side whilst I tell thee the tale which the King would have thee know."

So they sat down on the grass beside the brimming river, scant two bowshots from that fair house, and the damsel said, reading from a scroll which she drew from her bosom:

"O Spearman, in yonder house dwelleth the woman foredoomed to love thee: if thou wouldst see her, go thitherward, following the path which turneth from the river-side by yonder oak-tree, and thou shalt presently come to a thicket of bay-trees at the edge of an apple-orchard, whose trees are blossoming; abide thou hidden by the bay-leaves, and thou shalt see maidens come

into the orchard, and at last one fairer than all the others. This shall be thy love foredoomed, and none other; and thou shalt know her by this token, that when she hath set her down on the grass beside the bay-tree, she shall say to her maidens: 'Bring me now the book wherein is the image of my beloved, that I may solace myself with beholding it before the sun goes down and the night cometh.'"

Now Hallblithe was troubled when she read out these words, and he said: "What is this tale about a book? I know not of any book that lieth betwixt me and my beloved."

"O Spearman," said the damsel, "I may tell thee no more, because I know no more. But keep up thine heart! For dost thou know any more than I do what hath befallen thy beloved since thou wert sundered from her? and why should not this matter of the book be one of the things that hath befallen her? Go now with joy, and come again blessing us."

"Yea, go, faring-fellow," said the Sea-eagle, "and come back joyful, that we may all be merry together. And we will abide thee here."

Hallblithe foreboded evil, but he held his peace and went his ways down the path by the oak-tree; and they abode there by the water-side, and were very merry talking of this and that (but no whit of Hallblithe), and kissing and caressing each other; so that it seemed but a little while to them ere they saw Hallblithe coming back by the oak-tree. He went slowly, hanging his head like a man sore-burdened with grief: thus he came up to them, and stood there above them as they lay on the fragrant grass, and he saying no word and looking so sad and sorry, and withal so fell, that they feared his grief and his anger, and would fain have been away from him; so that they durst not ask him a question for a long while, and the sun sank below the hill while they abided thus.

Then all trembling the damsel spake to the Sea-eagle: "Speak to him, dear friend, else must I flee away, for I fear his silence."

Quoth the Sea-eagle: "Shipmate and friend, what hath be-tided? How art thou? May we hearken, and mayhappen amend it?"

Then Hallblithe cast himself adown on the grass and said: "I

am accursed and beguiled; and I wander round and round in a tangle that I may not escape from. I am not far from deeming that this is a land of dreams made for my beguiling. Or has the earth become so full of lies, that there is no room amidst them for a true man to stand upon his feet and go his ways?"

Said the Sea-eagle: "Thou shalt tell us of what hath betid, and so ease the sorrow of thy soul if thou wilt. Or if thou wilt, thou shalt nurse thy sorrow in thine heart and tell no man. Do what thou wilt; am I not become thy friend?"

SAID Hallblithe: "I will tell you twain the tidings, and thereafter ask me no more concerning them. Hearken. I went whereas ye bade me, and hid myself in the bay-tree thicket; and there came maidens into the blossoming orchard and made a resting-place with silken cushions close to where I was lurking, and stood about as though they were looking for some one to come. In a little time came two more maidens, and betwixt them one so much fairer than any there, that my heart sank within me: whereas I deemed because of her fairness that this would be the foredoomed love whereof ye spake, and lo, she was in nought like to my troth-plight maiden, save that she was exceeding beauteous: nevertheless, heart-sick as I was, I determined to abide the token that ye told me of. So she lay down amidst those cushions, and I beheld her that she was sad of countenance; and she was so near to me that I could see the tears welling into her eyes, and running down her cheeks; so that I should have grieved sorely for her had I not been grieving so sorely for myself. For presently she sat up and said: 'O maiden, bring me hither the book wherein is the image of my beloved, that I may behold it in this season of sunset wherein I first beheld it; that I may fill my heart with the sight thereof before the sun is gone and the dark night come.'

"Then indeed my heart died within me when I wotted that this was the love whereof the King spake, that he would give to me, and she not mine own beloved, yet I could not choose but abide and look on a while, and she being one that any man might love beyond measure. Now a maiden went away into the house and came back again with a book covered with gold set with gems; and the fair woman took it and opened it, and I was so near to her that I saw every leaf clearly as she turned the leaves. And in that book

were pictures of many things, as flaming mountains, and castles of war, and ships upon the sea, but chiefly of fair women, and queens, and warriors and kings; and it was done in gold and azure and cinnabar and minium. So she turned the leaves, till she came to one whereon was pictured none other than myself, and over against me was the image of mine own beloved, the Hostage of the Rose, as if she were alive, so that the heart within me swelled with the sobbing which I must needs refrain, which grieved me like a sword-stroke. Shame also took hold of me as the fair woman spoke to my painted image, and I lying well-nigh within touch of her hand; but she said: 'O my beloved, why dost thou delay to come to me? For I deemed that this eve at least thou wouldst come, so many and strong as are the meshes of love which we have cast about thy feet. Oh come to-morrow at the least and latest, or what shall I do, and wherewith shall I quench the grief of my heart? Or else why am I the daughter of the Undying King, the Lord of the Treasure of the Sea? Why have they wrought new marvels for me, and compelled the Ravagers of the Coasts to serve me, and sent false dreams flitting on the wings of the night? Yea, why is the earth fair and fruitful, and the heavens kind above it, if thou comest not to-night, nor to-morrow, nor the day after? And I the daughter of the Undying, on whom the days shall grow and grow as the grains of sand which the wind heaps up above the sea-beach. And life shall grow huger and more hideous round about the lonely one, like the ling-worm laid upon the gold, that waxeth thereby, till it lies all round about the house of the queen entrapped, the moveless unending ring of the years that change not.'

"So she spake till the weeping ended her words, and I was all abashed with shame and pale with anguish. I stole quietly from my lair unheeded of any, save that one damsel said that a rabbit ran in the hedge, and another that a blackbird stirred in the thicket. Behold me, then, that my quest beginneth again amidst the tangle of lies whereinto I have been entrapped."

CHAPTER XIV. HALLBLITHE HAS SPEECH WITH THE KING AGAIN.

HE stood up when he had made an end, as a man ready for the road; but they lay there downcast and abashed, and had no words to answer him. For the Sea-eagle was sorry that his faring-fellow was hapless, and was sorry that he was sorry; and as for the damsel, she had not known but that she was leading the goodly Spearman to the fulfilment of his heart's desire. Albeit after a while she spake again and said:

“Dear friends, day is gone and night is at hand; now to-night it were ill lodging at yonder house; and the next house on our backward road is over far for wayworn folk. But hard by through the thicket is a fair little wood-lawn, by the lip of a pool in the stream wherein we may bathe us to-morrow morning; and it is grassy and flowery and sheltered from all winds that blow, and I have victual enough in my wallet. Let us sup and rest there under the bare heaven, as oft is the wont of us in this land; and on the morrow early we will arise and get us back again to Wood-end, where yet the King abideth, and there shalt thou talk to him again, O Spearman.”

Said Hallblithe: “Take me whither ye will; but now nought availeth. I am a captive in a land of lies, and here most like shall I live betrayed and die hapless.”

“Hold thy peace, dear friend, of such words as those last,” said she, “or I must needs flee from thee, for they hurt me sorely. Come now to this pleasant place.”

She took him by the hand and looked kindly on him, and the Sea-eagle followed him, murmuring an old song of the harvest-field, and they went together by a path through a thicket of white-thorn till they came unto a grassy place. There then they sat them down, and ate and drank what they would, sitting by the lip of the pool till a waning moon was bright over their heads. And Hallblithe made no semblance of content; but the Sea-eagle and his damsel were grown merry again, and talked and sang together like autumn staves, with the kissing and caressing of lovers.

So at last those twain lay down amongst the flowers, and slept

268 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

in each other's arms; but Hallblithe betook him to the brake a little aloof, and lay down, but slept not till morning was at hand, when slumber and confused dreams overtook him.

He was awaked from his sleep by the damsel, who came pushing through the thicket all fresh and rosy from the river, and roused him, and said: "Awake now, Spearman, that we may take our pleasure in the sun; for he is high in the heavens now, and all the land laughs beneath him."

Her eyes glittered as she spoke, and her limbs moved under her raiment as though she would presently fall to dancing for very joy. But Hallblithe arose wearily, and gave her back no smile in answer, but thrust through the thicket to the water, and washed the night from off him, and so came back to the twain as they sat dallying together over their breakfast. He would not sit down by them, but ate a morsel of bread as he stood, and said: "Tell me how I can soonest find the King. I bid you not lead me thither, but let me go my ways alone. For with me time presses, and with you meseemeth time is nought. Neither am I a meet fellow for the happy."

But the Sea-eagle sprang up, and swore with a great oath that he would nowise leave his shipmate in the lurch. And the damsel said: "Fair man, I had best go with thee; I shall not hinder thee, but further thee rather, so that thou shalt make one day's journey of two."

And she put forth her hand to him, and caressed him smiling, and fawned upon him, and he heeded it little, but hung not aback from them since they were ready for the road: so they set forth all three together.

THEY made such diligence on the backward road that the sun was not set by then they came to Wood-end; and there was the King sitting in the door of his pavilion. Thither went Hallblithe straight, and thrust through the throng, and stood before the King; who greeted him kindly, and was no less sweet of face than on that other day.

Hallblithe hailed him not, but said: "King, look on my anguish, and if thou art other than a king of dreams and lies, play no longer with me, but tell me straight out if thou knowest of my troth-plight maiden, whether she is in this land or not."

Then the King smiled on him and said: "True it is that I know of her; yet know I not whether she is in this land or not."

"King," said Hallblithe, "wilt thou bring us together and stay my heart's bleeding?"

Said the King: "I cannot, since I know not where she is."

"Why didst thou lie to me the other day?" said Hallblithe.

"I lied not," said the King; "I bade bring thee to the woman that loved thee, and whom thou shouldst love; and that is my daughter. And look thou! Even as I may not bring thee to thine earthly love, so couldst thou not make thyself manifest before my daughter, and become her deathless love. Is it not enough?"

He spake sternly for all that he smiled, and Hallblithe said: "O King, have pity on me!"

"Yea," said the King; "pity thee I do: but I will live despite thy sorrow; my pity of thee shall not slay me, or make thee happy. Even in such wise didst thou pity my daughter."

Said Hallblithe: "Thou art mighty, O King, and maybe the mightiest. Wilt thou not help me?"

"How can I help thee?" said the King, "thou who wilt not help thyself. Thou hast seen what thou shouldst do: do it then and be holpen."

Then said Hallblithe: "Wilt thou not slay me, O King, since thou wilt not do aught else?"

"Nay," said the King, "thy slaying wilt not serve me nor mine: I will neither help nor hinder. Thou art free to seek thy love wheresoever thou wilt in this my realm. Depart in peace!"

Hallblithe saw that the King was angry, though he smiled upon him; yet so coldly, that the face of him froze the very marrow of Hallblithe's bones: and he said within himself: "This King of lies shall not slay me, though mine anguish be hard to bear: for I am alive, and it may be that my love is in this land, and I may find her here, and how to reach another land I know not."

So he turned from before the face of the King as the sun was setting, and he went down the land southward betwixt the mountains and the sea, not heeding whether it were night or day; and he went on till it was long past midnight, and then for mere weariness laid him down under a tree, not knowing where he was, and fell asleep.

And in the morning he woke up to the bright sun, and found folk standing round about him, both men and women, and their sheep were anigh them, for they were shepherd folk. So when they saw that he was awake, they greeted him, and were blithe with him and made much of him; and they took him home to their house, and gave him to eat and to drink, and asked him what he would that they might serve him. And they seemed to him to be kind and simple folk, and though he loathed to speak the words, so sick at heart he was, yet he told them how he was seeking his troth-pledge maiden, his earthly love, and asked them to say if they had seen any woman like her.

They heard him kindly and pitied him, and told him how they had heard of a woman in the land, who sought her beloved even as he sought his. And when he heard that, his heart leapt up, and he asked them to tell him more concerning this woman. Then they said that she dwelt in the hill-country in a goodly house, and had set her heart on a lovely man, whose image she had seen in a book, and that no man but this one would content her; and this, they said, was a sad and sorry matter, such as was unheard of hitherto in the land.

So when Hallblithe heard this, as heavily as his heart fell again, he changed not countenance, but thanked the kind folk and departed, and went on down the land betwixt the mountains and the sea, and before nightfall he had been into three more houses of folk, and asked there of all comers concerning a woman who was sundered from her beloved; and at none of them gat he any answer to make him less sorry than yesterday. At the last of the three he slept, and on the morrow early there was the work to begin again; and the next day was the same as the last, and the day after differed not from it. Thus he went on seeking his beloved betwixt the mountains and the plain, till the great rock-wall came down to the side of the sea and made an end of the Glittering Plain on that side. Then he turned about and went back by the way he had come, and up the country betwixt the mountains and the plain northward, until he had been into every house of folk in those parts and asked his question.

Then he went up into that fair country of the dales, and even anigh to where dwelt the King's Daughter, and otherwhere in the

land and everywhere, quartering the realm of the Glittering Plain as the heron quarters the flooded meadow when the waters draw aback into the river. So that now all people knew him when he came, and they wondered at him; but when he came to any house for the third or fourth time, they wearied of him, and were glad when he departed.

Ever it was one of two answers that he had: either folk said to him, "There is no such woman; this land is happy, and nought but happy people dwell herein;" or else they told him of the woman who lived in sorrow, and was ever looking on a book, that she might bring to her the man whom she desired.

Whiles he wearied and longed for death, but would not die until there was no corner of the land unsearched. Whiles he shook off weariness, and went about his quest as a craftsman sets about his work in the morning. Whiles it irked him to see the soft and merry folk of the land, who had no skill to help him, and he longed for the house of his fathers and the men of the spear and the plough; and thought, "Oh, if I might but get me back, if it were but for an hour and to die there, to the meadows of the Raven, and the acres beneath the mountains of Cleveland by the Sea. Then at least should I learn some tale of what is or what hath been, howsoever evil the tidings were, and not be bandied about by lies for ever."

CHAP. XV. YET HALLBLITHE SPEAKETH WITH THE KING.

SO wore the days and the moons; and now were some six moons worn since first he came to the Glittering Plain; and he was come to Wood-end again, and heard and knew that the King was sitting once more in the door of his pavilion to hearken to the words of his people, and he said to himself: "I will speak yet again to this man, if indeed he be a man; yea, though he turn me into stone."

And he went up toward the pavilion; and on the way it came into his mind what the men of the kindred were doing that morning; and he had a vision of them as it were, and saw them yoking the oxen to the plough, and slowly going down the acres, as the

shining iron drew the long furrow down the stubble-land, and the light haze hung about the elm-trees in the calm morning, and the smoke rose straight into the air from the roof of the kindred. And he said: "What is this? am I death-doomed this morning that this sight cometh so clearly upon me amidst the falseness of this unchanging land?"

Thus he came to the pavilion, and folk fell back before him to the right and the left, and he stood before the King, and said to him: "I cannot find her; she is not in thy land."

Then spake the King, smiling upon him, as erst: "What wilt thou then? Is it not time to rest?"

He said: "Yea, O King; but not in this land."

Said the King: "Where else than in this land wilt thou find rest? Without is battle and famine, longing unsatisfied, and heart-burning and fear; within it is plenty and peace and good will and pleasure without cease. Thy word hath no meaning to me."

Said Hallblithe: "Give me leave to depart, and I will bless thee."

"Is there nought else to do?" said the King.

"Nought else," said Hallblithe.

Therewith he felt that the King's face changed though he still smiled on him, and again he felt his heart grow cold before the King.

But the King spake and said: "I hinder not thy departure, nor will any of my folk. No hand will be raised against thee; there is no weapon in all the land, save the deedless sword by my side and the weapons which thou bearest."

Said Hallblithe: "Dost thou not owe me a joy in return for my beguiling?"

"Yea," said the King, "reach out thine hand to take it."

"One thing only may I take of thee," said Hallblithe; "my troth-plight maiden or else the speeding of my departure."

Then said the King, and his voice was terrible though yet he smiled: "I will not hinder; I will not help. Depart in peace!"

THEN Hallblithe turned away dizzy and half fainting, and strayed down the field, scarce knowing where he was; and as he went he felt his sleeve plucked at, and turned about, and lo! he was face to face with the Sea-eagle, no less joyous than aforetime.

He took Hallblithe in his arms and embraced him and kissed him, and said: "Well met faring-fellow! Whither away?"

"Away out of this land of lies," said Hallblithe.

The Sea-eagle shook his head, and quoth he: "Art thou still seeking a dream? And thou so fair that thou puttest all other men to shame."

"I seek no dream," said Hallblithe, "but rather the end of dreams."

"Well," said the Sea-eagle, "we will not wrangle about it. But hearken. Hard by in a pleasant nook of the meadows have I set up my tent; and although it be not as big as the King's pavilion, yet is it fair enough. Wilt thou not come thither with me and rest thee to-night; and to-morrow we will talk of this matter?"

Now Hallblithe was weary and confused, and down-hearted beyond his wont, and the friendly words of the Sea-eagle softened his heart, and he smiled on him and said: "I give thee thanks; I will come with thee: thou art kind, and hast done nought to me save good from the time when I first saw thee lying in thy bed in the Hall of the Ravagers. Dost thou remember the day?"

The Sea-eagle knitted his brow as one striving with a troublous memory, and said: "But dimly, friend, as if it had passed in an ugly dream: meseemeth my friendship with thee began when I came to thee from out of the wood, and saw thee standing with those three damsels; that I remember full well: ye were fair to look on."

Hallblithe wondered at his words, but said no more about it, and they went together to a flowery nook nigh a stream of clear water where stood a silken tent, green like the grass which it stood on, and flecked with gold and goodly colours. Nigh it on the grass lay the Sea-eagle's damsel, ruddy-cheeked and sweet-lipped, as fair as aforetime. She turned about when she heard men coming, and when she saw Hallblithe a smile came into her face like the sun breaking out on a fair but clouded morning, and she went up to him and took him by the hands and kissed his cheek, and said: "Welcome, Spearman! welcome back! We have heard of thee in many places, and have been sorry that thou wert not glad, and now are we fain of thy returning. Shall not sweet life begin for thee from henceforward?"

274 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

Again was Hallblithe moved by her kind welcome; but he shook his head and spake: "Thou art kind, sister; yet if thou wouldst be kinder thou wilt show me a way whereby I may escape from this land. For abiding here has become irksome to me, and meseemeth that hope is yet alive without the Glittering Plain."

Her face fell as she answered: "Yea, and fear also, and worse, if aught be worse. But come, let us eat and drink in this fair place, and gather for thee a little joyance before thou departest, if thou needs must depart."

He smiled on her as one not ill-content, and laid himself down on the grass, while the twain busied themselves, and brought forth fair cushions and a gilded table, and laid dainty victual thereon and good wine.

So they ate and drank together, and the Sea-eagle and his mate became very joyous again, and Hallblithe bestirred himself not to be a mar-feast; for he said within himself: "I am departing, and after this time I shall see them no more; and they are kind and blithe with me, and have been aforetime; I will not make their merry hearts sore. For when I am gone I shall be remembered of them but a little while."

CHAPTER XVI. THOSE THREE GO THEIR WAYS TO THE EDGE OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN.

SO the evening wore merrily; and they made Hallblithelie in an ingle of the tent on a fair bed, and he was weary, and slept thereon like a child. But in the morning early they waked him; and while they were breaking their fast they began to speak to him of his departure, and asked him if he had an inkling of the way whereby he should get him gone, and he said: "If I escape it must needs be by way of the mountains that wall the land about till they come down to the sea. For on the sea is no ship and no haven; and well I wot that no man of the land durst or can ferry me over to the land of my kindred, or elsewhere without the Glittering Plain. Tell me therefore (and I ask no more of you), is there any rumour or memory of a way that cleaveth yonder mighty wall of rock to other lands?"

Said the damsel: "There is more than a memory or a rumour :

there is a road through the mountains known to all men. For at whiles the earthly pilgrims come into the Glittering Plain thereby; and yet but seldom, so many are the griefs and perils which beset the wayfarers on that road. Whereof thou hadst far better bethink thee in time, and abide here and be happy with us and others who long sore to make thee happy."

"Nay," said Hallblithe, "there is nought to do but tell me of the way, and I will depart at once, blessing you."

Said the Sea-eagle: "More than that at least will we do. May I lose the bliss whereto I have attained, if I go not with thee to the very edge of the land of the Glittering Plain. Shall it not be so, sweetheart?"

"Yea, at least we may do that," said the damsel; and she hung her head as if she were ashamed, and said: "And that is all that thou wilt get from us at most."

Said Hallblithe: "It is enough, and I asked not so much."

Then the damsel busied herself, and set meat and drink in two wallets, and took one herself and gave the other to the Sea-eagle, and said: "We will be thy porters, O Spearman, and will give thee a full wallet from the last house by the Desert of Dread, for when thou hast entered therein, thou mayst well find victual hard to come by: and now let us linger no more since the road is dear to thee."

So they set forth on foot, for in that land men were slow to feel weariness; and turning about the hill of Wood-end, they passed by some broken country, and came at even to a house at the entrance of a long valley, with high and steeply-sloping sides, which seemed, as it were, to cleave the dale country wherein they had fared aforetime. At that house they slept well-guested by its folk, and the next morning took their way down the valley, and the folk of the house stood at the door to watch their departure; for they had told the wayfarers that they had fared but a little way thitherward and knew of no folk who had used that road.

So those three fared down the valley southward all day, ever mounting higher as they went. The way was pleasant and easy, for they went over fair, smooth, grassy lawns betwixt the hill-sides, beside a clear rattling stream that ran northward; at whiles were clumps of tall trees, oak for the most part, and at whiles thickets

276 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

of thorn and eglantine and other such trees: so that they could rest well shaded when they would.

They passed by no house of men, nor came to any such in the even, but lay down to sleep in a thicket of thorn and eglantine, and rested well, and on the morrow they rose up betimes and went on their ways.

THIS second day as they went, the hill-sides on either hand grew lower, till at last they died out into a wide plain, beyond which in the southern offing the mountains rose huge and bare. This plain also was grassy and beset with trees and thickets here and there. Hereon they saw wild deer enough, as hart and buck, and roebuck and swine: withal a lion came out of a brake hard by them as they went, and stood gazing on them, so that Hallblithe looked to his weapons, and the Sea-eagle took up a big stone to fight with, being weaponless; but the damsel laughed, and tripped on her way lightly with girt-up gown, and the beast gave no more heed to them.

Easy and smooth was their way over this pleasant wilderness, and clear to see, though but little used, and before nightfall, after they had gone a long way, they came to a house. It was not large nor high, but was built very strongly and fairly of good ashlar: its door was shut, and on the jamb thereof hung a slug-horn. The damsel, who seemed to know what to do, set her mouth to the horn, and blew a blast; and in a little while the door was opened, and a big man clad in red scarlet stood therein: he had no weapons, but was somewhat surly of aspect: he spake not, but stood abiding the word: so the damsel took it up and said: "Art thou not the Warden of the Uttermost House?"

He said: "I am."

Said the damsel: "May we guest here to-night?"

He said: "The house lieth open to you with all that it hath of victual and plenishing: take what ye will, and use what ye will."

They thanked him; but he heeded not their thanks, and withdrew him from them. So they entered and found the table laid in a fair hall of stone carven and painted very goodly; so they ate and drank therein, and Hallblithe was of good heart, and the Sea-eagle and his mate were merry, though they looked softly and shyly on

Hallblithe because of the sundering anigh; and they saw no man in the house save the man in scarlet, who went and came about his business, paying no heed to them. So when the night was deep they lay down in the shut-bed off the hall, and slept, and the hours were tidingless to them until they woke in the morning.

On the morrow they arose and broke their fast, and thereafter the damsel spake to the man in scarlet and said: "May we fill our wallets with victual for the way?"

Said the Warden: "There lieth the meat."

So they filled their wallets, while the man looked on; and they came to the door when they were ready, and he unlocked it to them, saying no word. But when they turned their faces towards the mountains he spake at last, and stayed them at the first step. Quoth he: "Whither away? Ye take the wrong road!"

Said Hallblithe: "Nay, for we go toward the mountains and the edge of the Glittering Plain."

"Ye shall do ill to go thither," said the Warden, "and I bid you forbear."

"O Warden of the Uttermost House, wherefore should we forbear?" said the Sea-eagle.

Said the scarlet man: "Because my charge is to further those who would go inward to the King, and to stay those who would go outward from the King."

"How then if we go outward despite thy bidding?" said the Sea-eagle, "wilt thou then hinder us perforce?"

"How may I," said the man, "since thy fellow hath weapons?"

"Go we forth, then," said the Sea-eagle.

"Yea," said the damsel, "we will go forth. And know, O Warden, that this weaponed man only is of mind to fare over the edge of the Glittering Plain; but we twain shall come back hither again, and fare inwards."

Said the Warden: "Nought is it to me what ye will do when you are past this house. Nor shall any man who goeth out of this garth toward the mountains ever come back inwards save he cometh in the company of new comers to the Glittering Plain."

"Who shall hinder him?" said the Sea-eagle.

"The KING," said the Warden.

Then there was silence awhile, and the man said: "Now do as

ye will." And therewith he turned back into the house and shut the door.

But the Sea-eagle and the damsel stood gazing on one another, and at Hallblithe; and the damsel was downcast and pale; but the Sea-eagle cried out: "Forward now, O Hallblithe, since thou willest it, and we will go with thee and share whatever may befall thee; yea, right up to the very edge of the Glittering Plain. And thou, O beloved, why dost thou delay? Why dost thou stand as if thy fair feet were grown to the grass?"

But the damsel gave a lamentable cry, and cast herself down on the ground, and knelt before the Sea-eagle, and took him by the knees, and said betwixt sobbing and weeping: "O my lord and love, I pray thee to forbear, and the Spearman, our friend, shall pardon us. For if thou goest, I shall never see thee more, since my heart will not serve me to go with thee. O forbear! I pray thee!"

And she grovelled on the earth before him; and the Sea-eagle waxed red, and would have spoken; but Hallblithe cut his speech across, and said: "Friends, be at peace! For this is the minute that sunders us. Get ye back at once to the heart of the Glittering Plain, and live there and be happy; and take my blessing and thanks for the love and help that ye have given me. For your going forward with me should destroy you and profit me nothing. It would be but as the host bringing his guests one field beyond his garth, when their goal is the ends of the earth; and if there were a lion in the path, why should he perish for courtesy's sake?"

Therewith he stooped down to the damsel, and lifted her up and kissed her face; and he cast his arms about the Sea-eagle and said to him: "Farewell, shipmate!"

Then the damsel gave him the wallet of victual, and bade him farewell, weeping sorely; and he looked kindly on them for a moment of time, and then turned away from them and fared on toward the mountains, striding with great strides, holding his head aloft. But they looked no more on him, having no will to eke their sorrow, but went their ways back again without delay.

CHAPTER XVII. HALLBLITHE AMONGST THE MOUNTAINS.

SO strode on Hallblithe; but when he had gone but a little way his head turned, and the earth and heavens wavered before him, so that he must needs sit down on a stone by the wayside, wondering what ailed him. Then he looked up at the mountains, which now seemed quite near to him at the plain's ending, and his weakness increased on him; and lo! as he looked, it was to him as if the crags rose up in the sky to meet him and overhang him, and as if the earth heaved up beneath him, and therewith he fell aback and lost all sense, so that he knew not what was become of the earth and the heavens and the passing of the minutes of his life.

When he came to himself he knew not whether he had lain so a great while or a little; he felt feeble, and for a while he lay scarce moving, and beholding nought, not even the sky above him. Presently he turned about and saw hard stone on either side, so he rose wearily and stood upon his feet, and knew that he was faint with hunger and thirst. Then he looked around him, and saw that he was in a narrow valley or cleft of the mountains amidst wan rocks, bare and waterless, where grew no blade of green; but he could see no further than the sides of that cleft, and he longed to be out of it that he might see whitherward to turn. Then he thought him of his wallet, and set his hand to it and opened it, thinking to get victual thence; but lo! it was all spoilt and wasted. None the less, for all his feebleness, he turned and went toiling slowly along what seemed to be a path little trodden leading upward out of the cleft; and at last he reached the crest thereof, and sat him down on a rock on the other side; yet durst not raise his eyes awhile and look on the land, lest he should see death manifest therein. At last he looked, and saw that he was high up amongst the mountain-peaks: before him and on either hand was but a world of fallow stone rising ridge upon ridge like the waves of the wildest of the winter sea. The sun not far from its midmost shone down bright and hot on that wilderness; yet was there no sign that any man had ever been there since the beginning of the world, save that the path aforesaid seemed to lead onward down the stony slope.

This way and that way and all about he gazed, straining his eyes if perchance he might see any diversity in the stony waste; and at last betwixt two peaks of the rock-wall on his left hand he descried a streak of green mingling with the cold blue of the distance; and he thought in his heart that this was the last he should see of the Glittering Plain. Then he spake aloud in that desert, and said, though there was none to hear: "Now is my last hour come; and here is Hallblithe of the Raven perishing, with his deeds undone and his longing unfulfilled, and his bridal-bed acold for ever. Long may the House of the Raven abide and flourish, with many a man and maiden, valiant and fair and fruitful! O kindred, cast thy blessing on this man about to die here, doing none otherwise than ye would have him!"

He sat there a little while longer, and then he said to himself: "Death tarries; were it not well that I go to meet him, even as the cot-carle preventeth the mighty chieftain?"

Then he arose, and went painfully down the slope, steadying himself with the shaft of his gleaming spear; but all at once he stopped; for it seemed to him that he heard voices borne on the wind that blew up the mountain-side. But he shook his head and said: "Now forsooth beginneth the dream which shall last for ever; nowise am I beguiled by it." None the less he strove the more eagerly with the wind and the way and his feebleness; yet did the weakness wax on him, so that it was but a little while ere he faltered and reeled and fell down once more in a swoon.

When he came to himself again he was no longer alone: a man was kneeling down by him and holding up his head, while another before him, as he opened his eyes, put a cup of wine to his lips. So Hallblithe drank and was refreshed; and presently they gave him bread, and he ate, and his heart was strengthened, and the happiness of life returned to it, and he lay back, and slept sweetly for a season.

When he awoke from that slumber he found that he had gotten back much of his strength again, and he sat up and looked around him, and saw three men sitting anigh, armed and girt with swords, yet in evil array, and sore travel-worn. One of these was very old, with long white hair hanging down; and another, though he was not so much stricken in years, still looked an old man of over sixty

winters. The third was a man some forty years old, but sad and sorry and drooping of aspect.

So when they saw him stirring, they all fixed their eyes upon him, and the oldest man said: "Welcome to him who erst had no tidings for us!" And the second said: "Tell us now thy tidings." But the third, the sorry man, cried out aloud, saying: "Where is the Land? Where is the Land?"

Said Hallblithe: "Meseemeth the land which ye seek is the land which I seek to flee from. And now I will not hide that meseemeth I have seen you before, and that was at Cleveland by the Sea when the days were happier."

Then they all three bowed their heads in yea-say, and spake: "Where is the Land? Where is the Land?"

Then Hallblithe arose to his feet, and said: "Ye have healed me of the sickness of death, and I will do what I may to heal you of your sickness of sorrow. Come up the pass with me, and I will show you the land afar off."

Then they arose like young and brisk men, and he led them over the brow of the ridge into the little valley wherein he had first come to himself: there he showed them that glimpse of a green land betwixt the two peaks, which he had beheld e'en now; and they stood a while looking at it and weeping for joy.

Then spake the oldest of the seekers: "Show us the way to the land."

"Nay," said Hallblithe, "I may not; for when I would depart thence, I might not go by mine own will, but was borne out either, I wot not how. For when I came to the edge of the land against the will of the King, he smote me, and then cast me out. Therefore since I may not help you, find ye the land for yourselves, and let me go blessing you, and come out of this desert by the way whereby ye entered it. For I have an errand in the world."

Spake the youngest of the seekers: "Now art thou become the yoke-fellow of Sorrow, and thou must wend, not whither thou wouldst, but whither she will: and she would have thee go forward toward life, not backward toward death."

Said the midmost seeker: "If we let thee go further into the wilderness thou shalt surely die: for hence to the peopled parts, and the City of Merchants, whence we come, is a month's journey:

and there is neither meat nor drink, nor beast nor bird, nor any green thing all that way; and since we have found thee famishing, we may well deem that thou hast no victual. As to us we have but little; so that if it be much more than three days' journey to the Glittering Plain, we may well starve and die within sight of the Acre of the Undying. Nevertheless that little will we share with thee if thou wilt help us to find that good land; so that thou mayst yet put away Sorrow, and take Joy again to thy board and bed."

Hallblithe hung his head and answered nought; for he was confused by the meshes of ill-hap, and his soul grew sick with the bitterness of death. But the sad man spake again and said: "Thou hast an errand sayest thou? is it such as a dead man may do?"

Hallblithe pondered, and amidst the anguish of his despair was borne in on him a vision of the sea-waves lapping the side of a black ship, and a man therein: who but himself, set free to do his errand, and his heart was quickened within him, and he said: "I thank you, and I will wend back with you, since there is no road for me save back again into the trap."

The three seekers seemed glad thereat, and the second one said: "Though death is pursuing, and life lieth ahead, yet will we not hasten thee unduly. Time was when I was Captain of the Host, and learned how battles were lost by lack of rest. Therefore have thy sleep now, that thou mayst wax in strength for our helping."

Said Hallblithe: "I need not rest; I may not rest; I will not rest."

Said the sad man: "It is lawful for thee to rest. So say I, who was once a master of law."

Said the long-hoary elder: "And I command thee to rest; I who was once the king of a mighty folk."

In sooth Hallblithe was now exceeding weary; so he laid him down and slept sweetly in the stony wilderness amidst those three seekers, the old, the sad, and the very old.

WHEN he awoke he felt well and strong again, and he leapt to his feet and looked about him, and saw the three seekers stirring, and he deemed by the sun that it was early morning. The sad man brought forth bread and water and wine, and they broke their fast; and when they had done he spake and said: "Abideth

now in wallet and bottle but one more full meal for us, and then no more save a few crumbs and a drop or two of wine if we husband it well."

Said the second elder: "Get we to the road, then, and make haste. I have been seeking, and meseemeth, though the way be long, it is not utterly blind for us. Or look thou, Raven-son, is there not a path yonder that leadeth onward up to the brow of the ghyll again? and as I have seen, it leadeth on again down from the said brow."

Forsooth there was a track that led through the stony tangle of the wilderness; so they took to the road with a good heart, and went all day, and saw no living thing, and not a blade of grass or a trickle of water: nought save the wan rocks under the sun; and though they trusted in their road that it led them aright, they saw no other glimpse of the Glittering Plain, because there rose a great ridge like a wall on the north side, and they went as it were down along a trench of the rocks, albeit it was whiles broken across by ghylls, and knolls, and reefs.

So at sunset they rested and ate their victual, for they were very weary; and thereafter they lay down, and slept as soundly as if they were in the best of the halls of men. On the morrow betimes they arose soberly and went their ways with few words, and, as they deemed, the path still led them onward. And now the great ridge on the north rose steeper and steeper, and their crossing it seemed not to be thought of; but their half-blind track failed them not. They rested at even, and ate and drank what little they had left, save a mouthful or two of wine, and then went on again by the light of the moon, which was so bright that they still saw their way. And it happened to Hallblithe, as mostly it does with men very travel-worn, that he went on and on scarce remembering where he was, or who his fellows were, or that he had any fellows.

So at midnight they lay down in the wilderness again, hungry and weary. They rose at dawn and went forward with waning hope: for now the mountain ridge on the north was close to their path, rising up along a sheer wall of pale stone over which nothing might go save the fowl flying; so that at first on that morning they looked for nothing save to lay their bones in that grievous desert where no man should find them.

284 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

But, as beset with famine, they fared on heavily down the narrow track, there came a hoarse cry from Hallblithe's dry throat and it was as if his cry had been answered by another like to his; and the seekers turned and beheld him pointing to the cliff-side, and lo! half-way up the pale sun-litten crag stood two ravens in a cranny of the stone, flapping their wings and croaking, with thrusting forth and twisting of their heads; and presently they came floating on the thin pure air high up over the heads of the wayfarers, croaking for the pleasure of the meeting, as though they laughed thereat.

Then rose the heart of Hallblithe, and he smote his palms together, and fell to singing an old song of his people, amidst the rocks whereas few men had sung aforetime.

WHENCE are ye and whither, O fowl of our fathers?
What field have ye looked on, what acres unshorn?
What land have ye left where the battle-folk gathers,
And the war-helms are white o'er the paths of the corn?

What tale do ye bear of the people uncraven,
Where amidst the long hall-shadow sparkle the spears;
Where aloft on the hall-ridge now flappeth the raven,
And singeth the song of the nourishing years?

There gather the lads in the first of the morning,
While white lies the battle-day's dew on the grass,
And the kind steeds trot up to the horn's voice of warning,
And the winds wake and whine in the dusk of the pass.

O fowl of our fathers, why now are ye resting?
Come over the mountains and look on the foe.
Full fair after fight won shall yet be your nesting;
And your fledglings the sons of the kindred shall know.

Therewith he strode with his head upraised, and above him flew the ravens, croaking as if they answered his song in friendly fashion.

It was but a little after this that the path turned aside sharp toward the cliffs, and the seekers were abashed thereof, till Hallblithe

running forward beheld a great cavern in the face of the cliff at the path's ending: so he turned and cried on his fellows, and they hastened up, and presently stood before that cavern's mouth with doubt and joy mingled in their minds; for now, mayhappen, they had reached the gate of the Glittering Plain, or mayhappen the gate of death.

The sad man hung his head and spake: "Doth not some new trap abide us? What do we here? is this aught save death?"

Spake the Elder of Elders: "Was not death on either hand e'en now, even as treason besetteth the king upon his throne?"

And the second said: "Yea, we were as the host which hath no road save through the multitude of foemen."

But Hallblithe laughed and said: "Why do ye hang back, then? As for me, if death be here, soon is mine errand sped." Therewith he led the way into the dark of the cave, and the ravens hung about the crag overhead croaking, as the men left the light.

So was their way swallowed up in the cavern, and day and its time became nought to them; they went on and on, and became exceeding faint and weary, but rested not, for death was behind them. Whiles they deemed they heard waters running, and whiles the singing of fowl; and to Hallblithe it seemed that he heard his name called, so that he shouted back in answer; but all was still when the sound of his voice had died out.

At last, when they were pressing on again after a short while of resting, Hallblithe cried out that the cave was lightening: so they hastened onward, and the light grew till they could dimly see each other, and dimly they beheld the cave that it was both wide and high. Yet a little further, and their faces showed white to one another, and they could see the crannies of the rocks, and the bats hanging garlanded from the roof. So then they came to where the day streamed down bright on them from a break overhead, and lo! the sky and green leaves waving against it.

To those way-worn men it seemed hard to clamber out that way, and especially to the elders: so they went on a little further to see if there were aught better abiding them, but when they found the daylight failing them again, they turned back to the place of the break in the roof, lest they should waste their strength and perish in the bowels of the mountain. So with much ado they

hove up Hallblithe till he got him first on to a ledge of the rocky wall, and so, what by strength, what by cunning, into the daylight through the rent in the roof. So when he was without he made a rope of his girdle and strips from his raiment, for he was ever a deft craftsman, and made a shift to heave up therewith the sad man, who was light and lithe of body; and then the two together dealt with the elders one after another, till they were all four on the face of the earth again.

The place whereto they had gotten was the side of a huge mountain, stony and steep, but set about with bushes, which seemed full fair to those wanderers amongst the rocks. This mountain-slope went down towards a fair green plain, which Hallblithe made no doubt was the outlying waste of the Glittering Plain: nay, he deemed that he could see afar off thereon the white walls of the Uttermost House. So much he told the seekers in few words; and then while they grovelled on the earth and wept for pure joy, whereas the sun was down and it was beginning to grow dusk, he went and looked around soberly to see if he might find water and any kind of victual; and presently a little down the hillside he came upon a place where a spring came gushing up out of the earth and ran down toward the plain; and about it was green grass growing plentifully, and a little thicket of bramble and wilding fruit-trees. So he drank of the water, and plucked him a few wilding apples somewhat better than crabs, and then went up the hill again and fetched the seekers to that mountain hostelry; and while they drank of the stream he plucked them apples and bramble-berries. For indeed they were as men out of their wits, and were dazed by the extremity of their joy, and as men long shut up in prison, to whom the world of men-folk hath become strange. Simple as the victual was, they were somewhat strengthened by it and by the plentiful water, and as night was now upon them, it was of no avail for them to go further: so they slept beneath the boughs of the thorn-bushes.

CHAPTER XVIII. HALLBLITHE DWELLETH IN THE WOOD ALONE.

BUT on the morrow they arose betimes, and broke their fast on that woodland victual, and then went speedily down the mountain-side; and Hallblithe saw by the clear morning light that it was indeed the Uttermost House which he had seen across the green waste. So he told the seekers; but they were silent and heeded nought, because of a fear that had come upon them, lest they should die before they came into that good land. At the foot of the mountain they came upon a river, deep but not wide, with low grassy banks, and Hallblithe, who was an exceeding strong swimmer, helped the seekers over without much ado; and there they stood upon the grass of that goodly waste.

Hallblithe looked on them to note if any change should come over them, and he deemed that already they were become stronger and of more avail. But he spake nought thereof, and strode on toward the Uttermost House, even as that other day he had stridden away from it.

Such diligence they made, that it was but little after noon when they came to the door thereof. Then Hallblithe took the horn and blew upon it, while his fellows stood by murmuring, "It is the Land! It is the Land!"

So came the Warden to the door, clad in red scarlet, and the elder went up to him and said: "Is this the Land?"

"What land?" said the Warden.

"Is it the Glittering Plain?" said the second of the seekers.

"Yea, forsooth," said the Warden. Said the sad man: "Will ye lead us to the King?"

"Ye shall come to the King," said the Warden.

"When, oh when?" cried they out all three.

"The morrow of to-morrow, maybe," said the Warden.

"Oh! if to-morrow were but come!" they cried.

"It will come," said the red man; "enter ye the house, and eat and drink and rest you."

So they entered, and the Warden heeded Hallblithe nothing. They ate and drank and then went to their rest, and Hallblithe lay in a shut-bed off from the hall, but the Warden brought the

seekers elsewhere, so that Hallblithe saw them not after he had gone to bed; but as for him he slept and forgot that aught was.

In the morning when he awoke he felt very strong and well-liking; and he beheld his limbs that they were clear of skin and sleek and fair; and he heard one hard by in the hall carolling and singing joyously. So he sprang from his bed with the wonder of sleep yet in him, and drew the curtains of the shut-bed and looked forth into the hall; and lo! on the high-seat a man of thirty winters by seeming, tall, fair of fashion, with golden hair and eyes as grey as glass, proud and noble of aspect; and anigh him sat another man of like age to look on, a man strong and burly, with short curling brown hair and a red beard, and ruddy countenance, and the mien of a warrior. Also, up and down the hall, paced a man younger of aspect than these two, tall and slender, black-haired and dark-eyed, amorous of countenance; he it was who was singing a snatch of song as he went lightly on the hall pavement: a snatch like to this:

FAIR is the world, now autumn's wearing,
And the sluggard sun lies long abed;
Sweet are the days, now winter's nearing,
And all winds feign that the wind is dead.

Dumb is the hedge where the crabs hang yellow,
Bright as the blossoms of the spring;
Dumb is the close where the pears grow mellow,
And none but the dauntless redbreasts sing.

Fair was the spring, but amidst his greening
Grey were the days of the hidden sun;
Fair was the summer, but overweening,
So soon his o'er-sweet days were done.

Come then, love, for peace is upon us,
Far off is failing, and far is fear,
Here where the rest in the end hath won us,
In the garnering tide of the happy year.

Come from the grey old house by the water,
Where, far from the lips of the hungry sea,
Green groweth the grass o'er the field of the slaughter,
And all is a tale for thee and me.

So Hallblithe did on his raiment and went into the hall; and when those three saw him they smiled upon him kindly and greeted him; and the noble man at the board said: "Thanks have thou, O Warrior of the Raven, for thy help in our need: thy reward from us shall not be lacking."

Then the brown-haired man came up to him, and clapped him on the back and said to him: "Brisk man of the Raven, good is thy help at need; even so shall be mine to thee henceforward."

But the young man stepped up to him lightly, and cast his arms about him, and kissed him, and said: "O friend and fellow, who knoweth but I may one day help thee as thou hast holpen me? though thou art one who by seeming mayst well help thyself. And now mayst thou be as merry as I am to-day!"

Then they all three cried out joyously: "It is the Land! It is the Land!"

So Hallblithe knew that these men were the two elders and the sad man of yesterday, and that they had renewed their youth.

Joyously now did those men break their fast: nor did Hallblithe make any grim countenance, for he thought: "That which these dotards and drivellers have been mighty enough to find, shall I not be mighty enough to flee from?" Breakfast done, the seekers made little delay, so eager as they were to behold the King, and to have handsel of their new sweet life. So they got them ready to depart, and the once-captain said: "Art thou able to lead us to the King, O Raven-son, or must we seek another man to do so much for us?"

Said Hallblithe: "I am able to lead you so nigh unto Woodend (where, as I deem, the King abideth) that ye shall not miss him."

Therewith they went to the door, and the Warden unlocked to them, and spake no word to them when they departed, though they thanked him kindly for the guesting.

When they were without the garth, the young man fell to running about the meadow plucking great handfuls of the rich flowers that grew about, singing and carolling the while. But he who had been king looked up and down and round about, and said at last: "Where be the horses and the men?"

But his fellow with the red beard said: "Raven-son, in this land when they journey, what do they as to riding or going afoot?"

Said Hallblithe: "Fair fellows, ye shall wot that in this land folk go afoot for the most part, both men and women; whereas they weary but little, and are in no haste."

Then the once-captain clapped the once-king on the shoulder, and said: "Hearken, lord, and delay no longer, but gird up thy gown, since here is no mare's son to help thee: for fair is to-day that lies before us, with many a fair new day beyond it."

So Hallblithe led the way inward, thinking of many things, yet but little of his fellows. Albeit they, and the younger man especially, were of many words; for this black-haired man had many questions to ask, chiefly concerning the women, what they were like to look on, and of what mood they were. Hallblithe answered thereto as long as he might, but at last he laughed and said: "Friend, forbear thy questions now; for meseemeth in a few hours thou shalt be aswise hereon as is the God of Love himself."

So they made diligence along the road, and all was tidingless till on the second day at even they came to the first house off the waste. There had they good welcome, and slept. But on the morrow when they arose, Hallblithe spake to the Seekers, and said: "Now are things much changed betwixt us since the time when we first met: for then I had all my desire, as I thought, and ye had but one desire, and well nigh lacked hope of its fulfilment. Whereas now the lack hath left you and come to me. Wherefore even as time agone ye might not abide even one night at the House of the Raven, so hard as your desire lay on you; even so it fareth with me to-day, that I am consumed with my desire, and I may not abide with you; lest that befall which befalleth betwixt the full man and the fasting. Wherefore now I bless you and depart."

They abounded in words of good-will to him, and the once-king said: "Abide with us, and we shall see to it that thou have all the dignities that a man may think of."

And the once-captain said: "Lo, here is mine hand that hath been mighty; never shalt thou lack it for the accomplishment of thine uttermost desire. Abide with us."

Lastly said the young man: "Abide with us, Son of the Raven! Set thine heart on a fair woman, yea even were it the fairest; and I will get her for thee, even were my desire set on her."

But he smiled on them, and shook his head, and said: "All hail to you! but mine errand is yet undone." And therewith he departed.

He skirted Wood-end and came not to it, but got him down to the side of the sea, not far from where he first came aland, but somewhat south of it. A fair oak-wood came down close to the beach of the sea; it was some four miles end-long and overthwart. Thither Hallblithe betook him, and in a day or two got him wood-wright's tools from a house of men a little outside the wood, three miles from the sea-shore. Then he set to work and built him a little frame-house on a lawn of the wood beside a clear stream; for he was a very deft wood-wright. Withal he made him a bow and arrows, and shot what he would of the fowl and the deer for his livelihood; and folk from that house and otherwhence came to see him, and brought him bread and wine and spicery and other matters which he needed. And the days wore, and men got used to him, and loved him as if he had been a rare image which had been brought to that land for its adornment; and now they no longer called him the Spearman, but the Wood-lover. And as for him, he took all in patience, abiding what the lapse of days should bring forth.

CHAPTER XIX. HALLBLITHE BUILDS HIM A SKIFF.

AFTER Hallblithe had been housed a little while, and the time was again drawing nigh to the twelfth moon since he had come to the Glittering Plain, he went in the wood one day; and, pondering many things without fixing on any one, he stood before a very great oak-tree and looked at the tall straight bole thereof, and there came into his head the words of an old song which was written round a scroll of the carving over the shut-bed, wherein he was wont to lie when he was at home in the House of the Raven: and thus it said:

I am the oak-tree, and forsooth
Men deal by me with little ruth;
My boughs they shred, my life they slay,
And speed me o'er the watery way.

He looked up into that leafy world for a little and then turned back toward his house; but all day long, whether he were at work or at rest, that posy ran in his head, and he kept on saying it over, aloud or not aloud, till the day was done and he went to sleep.

Then in his sleep he dreamed that an exceeding fair woman stood by his bedside, and at first she seemed to him to be an image of the Hostage. But presently her face changed, and her body and her raiment; and, lo! it was the lovely woman, the King's daughter whom he had seen wasting her heart for the love of him. Then even in his dream shame thereof overtook him, and because of that shame he awoke, and lay awake a little, hearkening the wind going through the woodland boughs, and the singing of the owl who had her dwelling in the hollow oak nigh to his house. Slumber overcame him in a little while, and again the image of the King's daughter came to him in his dream, and again when he looked upon her, shame and pity rose so hotly in his heart that he awoke weeping, and lay a while hearkening to the noises of the night. The third time he slept and dreamed; and once more that image came to him. And now he looked, and saw that she had in her hand a book covered outside with gold and gems, even as he saw it in the orchard-close aforetime: and he beheld her face that it

THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN 293

was no longer the face of one sick with sorrow; but glad and clear, and most beauteous.

Now she opened the book and held it before Hallblithe and turned the leaves so that he might see them clearly; and therein were woods and castles painted, and burning mountains, and the wall of the world, and kings upon their thrones, and fair women and warriors, all most lovely to behold, even as he had seen it aforetime in the orchard when he lay lurking amidst the leaves of the bay-tree.

So at last she came to the place in the book wherein was painted Hallblithe's own image over against the image of the Hostage; and he looked thereon and longed. But she turned the leaf, and, lo! on one side the Hostage again, standing in a fair garden of the spring with the lilies all about her feet, and behind her the walls of a house, grey, ancient, and lovely: and on the other leaf over against her was painted a sea rippled by a little wind and a boat thereon sailing swiftly, and one man alone in the boat sitting and steering with a cheerful countenance; and he, who but Hallblithe himself. Hallblithe looked thereon for a while and then the King's daughter shut the book, and the dream flowed into other imaginings of no import.

In the grey dawn Hallblithe awoke, and called to mind his dream, and he leapt from his bed and washed the night from off him in the stream, and clad himself and went the shortest way through the wood to that House of folk aforesaid: and as he went his face was bright and he sang the second part of the carven posy; to wit:

Along the grass I lie forlorn
That when a while of time is worn,
I may be filled with war and peace
And bridge the sundering of the seas.

He came out of the wood and hastened over the flowery meads of the Glittering Plain, and came to that same house when it was yet very early. At the door he came across a damsel bearing water from the well, and she spake to him and said: "Welcome, Wood-lover! Seldom art thou seen in our garth; and that is a pity of thee. And now I look on thy face I see that gladness hath come into

thine heart, and that thou art most fair and lovely. Here then is a token for thee of the increase of gladness." Therewith she set her buckets on the earth, and stood before him, and took him by the ears, and drew down his face to hers and kissed him sweetly. He smiled on her and said: "I thank thee, sister, for the kiss and the greeting; but I come here having a lack."

"Tell us," she said, "that we may do thee a pleasure."

He said: "I would ask the folk to give me timber, both beams and battens and boards; for if I hew in the wood it will take long to season."

"All this is free for thee to take from our wood-store when thou hast broken thy fast with us," said the damsel. "Come thou in and rest thee."

She took him by the hand and they went in together, and she gave him to eat and drink, and went up and down the house, saying to every one: "Here is come the Wood-lover, and he is glad again; come and see him."

So the folk gathered about him, and made much of him. And when they had made an end of breakfast, the head man of the House said to him: "The beasts are in the wain, and the timber abideth thy choosing; come and see."

So he brought Hallblithe to the timber-bower, where he chose for himself all that he needed of oak-timber of the best; and they loaded the wain therewith, and gave him what he would moreover of nails and tree-nails and other matters; and he thanked them; and they said to him: "Whither now shall we lead thy timber?"

"Down to the sea-side," quoth he, "nighest to my dwelling."

So did they, and more than a score, men and women, went with him, some in the wain, and some afoot. Thus they came down to the sea-shore, and laid the timber on the strand just above high-water mark; and straightway Hallblithe fell to work shaping him a boat, for well he knew the whole craft thereof; and the folk looked on wondering, till the tide had ebbd the little it was wont to ebb, and left the moist sand firm and smooth; then the women left watching Hallblithe's work, and fell to paddling barefoot in the clear water, for there was scarce a ripple on the sea; and the carles came and played with them so that Hallblithe was left alone a while; for this kind of play was new to that folk, since they

seldom came down to the sea-side. Thereafter they needs must dance together, and would have had Hallblithe dance with them; and when he naysaid them because he was fain of his work, in all playfulness they fell to taking the adze out of his hand, whereat he became somewhat wroth, and they were afraid and went and had their dance out without him.

By this time the sun was grown very hot, and they came to him again, and lay down about him and watched his work, for they were weary. And one of the women, still panting with the dance, spake as she looked on the loveliness of her limbs, which one of the swains was caressing: "Brother," said she, "great strokes thou smitest; when wilt thou have smitten the last of them, and come to our house again?"

"Not for many days, fair sister," said he, without looking up.

"Alas that thou shouldst talk so," said a carle, rising up from the warm sand; "what shall all thy toil win thee?"

Spake Hallblithe: "Maybe a merry heart, or maybe death."

At that word they all rose up together, and stood huddled together like sheep that have been driven to the croft-gate, and the shepherd hath left them for a little and they know not whither to go. Little by little they got them to the wain and harnessed their beasts thereto, and departed silently by the way that they had come; but in a little time Hallblithe heard their laughter and merry speech across the flowery meadows. He heeded their departure little, but went on working, and worked the sun down, and on till the stars began to twinkle. Then he went home to his house in the wood, and slept and dreamed not, and began again on the morrow with a good heart.

To be short, no day passed that he wrought not his full tale of work, and the days wore, and his shipwright's work throve. Often the folk of that house, and from otherwhere round about, came down to the strand to watch him working. Nowise did they wilfully hinder him, but whiles when they could get no talk from him, they would speak of him to each other, wondering that he should so toil to sail upon the sea; for they loved the sea but little, and it soon became clear to them that he was looking to nought else: though it may not be said that they deemed he would leave the land for ever. On the other hand, if they hindered him not, neither did

296 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

they help, saving when he prayed them for somewhat which he needed, which they would then give him blithely.

Of the Sea-eagle and his damsel, Hallblithe saw nought; whereat he was well content, for he deemed it of no avail to make a second sundering of it.

So he worked and kept his heart up, and at last all was ready; he had made him a mast and a sail, and oars, and whatso-other gear there was need of. So then he thrust his skiff into the sea on an evening whenas there were but two carles standing by; for there would often be a score or two of folk. These two smiled on him and bespake him kindly, but would not help him when he bade them set shoulder to her bows and shove. Albeit he got the skiff into the water without much ado, and got into her, and brought her to where a stream running from out of his wood made a little haven for her up from the sea. There he tied her to a tree-bole, and busied himself that even with getting the gear into her, and victual and water withal, as much as he deemed he should need: and so, being weary, he went to his house to sleep, thinking that he should awake in the grey of the morning and thrust out into the deep sea. And he was the more content to abide, because on that eve, as oftenest betid, the wind blew landward from the sea, whereas in the morning it oftenest blew seaward from the land. In any case he thought to be astir so timely that he should come alone to his keel, and depart with no leave-takings. But, as it fell out, he overslept himself, so that when he came out into the wood clad in all his armour, with his sword girt to his side, and his spear over his shoulder, he heard the voices of folk, and presently found so many gathered about his boat that he had some ado to get aboard.

The folk had brought many gifts for him of such things as they deemed he might need for a short voyage, as fruit and wine, and woollen cloths to keep the cold night from him; he thanked them kindly as he stepped over the gunwale, and some of the women kissed him: and one said (she it was, who had met him at the stead that morning when he went to fetch timber): "Thou wilt be back this even, wilt thou not, brother? It is yet but early, and thou shalt have time enough to take all thy pleasure on the sea, and then come back to us to eat thy meat in our house at nightfall."

She spake, knitting her brows in longing for his return; but he

knew that all those deemed he would come back again soon; else had they deemed him a rebel of the King, and might, as he thought, have stayed him. So he changed not countenance in any wise, but said only: "Farewell, sister, for this day, and farewell to all you till I come back."

Therewith he unmoored his boat, and sat down and took the oars, and rowed till he was out of the little haven, and on the green sea, and the keel rose and fell on the waves. Then he stepped the mast and hoisted sail, and sheeted home, for the morning wind was blowing gently from the mountains over the meadows of the Glittering Plain, so the sail filled, and the keel leapt forward and sped over the face of the cold sea. And it is to be said that whether he wotted or not, it was the very day twelve months since he had come to that shore along with the Sea-eagle. So that folk stood and watched the skiff growing less and less upon the deep till they could scarce see her. Then they turned about and went into the wood to disport them, for the sun was growing hot. Nevertheless, there were some of them (and that damsel was one), who came back to the sea-shore from time to time all day long; and even when the sun was down they looked seaward under the rising moon, expecting to see Hallblithe's bark come into the shining path which she drew across the waters round about the Glittering Land.

CHAPTER XX. SO NOW SAILETH HALLBLITHE AWAY FROM THE GLITTERING PLAIN.

BUT as to Hallblithe, he soon lost sight of the Glittering Plain and the mountains thereof, and there was nought but sea all round about him, and his heart swelled with joy as he sniffed the brine and watched the gleaming hills and valleys of the restless deep; and he said to himself that he was going home to his Kindred and the Roof of his Fathers of old time.

He stood as near due north as he might; but as the day wore, the wind headed him, and he deemed it not well to beat, lest he should make his voyage overlong; so he ran on with the wind abeam, and his little craft leapt merrily over the sea-hills under the freshening breeze. The sun set and the moon and stars shone out, and he still sailed on, and durst not sleep, save as a dog does,

298 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

with one eye. At last came dawn, and as the light grew it was a fair day with a falling wind, and a bright sky, but it clouded over before sunset, and the wind freshened from the north by east, and, would he, would he not, Hallblithe must run before it night-long, till at sunrise it fell again, and all day was too light for him to make much way beating to northward; nor did it freshen till after the moon was risen some while after sunset. And now he was so weary that he must needs sleep; so he lashed the helm, and took a reef in the sail, and ran before the wind, he sleeping in the stern.

But past the middle of the night, towards the dawning, he awoke with the sound of a great shout in his ears. So he looked over the dark waters, and saw nought, for the night was cloudy again. Then he trimmed his craft, and went to sleep again, for he was overburdened with slumber.

WHEN he awoke it was broad daylight; so he looked to the tiller and got the boat's head a little up to the wind, and then gazed about him with the sleep still in his eyes. And as his eyes took in the picture before him he could not refrain a cry; for lo! there arose up great and grim right ahead the black cliffs of the Isle of Ransom. Straightway he got to the sheet, and strove to wear the boat; but for all that he could do she drifted toward the land, for she was gotten into a strong current of the sea that set shoreward. So he struck sail, and took the oars and rowed mightily so that he might bear her off shore; but it availed nothing, and still he drifted landward. So he stood up from the oars, and turned about and looked, and saw that he was but some three furlongs from the shore, and that he was come to the very haven-mouth whence he had set sail with the Sea-eagle a twelvemonth ago: and he knew that into that haven he needs must get him, or be dashed to pieces against the high cliffs of the land: and he saw how the waves ran on to the cliffs, and whiles one higher than the others smote the rock-wall and ran up it, as if it could climb over on to the grassy lip beyond, and then fell back again, leaving a river of brine running down the steep.

Then he said that he would take what might befall him inside the haven. So he hoisted sail again, and took the tiller, and steered right for the midmost of the gate between the rocks, wondering

what should await him there. Then it was but a few minutes ere his bark shot into the smoothness of the haven, and presently began to lose way; for all the wind was dead within that land-locked water. Hallblithe looked steadily round about seeking his foe; but the haven was empty of ship or boat; so he ran his eye along the shore to see where he should best lay his keel; and as aforesaid there was no beach there, and the water was deep right up to the grassy lip of the land; though the tides ran somewhat high, and at low water would a little steep undercliff go up from the face of the sea. But now it was near the top of the tide, and there was scarce two feet betwixt the grass and the dark-green sea.

Now Hallblithe steered toward an angle of the haven; and beyond it, a little way off, rose a reef of rocks out of the green grass, and thereby was a flock of sheep feeding, and a big man lying down amongst them, who seemed to be unarmed, as Hallblithe could not see any glint of steel about him. Hallblithe drew nigh the shore, and the big man stirred not; nor did he any the more when the keel ran along the shore, and Hallblithe leapt out and moored his craft to his spear stuck deep in the earth. And now Hallblithe deems that the man must be either dead or asleep: so he drew his sword and had it in his right hand, and in his left a sharp knife, and went straight up to the man betwixt the sheep, and found him so lying on his side that he could not see his face; so he stirred him with his foot, and cried out: "Awake, O Shepherd! for dawn is long past and day is come, and therewithal a guest for thee!"

The man turned over and slowly sat up, and, lo! who should it be but the Puny Fox? Hallblithe started back at the sight of him, and cried out at him, and said: "Have I found thee, O mine enemy?"

The Puny Fox sat up a little straighter, and rubbed his eyes and said: "Yea, thou hast found me sure enough. But as to my being thine enemy, a word or two may be said about that presently."

"What!" said Hallblithe, "dost thou deem that aught save my sword will speak to thee?"

"I wot not," said the Puny Fox, slowly rising to his feet, "but I suppose thou wilt not slay me unarmed, and thou seest that I have no weapons."

300 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

“Get thee weapons, then,” quoth Hallblithe, “and delay not; for the sight of thee alive sickens me.”

“Ill is that,” said the Puny Fox, “but come thou with me at once, where I shall find both the weapons and a good fighting-stand. Hasten! time presseth, now thou art come at last.”

“And my boat?” said Hallblithe.

“Wilt thou carry her in thy pouch?” said the Puny Fox; “thou wilt not need her again, whether thou slay me, or I thee.”

Hallblithe knit his brows on him in his wrath; for he deemed that Fox’s meaning was to threaten him with the vengeance of the kindred. Howbeit, he said nought; for he deemed it ill to wrangle in words with one whom he was presently to meet in battle; so he followed as the Puny Fox led. Fox brought him past the reef of rock aforesaid, and up a narrow cleft of the cliffs overlooking the sea, whereby they came into a little grass-grown meadow well nigh round in shape, as smooth and level as a hall-floor, and fenced about by a wall of rock: a place which had once been the mouth of an earth-fire, and a cauldron of molten stone.

WHEN they stood on the smooth grass Fox said: “Hold thee there a little, while I go to my weapon-chest, and then shall we see what is to be done.”

Therewith he turned aside to a cranny of the rock, and going down on his hands and knees, fell to creeping like a worm up a hole therein, which belike led to a cavern; for after his voice had come forth from the earth, grunting and groaning, and cursing this thing, and that, out he comes again feet first, and casts down an old rusty sword without a sheath; a helm no less rusty, and battered withal, and a round target, curled up and outworn as if it would fall to pieces of itself. Then he stands up and stretches himself, and smiles pleasantly on Hallblithe and says: “Now, mine enemy, when I have donned helm and shield and got my sword in hand, we may begin the play: as to a hauberk I must needs go lack; for I could not come by it; I think the old man must have chaffered it away: he was ever too money-fain.”

But Hallblithe looked on him angrily and said: “Hast thou brought me hither to mock me? Hast thou no better weapons wherewith to meet a warrior of the Raven than these rusty shards,

which look as if thou hadst robbed a grave of the dead? I will not fight thee so armed."

"Well," said the Puny Fox, "and from out of a grave come they verily: for in that little hole lieth my father's grandsire, the great Sea-mew of the Ravagers, the father of that Sea-eagle whom thou knowest. But since thou thinkest scorn of these weapons of a dead warrior, in go the old carle's treasures again! It is as well maybe; since he might be wrath beyond his wont if he were to wake and miss them; and already this cold cup of the once-boiling rock is not wholly safe because of him."

So he crept into the hole once more, and out of it presently, and stood smiting his palms one against the other to dust them, like a man who has been handling parchments long laid by; and Hallblithe stood looking at him, still wrathful, but silent.

Then said the Puny Fox: "This at least was a wise word of thine, that thou wouldst not fight me. For the end of fighting is slaying; and it is stark folly to fight without slaying; and now I see that thou desirest not to slay me: for if thou didst, why didst thou refuse to fall on me armed with the ghosts of weapons that I borrowed from a ghost? Nay, why didst thou not slay me as I crept out of yonder hole? Thou wouldst have had a cheap bargain of me either way. It would be rank folly to fight me."

Said Hallblithe hoarsely: "Why didst thou bewray me, and lie to me, and lure me away from the quest of my beloved, and waste a whole year of my life?"

"It is a long story," said the Puny Fox, "which I may tell thee some day. Meantime I may tell thee this, that I was compelled thereto by one far mightier than I, to wit the Undying King."

At that word the smouldering wrath blazed up in Hallblithe, and he drew his sword hastily and hewed at the Puny Fox: but he leapt aside nimbly and ran in on Hallblithe, and caught his sword-arm by the wrist, and tore the weapon out of his hand, and overbore him by sheer weight and stature, and drave him to the earth. Then he rose up, and let Hallblithe rise also, and took his sword and gave it into his hand again and said: "Crag-nester, thou art wrathful, but little. Now thou hast thy sword again and mayst slay me if thou wilt. Yet not until I have spoken a word to thee: so hearken! or else by the Treasure of the Sea I will slay thee with

my bare hands. For I am strong indeed in this place with my old kinsman beside me. Wilt thou hearken?"

"Speak," said Hallblithe, "I hearken."

Said the Puny Fox: "True it is that I lured thee away from thy quest, and wore away a year of thy life. Yet true it is also that I repent me thereof, and ask thy pardon. What sayest thou?"

Hallblithe spake not, but the heat died out of his face and he was become somewhat pale. Said the Puny Fox: "Dost thou not remember, O Raven, how thou badest me battle last year on the sea-shore by the side of the Rollers of the Raven? and how this was to be the prize of battle, that the vanquished should serve the vanquisher year-long, and do all his will? And now this prize and more thou hast won without battle; for I swear by the Treasure of the Sea, and by the bones of the great Sea-mew yonder, that I will serve thee not year-long but life-long, and that I will help thee in thy quest for thy beloved. What sayest thou?"

Hallblithe stood speechless a moment, looking past the Puny Fox, rather than at him. Then the sword tumbled out of his hand on to the grass, and great tears rolled down his cheeks and fell on to his raiment, and he reached out his hand to the Puny Fox and said: "O friend, wilt thou not bring me to her? for the days wear, and the trees are growing old round about the Acres of the Raven."

Then the Puny Fox took his hand, and laughed merrily in his face, and said: "Great is thine heart, O Carrion-biter! But now that thou art my friend I will tell thee that I have a deeming of the whereabouts of thy beloved. Or where deemest thou was the garden wherein thou sawest her standing on the page of the book in that dream of the night? So it is, O Raven-son, that it is not for nothing that my grandsire's father lieth in yonder hole of the rocks; for of late he hath made me wise in mighty lore. Thanks have thou, O kinsman!" And he turned him toward the rock wherein was the grave.

But Hallblithe said: "What is to do now? Am I not in a land of foemen?"

"Yea, forsooth," said the Puny Fox, "and even if thou knewest where thy love is, thou shouldst hardly escape from this isle unslain, save for me."

Said Hallblithe: "Is there not my bark, that I might depart at at once? for I deem not that the Hostage is on the Isle of Ransom."

The Puny Fox laughed boisterously and said: "Nay, she is not. But as to thy boat, there is so strong a set of the flood-tide toward this end of the isle, that with the wind blowing as now, from the north-north-east, thou mayst not get off the shore for four hours at least, and I misdoubt me that within that time we shall have tidings of a ship of ours coming into the haven. Thy bark they shall take, and thee also if thou art therein; and then soon were the story told, for they know thee for a rebel of the Undying King. Harken! Dost thou not hear the horn's voice? Come up hither and we shall see what is towards."

So saying, he led hastily up a kind of stair in the rock-wall, until they reached a cranny, whence through a hole in the cliff, they could see all over the haven. And lo! as they looked, in the very gate and entry of it came a great ship heaving up her bows on the last swell of the outer sea (where the wind had risen somewhat), and rolling into the smooth, land-locked water. Black was her sail, and the image of the Sea-eagle enwrought thereon spread wide over it; and the banner of the Flaming Sword streamed out from the stern. Many men all-weaponed were on the decks, and the minstrels high up on the poop were blowing a merry song of return on their battle-horns.

"Lo, you," said the Puny Fox, "thy luck or mine hath served thee this time, in that the Flaming Sword did not overhaul thee ere thou madest the haven. We are well here at least."

Said Hallblithe: "But may not some of them come up hither perchance?"

"Nay, nay," said the Puny Fox; "they fear the old man in the cleft yonder; for he is not over guest-fain. This mead is mine own, as for other living men; it is my unroofed house, and I have here a house with a roof also, which I will show thee presently. For now since the Flaming Sword hath come, there is no need for haste; nay, we cannot depart till they have gone up-country. So I will show thee presently what we shall do to-night."

So there they sat and watched those men bring their ship to the shore and moor her hard by Hallblithe's boat. They cried out when they saw her, and when they were a land they gathered

about her to note her build, and the fashion of the spear whereto she was tied. Then in a while the more part of them, some fourscore in number, departed up the valley toward the great house and left none but a half dozen ship-warders behind.

"Seest thou, friend of the Ravens," said the Fox, "hadst thou been there, they might have done with thee what they would. Did I not well to bring thee into my unroofed house?"

"Yea, verily," said Hallblithe; "but will not some of the shipwards, or some of the others returning, come up hither and find us? I shall yet lay my bones in this evil island."

The Puny Fox laughed, and said: "It is not so bad as thy sour looks would have it; anyhow it is good enough for a grave, and at this present I may call it a casket of precious things."

"What meanest thou?" said Hallblithe eagerly.

"Nay, nay," said the other, "nought but what thou knowest. Art thou not therein, and I myself? without reckoning the old carle in the hole yonder. But I promise thee thou shalt not die here this time, unless thou wilt. And as to folk coming up hither, I tell thee again they durst not; because they fear my great-grand-sire over much. Not that they are far wrong therein; for now he is dead, the worst of him seemeth to come out of him, and he is not easily dealt with, save by one who hath some share of his wisdom. Thou thyself couldst see by my kinsman, the Sea-eagle, how much of ill blood and churlish malice there may be in our kindred when they wax old, and loneliness and dreariness taketh hold of them. For I must tell thee that I have oft heard my father say that his father the Sea-eagle was in his youth and his prime blithe and buxom, a great lover of women, and a very friendly fellow. But ever, as I say, as the men of our kind wax in years, they worsen; and thereby mayst thou deem how bad the old man in yonder must be, since he hath lain so long in the grave. But now we will go to that house of mine on the other side of the mead, over against my kinsman's."

Therewith he led Hallblithe down from the rock, while Hallblithe said to him: "What! art thou also dead that thou hast a grave here?"

"Nay, nay," said Fox, smiling, "am I so evil-conditioned then? I am no older than thou art."

“But tell me,” said Hallblithe, “wilt thou also wax evil as thou growest old?”

“Maybe not,” said Fox, looking hard at him, “for in my mind it is that I may be taken into another house, and another kindred, and amongst them I shall be healed of much that might turn to ill.”

THEREWITH were they come across the little meadow to a place where was a cave in the rock closed with a door, and a wicket window therein. Fox led Hallblithe into it, and within it was no ill dwelling; for it was dry and clean, and there were stools therein and a table, and shelves and lockers in the wall. When they had sat them down Fox said: “Here mightest thou dwell safely as long as thou wouldst, if thou wouldst risk dealings with the old carle. But, as I wot well that thou art in haste to be gone and get home to thy kindred, I must bring thee at dusk to-day close up to our feast-hall, so that thou mayst be at hand to do what hath to be done to-night, so that we may get us gone to-morrow. Also thou must do off thy Raven gear lest we meet any in the twilight as we go up to the house; and here have I to hand home-spun raiment such as our war-taken thralls wear, which shall serve thy turn well enough; but this thou needst not do on till the time is at hand for our departure; and then I will bring thee away, and bestow thee in a bower hard by the hall; and when thou art within, I may so look to it that none shall go in there, or if they do, they shall see nought in thee save a carle known to them by name. My kinsman hath learned me to do harder things than this. But now it is time to eat and drink.”

Therewith he drew victual from out a locker and they fell to. But when they had eaten, Fox taught Hallblithe what he should do in the hall that night, as shall be told hereafter. And then, with much talk about many things, they wore away the day in that ancient cup of the seething rock, and a little before dusk set out for the hall, bearing with them Hallblithe's gear bundled up together, as though it had been wares from over sea. So they came to the house before the tables were set, and the Puny Fox bestowed Hallblithe in a bower which gave into the buttery, so that it was easy to go straight into the mid-most of the hall. There was Hallblithe clad and armed in his Raven gear; but Fox gave him

a vizard to go over his face, so that none might know him when he entered therein.

CHAPTER XXI. OF THE FIGHT OF THE CHAMPIONS IN THE HALL OF THE RAVAGERS.

NOW it is to be told that the chieftains came into the hall that night and sat down at the board on the dais, even as Hallblithe had seen them do aforetime. And the chieftain of all, who was called the Erne of the Sea-eagles, rose up according to custom and said: "Hearken, folk! this is a night of the champions, whereon we may not eat till the pale blades have clashed together, and one hath vanquished and another been overcome. Now let them stand forth and give out the prize of victory which the vanquished shall pay to the vanquisher. And let it be known, that, whosoever may be the champion that winneth the battle, whether he be a kinsman, or an alien, or a foeman declared; yea, though he have left the head of my brother at the hall-door, he shall pass this night with us safe from sword, safe from axe, safe from hand: he shall eat as we eat, drink as we drink, sleep as we sleep, and depart safe from any hand or weapon, and shall sail the sea at his pleasure in his own keel or in ours, as to him and us may be meet. Blow up horns for the champions!"

So the horns blew a cheerful strain, and when they were done, there came into the hall a tall man clad in black, and with black armour and weapons saving the white blade of his sword. He had a vizard over his face, but his hair came down from under his helm like the tail of a red horse.

So he stood amidst the floor and cried out: "I am the champion of the Ravagers. But I swear by the Treasure of the Sea that I will cross no blade to-night save with an alien, a foeman of the kindred. Hearest thou, O chieftain, O Erne of the Sea-eagles?"

"Hear it I do," said the chieftain, "and I deem that thy meaning is that we should go supperless to bed; and this cometh of thy perversity: for we know thee despite thy vizard. Belike thou deemest that thou shalt not be met this even, and that there is no free alien in the island to draw sword against thee. But beware! For when we came aland this morning we found a skiff of the

aliens tied to a great spear stuck in the bank of the haven; so that there will be one foeman at least abroad in the island. But we said if we should come on the man, we would set his head on the gable of the hall with the mouth open toward the North for a token of reproach to the dwellers in the land over sea. But now give out the prize of victory, and I swear by the Treasure of the Sea that we will abide by thy word."

Said the champion: "These are the terms and conditions of the battle; that whichso of us is vanquished, he shall either die, or serve the vanquisher for twelve moons, to fare with him at his will, to go his errands, and do according to his commandment in all wise. Hearest thou, chieftain?"

"Yea," said he, "and by the Undying King, both thou and we shall abide by this bargain. So look to it that thou smite great strokes, lest our hall lack a gable-knop. Horns, blow up for the alien champion!"

So again the horns were winded; and ere their voice had died, in from the buttery screens came a glittering image of war, and there stood the alien champion over against the warrior of the sea; and he too had a vizard over his face.

Now when the folk saw him, and how slim and light and small he looked beside their champion, and they beheld the Raven painted on his white shield, they hooted and laughed for scorn of him and his littleness. But he tossed his sword up lightly and caught it by the hilts as it fell, and drew nigher to the champion of the sea and stood facing him within reach of his sword. Then the chieftain on the high-seat put his two hands to his mouth and roared out: "Fall on, ye champions, fall on!"

But the folk in the hall were so eager that they stood on the benches and the boards, and craned over each other's shoulders, so that they might lose no whit of the hand-play. Now flashed the blades in the candle-lit hall, and the red-haired champion hove up his sword and smote two great strokes to right and to left; but the alien gave way before him, and the folk cried out at him in scorn and in joy of their champion, who fell to raining down great strokes like the hail amidst the lightning. But so deft was the alien, that he stood amidst it unhurt, and laid many strokes on his foeman, and did all so lightly and easily, that it seemed as if he were dancing

rather than fighting; and the folk held their peace and began to doubt if their huge champion would prevail. Now the red-haired fetched a mighty stroke at the alien, who leapt aside lightly and gat his sword in his left hand and dealt a great stroke on the other's head, and the red-haired staggered, for he had over-reached himself; and again the alien smote him a left-handed stroke so that he fell full length on the floor with a mighty clatter, and the sword flew out of his hand: and the folk were dumb-founded.

Then the alien threw himself on the sea-champion, and knelt upon him, and shortened his sword as if to slay him with a thrust. But thereon the man overthrown cried out: "Hold thine hand, for I am vanquished! Now give me peace according to the bargain struck between us, that I shall serve thee year-long, and follow thee wheresoever thou goest."

Therewith the alien champion arose and stood off from him, and the man of the sea gat to his feet, and did off his helm, so that all men could see that he was the Puny Fox.

Then the victorious champion unhelmed himself, and lo, it was Hallblithe! And a shout arose in the hall, part of wonder, part of wrath.

Then cried out the Puny Fox: "I call on all men here to bear witness that by reason of this battle, Hallblithe of the Ravens is free to come and go as he will in the Isle of Ransom, and to take help of any man that will help him, and to depart from the isle when he will and how he will, taking me with him if so he will."

Said the chieftain: "Yea, this is right and due, and so shall it be. But now, since no freeman, who is not a foe of the passing hour, may abide in our hall without eating of our meat, come up here, Hallblithe, and sit by me, and eat and drink of the best we have, since the Norns would not give us thine head for a gable-knop. But what wilt thou do with thy thrall the Puny Fox; and whereto in the hall wilt thou have him shown? Or wilt thou that he sit fasting in the darkness to-night, laid in gyves and fetters? Or shall he have the cheer of whipping and stripes, as befitteth a thrall to whom the master oweth a grudge? What is thy will with him?"

Said Hallblithe: "My will is that thou give him a seat next to me, whether that be high or low, or the bench of thy prison-house. That he eat of my dish, and drink of my cup, whatsoever the meat

and drink may be. For to-morrow I mean that we twain shall go under the earth-collar together, and that our blood shall run together and that we shall be brothers in arms henceforward." Then Hallblithe did on his helm again and drew his sword, and looked aside to the Puny Fox to bid him do the like, and he did so, and Hallblithe said: "Chieftain, thou hast bidden me to table, and I thank thee; but I will not set my teeth in meat, out of our own house and land, which hath not been truly given to me by one who wotteth of me, unless I have conquered it as a prey of battle; neither will I cast a lie into the loving-cup which shall pass from thy lips to mine: therefore I will tell thee, that though I laid a stroke or two on the Puny Fox, and those no light ones, yet was this battle nought true and real, but a mere beguiling, even as that which I saw foughten in this hall aforetime, when meseemeth the slain men rose up in time to drink the good-night cup. Therefore, O men of the Ravagers, and thou, O Puny Fox, there is nought to bind your hands and refrain your hearts, and ye may slay me if ye will without murder or dishonour, and may make the head of Hallblithe a knop for your feast-hall. Yet shall one or two fall to earth before I fall."

Therewith he shook his sword aloft, and a great roar arose, and weapons came down from the wall, and the candles shone on naked steel. But the Puny Fox came and stood by Hallblithe, and spake in his ear amidst the uproar: "Well now, brother-in-arms, I have been trying to learn thee the lore of lies, and surely thou art the worst scholar who was ever smitten by master. And the outcome of it is that I, who have lied so long and well, must now pay for all, and die for a barren truth."

Said Hallblithe: "Let all be as it will! I love thee, lies and all; but as for me I cannot handle them. Lo you! great and grim shall be the slaying, and we shall not fall unavenged."

Said the Puny Fox: "Hearken! for still they hang back. Belike it is I that have drawn this death on thee and me. My last lie was a fool's lie and we die for it: for what wouldst thou have done hadst thou wotted that thy beloved, the Hostage of the Rose—" He broke off perforce; for Hallblithe was looking to right and left and handling his sword, and heard not that last word of his; and from both sides of the hall the throng was drawing round about those

310 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

twain, weapon in hand. Then Hallblithe set his eyes on a big man in front who was heaving up a heavy short-sword and thought that he would at least slay this one. But or ever he might smite, the great horn blared out over the tumult, and men forbore a while and fell somewhat silent.

Then came down to them the voice of the chieftain, a loud voice, but clear and with mirth mingled with anger in it, and he said: "What do these fools of the Ravagers cumbering the floor of the feast-hall, and shaking weapons when there is no foeman anigh? Are they dreaming-drunk before the wine is poured? Why do they not sit down in their places, and abide the bringing in of the meat? And ye women, where are ye, why do ye delay our meat, when ye may well wot that our hearts are drooping for hunger; and all hath been duly done, the battle of the champions fought and won, and the prize of war given forth and taken? How long, O folk, shall your chieftains sit fasting?"

Then there arose great laughter in the hall, and men withdrew them from those twain and went and sat them down in their places.

Then the chieftain said: "Come up hither, I say, O Hallblithe, and bring thy war-thrall with thee if thou wilt. But delay not, unless it be so that thou art neither hungry nor thirsty; and good sooth thou shouldst be both; for men say that the ravens are hard to satisfy. Come then and make good cheer with us!"

So Hallblithe thrust his sword into the sheath, and the Puny Fox did the like, and they went both together up the hall to the high-seat. And Hallblithe sat down on the chieftain's right hand, and the Puny Fox next to him; and the chieftain, the Erne, said: "O Hallblithe, dost thou need thine armour at table; or dost thou find it handy to take thy meat clad in thy byrny and girt with a sword?"

Then laughed Hallblithe and said: "Nay, meseemeth to-night I shall need war-gear no more." And he stood up and did off all his armour and gave it, sword and all, into the hands of a woman, who bore it off, he knew not whither. And the Erne looked on him and said: "Well is that I and now I see that thou art a fair young man, and it is no marvel though maidens desire thee."

As he spake came in the damsels with the victual, and the cheer was exceeding good, and Hallblithe grew light-hearted.

BUT when the healths had been drunk as aforetime, and men had drunk a cup or two thereafter, there rose a warrior from one of the endlong benches, a big young man, black-haired and black-bearded, ruddy of visage, and he said in a voice that was rough and fat: "O Erne, and ye other chieftains, we have been talking here at our table concerning this guest of thine who hath beguiled us, and we are not wholly at one with thee as to thy dealings with him. True it is, now that the man hath our meat in his belly, that he must depart from amongst us with a whole skin, unless of his own will he stand up to fight some man of us here. Yet some of us think that he is not so much our friend that we should help him to a keel whereon to fare home to those that hate us: and we say that it would not be unlawful to let the man abide in the isle, and proclaim him a wolf's-head within a half-moon of to-day. Or what sayest thou?"

Said the Erne: "Wait for my word a while, and hearken to another! Is the Grey-goose of the Ravagers in the hall? Let him give out his word on this matter."

Then arose a white-headed carle from a table nigh to the dais, whose black raiment was well adorned with gold. Despite his years his face was fair and little wrinkled; a man with a straight nose and a well-fashioned mouth, and with eyes still bright and grey. He spake: "O folk, I find that the Erne hath done well in cherishing this guest. For first, if he hath beguiled us, he did it not save by the furtherance and sleight of our own kinsman; therefore if any one is to die for beguiling us, let it be the Puny Fox. Secondly, we may well wot that heavy need hath driven the man to this beguilement; and I say that it was no unmanly deed for him to enter our hall and beguile us with his sleight; and that he hath played out the play right well and cunningly with the wisdom of a warrior. Thirdly, the manliness of him is well proven, in that having overcome us in sleight, he hath spoken out the sooth concerning our beguilement and hath made himself our foeman and captive, when he might have sat down by us as our guest, freely and in all honour. And this he did, not as contemning the Puny Fox and his lies and crafty wiles (for he hath told us that he loveth him); but so that he might show himself a man in that which trieth manhood. Moreover, ye shall not forget that he is the rebel of the Undying King,

312 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

who is our lord and master; therefore in cherishing him we show ourselves great-hearted, in that we fear not the wrath of our master. Therefore I naysay the word of the War-brand that we should make this man a wolf's-head; for in so doing we shall show ourselves lesser-hearted than he is, and of no account beside of him; and his head on our hall-gable should be to us a nithing-stake, and a tree of reproach. So I bid thee, O Erne, to make much of this man; and thou shalt do well to give him worthy gifts, such as warriors may take, so that he may show them at home in the House of the Raven, that it may be the beginning of peace betwixt us and his noble kindred. This is my say, and later on I shall wax no wiser."

THEREWITH he sat down, and there arose a murmur and stir in the hall; but the more part said that the Grey-goose had spoken well, and that it was good to be at peace with such manly fellows as the new guest was.

But the Erne said: "One word will I lay hereto, to wit, that he who desireth mine enmity let him do scathe to Hallblithe of the Ravens and hinder him." Then he bade fill round the cups, and called a health to Hallblithe, and all men drank to him, and there was much joyance and merriment.

But when the night was well worn, the Erne turned to Hallblithe and said: "That was a good word of the Grey-goose which he spake concerning the giving of gifts: Raven-son, wilt thou take a gift of me and be my friend?"

"Thy friend will I be," said Hallblithe, "but no gift will I take of thee or any other till I have the gift of gifts, and that is my troth-pledge maiden. I will not be glad till I can be glad with her."

Then laughed the Erne, and the Puny Fox grinned all across his wide face, and Hallblithe looked from one to the other of them and wondered at their mirth, and when they saw his wondering eyes, they did but laugh the more; and the Erne said: "Nevertheless, thou shalt see the gift which I would give thee; and then mayst thou take it or leave it as thou wilt. Ho ye! bring in the throne of the Eastland with them that minister to it!"

Certain men left the hall as he spake, and came back bearing with them a throne fashioned most goodly of ivory, parcel-gilt and begemmed, and adorned with marvellous craftsmanship: and

they set it down amidst of the hall-floor and went aback to their places, while the Erne sat and smiled kindly on the folk and on Hallblithe. Then arose the sound of fiddles and the lesser harp, and the doors of the screen were opened, and there flowed into the hall a company of fair damsels not less than a score, each one with a rose on her bosom, and they came and stood in order behind the throne of the Eastlands, and they strewed roses on the ground before them: and when they were duly ranged they fell to singing:

NOW waneth spring,
 While all birds sing,
 And the south wind blows
 The earliest rose
 To and fro
 By the doors we know,
 And the scented gale
 Fills every dale.

Slow now are brooks running because of the weed,
 And the thrush hath no cunning to hide her at need,
 So swift as she flieth from hedge-row to tree
 As one that toil trieth, and deedful must be.

And O! that at last,
 All sorrows past,
 This night I lay
 'Neath the oak-beams grey!
 O, to wake from sleep,
 To see dawn creep
 Through the fruitful grove
 Of the house that I love!

O! my feet to be treading the threshold once more,
 O'er which once went the leading of swords to the war!
 O! my feet in the garden's edge under the sun,
 Where the seeding grass hardens for haysel begun!

Lo, lo! the wind blows
 To the heart of the Rose,
 And the ship lies tied
 To the haven side!

314 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

But O for the keel
The sails to feel!
And the alien ness
Growing less and less;
As down the wind driveth and thrusts through the sea
The sail-burg that striveth to turn and go free,
But the lads at the tiller they hold her in hand,
And the wind our well-willer drives fierce to the land.

We shall wend it yet,
The highway wet;
For what is this
That our bosoms kiss?
What lieth sweet
Before our feet?
What token hath come
To lead us home?
'Tis the Rose of the garden walled round from the croft
Where the grey roof its warden steep riseth aloft,
'Tis the Rose 'neath the oaken-beamed hall, where they bide,
The pledges unbroken, the hand of the bride.

Hallblithe heard the song, and half thought it promised him somewhat; but then he had been so misled and mocked at, that he scarce knew how to rejoice at it.

Now the Erne spake: "Wilt thou not take the chair and these dainty song-birds that stand about it? Much wealth might come into thine hall if thou wert to carry them over sea to rich men who have no kindred, nor affinity wherein to wed, but who love women as well as other men."

Said Hallblithe: "I have wealth enow were I once home again. As to these maidens, I know by the fashion of them that they are no women of the Rose, as by their song they should be. Yet will I take any of these maidens that have will to go with me and be made sisters of my sisters, and wed with the warriors of the Rose; or if they are of a kindred, and long to sit each in the house of her folk, then will we send them home over the sea with warriors to guard them from all trouble. For this gift I thank thee. As to thy

throne, I bid thee keep it till a keel cometh thy way from our land, bringing fair gifts for thee and thine. For we are not so unwealthy."

Those that sat nearby heard his words and praised them; but the Erne said: "All this is free to thee, and thou mayst do what thou wilt with the gifts given to thee. Yet shalt thou have the throne; and I have thought of a way to make thee take it. Or what sayst thou, Puny Fox?"

Said the Puny Fox: "Yea if thou wilt, thou mayst, but I thought it not of thee that thou wouldst. Now is all well."

Again Hallblithe looked from one to the other and wondered what they meant. But the Erne cried out: "Bring in now the sitter, who shall fill the empty throne!"

Then again the screen-doors opened, and there came in two weaponed men, leading between them a woman clad in gold and garlanded with roses. So fair was the fashion of her face and all her body, that her coming seemed to make a change in the hall, as though the sun had shone into it suddenly. She trod the hall-floor with firm feet, and sat down on the ivory chair. But even before she was seated therein Hallblithe knew that the Hostage was under that roof and coming toward him. And the heart rose in his breast and fluttered therein, so sore he yearned toward the Daughter of the Rose, and his very speech-friend. Then he heard the Erne saying, "How now, Raven-son, wilt thou have the throne and the sitter therein, or wilt thou gainsay me once more?"

Thereafter he himself spake, and the sound of his voice was strange to him and as if he knew it not: "Chieftain, I will not gainsay thee, but will take thy gift, and thy friendship therewith, whatsoever hath betided. Yet would I say a word or two unto the woman that sitteth yonder. For I have been straying amongst wiles and images, and may happen I shall yet find this to be but a dream of the night, or a beguilement of the day." Therewith he arose from the table, and walked slowly down the hall; but it was a near thing that he did not fall a-weeping before all those aliens, so full his heart was.

He came and stood before the Hostage, and their eyes were upon each other, and for a little while they had no words. Then Hallblithe began, wondering at his voice as he spake: "Art thou

316 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

a woman and my speech-friend? For many images have mocked me, and I have been encompassed with lies, and led astray by behests that have not been fulfilled. And the world hath become strange to me, and empty of friends."

Then she said: "Art thou verily Hallblithe? For I also have been encompassed by lies, and beset by images of things unhelpful."

"Yea," said he, "I am Hallblithe of the Ravens, wearied with desire for my troth-plight maiden."

Then came the rosy colour into the fairness of her face, as the rising sun lighteth the garden of flowers in the June morning; and she said: "If thou art Hallblithe, tell me what befell to the finger-gold-ring that my mother gave me when we were both but little."

Then his face grew happy, and he smiled, and he said: "I put it for thee one autumntide in the snake's hole in the bank above the river, amidst the roots of the old thorn-tree, that the snake might brood it, and make the gold grow greater; but when winter was over and we came to look for it, lo! there was neither ring nor snake, nor thorn-tree: for the flood had washed it all away."

Thereat she smiled most sweetly, and whereas she had been looking on him hitherto with strained and anxious eyes, she now beheld him simply and friendly; and she said: "O Hallblithe, I am a woman indeed, and thy speech-friend. This is the flesh that desreth thee, and the life that is thine, and the heart which thou rejoicest. But now tell me, who are these huge images around us, amongst whom I have sat thus, once in every moon this year past, and afterwards I was taken back to the women's bower? Are they men or mountain-giants? Will they slay us, or shut us up from the light and air? Or hast thou made peace with them? Wilt thou then dwell with me here, or shall we go back again to Cleveland by the Sea? And when, oh, when shall we depart?"

He smiled and said: "Quick come thy questions, beloved. These are the folks of the Ravagers and the Sea-eagles: they be men, though fierce and wild they be. Our foes they have been, and have sundered us; but now are they our friends, and have brought us together. And to-morrow, O friend, shall we depart across the waters to Cleveland by the Sea."

She leaned forward, and was about to speak softly to him, but suddenly started back, and said: "There is a big, red-haired man, as big as any here, behind thy shoulder. Is he also a friend? What would he with us?"

So Hallblithe turned about, and beheld the Puny Fox beside him, who took up the word and spoke, smiling as a man in great glee: "O maiden of the Rose, I am Hallblithe's thrall, and his scholar, to unlearn the craft of lying, whereby I have done amiss towards both him and thee. Whereof I will tell thee all the tale soon. But now I will say that it is true that we depart to-morrow for Cleveland by the Sea, thou and he, and I in company. Now I would ask thee, Hallblithe, if thou wouldst have me bestow this gift of thine in safe-keeping to-night, since there is an end of her sitting in the hall like a graven image: and to-morrow the way will be long and wearisome, What sayest thou?"

Said the Hostage: "Shall I trust this man and go with him?"

"Yea, thou shalt trust him," said Hallblithe, "for he is trusty. And even were he not, it is meet for us of the Raven and the Rose to do as our worth biddeth us, and not to fear this folk. And it behoveth us to do after their customs since we are in their house."

"That is sooth," she said; "big man, lead me out of the hall to my place. Farewell, Hallblithe, for a little while, and then shall there be no more sundering for us."

Therewith she departed with the Puny Fox, and Hallblithe went back to the high-seat and sat down by the Erne, who laughed on him and said: "Thou hast taken my gift, and that is well: yet shall I tell thee that I would not have given it to thee if I could have kept it for myself in such plight as thou wilt have it. But all I could do, and the Puny Fox to help withal, availed me nought. So good luck go with thine hands. Now will we to bed, and to-morrow I will lead thee out on thy way; for to say sooth, there be some here who are not well pleased with either thee or me; and thou knowest that words are wasted on wilful men, but that deeds may avail somewhat."

Therewith he cried out for the cup of good-night, and when it was drunken, Hallblithe was shown to a fair shut-bed; even that wherein he had lain aforetime; and there he went to sleep in joy, and in good liking with all men.

CHAPTER XXII. THEY GO FROM THE ISLE OF RANSOM & COME TO CLEVELAND BY THE SEA.

IN the morning early Hallblithe arose from his bed, and when he came into the mid-hall, there was the Puny Fox and the Hostage with him; Hallblithe kissed her and embraced her, and she him; yet not like lovers long sundered, but as a man and maid betrothed are wont to do, for there were folk coming and going about the hall. Then spake the Puny Fox: "The Erne is abiding us out in the meadow yonder; for now nought will serve him but he must needs go under the earth-collar with us. How sayest thou, is he enough thy friend?"

Said Hallblithe, smiling on the Hostage: "What hast thou to say to it, beloved?"

"Nought at all," she said, "if thou art friend to any of these men. I may deem that I have somewhat against the chieftain, whereof belike this big man may tell thee hereafter; but even so much meseemeth I have against this man himself, who is now become thy friend and scholar; for he also strove for my beguilement, and that not for himself, but for another."

"True it is," said the Fox, "that I did it for another; even as yesterday I took thy mate Hallblithe out of the trap whereinto he had strayed, and compassed his deliverance by means of the unfaithful battle; and even as I would have stolen thee for him, O Rose-maiden, if need had been; yea, even if I must have smitten into ruin the roof-tree of the Ravagers. And how could I tell that the Erne would give thee up unstolen? Yea, thou sayest sooth, O noble and spotless maiden; all my deeds, both good and ill, have I done for others; and so I deem it shall be while my life lasteth."

Then Hallblithe laughed and said: "Art thou nettled, fellow-in-arms, at the word of a woman who knoweth thee not? She shall yet be thy friend, O Fox. But tell me, beloved, I deemed that thou hadst not seen Fox before; how then can he have helped the Erne against thee?"

"Yet she sayeth sooth," said Fox, "this was of my sleight: for when I had to come before her, I changed my skin, as I well know how; there are others in this land who can do so much as that. But what sayest thou concerning the brotherhood with the Erne?"

THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN 319

“Let it be so,” said Hallblithe, “he is manly and true, though masterful, and is meet for this land of his. I shall not fall out with him; for seldom meseemeth shall I see the Isle of Ransom.”

“And I never again,” said the Puny Fox.

“Dost thou loathe it, then,” said the Hostage, “because of the evil thou hast done therein?”

“Nay,” said he, “what is the evil, when henceforth I shall do but good? Nay, I love the land. Belike thou deemest it but dreary with its black rocks and black sand, and treeless wind-swept dales; but I know it in summer and winter, and sun and shade, in storm and calm. And I know where the fathers dwelt and the sons of their sons’ sons have long lain in the earth. I have sailed its windiest firths, and climbed its steepest crags; and ye may well wot that it hath a friendly face to me; and the land-wights of the mountains will be sorry for my departure.”

So he spake, and Hallblithe would have answered him, but by now were they come to a grassy hollow amidst the dale, where the Erne had already made the earth-yoke ready. To wit, he had loosened a strip of turf all save the two ends, and had propped it up with two ancient dwarf-wrought spears, so that amidmost there was a lintel to go under.

So when he saw those others coming, he gave them the sele of the day, and said to Hallblithe: “What is it to be? shall I be less than thy brother-in-arms henceforward?”

Said Hallblithe: “Not a whit less. It is good to have brothers in other lands than one.”

SO they made no delay, but clad in all their war-gear, they went under the earth-yoke one after the other; thereafter they stood together, and each let blood in his arm, so that the blood of all three mingled together fell down on the grass of the ancient earth; and they swore friendship and brotherhood each to each.

But when all was done the Erne spake: “Brother Hallblithe, as I lay awake in bed this morning I deemed that I would take ship with thee to Cleveland by the Sea, that I might dwell there a while. But when I came out of the hall, and saw the dale lying green betwixt hill-side and hill-side, and the glittering river running down amidmost, and the sheep and kine and horses feeding

320 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

up and down on either side the water: and I looked up at the fells and saw how deep blue they stood up against the snowy peaks, and I thought of all our deeds on the deep sea, and the merry nights in yonder abode of men: then I thought that I would not leave the kindred, were it but for a while, unless war and lifting called me. So now I will ride with thee to the ship, and then farewell to thee."

"It is good," said Hallblithe, "though not as good as it might be. Glad had we been with thee in the hall of the Ravens."

As he spoke drew anigh the carles leading the horses, and with them came six of those damsels whom the Erne had given to Hallblithe the night before; two of whom asked to be brought to their kindred over sea; but the other four were fain to go with Hallblithe and the Hostage, and become their sisters at Cleveland by the Sea.

So then they got to horse and rode down the dale toward the haven, and the carles rode with them, so that of weaponed men they were a score in company. But when they were half-way to the haven they saw where hard by three knolls on the way-side were men standing with their weapons and war-gear glittering in the sun. So the Erne laughed and said: "Shall we have a word with War-brand then?"

But they rode steadily on their way, and when they came up to the knolls they saw that it was War-brand indeed with a score of men at his back; but they stirred not when they saw Erne's company that it was great. Then Erne laughed aloud and cried out in a big voice, "What, lads! ye ride early this morning; are there foemen abroad in the Isle?"

They shrank back before him, but a carle of those who was hindermost cried out: "Art thou coming back to us, Erne, or have thy new friends bought thee to lead them in battle?"

"Fear it nought," quoth Erne, "I shall be back before the shepherd's noon."

So they went their ways and came to the haven, and there lay the Flaming Sword, and beside her a trim bark, not right great, all ready for sea: and Hallblithe's skiff was made fast to her for an after-boat.

Then the Hostage and Hallblithe and the six damsels went

aboard her, and when the Erne had bidden them farewell, they cast off the hawsers and thrust her out through the haven-mouth; but ere they had got midmost of the haven, they saw the Erne, that he had turned about, and was riding up the dale with his house-carles, and each man's weapon was shining in his hand: and they wondered if he were riding to battle with War-brand; and Fox said: "Meseemeth our brother-in-arms hath in his mind to give those waylayers an evil minute, and verily he is the man to do the same."

So they gat them out of the haven, and the ebb-tide drave out seaward strongly, and the wind was fair for Cleveland by the Sea; and they ran speedily past the black cliffs of the Isle of Ransom, and soon were they hull down behind them. But on the afternoon of the next day they hove up the land of the kindreds, and by sunset they beached their ship on the sand by the Rollers of the Raven, and went ashore without more ado. And the strand was empty of all men, even as on the day when Hallblithe first met the Puny Fox. So then in the cool of the evening they went up toward the House of the Raven. Those damsels went together hand in hand two by two, and Hallblithe held the Hostage by the hand; but the Puny Fox went along beside them, gleeful and of many words; telling them tales of his wiles and his craft, and his skin-changing.

"But now," quoth he, "I have left all that behind me in the Isle of Ransom, and have but one shape, and I would for your behoof that it were a goodlier one: and but one wisdom have I, even that which dwelleth in mine own head-bone. Yet it may be that this may avail you one time or other. But lo you! though I am thy thrall, have I not the look of a thrall-huckster from over sea leading up my wares to the cheaping-stead?" They laughed at his words and were merry, and much love there was amongst them as they went up to the House of the Raven.

But when they came thither they went into the garth, and there was no man therein, for it was now dusk, and the windows of the long hall were yellow with candle-light. Then said Fox: "Abide ye here a little; for I would go into the hall alone and see the conditions of thy people, O Hallblithe."

"Go thou, then," said Hallblithe, "but be not rash, I counsel

thee; for our folk are not over-patient when they deem they have a foe before them."

The Puny Fox laughed, and said: "So it is then the world over, that happy men are wilful and masterful."

Then he drew his sword and smote on the door with the pomel, and the door opened to him and in he went: and he found that fair hall full of folk and bright with candles; and he stood amidst the floor; all men looked on him, and many knew him at once to be a man of the Ravagers, and silence fell upon the hall, but no man stirred hand against him. Then he said: "Will ye hearken to the word of an evil man, a robber of the folks?"

Spake the chieftain from the dais: "Words will not hurt us, sea-warrior; and thou art but one among many; wherefore thy might this eve is but as the might of a new-born baby. Speak, and afterwards eat and drink, and depart safe from amongst us!"

Spake the Puny Fox: "What is gone with Hallblithe, a fair young man of your kindred, and with the Hostage of the Rose, his troth-plight maiden?"

Then was the hush yet greater in the hall, so that you might have heard a pin drop; and the chieftain said: "It is a grief of ours that they are gone, and that none hath brought us back their dead bodies that we might lay them in the Acre of the Fathers."

Then leapt up a man from the end-long table nigh to Fox, and cried out: "Yea, folk! they are gone, and we deem that runagates of thy kindred, O new-come man, have stolen them from us; wherefor they shall one day pay us."

Then laughed the Puny Fox and said: "Some would say that stealing Hallblithe was like stealing a lion, and that he might take care of himself; though he was not as big as I am."

Said the last speaker: "Did thy kin or didst thou steal him, O evil man?"

"Yea, I stole him," quoth Fox, "but by sleight, and not by might."

Then uprose great uproar in the hall, but the chieftain on the high-seat cried out: "Peace, peace!" and the noise abated, and the chieftain said: "Dost thou mean that thou comest hither to give us thine head for making away with Hallblithe and the Hostage?"

"I mean to ask rather," said the Fox, "what thou wilt give me for the bodies of these twain?"

Said the chieftain: "A boat-load of gold were not too much if thou shouldst live a little longer."

Quoth the Puny Fox: "Well, in anywise I will go and bring in the bodies aforesaid, and leave my reward to the goodwill of the Ravens."

Therewith he turned about to go, but lo! there already in the door stood Hallblithe holding the Hostage by the hand; and many in the hall saw them, for the door was wide. Then they came in and stood by the side of the Puny Fox, and all men in the hall arose and shouted for joy. But when the tumult was a little abated, the Puny Fox cried out: "O chieftain, and all ye folk! if a boat-load of gold were not too much reward for the bringing back the dead bodies of your friends, what reward shall he have who hath brought back their bodies and the souls therein?"

Said the chieftain: "The man shall choose his own reward." And the men in the hall shouted their yeasay.

Then said the Puny Fox: "Well, then, this I choose, that ye make me one of your kindred before the fathers of old time."

They all cried out that he had chosen wisely and manfully; but Hallblithe said: "I bid you do for him no less than this; and ye shall wot that he is already my sworn brother-in-arms."

Now the chieftain cried out: "O Wanderers from over the sea, come up hither and sit with us and be merry at last!"

SO they went up to the dais, Hallblithe and the Hostage, and the Puny Fox and the six maidens withal. And since the night was yet young, the supper of the men of the Ravens was turned into the wedding-feast of Hallblithe and the Hostage, and that very night she became a wife of the Ravens, that she might bear to the House the best of men and the fairest of women.

But on the morrow they brought the Puny Fox to the mote-stand of the kindreds that he might stand before the fathers and be made a son of the kindred; and this they did because of the word of Hallblithe, and because they believed in the tale which he told them of the Glittering Plain and the Acre of the Undying. The four maidens also were made sisters of the House; and the

324 THE STORY OF THE GLITTERING PLAIN

other twain were sent home to their own kindred in all honour.

Of the Puny Fox it is said that he soon lost and forgot all the lore which he had learned of the ancient men, living and dead; and became as other men and was no wizard. Yet he was exceeding valiant and doughty; and he ceased not to go with Hallblithe wheresoever he went; and many deeds they did together, whereof the memory of men hath failed: but neither they nor any man of the Ravens came any more to the Glittering Plain, or heard any tidings of the folk that dwell there.

HEREWITH ENDETH THE TALE.

PRINTED BY W. H. SMITH AND SON AT
THE ARDEN PRESS LETCHWORTH