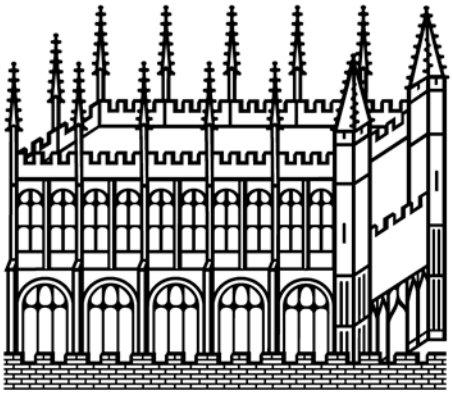
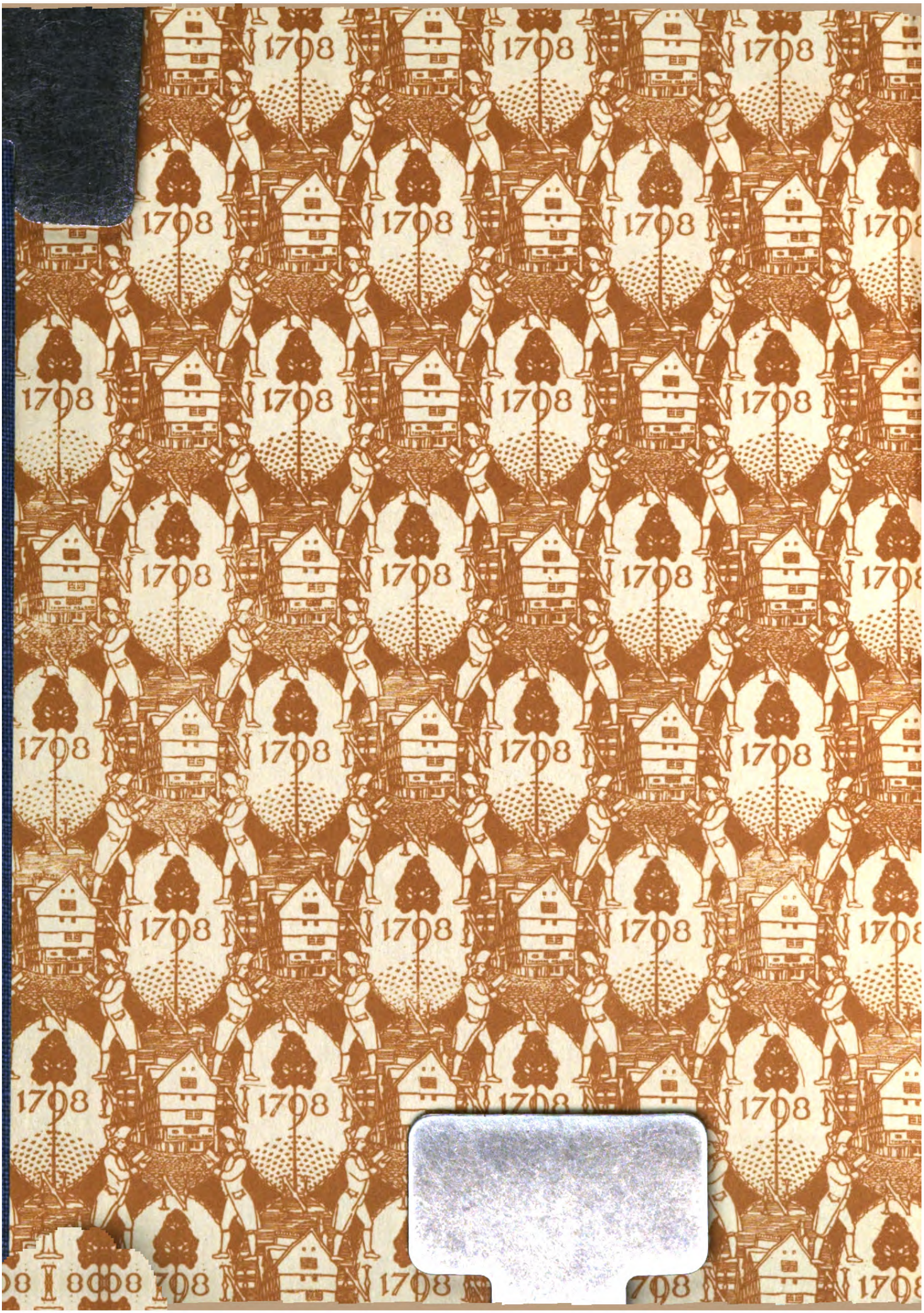


The Defence of Ely

Kingsley


1708


1708

Books within Books

Edited by RICHARD WILSON, D.LITT.

THE DEFENCE OF ELY

No. 6

"Dreams, Books,
are each a World;
and Books, we know,
are a Substantial World,
both Pure and Good"

W. Wordsworth

London Edinburgh
Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd

THE DEFENCE OF ELY

Taken from the Novel
entitled
HEREWARD THE WAKE
BY
Charles Kingsley

LONDON EDINBURGH
THOMAS NELSON AND SONS LTD.

WAKE again, Teutonic Father-ages,
Speak again, beloved primæval creeds;
Flash ancestral spirit from your pages,
Wake the greedy age to noble deeds.

. . . . . .

Speak! but ask us not to be as ye were!
All but God is changing day by day.
He who breathes on man the plastic spirit
Bids us mould ourselves its robe of clay.

. . . . . .

Old decays but foster new creations;
Bones and ashes feed the golden corn;
Fresh elixirs wander every moment,
Down the veins through which the live past feeds
its child, the live unborn.

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT
THE PRESS OF THE PUBLISHERS

THE DEFENCE OF ELY

CHAPTER I

[*Hereward, surnamed "The Wake," is said to have been the son of Earl Leofric of Mercia, the third greatest man in England in the time of Edward the Confessor, and of the Lady Godiva his wife. Outlawed in his youth by his own father for his lawless ways, he left his home in Lincolnshire, and in company with his faithful servant, Martin Lightfoot, saw many adventures.*]

OF Hereward's doings for the next few months nought is known. He may very likely have joined Siward in the Scotch war. He may have looked, wondering, for the first time in his life, upon the bones of the old world, where they rise at Dunkeld out of the lowlands of the Tay, and have trembled lest the black crags of Birnam should topple on his head with all their pines.

He may have helped himself to bring Birnam wood to Dunsinane on the day of the Seven Sleepers, and heard Siward, when his son Asbiorn's corpse was carried into camp, ask only, " Has he all his wounds in front ? " *

He may have seen old Siward, after Macbeth's defeat (not death, as Shakespeare relates the story), go back to

* Shakespeare (*Macbeth*, Act V. Scene viii.) calls his son "young Siward." He too was slain in the battle; but he was old Siward's nephew. Old Siward actually asked, " Had he his hurts before ? "

Northumbria " with such booty as no man had obtained before," a proof—if the fact be fact—that the Scotch lowlands were not, in the eleventh century, the poor and barbarous country which some have reported them to have been.

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

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

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

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

Wherever Gilbert lived, however, he heard that Hereward was outlawed, and sent for him, having, it would seem, some connection with his father. And there he lived, doubtless happily enough, fighting Celts and hunting deer, so that as yet the pains and penalties of exile did not press very hardly upon him.

The handsome, petulant, good-humoured lad had become in a few weeks the darling of Gilbert's ladies, and the envy of all his knights and gentlemen. Hereward the singer, harp-player, dancer, Hereward the rider and hunter, was in all mouths. But he himself was discontented at having as yet fallen in with no adventure worthy of a man, and he looked curiously and longingly at the

menagerie of wild beasts enclosed in strong wooden cages which Gilbert kept in one corner of the great courtyard, not for any scientific purposes, but to try with them, at Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide, the mettle of the young gentlemen who were candidates for the honour of knighthood.

But after looking over the bulls and stags, wolves and bears, Hereward settled it in his mind that there was none worthy of his steel save one huge white bear, whom no man had yet dared to face, and whom Hereward, indeed, had never seen, hidden as he was all day within the old oven-shaped Pict's house of stone which had been turned into his den.

There was a mystery about the uncanny brute which charmed Hereward. He was said to be half-human, perhaps wholly human ; to be a son of the Fairy Bear, near kinsman, if not brother, uncle, or cousin, of Siward Digre himself. He had, like his fairy father, iron claws ; he had human intellect, and understood human speech and the arts of war—at least so all in the place believed, and not so absurdly as at first sight seems.

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

Terrible was the brown bear, but more terrible " the white sea-deer," as the Saxons called him ; the hound of Hrymir, the whale's bane, the seal's dread, the rider of the iceberg, the sailor of the floe, who ranged for his prey under the six months' night lighted by Surtur's fires, even to the gates of Muspelheim. To slay him was a feat

worthy of Beowulf's self; and the greatest wonder, perhaps, among all the wealth of Crowland, was the twelve white bear-skins which lay before the altars, the gift of the great Canute.

How Gilbert had obtained his white bear, and why he kept him there in durance vile, was a mystery over which men shook their heads. Again and again Hereward asked his host to let him try his strength against the monster of the North. Again and again the shrieks of the ladies, and Gilbert's own pity for the stripling youth, brought a refusal. But Hereward settled it in his heart, nevertheless, that somehow or other, when Christmas time came round, he would extract from Gilbert leave to fight that bear, and then either make himself a name or die like a man.

Meanwhile Hereward made a friend. Among all the ladies of Gilbert's household, however kind they were inclined to be to him, he took a fancy only to one—a little girl of ten years old. Alftruda was her name. He liked to amuse himself with this child, without, as he fancied, any danger of falling in love; for already his dreams of love were of the highest and most fantastic, and an Emir's daughter, or a Princess of Constantinople, was the very lowest game at which he meant to fly.

Alftruda was beautiful, too, exceedingly, and precocious, and, it may be, vain enough to repay his attentions in good earnest. Moreover she was English, as he was, and royal likewise; a relation of Elfgiva, daughter of Ethelred, once King of England. Between the English lad, then, and the English maiden grew up in a few weeks an innocent friendship, which had almost become more than friendship through the intervention of the Fairy Bear.

For as Hereward was coming in one afternoon from hunting, hawk on fist, with Martin Lightfoot trotting behind, crane and heron, duck and hare slung over his shoulder, on reaching the courtyard gates he was aware of screams and shouts within, tumult and terror among man and beast.

Hereward tried to force his horse in at the gate. The beast stopped and turned, snorting with fear; and no wonder, for in the midst of the courtyard stood the Fairy Bear, his white mane bristled up till he seemed twice as big as any of the sober brown bears which Hereward yet had seen, his long snake neck and cruel visage wreathing about in search of prey.

A dead horse, its back broken by a single blow of the paw, and two or three writhing dogs, showed that the beast had turned (like too many of his human kindred in those days) "Berserker." The courtyard was utterly empty; but from the ladies' bower came shrieks and shouts, not only of women but of men, and knocking at the bower door, adding her screams to those inside, was a little white figure, which Hereward recognized as Alftruda's. They had barricaded themselves inside, leaving the child out; and now dared not open the door, as the bear swung and rolled towards it, looking savagely right and left for a fresh victim.

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

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

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

He heard the dull crash of the steel, he felt the sword jammed tight. He shut his eyes for an instant, fearing lest, in his dreams, his blow had come to nought—lest his sword had turned aside, or melted like water in his hand, and the next moment would find him crushed to

earth, blinded and stunned. Something tugged at his sword. He opened his eyes, and saw the huge carcass bend, reel, roll slowly over to one side, dead, tearing out of his hand the sword, which was firmly fixed into the skull.

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

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

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

"I have done it, Martin."

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

"What care I?"

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

"What is that for?" said Hereward.

"When the master kills the game, the knave can but

skin it. We may sleep warm under this fur in many a cold night by sea and moor."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A burst of laughter from the knights and gentlemen followed.

"How loud the young cockerel crows after his first scuffle!"

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

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

"That was meant for us. If the man who killed the bear has not deserved knighthood, what must we have deserved who have not killed him? You understand his meaning, gentlemen; do not forget it!"

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

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

* In an earlier part of the story Martin had shown his axe to his master, and we read:—

"It was a tool the like of which in shape Hereward had seldom seen, and never its equal in beauty. The handle was some fifteen inches long, made of thick strips of black whalebone, curiously bound with silver, and butted with narwhal ivory. This handle was evidently the work of some cunning Norseman of old. But who had been the maker of the blade? It was some eight inches long, with a sharp edge on one side, a sharp crooked pick on the other; of the finest steel, inlaid with strange characters in gold, the work probably of some Circassian, Tartar, or Persian; such a battle-axe as Rustum or Zohrab may have wielded in fight on the banks of Oxus; one of those magic weapons,

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

Then she commanded Hereward to sheathe his sword.

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

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

The knights were civil enough to him, the ladies more than civil. He hunted, he wrestled, he tilted; he was promised a chance of fighting for glory, as soon as a

brought, men knew not how, out of the magic East, which were hereditary in many a Norse family, and sung of in many a Norse saga.

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

Highland chief should declare war against Gilbert or drive off his cattle—an event which (and small blame to the Highland chiefs) happened every six months.

No one was so well content with himself as Hereward ; and therefore he fancied that the world must be equally content with him, and he was much disconcerted when Martin drew him aside one day, and whispered,—

" If I were my lord, I should wear a mail shirt under my coat to-morrow out hunting."

" What ? "

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

" Who should harm me ? "

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

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

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

" Eh ? "

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

" Rubbish ! "

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

seeing that there are half a dozen in the house who would be glad enough of the chance."

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

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

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

" A very fit and proper place for this same treason—unless thou hast been drinking beer and thinking beer."

But Martin was nowhere to be seen.

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

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

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

To turn was impossible. To stop, even to walk on, was to be ridden over and hurled to the ground helplessly. To gain the mouth of the gully, and then turn on his pursuer, was his only chance. For the first and almost the last time in his life he struck spurs into his horse and ran away. As he went an arrow struck him sharply in the back, piercing the corselet, but hardly entering the flesh. As he neared the mouth, two other knights crashed their horses through the brushwood from right and left, and stood awaiting him, their spears ready to strike. He was caught in a trap. A shield might have saved him, but he had none.

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

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

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

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

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

It was true. He had broken the poor beast's leg with a

blow of the axe, and they had to kill the horse out of pity ere they left.

Martin dragged his prisoner forward.

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

The knight answered nothing.

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

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

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

And so was Hereward avenged of his enemies, and began to win for himself the famous sobriquet of " Wake," the watcher whom no man ever took unawares. Judicial, even private inquiry into the matter there was none. That gentlemen should meet in the forest, try to commit murder on each other's bodies, was rather too common a mishap to stir up more than an extra gossiping among the women, and an extra cursing among the men ; and as the former were all on Hereward's side, his plain story was taken as it stood.

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

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

" You, lady, and your good lord will I ever love, and at your service my sword shall ever be ; but not here. Ill blood I will not make. Among traitors I will not dwell. I have killed two of them, and shall have to kill two of their kinsmen next, and then two more, till you

have no knights left; and pity that would be. No; the world is wide, and there are plenty of good fellows in it who will welcome me without forcing me to wear mail under my coat out hunting."

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

CHAPTER II

THE next place in which Hereward appeared was far away on the south-west, upon the Cornish shore. He went into port on board a merchant ship carrying wine, and intending to bring back tin. The merchant had told him of one Alef, a valiant *regulus*, or kinglet, living at Gweek, up the Helford River, who was indeed a distant connection of Hereward himself, having married, as did so many of the Celtic princes, the daughter of a Danish sea rover of Siward's blood.

They told him also that the kinglet increased his wealth, not only by the sale of tin and of red cattle, but by a certain amount of " summer-leding " (that is, piracy between seed-time and harvest) in company with his Danish brothers-in-law from Dublin and Waterford; and Hereward, who believed, with most Englishmen of the East Country, that Cornwall still produced a fair crop of giants, some of them with two and even three heads, had hopes that Alef might show him some adventure worthy of his sword.

He sailed in therefore over a rolling bar, between jagged points of black rock, and up a tide river which wandered and branched away inland like a landlocked lake, between high green walls of oak and ash, till they

saw at the head of the tide Alef's town, nestling in a glen which sloped towards the southern sun. They discovered, besides, two ships drawn up upon the beach, whose long lines and snake-heads, besides the stoat carved on the beakhead of one, and the adder on that of the other, bore witness to the piratical habits of their owner.

The merchants, it seemed, were well known to the Cornishmen on shore, and Hereward went up with them unopposed—past the ugly dykes and muddy leats, where Alef's slaves were streaming the gravel for tin ore; through rich alluvial pastures spotted with red cattle; and up to Alef's town.

Earthworks and stockades surrounded a little church of ancient stone, and a cluster of granite cabins thatched with turf, in which the slaves abode. In the centre of all a vast stone barn, with low walls and high sloping roof, contained Alef's family, treasures, house-carles, horses, cattle, and pigs.

They entered at one end between the pigstyes, passed on through the cow-stalls, then through the stables, till they saw before them, dim through the reek of peat-smoke, a long oaken table, at which sat huge dark-haired Cornishmen, with here and there among them the yellow head of a Norseman, who were Alef's following or fighting men. Boiled meat was there in plenty, barley cakes and ale.

At the head of the table, on a high-backed settle, was Alef himself, a jolly giant, who was just setting to work to drink himself stupid with mead made from narcotic heather honey. By his side sate a lovely dark-haired girl, with great gold torcs upon her throat and wrists, and a great gold brooch fastening a shawl which had plainly come from the looms of Spain or of the East; and next to her again, feeding her with tit-bits cut off with his own dagger, and laid on barley-cake instead of a plate, sat a more gigantic personage even than Alef, the biggest man that Hereward had ever seen, with high cheek-bones and

small ferret eyes, looking out from a greasy mass of bright red hair and beard.

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

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

The merchant nodded.

" And you want tin ? "

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

The Norse trader of those days, it must be remembered, was none of the cringing and effeminate chapmen who figure in the stories of the Middle Ages. A free Norse or Dane, himself often of noble blood, he fought as willingly as he bought ; and held his own as an equal, whether at the court of a Cornish kinglet or at that of the great Kaiser of the Greeks.

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

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

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

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

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

As he did so his eye happily caught that of the fair princess. She was watching him with a strange look, admiring, warning, imploring; and when she saw that he noticed her, she laid her finger on her lips in token of silence, crossed herself devoutly, and then laid her finger on her lips again, as if beseeching him to be patient and silent in the name of the heavenly powers.

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

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

" One could see without eyes, noble sir, that you were worth any ten common men; but as every one has not like you the luck of so lovely a lady by your side, I thought that perchance you might hand over some of your lesser quarrels to one like me, who has not yet seen so much good

fighting as yourself, and enjoy yourself in pleasant company at home, as I should surely do in your place."

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

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

After which those who could go to bed went to bed, not as in England,* among the rushes on the floor, but in the bunks or berths of wattle which stood two or three tiers high along the wall.

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

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

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

"And what didst thou hear?"

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

* Cornwall was not then considered part of England. (Even yet Cornish people sometimes say they are going into England when they cross the Tamar. —Ed.)

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

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

"Praising him up, man?"

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

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

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

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

"If you can," said Martin Lightfoot.

"If I can?" retorted Hereward fiercely.

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

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

As they went in to the morning meal they met Alef. He was in high good-humour with Hereward; and all

the more so when Hereward told him his name, and how he was the son of Leofric.

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

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

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

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

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

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

For during the meal the fair lady, with no worse intention perhaps than that of teasing her tyrant, fell to open praises of Hereward's fair face and golden hair, and being insulted therefor by the Ironhook, retaliated by observations about his personal appearance, which were more common in the eleventh century than they happily are now. He, to comfort himself, drank deep of the

French wine which had just been bought and broached, and then went out into the courtyard, where in the midst of his admiring fellow-ruffians he enacted a scene as ludicrous as it was pitiable.

All the childish vanity of the savage boiled over. He strutted, he shouted, he tossed about his huge limbs, he called for a harper, and challenged all around to dance, sing, leap, fight, do anything against him. Meeting with nothing but admiring silence, he danced himself out of breath, and then began boasting once more of his fights, his cruelties, his butcheries, his impossible escapes and victories; till at last, as luck would have it, he espied Hereward, and poured out a stream of abuse against Englishmen and English courage.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whereupon the two were parted for the while.

Two hours afterwards Hereward, completely armed with helmet and mail shirt, sword and javelin, hurried

across the great courtyard, with Martin Lightfoot at his heels, towards the little church upon the knoll above. The two wild men entered into the cool darkness, and saw before them by the light of a tiny lamp the crucifix over the altar. They stopped, trembling, for a moment; bowed themselves, and then hurried on to a low doorway to the right, inside which dwelt Alef's chaplain, one of those good Celtic priests who were supposed to represent a Christianity more ancient than, and all but independent of, the then all-absorbing Church of Rome.

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

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

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

"Speak to him in Latin, Martin; maybe he will understand that."

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

"Ironhook?" answered the priest in good Latin enough. "And he so young! God help him, he is a dead man! What is this? A fresh soul sent to its account by the hands of that man of Belial? Cannot he entreat him? can he not make peace, and save his young

life ? He is but a stripling, and that man, like Goliath of old, a man of war from his youth up."

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

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

Hereward understood his meaning, though not his words.

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

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

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

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

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

" Tell him how I robbed my father."

The priest groaned as Martin did so.

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

Again the priest groaned.

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

Here the priest groaned more bitterly still.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

" And if he comes back safe from this battle, he will

give you ten pennies for yourself and your church, priest, and therefore expects you to pray your very loudest while he is gone."

"I will pray, I will pray," said the holy man; "I will wrestle in prayer. Ah! that he could slay the wicked, and reward the proud according to his deservings. Ah! that he could rid me and my master, and my young lady, of this son of Belial—this devourer of widows and orphans—this slayer of the poor and needy, who fills this place with innocent blood—him of whom it is written, 'They stretch forth their mouth unto the heaven, and their tongue goeth through the world. Therefore fall the people unto them, and thereout suck they no small advantage.' I will shrive him, shrive him of all save robbing the priest, and for that he must go to the bishop, if he live; and, if not, the Lord have mercy on his soul."

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

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

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

"I will, I will," quoth he, and kneeling down began to chant that noble 73rd Psalm, "Quam bonus Israel!" which he had just so fitly quoted.

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

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

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

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

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

Hereward held out his hand. Martin fell on his knees

and kissed it, watched him with set teeth till he disappeared in the wood, and then started forward and entered the bushes at a different spot.

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

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

The priest had just finished his chant of the 73rd Psalm, and had betaken himself in his spiritual warfare, as it was then called, to the equally apposite 52nd, " Quid gloriaris ? "

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

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

And in hurried the princess.

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

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

" His sword—the Ogre's—his magic sword, which kills whomsoever it strikes. I coaxed him to let me have it last night when he was tipsy, for fear he should quarrel with the young stranger ; and I have kept it from him

ever since by one excuse or another ; and now he has sent one of his ruffians in for it, saying that if I do not give it up at once he will come back and kill me."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alef's perplexity was much increased when his daughter bounded towards him, seized him by the arm, and hurried him on, showing by look and word which of the combatants she favoured so plainly that the ruffians behind broke into scornful murmurs. They burst through

the bushes. Martin Lightfoot happily heard them coming, and had just time to slip away noiselessly, like a rabbit, to the other part of the cover.

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

"Foul play!" cried one.

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

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

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

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

Alef entreated, threatened, promised a fair trial if the men would give fair play; when, to complete the confusion, the princess threw herself upon the corpse, shrieking and tearing her hair, and, to Hereward's sur-

prise and disgust, bewailed the prowess and the virtues of the dead, calling upon all present to avenge his murder.

Hereward vowed inwardly that he would never again trust woman's fancy, or fight in woman's quarrel.

He was now nigh at his wits' end. The house-carles had closed round him in a ring with the intention of seizing him, and however well he might defend his front he might be crippled at any moment from behind ; but in the very nick of time Martin Lightfoot burst through the crowd, set himself heel to heel with his master, and broke out, not with threats, but with a good-humoured laugh.

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

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

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

Hereward saw the effect of Martin's words, and burst out in Danish likewise with a true Viking chant,—

" Look at me, dread me !
I am the Hereward,*
The watcher, the champion,
The Berserker, the Viking,

* " Guardian of the Army."

The land-thief, the sea-thief,
Young summer-pirate,
Famous land-waster,
Slayer of witch-bears,
Queller of Ogres,
Fattener of ravens,
Darling of grey wolves,
Wild widow-maker.
Touch me—to wolf and
Raven I give you.
Ship with me boldly,
Follow me gaily,
Over the swan's road,
Over the whale's bath,
Far to the southward,
Where sun and sea meet;
Where from the palm-boughs
Apples of gold hang;
And freight there our long-snake
With sendal and orfray,
Dark Moorish maidens,
And gold of Algier."

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

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

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

" Has not the girl betrayed me shamefully ? "

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

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

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

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

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

" But such a misbegotten savage."

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

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

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

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

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

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

" I am the princess," she whispered, " let me in."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

" Then you really stole his sword ? "

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

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

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

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

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

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

" So I have all the blows and none of the spoil ? "

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

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

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

" Never," quoth Hereward.

" It must be. How else can I explain your having got the key ? I made them give me the key on the pretence that with one who had most cause to hate you it would be safe ; and when they come and find us in the morning I shall tell them how I came here to stab you with my own hands—you must lay the dagger by me—

and how you and your man fell upon us and bound us, and you escaped. Ah! Mary Mother," continued the maiden with a sigh, " when shall we poor weak women have no more need of lying ? "

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

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

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

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

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

world, or would it grow and bear the noble fruit of "gentle, very perfect knighthood" ?

They reached the ship, clambered on board without ceremony, at the risk of being taken and killed as robbers, and told their case. The merchants had not completed their cargo of tin. Hereward offered to make up their loss to them if they would set sail at once; and they, feeling that the place would be for some time to come too hot to hold them, and being also in high delight, like honest Ostmen, with Hereward's prowess, agreed to sail straight for Waterford, and complete their cargo there.

CHAPTER III

[*Hereward next took service with Ranald, King of Waterford, was foremost in many fights, and then helped the Princess of Cornwall a second time, as we are now to read.*]

FAT was the feasting and loud was the harping in the halls of Alef, King of Gweek. Savoury was the smell of fried pilchard and hake; more savoury still that of roast porpoise; most savoury of all that of fifty huge squab pies, built up of layers of apples, bacon, onions, and mutton, and at the bottom of each a squab, or young cormorant, which diffused both through the pie and through the ambient air, a delicate odour of mingled guano and polecat.

And the occasion was worthy alike of the smell and of the noise; for King Alef, finding that after the Ogre's death the neighbouring kings were but too ready to make reprisals on him for his champion's murders and robberies, had made a treaty of alliance, offensive and defensive, with Hannibal, the son of Gryll, King of Marazion, and had confirmed the same by bestowing on him the hand

of his fair daughter. Whether she approved of the match or not was asked neither by King Alef nor by King Hannibal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At last she burst into tears.

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

"Oh, cause enough;" and he told bluntly enough the princess's story. "And what is more," said he, "the King of Waterford sent a ship over last week, with forty proper lads on board, and two gallant Holders with them,

to demand her ; but for all answer, they were put into the strong house, and there they lie, chained to a log, at this minute. Pity it is, and shame, I hold, for I am a Dane myself ; and pity, too, that such a bonny lass should go to an unkempt Welshman like this, instead of a tight smart Viking's son, like the Waterford lad."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whereat men wondered, but held their tongues.

And when the eating was over, and the drinking began,

the princess rose, and came round to drink the farewell health.

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

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

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

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

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

" Silence, fool ! " said the princess. " Why should he know our West Country ways ? He may take it from my hand, if not from hers."

And she held out to him the cup herself.

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

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

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

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

" It is a fool's trick," answered the stranger at last,

" to put off what you must do at last. If I had but the time, I would pay you for your tune with a better one than you ever heard."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The hot old Punic * blood flushed up in his cheeks, and his thin Punic lips curved into a snaky smile—perhaps the old Punic treachery in his heart; for all that Hannibal was heard to reply was, " We must not disturb the good-fellowship of a Cornish wedding."

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

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

In the morning the marriage ceremony was performed, and then began the pageant of leading home the bride.

* Hannibal, still a common name in Cornwall, is held—and not unlikely—to have been introduced there by ancient Phœnician colonists.

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

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

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

So the first boatload went up, the minstrels in front harping and piping till the greenwood rang ; King Hannibal next, with his bride, and behind him spearmen and axemen, with a Dane between every two.

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

Then each pair of them seized the Dane between them, and began to bind his hands behind his back.

" What will you do with us ? "

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

" You promised ! " cried the princess.

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

The wretched princess shuddered, for she knew too well that such an atrocity was easy and common enough. She knew it well. Why should she not ? The story of the Cid's daughters and the knights of Carrion ; the far more authentic one of Robert of Belesme ; and many another ugly tale of the early middle age, will prove but too certainly that, before the days of chivalry began, neither youth, beauty, nor the sacred ties of matrimony, could protect women from the most horrible outrages at the hands of those who should have been their protectors.

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

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

" Bind your horse to a tree, for we shall want him, and wait."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Hereward!"

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER IV

[*After further adventures on land and sea the hero came to Flanders, where he won the hand of Torfrida of St. Omer, who was of highest lineage, lovely, wealthy, and reputed to have knowledge of witchcraft. To Hereward, in St. Omer, came one day an indirect message from Duke William of Normandy making lavish promises of reward for his help in his coming expedition against England. The proud answer was, "On the day that William is King of all England, Hereward will come and put his hands between his and be his man." In* 1069 *the Countess Gyda, mother of King Harold of England, came unexpectedly to St. Omer, and told Hereward and his wife of the woeful state of his native land and of its sore need of a native-born champion.*]

"You," said Gyda, "are above all men the man who is needed." And she began praising Hereward's valour,

his fame, his eloquence, his skill as a general and engineer; and when he suggested, smiling, that he was an exile and an outlaw, she insisted that he was all the fitter from that very fact. He had no enemies among the nobles. He had been mixed up in none of the civil wars and blood-feuds of the last fifteen years. He was known only as that which he was, the ablest English captain of his day—the only man who could cope with William, the only man whom all parties in England would alike obey.

And so, with flattery as well as with truth, she persuaded, if not Hereward, at least Torfrida, that he was the man destined to free England once more; and that an earldom, or anything which he chose to ask, would be the sure reward of his assistance.

"Torfrida," said Hereward that night, "kiss me well, for you will not kiss me again for a while."

"What?"

"I am going to England to-morrow."

"Alone?"

"Alone—I and Martin Lightfoot to spy out the land, and a dozen or so of house-carles to take care of the ship in harbour."

"But you have promised to fight the Viscount of Pinkney."

"I will be back again in time for him. Not a word—I must go to England, or go mad."

"But Countess Gyda? Who will squire her to Bruges?"

"You and the rest of my men. You must tell her all. She has a woman's heart, and will understand. I shall be back within the month, if I am alive on land or water."

"Hereward, Hereward, the French will kill you!"

"Not while I have your armour on. Peace, little fool! Are you actually afraid for Hereward at last?"

"O heavens! when am I not afraid for you?" and she cried herself to sleep upon his bosom. But she knew

that it was the right, and knightly, and Christian thing to do.

Two days after a longship ran out of the Aa, and sailed away north.

. . . . . .

It may have been well a week after, that Hereward came from the direction of Boston, with Martin running at his heels.

As Hereward rode along the summer wold the summer sun sank low, till just before it went down he came to an island of small enclosed fields, high banks, elm trees, and a farm inside; one of those most ancient holdings of the southern and eastern counties still to be distinguished, by their huge banks and dykes full of hedgerow timber, from the more modern corn-lands outside, which were in Hereward's time mostly common pasture-land or rough fen.

"This should be Azerdun," said he; "and there inside, as I live, stands Azer getting in his crops. But whom has he with him?"

With the old man were some half-dozen men of his own rank, some helping the serfs with might and main, one or two standing on the top of the banks, as if on the lookout; but all armed *cap-à-pie*.

"His friends are helping him to get them in," quoth Martin, "for fear of the rascally Frenchmen. A pleasant and peaceable country we have come back to."

"And a very strong fortress are they holding," said Hereward, "against either French horsemen or French arrows. How to dislodge those six fellows without six times their number, I do not see. It is well to recollect that."

And so he did, and turned to use again and again, in after years, the strategic capabilities of an old-fashioned English farm.

Hereward spurred his horse up to the nearest gate, and was instantly confronted by a little fair-haired man, as broad as he was tall, who heaved up a long twybill,

or double axe, and bade him, across the gate, go to a certain place.

" Little Winter, little Winter, my chuck, my darling, my mad fellow, my brother-in-arms, my brother in robbery and murder, are you grown so honest in your old age that you will not know little Hereward the wolf's head ? "

" Hereward ! " shrieked the doughty little man. " I took you for an accursed Norman in those outlandish clothes ; " and lifting up no little voice, he shouted,—

" Hereward is back, and Martin Lightfoot at his heels ! "

The gate was thrown open, and Hereward all but pulled off his horse. He was clapped on the back, turned round and round, admired from head to foot, shouted at by old companions of his boyhood, naughty young housecarles of his old troop, now settled down into honest thriving yeomen, hard working and hard fighting, who had heard again and again, with pride, of his doughty doings over sea.

" And what," asked Hereward, after the first congratulations were over, " of my mother ? What of the folk at Bourne ? "

All looked each at the other, and were silent.

" You are too late, young lord," said Azer.

" Too late ? "

" The Frenchman has given it to a man of Gilbert of Ghent's—his butler, groom, cook, for aught I know."

" To Gilbert's man ? And my mother ? "

" God help your mother, and your young brother too. She fled to Bourne a while ago out of Shropshire. All her lands in those parts are given away to Frenchmen. Even Coventry minster was not safe for her ; so hither she came. But even here the French villains have found her out. Three days ago some five-and-twenty French marched into the place."

" And you did not stop them ? "

" Young sir, who are we to stop an army ? We have

enough to keep our own. Gilbert, let alone the villain Ivo of Spalding, can send a hundred men down on us in four-and-twenty hours."

"Then I," said Hereward, in a voice of thunder, "will find the way to send two hundred down on him;" and turning his horse from the gate, he rode away furiously towards Bourne.

He turned back as suddenly, and galloped into the field.

"Lads! old comrades! will you stand by me if I need you? Will you follow The Wake, as hundreds have followed him already, if he will only go before?"

"We will, we will!"

"I shall be back ere morning. What you have to do I will tell you then."

"Stop and eat, but for a quarter of an hour."

Then Hereward swore a great oath, by oak and ash and thorn, that he would neither eat bread nor drink water while there was a Norman left in Bourne.

"A little ale, then, if no water," said Azer.

Hereward laughed, and rode away.

"You will not go single-handed against all those ruffians?" shouted the old man after him. "Saddle, lads, and go with him, some of you, for very shame's sake."

But when they galloped after Hereward he sent them back. He did not know yet, he said, what he would do. Better that they should gather their forces, and see what men they could afford him, in case of open battle. And he rode swiftly on.

When he came within the lands of Bourne it was dark.

"So much the better," thought Hereward. "I have no wish to see the old place till I have somewhat cleaned it out."

He rode slowly into the long street between the overhanging gables, past the crossways, and along the Watergang and the high earth-banks of his ancient home.

Above them he could see the great hall, its narrow windows all ablaze with light. With a bitter growl he turned back, trying to recollect a house where he could safely lodge. Martin pointed one out.

"Old Viking Surturbrand, the house-carle, did live there, and maybe lives there still."

"We will try;" and Martin knocked at the door.

The wicket was opened, but not the door, and through the wicket window a surly voice asked who was there.

"Who lives here?"

"Pery, son of Surturbrand. Who art thou who askest?"

"An honest gentleman and his servant, looking for a night's lodging."

"This is no place for honest folk."

"As for that, we don't wish to be more honest than you would have us; but lodging we will pay for, freely and well."

"We want none of thy money;" and the wicket was shut.

Martin pulled out his axe and drove the panel in.

"What art doing? We shall rouse the town," said Hereward.

"Let be; these are no French, but honest English, who like one all the better for a little horse-play."

"What didst do that for?" asked the surly voice again. "Were it not for those rascal Frenchmen up above, I would come out and split thy skull for thee."

"If there be Frenchmen up above," said Martin, in a voice of feigned terror, "take us in for the love of the Virgin and all saints, or murdered we shall be ere morning light."

"Thou hast no call to stay in the town, man, unless thou like."

Hereward rode close to the wicket, and said in a low voice, "I am a nobleman of Flanders, good sir, and a sworn foe to all French. My horse is weary, and cannot

make a step forward; and if thou be a Christian man, thou wilt take me in and let me go off safe ere morning light."

"From Flanders!" And the man turned and seemed to consult those within. At length the door was slowly opened, and Pery appeared, his double axe over his shoulder.

"If thou be from Flanders, come in in God's name; but be quick, ere those Frenchmen get wind of thee."

Hereward went in. Five or six men were standing round the long table, upon which they had just laid down their double axes and javelins. More than one countenance Hereward recognized at once. Over the peat fire sat a very old man, his hands upon his knees, as he warmed his bare feet at the embers. He started up at the noise, and Hereward saw at once that it was old Surturbrand, and that he was blind.

"Who is it? Is Hereward come?" asked he, with the dull, dreamy voice of age.

"Not Hereward, father," said some one, "but a knight from Flanders."

The old man dropped his head upon his breast again with a querulous whine, while Hereward's heart beat high at hearing his own name. At all events he was among friends; and approaching the table he unbuckled his sword and laid it down among the other weapons. "At least," said he, "I shall have no need of thee as long as I am here among honest men."

"What shall I do with my master's horse?" asked Martin. "He can't stand in the street to be stolen by drunken French horseboys."

"Bring him in at the front door and out at the back," said Pery. "Fine times these when a man dare not open his own yard gate."

"You seem to be all besieged here," said Hereward. "How is this?"

"Are you such a stranger," asked Pery, "that you

do not know what has happened in this town during the last three days ? "

" No good, I will warrant, if you have Frenchmen in it."

" Why was not Hereward here ? " wailed the old man in the corner. " It never would have happened if he had been in the town."

" What ? " asked Hereward, trying to command himself.

" What has happened," said Pery, " makes a free Englishman's blood boil to tell of. Here, sir knight, three days ago, comes in this Frenchman with some twenty ruffians of his own, and more of one Taillebois', too, to see him safe ; says that this new king, this base-born Frenchman, has given away all Earl Morcar's lands, and that Bourne is his ; kills a man or two ; upsets the women ; gets drunk, ruffles and roysters ; breaks into my lady's bower, calling her to give up her keys, and when she gives them, will have all her jewels too. She faces the rogues like a brave princess ; and two of the hounds lay hold of her, and say that she shall ride through Bourne as she rode through Coventry. The boy Godwin —he that was the great earl's godson, our last hope, the last of our house—draws sword on them ; and he, a boy of sixteen summers, kills them both out of hand. The rest set on him, cut his head off, and there it sticks on the gable spike of the hall to this hour. And do you ask, after that, why free Englishmen are dull company ? "

" This is a dark story," said he calmly ; " and it would behove me as a gentleman to succour this distressed lady, did I but know how. Tell me what I can do now, and I will do it."

" Your health ! " cried one. " You speak like a true knight ! "

" And he looks the man to keep his word, I'll warrant him," spoke another.

" He does," said Pery, shaking his head. " Never-

theless, if anything could have been done, sir, be sure we would have done it; but all our armed men are scattered up and down the country, each taking care, as is natural, of his own cattle and his own women. There are not ten men-at-arms in Bourne this night; and what is worse, sir, as you may guess, who seem to have known war as well as I, there is no man to lead them."

Here Hereward was on the point of saying, "And what if I led you?"—on the point, too, of discovering himself; but he stopped short.

He was startled by a burst of noise outside—music, laughter, and shouts.

"There," said Pery bitterly, "are those Frenchmen, dancing and singing in the hall, with my Lord Godwin's head above them!" And curses bitter and deep went round the room. They sat sullen and silent it may be for an hour or more; only moving when, at some fresh outbreak of revelry, the old man started from his doze and asked if that was Hereward coming.

"And who is this Hereward of whom you speak?" said Hereward at last.

"We thought you might know him, sir knight, if you come from Flanders, as you say you do," said three or four voices in a surprised and surly tone.

"Certainly I know such a man, if he be Hereward the wolf's head, Hereward the outlaw, Hereward the Wake, as they call him. And a good soldier he is, though he be not yet made a knight; and married, too, to a rich and fair lady. I served under this Hereward a few months ago in the Zeeland war, and know no man whom I would sooner follow."

"Nor I either," chimed in Martin Lightfoot from the other end of the table.

"Nor we," cried all the men-at-arms at once, each vying with the other in extravagant stories of their hero's prowess, and in asking the knight of Flanders whether they were true or not.

To avoid offending them, Hereward was forced to confess to a great many deeds which he had never done; but he was right glad to find that his fame had reached his native place, and that he could count on the men if he needed them.

"But who is this Hereward," said he, "that he should have to do with your town here?"

Half a dozen voices at once told him his own story.

"I always heard," said he dryly, "that that gentleman was of some very noble kin; and I will surely tell him all that has befallen here as soon as I return to Flanders."

At last they grew sleepy. The men went out and brought in bundles of sweet sedge, spread them against the wall, and prepared to lie down, each with his weapon by his side. But when they were lain down, Hereward beckoned to him Pery and Martin Lightfoot, and went out into the back yard, under the pretence of seeing to his horse.

"Pery Surturbrandsson," said he, "thou seemest to be an honest man, as we in foreign parts hold all the Danelagh folk to be. Now it is fixed in my mind to go up, and my servant with me, to yon hall, and see what those French upstarts are about. Wilt thou trust me to go, without my fleeing back here if I am found out, or in any way bringing thee to harm by mixing thee up in my private matters? And wilt thou, if I do not come back, keep for thine own the horse which is in thy stable, and give moreover this purse and this ring to thy lady, if thou canst find means to see her face to face, and say thus to her—that he that sent that purse and ring may be found, if he be alive, at St. Omer, or with Baldwin, Marquis of Flanders; and that if he be dead (as he is like enough to be, his trade being nought but war) she will still find at St. Omer a home and wealth and friends, till these evil times be overpast?"

As Hereward had spoken with some slight emotion,

he had dropped unawares his assumed Flemish accent, and had spoken in broad burly Lincolnshire; and therefore it was that Pery, who had been staring at him by the moonlight all the while, said, when he was done, tremblingly,—

"Either you are Hereward, or you are his double-ganger. You speak like Hereward, you look like Hereward—just what Hereward would be now, you are. You are my lord, whom men call Wake, and you cannot deny it."

"Pery, if thou knowest me, speak of me to no living soul, save to thy lady my mother; and let me and my serving-man go free out of thy yard gate. If I ask thee before morning to open it again to me, thou wilt know that there is not a Frenchman left in the hall of Bourne."

Pery threw his arms round him, and embraced him silently.

"Get me only," said Hereward, "some long woman's gear and black mantle, if thou canst, to cover this bright armour of mine."

Pery went off in silence as one stunned, brought the mantle, and let them out of the yard gate. In ten minutes more the two had waded the Water-gang, scrambled the dyke and its palisade, and stood under the gable of the great hall. Not a soul was stirring outside. The serfs were all cowering in their huts like so many rabbits in their burrows, listening in fear to the revelry of their new tyrants. The night was dark, but not so dark that Hereward could not see between him and the sky his brother's long locks floating in the breeze.

"That I must have down, at least," said he, in a low voice.

"Then here is wherewithal," said Martin Lightfoot, as he stumbled over something. "The drunken villains have left the ladder in the yard."

Hereward raised the ladder, took down the head, and wrapped it in the cloak; and ere he did so, he kissed the cold forehead.

Then he slipped round to one of the narrow unshuttered windows and looked in. The hall was in a wasteful blaze of light—a whole month's candles burning in one night. The table was covered with all his father's choicest plate; the wine was running waste upon the floor; the men were lolling at the table in every stage of drunkenness; the loose women, camp-followers, and such like, were almost as drunk as their masters; and at the table-head, most drunk of all, sat, in Earl Leofric's seat, the new Lord of Bourne.

Hereward could scarce believe his eyes. He was none other than Gilbert of Ghent's stout Flemish cook, whom he had seen many a time in Scotland. Hereward turned from the window in disgust, but looked again as he heard words which roused his wrath still more. He slipped down from the window to Martin, and led him round the house.

"Now then, down with the ladder quick, and dash in the door. I go in; stay thou outside. If any man passes me, see that he pass not thee."

Martin chuckled a ghostly laugh as he helped the ladder down. In another moment the door was burst in, and Hereward stood upon the threshold. He gave one war-shout of "A Wake! A Wake!" and then rushed forward.

And then began a murder grim and great. They fought with ale-cups, with knives, with benches; but, drunken and unarmed, they were hewn down like sheep. Fifteen Normans, says the chronicler, were in the hall when Hereward burst in. When the sun rose there were fifteen heads upon the gable. Escape had been impossible. Martin had laid the ladder across the door, and the few who escaped the master's terrible sword stumbled over it, to be brained by the man's not less terrible axe.

Then Hereward took up his brother's head, and went in to his mother.

The women in the bower opened to him. They had

seen all that passed from the gallery above, which, as usual, hidden by a curtain, enabled the women to watch unseen what passed in the hall below.

The Lady Godiva sat crouched together, all but alone —for her bower-maidens had fled or been carried off long since—upon a low stool beside a long dark thing covered with a pall. So utterly crushed was she that she did not even lift up her head as Hereward entered.

He placed his ghastly burden reverently beneath the pall, and then went and knelt before his mother.

For a while neither spoke a word. Then the Lady Godiva suddenly drew back her hood, and dropping on her knees threw her arms round Hereward's neck, and wept till she could weep no more.

"Blessed strong arms," sobbed she at last, "around me! To feel something left in the world to protect me—something left in the world which loves me."

"You forgive me, mother?"

"You forgive me? It was I, I who was in fault—I, who should have cherished you, my strongest, my bravest, my noblest—now my all."

"No, it was all my fault; and on my head is all this misery. If I had been here, as I ought to have been, all this might have never happened."

"You will not leave me?"

"If I do, I come back, to finish what I have begun."

"More blood? O God! Hereward, not that! Let us return good for evil. Let us take up our crosses. Let us bear our sin. Let us humble ourselves under God's hand, and flee into some convent, and there die praying for our country and our kin."

"Men must watch while women pray. I will take you to a minster—to Peterborough."

"No, not to Peterborough——"

"But my uncle Brand is abbot there, they tell me, now this four years, and that rogue Herluin prior in his place."

" Brand is dying—dying of a broken heart, like me. The Frenchman has given his abbey to one Thorold, the tyrant of Malmesbury—a Frenchman like himself. No, take me where I shall never see a French face. Take me to Crowland—and him with me—where I shall see nought but English faces, and hear English chants, and die a free Englishwoman under St. Guthlac's wings."

CHAPTER V

[*After conducting his mother to Crowland and being knighted with two companions, Winter and Gwenoch, by the monks of Peterborough, adopting as his shield device a monk's girdle arranged to form a W to stand for Wake, Hereward went again to Flanders, whence he sailed for England after a time with his wife and child. From Bourne he summoned his friends to his banner, and set to work to train an army in the fens, while William of Normandy was earning the title he hated, that of " the Conqueror," by laying waste the North which had risen against him under Edwin and Morcar, the nephews of Hereward, who after their defeat took refuge with their uncle at Bourne.*]

As the winter ran on other fugitives came in, mostly of rank and family. At last Edwin himself came, young and fair, like Morcar ; he who should have been the Conqueror's son-in-law, for whom his true-love pined, as he pined, in vain. Where were Sweyn and his Danes ? Whither should they go till he came ?

" To Ely," answered Hereward.

Whether or not it was his wit which first seized on the military capabilities of Ely is not told. Leofric the deacon, who is likely to know best, says that there were men already there holding out against William, and that

they sent for Hereward; but it is not clear from his words whether they were fugitives, or merely bold Abbot Thurstan and his monks.

It is but probable, nevertheless, that Hereward, as the only man among the fugitives who ever showed any ability whatsoever, and who was also the only leader (save Morcar) connected with the fen, conceived the famous "Camp of Refuge," and made it a formidable fact. Be that as it may, Edwin and Morcar went to Ely, and there joined other valiant and noble gentlemen, the last wrecks of the English aristocracy. And there they sat in Abbot Thurstan's hall, and waited for Sweyn and the Danes.

. . . . . .

There sat round the hall of Ely all the magnates of the east land and east sea. The abbot was on his high seat; and on a seat higher than his, prepared specially, Sweyn Ulfsson, King of Denmark and England. By them sat the Bishops Egelwin the Englishman and Christiern the Dane; Asbiorn; the young Earls Edwin and Morcar, and Sweyn's two sons; and, it may be, the sons of Tosti Godwinsson, and Arkill the great thane, and Siward Barn, and Hereward himself. Below them were knights, Vikings, captains, great holders from Denmark, and the prior and inferior officers of Ely minster. And at the bottom of the misty hall, on the other side of the column of blue vapour which went trembling up from the great heap of burning turf amidst, were house-carles, monks, wild men from the Baltic shores, crowded together to hear what was done in that parliament of their betters.

They spoke like free Danes—the betters from the upper end of the hall, but every man as he chose. They were in full Thing—in parliament—as their forefathers had been wont to be for countless ages. Their House of Lords and their House of Commons were not yet defined from each other; but they knew the rules of the house, the courtesies of debate, and, by practice of free speech,

had educated themselves to bear and forbear, like gentlemen.

But the speaking was loud and earnest, often angry that day. "What was to be done?" was the question before the house.

"That depended," said Sweyn, the wise and prudent king, "on what could be done by the English to co-operate with them." And what that was has been already told.

"When Tosti Godwinsson, ye bishops, jarls, knights, and holders, came to me five years ago, and bade me take my rights in this land of England, I answered him that I had not wit enough to do the deeds which Canute my uncle did; and so sat still in peace. I little thought that I should have lost in five years so much of those small wits to which I confessed, that I should come after all to take my rightful kingdom of England, and find two kings in it already, both more to the English mind than I am. While William the Frenchman is king by the sword, and Edgar the Englishman king by proclamation of earls and thanes, there seems no room here for Sweyn, nephew of Canute, king of kings."

"We will make room for you! We will make a rid road from here to Winchester!" shouted the meeting, with one voice.

"It is too late. What say you, Hereward Leofricsson, who go for a wise man among men?"

Hereward rose, and spoke gracefully, earnestly, eloquently; but he could not deny Sweyn's plain words.

"The Wake beats about the bush," said Jarl Asbiorn, rising when Hereward sat down. "None knows better than he that all is over. Earl Edwin and Earl Morcar, who should have helped us along Watling Street, are here fugitives. Earl Gospatric and Earl Waltheof are William's men now, soon to raise the landsfolk against us. We had better go home before we have eaten up the monks of Ely."

Then Edwin rose, entreating peace. "They were beaten. The hand of God was against them. Why should they struggle any more? Or, if they struggled on, why should they involve the Danes in their own ruin!"

Then man after man rose, and spoke rough Danish common sense. They had come hither to win England. They had found it won already. Let them take what they had got from Peterborough,* and go.

Then Winter sprang up. "Take the pay, and sail off with it, without having done the work? That would be a noble tale to carry home to your fair wives in Jutland. I shall not call you niddering, being a man of peace, as all know." Whereat all laughed, for the doughty little man had not a hand's-breadth on head or arm without its scar. "But if your ladies call you so, you must have a shrewd answer to give, besides knocking them down."

Sweyn spoke without rising: "The good knight forgets that this expedition has cost Denmark already nigh as much as Harold Hardraade's cost Norway. It is hard upon the Danes, if they are to go away empty-handed as well as disappointed."

"The king has right!" cried Hereward. "Let them take the plunder of Peterborough as pay for what they have done, and what besides they would have done if Asbiorn the jarl—nay, men of England, let us be just!—what Asbiorn himself would have done if there had been heart and wit, one mind and one purpose, in England. The Danes have done their best. They have shown themselves what they are, our blood and kin. I know that some talk of treason, of bribes. Let us have no more such vain and foul suspicions. They came as our friends; and as our friends let them go, and leave us to fight out our own quarrel to the last drop of blood."

"Would God!" said Sweyn, "thou wouldest go too,

* They had sacked the minster with the help of Hereward, who wished to prevent the appointment of a Norman as head of the monastery.

thou good knight.—Here, earls and gentlemen of England! Sweyn Ulfsson offers to every one of you, who will come to Denmark with him, shelter and hospitality till better times shall come."

Then arose a mixed cry. Some would go, some would not. Some of the Danes took the proposal cordially; some feared bringing among themselves men who would needs want land, of which there was none to give. If the English came, they must go up the Baltic, and conquer fresh lands for themselves from heathen Letts and Finns.

Then Hereward rose again, and spoke so nobly and so well that all ears were charmed.

They were Englishmen, and they would rather die in their own merry England than win new kingdoms in the cold north-east. They were sworn, the leaders of them, to die or conquer, fighting the accursed Frenchman.

And every Englishman shouted, "Hereward is right! We will live and die fighting the French!"

And Sweyn Ulfsson rose again, and said with a great oath, "That if there had been three such men as Hereward in England, all would have gone well."

Hereward laughed. "Thou art wrong for once, wise king. We have failed, just because there were a dozen men in England as good as I, every man wanting his own way; and too many cooks have spoiled the broth. What we wanted is not a dozen men like me, but one like thee, to take us all by the back of the neck and shake us soundly, and say, 'Do that or die!'"

And so, after much talk, the meeting broke up.

Hereward went up to the minster tower, and watched the Ouse flashing with countless oars northward toward Southrey Fen. And when they were all out of sight he went back, and lay down on his bed, and wept—once and for all. Then he arose, and went down into the hall to abbots and monks, and earls and knights, and was the boldest, cheeriest, wittiest of them all.

"They say," quoth he to Torfrida that night, "that

some men have grey heads on green shoulders. I have a grey heart in a green body."

"And my heart is growing very grey too," said Torfrida.

"Certainly not thy head." And he played with her raven locks.

"That may come too, and too soon."

For, indeed, they were in very evil case.

CHAPTER VI

When William heard that the Danes were gone, he marched on Ely with all the Frenchmen of the east, who had been either expelled from their lands or were in fear of expulsion.

With them, too, was a great army of mercenaries, ruffians from all France and Flanders, hired to fight for a certain term, on the chance of plunder or of fiefs in land. Their brains were all aflame with the tales of inestimable riches hidden in Ely. There were the jewels of all the monasteries round; there were the treasures of all the fugitive English nobles; there were—what was there not? And they grumbled when William halted them and hutted them at Cambridge, and began to feel cautiously the strength of the place—which must be strong, or Hereward and the English would not have made it their camp of refuge.

Perhaps he rode up to Madingley windmill, and saw, fifteen miles away, clear against the sky, the long line of what seemed nought but a low upland park, with the minster tower among the trees, and between him and them a rich champaign of grass, over which it was easy enough to march all the armies of Europe; and thought Ely an easy place to take.

But men told him that between him and those trees

lay a black abyss of mud and peat and reeds—Haddenham fen and Smithy fen, with the deep sullen Westwater or " Ald-reche " of the Ouse winding through them. The old Roman road to Stretham was sunk and gone long since under the bog, whether by English neglect, or whether (as some think) by actual and bodily sinking of the whole land. The narrowest space between dry land and dry land was a full half-mile, and how to cross that half-mile no man knew.

What were the approaches on the west ? There were none. Beyond Earith, where now run the great washes of the Bedford Level, was a howling wilderness of meres, eas, reed-ronds, and floating alder-beds, through which only the fen-men wandered, with leaping-pole and log-canoe.

What in the east ? The dry land neared the island on that side. And it may be that William rowed round by Burwell to Fordham and Soham, and thought of attempting the island by way of Barraway ; and saw beneath him a labyrinth of islands, meres, fens, with the Cam, increased by the volume of the Ouse, spreading far deeper and broader than now between Barraway and Thetford-in-the-Isle ; and saw, too, that a disaster in that labyrinth might be a destruction.

So he determined on the near and straight path, through Long Stanton and Willingham, down the old bridle-way from Willingham ploughed field (every village there, and in the isle likewise, had and has still its " field " or ancient clearing of ploughed land) ; and then to try that terrible half-mile, with the courage and wit of a general to whom human lives were as those of the gnats under the hedge.

So all his host camped themselves in Willingham field, by the old earthwork which men now call Belsar's Hills ; and down the bridle-way poured countless men, bearing timber and fagots, cut from all the hills, that they might bridge the black half-mile.

They made a narrow, firm path through the reeds, and down to the brink of the Ouse, if brink it could be called, where the water, rising and falling a foot or two each tide, covered the floating peat for many yards, before it sank into a brown depth of bottomless slime. They would make a bottom for themselves by driving piles.

The piles would not hold ; and they began to make a floating bridge with long beams, say the chroniclers, and blown-up cattle-hides to float them.

Soon they made a floating-sow, and thrust it on before them as they worked across the stream, for they were getting under shot from the island.

Meanwhile the besieged had not been idle. They had thrown up a turf rampart on the island shore, and *antemuralia et propugnacula*—doubtless overhanging " hoardings " or scaffolds, through the floor of which they could shower down missiles. And so they awaited the attack, contenting themselves with gliding in and out of the reeds in their canoes, and annoying the builders with arrows and cross-bow bolts.

At last the bridge was finished, and the sow safe across the Westwater, and thrust in, as far as it would float, among the reeds on the high tide. They in the fort could touch it with a pole.

The English would have destroyed it if they could. But The Wake bade them leave it alone. He had watched all their work, and made up his mind to the event.

" The rats have set a trap for themselves," he said to his men, " and we shall be fools to break it up till the rats are safe inside."

So there the huge sow lay, black and silent, showing nothing to the enemy but a side of strong plank, covered with hide to prevent its being burned. It lay there for three hours, and The Wake let it lie.

He had never been so cheerful, so confident. " Play the man this day, every one of you, and ere nightfall you will have taught the Frenchman once more the lesson of

York. He seems to have forgotten that. It is time to remind him of it."

And he looked to his bow and to his arrows, and prepared to play the man himself, as was the fashion in those old days, when a general proved his worth by hitting harder and more surely than any of his men.

At last the army was in motion, and Willingham field opposite was like a crawling ants' nest. Brigade after brigade moved down to the reed beds, and the assault began.

And now advanced along the causeway, and along the bridge, a dark column of men, surmounted by glittering steel—knights in complete mail, footmen in leather coats and jerkins; at first orderly enough, each under the banner of his lord, but more and more mingled and crowded as each hurried forward, eager for his selfish share of the inestimable treasures of Ely. They pushed along the bridge. The mass became more and more crowded; men stumbled over each other and fell off into the mire and water, calling vainly for help; but their comrades hurried on unheeding, in the mad thirst for spoil.

On they came in thousands, and fresh thousands streamed out of the fields, as if the whole army intended to pour itself into the isle at once.

"They are numberless," said Torfrida, in a serious and astonished voice, as she stood by Hereward's side.

"Would they were!" said Hereward. "Let them come on, thick and threefold. The more their numbers, the fatter will the fish below be before to-morrow morning. Look there, already!"

And already the bridge was swaying and sinking beneath their weight. The men, in places, were ankle deep in water. They rushed on all the more eagerly, filled the sow, and swarmed up to its roof.

Then, what with its own weight, what with the weight of the laden bridge which dragged upon it from behind,

the huge sow began to tilt backwards, and slide down the slimy bank.

The men on the top tried vainly to keep their footing, to hurl grapnels into the rampart, to shoot off their quarrels and arrows.

" You must be quick, Frenchmen," shouted Hereward in derision, " if you mean to come on board here."

The French knew that well ; and as Hereward spoke, two panels in the front of the sow creaked on their hinges and dropped landward, forming two drawbridges, over which reeled to the attack a close body of knights, mingled with soldiers bearing scaling ladders.

They recoiled. Between the ends of the drawbridges and the foot of the rampart was some two fathoms' breadth of black ooze. The catastrophe which The Wake had foreseen was come, and a shout of derision arose from the unseen defenders above.

" Come on, leap it like men ! Send back for your horses, knights, and ride them at it like bold huntsmen ! "

The front rank could not but rush on, for the pressure behind forced them forward whether they would or not. In a moment they were wallowing waist deep, trampled on, disappearing under their struggling comrades, who disappeared in their turn.

" Look, Torfrida ! If they plant their scaling ladders, it will be on the foundation of their comrades' corpses."

Torfrida gave one glance through the openings of the hoarding upon the writhing mass below, and turned away in horror. The men were not so merciful. Down between the hoarding beams rained stones, javelins, arrows, increasing the agony and death. The scaling ladders would not stand in the mire ; if they had stood a moment, the struggles of the dying would have thrown them down. And still fresh victims pressed on from behind, shouting, " Dex Aie ! On to the gold of Ely ! " and still the sow, under the weight, slipped further and further back into

the stream, and the foul gulf widened between besiegers and besieged.

At last one scaling ladder was planted upon the bodies of the dead and hooked firmly on the gunwale of the hoarding. Ere it could be hurled off again by the English, it was so crowded with men that even Hereward's strength was insufficient to lift it off. He stood at the top, ready to hew down the first comer ; and he hewed him down.

But the French were not to be daunted. Man after man dropped dead from the ladder top, man after man took his place, sometimes scrambling over each other's backs.

The English, even in the insolence of victory, cheered them with honest admiration. " You are fellows worth fighting, you French ! "

" So we are," shouted a knight, the first and last who crossed that parapet ; for, thrusting Hereward back with a blow of his sword-hilt, he staggered past him over the hoarding, and fell on his knees.

A dozen men were upon him, but he was up again and shouting,—

" To me, men-at-arms ! A Deda ! A Deda ! " But no man answered.

" Yield ! " quoth Hereward.

Sir Deda answered by a blow on Hereward's helmet, which felled The Wake to his knees, and broke the sword into twenty splinters.

" Well hit ! " said Hereward, as he rose. " Don't touch him, men ! this is my quarrel now.—Yield, sir ! you have done enough for your honour. It is madness to throw away your life."

The knight looked round on the fierce ring of faces, in the midst of which he stood alone.

" To none but The Wake."

" The Wake am I."

" Ah," said the knight, " had I but hit a little harder ! "

" You would have broken your sword into more

splinters. My armour is enchanted. So yield like a reasonable and valiant man."

"What care I?" said the knight, stepping on to the earthwork, and sitting down quietly. "I vowed to St. Mary and King William that into Ely I would get this day, and in Ely I am; so I have done my work."

"And now you shall taste, as such a gallant knight deserves, the hospitality of Ely."

It was Torfrida who spoke.

"My husband's prisoners are mine; and I, when I find them such gallant knights as you are, have no lighter chains for them than that which a lady's bower can afford."

Sir Deda was going to make an equally courteous answer, when over and above the shouts and curses of the combatants rose a yell so keen, so dreadful, as made all hurry forward to the rampart.

That which The Wake had foreseen was come at last. The bridge, strained more and more by its living burden and by the falling tide, had parted—not at the Ely end, where the sliding of the sow took off the pressure, but at the end nearest the camp. One sideway roll it gave, and then, turning over, engulfed in that foul stream the flower of Norman chivalry.

Thousands are said to have perished. Their armour and weapons were found at times by delvers and dykers for centuries after; are found at times unto this day beneath the rich drained cornfields which now fill up that black half-mile, or in the bed of the narrow brook to which the Westwater, robbed of its streams by the Bedford Level, has dwindled down at last.

William, they say, struck his tents and departed forthwith, "groaning from deep grief of heart." Eastward he went, and encamped the remains of his army at Brandon, where he seems to have begun that castle, the ruins of which still exist in Weeting Park hard by. He put a line of sentinels along the Rech-dyke, which men now

call the Devil's Ditch; and did his best to blockade the isle, as he could not storm it. And so ended the first battle of Aldreth.

CHAPTER VII

A MONTH after the fight there came into the camp at Brandon, riding on an ambling pad, himself fat and well-liking, none other than Sir Deda.

Boisterously he was received, as one alive from the dead, and questioned as to his adventures and sufferings.

"Adventures I have had, and strange ones; but as for sufferings—instead of fetter-galls, I bring back, as you see, a new suit of clothes; instead of an empty and starved stomach, a surfeit from good victuals and good liquor; and whereas I went into Ely on foot, I came out on a fast hackney."

So into William's tent he went, and there he told his tale.

"So, Deda, my friend!" quoth the duke, in high good-humour, for he loved Deda. "You seem to have been in good company?"

"Never in better, sire, save in your presence. Of the earls and knights in Ely all I can say is, God's pity that they are rebels; for more gallant and courteous knights, or more perfect warriors, never saw I either in Normandy or at Constantinople, among the Varangers themselves."

"Eh? and what are the names of these gallants, for you have used your eyes and ears, of course?"

"Edwin and Morcar, the earls—two fine young lads."

"I know it. Go on," and a shade passed over William's brow as he thought of his own falsehood, and of his fair daughter weeping in vain for the fair bridegroom whom he had promised to her.

"Siward Barn, as they call him, the boy Orgar, and

Thurkil Barn. Those are the knights. Egelwin, Bishop of Durham, is there too ; and besides them all, and above them all, Hereward the Wake. The like of that knight I may have seen ; his better saw I never."

" Sir fool ! " said Earl Warrenne, who had not yet—small blame to him—forgotten his brother's death, " they have soused thy brains with their muddy ale, till thou knowest not friend from foe. What ! hast thou to come hither praising up to the king's majesty such an outlawed villain as that, with whom no honest knight would keep company ? "

" If you, Earl Warrenne, ever found Deda drunk or lying, it is more than the king here has done."

" Let him speak, earl," said William. " I have not an honester man in my camp ; and he speaks for my information, not for yours."

" Then for yours will I speak, sir king. These men treated me knightly, and sent me away without ransom."

" They had an eye to their own profit, it seems," grumbled the earl.

" But force me they did to swear on the holy Gospels that I should tell your majesty the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And I keep my oath," quoth Deda.

" Go on, then, without fear or favour. Are there any other men of note in the island ? "

" No."

" Are they in want of provisions ? "

" Look how they have fattened me."

" What do they complain of ? "

" I will tell you, sir king. The monks, like many more, took fright at the coming over of our French men of God to set right all their filthy barbarous ways ; and that is why they threw Ely open to the rebels."

" I will be even with the sots," quoth William.

" However, they think that danger blown over just now ; for they have a story among them, which, as my

lord the king never heard before, he may as well hear now."

"Eh?"

"How your majesty should have sent across the sea a whole shipload of French monks."

"That have I, and will more, till I reduce these swine into something like obedience to his Holiness of Rome."

"Ah, but your majesty has not heard how one Bruman, a valiant English knight, was sailing on the sea and caught those monks. Whereon he tied a great sack to the ship's head, and cut the bottom out, and made every one of those monks get into that sack and so fall through into the sea, whereby he rid the monks of Ely of their rivals."

"Pooh! why tell me such an old wives' fable, knight?"

"Because the monks believe that old wives' fable, and are stout-hearted and stiff-necked accordingly."

"Well, Sir Deda?"

"So they have got together all their kin—for among these monks every one is kin to a thane, or knight, or even an earl—and there they are, brother by brother, cousin by cousin, knee to knee, and back to back, like a pack of wolves, and that in a hold which you will not enter yet awhile."

"Does my friend Deda doubt his duke's skill at last?"

"Sir duke—sir king, I mean now, for king you are and deserve to be—I know what you can do. I remember how we took England at one blow on Senlac field; but see you here, sir king, how will you take an island with four such saints to guard it as St. Etheldreda, St. Withberga, St. Sexberga, and St. Ermenilda?"

"By promising the holy ladies," said William, with a smile, "to honour them better than ever did yet an English swine."

"Amen. But again, how will you take an island where four kings such as you (if the world would hold four such at once) could not stop one churl from plough-

ing the land, or one bird-catcher from setting lime-twigs?"

"And what if I cannot stop the bird-catchers? Do they expect to lime Frenchmen as easily as sparrows?"

"Sparrows! It is not sparrows that I have been fattening on this last month. I tell you, sire, I have seen wild-fowl alone in that island enough to feed them all the year round. I was there in the moulting time, and saw them take one day one hundred, one two hundred, and once, as I am a belted knight, a thousand duck out of one single mere. There is a wood there with herons sprawling about the tree-tops—I did not think there were so many in the world; otters and weasels, ermines and pole-cats, for fur robes; and fish for Lent and Fridays in every puddle and leat—pike and perch, roach and eels, on every old wife's table; while the knights think scorn of anything worse than smelt and burbot."

"Splendeur Dex!" quoth William, who, Norman-like, did not dislike a good dinner. "I must keep Lent in Ely before I die."

"Then you had best make peace with the burbot-eating knights, my lord."

"But have they flesh-meat?"

"The island is half of it a garden—richer land, they say, is none in these realms, and I believe it; but besides that there is a deer-park there with a thousand head in it, red and fallow, besides hares; and plenty of swine and goats in woods, and sheep and cattle. And if they fail, there are plenty more to be got, they know where."

"They know where? Do you, sir knight?" asked William keenly.

"Out of every little island in their fens, for forty miles on end. There are the herds fattening themselves on the richest pastures in the land, and no man needing to herd them, for they are all safe among dykes and meres."

"I will make my boats sweep their fens clear of every head——"

" Take care, my lord king, lest never a boat come back from that errand. With their narrow flat-bottomed punts, cut out of a single log, and their leaping-poles, wherewith they fly over dykes of thirty feet in width, they can ambuscade in those reed-beds and alder-beds, kill whom they will, and then flee away through the marsh, like so many horse-flies. And if not, one trick have they left, which they never try save when driven into a corner ; but from that may all saints save us ! "

" What then ? "

" Firing the reeds."

" And destroying their own cover ? "

" True ; therefore they will only do it in despair."

" Then to despair will I drive them, and try their worst. So these monks are as stout rebels as the earls ? "

" I only say what I saw. At the hall-table there dined each day maybe some fifty belted knights, with every one a monk next to him ; and at the high table the abbot, and the earls, and Hereward and his lady. And behind each knight, and each monk likewise, hung against the wall lance and shield, helmet and hauberk, sword and axe."

" To monk as well as knight ? "

" As I am a knight myself ; and were as well used, too, for aught I saw. The monks took turns with the knights as sentries, and as foragers likewise ; and the knights themselves told me openly the monks were as good men as they."

" As wicked, you mean," groaned the chaplain. " O accursed and bloodthirsty race, why does not the earth open and swallow you, with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram ? "

" They would not care," quoth Deda. " They are born and bred in the bottomless pit already. They would jump over, or flounder out, as they do to their own bogs every day."

" You speak irreverently, my friend," quoth William.

" Ask those who are in camp, and not me. As for

whither they went, or how, the English were not likely to tell me. All that I know is that I saw fresh cattle come in every few days, and fresh farms burned, too, on the Norfolk side. There were farms burning only last night between here and Cambridge. Ask your sentinels on the Rech-dyke how that came about!"

"I can answer that," quoth a voice from the other end of the tent. "I was on the Rech-dyke last night, close down to the fen—worse luck and shame for me!"

"Answer, then!" quoth William, with one of his fiercest oaths, glad to have some one on whom he could turn his rage and disappointment.

"There came seven men in a boat up from Ely yester-even, and five of them were monks; they came up from Burwell fen, and plundered and burned Burwell town."

"And where were all you mighty men of war?"

"Ten of ours ran down to stop them, with Richard, Viscount Osbert's nephew, at their head. The villains came at a foot's pace up the Rech-dyke, and attacked them at lance-point; and before we could get to them——"

"Thy men had run, of course."

"They were every one dead or wounded, save Richard; and he was fighting single-handed with an Englishman, while the other six stood around, and looked on."

"Then they fought fairly?" said William.

"As fairly, to do them justice, as if they had been Frenchmen and not English churls. As we came down along the dyke, a little man of them steps between the two, and strikes up their swords as if they had been two reeds. 'Come!' cries he, 'enough of this. You are two stout knights well matched, and you can fight out this any other day;' and away he and his men go down the dyke end to the water."

"Leaving Richard safe?"

"Wounded a little, but safe enough."

"And then?"

" We followed them to the boat as hard as we could, killed one of their boatmen with a javelin, and caught another."

" Knightly done ! " and William swore an awful oath, " and worthy of valiant Frenchmen. These English set you the example of chivalry by letting your comrade fight his own battle fairly, instead of setting on him all together; and you repay them by hunting them down with darts, because you dare not go within sword's-stroke of better men than yourselves. Go. I am ashamed of you. No, stay. Where is your prisoner ? For, splendeur Dex, I will send him back safe and sound in return for Deda, to tell the knights of Ely that if they know so well the courtesies of war, William of Rouen does too."

" The prisoner, sire," quoth the knight, trembling, " is—is——"

" You have not murdered him ? "

" Heaven forbid ! but——"

" He broke his bonds and escaped ? "

" Gnawed them through, sire, as we supposed, and escaped through the mire in the dark.

" But did he tell you nought ere he bade you good-morning ? "

" He told us the names of all the seven. He that beat down the swords was Hereward himself."

" I thought as much. When shall I have that fellow at my side ? "

" He that fought Richard was one Wenoch."

" I have heard of him."

" He that we took was Azer the Hardy, a monk of Nicole—Licole. And the rest were Turstan the Younger ; one Siward, another monk ; Leofric the deacon, Hereward's minstrel ; and Boter, the traitor monk of St. Edmunds'."

" And if I catch them," quoth William, " I will make an abbot of every one of them."

" Sire ? " quoth the chaplain, in a deprecating tone.

CHAPTER VIII

THEY of Ely were now much straitened, being shut in both by land and water; and what was to be done, either by themselves or by the king, they knew not. Would William simply starve them, or at least inflict on them so perpetual a Lent—for of fish there could be no lack, even if they ate or drove away all the fowl—as would tame down their proud spirits. Or was he gathering vast armies, from they knew not whence, to try, once and for all, another assault on the island—it might be from several points at once?

They must send out a spy, and find out news from the outer world, if news were to be gotten. But who would go?

So asked the bishop, and the abbot, and the earls, in council in the abbot's lodging.

Torfrida was among them. She was always among them now. She was their Alruna-wife, their wise woman, whose counsels all received as more than human.

"I will go," said she, rising up like a goddess on Olympus. "I will cut off my hair, and put on boy's clothes, and smirch myself brown with walnut leaves, and I will go. I can talk their French tongue. I know their French ways; and as for a story to cover my journey and my doings, trust a woman's wit to invent that."

They looked at her, with delight in her courage, but with doubt.

"If William's French grooms got hold of you, Torfrida, it would not be a little walnut-brown which would hide you," said Hereward. "But it is like you to offer—worthy of you, who have no peer."

"That she has not," quoth churchmen and soldiers alike.

"Nevertheless, to send you would be to send The

Wake's praying half, and that would be bad religion. The Wake's fighting half is going, while you pray here as well as watch."

"Uncle, uncle," said the young earls, "send Winter, Gery, Leofwin Prat, any of your good men, but not yourself. If we lose you, we lose our head and our king."

And all begged Hereward to let any man go rather than himself.

"I am going, lords and knights; and what Hereward says he does. It is one day to Brandon. It may be two days back; for if I miscarry—as I most likely shall—I must come home round about. On the fourth day you shall hear of me or from me.—Come with me, Torfrida."

And he strode out.

He cropped his golden locks, he cropped his golden beard; and Torfrida wept, as she cropped them, half with fear for him, half for sorrow over his shorn glories.

"I am no Samson, my lady; my strength lieth not in my locks. Now for some rascal's clothes—as little dirty as you can get me for fear of company."

And Hereward put on filthy garments, and taking mare Swallow with him, got into a barge and went across the river to Soham.

He could not go down the great Ouse and up the Little Ouse, which was his easiest way, for the French held all the river below the isle; and, besides, to have come straight from Ely might cause suspicion. So he went down to Fordham, and crossed the Lark at Mildenhall; and just before he got to Mildenhall, he met a potter carrying pots upon a pony.

"Halt, my stout churl," quoth he, "and put thy pots on my mare's back."

"The man who wants them must fight for them," quoth that stout churl, raising a heavy staff.

"Then here is he that will," quoth Hereward; and jumping off his mare, he twisted the staff out of the potter's hands, and knocked him down therewith.

" That will teach thee to know an Englishman when thou seest him."

" I have met my master," quoth the churl, rubbing his head. " But dog does not eat dog; and it is hard to be robbed by an Englishman, after being robbed a dozen times by the French."

" I will not rob thee. There is a silver penny for thy pots and thy coat—for that I must have likewise. And if thou tellest to mortal man aught about this, I will find those who will cut thee up for dogs' meat; but if not, then turn thy horse's head and ride back to Ely, if thou canst cross the water, and say what has befallen thee, and thou wilt find there an abbot who will give thee another penny for thy news."

So Hereward took the pots, and the potter's clay-greased coat, and went on through Mildenhall, " crying," saith the chronicler, " after the manner of potters, in the English tongue, ' Pots ! pots ! good pots and pans ! ' "

But when he got through Mildenhall, and well into the rabbit-warrens, he gave mare Swallow a kick, and went over the heath so fast northward, that his pots danced such a dance as broke half of them before he got to Brandon.

" Never mind," quoth he, " they will think that I have sold them." And when he neared Brandon he pulled up, sorted his pots, kept the whole ones, threw the shreds at the rabbits, and walked on into Brandon solemnly, leading the mare, and crying, " Pots ! "

So lean and ill-looking was that famous mare, says the chronicler, that no one would suspect her splendid powers, or take her for anything but a potter's nag when she was caparisoned in proper character. Hereward felt thoroughly at home in his part; as able to play the Englishman which he was by rearing, as the Frenchman which he was by education.

He was full of heart, and happy. He enjoyed the keen fresh air of the warrens; he enjoyed the ramble out of

the isle, in which he had been cooped up so long; he enjoyed the jest of the thing—disguise, stratagem, adventure, danger. And so did the English, who adored him. None of The Wake's crafty deeds is told so carefully and lovingly, and none, doubt it not, was so often sung in after years by farmhouse hearths, or in the outlaws' lodge, as this. Robin Hood himself may have trolled out many a time, in doggerel strain, how Hereward played the potter.

And he came to Brandon, to the "king's court," from which William could command the streams of Wissey and Little Ouse, with all their fens; and saw with a curse the new buildings of Weeting Castle—like the rest, of which Sir F. Palgrave eloquently says: "New, and strong, and cruel in their strength—how the Englishman must have loathed the damp smell of the fresh mortar, and the sight of the heaps of rubble, and the chippings of the stone, and the blurring of the lime upon the green sward; and how hopeless he must have felt when the great gates opened, and the wains were drawn in, heavily laden with the salted beeves, and the sacks of corn and meal furnished by the royal demesnes, the manors which had belonged to Edward the Confessor, now the spoil of the stranger: and when he looked into the castle court, thronged by the soldiers in bright mail, and heard the carpenters working upon the ordnance—every blow and stroke, even of the hammer or mallet, speaking the language of defiance."

These things The Wake saw; and felt, like others, hopeless for the moment. And there rang in his ears his own message to William: "When thou art king of all England, I will put my hands between thine, and be thy man."

"He is not king of all England yet!" thought he again; and drew himself up so proudly, that one passing by jeered him,—

"There goes a bold swaggerer enough, to be selling pots abroad." The Wake slouched his shoulder, and

looked as mean a churl as ever. Next he cast about for a night's lodging, for it was dark.

Outside the town was a wretched cabin of mud and turf—such a one as Irish folk live in to this day; and Hereward said to himself, "This is bad enough to be good enough for me."

So he knocked at the door, and knocked till it was opened and a hideous old crone put out her head.

"Who wants to see me at this time of night?"

"Any one would who had heard how beautiful you are. Do you want any pots?"

"Pots? What have I to do with pots, thou saucy fellow? I thought it was some one wanting a charm." And she shut the door.

"A charm?" thought Hereward. "Maybe she can tell me news, if she be a witch. They are shrewd souls, those witches, and know more than they tell. And if I can get any news, I care not if Satan brings it in person."

So he knocked again, till the old woman looked out once more, and bade him angrily be off.

"But I am belated here, good dame, and afraid of the French. And I will give thee the best bit of clay on my mare's back—pot—pan—panshin—crock—jug, or what thou wilt, for a night's lodging."

"Have you any little jars—jars no longer than my hand?" asked she; for she used them in her trade, and had broken one of late, but to pay for one she had neither money nor mind. So she agreed to let Hereward sleep there, for the value of two jars.—"But what of that ugly brute of a horse of thine?"

"She will do well enough in the turf-shed."

"Then thou must pay with a panshin."

"Ugh!" groaned Hereward, "thou drivest a hard bargain for an Englishwoman with a poor Englishman."

"How knowest thou that I am English?"

"So much the better if thou art not," thought Here-

ward; and bargained with her for a panshin against a lodging for the horse in the turf-house and a bottle of bad hay.

Then he went in, bringing his panniers with him with ostentatious câre.

"Thou canst sleep there on the rushes. I have nought to give thee to eat."

"Nought needs nought," said Hereward, threw himself down on a bundle of rush, and in a few minutes snored loudly.

But he was never less asleep. He looked round the whole place, and he listened to every word.

The devil, as usual, was a bad paymaster; for the witch's cabin seemed only somewhat more miserable than that of other old women. The floor was mud, the rafters unceiled; the stars shone through the turf roof. The only hint of her trade was a hanging shelf, on which stood five or six little earthen jars, and a few packets of leaves. A parchment, scrawled with characters which the owner herself probably did not understand, hung against the cob wall; and a human skull—probably used only to frighten her patients—dangled from the roof-tree.

Hereward was very much frightened. He believed devoutly in the powers of a witch.

So he trembled on his rushes, and wished himself safe through that adventure, without being turned into a hare or a wolf.

"I would sooner be a wolf than a hare, of course; but—who comes here?"

And to the first old crone, who sat winking her bleared eyes, and warming her bleared hands over a little heap of peat in the middle of the cabin, entered another crone, if possible uglier.

"Two of them! If I am not roasted and eaten this night, I am a lucky man."

His heart leaped for joy on hearing the two old hags talk to each other in French.

"Well, how have you sped? Have you seen the king?"

"No; but Ivo Taillebois.*—Eh? Who the foul fiend have you lying there?"

"Only an English brute. He cannot understand us. Talk on; only don't wake the hog. Have you got the gold?"

"Never mind."

Then there was a grumbling and a quarrelling, from which Hereward understood that the gold was to be shared between them.

"But it is a bit of a chain. To cut it will spoil it."

The other insisted, and he heard them chop the gold chain in two.

"And is this all?"

"I had work enough to get that. He said, no play no pay; and he would give it me after the isle was taken. But I told him my spirit was a Jewish spirit, that used to serve Solomon the Wise; and he would not serve me, much less come over the sea from Normandy, unless he smelt gold, for he loved it like any Jew."

"And what did you tell him then?"

"That the king must go back to Aldreth again, for only from thence would he take the isle; for—and that was true enough—I dreamt I saw all the water of Aldreth full of wolves, clambering over into the island on each other's backs."

"That means that some of them will be drowned."

"Let them drown. I left him to find out that part of the dream himself. Then I told him how he must make another causeway, bigger and stronger than the last, and a tower on which I could stand and curse the English. And I promised him to bring a storm right in the faces of the English, so that they could neither fight nor see."

"But if the storm does not come?"

* A Norman knight who held some of Hereward's lands.

" It will come. I know the signs of the sky—who better?—and the weather will break up in a week. Therefore I told him he must begin his works at once, before the rain came on; and that we would go and ask the guardian of the well to tell us the fortunate day for attacking."

" That is my business," said the other; " and my spirit likes the smell of gold as well as yours. Little you would have got from me, if you had not given me half the chain."

Then the two rose.

" Let us see whether the English hog is asleep."

One of them came and listened to Hereward's breathing, and put her hand upon his chest. His hair stood on end, a cold sweat came over him. But he snored more loudly than ever.

The two old crones went out satisfied. Then Hereward rose and glided after them.

They went down a meadow to a little well, which Hereward had marked as he rode thither hung round with bits of rag and flowers, as similar " holy wells " are decorated in Ireland to this day.

He hid behind a hedge, and watched them stooping over the well, mumbling he knew not what of cantrips.

Then there was a silence, and a tinkling sound as of water.

" Once—twice—thrice," counted the witches. Nine times he counted the tinkling sound.

" The ninth day—the ninth day, and the king shall take Ely," said one in a cracked scream, rising and shaking her fist towards the isle.

Hereward was more than half minded to have put his dagger—the only weapon which he had—into the two old beldames. But the fear of an outcry kept him still. He had found out already so much, that he was determined to find out more. So to-morrow he would go up to the court itself, and take what luck sent.

He slipped back to the cabin, and lay down again; and as soon as he had seen the two old crones safe asleep, fell asleep himself, and was so tired that he lay till the sun was high.

"Get up!" screamed the old dame at last, kicking him, "or I shall make you give me another crock for a double night's rest."

He paid his lodging, put the panniers on the mare, and went on crying pots.

When he came to the outer gateway of the court, he tied up the mare, and carried the crockery in on his own back boldly. The scullions saw him, and called him into the kitchen to see his crockery, without the least intention of paying for what they took.

A man of rank belonging to the court came in, and stared fixedly at Hereward.

"You are mightily like that villain Hereward, man," quoth he.

"Anon?" asked Hereward, looking as stupid as he could.

"If it were not for his brown face and his short hair, he is as like the fellow as a churl can be to a knight."

"Bring him into the hall," quoth another, "and let us see if any man knows him."

Into the great hall he was brought, and stared at by knights and squires. He bent his knees, rounded his shoulders, and made himself look as mean as he could.

Ivo Taillebois and Earl Warrenne came down and had a look at him.

"Hereward?" said Ivo. "I will warrant that little slouching cur is not he. Hereward must be half as big again, if it be true that he can kill a man with one blow of his fist."

"You may try the truth of that for yourself some day," thought Hereward.

"Does any one here talk English? Let us question the fellow," said Earl Warrenne.

"Hereward? Hereward? Who wants to know about that villain?" answered the potter, as soon as he was asked in English. "Would to Heaven he were here, and I could see some of you noble knights and earls paying him for me; for I owe him more than ever I shall pay myself."

"What does he mean?"

"He came out of the isle ten days ago, nigh on to evening, and drove off a cow of mine and four sheep, which was all my living, noble knights, save these pots."

"And where is he since?"

"In the isle, my lords, well-nigh starved, and his folk falling away from him daily, from hunger and ague-fits. I doubt if there be a hundred sound men left in Ely."

"Have you been in thither, then, villain?"

"Heaven forbid! I in Ely? I in the wolf's den? If I went in with nought but my skin, they would have it off me before I got out again. Ah, if your lordships would but come down, and make an end of him once for all; for he is a great tyrant, and terrible, and devours us poor folk like so many mites in his cheese."

"Take this babbler into the kitchen, and feed him," quoth Earl Warrenne, and so the colloquy ended.

CHAPTER IX

INTO the kitchen again the potter went. The king's luncheon was preparing; so he listened to the chatter, and picked up this, at least, which was valuable to him: that the witches' story was true; that a great attack would be made from Aldreth; that boats had been ordered up the river to Cotinglade, and pioneers and entrenching tools were to be sent on that day to the old causeway.

But soon he had to take care of himself. Earl Warrenne's commands to feed him were construed by the cook-boys and scullions into a command to make him drunk likewise. To make a laughing-stock of an Englishman was too tempting a jest to be resisted; and Hereward was drenched (says the chronicler) with wine and beer, and sorely baited and badgered. At last one rascal hit upon a notable plan.

"Pluck out the English hog's hair and beard, and put him blindfold in the midst of his pots, and see what a smash we shall have."

Hereward pretended not to understand the words, which were spoken in French; but when they were interpreted to him, he grew somewhat red about the ears.

Submit he would not. But if he defended himself, and made an uproar in the king's court, he might very likely find himself riding Odin's horse before the hour was out. However, happily for him, the wine and beer had made him stout of heart, and when one fellow laid hold of his beard he resisted sturdily.

The man struck him, and that hard. Hereward, hot of temper, and careless of life, struck him again, right under the ear.

The fellow dropped for dead.

Up leapt cook-boys, scullions, *lécheurs* (who hung about the kitchen to *lécher*, lick the platters), and all the foul-mouthed rascality of a great mediæval household, and attacked Hereward with forks and flesh-hooks.

Then was Hereward aware of a great broach, or spit, before the fire; and recollecting how he had used such a one as a boy against the monks of Peterborough, was minded to use it against the cooks of Brandon, which he did so heartily that in a few moments he had killed one, and driven the others backward in a heap.

But his case was hopeless. He was soon overpowered by numbers from outside, and dragged into the hall, to

receive judgment for the mortal crime of slaying a man within the precincts of the court.

He kept up heart. He knew that the king was there; he knew that he should most likely get justice from the king. If not, he could but discover himself, and so save his life, for that William would kill him willingly he did not believe.

So he went in boldly and willingly, and up the hall, where, on the dais, stood William the Norman.

William had finished his luncheon, and was standing at the board-side. A page held water in a silver basin, in which he was washing his hands. Two more knelt and laced his long boots; for he was, as always, going a-hunting.

Then Hereward looked at the face of the great man, and felt at once that it was the face of the greatest man whom he had ever met.

"I am not that man's match," said he to himself. "Perhaps it will all end in being his man, and he my master."

"Silence, knaves!" said William, "and speak one of you at a time. How came this?"

"A likely story, forsooth!" said he, when he had heard. "A poor English potter comes into my court, and murders my men under my very eyes for mere sport. I do not believe you, rascals!—You, churl," and he spoke through an English interpreter, "tell me your tale, and justice you shall have or take, as you deserve. I am the King of England, man, and I know your tongue, though I speak it not yet, more pity."

Hereward fell on his knees.

"If you are indeed my lord the king, then I am safe, for there is justice in you—at least so all men say." And he told his tale manfully.

"Splendeur Dex! but this is a far likelier story, and I believe it. Hark you, you ruffians! Here am I, trying to conciliate these English by justice and mercy, whenever

they will let me ; and here are you outraging them, and driving them mad and desperate, just that you may get a handle against them, and thus rob the poor wretches and drive them into the forest. From the lowest to the highest—from Ivo Taillebois there down to you cook-boys—you are all at the same game. And I will stop it ! The next time I hear of outrage to unarmed man or harmless woman, I will hang that culprit were he Odo my brother himself."

This excellent speech was enforced with oaths so strange and terrible that Ivo Taillebois shook in his boots, and the chaplain prayed fervently that the roof might not fall in on their heads.

" Thou smilest, man ? " said William quickly, to the kneeling Hereward. " So thou understandest French ? "

" A few words only, most gracious king, which we potters pick up wandering everywhere with our wares," said Hereward, speaking in French ; for so keen was William's eye that he thought it safer to play no tricks with him.

Nevertheless, he made his French so execrable that the very scullions grinned, in spite of their fear.

" Look you," said William, " you are no common churl ; you have fought too well for that. Let me see your arm."

Hereward drew up his sleeve.

" Potters do not carry sword-scars like those, neither are they tattooed like English thanes. Hold up thy head, man, and let us see thy throat."

Hereward, who had carefully hung down his head to prevent his throat-patterns being seen, was forced to lift it up.

" Aha ! So I expected. There is fair ladies' work there. Is not this he who was said to be so like Hereward ? Very good. Put him in ward till I come back from hunting. But do him no harm. For "—and William fixed on Hereward eyes of the most intense

intelligence—" were he Hereward himself, I should be right glad to see Hereward safe and sound; my man at last, and earl of all between Humber and the fens."

But Hereward did not rise at the bait. With a face of stupid and ludicrous terror, he made reply in broken French,—

" Have mercy, mercy, lord king! Make not that fiend earl over us. Even Ivo Taillebois there would be better than he. Send him to be earl over the imps in hell, or over the wild Welsh who are worse still; but not over us, good lord king, whom he hath polled and peeled till we are——"

" Silence! " said William, laughing, as did all round him. " Thou art a cunning rogue enough, whoever thou art. Go into limbo, and behave thyself till I come back."

" All saints send your grace good sport, and thereby me a good deliverance," quoth Hereward, who knew that his fate might depend on the temper in which William returned. So he was thrust into an outhouse, and there locked up.

He sat on an empty barrel, meditating on the chances of his submitting to the king after all, when the door opened, and in strode one with a drawn sword in one hand, and a pair of leg-shackles in the other.

" Hold out thy shins, fellow! Thou art not going to sit at thine ease there like an abbot, after killing one of us grooms, and bringing the rest of us into disgrace. Hold out thy legs, I say! "

" Nothing easier," quoth Hereward cheerfully, and held out a leg. But when the man stooped to put on the fetters, he received a kick which sent him staggering.

After which he recollected very little, at least in this world; for Hereward cut off his head with his own sword.

After which (says the chronicler) he broke away out of the house, and over garden walls and palings, hiding

and running, till he got to the front gate, and leaped upon mare Swallow.

And none saw him, save one unlucky groom-boy, who stood yelling and cursing in front of the mare's head, and went to seize her bridle.

Whereon, between the imminent danger and the bad language, Hereward's blood rose, and he smote that unlucky groom-boy; but whether he slew him or not, the chronicler had rather not say.

Then he shook up mare Swallow, and with one great shout of "A Wake! A Wake!" rode for his life, with knights and squires (for the hue-and-cry was raised) galloping at her heels.

Who then were astonished but those knights, as they saw the ugly potter's garron gaining on them, length after length, till she and her rider had left them far behind?

Who then was proud but Hereward, as the mare tucked her great thighs under her, and swept on over heath and rabbit burrow, over rush and fen, sound ground and rotten all alike to that enormous stride, to that keen bright eye which foresaw every footfall, to that raking shoulder which picked her up again at every stagger?

Hereward laid the bridle on her neck and let her go. Fall she could not, and tire she could not; and he half wished she might go on for ever. Where could a man be better than on a good horse, with all the cares of this life blown away out of his brains by the keen air which rushed round his temples? And he galloped on, as cheery as a boy, shouting at the rabbits as they scuttled from under his feet, and laughing at the dotterel as they postured and anticked on the mole-hills.

But when he got through Mildenhall, he began to think how he should get home to Ely.

The hue-and-cry would be out against him. The ports and ferries to the east of the isle as far south as Cambridge would be guarded; and all the more surely,

on account of the approaching attack. True, he knew many a path and ford which the French could not know ; but he feared to trust himself in the labyrinth of fens and meres, with a mob of pursuers at his heels. A single mistake might pound him among morasses, and force him, even if he escaped himself through the reeds, to leave the mare behind. And to do that was shame and loss intolerable. No. Mare Swallow, for her own sake, must do a deed that day.

He would go south by the Roman roads. He would go right round the fens—round Cambridge itself—into the western forests. There he could lie hid till some friend at Somersham or Earith should ferry him over to the western side of the isle. The distance was great—well-nigh fifty miles ; but the land was light and sound, and the going safe and good. It must be done. It should be done.

He gathered the mare together, as he rode up the slope of Kennet heath. She was going steadily and soundly, breathing like a sleeping child. His pursuers were two miles behind—black dots among the barrows on Barton hill. He had time to rest her, and trotted on steadily, keeping to the uplands and the high road, from whence he could see far and wide over the land.

On by Newmarket heath—nameless and desert then—over smooth chalk turf ; through glades of fern and thorn ; past barrows where slept the heroes of old times, Briton, Roman, Saxon, Dane ; forefathers of his own, perhaps, among them. Ay, that was the place for a hero to sleep in. Not choked in a minster charnel-house, amid green damp and droning monks, but out under the free sky, with his weapons round him, his horse, his dog, the antlers of his game ; where he might come up out of his barrow on moonlight nights, and stare at the flying clouds, and scent the rushing breeze. Ah, that he could be buried there ! But then Torfrida—he should like to lie by her.

He was at the Rech-dyke now, and warily he looked eastward, as he led the mare up the steep bank, for French scouts between him and the fens; but none were within sight.

He paused upon the top of that great earthwork. Dangerous as it was to stop in that exposed height, making himself a beacon against the sky, he could not but look down, and back, at all which remained of free English soil.

He looked down over Swaffham, Quy, and Waterbeach, and the rest of the tree-embowered hamlets which fringed the fen, green knolls on the shore of a boundless sea of pale-blue mist; and above that sea, to the far north, a line of darker blue, which was the sacred isle. As the sun sank lower, higher rose the mist; and the isle grew more and more faint, vaporous, dreamy, as fen-distances are wont to be. Was it not about to fade away in reality; to become a vapour and a dream, and leave him alone and free? Earls, knights, house-carles, monks, seemed all becoming phantoms, fading with their fading cause. Was it worth while to fight, to die, for them, for anything? What was William to him? What was England? Why play out the lost game to the last? Why not leave all behind, and ride down south—to the sea—the free sea, and the wild joys of the Viking's life? And he led the mare down the Rech-dyke, and up again on to the down, faltering, stopping, his head sunken on his breast, his heart sunken within.

But Torfrida—Torfrida and the little girl. They at least were not phantoms. They could not vanish, could not even die—to him. His they were for ever. What fiend had been putting boy's dreams into his head?

And he sprang hastily into the saddle, as one that flees from a temptation. "Home, mare! Home to prison again! We have been out far too long, old lass! too long."

He held on over the Fleam-dyke; but he feared to

turn downwards into the Cambridge flats, and kept his vantage-ground upon the downs, till, on the top of the Gogmagog, he struck the old Roman road, which men call "Wort's Causeway" at this day. Down that he turned, short to the right, toward the green meadows, and the long line of mighty elms, and the little village which clustered, unconscious of its coming glories, beneath the new French keep, beside the Roman bridge.

The setting sun gilded the white flints of the keep; and Hereward looked on them with a curse. But it gilded, too, the tree-tops of the great forest beyond; and Hereward uttered something like a prayer to St. Etheldreda and her ladies three. For if he could but reach that forest, he was safe.

The Wake was, of course, too wise to go through Cambridge street, under the eyes of the French garrison. But he saw that the Roman road led straight to a hamlet some mile above the town; and at the road end, he guessed, there must be either a bridge or a ford. There he could cross the Cam. And he rode slowly downward, longing for it to grow dark, and saving the mare, in case she should be needed for a sudden rush.

And a rush was soon needed. For on the hill behind him he saw armour glitter in the red light, and a brace of knights. They paused for a moment, and then espied him. One galloped down the road toward him; the other spurred to the right, straight for Cambridge.

"I shall have the whole pack of wolves out, and on me, in half an hour," thought Hereward, and struck spurs into the mare.

Into the ford he dashed, making more splash than ever did geese in Shelford fen; and out again, and on to the clay wold, and away for Coton and Madingley rise, and the black wall of oak and ash and elm.

And as he entered the forest at Madingley, he rose in his stirrups, with a shout of "A Wake! A Wake!" which was heard, for aught he cared, in Cambridge

Castle; and then rode on leisurely toward the Draytons and the ferry over the Ouse at Holywell, for well he knew that they who could not catch The Wake in the field, were still less likely to catch him in the wood.

And so through the forest, by a clear moonlight (says the chronicler), he came in the early morning to the Isle Somersham, which was then all deep wood (as the names of Woodhurst and Somersham Parks still testify), and was ferried over at Earith by one of his many friends into the isle of Ely.

And of all those knights that followed him, none ever saw or heard sign of him, save one; and his horse came to a standstill in "the aforesaid wood," and he rolled off and lay breathless under a tree, looking up at his horse's heaving flanks and wagging tail, and wondering how he should get out of that place before the English found him and made an end of him.

Then there came up to him a ragged churl, and asked him who he was, and offered to help him.

"For the sake of God and courtesy," quoth he, his French pride being well-nigh beat out of him, "if thou hast seen or heard anything of Hereward the Wake, good fellow, tell me, and I will repay thee well."

"As thou hast asked me for the sake of God and of courtesy, sir knight, I will tell thee. I am The Wake. And in token thereof thou shalt give me thy lance and sword, and take instead this sword which I carried off from the king's court at Brandon; and promise me, on the faith of a knight, to bear it back to King William, and tell him that Hereward and he have met at last, and that he had best beware of the day when they shall meet again."

So that knight, not having recovered his wind, was fain to submit, and go home a sadder and a wiser man. And King William laughed a royal laugh, and commanded his knights that they should in no wise harm The Wake,

but take him alive, and bring him in, and they should have great rewards.

Which seemed to them more easily said than done.

CHAPTER X

HEREWARD came back in fear and trembling after all. He believed in the magic powers of the witch of Brandon ; and he asked Torfrida, in his simplicity, whether she was not cunning enough to defeat her spells by counter spells.

Torfrida smiled and shook her head.

" My knight, I have long since given up such vanities. Let us not fight evil with evil, but rather with good. Better are prayers than charms ; for the former are heard in heaven above, and the latter only in the pit below. Let me and all the women of Ely go rather in procession to St. Etheldreda's well, there above the fort at Eldreth, and pray St. Etheldreda to be with us when the day shall come, and defend her own isle, and the honour of us women who have taken refuge in her holy arms."

So all the women of Ely walked out barefoot to St. Etheldreda's well, with Torfrida at their head, clothed in sackcloth, and with fetters on her wrists, and waist, and ankles ; which she vowed, after the strange, sudden, earnest fashion of those times, never to take off again till she saw the French host flee from Aldreth before the face of St. Etheldreda. So they prayed, while Hereward and his men worked at the forts below. And when they came back, and Torfrida was washing her feet, sore and bleeding from her pilgrimage, Hereward came in.

" You have murdered your poor soft feet, and have taken nothing thereby, I fear."

" I have. If I had walked on sharp razors all the

way, I would have done it gladly, to know what I know now. As I prayed I looked out over the fen, and St. Etheldreda put a thought into my heart. But it is so terrible a one that I fear to tell it to you. And yet it seems our only chance."

Hereward threw himself at her feet, and prayed her to tell. At last she spoke, as one half afraid of her own words,—

"Will the reeds burn, Hereward?"

Hereward kissed her feet again and again, calling her his prophetess, his saviour.

"Burn! yes, like tinder, in this March wind, if the drought only holds. Pray that the drought may hold, Torfrida."

"There, there, say no more. How hard-hearted war makes even us women! There, help me to take off this rough sackcloth, and dress myself again."

Meanwhile William had moved his army again to Cambridge, and on to Willingham field, and there he began to rebuild his causeway, broader and stronger; and commanded all the fishermen of the Ouse to bring their boats to Cotinglade, and ferry over his materials. "Among whom came Hereward in a very narrow canoe, with head and beard shaven lest he should be known, and worked diligently among the rest. But the sun did not set that day without mischief; for before Hereward went off he finished his work by setting the whole on fire, so that it was all burnt, and some of the French killed and drowned."

And so The Wake went on, with stratagems and ambushes, till "after seven days' continual fighting they had hardly done one day's work, save four globos of wood, in which they intended to put their artillery. But on the eighth day they determined to attack the isle, putting in the midst of them that pythoness woman on a high place, where she might be safe freely to exercise her art."

When the men marched down to Haddenham that afternoon, Torfrida rode at their head on a white charger, robed from throat to ankle in sackcloth, her fetters clanking on her limbs. But she called on the English to see in her the emblem of England captive yet unconquered, and to break her fetters and the worse fetters of every woman in England who was the toil and slave of the brutal invaders; and so fierce a triumph sparkled from her wild hawk-eyes that the Englishmen looked up to her weird beauty as to that of an inspired saint; and when the French came on to the assault there stood on the grassy mound behind the English fort a figure clothed in sackcloth, barefooted, and bareheaded, with fetters shining on waist, and wrist, and ankle—her long black locks streaming in the wind, her long white arms stretched crosswise toward heaven, in imitation of Moses of old above the battle with Amalek, invoking St. Etheldreda and all the powers of heaven, and chanting doom and defiance to the invaders.

And the English looked on her, and cried, "She is a prophetess! We will surely do some great deed this day, or die around her feet like heroes!"

And opposite to her, upon the French tower, the old hag of Brandon howled and gibbered, calling for the thunderstorm which did not come, for all above, the sky was cloudless blue.

And the English saw and felt, though they could not speak it, dumb nation as they were, the contrast between the spirit of cruelty and darkness and the spirit of freedom and light.

So strong was the new bridge that William trusted himself upon it on horseback, with Ivo Taillebois at his side.

William doubted the powers of the witch, and felt rather ashamed of his new helpmate; but he was confident in his bridge, and in the heavy artillery which he had placed in his four towers.

William waited for the rising of the tide; and when the tide was near its height, he commanded the artillery to open, and clear the fort opposite of the English. Then with crash and twang the balistas and catapults went off, and great stones and heavy lances hurtled through the air.

"Back!" shouted Torfrida, raised almost to madness by fasting, self-torture, and religious frenzy. "Out of yon fort, every man. Why waste your lives under that artillery? Stand still this day, and see how the saints of heaven shall fight for you!"

So utter was the reverence which she commanded for the moment, that every man drew back, and crowded round her feet outside the fort.

"The cowards are fleeing already. Let your men go, sir king!" shouted Taillebois.

"On to the assault! Strike for Normandy!" shouted William.

"I fear much," said he to himself, "that this is some stratagem of that Wake's. But conquered they must be."

. . . . . .

The evening breeze curled up the reach. The great pike splashed out from the weedy shores, sending the whitefish flying in shoals into the low glare of the setting sun; and heeded not, stupid things, the barges packed with mailed men, which swarmed in the reeds on either side the bridge, and began to push out into the river.

The starlings swung in thousands round the reed-ronds, looking to settle in their wonted place, but dare not; and rose and swung round again, telling each other, in their manifold pipings, how all the reed-ronds teemed with mailed men. And all above, the sky was cloudless blue.

And then came a trample, a roll of many feet on the soft spongy peat, a low murmur which rose into wild shouts of "Dex Aie!" as a human tide poured along the causeway, and past the witch of Brandon heath.

" Dex Aie ? " quoth William, with a sneer. " Debbles Aie ! would fit better."

" If, sire, the powers above would have helped us, we should have been happy enough to—— But if they will not, it is not our fault if we try below," said Ivo Taillebois.

William laughed. " It is well to have two strings to one's bow, sir. Forward, men ! forward ! " shouted he, riding out to the bridge-end, under the tower.

" Forward ! " shouted Ivo Taillebois.

" Forward ! " shouted the hideous hag overhead. " The spirit of the well fights for you."

" Fight for yourselves," said William.

There were fifty yards of deep clear water between Frenchman and Englishman. Only fifty yards. Not only the arrows and arblast quarrels, but heavy hand-javelins, flew across every moment ; every now and then a man toppled forward, and plunged into the blue depth among the eels and pike, to find his comrades of the summer before ; and then the stream was still once more. The coots and water-hens swam in and out of the reeds, and wondered what it was all about. The water-lilies flapped upon the ripple, as lonely as in the loneliest mere. But their floats were soon broken, their white cups stained with human gore. Fifty yards of deep clear water ; and treasure inestimable to win by crossing it.

They thrust out balks, canoes, pontoons ; they crawled upon them like ants, and thrust out more yet beyond, heedless of their comrades, who slipped, and splashed, and sank, holding out vain hands to hands too busy to seize them. And always the old witch jabbered overhead with her cantrips, pointing, mumming, praying for the storm ; while all above, the sky was cloudless blue.

And always on the mound opposite, while darts and quarrels whistled round her head, stood Torfrida, pointing with outstretched scornful finger at the strugglers in the river, and chanting loudly what the Frenchmen could

not tell ; but it made their hearts, as it was meant to do, melt like wax within them.

" They have a counter witch to yours, Ivo, it seems, and a fairer one. I am afraid the devils are more likely to listen to her than to that old broomstick-rider aloft."

" Fair is that fair cause has, sir king."

" A good argument for honest men, but none for fiends. What is the fair fiend pointing at so earnestly there ? "

" Somewhat among the reeds. Hark to her now ! She is singing, somewhat more like an angel than a fiend, I will say for her."

And Torfrida's song, coming clear and sweet across the water, rose louder and shriller till it almost drowned the jabbering of the witch.

" She sees more than we do."

" But I see ! " cried William, smiting his hand upon his thigh. " Par le splendeur Dex ! she has been showing them where to fire the reeds ; and they have done it ! "

A puff of smoke, a wisp of flame, and then another and another ; and a canoe shot out from the reeds on the French shore, and glided into the reeds of the island.

" The reeds are on fire, men ! Have a care ! " shouted Ivo.

" Silence, fool ! Frighten them once, and they will leap like sheep into that gulf.—Men ! right about ! draw off—slowly and in order. We will attack again to-morrow."

The cool voice of the great captain arose too late. A line of flame was leaping above the reed bed, crackling and howling before the evening breeze. The column on the causeway had seen their danger but too soon, and fled—but whither ?

A shower of arrows, quarrels, javelins fell upon the head of the column as it tried to face about and retreat, confusing it more and more. One arrow, shot by no common arm, went clean through William's shield and

pinned it to the mailed flesh. He could not stifle a cry of pain.

"You are wounded, sire. Ride for your life! It is worth that of a thousand of these churls," and Ivo seized William's bridle and dragged him, in spite of himself, through the cowering, shrieking, struggling crowd.

On came the flame, leaping and crackling, laughing and shrieking, like a live fiend. The archers and slingers in the boats cowered before it, and fell, scorched corpses, as it swept on. It reached the causeway, surged up, recoiled from the mass of human beings, then sprang over their heads and passed onwards, girding them with flame.

The reeds were burning around them; the timbers of the bridge caught fire; the peat and fagots smouldered beneath their feet. They sprang from the burning footway, and plunged into the fathomless bog, covering their faces and eyes with scorched hands, and then sank in the black gurgling slime.

Ivo dragged William on, regardless of curses and prayers from his soldiery, and they reached the shore just in time to see between them and the water a long black smouldering, writhing line; the morass to right and left, which a minute before had been deep reed, an open smutty pool, dotted with boatfuls of shrieking and cursing men; and at the causeway end the tower, with the flame climbing up its posts, and the witch of Brandon throwing herself desperately from the top, and falling dead upon the embers, a motionless heap of rags.

"Fool that thou art! Fool that I was!" cried the great king, as he rolled off his horse at his tent door, cursing with rage and pain.

Ivo Taillebois sneaked off, sent over to Brandon for the second witch, and hanged her, as some small comfort to his soul. Neither did he forget to search the cabin, till he found buried in a crock the bits of his own gold chain, and various other treasures, for which the wretched

old women had bartered their souls. All which he confiscated to his own use, as a much-injured man.

The next day William withdrew his army. The men refused to face again that blood-stained pass. The English spells, they said, were stronger than theirs, and than the daring of brave men. Let William take Torfrida and burn her, as she had burned them, with reeds out of Willingham fen; then might they try to storm Ely again.

Torfrida saw them turn, flee, die in agony. Her work was done; her passion exhausted; her self-torture, and the mere weight of her fetters, which she had sustained during her passion, weighed her down: she dropped senseless on the turf, and lay in a trance for many hours.

Then she arose, and, casting off her fetters and her sackcloth, was herself again, but a sadder woman till her dying day.

CHAPTER XI

[*In spite of his success, Hereward knew that his only hope was to hold out long enough to make good terms with the Conqueror. After a while Edwin and Morcar left him, the former being killed on his way to Winchester, the latter surrendering to the Normans, only to be cast into prison. William now sent a message to the monks of Ely reminding them that they were in rebellion against the Pope, threatening to take all their lands, but promising that if they would yield he would pardon all of them except Torfrida, who was to be burnt as a witch. The monks, terrified by these threats, and in the absence of Hereward, who was seeking food, were inclined to yield. Martin sought him out and told him of the danger.*]

HEREWARD was already on his way home, and never did he and his good men row harder than they rowed

that day back to Sutton. He landed, and hurried on with half his men, leaving the rest to disembark the booty. He was anxious as to the temper of the monks. He foresaw all that Torfrida had foreseen. And as for Torfrida herself, she was half mad.

The sun was setting long before they reached Ely; but just as he sank into the western fen Winter stopped, pointing. Was that the flash of arms?—there, far away, just below Willingham town. Or was it the setting sun upon the ripple of some long water?

"There is not wind enough for such a ripple," said one. But ere they could satisfy themselves, the sun was down, and all the fen was grey.

Hereward was still more uneasy. If that had been the flash of arms, it must have come off a very large body of men, moving in column, on the road between Cambridge and Ely. He hastened on his men. But ere they were within sight of the minster tower, they were aware of a horse galloping violently towards them through the dusk. Hereward called a halt. He heard his own heart beat as he stopped. The horse was pulled up short among them. On its back was a lad, with a smaller boy behind him, clasping his waist.

"Hereward? Thank God, I am in time! And the child is safe too. Thanks, thanks, dear saints!" a voice sobbed out.

It was the voice of Torfrida.

"Treason!" she gasped.

"I knew it."

"The French are in the island. They have got Aldreth. The whole army is marching from Cambridge. The whole fleet is coming up from Southrey. And you have time——"

"To burn Ely over the monks' heads. Men! Get bogwood out of yon cottage, make yourselves torches, and onward!"

Then rose a babel of questions, which Torfrida an-

swered as she could. But she had nothing to tell. "Clerks' cunning," she said bitterly, "was an overmatch for woman's wit." She had sent out a spy, but he had not returned till an hour since. Then he came back breathless, with the news that the French army was on the march from Cambridge, and that, as he came over the water at Aldreth, he found a party of French knights in the fort on the Ely side, talking peaceably with the monks on guard.

She had run up to the borough hill—which men call Cherry Hill at this day—and one look to the north-east had shown her the river swarming with ships. She had rushed home, put boy's clothes on herself and her child, hid a few jewels in her bosom, saddled Swallow, and ridden for her life thither.

And when the men heard that a yell of fury and despair burst from all throats.

Should they go back to their boats?

"No! onward," cried Hereward. "Revenge first, and safety after. Let us leave nothing for the accursed Frenchmen but smoking ruins; and then gather our comrades, and cut our way back to the north."

"Good counsel," cried Winter. "We know the roads, and they do not; and in such a dark night as is coming, we can march out of the island without their being able to follow us a mile."

They hurried on; but stopped once more, at the galloping of another horse.

"Who comes, friend or foe?"

"Alwyn, son of Orgar!" cried a voice under breath. "Don't make such a noise, men! The French are within half a mile of you."

"Then one traitor monk shall die ere I retreat," cried Hereward, seizing him by the throat.

"For Heaven's sake, hold!" cried Torfrida, seizing his arm. "You know not what he may have to say."

"I am no traitor, Hereward. I have fought by your

side as well as the best ; and if any but you had called Alwyn——"

" A curse on your boasting. Tell us the truth."

" The abbot has made peace with the king. He would give up the island, and St. Etheldreda should keep all her lands and honours. I said what I could ; but who was I to resist the whole chapter ? Could I alone brave St. Etheldreda's wrath ? "

" Alwyn the valiant afraid of a dead girl ! "

" Blaspheme not, Hereward ! She may hear you at this moment ! Look there ! " and pointing up, the monk cowered in terror, as a meteor flashed through the sky.

" That is St. Etheldreda shooting at us, eh ? Then all I can say is, she is a very bad marksman. And the French are in the island ? "

" They are."

" Then forward, men, for one half-hour's pleasure ; and then to die like Englishmen."

" On ? " cried Alwyn. " You cannot go on. The king is at Whichford at this moment with all his army, half a mile off—right across the road to Ely ! "

Hereward grew Berserk. " On, men ! " shouted he ; " we shall kill a few Frenchmen apiece before we die ! "

" Hereward," cried Torfrida, " you shall not go on ! If you go, I shall be taken. And if I am taken, I shall be burned. And I cannot burn—I cannot ! I shall go mad with terror before I come to the stake ! I cannot go stripped to my smock before those Frenchmen. I cannot be roasted piecemeal ! Hereward, take me away ! Take me away ! or kill me, now and here ! "

He paused. He had never seen Torfrida thus overcome.

" Let us flee ! The stars are against us. God is against us ! Let us hide—escape abroad ; beg our bread, go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem together—for together it must be always ; but take me away ! "

" We will go back to the boats, men," said Hereward.

But they did not go. They stood there, irresolute, looking towards Ely.

The sky was pitchy dark. The minster roofs, lying north-east, were utterly invisible against the blackness.

" We may at least save some who escape out," said Hereward. " March on quickly to the left, under the hill to the plough-field."

They did so.

" Lie down, men. There are the French, close on our right. Down among the bushes."

And they heard the heavy tramp of men within a quarter of a mile.

" Cover the mare's eyes, and hold her mouth lest she neigh," said Winter.

Hereward and Torfrida lay side by side upon the heath. She was shivering with cold and horror. He laid his cloak over her, put his arm round her.

" Your stars did not foretell you this, Torfrida." He spoke not bitterly, but in utter sadness.

She burst into an agony of weeping.

" My stars at least foretold me nothing but woe, since first I saw your face."

" Why did you marry me, then ? " asked he, half angrily.

" Because I loved you. Because I love you still."

" Then you do not regret ? "

" Never, never, never ! I am quite happy—quite happy. Why not ? "

A low murmur from the men made them look up. They were near enough to the town to hear—only too much. They heard the tramp of men, shouts and yells. Then the shrill cries of women. All dull and muffled the sounds came to them through the still night ; and they lay there spellbound, as in a nightmare, as men assisting at some horrible tragedy which they had no power to prevent. Then there was a glare, and a wisp of smoke

against the black sky, and then a house began burning brightly, and then another.

"This is the Frenchman's faith!"

And all the while, as the sack raged in the town below, the minster stood above, glaring in the firelight, silent and safe.

They waited nearly an hour, but no fugitives came out.

"Come, men," said Hereward wearily, "we may as well to the boats."

And so they went, walking on like men in a dream, as yet too stunned to realize to themselves the hopeless horror of their situation. Only Hereward and Torfrida saw it all, looking back on the splendid past—the splendid hopes for the future: glory, honour, an earldom, a free Danish England—and this was all that was left!

"No, it is not!" cried Torfrida suddenly, as if answering her own unspoken thoughts and his. "Love is still left. The gallows and the stake cannot take that away." And she clung closer to her husband's side, and he again to hers.

They reached the shore, and told their tale to their comrades. "Whither now?"

"To Well. To the wide mere," * said Hereward.

"But their ships will hunt us out there."

"We shall need no hunting. We must pick up the men at Cissham. You would not leave them to be murdered, too, as we have left the Ely men?"

No, they would go to Well. And then?

"The Bruneswald, and the merry greenwood," said Hereward.

"Hey for the merry greenwood!" shouted Leofric the deacon. And the men, in the sudden delight of

* Probably near Upwell and Outwell, in the direction of Wisbeach. There the old Nene and the old Welney Rivers, joining, formed vast morasses, now laid dry by the Middle Level and Marshland Drains. From this point Hereward could escape north into Lincolnshire, either by Wisbeach and the Wash, or by Crowland and Bourne.

finding any place, any purpose, answered with a lusty cheer.

" Brave hearts ! " said Hereward. " We will live and die together like Englishmen."

" We will, we will, Viking."

" Where shall we stow the mare ? " asked Gery, " the boats are full already."

" Leave her to me. On board, Torfrida."

He got on board last, leading the mare by the bridle.

" Swim, good lass ! " said he, as they pushed off ; and the good lass, who had done it many a time before, waded in, and was soon swimming behind. Hereward turned, and bent over the side in the darkness. There was a strange gurgle, a splash, and a swirl. He turned round, and sat upright again. They rowed on.

" That mare will never swim all the way to Well," said one.

" She will not need it," said Hereward.

" Why ? " said Torfrida, feeling in the darkness ; " she is loose. What is this in your hand ? Your dagger ? and wet ? "

" Mare Swallow is at the bottom of the reach. We could never have got her to Well."

" And you have——" cried a dozen voices.

" Do you think that I would let a cursed Frenchman —ay, even William's self—say that he had bestridden Hereward's mare ? "

None answered ; but Torfrida, as she laid her head upon her husband's bosom, felt the great tears running down from his cheek on to her own.

None spoke a word. The men were awestricken. There was something despairing and ill-omened in the deed. And yet there was a savage grandeur in it, which bound their savage hearts still closer to their chief. And so mare Swallow's bones lie somewhere in the peat unto this day.

They got to Well. They sent out spies to find the

men who had been "wasting Cissham with fire and sword"; and at last brought them in. Ill news, as usual, had travelled fast. They had heard of the fall of Ely, and hidden themselves "in a certain very small island which is called Stimtench," where, thinking that the friends in search of them were Frenchmen in pursuit, they hid themselves amongst the high reeds. There two of them—one Starkwulf by name, the other Broher—hiding near each other, "thought that, as they were monks, it might conduce to their safety if they had shaven crowns; and set to work with their swords to shave each other's heads as well as they could. But at last, by their war-cries and their speech, recognizing each other, they left off fighting," and went after Hereward.

So jokes, grimly enough, the old chronicler, who may have seen them come in the next morning with bleeding coxcombs, and could laugh over the thing in after years. But he was in no humour for jesting in the days in which they lay at Well. Nor was he in jesting humour when, a week afterwards, hunted by the French from Well, and forced to take to meres and waterways known only to them, and too shallow and narrow for the French ships, they found their way across into the old Nene, and so on toward Crowland, leaving Peterborough far on the left. For, as they neared Crowland, they saw before them, rowing slowly, a barge full of men. And as they neared that barge, behold, all they who rowed were blind of both their eyes, and all they who sat and guided them were maimed of both their hands. And as they came alongside, there was not a man in all that ghastly crew but was an ancient friend, by whose side they had fought full many a day, and with whom they had drunk deep full many a night.

They were the first-fruits of William's vengeance; thrust into that boat, to tell the rest of the fen-men what those had to expect who dared oppose the Norman.

CHAPTER XII

[*So Hereward took to the greenwood and lived the life, free and dangerous, with which the famous stories of Robin Hood have made us familiar. But it was a rough life for Torfrida, and the time came when Hereward chafed under it, so that the two fell to blaming each other, and at last quarrelled so fiercely that Torfrida became a nun at Crowland, and Martin Lightfoot entered the monastery also to be near his beloved lady, considering that Hereward had treated her cruelly, as indeed he had; and he now wished to marry a noble lady named Alftruda, whom he had known in her childhood long before he met Torfrida, and had rescued from the bear of Gilbert of Ghent, as we have already read.*]

"On account of which," says the chronicler, "many troubles came to Hereward; because Torfrida was most wise, and of great counsel in need. For afterwards, as he himself confessed, things went not so well with him as they did in her time."

And the first thing that went ill was this. He was riding through the Bruneswald, and behind him Gery, Wenoch, and Matelgar, these three. And there met him in an open glade a knight, the biggest man he had ever seen, on the biggest horse, and five knights behind him. He was an Englishman and not a Frenchman, by his dress; and Hereward spoke courteously enough to him. But who he was, and what his business was in the Bruneswald, Hereward thought that he had a right to ask.

"Tell me who thou art who askest, before I tell thee who I am who am asked, riding here on common land," quoth the knight surlily enough.

"I am Hereward, without whose leave no man has ridden the Bruneswald for many a day."

"And I am Letwold the Englishman, who rides

whither he will in merry England, without care for any Frenchman upon earth."

"Frenchman? Why callest thou me Frenchman, man? I am Hereward."

"Then thou art, if tales be true, as French as Ivo Taillebois. I hear that thou hast left thy true lady, like a fool and a churl, and goest to London, or Winchester, or the nether pit—I care not which—to make thy peace with the Mamzer."

The man was a surly brute, but what he said was so true that Hereward's wrath arose. He had promised Torfrida many a time never to quarrel with an Englishman, but to endure all things. Now, out of very spite to Torfrida's counsel, because it was Torfrida's, and he had promised to obey it, he took up the quarrel.

"If I am a fool and a churl, thou art a greater fool to provoke thine own death; and a greater——"

"Spare your breath," said the big man, "and let me try Hereward, as I have many another."

Whereon they dropped their lance-points, and rode at each other like two mad bulls. And by the contagion of folly common in the middle age, at each other rode Hereward's three knights and Letwold's five. The two leaders found themselves both rolling on the ground, jumped up, drew their swords, and hewed away at each other. Gery unhorsed his man at the first charge, and left him stunned. Then he turned on another, and did the same by him. Wenoch and Matelgar each overthrew their man. The fifth of Letwold's knights threw up his lance-point, not liking his new company. Gery and the other two rode in on the two chiefs, who were fighting hard, each under shield.

"Stand back!" roared Hereward, "and give the knight fair play! When did any one of us want a man to help him? Kill or die single has been our rule, and shall be."

They threw up their lance-points, and stood round to

see that great fight. Letwold's knight rode in among them, and stood likewise, and friend and foe looked on, as they might at a pair of game-cocks.

Hereward had, to his own surprise and that of his fellows, met his match. The sparks flew, the iron clanged, but so heavy were the stranger's strokes that Hereward reeled again and again. So sure was the guard of his shield that Hereward could not wound him, hit where he would. At last he dealt a furious blow on the stranger's head.

"If that does not bring your master down," quoth Gery. "By ——, Brainbiter is gone!"

It was too true. Sword Brainbiter's end was come. The Ogre's magic blade * had snapped off short by the hilt.

"Your master is a true Englishman, by the hardness of his brains," quoth Wenoch, as the stranger, reeling for a moment, lifted up his head, and stared at Hereward in the face, doubtful what to do.

"Will you yield, or fight on?" cried he.

"Yield?" shouted Hereward, rushing upon him, as a mastiff might on a lion, and striking at his helm, though shorter than he by a head and shoulders, such swift and terrible blows with the broken hilt, as staggered the tall stranger.

"What are you at, forgetting what you have at your side?" roared Gery.

Hereward sprang back. He had, as was his custom, a second sword on his right thigh.

"I forget everything now," said he to himself angrily.

And that was too true. But he drew the second sword, and sprang at his man once more.

The stranger tried, according to the chronicler, who probably had it from one of the three bystanders, a blow which has cost many a brave man his life. He struck

* Which Hereward had won when he overcame the Cornish giant in his youth.

right down on Hereward's head. Hereward raised his shield, warding the stroke, and threw in that *coup dejarret* which there is no guarding, after the downright blow has been given. The stranger dropped upon his wounded knee.

"Yield," cried Hereward in his turn.

"That is not my fashion." And the stranger fought on upon his stumps, like Witherington in "Chevy Chase."

Hereward, mad with the sight of blood, struck at him four or five times. The stranger's guard was so quick that he could not hit him, even on his knee. He held his hand, and drew back, looking at his new rival.

"What the murrain are we two fighting about?" said he at last.

"I know not, neither care," said the other, with a grim chuckle. "But if any man will fight me, him I fight, ever since I had beard to my chin."

"Thou art the best man that ever I faced."

"That is like enough."

"What wilt thou take if I give thee thy life?"

"My way on which I was going. For I turn back for no man alive on land."

"Then thou hast not had enough of me?"

"Not by another hour."

"Thou must be born of fiend, and not of man."

"Very like. It is a wise son knows his own father."

Hereward burst out laughing.

"Would to Heaven I had had thee for my man this three years since."

"Perhaps I would not have been thy man."

"Why not?"

"Because I have been my own man ever since I was born, and am well content with myself for my master."

"Shall I bind up thy leg?" asked Hereward, having no more to say, and not wishing to kill the man.

"No. It will grow again, like a crab's claw."

"Thou art a fiend." And Hereward turned away sulky and half afraid.

"Very like. No man knows what a devil he is till he tries."

"What dost mean?" and Hereward turned angrily back.

"Fiends we are all, till God's grace comes."

"Little grace has come to thee yet, by thy ungracious tongue."

"Rough to men may be gracious to women."

"What hast thou to do with women?" asked Hereward fiercely.

"I have a wife, and I love her."

"Thou art not like to get back to her to-day."

"I fear not, with this paltry scratch. I had looked for a cut from thee would have saved me all fighting henceforth."

"What dost mean?" asked Hereward with an oath.

"That my wife is in heaven, and I would needs follow her."

Hereward got on his horse, and rode away. Never could he find out who that Sir Letwold was, or how he came into the Bruneswald. All he knew was, that he never had had such a fight since he wore beard, and that he had lost sword Brainbiter, from which his evil conscience augured that his luck had turned, and that he should lose many things besides.

CHAPTER XIII

AFTER these things Hereward summoned all his men, and set before them the hopelessness of any further resistance, and the promises of amnesty, lands, and honours which William had offered him; and persuaded them—and indeed he had good arguments enough and to spare

—that they should go and make their peace with the king.

They were so accustomed to look up to his determination, that when it gave way theirs gave way likewise. They were so accustomed to trust his wisdom, that most of them yielded at once to his arguments. That the band should break up, all agreed. A few of the more suspicious, or more desperate, said that they could never trust the Frenchman ; that Hereward himself had warned them again and again of his treachery.

But Hereward was deaf to their arguments. He had said as little to them as he could about Alftruda for very shame. For her sake, he had determined to run his head blindly into the very snare of which he had warned others. And he had seared—so he fancied—his conscience. It was Torfrida's fault now, not his. If she left him—if she herself freed him of her own will—why, he was free, and there was no more to be said about it.

And Hereward took Gwenoch, Gery, and Matelgar, and rode south to the king.

But when he had gotten a long way upon the road, a fancy came over him. He was not going in pomp and glory enough. It seemed mean for the once great Hereward to sneak into Winchester with three knights. Perhaps it seemed not over-safe for the once great Hereward to travel with only three knights. So he went back all the way to camp, and took (says the chronicler) " forty most famous knights, all big and tall of stature, and splendid—if from nothing else, from their looks and their harness alone."

So Hereward and those forty knights rode down from Peterborough, along the Roman road. For the Roman roads were then, and for centuries after, the only roads in this land ; and our forefathers looked on them as the work of gods and giants, and called them after the names of their old gods and heroes—Irmen Street, Watling Street, and so forth.

Be that as it may, down the Roman road Hereward went; past Alconbury Hill, of the old posting days; past Hatfield, then deep forest; and so to St. Albans, then deep forest likewise. And there they lodged in the minster; for the monks thereof were good English, and sang masses daily for King Harold's soul. And the next day they went south, by ways which are not so clear.

Just outside St. Albans—Verulamium of the Romans—they turned at St. Stephen's to the left, off the Roman road to London; and by another Roman road struck into the vast forest which ringed London round from north-east to south-west. Following the upper waters of the Colne, which ran through the woods on their left, they came to Watford, and then turned probably to Rickmansworth. No longer on the Roman paved ways, they followed horse-tracks, between the forest and the rich marsh-meadows of the Colne, as far as Denham, and then struck into a Roman road again at the north end of Langley Park. From thence over heathy commons—for that western part of Buckinghamshire, its soil being light and some gravel, was little cultivated then, and hardly all cultivated now—they held on straight by Langley town into the Vale of Thames.

On through Windsor Forest, Edward the Saint's old hunting-ground; its bottoms choked with beech and oak, and birch and alder scrub; its upper lands vast flats of level heath; along the great trackway which runs along the lower side of Chobham Camp, some quarter of a mile broad, every rut and trackway as fresh at this day as when the ancient Briton, finding that his neighbour's essedum—chariot or rather cart—had worn the ruts too deep, struck out a fresh wandering line for himself across the dreary heath.

Over the Blackwater by Sandhurst, and along the flats of Hartford Bridge, where the old furze-grown ruts show the trackway to this day. Down into the clayland

forests of the Andredsweald, and up out of them again at Basing, on to the clean crisp chalk turf; to strike at Popham Lane the Roman road from Silchester, and hold it over the high downs, till they saw far below them the royal city of Winchester.

Itchen, silver as they looked on her from above, but when they came down to her so clear that none could see where water ended and where air began, hurried through the city in many a stream. Beyond it rose the "White Camp," the "Venta Belgarum," the circular earthwork of white chalk on the high down. Within the city rose the ancient minster church, built by Ethelwold—ancient even then—where slept the ancient kings Kennulf, Egbert, and Ethelwulf, the Saxons; and by them the Danes, Canute the Great, and Hardicanute his son, and Norman Emma, his wife, and Ethelred's before him; and the great Earl Godwin, who seemed to Hereward to have died, not twenty, but two hundred years ago;—and it may be an old Saxon hall upon the little isle whither Edgar had bidden bring the heads of all the wolves in Wessex, where afterwards the bishops built Wolvesey Palace. But nearer to them, on the down which sloped up to the west, stood an uglier thing, which they saw with curses deep and loud—the keep of the new Norman castle by the west gate.

Hereward halted his knights upon the down outside the northern gate. Then he rode forward himself. The gate was open wide, but he did not care to go in.

So he rode into the gateway, and smote upon the gate with his lance-butt. But the porter saw the knights upon the down, and was afraid to come out, for he feared treason.

Then Hereward smote a second time, but the porter did not come out.

Then he took the lance by the shaft, and smote a third time. And he smote so hard that the lance-butt flew to flinders against Winchester Gate.

And at that started out two knights, who had come down from the castle, seeing the meinie on the down, and asked,—

" Who art thou who knockest here so bold ? "

" Who I am any man can see by those splinters, if he knows what men are left in England this day."

The knights looked at the broken wood, and then at each other. Who could the man be who could beat an ash stave to flinders at a single blow ?

" You are young, and do not know me ; and no shame to you. Go and tell William the king that Hereward is come to put his hands between the king's, and be the king's man henceforth."

" You are Hereward ? " asked one, half awed, half disbelieving, at Hereward's short stature.

" You are—I know not who. Pick up those splinters, and take them to King William, and say, ' The man who broke that lance against the gate is here to make his peace with thee,' and he will know who I am."

And so cowed were these two knights with Hereward's royal voice, and royal eye, and royal strength, that they went simply, and did what he bade them.

And when King William saw the splinters, he was as joyful as man could be, and said,—

" Send him to me, and tell him, Bright shines the sun to me that lights Hereward into Winchester."

" But, lord king, he has with him a meinie of full forty knights."

" So much the better. I shall have the more valiant Englishmen to help my valiant French."

So Hereward rode round, outside the walls, to William's new entrenched palace outside the west gate, by the castle.

And then Hereward went in, and knelt before the Norman, and put his hands between William's hands, and swore to be his man.

" I have kept my word," said he, " which I sent to

thee at Rouen seven years agone. Thou art king of all England, and I am the last man to say so."

"And since thou hast said it, I am king indeed. Come with me, and dine; and to-morrow I will see thy knights."

And William walked out of the hall, leaning on Hereward's shoulder, at which all the Normans gnashed their teeth with envy.

"And for my knights, lord king? Thine and mine will mix, for a while yet, like oil and water; and I fear lest there be murder done between them."

"Likely enough."

So the knights were bestowed in a "vill" near by; "and the next day the venerable king himself went forth to see those knights, and caused them to stand, and march before him, both with arms and without. With whom being much delighted, he praised them, congratulating them on their beauty and stature, and saying that they must all be knights of fame in war." After which Hereward sent them all home except two; and waited till he should marry Alftruda, and get back his heritage.

[*Torfrida was interviewed by a priest, and in order to set free Hereward to marry again confessed that she had practised sorcery and witchcraft from her youth, prayed for pardon, and declared her intention to spend the rest of her life in the convent. So Hereward was set free and married Alftruda.*]

And now behold Hereward at home again, fat with the wages of sin, and not knowing that they are death.

He is once more "Dominus de Brunne cum Marisco," (Lord of Bourne with the Fen), "with all returns and liberties and all other things adjacent to the same vill, which are now held as a barony from the lord king of England." He has a fair young wife, and with her farms and manors even richer than his own. He is still young,

hearty, wise by experience, high in the king's favour, and deservedly so.

Why should he not begin life again ?

Why not ? Unless it be true that the wages of sin are, not a new life, but death.

And yet he had his troubles. Hardly a French knight or baron round but had a blood-feud against him, for a kinsman slain. Oger the Breton was not likely to forgive his wounded arm. Sir Aswart, Thorold the abbot's man, was not likely to forgive him for turning him out of the three Manthorpe manors, which he had comfortably held for two years past, and sending him back to lounge in the abbot's hall at Peterborough, without a yard of land which he could call his own. Sir Ascelin was not likely to forgive him for marrying Alftruda, whom he had intended to marry himself. Ivo Taillebois was not likely to forgive him for existing within a hundred miles of Spalding, any more than the wolf would forgive the lamb for fouling the water below him. Besides, had not he (Ivo) married Hereward's niece ? And what more grievous offence could Hereward commit than to be her uncle, reminding Ivo of his own low birth by his nobility, and too likely to take Lucia's part whenever it should please Ivo to beat or kick her ? Only Gilbert of Ghent, " the pious and illustrious earl," sent messages of congratulation and friendship to Hereward, it being his custom to sail with the wind, and worship the rising sun —till it should decline again.

But more. Hardly one of the Frenchmen round but, in the conceit of their skin-deep yesterday's civilization, looked on Hereward as a barbarian Englishman, who had his throat tattooed, and wore a short coat, and preferred —the churl—to talk English in his own hall, though he could talk as good French as they when he was with them, besides three or four barbarian tongues if he had need.

But more still. If they were not likely to bestow their

love on Hereward, Hereward was not likely to win love from them of his own will. He was peevish and wrathful, often insolent and quarrelsome ; and small blame to him. The French were invaders and tyrants, who had no business there, and would not have been there if he had had his way. And they and he could no more amalgamate than fire and water. Moreover, he was a very great man, or had been such once, and he thought himself one still. He had been accustomed to command men, whole armies ; and he would no more treat these French as his equals than they would treat him as such. His own son-in-law, Hugh of Evermue, had to take hard words—thoroughly well deserved, it may be, but all the more unpleasant for that reason.

The truth was, that Hereward's heart was gnawed with shame and remorse, and therefore he fancied, and not without reason, that all men pointed at him the finger of scorn.

. . . . . .

Hereward had gone home, and sat down to eat and drink. His manner was sad and strange. He drank much at the midday meal, and then lay down to sleep, setting guards as usual.

After a while he leapt up with a shriek and shudder.

They ran to him, asking whether he was ill.

" Ill ? No. Yes. Ill at heart. I have had a dream —an ugly dream. I thought that all the men I ever slew on earth came to me with their wounds all gaping, and cried at me, ' Our luck then, thy luck now.' Chaplain ! is there not a verse somewhere—uncle Brand said it to me on his deathbed—' Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed ' ? "

" Surely the master is fey," whispered Gwenoch in fear to the chaplain. " Answer him out of Scripture."

" Text ? None such that I know of," quoth priest Ailward, a graceless fellow, who had taken Leofric's place. " If that were the law, it would be but few honest

men that would die in their beds. Let us drink, and drive girls' fancies out of our heads."

So they drank again; and Hereward fell asleep once more.

"It is thy turn to watch, priest," said Winter to Ailward. "So keep the door well, for I am worn out with hunting," and so fell asleep.

Ailward shuffled into his harness, and went to the door. The wine was heady; the sun was hot. In a few minutes he was asleep likewise.

Hereward slept, who can tell how long? But at last there was a bustle, a heavy fall; and waking with a start, he sprang up. He saw Ailward lying dead across the door, and above him a crowd of fierce faces, some of which he knew too well.

There was no time to put on mail or helmet. He saw sword and shield hang on a perch, and tore them down. As he girded the sword on, Winter sprang to his side.

"I have three lances—two for me and one for you, and we can hold the door against twenty."

"Till they fire the house over our heads. Shall Hereward die like a wolf in a cave? Forward, all The Wake men! A Wake! A Wake!"

And he rushed out upon his fate. No man followed him, save Winter. The rest, dispersed, unarmed, were running hither and thither helplessly.

"Brothers in arms, and brothers in Valhalla!" shouted Winter as he rushed after him.

A knight was running to and fro in the court, shouting Hereward's name. "Where is the villain? Wake! We have caught thee asleep at last."

"I am out," quoth Hereward, as the man almost stumbled against him; "and this is in."

And through shield, and hauberk, and body, as says Gaimar, went Hereward's javelin, while all drew back, confounded for the moment at that mighty stroke.

"Felons!" shouted Hereward, "your king has given

me his truce, and do you dare break my house and kill my folk? Is that your French law? And is this your French honour—to take a man unawares over his meat? Come on, traitors all, and get what you can of a naked man; * you will buy it dear.—Guard my back, Winter!"

And he ran right at the press of knights, and the fight began.

"He gored them like a wood wild boar,
As long as that lance might endure,"

says Gaimar.

"And when that lance did break in hand,
Full fell enough he smote with brand."

And as he hewed on silently, with grinding teeth, and hard glittering eyes, of whom did he think? Of Alftruda?

Not so. But of that pale ghost, with great black hollow eyes, who sat in Crowland, with thin bare feet, and sackcloth on her tender limbs, watching, praying, longing, loving, uncomplaining. That ghost had been for many a month the background of all his thoughts and dreams. It was so clear before his mind's eye now that, unawares to himself, he shouted "Torfrida!" as he struck, and struck the harder at the sound of his old battle-cry.

And now he is all wounded and be-bled; and Winter, who has fought back to back with him, has fallen on his face; and Hereward stands alone, turning from side to side, as he sweeps his sword right and left till the forest rings with the blows, but staggering as he turns. Within a ring of eleven corpses he stands. Who will go in and make the twelfth?

A knight rushes in, to fall headlong down, cloven through the helm; but Hereward's blade snaps short, and he hurls it away as his foes rush in with a shout of joy.

* That is, without armour.

He tears his shield from his left arm, and with it, says Gaimar, brains two more.

But the end is come. Taillebois and Evermue are behind him now; four lances are through his back, and bear him down upon his knees.

"Cut off his head, Breton!" shouted Ivo. Raoul de Dol rushed forward, sword in hand. At that cry Hereward lifted up his dying head. One stroke more ere it was all done for ever.

And with a shout of "Torfrida!" which made the Bruneswald ring, he hurled the shield full in the Breton's face, and fell forward dead.

THE END

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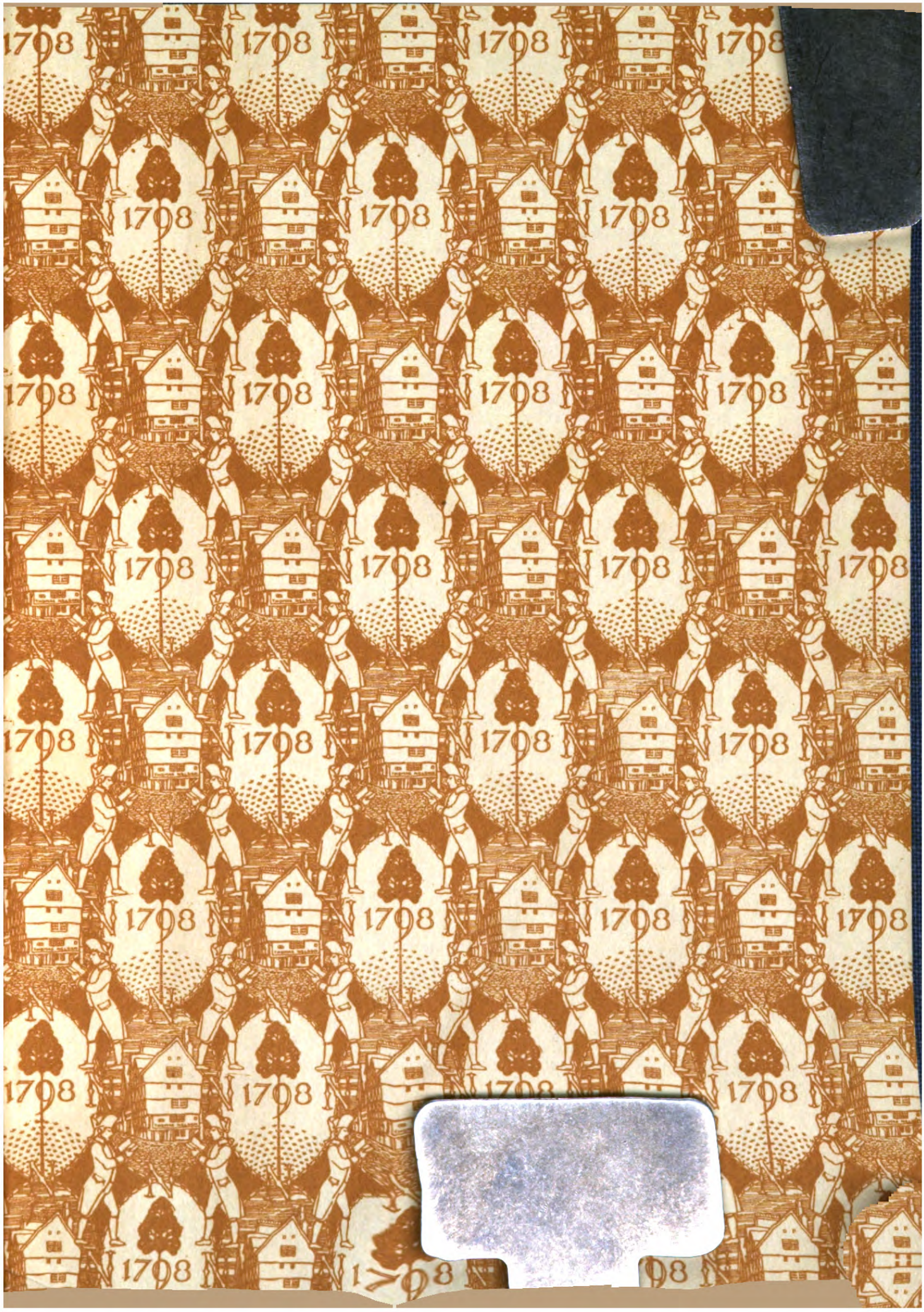
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