FISHERMAN GRIM

BY

MARY C. ROWSELL.

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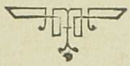

367

FISHERMAN GRIM FINDS LITTLE HABLOK

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BY

MARY C. ROWSELL,

Author of "Traitor or Patriot?" "The Pedlar and his Dog;" &c.

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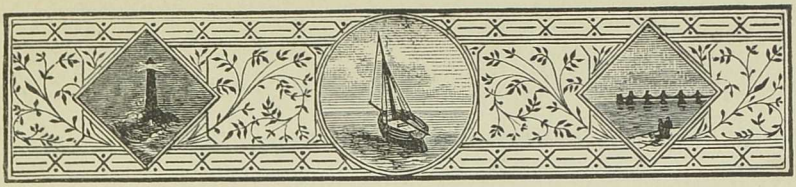
CONTENTS.



FISHERMAN GRIM.

CHAPTER I.

THE COTTAGE BY THE SEA.

THERE was once a poor fisherman whose name was Grim. He had no wife or children, and lived all alone a long way from everywhere and everybody in a little cottage down by the sea-shore. The only friend he had worth the name, was his cat Tib.

Before Tib came to him—and where he came from, Grim knew no more than the man in the moon—before Tib I say, came mewing pitifully at his door one bitter cold winter's night, Grim had been lonely indeed. Tib was only a tiny tabby kitten when the wind blew him in at the opened door right on to the hearth in front of Grim's comfortable wood fire. That was a year

ago now, and Tib had grown into a splendid big cat, and a clever cat too, and very good-tempered. He doated on his master, and would follow him wherever he went—wherever, that is to say, he went on dry land. Of course he stopped short at the edge of the waves; for he was terribly put about if by chance he ever set his paw in a puddle, or in one of the holes in the sand alongshore, in which the ebb of the tide happened to have left a little water, or a sprinkling of salt spray fell on his velvet coat.

That was the only point on which Tib did not thoroughly understand his master. What pleasure Grim could find in jumping—barefooted—think of it!—always barefooted into that damp old tub of a fishing-boat, singing his merry Yo-ho! Heave-oh! and pushing off into that dreadful deep deep blue-green water, was past Tib's comprehension. There was some sense to be sure in the load of beautiful shining fish Grim always brought back with him, and which he allowed Tib to inspect, and to choose whatever he preferred for his supper. Sometimes it would be a nice young sole, sometimes a mackerel all in blue and silver, but oftenest a herring; for Tib, who was a cat of taste and

judgment, soon discovered that the herrings were uncommonly fine flavoured. He was not sure whether he preferred them just fresh as they came out of the sea, or salted, and hung up to dry in Grim's huge chimney, as Grim had a clever way of doing.

When they were ready for eating, Grim used to pack them in baskets made of osier twigs, which he gathered and wove himself in the long winter evenings. And when he had packed as many as he could carry, he used to string them together, and take them to the nearest towns to sell; but the nearest towns were a long way off. About the two nearest were called York and Lincoln, and when Grim went on his errand there, he was sometimes four or five days away. Then it was he found the comfort of leaving someone to take care of his cottage. Tib always did this very well, all Grim had to do before he went was to leave Tib a plentiful supply of fish, and a basin of skim-milk; and when he came home there used to be the cottage as safe as a church, and Tib running out to purr him welcome home.

It was certainly very clever of Tib to guard

the cottage so well; still, as I have told you, it was as far away from human ken as could be; and if not actually out of the world, it looked at the world's end, though even that was not really the case. It was only the very edge of England, on the side where it is divided from the great continent of Europe by the waters of the North Sea. If you crossed those stormy waves far enough, straight as you could well go, you would have first passed a curiously-shaped little island called Heligoland, sticking up on one side in a steep sharp point, and then you would have come to the country called Denmark. If, however, you were like Master Tib, and, not relishing the notion of a voyage on those tossing waves, preferred to look at home, then casting your eyes north and south, and indeed also west of you, they would see a vast stretch of greenish flat land, very marshy, and threaded all over with broad runnels of water, which tasted for the most part brackish and bitter, because the salt sea water was mixed with them. Just here and there a little speck of a shepherd's hut might be seen on the wide waste; but the shriek of the sea-birds, and the cries of the herons and bustards

wheeling in mid-air, were all the sounds Grim ever heard in his lonely home, excepting the howling of the winds, and the beating of the waves upon the shore.

CHAPTER II.

THE CASTLE BY THE SEA.

LIGHTS were gleaming in the castle of the Danish King Birkabegn. They flashed on the dark pine-trees clothing the craggy precipices, and streamed in golden zigzags on the ripples of the offing, where the great ships, shaped like dragons and strange big birds and serpents, lay at anchor. Through the open windows of the banqueting-hall floated the chanting of the minstrels to the sweet music of their harps, and their song was of the mighty deeds by flood and field of the king's ancestors; for the king was giving a great feast to his lords and knights; and he sat on a dais in their midst, clothed in his royal robes and his golden crown upon his head. He was very tall and broad-shouldered, and his face,

which looked brave, and yet very gentle too, was as bronzed and rugged as some rock that has a thousand times withstood the scorching sun rays, and the bitter wintry winds, and the salt sea spray.

Upon his knee sat a little boy of about three years old. He was a beautiful child, with blue eyes like the king's, hair of as bright golden as the king's crown, his skin was pure and clear as the blush-roses that grew in the castle garden, and his limbs were lissom and full of grace. One of his hands was flung lovingly round the king's neck, the other toyed with the hilt of the mighty sword, which, even in such peaceful moments as these, King Birkabegn never laid aside.

For some time the king's gaze had been resting, full of thought and affection, on the child. "Come, Hablok," he said at last, "it is time for you to be in bed."

The merry smile on Hablok's lips faded a little. "Not yet, father," he said pleadingly.

"Nay, but the little birds have been asleep this hour," said the king.

"Little birds are not kings' sons," objected Hablok.

"Some of them may be for aught you know; or I either," laughed the king.

The little boy looked puzzled. "But you know everything, father," he said.

"Nay, that only is known by the great All-Father, my son," replied Birkabegn. "There is but one thing certain to me at this moment—that it is high time for little boys to be in bed."

Then the king, first beckoning to a page who stood near to take the boy and lead him to Norna his nurse, set Hablok standing on his knee, so that all the goodly company could see him. "My son bids you all a fair good-night," cried King Birkabegn.

"We drink his health and long life," responded an aged gray-bearded man seated on the dais near the king, and almost as richly attired as Birkabegn himself. Then he filled his cup, and the other guests, following his example, rose to their feet, and with one accord shouted: "Health and long life to the son of Birkabegn, Hablok the Dane!"

And when they had drained their cups, they turned them mouth downwards to the ground, to show that they had drunk to the full to the well-

being of the child who one day would be king over them and their children. So loud and hearty was the shout, that it was hardly possible to imagine that there were some voices which had remained silent. Nevertheless that was so, just as these silent persons did not rise when the rest did. It was, to be sure, possible that they had not heard, for all the shout sounded like thunder—since some of them were so lost in conversation together, and others sat apart, wrapped in profound and moody thought.

"You have not drunk, Jarl Erik," said the gray-bearded man, addressing one of these seated nearest to him.

"The wine is not good, Jarl Halfdene," sulkily replied Jarl Erik, who was a big tall man, magnificently clad, but his face was sharp and spiteful looking, and he did not lift his little ferrety eyes when he spoke.

"I see no fault in it," said Jarl Halfdene, pouring into his own cup a little of the wine from the huge flagon which stood before Jarl Erik, and tasting it.

"If it be to your taste, Jarl Halfdene," snarled Erik's neighbour, "it is not to ours!"

"Are the grapes sour?" laughed Jon, the king's jester, who was seated on the dais steps at the king's feet.

"Silence, fool!" said the king. "Ho there! Bring fresh wine," he cried aloud to the servers.

"Nay, not for me," said Halfdene when one of them offered to fill his cup with the newly-brought wine. "The old is better. Come, so," he added when the dissatisfied guests had had their cups replenished, and still seemed strangely slow to drink, for such rare topers as those old Danish warriors were. "Drink one, drink all, to the health of Hablok—"

But ere he could say more there was a loud stir and tumult without, and a man clad in strange garments rushed into the hall and threw himself at the king's feet.

"What now?" demanded Birkabegn.

"The red flame of the enemy's fires flashes from the great ships on our shores; and the number of the foe is as three men to one. Our king implores the aid of Birkabegn and his brave knights," cried the man in breathless haste.

The soft light in the king's eyes kindled to a fierce blaze as they rested on the badge em-

broidered on the messenger's breast, for he recognized it as that of the King of Iceland, who was his sworn and dearly-loved friend. He looked round on his assembled guests, and like wildfire the angry light of his face reflected in their faces. With a loud shout the warriors rose to their feet; and swords flashed from their sheaths. "To arms! To the ships!" cried they. "Quick! Let us be going!" And they clashed their sword-blades upon their shields, drowning the sweet singing and the harp music of the minstrels.

Down on the beach the news was spreading from mouth to mouth; and before King Birkabegn's orders to hoist sail had well gone forth, the work was almost done and the rowers were in their seats. Torches flashed hither and thither in the dusky autumn twilight, for the sun was set, and the women and little children looked on sorrowfully but tearlessly, for there was no work among the people of those days so important as fighting, and it was their lot to be left alone for months, or sometimes for years together, and of course they were often left alone altogether in this world, because husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers were frequently killed in battle. The

tillage of the soil, and the other peaceful occupations that are honourable in these days for men to do, were left to women and to the slaves or lowest born.

All this sudden stir and commotion made little Hablok wide awake. Not that he had been sleepy. Of course not. No little boys, or girls either, ever own to the dustman coming; but now his blue eyes were wide open with wonder and surprise as he looked up into his father's face.

"Farewell, Hablok!" said King Birkabegn tenderly, and all the fierce glitter in his eyes again softening as he gazed on his little son. "Farewell till we meet again!"

"Are you going away, father?" lisped the child.

"Ay, to come back to thee soon, my son, if the All-Wise permits; and if not—listen, Hablok—Thou wilt be king in my stead. Dost understand?"

And when Hablok still looked wonderingly and tearfully—for he was but a baby, and all his sad thought was that his father was going to leave him—King Birkabegn took the golden crown from his own head and set it lightly on the top of his boy's curls; then he rose and car-

ried him in his arms to the great window of the banqueting-hall, where Jarl Halfdene stood watching the crowd upon the beach, and placed him in the old man's arms, looking long and earnestly as he did so into his eyes. "In your trust, Jarl Halfdene," he said at last in solemn tones.

"To the death!" as solemnly replied Halfdene, and looking as earnestly into Birkabegn's face, as he pressed the little child to his breast. Then, without another word, the king turned and buckled on his steel helmet surmounted with the glittering gilt raven, which a page was holding in readiness, grasped the hilt of his long sword, and hurried out into the gathering darkness.

CHAPTER III.

THE SCARLET TUNIC.

FOR a little while after King Birkabegn was gone Hablok wept piteously, and all Jarl Halfdene's coaxing and endeavours to console him were useless; but he was wearied out; and

before the last ship had pushed off from the beach, he lay sound asleep in Halfdene's arms.

The old man still stood watching the dark line upon the moonlit sea marking the course of the ships that were bearing away the bravest and noblest of the land. Only the women, and the sick, and the slaves, and the old men were left behind, and two or three nobles and councillors in care of the kingdom until the king should return.

These nobles were called jarls, and the most trusted and beloved among them all at King Birkabegn's court was Jarl Halfdene. Right well he deserved to be so; for first to King Birkabegn's father, then to Birkabegn himself, he had been as a trusty right hand, and shown himself to be as wise as he was honourable and loyal; and the king knew that no harm could ever befall his little son while he was in Jarl Halfdene's care.

But Jarl Halfdene was growing an old old man now; and though King Birkabegn believed that the other jarls and councillors he left behind were also as true as gold, and loyal like Halfdene, that was not so. They were very civil and honey-lipped to the king before his face; but

behind his back they spoke evil of him, and had wished him dead this long time, and would have killed him if they had dared, so that they might make a new king whom they preferred because he was as bad as themselves. That, however, they had had poor chance of doing, because he was always so closely surrounded by his true and faithful liegemen; and, like most evil-minded people, these men were cowards, and feared to attempt what they wished. These, as perhaps you have guessed, were the men who had found fault with the wine at the feast; and, as Jarl Halfdene suspected, it was not the wine which was bad, but the thoughts filling their hearts. And as he stood watching the king's departure his own heart was heavy, because he felt that if he should fall ill or die, little Hablok would be in these men's hands; for they were the ones who had contrived to be left at home on one excuse or another; and as I have already told you, nobody as a rule liked being left at home; for fighting and a life on the tossing green waves of those northern seas were what they loved best in the world.

And so for a while Halfdene's heart was full of

foreboding; but presently he cheered up. To be sure he was old and his white beard fell long down over his breast; but he was hale and strong still, and he trusted his life might be spared till King Birkabegn came back. How long that might be, of course it was not possible to say. Sometimes the quarrels and disputes of these sea-kings took a tremendous time to settle, sometimes a few weeks finished the business; but whichever way it might be, Halfdene hoped the All-Father would permit him to look upon his king's face again, if it were only for Hablok's sake.

How long Jarl Halfdene sat in the deserted banqueting-hall with the sleeping boy in his arms, his eyes fixed wistfully on the fast-fading ships, he did not know until he was roused by the ringing of the castle curfew-bell; and at the same moment Norna, Hablok's nurse, entered. "He is there, is he?" she said half crossly, half laughing. "Well, all's well that ends well. I have been seeking him these two hours high and low, until I have got the cold chills lest he should have crept unbeknown into one of the ships—for he is a daring pickle—and got carried out to sea."

Jarl Halfdene smiled. "Nay, nothing so

terrible as that," he replied. "Hablok is tired out, and has been sleeping sound in my arms these two hours past."

"And no safer place neither," said the old woman contentedly; for Jarl Halfdene was a great favourite with her, and next to King Birkabegn, she believed him the best man in all the world. "No better place neither."

"If you think so, Norna," said Halfdene, looking down tenderly on the sleeping child, upon whose red lips a smile of perfect peace and restfulness rested, though traces of tears still glistened on the long eyelashes shading his rosy cheeks; "if you think so, what do you say to leaving him with me till morning? If we stir him he might waken, and then he would be asking for my lord the king, and his grief would all come back, and perchance you would not be able to hush him to sleep again. See now—go you to bed—yes? and at morning dawn come to my chamber door and fetch him away, I'll promise he will have slept his sleep out by then."

"Ay, ay!" nodded the old woman. "Never a wink he sleeps after dawn or lets others sleep neither. Chattering like the young magpies in the

apple boughs. You'll have enough and to spare of his company ere the first sun diamonds sparkle on the sea, Jarl Halfdene. But, to be sure, let it be as you say, for Hablok has known sorrow to-night for the first time; and it is none so rare in a man's life, or a woman's either—Welladay!—that Norna should force it on him."

"Good-night, then," said Halfdene, yawning a little, for he was himself sleepy.

"Good-night, Jarl Halfdene, and may the All-Wise make your sleep sweet."

"And yours, Norna," replied the old man. "Have you set my herb drink for me? The night is hot, and I am thirsty."

"Ay, it stands where it always does, on the little table beside your pillow, Jarl Halfdene. I set it there as I came hither. I brewed it myself, and I'll warrant you'll find it taste as it should. Eh!" she added, gazing lovingly at the slumbering boy; "I never felt so wishful to kiss his sweet pretty face as now. But I won't, I won't, 'twould waken him. I'll wait till morning dawn."

"Till morning dawn, Norna," echoed Jarl Halfdene, as Norna lifted the tapestry and disappeared.

Then Halfdene rose from his seat in the window. He stood listening for a few moments in the vast empty banqueting-hall. All was quiet; he heard no sound but the soft regular breathing of little Hablok in his arms, and the low ripple of the sea far down below; and there was no light but the fading moongleams glinting across the floor. These showed him the way to his sleeping chamber in the castle turret hanging sheer over the deep sea, and there he laid Hablok down on his own bed, and loosened the little tunic of scarlet, all edged with golden broidered work, from about his fair white throat, for the night was sultry, and Halfdene thought to himself that in a few days there would be a storm break, and he prayed the All-Father to protect King Birkabegn and his brave companions, and bring them safe back; and then his heart felt more at rest, and he laid himself down beside Hablok and soon fell asleep.

And so the night passed, and at break of day Norna the nurse came as she had promised to Jarl Halfdene's door. It stood a little way ajar, and she tapped at it softly, for she did not want to waken Halfdene, and, thought she, "Hablok's

quick ears can hear the very stirring of a mouse;" but there was no answer. Then she tapped and called louder. "Hablok! Hablok!" she cried; but still there was no answer.

"How soundly he sleeps!" thought Norna. "Hablok! I say, Hablok!" And then she made no more ado, but rapped a loud tattoo on the stout oaken door panels. "Hablok!"

But when still not a sound was to be heard within the chamber, a great fear seized Norna, and she waited no longer, but pushed the door open, and flinging aside the tapestry hanging before it, hurried towards the bed. "Hablok!" she cried imploringly; "Jarl Halfdene!"

But the boy was not there. And the great deep silence remained unbroken; and there upon the bed lay Jarl Halfdene alone, his face white as fair marble, and all over it a sweet restful light. The lattice stood open, and the fresh morning air gently stirred his silvery hair; but his eyes were closed, and Norna need not have feared wakening him, for in this world he would never waken more. Jarl Halfdene was dead.

Then Norna uttered a loud cry that rang through the castle, and brought all that were in

it to the spot. "See! see!" she wailed forth, pointing to the bed, "Jarl Halfdene is dead, and Hablok is not here!"

"And why should he be here?" demanded the voice of Jarl Erik, who stood looking on with his little ferrety eyes from a spot near the door. "You are the boy's nurse, mother; not Jarl Halfdene."

"Though, to be sure," said another, who stood peeping over his shoulder, "Jarl Halfdene was only just another old woman, and—"

But Jarl Erik frowned the speaker down. "How came you here, to look for Hablok, mother?" he sternly demanded of Norna.

Then Norna weepingly explained how Halfdene had desired her to let Hablok remain with him till morning.

"A nice trustworthy nurse you are," sneeringly said Jarl Erik, "to leave him in the old dotard's care!"

"He was not an old dotard, Jarl Erik," fierily sobbed forth Norna. "If he was double your age, he had double the sense and wisdom you have, or ever will have, live as long as you may."

"But with one foot in the grave," began the man who was looking over Erik's shoulder.

"That may be your case, for aught you know, Jarl Wulf," retorted Norna. "The young are taken as well as the aged. Jarl Halfdene looked healthier last night than you do now with your yellow cheeks, and when I brought him his herb drink he said—See," she went on, stopping suddenly to point to the silver cup which had contained the drink, and now lay rolled away upon the floor; "he must have drunk it ere he died."

"That does not follow," said Jarl Erik, kicking the cup away with his foot; "he may have been about to drink, and his failing hand may have dropped it, so that the liquor was spilt." But there was no stain upon the floor, as there must have been had the herb drink spilled from the cup.

But for all that Norna could spare no thought. "Hablok! Hablok!" was all she said, wringing her withered hands. "Quick! quick! The castle must be searched. Hablok, where are you?"

"That is a question easily answered, I should say," said Jarl Erik in his calm sneering tones, as he pointed to the open casement. "King Bir-

kabegn's son bade fair to be just another Birkabegn over again. An adventurous young daredevil, whom nothing would daunt, not even fifty feet of precipice. Depend upon it, mother, young Hablok climbed to the window here, and has fallen over into the sea and got drowned."

"Or," suggested Jarl Wulf, "perhaps he fell upon the rocks, and lies dashed to pieces."

"Possibly," coolly nodded Erik. "Come, we will go and see;" and he left the death-chamber, followed by his particular friends and familiars.

But though all that day every creature in the castle, as well as the peasants and cottagers far and wide, sought high and low for Hablok, they found no trace of him till towards sundown, when Jon the Jester, who was agile as a monkey, suddenly caught sight of a piece of red and shining stuff fluttering in the rising breeze on a sharp point of rock that jutted out far down under the casement of Jarl Halfdene's sleeping-chamber in the turret overhanging the sea; and, at the peril of his life, Jon scrambled to the point, and, grasping at the piece of stuff, he brought it to Norna. "See," said he, "what I have found;" and though he was but a fool, the tears streamed down his cheeks.

And at sight of the piece of stuff Norna flung up her hands, and broke into piercing cries of grief and wailing, for she knew it to be Hablok's little scarlet-and-gold broidered tunic; and no more words needed to make her feel sure that he had fallen out of the lattice, and perished by a terrible death.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BIRD-BOAT.

FISHERMAN GRIM walked by the sea-shore at break of day. So beautiful a daybreak it was, that it seemed to him the loveliest he had ever beheld; but that was no doubt because of its contrast with the past night, which had been a black and awful one indeed, with the most terrible thunderstorm he could remember. Now, however, after the darkness and turmoil, had come peace and light. Each moment the young sunrays grew stronger and warmer. They shone on the wet leaves of Grim's little garden, till they glistened again, and on the blades of tall grass

clothing the sand hillocks, waving merrily in the soft wind that blew from the sea. All night long the waves, crested with foam showing ghastly in the blue forked lightning flashes, had roared and groaned, but now they were fast sinking to rest; and the broad sea shone, as far as eye could reach, like millions of diamonds beneath the blue sky, where little fleecy cloudlets sailed so fast that they attracted the interested attention of Tib, who was sitting at the cottage-door, blinking up at them as if he had more than half a mind to spring at them, and dab them about with his paw. Then all of a sudden, his sharp prick ears would catch the hundred-and-one chirps and buzzes of the grasshoppers, and gnats, and creatures hopping and skipping on every side of him, and then, too, he was busy watching his master, who was slowly walking about near the waves; and when Grim passed in his neighbourhood, Tib would look up in his face, as much as to remark: "Quite a nice change in the weather!"

And, indeed, he was more pleased at it than he could say; for he had been terribly frightened all night. Every moment he had thought, and so indeed had Grim, that each thunderclap, as

it rolled over the cottage roof, must cleave it through, and it had been all Grim's work to stroke, and try and pacify the poor little cat, who had cowered to his breast with piteous looks.

"What a night!" Grim had said to himself again and again, as he listened to the uproar and the driving of the rain. "The bravest ship could not live through it!"

And when at last Grim opened his door in the morning, and let the pure crisp sunlit air into his little room, he hesitated before he stepped outside; for he was full of the dread that always possessed him after these sea-storms, that out there upon the sands, he might come upon something which yesterday had had life and breath, but which the angry waves had devoured in the night, and then cast up pale and dead. When, however, he at last summoned courage, and had gone from end to end of the sands belting the little promontory on which his cottage stood, he had come upon nothing but huge masses of sea-weed thrown far up by the tide, which, as it receded, left the goggle-eyed crabs fumbling about among the rocks, and the bright red starfish, and the limp jelly-fish looking as if they had been put into a

shape and not set properly; but there was nothing to make Grim miserable, and he began to feel very hungry.

As to Tib, he was always ready for his breakfast; and Grim was just about to turn in and light his peat-fire, and set the pot on to boil, when, as he chanced to cast another glance at the beautiful shining sea, his heart gave a great leap, for there, about fifty yards from the edge of the waves, exactly opposite his cottage, he saw a great black Something in the water!

He rubbed his eyes, for he had not noticed anything before, and he thought perhaps it was fancy, or that he must be dreaming still; but now he saw it clearer than ever. The thing seemed to be about as big as his fishing-boat, but not at all of that shape. It — then Grim started and shrank in terror, for all at once the waves twirled it about sideways, and he saw it had a tremendous head and long neck, and a shining tail that stuck right up out of the water, and the colour of it was black as a coal, except where it shone like burnished brass.

If only it would keep still for a moment; but what with the dazzling sunlight, and the tossing

and splashing of the shallow waves, Grim could not make out whether it was bird, beast, or reptile. Or was it all three? and Grim became goose-flesh from head to foot.

Supposing it was a sea-serpent!

He had heard of such creatures; and though he had always laughed at such old wives' tales, he felt more inclined now to call out, or run off and hide; for there the monster came on, on, now stopping a moment and twisting about on all sides as if to see where he was, now gliding fast straight ahead, making for the identical spot, seemingly, upon which Grim was standing, and from which he could not have moved now for a king's ransom, he was so numbed with amazement and terror.

All at once there rolled in a swell of deep blue-green water, which sent the monster drifting forward swift and straight as an arrow right upon the sand only a few feet short of dry land; and there it came to a dead halt, and Grim's teeth chattered in his head, for it was staring him full in the face, with its big round shining eyes; but they looked wonderfully merry and good-tempered, and quite as astonished as Grim could be himself, and there was a sort of laugh on its

curious face. And then Grim burst out laughing too, for by this time he had found out the thing was a boat!

Yes. It was a boat. A boat hewn and shaped like a raven. Her bows painted black, and her tail, which formed her helm, and the neck and head which made her prow, painted golden; and then Grim began dimly to recall how he had heard of these strange-shaped boats, but believed no more that there were such things than he believed there were sea-serpents. Now, however, seeing was believing. There it—she—stood as large as life; a great deal larger, indeed, looking at her from a raven's point of view. And a rare fine-built craft she seemed to be; and all Grim's one thought now was, that he should like a nearer look at her.

No sooner thought than done; and tucking up his breeches, he waded into the surf and in a few minutes came up alongside of her. But there a fresh wonder almost took away his senses, for quietly sleeping deep down in the prow of the boat, on a mantel of blue velvet, lay a little boy of about three years old. He had beautiful long wavy hair, and handsome but delicate features,

and a rosy flush on his pure white skin. One little plump white hand and arm made a pillow for his head, the other hand clasped together the short white tunic, edged with golden fringe, which was the only garment he wore, and his beautiful limbs were shining wet with the splashing of the waves.

The hold was indeed half full of water; but where the child lay, in the bosom as it were of the great bird, was quite dry and sheltered; and such a restful happy smile hovered on the half-parted rosy lips, that he might have been sleeping in his mother's or his father's arms.

How long Grim stood lost in wonder and admiration at this strange sight, he never knew. Then he strove to cudgel his brains into guessing how it had all come about; but the more he thought, the more puzzled he was. The only idea seeming at all like sense that he had, was, that there might have been two or three persons in the boat when she put off—from goodness knew where—Fairyland perhaps, and these had been washed overboard in the storm, while the babe, for it was scarcely more—. But before Grim could get any further with his guessings the child stirred, and opened its eyes, and rubbed

them with his little pinky-white fingers, and looked up into the sky, which was not bluer than they were. Then he stretched his beautiful lissom young limbs, and sat up; and when he had listened for a little while to the plash of the waves against the boat's keel, he smiled as if he heard sweet familiar music, and murmured, "Father."

Then Grim, who stood in the shadow of the bird-boat's wings, was still more astonished. "This child," thought he to himself, "can be no foreigner after all; for does he not say, 'Father' as our children do?" and though he said it, to be sure, with a little difference, that, Grim imagined, was because as yet the little lisping tongue could scarce speak at all.

Then suddenly the smile faded from the boy's face; and tears brimmed up into his eyes, as if some sad thought had flashed into his heart. "Fader," he cried again, but this time very piteously.

"Thy father is not here, darling," said truthful Grim for want of something better to say.

The little lad looked hard at Grim, as if he was striving to understand him. "Jarl Half-

dene," he said then. "Norna;" and his rosy lips began to pucker.

"Now what is the baby talking about?" said Grim, looking as if he was going to cry too. "Is it somebody's name he is saying?" for he guessed it might be, from the child's tone, and the way he looked round as if in search of someone he expected to see. So then a bright idea struck Grim. "No," he said, tapping his own breast, "Grim, Grim."

"Grim-grim," said the boy, and the puckering lips smoothed into a smile, and he rose and climbed up on the benches of the boat, and took a near view of Grim.

"Yes," replied Grim, holding out his arms, "will you come?"

For a moment the boy shrank back, the next he was in Grim's arms, with one of his own little arms round his new friend's neck. He was shivering, for the early morning breeze blew rather chill, and the thin little shirt was soaked with sea-water. "Poor baby!" thought Grim, wrapping him round inside the breast of his own frieze jerkin. "Never mind, you shall have some warm bread and milk."

By this time Grim began to feel sure that the little fellow must have come from some far-off foreign place, and gave up any hope of being understood; and yet, at the sound of some of the words he said, it was curious to see how the child turned his head, and seemed as if he did comprehend something of their meaning.

When he caught sight of Tib, he pointed at him with his little fat hands, and crowed with delight.

"Tib," called Grim, as delighted as the child. "Come here, Tib, Tib."

"Tib-tib!" shouted the child, and struggling from Grim's arms he ran and caught up the cat, and hugged him and kissed him, and Tib offered no objection, for he was accustomed to be made much of, and liked it.

Then Grim stirred up his peat fire, and put on the milk to boil, and sopped a slice of the coarse rye loaf, which was the best food he had to offer his little visitor, excepting a piece of the haddock that was broiling, and then they all three made such a very good breakfast, that it was really difficult to say which made the best; but taking it altogether, Grim was inclined to

think it was his unexpected visitor. "And no wonder neither," thought Grim, as he watched the last morsels of the bread and milk disappear, "for who knows when last he had a breakfast?"

Then, while Hablok and Tib made further acquaintance, he went down again to the sea-shore, where the tide had now left the boat quite high and dry sticking in the sand.

When he had hauled it up above sea-mark he got into it, and searched its every corner; but as it was not a bit bigger than his own fishing-boat that was soon done; and he only found in it a keg of fresh water, which had fallen over and was nearly empty, a few scraps of crust sodden with the salt sea-water, and the blue silken cloak, which was a large-sized man's cloak marked in one corner with a big letter "W" in golden threads, and edged with fine gold embroidered work. It had a beautiful soft thick lining of miniver fur; and no doubt the little solitary passenger of the bird-boat had crept under it, and so been saved from perishing with cold and wet through his perilsome voyage.

The first thing Grim set about doing after breakfast was to cut up an old jerkin of his own

and stitch it together into a little one for the boy. Then he contrived a pair of breeches out of a piece of coarse blue striped linen he had by him. Lonely men are obliged to be handy with their needles, and sailors and fishermen are often cleverer even than women at sewing; and it was astonishing how soon he had the little jerkin and breeches finished. To be sure he sat over it all day, and worked on all next night; but he was well rewarded for his hard work when he put them on the boy, and they fitted quite nicely. And the best part of all was, to see the delight of the little fellow in his wonderful new clothes. He clapped his hands and danced about in them; and then Grim fell into a brown study about shoes and stockings. "I dare say I could manage those too if I tried," thought he; "but I am afraid they might turn out a bit clumsy, and it will never do to spoil such dear beautiful-shaped little feet. No, when I go to Bardney I will talk about the shoes and stockings with the brothers; and in the meantime he must run about barefooted. He doesn't seem to mind it."

That was quite true. The little boy was as happy as the days were long. He was never

tired of running about the sea-shore, picking up shells and sea-weed and playing with Tib; and Tib seemed just as happy as his companion; and when the red sun set and the stars peeped forth they both used to fall asleep, tired out with mirth and play, till daylight dawned once more.

CHAPTER V.

THE CAKES.

THE great difficulty was Grim and Hablok not knowing one another's language; but it was curious how quickly the little fellow picked up Grim's words. This was no doubt all the easier, because Grim was not a man of a great many words, and those he did speak, dropped slowly from his lips; and the little boy took them up quick, like some little chicken pecking up barley grains. Perhaps if he had been older, he would have found it harder to learn Grim's speech, because he would have known more of his own and got confused; but as it was, a great deal of it was just like learning to speak at his own father's or mother's

knee. Then, too, although many words were different, there really seemed as if as many more were like what the child had been used to hear in his own country; so that altogether, in a surprisingly short time they began clearly to understand each other's talk.

When Hablok had been about a week with Grim the time came round for Grim to take a journey to Bardney Monastery. Father Ethelwin the abbot and his monks were the best friends Grim had in the world. They ate no meat on Fridays, and were glad to buy the fish he had to sell. And so one evening, after he had had an extra good haul, he packed the fish neatly in his osier baskets, and next morning at sunrise he started off, leaving Tib to look after the cottage, and taking Hablok with him.

They had a right merry journey; part of the way he carried Hablok on his shoulder, making room for him among the fish-baskets, and part of the way Hablok trotted beside him.

At last they came in sight of Bardney Monastery. It was a peaceful pretty place, with its gray walls and red roof standing in the midst of fields covered with very green grass which the cows and

sheep seemed to be greatly enjoying. A clear stream, fringed with beautiful wild flowers and tall rushes, wound along near the path right up to the monastery gates. Several men, dressed in straight long black garments, which, however, they had tucked well up out of the way, were working in the pretty garden, weeding its paths and pruning the bushes. They looked up and nodded a friendly good-day to Grim as he passed, and stared at Hablok with good-natured curiosity.

At last they arrived at a great door, which was opened by a monk with a round rosy face, and a huge ladle in his hand.

"Good-morning, Brother Boniface!" said Grim. "Any fish to-day?"

"I should rather think so," replied the rosy-faced brother, who was the monastery cook. "Why, what's become of you all this time? A nice pickle we were in last Friday, with nothing but carp and sticklebacks for dinner."

"I'm very sorry—" began Grim.

"Well, well; what have you brought with you?" interrupted Brother Boniface, as Grim began to unload his baskets.

"The finest fish you ever saw in all your life," replied Grim.

"And the queerest," said Brother Boniface, sparing a glance to Grim's little companion. "Who's this youngster?"

"That's more than I know," smiled Grim.

"Pooh!" said Brother Boniface, who fancied Grim was poking fun at him. "Don't know's no answer. I suppose you didn't fish him out of the sea?"

"That's pretty close to what I did do," said Grim. "I found him in an open boat that ran aground on the sands not a hundred yards from my door."

"Heaven protect us!" ejaculated Brother Boniface, looking harder than ever at Hablok. "Well, didn't he tell you where he started from? He looks as if he'd a tongue in his head."

"Yes, but it's an outlandish one. He doesn't know our way of talking."

"Ah!" said Brother Boniface, smiling at the little boy very good-humouredly. "Does he know how to eat a cake? That's much more important."

"I haven't found an opportunity to try him,"

laughed Grim, with whom even the coarse barley-bread was not too plentiful; "but I expect he can."

Brother Boniface soon settled these doubts by taking Hablok in his arms, and perching him on the edge of the great kitchen table, he emptied a little plateful of fresh-baked cakes into the skirt of his little jerkin. "Tib-tib," said Hablok, stowing a couple of the cakes carefully away in his pocket before he ate a morsel himself.

"That is a funny language to be sure!" said Brother Boniface. "You might live a hundred years, and not know what that means."

"Oh, I only wish it was all as plain to understand as that," laughed Grim. "Tib's our cat, you see, and Hablok won't touch bit nor sup till Tib's had a share."

"A fine mannerly little boy," said Brother Boniface. "I tell you what, Son Grim, Father Ethelwin's rarely fond of curiosities. He'd like to see the lad, I'm sure. And he'd understand his prattle quick enough."

Grim looked pleased, for that was just what he wished might happen; only he was a little afraid of speaking his mind. Father Ethelwin as he

was called, the ruler of Bardney Monastery, was such a tall dignified grave-faced man, and though, if he chanced to see Grim when he came with his fish, he always said, "Benedicite, my son," which means, "Bless thee, my son," very gently and kindly, that was all he had ever said; and anyhow Grim, being but a poor ignorant fisherman, stood very much in awe of learned Father Ethelwin, who wrote books, and understood, so it was said, every language that was spoken.

At that identical present moment Father Ethelwin was sitting writing his book in his own quiet private little room, and even Brother Boniface, who was not afraid of mortal thing, thought again before he would quite make up his mind to interrupt him, but he soon said: "Come, lad, come, gossip," and lifting down Hablok from the table he took him by his little hand, and away the three went in and out along a number of shadowy stone passages, till, right at the end of one, Brother Boniface stopped before a close-shut oaken door, and tapped on it softly.

"Enter," said a low grave voice. And they all three went into the room, which would have been dark, but for the rays of sunlight shining through

the green leaves climbing about the painted panes of the half-open lattice, beside which Father Ethelwin was seated, writing on a broad strip of parchment.

When he looked up to see who disturbed him there was a little frown on his forehead, but it disappeared as he perceived that the foremost intruder was a little boy; for he loved children. "Come hither, my child," he said, stretching out his hand to Hablok; "whose little boy are you?"

"He doesn't understand you, father," said Grim.

Then as the abbot looked up for an explanation, Grim at once told him the curious tale, not forgetting the bird-boat.

"Shaped like a raven, you say," said Father Ethelwin thoughtfully, when Grim had come to the end of his story.

"Talking of ravens, puts me in mind of my roast capons," said Brother Boniface, stealing softly away and leaving the three together. It was all very interesting, but there was dinner to dish up, and the capons would burn to a cinder.

"The raven is the badge of Denmark. You

ought to know that, my son," said Father Ethelwin to Grim, and of course Grim did know it well enough, for when he was out with his nets he used to meet the Danish boats painted with the raven on their prows in all directions.

Then a great light seemed suddenly to break in on Grim's mind. Why, over and again of course he had seen these odd-shaped boats, fashioned in the likeness of all sorts of beasts—dragons, and snails, and snakes. And while Grim was pondering over this, Father Ethelwin and Hablok were deep in a chat that soon settled the question, but which rather worried Grim, who fancied for the moment he understood what they said, and yet did not. "Yes," said Father Ethelwin, turning to Grim, "it is all plain enough. This little boy is a Dane, and somehow must have got adrift on the sea; but he does not know how, that is clear, and though I understand Danish I am not clever at baby talk, even our Saxon sort. The thing is, What is to become of him? God has seen fit to throw him on our care. I will, if you like, take him into the monastery along with our little orphans, and when he is grown up we will make a monk of him. Will you like to be a monk?"

added Ethelwin, addressing Hablok in his own tongue, "and live here at Bardney?"

Hablok put up a lip, and struggling down from Father Ethelwin's arms, made a dive into Grim's.

"Or a fisherman," said Grim, "and stay with me and Tib? Tell him what I say, father," entreated Grim.

"That is only just," assented the abbot; and when he had done as Grim wished, Hablok did not hesitate a moment to reply that he did not want to be a monk, and wanted to stay with Grim and Tib.

"Well, well," said Father Ethelwin with a little sigh, "let it be so. He is but a baby, and if you will be at the trouble of him—"

"He is no trouble," quickly interrupted Grim, in whose eyes tears had risen at the idea of parting with him. "He is a treasure the sea has brought a poor lonely man. I would gladly share my last crust with him."

"Nay," said Father Ethelwin. "There is no need for that. Hablok shall go back with you only on one condition, that you accept for his maintenance a measure of flour, and one also of milk to carry back with you every week when

you bring your fish to sell to Brother Boniface. And when he is old enough he must come here every day to be instructed in such learning as we poor monks can teach him; and above all in the Christian faith."

"That is but right," said Grim; "and for his food, though he should not starve; he is a growing lad, and your kind charity is well bestowed."

"And though you will not stay with me," smiled Father Ethelwin, stroking the child's golden hair, "yet you will kiss me, Hablok, before you go?"

And Hablok, first looking earnestly into Father Ethelwin's face, flung up his arms around his neck, and kissed him heartily.

"And now we will go," said Grim, who perhaps was afraid that Hablok's pretty ways would tempt Father Ethelwin to try and keep him; and, taking Hablok by the hand, he made him kneel on one knee as he did, while the good abbot laid his hand on their heads and gave them his blessing; and then away they went with the empty fish-baskets back to Tib and the cottage.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WICKED QUEEN.

I COULD tell you a great deal that I think you would like about Hablok's life by the sea-shore with Grim and Tib—for Tib was a most wonderful cat—and all the fun they used to have together. Then there were the voyages that Hablok took with Grim in the fishing-boat, and the hauling in of the nets, and the sorting of the fish, and in the evening Grim taught Hablok to weave the osier baskets; but I must hasten over the next few years, and come to the time when Hablok began to go to and fro every day over the green fields to Bardney Monastery school, where he learned all kinds of useful things. The good monks loved him very much, for he minded his books, and grew up as kind-hearted and gentle as he was brave and daring when there was real need to be so.

Not with the monks only, but with everybody Hablok was a favourite. They all called him the fisherman's son, because mostly, people, as

time went on, did not know, or forgot, that he was not really so; and then, as many said, Grim was as loving as any father could be to a son.

Hablok was such a tiny child when the sea washed him up in the bird-boat that he would not have remembered about it but for seeing the boat constantly before his eyes in Grim's little garden behind the cottage, where Grim the fisherman had drawn it up a few days after it stranded; and there, year after year it stood, with its queer face and half-open beak, in which, often as not, while Hablok was at school, Tib might be seen curled up asleep. It was certainly a snug, sheltered perch, and a capital spot for keeping a look-out on the birds without being seen by them.

Twice a year Grim and Hablok tarred and painted the bird-boat, and no doubt she was still as stout and seaworthy as the day she drifted up, almost twelve years ago now; but Grim never launched her for fear she should get knocked about or damaged in any way. And so, knowing little change in his life but those summer and winter, and school time and holiday time brought, and the fair weather and foul of that wild coast, Hablok grew to be nearly fifteen

years old; but though his life might be peaceful and undisturbed, there were quarrelling and fighting enough on every side. It seemed as if every country in Europe wanted a piece of this little island of ours standing in mid-ocean. From right and left, north, south, east, west, poured the invaders, each insisting that originally it had been theirs; so that there was a strange jumble of Britons and Saxons and Danes and Franks and Jutes and Angles and others.

Along the eastern coast, the Danes had the best of it, no doubt because Scandinavia, as Norway, Sweden, and Denmark were called, faced that side of the island across the great sea flowing between; but the good Saxon King Alfred had done a great deal towards producing order, and when he died his sons and grandsons were called the kings of England in succession, but none of them had hearts or heads like his.

Among these was one who might have been a better man if he had had a better wife. Before he was king, he had married a lady who was a great earl's daughter, but she died, leaving a little daughter named Elfleda; and then he married a cruel ambitious woman, who cared not what

crimes she committed, so only that she might rule, and have everything for herself and her son.

Now, thought she, if she could only get rid of the little Elfleda, who was the owner of all her grandfather the great earl's possessions, because he was dead, and her mother was dead, then she would get Elfleda's lands and money for her own son. The only way to manage this was to kill Elfleda, and that she would not have scrupled to do if she could; but it was almost impossible, because her husband the king, having already found out what a wicked creature she was, had placed Elfleda in the care of the nuns of Ely.

The great houses in which nuns lived were called convents, and those the monks lived in were called monasteries. They were the only places in those unsettled and troubled times where people were safe from lawless and cruel men, for violent and rapacious as many of these men were, they were no longer heathens. They professed to believe in the true God and in Jesus Christ, and they rarely harmed the women and the peaceful-minded men who gave their lives to succouring the poor and the sick, and teaching the young, and giving a shelter to the homeless.

The wicked queen therefore dared not touch Elfleda while she was in the nuns' care. Nevertheless, she was determined to get her into her own power, and there were plenty of bad people about who were only too ready to help her, for their chance of getting a slice out of the portion she coveted, and so she just decided to bide her time.

In those days, and for hundreds of years after, the churches and monasteries possessed what was called right of sanctuary; which meant that within a certain boundary line near a church or monastery persons flying from their pursuers could not be touched. Once within the line they were safe. It depended on various circumstances how far this line extended. Sometimes it only took in part of the inside of the building itself, and sometimes it included the ground all round it.

This was the case with the nun's property at Ely, so that the Princess Elfleda was quite safe in wandering about the beautiful shady garden, and there was nothing to make her feel sad or cooped up. She was very happy with the nuns, who took great care of her, and taught her to make

bread and to do beautiful embroidery and tapestry work, and to play on the lute, and, above all, to tend the sick and poor.

Elfleda was a fair blue-eyed maiden, with a gentle sweet look in her face that made her seem very beautiful. She could be merry enough sometimes, but she was not quite such a chatterbox as most of her companions were; and often when they were at their play, Elfleda would wander away into the woods and fields surrounding the convent, and be as happy as the summer day was long, in watching the waving boughs and listening to the music of the warm breeze as it fanned her cheek. Or she would seat herself on a mossy stone beside the brook, and gaze into the clear water, where the fish darted about and the water-beetles sunned their shining armour.

But it is not always summer; and winter, when it came round, sometimes seemed to Elfleda very dreary; though, to be sure, when the snow fell fast, and the nuns would laughingly tell her "the old woman was plucking her goose," and the hoar-frost hung upon the leaves, Elfleda would think to herself that after all it was a glorious time, and her only regret would be for the suffer-

ings of the poor. Then with a right good-will she would help the sisters make warm garments, and give their alms at the convent gates.

One winter was more bitterly cold than it had been for many a year, and on every side there was trouble; not only, however, on account of the cold, but because there had come with it some dreadful fighting. Only ten miles off, for some days just before Christmas, a fierce battle had raged between the Saxons and the Danes, and this time the Danes had been completely vanquished. Most of them were left dead on the field of battle, and of the few who had escaped from it many fell dead by the wayside from cold and hunger.

These were the sad tidings that reached the nuns of Ely when they were preparing for the festival they had been taught to honour as the time when the angels sang in the starlit sky of "Peace and good-will towards men." And when the abbess heard of it, all she could say was "Welladay!" as the tears brimmed into her gentle old eyes. It seemed to her a strange pitiful thing that men could be so cruel to each other, and the nuns stopped twining their holly

and mistletoe wreaths, and only spoke together in low sad tones as the twilight gathered.

Suddenly the door of the great room in which they were gathered burst open and the portress rushed in.

"Come, mother, come!" she cried imploringly to the abbess. "There is a man lying at the gate, and I think he is dead, for he does not stir. I know not how long he has been there, for I only first saw him just now, as I was locking up for the night."

Then out went the abbess as fast as her aged limbs permitted her, all the nuns following to the gates, and there they beheld the man the portress had spoken of. Motionless, and his face almost as white as the surrounding snow, he lay upon the ground; but dead he was not, for his eyes moved restlessly, now from side to side, as if trying to find out where he was, and now closing and crinkling up as if he was in dire pain, which must indeed have been the case, for on his forehead there was a deep gash, from which the blood streamed, making a little red pool under his head in the snow, and one arm lay outstretched all twisted and anyhow, as if he could not move it.

But what most startled the nuns was the odd way in which he was dressed. One side of his jerkin and hose, and that not the same side, but opposite way about, was red, the other blue, while one sleeve was green and that on the hurt arm yellow. His reddish hair straggled in the blood-stained snow, and the cap he had worn, an odd-shaped peaked thing, curved like a drinking-horn, and covered with tiny bells, lay a little way off on the ground.

And though, as I have said, his face was very pale, it was mottled, like his garments, of all colours, chiefly yellow and blue, but that was with the cold, for he shivered cruelly. Notwithstanding, the poor fellow strove to smile and say some word, but the word and the smile both seemed to freeze on his ashen lips, then his eyes closed heavily, and he lay stone still.

But the abbess, who was very skilled in such matters, said quietly:

"'Tis not death, only a swoon."

And then, taking her own warm frieze mantle from her shoulders, she flung it over the wounded stranger, and kneeling down beside him began to chafe his ice-cold hands in hers, bidding the

nuns go bring a litter; and this done, they lifted him on to it as carefully as they could, and bore him into the infirmary, as the room was called where they tended their sick folk.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BLACKTHORN COPSE.

FOR many weeks the sick man lay in that room, for not only was his right arm badly broken, but either the wound in his head, or the cold and exposure, or both, threw him into a terrible fever.

Sometimes he would talk and chatter the night through, but such gibberish his kind nurses could not make out a word of it; and they said "it is the fever makes him talk so." But when the fever was all gone, and they began to expect him to talk like they did, and other sensible persons, he just took to hardly speaking at all. It was not, however, much expected of him, for he was very weak after his long illness, and besides it was

the rule of the place to be as silent as possible and only to speak when there was absolute need for it; and it was not such a bad rule in its way, saving an immense deal of worry and confusion; but little Elfleda did not like it much, for all she was not such a very great little chatterer, and she used to decide to herself that she would not care to be a nun, and pass her whole life in the convent.

Yet she understood very well that it would be very dangerous for her to leave it; for she was no longer a little child, she was growing tall, and would soon be fifteen years old, and the nuns said the older she grew the more the wicked queen was bent upon getting hold of her. Elfleda was not discontented at her lot, for she always had plenty to do with her work and her music, and helping the sisters to nurse their sick folk. She and the poor stranger whom the nuns found that snowy day at their gates became fast friends. She could not understand, any more than the rest, what he said; but somehow she was quicker to catch the meaning of his looks, and the signs he made, so that in time she became his chief nurse and companion; and when at last he was able to

walk a little way, it was Elfleda who led him out in the balmy spring air.

They used to be very happy, and made a language of their own to talk with; and when that did not serve their turn, they sang and laughed over it all, and were as blithe as the birds in the budding boughs overhead. Elfleda had a sweet clear voice, and the stranger's was deep and musical, and often Elfleda would pause in her own singing to listen to his trolling in that strange language, which sounded so like her own, and yet she only made out a word of it here and there.

One lovely spring morning the two wandered a longer distance than usual into the great wood near the convent. She wanted to show her friend a favourite nook of hers. It was where the stream that ran through the wood fell in a little cascade into the shallower course below. A lovelier spot never was seen. How the water sparkled and sprayed in the sunshine! and the young grass shoots prinked themselves in the wavelets, while overhead the birds chirped and twittered and tried their tiny wings in the gently waving boughs. How quiet and merry and

beautiful it all was, and how hard to think there was any sadness or strife in the world!

Below the cascade, on the further bank, lay a little dell, so closely embowered in blackthorn bushes that nothing beyond could be seen; and carpeted all over with daffodils and primroses and dog-violets nestling in the mossy grass-clothed clumps. The fresh green and golden, and white and purple of the wild flowers made it beautiful enough for the fairy queen's own home. And while the two stood and gazed longingly the same thoughts came to both, that they should dearly like to pluck a goodly posy and carry it home to the kind mother abbess; but Elfleda sighed and shook her head when her companion, setting one foot on a big flat stone lying in the glass-clear shallows, stretched out his left hand, which was still the only one he could use, to help her across.

He looked at her in wondering amazement. Surely she could not be afraid; this brave girl, who had turned pale, it is true, but had not flinched, while she held the dressings for the abbess, when she used to doctor that terrible wound on his forehead. And yet now, there she

stood, as if she was as much afraid of a splash of water as any kitten. The stream was not six inches deep, even supposing she did slip on the stepping-stones; but though his arm was only a left one, it was getting fairly strong now, and could take good care of her. But still Elfleda held back. How should she make him understand that she dared not cross that little bit of a stream? that the abbess had forbidden it, since it marked the boundary of the convent lands. Just a sort of Tom Tiddler's ground, as the children say? And, once beyond the line of it, who could say where those wicked men in the pay of the cruel queen might not be lurking?

Well, but yet how silly to think of that! In the first place, the blackthorn bushes grew so thickly you could hardly pass a hand between, much less a great full-grown man's body, and it was hardly likely any way that they should think of hanging about in such a lonely spot, on any poor chance of her coming that way; and, besides—besides, she would not stay three minutes. She would just pluck a handful of the beautiful flowers and fly back again; and with a little laugh she tripped down the bank, gave her

finger tips lightly into her companion's hand, and hey! presto! hop, skip, jump, there they both were ankle deep in the flowery copse.

How soft and fragrant it smelt! how glorious the flowers were! They could have tarried there the livelong day, and to be sure the five minutes grew to ten and twenty, and how much longer it would have been who can say? but that just then the sound of the dinner-bell fell afar off on the still air, and the two started hurriedly to return.

Elfleda was foremost; one foot already touched the first stepping-stone, when a rough hand seized her by both arms, and something dropped like a curtain before her eyes, and she was in darkness.

"Help! help!" she shrieked, and, stumbling on the slippery grass, she fell to the ground.

"Ho! ho!" mockingly shouted a voice. "Small chance of that, young mistress. We have you at last, have we! Come—"

"Leave hold, caitiff!" shouted another voice from the copse.

"Ay, leave hold, or by St. Edmund I'll shoot you dead where you stand!" cried a third voice close beside her.

A loud defiant laugh broke from the wretch

who had Elfleda in his grip; but it ended in a hideous yell; the iron fingers loosened their hold; the kerchief blindfolding her was torn off, and she beheld a tall fair-haired youth kneeling on the prostrate body of a man, in the calf of one of whose legs stuck a long arrow, and whose hands the youth was binding with a handkerchief behind his back. That done, he bestowed on him a kick which sent him rolling into the stream, where he lay floundering and spluttering and muttering, but unable to stir.

"How is it with you, fair mistress?" inquired the youth of Elfleda. "Has the craven wretch hurt you?"

"Nay," said she with white lips, and as well as she could speak for terror. "But I fear—" then she looked towards the bushes. "Is he hurt?" she added, pointing tremulously towards a heap of bright colour among the leaves.

The youth hurried towards the spot; but before he had quite reached it a face peeped through the leaves. "Jon! Jon!" cried the youth.

The heap stirred, and the face changed from one of crimson rage to wild astonishment.

"Jon! Jon!" cried the youth again, and added

some word Elfleda did not understand. "Jon!" Then he broke into a joyous laugh. "It is Jon! It is Jon!" he cried.

"Ay!" answered Jon in his own language, which the youth seemed to understand. "That is my name, to be sure. But thee I know not, fair youth." Then he sighed.

"And how I know you, I cannot tell," said the young man. "I must have seen you in my dreams. Surely it must be so, since you know me not. Look again."

"I know but one pair of eyes so kind and bravely blue as thine, fair youth," said Jon, gazing hard at the lad, and speaking very sadly, "and one pair of lips so sweet and merry when I made my quips. And he—welladay! he was my king and royal master."

"Nay," laughingly interrupted the other. "Then, to be sure, it can only be in my dreams that I have seen thee; for I know no kings and royal masters. I am but a poor fisherman's son."

"And what is thy name?"

"Hablok. But come," and still bearing the half unconscious Elfleda in his arms the youth hurried on till they reached the convent.

CHAPTER VIII.

HABLOK'S REWARD.

GREAT was the consternation of the nuns when they learned the danger that had nearly befallen Elfleda.

It was Hablok who told the story, for Elfleda was still almost breathless with terror, and unable to speak. He had been, he said, in the wood beyond the stream, and far away from any beaten path, tempted into the thicket by a little squirrel who led him an endless dance through brake and briar, till at last it jumped into the boughs of a wide-spreading leafy oak-tree. Quick as thought, Hablok climbed its trunk, and was just within arm's-length of the squirrel's tail when something moving stealthily along through the brambles just beneath him caught his eye; and forgetting all about the squirrel, he looked down, and saw a man creeping on all-fours into the thickest part of the blackthorn hedge a little way beyond. Nor was that all, for on looking again, he caught in another part of the thicket, a twinkle of scarlet

and yellow, and he fancied he heard the tinkle of little bells, though that, to be sure, might have been nothing but fancy, or the sound of the convent dinner-bell, which was just beginning to ring. Then suddenly as he stretched forward along a branch to see clearer, there flashed across an opening in the green tangle a gleam of golden, the flutter of a gown blue as the petals of a harebell, and then the bright upturned face of a maiden.

"But," went on Hablok, "I waited not to see more, for like a viper in the grass the fellow on all-fours was creeping farther and farther towards the opening in the blackthorn bushes; and his face had a cunning evil look, and it was plain to me that he was bent on wickedness. So I turned, and slipped down the tree on to the soft grass, holding my very breath lest he should hear, and, keeping as close behind him as I was able, I hid in the bushes, and waited to see his next move. It was to draw a kerchief from his pouch, and a bright-pointed knife from his belt; and then without more ado he sprang into the midst of the open green sward.

"At the same moment out sprang Jon here from

the bushes, and rushed to the maiden's rescue; but I was nearer, and came up first with the villain, who had already clutched her with one hand, and was blindfolding her with the other; but next instant the kerchief serves a better turn, and for aught I know he may still be tussling with its knots, for I tied his hands as I tie our fishing-nets, in no loose ones; and truly he looked a monstrous ugly fish when we left him floundering in the stream. But there was no time to deal with him as he deserved, for the maiden was half swooning, and her companion here," he added, pointing to Jon, "is short of an arm, at least for all use it serves him, and so I lifted her in my arms, and bring her to your care. Belike you know who she may be, and where she lives."

"For who she may be," replied the abbess, "that we know, fair youth. She is one that certain bad folk would sell their souls to get into their clutch; and that must content you now. For where she lives, it is here with the nuns of Ely. And truly we are beholden to you for what you have done, though, in a manner, she deserved not such brave deliverance, since her disobedience to my commands ran her into the peril. Had she

tarried, as I have always bidden her, on this side of the brook, the caitiff would not have dared to lay a hand on her."

"It is such a narrow little brook," pleaded Hablok, looking at Elfleda's penitent pale face.

"And the flowers were so sweet, dear mother," said Elfleda, venturing to lift her downcast eyes.

"Even so," said the abbess. "Just as 'tis but a little step that passes from the ways of right to sinfulness."

"But flowers are not sinful," said Hablok sturdily. "They are God's own work, and all He makes, Grim says, is good."

"Why, that is true indeed," said the abbess; "and the sin lay not in them, but in Elfleda's disobedience to those who know best what is right for her."

"She will not disobey you again," said Hablok.

"No," said the abbess with a grave little smile; "if only for the fright she has had, I think she will not."

"Forgive me, mother," implored Elfleda penitently. And when the abbess still looked grave, Hablok said, "Grim says that the angels rejoice over one who is sorry for his transgressions."

"Well, well," said the abbess, and the gravity faded out like a cloud. "You are pardoned, Elfleda, for I am sure your punishment has been sharp enough. But tell me, fair youth, who is this Grim who teaches you such Christian precepts?"

"My father," replied Hablok.

"I can recall no such name among the nobles of this part," said the abbess.

'He is not proudly born. He is but a poor fisherman."

"Heyday!" said the good mother under her breath, as she gazed at the handsome finely-cut features of the boy, and his flowing golden locks. "A poor fisherman, say you?" Then she put her hand in the alms-purse at her side, and took from it some gold pieces, which she held towards Hablok; but he proudly pushed them from him.

"I desire no reward," he said, "excepting one look from the Lady Elfleda's eyes, so that I may see they are no longer troubled."

"And in sweet remembrance, will you take these of me?" said Elfleda, lifting her eyes to Hablok's with a bright frank smile, and offering him the little posy she was twining together of

the daffodils and violets which had clung to the folds of her gown. "Will you have them? and though they wither, remember that my gratitude for your brave service can fade never."

With a low obeisance Hablok took the flowers, and as he jogged along on his homeward road he thought he would rather be having those next his breast than all the contents of the abbess's alms-purse thrice told.

CHAPTER IX.

STRANGE TALES.

THE wicked queen sat in her castle hall surrounded by her minions and favourites; and before her, in bedraggled garments, stood a man with sullen crest-fallen face, and a bandage round one leg.

"And so you have failed in your task, Scurf?" said the queen contemptuously, "and come to grief like a chased rat. You are a brave messenger," she went on, and her eyes glittered with

anger. "A child of twelve years old could have done the work."

"It was the surprise balked me," said Scurf in tones matching his sullen looks. "The arrow was in my leg, and I rolled into the water before I knew the young flitter-mouse was there."

"And have you no notion who or what he was?" demanded the queen, "so that he may be tracked up and strung to a tree, for his life shall pay for this."

"'Tis said he is one Hablok, a fisherman's son."

"Fisherman's son, forsooth!" exclaimed the queen. "Then, by my crown, he shall rue the day his peasant hands meddled with an earl's daughter! When barn-door fowls mate with eagles—stay," and a cunning glitter shone in the queen's eyes, "where does he live?"

"With his father, Grim, in a little lonely cottage by the sea."

"Good!" said the queen; then for a long time she sat with her chin resting on her hand, and the courtiers stood till their legs ached, but not daring of course to stir, and Scurf's wounded leg was simply agonizing. At last, however, she spoke.

"Go!" said she, and under the circumstances it was pleasant hearing, and go they did, as fast as their weary legs would take them without absolutely running. And when they were out of earshot of their royal mistress they said to each other: "What has she in her mind now?" and the rest shrugged their shoulders. They had not a notion. The only thing they were certain of was that no one had ever thwarted her will as this young fisherman's son had done, but he had been made to smart for it.

And in the meantime, Hablok recounted his adventure to Grim as they sat weaving their osier twigs in the twilight. At first Grim could only laugh heartily at the tale of the miserable Scurf's discomfiture; then tears of pride and content in Hablok's brave deed brimmed into his eyes, and then both the laughter and the tears were lost in a very grave thoughtful look.

"You must be wary, Hablok," he said, after a long silence, "for though it is a mighty secret, little birds will whisper; and I have heard say that the queen loves not the Lady Elfleda, and it may be she set on this miserable creature to lay hands on her."

"Nay," said Hablok, "that tale must be false, for who can look on the Lady Elfleda without loving her? I have but looked on her for half an hour, and in that time I have learned to think my life for hers would be well given were it needed."

"Ay," said Grim with a little smile as he gently twiddled Tib's ears; "but there are folks who love only themselves and their wicked desires, and 'tis said the queen is such a one. But now, tell me more about this Jon who was with the Lady Elfleda. A fool, you say?"

"I said he was clothed like one," said Hablok. "But I doubt he was far less one than the knave who got his ducking in the brook, and if only he had had the use of both his arms, he would have succoured the Lady Elfleda every whit as well as I did. And he could speak sensibly enough, too, when it was wanted of him. Though when I began by asking which road I was to carry her I had to speak twice, because he seemed little to comprehend the Saxon tongue, and 'twas well I knew his talk, which Father Ethelwin, you know, says is Danish."

"Ay, ay," said Grim. "He is a Dane, then, like

you, Hablok. Nay, don't frown, boy; you always knit your brows when I say you are a Dane."

"Because I love you, Grim, and this fair country."

"Why, for the matter of that," slyly laughed Grim, "you are but one of many Danes in your affection for our dear England. They love it so well, that they would send us Saxons packing out of it if they could."

"Oh! but I'd not do that," said Hablok. "There is room in it for both. I'd never lay a harming finger on one of the Lady Elfleda's race."

"Think no further, I entreat you, Hablok, of the Lady Elfleda," said Grim more seriously than ever. "I pray Heaven you may never see her again."

"And I," said Hablok with a rosy flush on his face, and a merry laugh, as he caught up Tib, and perched him atop of his golden curls; "I will pray Heaven not to grant your prayer. To-morrow," he went on, speaking half to himself, "I shall know how she fares, for to-morrow, after school, I am to meet Jon in the monastery meadows."

And next afternoon, true to this appointment they had made, Hablok and Jon walked together in the fields, talking familiarly like old friends who had been long parted and had met again, and Jon told Hablok the story of his life.

It was rather a curious one. Ever since he could remember anything he had been a fool, though some folks said they did not fancy he could have been entirely born one. Still, "years had brought increase," Jon continued with proud modesty, as he pointed to the silvery threads in his reddish-brown locks, and he considered it was quite true that there could be no fool like an old one. Though years ago my royal master used to say I had no equal; and he was a rare judge. I'd give my cap and bells," sighed on Jon, "dear as I hold them, to look upon his face once again ere I die. It was a sad day for Denmark when King Birkabegn went away to help sweep his neighbour, the King of Iceland's door-step, leaving his own to be fouled by a handful of traitors."

"But he did not dream they were traitors?" said Hablok.

"Not he. Men wise and good as my royal master are apt to think others like themselves.

He believed them all to be as good, or nearly so, as Jarl Halfdene."

"And who was he?" asked Hablok.

"The jarl he left at their head, one with an angel's soul, and a lion's heart; but Jarl Halfdene was grown old and weak, and they murdered him, put poison in his night draught the very night the king sailed away in the dragon ships. It was given out that Jarl Halfdene died a natural death, but there were those in Denmark who believed otherwise. And not content with that, they made away with the king's son, also, a little innocent child of three years old. Hablok he was named."

"Why, that is my name!" said Hablok.

"Ay," said Jon, looking at him for a moment, and then quietly continuing his story; "there are any number of Habloks about. Folks named their children after the little prince when he was born; and you are of about the age he would be if he were alive."

"But he is not?" asked Hablok.

Jon shook his head. "'Twas said he climbed a casement sill—and, to be sure, he was a daring young pickle for three years old—and toppled headlong into the sea. And in proof that this

was so, a scrap of his scarlet tunic was found clinging to a piece of rock beneath the casement. I found it myself; but his body was never found —any more than the king's pleasure-boat was ever found, though that was spirited away, people said, and all the pleasure went in it, for none could I ever find more in the castle after that day. The jarl they made king was a gloomy vinegar-faced fellow, who never had a smile for my jests. And no wonder, for crime clouded his heart. There was no place any more for me in the castle. I used to wander up and down its silent corridors where once I had borne the little prince on my shoulder, and the walls had echoed again with our laughter; until, from a fool, I became well-nigh a madman, and ran away to England; and here for ten years and more I have gone from place to place with my old lute, and getting my bread with trying to ply my trade; but I am not the fool I was; folks may say what they will. I make my jests with a heavy heart, and when they all laugh, I could weep, for I think of old Denmark, and those I loved.

"Then there is no room here for my trade; fighting is the only profitable one, and the people hate

the Danes; and though they have let me go scot-free so long, because I amused them a bit, last winter they set upon me, because the cold had frozen my jests, and I could think of no new bit of nonsense, and they hunted me all the way from Lincoln, pelting me with stones, and stole my lute, and at last, in running away from them, I slipped on the ice, and broke my arm just at the gates of Ely convent.

"The nuns were very good to me. They took me in, and patched up my broken arm, and mended my cracked skull, and nursed back all the poor wits in it as well as they could; but the Lady Elfleda says, while the fever was on me those went sorely astray; and when I ask her whither? she says, 'To Denmark, she thinks,' and then I say: 'Sweet lady'—for that she is—'Sweet lady, that is not astray. They have surely but gone home.' And now I am well again, I'd fain be following them, and yet I fear to do so, for I think I shall but find them dead and buried when I get there; for, without Birkabegn and Hablok, Denmark would be but a grave;" and then Jon's head drooped mournfully, and tears dropped on his scarlet leg.

"I should have rarely liked to have seen King Birkabegn's boat," said Hablok, partly because that was the truth, and partly because he wanted to cheer up Jon out of his sad thoughts.

"Ay, 'twas a brave boat," smiled Jon through his tears. "Not dragon or snake shaped like the big ships, but for all the world like a raven."

"A raven!"

"The royal badge of Denmark, yes," nodded Jon; "black as night, but with a golden tail that shone merrily on the green waves, and a red throat you could see ever so far down into. But there was a storm a few days after Birkabegn went away; and the tale went that it had gone down, though I could not swallow it."

"The boat?"

"Beshrew thee! No, the tale; for the boat always floated like a cork, and was as seaworthy as any of the big ships."

"Would you know her again if you saw her?"

"Ay, that would I. She has not her like; and besides, mischievous varlet that I was in those happy days, I left my mark in the big bird's throat, carving the letters of my name J. O. N.

So that I should know her again, should I not, think you?"

But Hablok sat silent for a while. Then he rose up and said:

"Well; it grows late, and I must be going. Farewell, Jon, for to-day. But to-morrow at this hour will you be at this same greenwood tree to meet me and my father Grim the fisherman, for he is coming to Bardney with his fish, and I help him carry it, and—"

"You! carry fish!" interrupted Jon, gazing at Hablok in astonishment. "A learned noble-looking youth like you; for I have heard you know all the monks can teach you, and they are so clever."

"Nay, not all," laughed Hablok. "And for what I know, I have in great part to thank dear Father Grim; since 'twas he who first brought me to my kind teachers' notice, and 'tis but little enough return I can make him, to help with the fishing work. But promise to be here to-morrow at this trysting tree; and when you have seen Grim, you will love him as I do."

"How do they catch fish in this country?" said Jon.

"Why, with a net or an angle, to be sure," said Hablok, pausing in surprise as he was about to go. "There's no other way."

"Oh, but there is," quoth Jon with a very grave face. "Just you ask the bears if there isn't."

"The bears?"

"Yes, and that's why they've such stumpy tails. Once a bear met a fox sneaking along with a bundle of fish he had stolen. 'And, prithee, where did you get that from, Mr. Reynard?' asks Bruin. 'I have been out angling, Mr. Bruin,' replies the cunning wicked story-teller. 'I wish I knew how to angle,' sighs the bear, 'for I love fish.' 'Oh, well, for you with your fine tail,' replied the fox, 'nothing is easier. All you have to do, is to go out on the ice and make a hole. Then put your tail down into it and hold it there for a good long time. You mustn't mind if it smarts a trifle, for that will be a sign that the fishes bite. The longer you keep it under the ice, the more fish you will catch; and when you must leave off, give it a smart jerk up.' Well, the bear did as the fox had instructed him, and held his tail a long while down in the hole he had made, until it just froze fast. Then he gave it a sudden jerk

up, and having grown brittle with being frozen, he jerked it quite off, so from that day bears go with stumpy tails."

"What a tale!" laughed Hablok. "Tell it to your grandmother."

"My grandmother," chanted the fool in a queer sing-song:

"My grandmother, she died first.
She taught me how to make apple crust;
Up with your heels, and down with your head;
That's the way to make crockery bread!"

And leaving Jon see-sawing on his back under the tree, Hablok ran all the way home.

CHAPTER X.

"J. O. N."

TIB was gone for his evening walk and Grim was out in his boat when Hablok reached the cottage. The first thing he did when he got a little breath was to climb up the neck of the bird-boat, and twist himself about like an eel,

till he got a good view inside the raven's open beak.

It was no easy task, but he managed it at last; and his heart gave a loud thump when, by the light of the dying day, he fancied he could distinguish some marks in the bird's red throat; and it thumped on louder than ever when, looking closer still, he read unmistakably those three letters: "J. O. N."

"Hi! hi!" shouted a voice below, before he had well got his head out of the bird's beak again. "What in the name of common sense are you doing, Hablok?"

Down like any plummet dropped Hablok, and in tremulous tones related to Grim what Jon had told him, and how he had found the letters as Jon had described inside the bird's beak.

"'Tis very strange," said Grim, passing his hand across his rugged forehead. "But if indeed it be true, as more and more I think it is, that you are the son of King Birkabegn, it behoves us all to be the more careful, and keep a silent tongue; for the wicked queen will hate you the worse when she finds it is a prince who has befriended the Lady Elfleda. But say no more now—I must think."

And through all the night Grim sat pondering what was best to be done; and as he sat the smouldering embers of the little fire out, with Tib nestling on his knee, just as he did long ago now, that stormy night, the memories came back to him all clear and real, as if it had happened no longer since than yesterday. But there on the wooden trestle lay Hablok, no longer a helpless little child, but a handsome stripling, to tell him how time had flown.

How noble he looked! His face was the face of a great king's son, for all his clothes were so coarse and poor; and that made Grim think of the little gold-fringed shirt and the blue silken cloak marked with the golden "W."

"That stands for 'Wulf,' I'll dare swear," said Grim to himself as he rose, and, going to a press, took out the two garments and examined them by the light of his oil-lamp. "The villain had some heart in him for all his wickedness, and belike wrapped the babe in his own cloak when Jarl Erik turned the bird-boat adrift."

And when next day he and Hablok went to Bardney, Grim made a bundle of the cloak and

the little shirt, and carried it with him, saying not a word to Hablok.

Jon was first at the trysting spot, and when Grim said, "Give you good-day, friend;" and Jon said, "At your service, Father Grim;" Grim replied: "If that be so, let us lose no time, but come with me to Father Ethelwin;" and away they all three went.

Father Ethelwin was an aged man now, but years upon years had made him wiser and wiser. He listened attentively to Grim's tale, and then to what Jon had to say. Then, after being lost for a while in profound thought, he said: "You did well to come to me. But this needs much consideration. I have had news only this very day that King Birkabegn is back ruling his own again; and Jarl Erik, the usurping traitor, is turned out of the kingdom. But leave me now, and come to-morrow again, for I must think, I say;" and with his blessing he sent them away. He had little time to think, notwithstanding; for scarce were they gone than a troop of horsemen clattered into the monastery courtyard, in whose midst rode a lady gorgeously attired, and whose face would have been handsome, had it

not been marred by an ugly scowl. It was the wicked queen, and she imperiously demanded to see Father Ethelwin.

"Admit her," said he. But there was no kind smile on his face when she entered, although she strove to look honey-sweet; and when he said, as it behoved him to do, "Peace be with you!" the tone was far more like "What do you want here?"

"I have come, reverend father," she said, "to speak with you of young Hablok, the son of Fisherman Grim."

"And what of Hablok, daughter?" said Ethelwin.

"That he seems a fine brave young fellow," said she.

"He is so truly," bowed Ethelwin.

"And yesterday saved the life of my stepdaughter Elfleda from the attack of a ruffian; and for this he should be rewarded."

"Ay," said Ethelwin, looking rather amazedly at the queen; "you think so?"

"I am sure of it. I wish to do so."

"He will take no gold."

"That shows his noble spirit," amiably purred

the queen. "I thought not of gold; I thought of something more priceless—the hand of Lady Elfleda."

Father Ethelwin started. "But," he began—

"I'll have no buts," interrupted she angrily. "It is my will—that is enough."

"But—"

"Silence! You tell me he is but a poor fisherman's son. Well?"

"Well," said Father Ethelwin, "if I did—"

"And what is she? A troublesome girl—" Then she stopped short, as if she had said more than she intended.

"A princess," said Ethelwin.

"Truly a fine princess!" scornfully laughed the queen. "A poor orphan."

"Not poor, lady; she owns wide lands."

"SHE owns them, forsooth! They belong to the king my husband, and so will come to my son. She their owner! A pretty tale!"

"And a true one, lady, as time will show."

The queen turned pale with anger. "I talk not with dotards," she said. "Elfleda must be Hablok's wife or a nun—which she pleases."

"She is too young yet to be either."

"But not too young to make a choice. She must live shut up for ever in this world, or become this peasant's wife, in a year and a day. That is my will and pleasure." And without waiting for any more, the queen sailed to the door.

"It shall be obeyed, daughter," said Father Ethelwin.

And when the retinue had clattered forth again Father Ethelwin sat down and found more than ever to think about.

"She is indeed a wicked queen," he said to himself. "She thinks, by mating this poor girl with Hablok, she will rid herself of her and get all her possessions. We shall see. Only this I know, that, prince or peasant, Hablok is a brave, noble-hearted youth, and will stand by and see no wrong done. Yes, the queen shall have her will and pleasure."

CHAPTER XI.

"HABLOK THE DANE."

AND in a year and a day the queen's pleasure was done, and Elfleda became the bride of Hablok the Dane. Long, however, ere the year and the day had passed, the wicked woman bitterly repented of what she had done, and in a hundred ways she strove to stop the marriage, for in that time it was proved, beyond all manner of doubt, that the little foundling child, whom Grim had nurtured as his own, was, in very deed and truth, the child of King Birkabegn, who now sat in his desolate hall, refusing to be consoled for the loss of his son.

It turned out to be almost as Jon had imagined. Wulf, who lived and died a miserable creature, had told the truth of it all on his death-bed. It was he who scrambled to the rock and hung the shred of the boy's tunic there, and, in some sort of compassion for the poor babe, wrapped him in his cloak, when in the darkest hour before dawn Jarl Halfdene died of the poisoned drink,

and Jarl Erik stole the sleeping child from his side and sent him adrift in the bird-boat.

As for Jarl Erik, he was utterly bad, and when King Birkabegn, on his return, sent him out of his kingdom, some of his subjects, whom he had cruelly oppressed while he had ruled, flung him into a pit of serpents, and he was stung to death.

But all this did not console King Birkabegn. Only in one thing, and that was in listening to poor old Norna's tales of her lost darling, did he find any gleam of comfort.

Day by day the king's strength wasted, and weaker went up his lonely cry in the desolate hall: "Oh, Hablok, my son! my son!"

One early summer morning as he sat thus, there suddenly sounded a loud stir upon the beach. So loud that even the king roused up and tottered feebly to the casement, and then, had he not heard the shouting on the beach, and seen the gathering throng, he would have thought he dreamed, such a wondrous sight he beheld. On, on it came, gliding over the glass-clear, swift, inflowing blue-green waves, just crested with snow-white foam—the Bird-boat! with its golden plumage, and good-natured eyes, and its wide open beak saying

plainer than speech: "Here we come! Here we come!" And faster and faster on they came. A strange motley crew. Motley! ay, for there in her golden prow sat a man dressed in scarlet and yellow, and all manner of colours, such as only a fool looks well in, and a cap covered with bells on his head. Already their merry jingle was wafted to the crowd upon the beach.

"'Tis Jon! 'Tis Jon!" cried they all, between laughing and tears.

Near him sat a gray-haired, sober-faced man, with a cat perched on his shoulder, and in the middle place a beautiful gentle-faced girl, and beside her a slender stalwart young man, with long, waving, golden hair, and clear blue eyes looking straight before him up at the hoary old castle walls.

"Who are these?" cried King Birkabegn, rubbing his tearful eyes, as the bird-boat swept up on to the beach, and he turned and listened, for there came a light step bounding up the stair, and the golden-haired youth burst into the hall. "Who—?"

"Father! Father! 'Tis I, thy child! Hablok the Dane!" and Hablok sank at his feet.

"Oh, Hablok! my son! my son!" and the old man fell upon his neck and sobbed for the great joy that had come to him; and then from the beach rose a great answering cry of gladness. "'Tis the dead returned to life! The lost one found! Long live our noble prince!"

. . . . . .

In Lincolnshire there is a town called Grimsby, and a brave old town it is, with a brave old seal of its own, upon which is engraved, among other things, two words: "Gryme" and "Habloc."

The founder of this town was Fisherman Grim, for King Birkabegn sent Grim back to England loaded with honours and presents, and with these he built houses and a church, and became as famous as he was good.

Sometimes, for all his wealth, he used to feel sad, for King Birkabegn's gain was his loss, so dearly did he love Hablok. But Hablok was not all lost to him, because he and his young wife Elfleda spent a great deal of their time in England. They lived when they came in a beautiful castle that belonged to Elfleda, for King Birkabegn sent a host of his warriors to help Hablok reclaim her possessions from the wicked queen,

who sorely rued the day when she planned to marry Elfleda to the "peasant's son."

Jon lived happy as the day was long for many a year; and in his restored health and happiness King Birkabegn reigned to a good old age.

Old Norna, who still lived, knew not whether she more loved her "young pickle," as she still persisted in calling Hablok, or his gentle wife the Lady Elfleda.

As for Tib, he never allowed Grim to feel very sad or lonely. Faithful as a dog, after his fashion, he remained Grim's companion; and thus loved and honoured by all who knew him, seeking no reward but the one to be found in doing kind deeds, lived, and at last died, "Fisherman Grim."

THE END.

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