

STORIES

FOR

Summer Days and Winter Nights.

SECOND SERIES.



THE

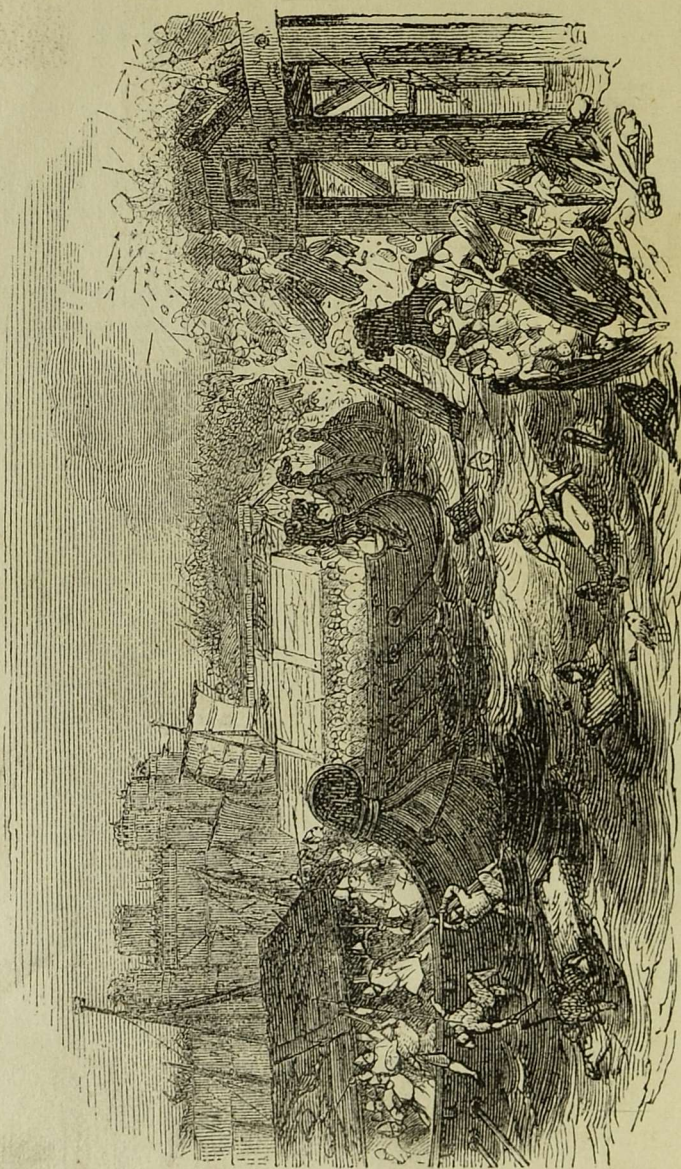
SEA-KINGS.



LONDON:

GROOMBRIDGE AND SONS,

PATERNOSTER ROW.



"Battle of London Bridge."

THE
SEA-KINGS.



The Young Sea-King.

Page 35.

London :
GROOMBRIDGE AND SONS,
PATERNOSTER ROW.

"'Tis pleasant, by the cheerful hearth, to hear
Of tempests and the dangers of the deep,
And pause at times and feel that we are safe.
Then listen to the perilous tale again,
And with an eager and suspended soul,
Woo terror to delight us."

THE SEA-KINGS.



CHAPTER I.

THE COUNTRY OF THE SEA-KINGS—THEIR RELIGION—
KING HAKE'S FIRE-SHIP—THE VIKINGS—INGIALD
AND THE WOLF'S HEART.

‘Now grandfather, we are ready for the story.’

‘What story?’

‘Oh, the one that you promised after you told us that nice one about William Tell.’

‘Did I promise you one?’

‘Oh, yes grandfather, that you did. It was summer then, but it is winter now. See how bright the fire burns; and there is your arm-chair in the warm corner. Do sit down grandfather and tell us the story.’

‘Yes, children, as you say it was summer then, and very pleasant under the tree; and although the frosty wind blows keenly now, and all the branches are bare, yet each season has its pleasures. Sometimes we fancy when the curtains are drawn close and all is snug, and the light shines on happy faces, that the cold winter season is more welcome than the gladsome summer. It is very comfortable to sit round the fire and read or talk or tell stories; and so if you will pay attention I will tell you something about the Sea-Kings.’

‘Oh! grandfather, that seems a nice name for a story: but who were the Sea-Kings?’

‘They had much to do with the early history of our own country, as you will know before long if you listen.’

Now, to understand clearly about the Sea-Kings we must first look at a map of Europe. Here you see up at the top, or north, are Norway and Sweden which form as it were but one country, with the Baltic sea and gulf of Bothnia on one side, and the North sea on the other. Then away out in the ocean you see Iceland, and lower down the Faroe, Shetland, and Orkney Isles, and under these England, Scotland and Ireland. These countries lie so near together, and there is so much water all about them, that it is not surprising the inhabitants should have been in the habit of making voyages from one to the other, nor that in the present day, there should be so much similarity among the languages spoken by the different peoples who inhabit them.

You will see also that the whole coast of Norway is full of ins and outs, long narrow rugged points of land stretching out, and the water flowing up into deep bays between; besides numerous islands great and small scattered a little way off in the sea all along the shore. This shore is for the most part very high and rocky, the waves beat against it with great fury in stormy weather, and the tide runs so fiercely in some of the narrow channels that vessels cannot cross them, and in one place forms a dangerous whirlpool. The deep bays are called fiords, and when once you get inside these you find the water as still as a lake, because they are sheltered from the wind and the ocean outside by the high steep cliffs: some of them are a hundred miles long. In many places the cliffs are quite bleak and barren; in others, fir-trees grow thickly upon them, and on the rocky islets, and their shadow in the water below

looks very beautiful. Towards the inner end of the fiords the land is low in parts, and here are found green and grassy meadows and small farms, where the people live in a simple contented style, in some respects much as they did in the time of the Sea-Kings. Then going farther into the country, you come to a high flat mountainous land called the *fielde*, or *fells*, as the people say in the north of England; and this you will see runs all down from north to south, and divides Norway from Sweden. Here and there the *fielde* comes so near to the sea that there is not room for meadows or farms, and in such spots the pine forests grow thick and wild almost to the water's edge, and would be good hiding-places for people afraid to show themselves and their deeds in open daylight. Several rapid rivers rush down from the *fielde*, forming grand waterfalls in their short course, and run into the sea generally at the head of the fiords. Numbers of salmon and other fish are caught in them, and are much prized as food by the inhabitants.

Besides this, I must tell you that the climate of these countries is not the same as we have it here in England: the summer is shorter and hotter, and the winter longer and colder. Fields are ploughed, the seed sown, the corn grows, ripens, and is cut down and stacked away all in the space of about two months. So bright and hot is the summer that the flowers seem to leap up as it were out of the ground to adorn the meadows, the grass of which grows thicker and greener than in southern lands. And how welcome is the approach of this season, for it unlocks all nature's treasures! The snow melts on the mountain slopes, the green turf peeps through, the tiny brooks begin to flow, the torrents swell, and the rivers rush down with a mighty flood. The trees burst almost all at once into leaf, the birds sing with extasy, and all creation seems to start into joy.

No wonder that the early inhabitants of such a country looking on the lofty mountains, the bright sky, the dark forests, and blue sea should have had strange fancies, and believed that invisible beings dwelt within them. Some among them of calm and gentle dispositions might have been heard to sing,—

“ It joys me well the sweet spring-tide, when leaves and flowers appear,

It joys me well by greenwood side, the blithe bird’s song to hear.”

But there were others who liked better the excitement of danger and strife, and they would reply:—

“ But more, by Thor, I joy to see the battle-ships afar,

And all the ranks with banners set preparing for the war.”

During part of the summer it is always daylight, and for some weeks in winter there is none but starlight. The winter lasts more than half of the year, and is so cold, with so much snow and ice, that no out-of-door work can be done; and the people choose this dreary season for visiting and merry-makings, and friendly parties at each other’s houses, in which the customs and superstitions of former times are often talked about. I have given you this short account of the country, that you may understand well what is to follow. It is sometimes called the Scandinavian peninsula; and if you look a little to the south of it on the map you will see a country somewhat similar to it named Denmark, of which we shall also have something to say.

Away to the east of Europe you will find a corner of that great quarter of the world, Asia: almost ever since the flood, the people there have been very numerous, and from time to time they have wandered forth in large troops to other countries. They lived by fighting and plundering on the way, and wherever they found a place that suited them they took possession of it until they again felt an inclination to go

farther. Well, as some writers say, about 400 years before the birth of Christ, one of these multitudes came up out of Asia, and made their way across the broad level regions of the east and north of Europe, till they came to the Scandinavian peninsula in the west, where they settled and made it their home. It is believed that their reason for choosing that country was the great quantity of copper and iron there lying in the earth: they used to dig these metals up and fashion them into weapons of war. Some people think that this did not happen until after the birth of Christ, but that is a question which cannot be decided with certainty. When these tribes went thus from place to place they were under the command of a leader or chief, and the one who led the people into Norway and Sweden was called Odin. It was said of him that he was a most brave and eloquent chief; when he looked at his friends his face was comely and beautiful, but to his enemies his countenance appeared fierce and terrible. He could persuade any one to do as he pleased; and was always victorious in battle. He had twelve godars, or wise and brave men who helped him to govern and make laws for the people. Besides these things, which appear very right and proper, other things are related concerning Odin altogether of a marvellous nature; how that he had two talking ravens who flew into all parts of the earth and brought him news from every quarter, so that he always knew what was going on. And about his doings among giants and dwarfs, and extraordinary and wonderful animals, and how he overcame them all, and reigned the first in power and dominion.

At that time printing was not invented, and those people did not know how to write, or make paper, therefore they could not preserve the history of events so well as we can in our day. They had to trust to their memories, and there was a class of men called

skalds, whose business it was to gain knowledge of every thing that took place, and learn it by heart, and tell it to others before they died, so that the accounts should not be forgotten. But as time went on some little matters went out of memory and others were brought in, and at last when they talked about Odin they said he was a god ; and under him there were other gods, some for evil, some for good. Thor was the god of war, his weapon was a huge mallet which he threw at his enemies, and when it thundered the people used to say that was the noise of Thor's mallet flying through the air. Then there was Loke the evil spirit, and Baldur, the god of light, the youngest and most beautiful of all the gods. It was related of him that nothing could injure him except the mistletoe, and one day Loke caused an arrow of mistletoe to be shot at him, and so Baldur died to the great sorrow of all the others : a festival was afterwards held in his honour. There was also a god of fire, one for wind, one for the sea ; some to punish cowards, others to reward the brave. In the end belief in the power of these gods came to be the religion of the people ; and they used to worship them in woods and temples, and kill animals for burnt sacrifices, and when their crops failed from bad seasons they would sometimes kill a man, and offer him up, thinking that this would please the gods, and cause them to send a good harvest, in the next year. Their heaven was a place called Walhalla, or hall of heroes ; no women were in it, and none went there but those who died in battle ; and there they passed their time in eating meat and drinking mead and ale. It was thought a great misfortune and disgrace to a man to be a coward or die in his bed, because then, as they believed, they went to a place where there was no good cheer as in the Walhalla. This belief made them always willing to fight, and great part of their history tells of nothing but battles :

to die in war was to win everlasting enjoyment. These seem to us strange notions ; but the people then did not know better, they had never heard of Christianity which teaches us that peacemakers are blessed.

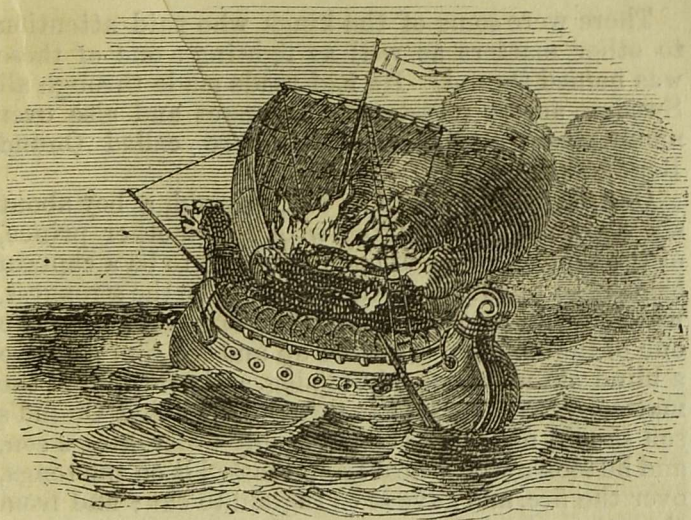
So it went on for a great many years : meantime some Saxons, a German tribe, had rowed across the sea in a few boats and made settlements in England—this was 1400 years ago. These people held the same belief and were a branch of the same race as those I have been telling you of whom we will now call the Northmen—a title by which they are most known. They in their turn sailed across the same sea some centuries later, and established themselves in this country ; and it is mostly from these two races that the English nation has descended.

The Northmen used to hold three or four great festivals in the course of the year ; one of them was in honour of Friga the wife of Odin ; and another in which Odin himself was celebrated by one of his names Yolner ; it took place in December, and when Christianity was introduced it came to be held on Christmas day, and was known as the Yule-feast, a name which is still used in Scotland. Another was to celebrate Baldur, and this afterwards came to be the feast of Saint John. In the ancient times horse-flesh was always eaten at these festivals, a custom which shows that the people came first from Asia, for there the Tartars eat horse-flesh at the present day. Not to have eaten it would have been thought by the Northmen as a great dishonour to their gods.

Some strange adventures are said to have happened at the earlier periods of their history. Once a chief named Sweyder resolved to travel far and wide until he had found Odin. As he was going through a wild part of the country he saw a dwarf standing by a large stone, who invited him in, promising that he should find what he was seeking. This was one of

the dwarfs that could make stones open and shut as he pleased : so Sweyder went into the opening and immediately the huge rock closed together, and he was never seen afterwards. Then there was prince Dag who had a talking sparrow, which flew hither and thither, and brought news of what was doing in the land. One day while the bird was picking some grain in a field the owner threw a stone and killed it ; on which Dag went with his men to avenge the loss of his favourite ; he slew the people on the farm and took away much plunder. As he was going across a river with his troop a poor thrall, or labouring peasant, ran up and threw a hay-fork into the midst of them ; it struck Dag and he fell from his horse and died ; and the skalds made a poem which related how that even a great man sometimes lost his life for a very small matter and by a very humble hand.

Once there was a king Hake—a fierce and mighty warrior who killed the king of Sweden and made himself master of his country. Three years afterwards two brothers, vikings, came up against him with their war-ships and many fighting men ; but king Hake was so brave and strong that he gained a victory with fewer men and drove the enemy away. He had however been grievously wounded, and seeing that his days could not be long, he gave orders that one of his great ships should be made ready and all his dead warriors placed upon it with their weapons, and a pile of tarwood built up over them. Then the king had himself laid on the top of the pile and made some of his people set it on fire, and hoist the sails. A strong wind was blowing which carried the blazing ship far out upon the ocean in sight of the amazed spectators, who all said that king Hake had chosen a glorious way of ending his life. From this we can understand how great was the courage and daring of these old Northmen.



Whenever they were short of provisions or other necessities, they would go off on plundering expeditions, and seize all they could lay their hands on and bring it home by shiploads. If one of the better sort of people commanded the expedition he was then called a sea-king, although he might have no land or any dominion but his vessel. The plunderers from among the thralls and common people were named vikings ; in the present day they would be called pirates. Frequently they murdered all who opposed them ; or carried them away as slaves, in the same way that negroes are now stolen from Africa and sold in southern countries. Once a girl named Yrsa was captured with a number of thralls who were minding cattle, and though she was poor she was beautiful and well-behaved. She was liked by every body for her good disposition, and was sometimes seen by the king who at last married her ; and so as the old history says “ Yrsa became queen of Sweden, and was considered an excellent woman.” Good conduct, it is often said, never fails of being approved.

There were some of the kings who paid attention to other matters as well as fighting : one of these was named Onund. He had roads made through all Sweden, across forests and morasses and also over mountains ; and he was therefore called Onund Roadmaker.

One day king Onund's son, Ingiald, a boy about six years old, was playing with Alf, another prince, of the same age ; each one pretended to be a captain leading on his army. Alf proved to be the strongest, which made Ingiald almost cry with vexation. So one of his companions came up and led him away to a blind old man, named Svipdag, and told him of the matter. Svipdag said it was a shame that Onund's son should not be as strong as any other king's son, and he took a wolf's heart, and roasted it on the tongs, over the fire, and gave it to Ingiald to eat ; and from that time the boy became a most ferocious person, and of the worst disposition. Such was the belief in that day ; but the truth was, that Ingiald's own heart was bad. Afterwards, when he came to be king, he invited six other kings to a feast in a large hall at Upsal, and when they had eaten and drunk plentifully, he ordered the hall to be set on fire, so that the six kings were burned to death, with all their attendants, and Ingiald took possession of their dominions. He at length perished himself in a similar manner ; for one day when he was feasting in a spacious hall, his enemies came up with a great army, whereupon Ingiald, seeing no chance of escape, set to drinking great draughts of ale, with his captains and soldiers, and then setting fire to the building, they all perished.

CHAPTER II.

KING HARALD THE FAIR-HAIRED—ISLANDS DISCOVERED
—NORMANDY CONQUERED—KING ATHELSTAN AND
THE WONDERFUL SWORD—KING HAKON—THE THING
—OLAF SOLD AS A SLAVE—THE EARL AND THE SLAVE
—BATTLE WITH KING SWEND.

It is not easy to fix the date of the events about which I have been telling, but now we come to a time that is much better known ; it is the reign of king Halfdan, who was called the Black, on account of his dark hair. He began to reign at the age of eighteen, about the year 841, more than a thousand years ago ; and made several good laws, and caused them to be respected. Once his queen dreamt that she was in the garden, and plucked a thorn out of her dress, which struck roots down into the earth, and grew into a large and beautiful tree with green and wide-spreading branches. The king never had dreams, and he asked the reason of one of his wise men, who told him he would be sure to dream if he slept in the sty among the swine. Halfdan did so, and dreamt that "he had the most beautiful hair which was all in ringlets ; some so long as to fall upon the ground, some reaching to the middle of his legs, some to his knees, some to his neck, and some were only as knots springing from his head. These ringlets were of various colours ; but one ringlet surpassed all the others in beauty, lustre, and size." In those days, people placed great faith in dreams, and these were supposed to show that the children of the king and queen would one day come to great

excellence and power ; perhaps we shall hear something about them as we go on. After reigning about twenty-two years, Halfdan was drowned by the ice breaking under him as he was crossing a lake in the winter.

He was succeeded by his son, Harald Haarfager, or Fair-haired. He had much trouble at first to defend the kingdom from other chiefs, who tried to gain possession of it after his father's death ; but Harald overcame them, and declared that he would not cut or comb his hair until he had brought the whole of Norway under subjection. To do this took him ten years, during which he fought a great many battles, and numbers of the people left the country and sailed across the ocean, and discovered Iceland and the Faroe Isles, and the Shetlands, and other islands off the coast of Scotland, and settled themselves in these countries. Large parties of them went about as vikings, and plundered everywhere, until at last King Harald determined to punish them, and sailed with a fleet to the Orkneys, and drove all the pirates out of these islands, and afterwards conquered part of the west coast of Scotland. It was there he had his hair cut and combed, and obtained the name of Fair-haired. Although he had brought all Norway under his sway, yet as his sons grew up, they and some of the chiefs quarrelled for a division of the kingdom ; and one named Rolf was banished because he would not live peaceably. This Rolf sailed away with his ships, till he came to that part of France now called Normandy, after the Northmen, where he fought with the inhabitants, and made himself master of the country, and reigned there for the rest of his life. He had a son, William, one of whose descendants was grandfather of William the Conqueror, a famous personage in the history of England.

The Saxon king, Athelstan, at this time reigned over England ; he sent messengers to Norway to

make a present of a sword to king Harald, and as soon as Harald took it by the handle, the messengers told him that he had become the king of England's subject. Harald was displeased at this, but he was a man who did not give way to anger, and he let the messengers depart. The next year, however, he sent a ship to England, and gave the command to one of his warriors, and desired him to carry his youngest son, Hakon, and place him on king Athelstan's knee. This was done to show that Harald was a greater man than the English king ; but Athelstan was a wise and good man, and took care of Hakon, and had him baptised and properly brought up and instructed. The boy grew up so stout and strong, that one day when the king gave him a sword, he cut half through a millstone with it at one blow. The sword after that was called Quernbiter ; quern being the name for a millstone. It must have been a wonderful sword !

King Harald died when he was more than eighty years old. Eric, one of his sons, wished to take his place, but Athelstan sent Hakon over from England, with ships and men, and the people chose Hakon for their king, although he was not more than fifteen years old. This made Eric discontented, and he tried to raise a war, in which he did not succeed, and then he sailed away to England, where Athelstan made him earl or ruler of Northumberland, on condition that he should defend it from vikings and other plunderers. He took up his residence at Jorvik, or York, and watched over the land for several years, till Athelstan died, and Edmund became king. Eric then sailed to the southwards, and pillaged the coast of England ; at last an army was sent against him, and he was slain.

Hakon was a wise ruler. He strove to keep peace among all his subjects, so that one should not injure or oppress the other, and established some excellent laws. As he had been instructed in Chris-

tianity in England, he wished to introduce this religion into Norway ; but when any change was to be made, it could not be done without asking the people's opinion and permission at a public meeting, called a Thing, or, as it is pronounced, Ting. This



was a kind of parliament held in the open air, which, in later days, gave rise to our present British parliament, whereby the nation preserves its liberties. Well, Hakon assembled a Thing, and great multitudes came to it. When they were seated, he stood up and said it was "his message and entreaty to the bonders (peasants) and householding men, both great and small, and to the whole public in general, young and old, rich and poor, women as well as men, that they should all allow themselves to be baptised, and should believe in one God, and in Christ, the Son ; and refrain from all sacrifices and heathen gods ; and should keep holy the seventh day, and abstain from all work on it, and keep a fast on the seventh-day." Old customs and habits are not to be changed in a

moment, even at the word of a king. The pagan Northmen were as ready to fight and die for their religion as Christians have been for theirs in other parts of the world, and they told Hakon that they were willing to obey him in all matters but that of giving up their ancient faith, and if he wished to force them, then they would not have him for king, but choose some other. Hakon was not well pleased at this; however, Earl Sigurd, a man of judgment, advised him to yield for a time to the will of the Thing, and wait for a more favourable opportunity to bring in Christianity. So the business ended without strife.

About this time the sons of that Eric who had been killed in England began to be troublesome; they thought they had a right to the kingdom, and came with parties of vikings to ravage the country. Thereupon Hakon made a law that all the people in the districts along the sea-coast, as far back as the salmon swam up the rivers, should furnish a number of war-ships, with men and provisions, for the defence of the shores, and so repel the enemies. At the same time, beacons were made ready on the tops of the hills, to be lighted when hostile armies were seen approaching, and thus give the signal of alarm from one eminence to another all over the country. Before long, messengers arrived with news of the fleet coming, commanded by Eric's sons; and although Hakon had not so many ships, he determined to stand the battle, and girded on his good sword Quernbiter. The two armies met; the custom was to throw their spears, and then rush to close combat; many strove to come near the king of Norway, but Hakon kept them off, as the skald sang:—

“The body-coats of linked steel,
The woven iron coats of mail
Like water fly before the swing
Of Hakon's sword—the champion.”

Presently a chief named Eyvind came up to the attack ; then Hakon wielding Quernbiter with both hands, gave him such a blow as clove him through his helmet and head down to his shoulder. On this the enemy began to give way, followed by the Northmen, when all at once an arrow struck King Hakon through the arm near his shoulder. He was carried away to his ship, and the wound bound up, but the bleeding could not be stopped, and he felt himself growing very weak, therefore he bade his men row homewards as fast as possible. There was not time to go far, and they put ashore at a place called Hakon's hill, for the king was almost lifeless. He sent word to Eric's sons, that they should be kings over the country, as Harald, their grandfather, had been before them, and so died. He was called Hakon the Good, and friends and enemies sorrowed over his death. They buried him, according to their custom, under a large mound of earth there upon the shore, and made pagan speeches over his tomb, and wished him in Walhalla.

When Eric's sons came into power, they were jealous of one another and of the great chiefs. They were afraid of king Hakon's wise earl Sigurd, and one night burnt him in his house, and caused some others to be killed. Now Sigurd had large estates in Drontheim district, where he was much beloved by the people. As soon as they heard of his death, they took his son, named Hakon, to be their leader, and refused to be governed by the kings. About the same time a queen named Astrid, whose husband was one of those that had been slain, was trying to escape with her young son Olaf into Russia, for she feared the sons of Eric. She found some friends, who sent her away in a ship ; but the vessel was captured on the voyage by pirates, and Olaf was sold as a slave in exchange for a ram. The buyer afterwards sold him again for a cloak to a farmer, who

treated him well, and kept him six years. At the end of this time, an uncle of his, who lived in the service of the king of Russia, came over to collect the taxes, and seeing Olaf, who was a very handsome boy, he asked him who he was. Olaf told him all his adventures, on which his uncle bought him from the farmer, and took him to the city of Novogorod, and there had him brought up. Walking one day in the market-place, Olaf saw the man who had first bought him for a slave, and having a little axe in his hand, he killed him with a blow on the head. The people would have maltreated him for this, had not his uncle taken him to the queen's palace for protection; he entered into her service, and stayed there several years.

Meanwhile there had been much strife and fighting between Norway and Denmark, which lasted nearly twenty years; several of the kings had fallen in battle, and Earl Hakon had become ruler of the Northmen. Olaf grew tired of staying at Novogorod, and went away on plundering cruises with his ships; he sailed to England and pillaged in many places, and then going to Ireland, he married a princess, and lived in the country. That was not a good state of things which permitted a great chief to go out with his men, and steal the goods of others. It is much better now with laws to protect the poor as well as the rich.

Now Olaf knew that he was a descendant from Harald Haarfager, and had therefore a title to be called king of Norway. So, after several years, he left Ireland and sailed to his own country. He arrived just at the time that the bonders were taking up arms against earl Hakon for some injustice which he had committed, and they went in great numbers to join Olaf's army. Hakon had been much beloved, for he was on the whole a wise ruler, yet he was forced to fly. He travelled secretly with Karker,

one of his thralls, and went to a house in the forest, where lived one of his wives, whom he asked to conceal him. A sharp pursuit was being made for the earl, and Thora (that was his wife's name) said the only safe hiding-place would be the pig-stye. "Well, let it be made ready for us," said Hakon; 'for to save our life is the first and foremost concern.' The slave dug a great hole in the stye, bore away the earth that he dug out, and laid wood over it. Then the earl and Karker both went into the hole. Thora covered it with wood, and threw earth and dung over it, and drove the swine upon the top of it." Near by there lay a great stone.

By-and-by Olaf came there with his warriors seeking the earl; they searched the house and all the holes and corners they could think of, but without finding what they wanted. "Then Olaf held a House Thing, or council, out in the yard, and stood upon the great stone which lay beside the swine-stye, and made a speech to the people, in which he promised to enrich the man with rewards and honours who should kill the earl. This speech was heard by the earl and the thrall Karker. There was a little daylight admitted to them.

'Why art thou so pale,' said the earl, 'and now again as black as earth? Thou hast not the intention to betray me?'

'By no means,' replied Karker.

'We were born on the same night,' said the earl, 'and the time will be short between our deaths.'

"King Olaf went away in the evening. When night came, the earl kept himself awake; but Karker slept, and was disturbed in his sleep, and the earl woke him.

"They then kept themselves awake both; the one, as it were, watching the other. But towards day the earl suddenly dropped asleep; thereupon Karker drew out a large knife, and cut off his head and ran

away. Late in the day he came to Lade, where he delivered the earl's head to King Olaf, and told all these circumstances of his own and earl Hakon's doings. Olaf had him taken out and beheaded."

There is much to be learned from this event. We see that a traitor sometimes meets with punishment instead of reward; and we see how that a great man who had been chief ruler of a kingdom, died a cruel death in a noisome hole, while another, who had been sold as a slave in his boyhood, came to be king over the country.

You will, I dare say, remember that when Olaf was captured, his mother was taken prisoner at the same time by the vikings, and kept as a slave in that same province of Russia where her son had been brought up. Now it so happened that Lodin, a rich Norway merchant, who used to make trading voyages, sailed one summer to that place; and "there he saw a woman who was to be sold as a slave; and on looking at her, he knew her to be Astrid, who had been married to King Tryggve. But she was altogether unlike what she had been when he last saw her; for now she was pale, meagre in countenance, and ill-clad. He went up to her, and asked how matters stood with her. She replied, 'It is heavy to be told; for I have been sold as a slave, and now I am again brought here for sale.' After speaking together a little, Astrid knew him, and begged him to buy her, and bring her home to her friends. 'On this condition,' said he, 'I will bring thee home to Norway,—that thou wilt marry me.' Now as Astrid stood in great need, and moreover knew that Lodin was a man of high birth, rich, and brave, she promised to do so for her ransom. Lodin accordingly bought Astrid, took her home to Norway with him, and married her with her friends' consent." Thus the mother as well as her son was restored to her native land once more,



and her husband and his relatives were consulted by king Olaf as some of his chief councillors.

It is recorded of Olaf that he was very expert in all bodily exercises ; he could climb, swim, and run better than most men. Once he climbed up and left his shield on the peak of a mountain where no one else could follow him ; he could run all round the rail of his ship, and outside along the oars while his men were rowing. He could use his sword with either hand, and throw two spears at once. He was besides of a very lively and generous disposition, which made him much beloved by his people, who held brave qualities in the highest admiration. But notwithstanding that he professed to be a Christian, he was very cruel towards his enemies and punished them in the severest manner ; some he ordered to be thrown over precipices, others were hunted by dogs or burnt alive ; and once he had a number of men fastened to a rock in the sea at low water, and when

the tide came up they were all drowned. Such deeds as these show how easy it is to be misled by passion.

Before these times Olaf had very much offended Sigrid the queen of Sweden ; she was now married to Swend king of Denmark, the same who once reigned in England and whom we call Sweyn ; his son was Knut or Canute the Great, whose rebuke to his flattering courtiers is so well known. Well, Sigrid was always urging her husband to raise an army and attack king Olaf ; Swend at last consented to do so, and got the king of Sweden and earl Eric to bring their ships and men and join with him. Meantime Olaf had gone to a part of the Russian dominions on the Baltic sea to give away his sister in marriage. He had a great many ships with him : as the old rhyme says.

“ From out the south bold Tryggve’s son
With one-and-seventy ships came on :
But the false earl the king betrayed ;
And treacherous Sigvald, it is said,
Deserted from king Olaf’s fleet,
And basely fled, the Danes to meet.”

It must have been a fine sight to see all these ships ; the blue waves curling before their keels, the foaming sweep of numerous oars, the sails bellying out, striped red and white and purple, the gilt figures at the head and stern, and the bright shields hanging all round the bulwarks. There was one very fine ship called the Crane, which had the figure-head of a bird ; another was the Dragon, and the most stately of all was the Long Serpent, which was steered by king Olaf. Now the false earl Sigvald had persuaded Olaf to steer near to an island behind which Swend and his confederates lay concealed with all their fleet, so that before he was aware he saw all their forces coming against him. Then some of his advisers begged him to sail away as fast as possible, for the

risk was too great, but Olaf replied 'Strike the sails ; never shall men of mine think of flight. I never fled from battle. Let God dispose of my life, but flight I never shall take.'

It was the custom then for each party to fasten their ships together with ropes : as soon as this was done the battle began. Fast and furious fell the blows ; grappling irons were thrown to pull the ships towards each other, and very soon Olaf's men had taken several vessels from the Swedes and Danes and cleared them of their crews, so that Swend and the king of Sweden were forced to give back for a while. Earl Eric however had a ship named Iron Beard, and was making fearful havoc on Olaf's line, taking his ships one after another and cutting them loose, until at last he came up by the side of the Long Serpent, in which Olaf himself was. Eric was the son of earl Hakon who had been murdered in the hole under the swine-stye, and the remembrance of this made him fight the more desperately. A great many men had taken refuge on board the Long Serpent, and now spears, battle-axes and other weapons were cast at them in such numbers that they became mad with rage, and in their eagerness to get close to their enemies they forgot they were upon the water, and so rushing hastily out of the vessel most of them were drowned. King Olaf still kept his place on the quarter-deck and gave the command ; and "Einar Tambarskelver, one of the sharpest of bow-shooters, stood by the mast, and shot with his bow. He shot an arrow at earl Eric, which hit the tiller-end just above the earl's head so hard that it entered the wood up to the arrow-shaft. The earl looked that way, and asked if they knew who had shot ; and at the same moment another arrow flew between his hand and his side, and into the stuffing of the chief's stool, so that the barb stood far out on the other side. Then said the earl to a

man called Fin, of Laplandish race, who was a superior archer 'Shoot that tall man by the mast.' Fin shot; and the arrow hit the middle of Einar's bow just at the moment that he was drawing it, and the bow was split in two parts.

'What is that,' cried king Olaf, 'that broke with such a noise?'

'Norway, king, from thy hands,' answered Einar.

'No! not quite so much as that,' says the king; 'take my bow and shoot,' flinging the bow to him.

Einar took the bow, and drew it over the head of the arrow. 'Too weak, too weak,' said he, 'for the bow of a mighty king!' and, throwing the bow aside, he took sword and shield, and fought valiantly.

After this the battle became fiercer than before: Earl Eric boarded the Long Serpent but was driven back after a sharp struggle; he tried again with more men, and so few defenders were left that he succeeded. Then Olaf and his marshal both leaped overboard from the quarter-deck, and all that remained of the crew sprang also into the sea. Olaf sank immediately but the marshal was saved; and then all earl Eric's men raised a great shout, and the earl kept the Long Serpent for himself.

Such was the end of king Olaf Trygvesson in the year 1000: many however believed that he was not drowned, but that he threw off his armour under water, and dived away beneath the war-vessels, until he came to a friendly ship at some distance off, which took him to land. This was doubtless one of those wonderful rumours with which people at times love to divert themselves, for Olaf was never again seen in Norway. His conquerors divided the kingdom among themselves. During his reign some adventurous vikings discovered Greenland and the northern parts of America.

CHAPTER III.

BATTLE OF LONDON BRIDGE—KING OLAF'S VISIT TO
HIS PARENTS — HIS BROTHERS AT PLAY — KING
CANUTE MAKES WAR—THE LAKE IN THE FOREST.

We now come to another Olaf, son of Harald, one of the petty kings who had been killed in the battles against earl Hakon. He was very daring and ready-witted, and quick at getting out of danger and difficulty. He sailed once up into the great lake by which Stockholm now stands, and stayed there some time to plunder ; but the king of Sweden came with ships and stretched chains across the entrance and caught the Northmen in a trap. Thereupon Olaf caused a canal to be dug from the lake to the sea all across several miles of flat country ; and as the chronicle relates—"It fell heavy rain just at this time ; and as the canal was dug out to the sea, the water and stream rushed into it. Then Olaf had all the rudders unshipped, and hoisted all sail aloft. It was blowing a strong breeze astern, and they steered with their oars, and the ships came in a rush over all the shallows, and got into the sea without any damage." In this way Olaf escaped the danger : the remains of the canal are to be seen even at this day.

After this he sailed across to England, about the time that King Swend died. As soon as Ethelred, the rightful Saxon king, heard of the death of his enemy, he came over from France, where he had taken refuge, and invited all who were willing, to

enter his service and assist him in recovering his kingdom from the Danes, who were then widely scattered in England, and numerous and powerful. "Then many people flocked to him; and among others came king Olaf with a great troop of Northmen to his aid. They steered first to London, and sailed into the Thames with their fleet; but the Danes had a castle within. On the other side of the river is a great trading place, which is called Sudrviki (now Southwark). There the Danes had raised a great work, dug large ditches, and within had built a bulwark of stone, timber, and turf, where they had stationed a strong army. King Ethelred ordered a great assault; but the Danes defended themselves bravely, and King Ethelred could make nothing of it. Between the castle and Southwark there was a bridge, so broad that two wagons could pass each other upon it. On the bridge were raised barricades, both towers and wooden parapets, in the direction of the river, which were nearly breast high; and under the bridge were piles driven into the bottom of the river. Now when the attack was made, the troops stood on the bridge everywhere and defended themselves. King Ethelred was very anxious to get possession of the bridge, and he called together all the chiefs to consult how they should get the bridge broken down. Then said king Olaf he would attempt to lay his fleet alongside of it, if the other ships would do the same. It was then determined in this council, that they should lay their war forces under the bridge; and each made himself ready with ships and men.

"King Olaf ordered great platforms of floating wood to be tied together with hazel bands, and for this he took down old houses; and with these as a roof, he covered over his ships so widely, that it reached over the ships' sides. Under this screen he set pillars so high and stout, that there was room for swinging their swords, and the roofs were strong

enough to withstand the stones cast down upon them. Now when the fleet and men were ready, they rowed up along the river ; but when they came near the bridge, there were cast down upon them so many stones and missile weapons, such as arrows and spears, that neither helmet nor shield could hold out against it ; and the ships themselves were so greatly damaged, that many retreated out of it. But king Olaf, and the Northmen's fleet with him, rowed quite up under the bridge, laid their cables around the piles which supported it, and then rowed off with all the ships, as hard as they could, down the stream. The piles were thus shaken to the bottom, and were loosened under the bridge. Now, as the armed troops stood thick of men upon the bridge, and there were likewise many heaps of stones and other weapons upon it, and the piles under it being loosened and broken, the bridge gave way, and a great part of the men upon it fell into the river, and all the others fled, some into the castle, some into Southwark. Thereafter Southwark was stormed and taken. Now when the people in the castle saw that the river Thames was mastered, and that they could not hinder the passage of ships up into the country, they became afraid, surrendered the tower, and took Ethelred to be their king." A song was made on this event, which says :—

“ London bridge is broken down—

Gold is won, and bright renown,

Shields resounding,

War-horns sounding,

Hildur shouting in the din !

Arrows singing,

Mail-coats ringing,

Odin makes our Olaf win !”

Thus by Olaf's assistance the kingdom was recovered, though the Danes were still troublesome in some parts where they had strong castles. Ethelred's

wife was Emma, sister of Robert and William, earls of Normandy, and this marriage was one of the reasons why William afterwards conquered England. Olaf was entrusted with a fleet to sail round the coasts and defend the whole country, which duty he fulfilled for three years until Ethelred's death, when he sailed away and plundered along the shores of France. He intended to go to Jerusalem, but was warned by a dream to return to Norway.

Earl Eric, who gained the sea-fight that I told you of in the last chapter, was brother-in-law of Canute, king of Denmark, and Canute wished to recover the power that his father Swend had lost in England ; so Eric joined him with troops, and helped him to take the castle of London, and drive out king Ethelred's sons, who took refuge in Normandy. Eric fell ill and died in England, and thus the way was opened for Olaf to make himself king over Norway. He sailed along the coast, and held Things with the people, but a great many refused to acknowledge him. Then he went away to visit his relations, whom he had not seen for many years, and to ask their assistance. A messenger ran on with news of his coming ; when his mother Aasta heard of it, she "stood up directly, and ordered the men and girls to put everything in the best order. She ordered four girls to bring out all that belonged to the decoration of the room, and put it in order with hangings and benches. Two fellows brought straw for the floor ; two brought forward four-cornered tables and the drinking-jugs ; two bore out victuals and placed the meat on the table ; two she sent away from the house to procure, in the greatest haste, all that was needed ; and two carried in the ale ; and all the other serving-men and girls went outside of the house. Messengers went to seek her husband king Sigurd wherever he might be, and brought to him his dress-clothes, and his horse with gilt saddle, and his bridle, which

was gilt and set with precious stones. Four men she sent off to the four quarters of the country, to invite all the great people to a feast, which she prepared as a rejoicing for her son's return. All who were before in the house she made to dress themselves with the best they had, and lent clothes to those who had none suitable.

"King Sigurd was standing in his corn-field when the messengers came to him and brought him the news, and also told him all that Aasta was doing at home in the house. He had many people on his farm. Some were shearing corn; some bound it together; some drove it to the building; some unloaded it, and put it in stack or barn; but the king, and two men with him, went sometimes into the field, sometimes to the place where the corn was put into the barn. His dress, it is told, was this:—He had a blue kirtle and blue hose; shoes which were laced about the legs; a gray cloak, and a gray wide-brimmed hat; a veil before his face (to keep off the musquitos); a staff in his hand with a gilt-silver head on it, and a silver ring around it. He attended carefully to his cattle and husbandry, and managed his household himself. He was nowise given to pomp, and was rather taciturn; but a man of the best understanding in Norway."

I have quoted this description of domestic life and manners that you may have an idea of the way in which people lived at that time. We see that straw was strewed over the floor to serve as a carpet; the best furniture and decorations were kept apart and only used on particular occasions, as is still the case with many people in England. We find that they had several things for comfort as well as ornament; and that although a man was called a king, he could go out and look after his farming men, and see that they did their work properly.

What follows gives us a little further insight into

the state of manners : Sigurd sat down there in the field, "and made them take off his shoes, and put corduvan boots on, to which he bound his gold spurs. Then he put off his cloak and coat, and dressed himself in his finest clothes, with a scarlet cloak over all ; girded on his sword, set a gilded helmet on his head, and mounted his horse. He sent his labouring people out to the neighbourhood, and gathered to him thirty well-clothed men, and rode home with them. As they rode up to the house, and were near the room, they saw on the other side of the house the banners of Olaf coming waving ; and there was he himself, with about a hundred men, all well equipped. People were gathered over all upon the house-tops. King Sigurd immediately saluted his step-son from horseback in a friendly way, and invited him and his men to come in and drink a cup with him. Aasta, on the contrary, went up and kissed her son, and invited him to stay with her ; and land, and people, and all the good she could do for him, stood at his service. King Olaf thanked her kindly for her invitation. Then she took him by the hand, and led him into the room, to the high seat. King Sigurd got men to take charge of their clothes, and give their horses corn ; and then he himself went to his high seat, and the feast was made with the greatest splendour."

It is pleasant to contemplate this scene a little, and to find so much love and friendliness displayed at a time when frequent turbulence made many people think that it was better to live in strife than in peace. We see here how the mother showed her love for her son ; she kissed him, and did all she could to make him honourable. A mother's love never fails, it is always ready to bless her children, whatever may be their condition : if she rejoices in their prosperity, so she does not forsake them in adversity.

Well, after a good deal of conversation and prudent counsel, Sigurd agreed to support Olaf in establishing his power over the whole kingdom. Thing-meetings were held in several districts, and most of the people agreed to acknowledge him as king. Olaf was severe to his enemies, but he endeavoured to benefit his people. We are told that it was his "custom to rise betimes in the morning, put on his clothes, wash his hands, and then go to the church and join in the morning prayers. Thereafter he went to the Thing-meeting, to bring people to agreement with each other, or to talk of one or the other matter that appeared to him necessary. He invited to him great and small, who were known to be men of understanding. He settled Christian privileges according to the advice of Bishop Grinkel and other learned priests; and bent his whole mind to uprooting heathenism, and old customs which he thought contrary to Christianity. And he succeeded so far that the bonders accepted of the laws which the king proposed."

Some time afterwards king Sigurd died, and Olaf went to see his mother Aasta. She had three children, who were sons of Sigurd, and brought them out for Olaf to see them. He took the two eldest, Halfdan and Guttorm, on his knees, and made a wry face, which frightened them; so he set them down, and took up the youngest, only three years old, named Harald, and looked angrily at him. But Harald was not at all afraid, and plucked at Olaf's beard, and it was therefore said that he would grow up to be a bold man. The next day, as the king and his mother were walking about the farm, they saw the three boys playing. Guttorm and Halfdan were pretending to build large houses and barns, and to have great numbers of cattle and sheep, while Harald was sailing little pieces of wood about in a pond. So you see from this that children

played in Norway eight hundred years ago, pretty much as they do now in England. Well, Olaf asked Harald what he was doing, and the boy replied that he was sailing his ships of war; on which the king laughed, and said, 'The time may come, young friend, when thou wilt command ships.'

"Then the king called to him Halfdan and Guttorm; and first he asked Guttorm, 'What would'st thou like to have?'

'Corn land,' replied he.

'And how great would'st thou like thy corn land to be?'

'I would have the whole ness that goes out into the lake sown with corn every summer.' A *ness* is a cape or point of land; and on that one there were ten farms.

The king replies, 'There would be a great deal of corn there.' And turning to Halfdan, he asked, 'And what would'st thou like to have?'

'Cows,' he replied.

'How many would'st thou like to have?'

'When they went to the lake to be watered, I would have so many, that they stood as tight round the lake as they could stand.'

'That would be a great house-keeping,' said the king, 'and therein ye take after your father.'

Then the king says to Harald, 'And what would'st thou like best to have?'

"House-servants," answered the little boy.

'And how many would'st thou have?'

'Oh! I would like to have so many as would eat up my brother Halfdan's cows at a single meal.'

Then Olaf laughed, and said to Aasta, 'Here, mother, thou art bringing up a king.'

Perhaps Olaf only spoke in jest, but what he said turned out to be true; and this little boy who was floating small blocks of wood in a pond, came to be a king in after years, under the name of King

Harald Sigurdsson. We shall hear more about him by-and-by.

Perhaps, if we could have looked in upon those little boys with their mother and friends when seated round the fire in the long winter evenings, we should have heard some of the numerous fairy tales which were then believed to be true. Whatever took place in the woods, the fields, or about the house, which the people could not explain, they used at once to say it was the work of the fairies ; and they fancied that in fine moonlight nights in summer, these little elves used to meet on sheltered grass-plots, and hold their merrymakings, and chant—

“ Round about, round about, in a fine ring,
Thus we dance, thus we dance, and thus we sing—
Trip and go, to and fro, over this green,
All about, in and out, for our brave queen.”

We do not believe in fairies now, because improved knowledge explains to us many things which were mysteries to our forefathers ; and nature's works are so curious that the fireside stories we relate about them are not less wonderful than the marvellous tales of former days.

Although at first it appeared that Olaf would rule the land peaceably, he in time would be always going somewhere on war-expeditions. Among other places he went to Denmark, and plundered all along the coast. Now Canute, who reigned in England, was king of Denmark too, and, like all these rulers of whom I have been telling you, he was a sea-king also, ready to sail at any time for attack or defence. As soon as he heard of Olaf's proceedings, he left England with a very numerous fleet of large ships, some of them larger than had ever before been seen. His own ship had 120 rowers ; and there was much gilding and paint about them all, and the sails were

striped with gay colours. The skalds made fine songs about it : one of them begins with this verse :

“ Canute is out beneath the sky—
Canute of the clear blue eye !
The king is out on the ocean’s breast
Leading his grand fleet from the west.”

The king of Sweden had joined with Olaf, and both together they thought to be able to resist Canute’s mighty forces. They came to the Helge river, and while the Swedish king stayed at the mouth of it with the ships, Olaf went with his people a long way up through the forest to a lake from which the river ran. Here they cut down trees and made a strong dam, so that the water could not run away, and the lake became deeper and deeper as the little streams continued to pour into it from the hills, and they laid great logs of timber in the dry bed of the river. A day or two after, messengers came hastily with news that Canute was coming ; on which Olaf broke down the dam, and marched the shortest way to the ships with his men, and joining the Swedish king, they went a little way out to sea, and lay to in order of battle. Canute saw them, but thought it would be best to put off the fight till the next day ; and he sailed with a number of his ships into the mouth of the river, and there cast anchor. Some of his sailors went on shore, and were occupying themselves in various ways, when all at once the river was seen rushing down like a mighty waterfall. There were many turnings and windings between the lake and the sea, so that it happened just as Olaf had planned : the overswollen stream bearing the heavy logs and the trees of which the dam had been made, poured furiously onwards, sinking several of the ships, flooding the shore, and drowning all the people who had landed. Some of the ships were cut loose from their cables, and driven

out to sea, and Canute's vessel was floated in among Olaf's fleet, but it was so large and strong that it could not be taken, and presently the two parties separated. The king of Sweden returned to his own country, and left Olaf with so small a force, that he could offer no resistance, and went, after a while, to take refuge with Jarisleif, the king of Russia. Great part of his people then accepted Canute as king of Norway.

After a time Olaf collected an army, and came again into the country, but although he met with some friends, most of the bonders were against him. They disliked him because of his just judgments : they had been used to go out as vikings between seed-time and harvest, and burn down houses and steal cattle. Olaf punished them for such doings ; and therefore they thought it best not to have him for king. Sometime afterwards both armies met at a place called Stiklestad, where there was a very sharp battle, in which Olaf was killed.

It was said that Olaf could work miracles, and after his death he was made a saint, and many cures, as the old monks reported, were performed at his tomb. He is now spoken of in history as Olaf the Saint. St. Olave's church, which stands near London-bridge, is named after him.

CHAPTER IV.

HARALD THE CASTLE-TAKER—HIS ESCAPE FROM CONSTANTINOPLE — THE MIDNIGHT ASSASSIN — EXPEDITION TO ENGLAND — DEATH OF HARALD — CONCLUSION.

You will perhaps remember that Olaf saw his three little brothers at play : well, Harald, the youngest, was in the battle of Stiklestad. He was then about fifteen years old. After the fight he escaped into Sweden, and from thence went and lived some years in Russia, where he travelled far and wide in the eastern parts of the country. At length he became a sea-king, and had the command of a vessel ; so that what Olaf said to him when he was floating the little blocks of wood in the pond came true. He sailed away all along the coast of France and Spain, and through the narrow passage now called the Straits of Gibraltar, into the Mediterranean sea, and on till he came to Constantinople, where he entered into the service of the Greek emperor Michael. There was already a good number of Northmen in the city ; they were glad to have a leader from their own country, and joined Harald's troop ; and whenever they went out to fight, they always gained the victory, while the Greek soldiers were often defeated. They went over to Africa, and made war upon the Saracens ; and then sailed to Sicily, where they besieged a strong castle. The walls were so high and thick that they could not break them down, and in those days there were no cannon. At last Harald

contrived a plan : "He made his bird-catchers catch the small birds which had their nests within the castle, but flew into the woods by day to get food for their young. He had small splinters of tarred wood bound upon the backs of the birds, smeared these over with wax and sulphur, and set fire to them. As soon as the birds were let loose, they all flew at once to the castle to their young, and to their nests, which they had under the house roofs that were covered with reeds or straw. The fire from the birds seized upon the house roofs ; and although each bird could only carry a small burden of fire, yet all at once there was a mighty flame, caused by so many birds carrying fire with them, and spreading it widely among the house-roofs. Thus one house after the other was set on fire, until the castle itself was in flames. Then the people came out of the castle and begged for mercy. Harald granted life and safety to all who asked quarter, and made himself master of the place."

From this castle they went to another, which was quite as strong and difficult to be taken. Here they concealed themselves behind the steep bank of a river, and dug a hole underground similar to a tunnel, working day and night, until they judged the farthest end was under the castle. Then they dug upwards, and presently came to a stone floor, which they broke through, and found themselves in the great hall. Many people of the castle were seated in the hall, eating and drinking, and not at all expecting such visitors ; some were killed, and others fled, pursued by the Northmen, who opened the gates, and let in their comrades, who had waited outside. Much booty was found here. Harald sent all that ever came to his share to the Russian king at Novogorod, that it might be taken care of, as he hoped some day to return to his native country.

After this they took a third castle, and marched

against a fourth, stronger than all the rest. They surrounded the building on all sides : and while they lay there, Harald fell ill, as it appeared, with a dangerous sickness. The people of the castle wondered that no assault was made upon them, and sent out spies to learn the cause. These heard that it was because the commander was expected to die ; and before long messengers came and asked leave to bury Harald's body in the castle with the assistance of the priests. It was then believed that the corpse of a king brought great honour and riches to a church or chapel, and leave was given. The priests put on their robes, and went to meet the coffin, which was carried by some of the soldiers. As soon as they came to the gates, which were wide open, they set the coffin down across the entrance, so that they could not be closed again, and blew their trumpets, and rushed on with drawn swords. The whole army of the Northmen ran up on hearing the alarm, and poured into the castle, and in a few minutes it was entirely in their possession. Thus they gained it by a trick ; for Harald was not really dead ; and the coffin was an empty one, intended only to keep the gate open, and thereby gain an entrance to the castle.

In this way Harald went on for a few years, gathering great wealth by the booty which fell into his hands ; it is said that he fought eighteen successful battles during the time. Afterwards he went to Jerusalem, which was then in the hands of the Crusaders ; and cleared the roads in the Holy Land of robbers, and bathed in the river Jordan. The song says—

“ The Northern king cleared far and wide
Jordan's fair banks on either side ;
The robber bands before him fled,
And his great name was widely spread.”

When this was done, he went back to Constantinople, and made ready to return to his own country ; but the empress Zoe did not wish to lose so brave a commander, and had him shut up in prison. Harald, however, escaped ; and going down to the shore with his men, seized two galleys, and rowed away. A short distance above the city, the channel grows narrower just where it enters the Black Sea, and here a strong chain was kept stretched across by the emperor's order, to prevent vessels going in or out without permission. When they came near the chain, Harald ordered the men at the oars to row as fast as they could, and all those who were not rowing to stand in the stern of the galleys, whereby the head rose high above the water. In this way, as the motion was so quick, they ran far up on the chain, and when they were fast, Harald bade the men run into the head of the galleys, which made that end overbalance the other, and slide off the chain into the deep water on the other side. One of the galleys was not strong enough to bear the strain, and broke in two, and several of the men were drowned. Thus Harald escaped from the port of Constantinople, and sailed quickly to Russia ; and when he came to Novogorod, he found all the treasures which he had sent quite safe, and there was so much, that Harald was said to be the richest man ever seen in the northern dominions. He had long loved Elizabeth, the daughter of king Jarisleif, and now he married her, and for a time all went very merrily.

There was an earl named Swend, a son of one of Harald's relatives, who came to him with troops, and promised to help him to conquer Norway, of which country Magnus was then king. Magnus heard of Harald's bravery and success in his undertakings, whereupon he sent and offered to divide the kingdom with him, rather than have strife. Harald accepted this offer ; and so came to pass that other

saying of his brother Olaf, that Aasta, his mother, was bringing up a king. Swend was not pleased at this friendly arrangement, and wanted Harald to make war on King Magnus, and went away one evening angry because his advice was not taken. Harald suspected that the dispute would lead to some mischief, and when he went on board his ship to sleep, he told his footboy to keep watch and see what happened ; and instead of lying down as usual, he put a block of wood into his bed-place, and reposed himself in another part of the vessel. At midnight, a boat came quietly to the side ; a man crept softly up, and struck so hard a blow with an axe in the bed where Harald used to lay, that it remained sticking fast in the block of wood. In a minute the man had slipped into the boat again, and rowed away in the darkness, so that he could not be seen ; but when the boy who had been set to watch woke his master, they found the axe still fast in the wood ; a proof that some one had been there with an evil intent, to kill the king. Harald then said that it was best to trust no longer to so false a friend as Swend, and ordered his men to row northwards, and in a few days they came to where Magnus was staying. Much friendship and good-will was expressed on both sides ; Magnus fulfilled his promise of giving up half of the kingdom, and Harald divided his money and treasures with Magnus, to the great astonishment of the people : they could not believe that so much riches could be brought together in one place. Not long after this, Magnus fell sick and died, and Harald became king of the whole country.

Swend had become king of Denmark, and there was always enmity between them ; Harald sailed many times with ships and men to pillage his neighbour's coasts. Once he came into Lymfiord, which has a narrow entrance, but stretches out very wide inside. The Danes came to the shore to oppose him,

and he was obliged to anchor for a time at a small barren island. Soon they wanted water to drink, and none could be found. Then Harald ordered his men to catch some earth-worms, and lay them in front of the fire. This was done to make them thirsty, and when they were a little scorched, he had a thread tied round their tails, and let them go. The worms crawled away till they came to a place where they crept downwards into the earth, and Harald ordered his men to dig in that spot for water. They did so, and found more than was wanted for all the crews. Meantime Swend had come to the mouth of the fiord with a large number of ships, hoping to make a prize of the Northmen and their vessels. But as night was coming on, Harald steered away to another part of the fiord, where it was separated only by a narrow neck of land from the open sea. Here, as soon as it was dark, he had his ships unloaded, and dragged across the neck of land to the sea on the other side, and loaded them again, and sailing away before daybreak he escaped from the danger which threatened him. Some months afterwards there was a great sea-fight between the two, in which Swend was defeated, and seventy of his ships captured, and he had a narrow escape for his life, for he was swimming about for some time in the water, and at last got to the shore in a small boat.

In the year 1066, when Harald had been king of Norway for twenty years, Edward the Confessor, king of England died; and Harald, a son of earl Godwin, became king in his stead. Toste, his brother, was displeased at this, for he thought that he also had right to be king; so he left the country, and went to Denmark and begged Swend to lend him ships and men, that he might go back to England and take away the power from his brother. But Swend said that he thought it was better to remain

quiet, and not risk so much ; then Toste answered that he would try somewhere else, where he would, perhaps, have good success. He travelled to Norway, and laid his plans before king Harald, telling him that so renowned a warrior should be ready to undertake so grand an enterprise. Harald considered a little while, and at last consented to assist Toste, and sent out a war-message over the land, and soon a great fleet of more than two hundred ships was collected.

They set sail, and stopped first at the Orkney islands, where Harald left his queen and two daughters ; they then went on to Yorkshire, where they burnt the town of Scarborough, and did other mischief. Next, they rowed up the river Humber and came to York, where the earls Morcar and Walthiof had a large army. Harald and the Northmen rushed to the attack with so much fury, that the English troops gave way, and earl Morcar was slain. This so dismayed the people in that part of the country, that numbers of them promised to be faithful to the invaders.

A few days afterwards, however, the English king Harald came up with another army ; on which Harald Sigurdsson, king of Norway, drew up his men in order of battle, and waited for the attack. Presently a messenger rode up, and asked if earl Toste was there, and the earl answered for himself. Then the messenger replied that his brother Harald would give him a third part of the kingdom if he would be peaceable. Toste replied, that it would have been better if the offer had been made sooner, and asked what should be given to king Harald Sigurdsson. The messenger rejoined, that the king of England would give him seven feet of English ground to lie upon.

‘Then,’ said the earl, ‘let king Harald Godwinsson know that we will not forsake king Harald Sigurds-

son ; that we are ready to do battle, and die with honour or gain a victory.'

Then the fight began : for a long time it seemed that the Northmen would be victorious, for the Englishmen could do nothing against their close ranks and long spears. On both sides the arrows flew as thick as hail, and many valorous deeds were done. At last an arrow pierced the king of Norway in the throat, and he fell dead on the field. This sight made his men fight with more fury than ever, till they were so weary as scarcely to be able to stand, and at length the English army gained the victory. Some of the Northmen fled, and escaped into different parts of the country, and others went back to the ships and sailed away to their own land.

Thus fell Harald Sigurdsson, one of the bravest of the sea-kings. Had he staid at home in Norway he might, perhaps, have lived for many years longer ; but ambition often tempts people into dangerous and fatal enterprises. His namesake Harald, the English king, met with a similar fate shortly afterwards, for no sooner had he gained this victory, than he had to march with all speed to the south of England to meet a new invader, William, earl of Normandy, afterwards called the Conqueror. A dreadful battle took place between the two armies, in which Harald was slain.

Thus my story comes to a close with an event important in the history of our own country, as well as in that of the Sea-Kings. Although we may look back on these fierce and indomitable warriors with feelings of dread, it is yet certain that Providence, who over-rules all things for good, has caused great benefits to result from their inroads and conquests in England. They were animated by a strong spirit of freedom, and resisted with courage and eloquence attempts at oppression on the part of their rulers. They spread this spirit wherever they went, and

introduced their Thing-meetings or parliaments among the people whom they subjected, and thus laid the foundations of civil right and constitutional liberty. Their language, too, though somewhat similar to that spoken by the early inhabitants of our native land, was full of fire and vigour ; it was ardent and glowing from the orator, touching and lofty from the poet, sweet in love, and tender in pity, manly and clear in the mouth of the many. Such a language, interfused with that of another nation, could not fail to enrich and invigorate it ; and now, we who speak the English tongue, one destined apparently to become the language of the greater part of the world, have reason to be thankful for the additions made to it by the Northmen. Many of our towns, villages and hamlets still bear the names given to them by the daring conquerors. They have left lasting traces behind—in our government, our manners and customs, our literature and industry. To them we owe much of our vigour of character, our love of freedom, and spirit of enterprise ; and it may with truth be said that England would not be the country she now is had it not been for the SEA-KINGS.

There were many other kings in Norway after this, but the history of their reigns is very similar to that which I have related. There was the same violence and bloodshed, the same grasping for power, with at times very sore oppression of the people, who would most of them much rather have lived in peace and quiet. Plundering expeditions were still sent out frequently as far as England and Scotland, and the Northmen carried off everything they could lay their hands on, caring nothing for the sufferings of the inhabitants they so cruelly robbed. The last incursion that the Sea-kings made into England was in 1153, in the reign of king Stephen. Since then,

by slow degrees, a better spirit has grown up, and now, in most countries of Europe, the people are learning that peace is preferable to war: Norway and Sweden, which were once the scenes of such mighty events, have become quiet and industrious countries. The iron and copper mines of Sweden are still worked, but the metal produced is applied to purposes less warlike than by the Northmen of former days; it is sent into different parts of the world, and manufactured into articles of utility. The Norwegians are good ship-builders and hardy mariners, and in this respect they resemble the Sea-kings of olden times. They do not now visit the coasts of other countries with fire and sword, but they carry the merchandise which their labour has produced, and exchange it for other articles of which they stand in need. In this way people find out that it is better to live on friendly terms, and to promote good-will among each other, than to be quarrelling and fighting for what does not belong to them. Thus Norway, which has a long and severe winter, is enabled to enjoy the tea and coffee, the fruits and spices of warmer lands. From the abundance of one the other is benefited; and although we may lose what is called the glory of war-expeditions, with all their pomp and martial display, we gain what is far better—the satisfaction of knowing that to have avoided strife tends to the well-being and happiness of all; and in the events of the past we learn lessons of wisdom for the present and future.

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