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THE VERIEST VIKING THAT EVER STEPPED A PLANK

THE KING'S THANE;

OR,

The Days of St. Edwin.

BY

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PREFACE.

I DEDICATE this book to my son FRANK. In it I have given the old stories according to the newer lights, and told them in less stilted phrase than is usually considered fit. I have done this intentionally, to think as our ancestors thought is difficult, but to speak as they spoke, with the language developed as it has been, seems to me impossible.

To those who know Professor Freeman's work, a few of the incidents will be familiar, and the authorities for the rest are so obvious that I need not give them here.

W. J. G.



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THE KING'S THANE.

CHAPTER I.

GIVE ME A CHANCE!



It was the last day of the month of Easter, and late in the afternoon. The sky was thick with vapour heaped up bank upon bank in ranges of deepening grey. The tatters rent by the wind from a distant cloud were gliding along, hardly a mile overhead, as if drawn by a magnet to the south. The sun was setting, but there was no sun to see, it had vanished two hours ago behind the veil in the west. The waves seemed greener and glassier than usual as they heaved and broke sullenly and lingeringly, and the coast looked rugged and chill in the light that told of the coming storm.

A small boat sailing south from Feltem was just clearing the point that marks the entrance to one of the loveliest fjords in Norway. As she opened the fjord the sheet of the one sail she carried was shortened in, and, curving gracefully to the east, she headed up the estuary. Slowly she slipped along, for her course was well within shelter of the northern shore.



On board were three lads. The youngest, a sturdy-looking fellow of fifteen, was busily engaged in doing nothing but looking out to leeward. The eldest was seated on the floor, holding the sheet. The other was steering by means of a long oar, for in shape and rig the boat was not unlike a modern whaler.

'Well, Gualla, what are you thinking about?' asked the steersman

'I was thinking of Yarl Godwulf's new ship,' said Gualla

'What, the new plan for the mast he told us of?'

'Old ways are best,' said Sigmar, as he moved round on the floor to join in the conversation. •

'Not always,' answered the steersman; 'the old way was to stand up when you held the sheet, but you do better in sitting down'

'I am not so sure of that now you say so,' said Sigmar, and with a laugh he scrambled to his feet, and continued, 'I would take her out more into the wind, Lilla. She can stand all that comes off this shore'

The wind had dropped to a gentle breeze, and it seemed to be dying away entirely in a series of feeble, petulant puffs

'It looks ugly,' said Lilla, glancing aloft. 'We must not get too far out.'

'Oh, we shall be all right if'—

'Look at the raven!' interrupted Gualla.

'Where?'

As Sigmar turned to look, his foot caught in the coil of rope, and he stumbled. Before he could recover himself a gust of wind came with a swoop on the boat and heeled her over. In vain Sigmar tried to cast off the sheet. His foot had cap-sized the coil, and the rope was jammed; and so fierce was the blast that the boat was lifted bodily to leeward. In vain Lilla tried to bring her head round. Her sail bore her down till her gunwale was under water

• And she filled and sank

The storm roared in its fury, and lashed the waves till

they growled and seethed in anger ; and then it swept along the sea in such fierce strength as to mow off the crests, and leave the surface flat as a mirror streaked in a million parallels, like the smooth granite over which the glacier has for ages crept to the shore.

When Gualla rose from his dive he found the squall at its fiercest ; the tide was coming in, and the wind was blowing straight down the valley so as to meet it. For the moment the waves had been planed off, and the finely divided spray was singing as it swept past him. Fortunately he was a bold and skilful swimmer, and after a deep breath or two he let himself sink, and swam for a minute under water. When he rose for the second time the gust had gone, and the steadier gale begun. And in the troubled sea he made straight away to the shore. He had seen his brother and Sigmar, and thought they were safe. Both were excellent swimmers, and would doubtless follow him to the nearest land.

Unfortunately he was wrong. As the boat went down Sigmar was hurt. His wrist and ankle were sprained, and he could hardly keep himself afloat. Lilla, finding his friend in difficulties, went to the rescue, and slowly swam with him in pursuit of Gualla. It was a long swim in such a sea, and both began to tire,—Sigmar, in pain, hardly able to help himself ; Lilla, stroking away, working onwards for both. Gualla found it as much as he could do to reach the beach, and, though Lilla was two years older,—and two years make a great difference in strength and endurance at that age—the chance of safety seemed but slight. Doggedly he kept at work, carried by the tide farther and farther up the fjord, and, by the drifting, his road to shore made longer. And the wind, now noting

down the valley, goaded the waves into the full swing of their power.

When Gualla reached the land, his first thought was of his brother. Looking out from the beach, he could see nothing of him. Running back a little and mounting the cliff, he again looked away across the water, but still there was no sign. Then he ran to the point, and some way to the east, just at the entrance of a small bay, he caught sight of Lilla and his friend as they rose on the crest of a wave

Mounting the hill, he ran along the edge of the cliff, the shortest way to the rescue. And then, gaining a small promontory that jutted out close to where Lilla was toiling with his burden, he threw off his wet clothes and swam out, to help—a long way out, as it proved

Meanwhile Lilla had been growing weaker and weaker Sigmar held on to him, and did all he could to follow easily. But the distance, the raging sea, and the weight, began to tell. Gradually the conviction grew on him that his strength would fail, and he should be lost. Swiftly he thought over the past, and the promise of the future, and the bitterness of being cut off short in his young life entered into him. Sigmar was thinking too,—thinking of how bravely his friend was trying his best to help him, when all seemed so hopeless, thinking as he rose and fell on the billows that each would sweep him under, thinking of how by his own clumsiness he had thus brought his friends into peril; thinking much of others, and but little of himself. For a brave heart had Sigmar, none braver or truer in this world.

Fainter and feebler grew the swimmer as he drifted to the point, farther on the tide, but no nearer to the shore.

His strength was well-nigh spent. The thought came to him, and made him cold at heart, and for a moment helpless to move

‘What if I should die?’

And Sigmar still held him, growing heavier as his weakness grew

‘Sigmar!’

‘Well?’

‘Can you not hold less heavily?’

‘I am doing all I can’

‘Try’

And he tried, but he could do no more.

‘Lilla! can you keep afloat much longer?’

‘I am nearly done for My limbs are like lead

‘Keep up if you can’

‘All right, but I cannot last long

Suddenly a mist clouded Lilla’s eyes, and his head fell, and his arms seemed unable to end their stroke

Thinking for a moment only of self-preservation, thoughtless of the friend dependent on him, he cried out in his agony,—

‘Oh, give me a chance!’

‘I will!—May the All-Father bless you!—Good-bye!’

And the boy let go his hold, and sank to his death.





CHAPTER II.

HOW GODWULF BUILT THE 'SEAFOWL.'



GUALLA saw Sigmar sink, but could do nothing to help him. He himself was nearly overwhelmed by the sea, for his strength had been much tried by the long swim and the run to the rescue. Lilla kept afloat but for the swing of another wave. Sigmar's good bye echoed in his ears, and the thought of the loss nearly crushed him. He saw nothing and heard nothing, not even

Gualla's wild shout to keep up. Fortunately, some one had seen Gualla as he ran along the cliff, and had come

full speed to help. As Gualla reached his brother, both fainted from exhaustion, and both would have been drowned had not Godwulf arrived in time to seize them, and bring them to the shore. Godwulf's men were but a minute or two behind their chief, and by them the boys were brought to, and taken home, and put to bed.

For a day or so they kept their beds, and were very weak. On the Friday they were up for a short time, and, after a long sleep, in the morning they were as well as ever. Gualla was but little changed; but with Lilla the case was different. The thought of Sigmar's sacrifice had sunk deep into him; he was never to forget it, it was to colour his life.

'“Give me a chance!” I asked,’ he said to himself. ‘And he gave me the chance. May I make the best of it. Let me have the chance to do as he did!’

As the brothers went down to the beach in the early morning, Godwulf met them.

‘How goes it now?’ asked the yarl, who was the very picture of health and heartiness. He was not a giant, nor had he fair hair; but in all other respects he looked what he was, the veriest Viking that ever stepped a plank. Six feet in height, broad-chested rather than broad-shouldered, with a body as physically perfect as a life of training could make it, he had not the quantity of many of his countrymen, but he had quite the quality.

‘Fear I have much of!’ said the yarl, ‘but I never let it get the better of me!’ And he never did.

His companions were not given to cowardice, and hated to speak of it. It was therefore new to them to hear a

leader coolly confess that he knew what fear was. And Ralf, who lived at Averoe, had presumed on the confession to pick a quarrel with Godwulf.

Unhappy Ralf !

'If we fight there will be only one of us left to worry the world,' said Godwulf.

'Then fight !'

And in less than an hour from the challenge, Averoe was the property of Ralf's successor. And Godwulf still 'worried the world'

'How goes it ?' asked the yarl, as the lads greeted him.

'How did it all happen ? Tell me'

And, seated on a rock by the waterside, Lilla related all that had passed.

The yarl, who for all his forty years looked more like the big boy that his wife said he was, than the hardy warrior that his enemies knew him to be, sat between the lads as the story was told

And when he heard how Sigmar had ended, he gazed fixedly out over the water, and then, suddenly looking round, he rose and said,—

'Let us go down to the ship'

On the beach of a tiny bay stood the hull of which such great things were expected. She was Godwulf's own ship, built by his own men from his own plan, and every frame and timber in her had been put in place under his superintendence. He had thought out the lines himself, so as to make her an improvement on his old vessel, and hour after hour had he spent getting the ribs to the curves he wanted. Seated at the bow or stern, he would have the planks taken off again and again until his eye was satisfied.



'I want a ship that will sail,' said he; and a ship that would sail he had built.

Twelve hundred^o and seventy years seems a long time to look back, and yet the difference in the spirit and speech of our sea-folk then and now is nothing like as great as might be imagined. And if the men differed little, the boats differed less.

Godwulf at this time was not a rich man. He was one of the yarls who then lived, one as good as another, along the Scandinavian coast-line. For in those days there was no over-lord or king, except on emergency, and the emergency rarely came. The yarl had not built a large vessel, but he

had designed her big enough to suit all his purposes. And how she answered his expectations, we shall ere long have an opportunity of judging.

The *Seafowl* was built of oak, every plank of which had been split, not sawn, and had its ends trimmed by the axe. The ribs and knees were of oak boughs hardly touched in their curve, and of great strength, fitted firmly and deeply into the heavy keelson which with many mortices was made solid with the keel. Throughout iron nails and spikes were used, driven home and punched in.

She was double ended, with raking stem and sternpost, the same as a modern whaleboat, but the after section was not an exact copy of the other, but was fined off so as to give a clean run. Her greatest beam was a little forward of amidships. There was no bluffness in her bow, but the deck-line was one unbroken sweep from stem to stern. The sheer was bold, but not exaggerated, and, as the yarl said approvingly, 'There is not a straight line in her!'

As each plank was put on, Godwulf satisfied himself of its curve and finish, and if it did not suit his whim off it came, and another took its place. He built his ship clinker fashion, lower plank first, then the next overlapping, and so on, and each streak on the port and starboard sides corresponded in thickness. Some of the men were now engaged in caulking the seams with oakum made of cow-hair which the women had spun into three-stranded cord, while others were at work on the oars or sweeps, thirty-two of which were to be used.

Over all the *Seafowl* was seventy-eight feet in length, her bow and stern rising from her keel in almost a quadrant

curve. In beam she was seventeen feet six inches. She was almost ready for her launch, and looked quite imposing as she stood boldly up on the ways. Seated in a cradle hung over the bow, a man was giving the finishing cuts to the figurehead,—a bird with the wings thrown back so as to clasp the cutwater.

'We shall float her on Wednesday,' said Godwulf. 'But I must give her another rub down first.'

'I like her amidships,' said Gualla. 'That was a good thought of yours to take her girth from the half blade of the linden leaf.'

'She is not so flat in the floor as she looked at first, but I think she'll do,' said Lilla.

'There is no change,' replied Godwulf. 'Now all the planking is on, the curve comes truer.'

'Is the canvas ready for her sail?' asked Gualla.

'Not quite, but it will be done to-day. I am going to have all the ropes of bast, and the hemp will do for the lines and tents.'

Mounting the ladder, Godwulf led the way aboard. There was no true deck, only a level floor with loose planks a couple of feet below the gunwale. And at present all was clear from end to end.

'That is how you are going to step the mast?' said Gualla.

'Yes. You see the log is not in the way, it does for ballast, and can be gripped firmly on to the keelson, and by cutting that hole through it we do not weaken anything.'

'Who cut the hole?'

'Oh, old Eric was very busy at it all last week.'

'So I should think. It must have been a tough job.'

'He is now working at the rudder, while Wilfrid is doing the thole-pins.'



• Is Wilfrid going with you ?'

'He says so. He says there is no chance for a man

here, no work to do, nothing but bad weather to make him gloomy ; and so he is off straight to the land of hope.'

'He will never do good,' said Lilla.

'Well, it gives him a—h'm, h'm— Let us see how the sweeps are getting on.'

And Godwulf abruptly made his way over the side.

Every one was at work on some part of the new ship, for Godwulf was anxious to get to sea. An old friend of his had taken up his quarters with King Redwald, the East Anglian, and there had recently come to him a trusty messenger, asking him to join in an expedition about to take place to the north.

The messenger, Sibald, an old Jute of some sixty-six winters, was talking to Eric as the yarl and his companions approached. Rising, they saluted respectfully, and then Eric resumed his work at the rudder.

'Well, old days again, old days, nothing new under the sun? is that it?' asked the yarl.

'No, my good yarl, we were speaking of those that are to go with us to King Redwald.'

'Cryda told me but an hour ago that he had thought better of it, and would join us,' said the yarl.

'What! father going to the land of the English? Are we going too?' asked Gualla, in astonishment.

'I know not for a surety,' said the yarl; 'but I think he will, if you can only coax your mother'

'Lilla, let us go and see. I want to go with Yarl Godwulf if you do not'

'Why this sudden change?' asked Lilla. 'Father up to now has refused to take my mother from her home'

'I spoke to him last night,' said the yarl; 'and I thought he had told you ere you met me'

'It is the first I have heard of it,' said Lilla.

'You would do well to tell your mother that she should come,' said Sibald.

'Ay! It is a rich country,' said Eric, 'but give me the more rugged Deira that the old priest made his jokes about'

'What priest? What jokes?' asked the yar! 'Ah, there's Wilfrid! Now if King Redwald likes a growler, what a champion he will have!'

'We northerners do our own growling!' said Eric; 'but in the south country all the growls and grins are done by rote.'

The old Jute smiled. He understood the allusion, though the others did not. But luckily he took it in good part. Sibald was not a quarrelsome man, or he would never have been made an ambassador.

'Nothing but ill luck,' said Wilfrid, as he came up. 'Glad to see you after your capsizes. Sad news for us all about Sigmar. But what could we hope for in such a place as this?'

And he stroked his long flaxen moustache, and gave such a look of disgust, that the yar! burst out laughing as he left the group, followed by the two lads.

On the Wednesday, great was the rejoicing by the side of the fjord. Godwulf had had a son born to him during the night, and he was to signalize the day by launching his new ship.

In the morning, as he sat in hall, his new-born child had been brought to him, and before his men, all gathered in solemn silence, he had given it its name. Into a bowl of water from the sea he had dipped his hand, and on the child's forehead he marked the sign of the hammer of

Thor. This, the mystic sign—the fylfot, or swastika, the symbol of the Most High—which meets us everywhere even among the inscriptions on the temples of the far East, is now claimed to be no other than the fire block of our Aryan ancestors. Be it so; but Godwulf knew not whence it came, and he cared not. He but followed the custom of his people, and he asked no questions.

Making, then, in water, on the baby's forehead, the cross with the short arms prolonged at right angles to the left, he stood there before his following, and, as the seeming zigzag swiftly ended, said, in a tone clear as a bell in the silence,—

‘This is my child, and I call him Ulfrea.’

And round the circle ran the word,—

‘Ulfrea! Ulfrea!’

For man after man repeated it, until the ring was complete, and then little Ulfrea, whimpering feebly, was taken back to his mother.

Having named the baby, Godwulf proceeded to name the ship, and in a ceremony just as solemn, but with a noisier ending.

Moving to where the vessel stood on the ways, the destined crew, forty in all, took their places on each side of her. All the struts and stays not absolutely necessary for the launch had been cleared away, and there she stood, smooth and bright in the morning sun, a graceful form that any maker might be proud of.

Not in the centre, but a foot or two in front of it, rose her single mast, and from it floated in the breeze the red and black diagonal of Yarl Godwulf's house. Halfway up the mast two small flags were flashed, on each of

which was a symbol in white. On one was the St. Andrew's cross, which is simply the old English letter G, the 'rune,' as it is called, and was doing duty either as the initial of Godwulf or as the sacred sign of 'a gift,' the gift of the ship from the land to the sea. On the other was the reversed N, with the centre bar from right to left, which is the old rune S, and was used either as the initial of the vessel's name or in its old mystic sense of 'the sail' upon the horizon. On the stern a temporary flag-staff had been fixed, and from that drooped a big red flag, having a black raven with outstretched wings, the national ensign so to speak, the first flag to float on the water. And on each side of her figurehead, now bright in the sunshine with a gold ring on the bird's neck and an old horseshoe nailed with seven gold studs beneath the bracket on which it stood, there drooped a couple of flags, placed overlappingly to give the pattern of the scroll that now crowns a vessel's bow.

Let us picture to ourselves that pleasant scene on the bright May morning. The sun was shining full on the ship, and the gentle breeze from the fjord just stirred the flags into leisurely ripples. Three large vessels were moored off the bay, ready to welcome the new-comer. A few rowing-boats were just nearing the sand, carrying the last who were to be present at the ceremony. Drawn up on each side of the ship stood the crew, in ring mail shirts, with buff-coloured trousers, trellised from ankle to knee with elaborate cross-garterings; each man in heavy marching order, with javelin, sword, and shield.

Seeing that all was ready, Godwulf returned to his house, and soon a small procession came thence along the beach. In front were the two valas in their bright white

dresses, walking side by side in stately magnificence ; and behind them came Yarl Godwulf, leading by the hand the fair-haired Hild, a demure-looking damsel of eleven years, who was going to name the ship, and who seemed fully aware of her importance, and rather alarmed at it. In the rear followed, two and two, some dozen of Yarl Godwulf's household.

Silently they approached the ship, and halted beneath her bows. Then a low chant broke forth from the valas, the crew joining in, and to its measured melody the white women marched round the vessel. One passed down her starboard side, the other down the port, and crossing and passing at the stern, they continued their march, and met again at the bow. Then mounting a platform, they stood with one hand on the horseshoe and the other on the hawser. Then they descended and again encircled the ship.

The chant then stopped, and Godwulf placed against the centre a gangway made of a long board with cross battens. And up this went the valas, then the yarl, then Hild, and then the steel-coated crew, who filed off along the sides, and took up their positions at their proper quarters. At a word from the yarl, their shields were hung over the side in the places made for them. Thirty-two shields there were in all, so that eight men were left to take up their stations fore and aft.

Then the chant began again, this time gradually changing to a more cheerful strain ; and the valas, starting from the stern, again made the tour of the vessel, crossing at the bows. Then the yarl and Hild followed them forward as they moved thither together side by side, and from the far corner of the deck the yarl took up a glass vase of wine and handed it to the eldest vala, who lowered it

gently overboard for about a yard, and hitched the end of the line to a cleat. Then the other vala gave Hild a small silver-mounted dagger, the 'seax' from which the 'Saxons' got their name, and, with a few words of blessing which we need not repeat, the priestesses returned to the stern.

The rudder was shipped and in position on the steer-board, or starboard, side, and the halliards, run through a block at the foot of the mast, had been led along aft. With his right hand on the rudder stood Fridgar, the yarls second in command, and on the other side stood our friend Lilla, with the halliards in his left hand. The valas were as far aft as they could get, each with one hand on the sternpost, and the other grasping the outstretched hand of the helmsman and the halliard holder. All along the bulwarks sat the steel-coated men, each touching his oar with one hand and his shield with the other.

And then, led by the valas, there broke forth the launching chorus, growing ever louder as the men and all the people joined in, the last lines sung out with a roar, as Hild with the dagger made the sign of the hammer in the air.

'The wood to the wave,
And the ship to the sea,
Let her leap to her life
As we let her go free!
Free !

'Let her thrill to the ribs,
Let her throb to the knees,
Let her quake to the waist,
Let her glow to the seas !
The seas !

' May death never daunt her
In fight or in chase.
She lives for her maker,
And dies for her race !
Her race !

' She lives and she longs
And she sighs for the sea !
Hild ! call her to help us,
And let her go free !
Free ! '

The blade flashed in the sunlight as it cut the line that held the hawser. The shipshore dropped away. The vessel seemed to breathe and wake to life. The song ceased, and Hild caught the cord that held the vase. With a swing she broke the glass against the bow. As the wine fell the ship moved, and in the momentary lull was heard the girl's silver voice,—

' I call thee, *Seafowl* ! '

And then arose a burst of cheering and shield-beating that rang out over the fjord and echoed from the cliffs, as faster, ever faster, *Seafowl* slipped backwards into her home.

CHAPTER III.

THE BATTLE OF WIMBLEDON.



IN a week the *Sea-fowl* was ready for sea ; and on the second Monday after the launch the anchor was weighed for the land of the English. We need not linger on the scenes at parting, painful then as now, though then more frequent.

To the vigorous strokes of her thirty-two long sweeps the *Sea-fowl* swiftly slipped down the fjord. Behind her roared and splashed the narrow waterfall,

by which the mountain stream found its way through the alder and birch woods. To the right towered the mighty

peak that even yet remains unscaled by man. On the left lay the long range of cliffs and crags, against which the waves were dashing in a thin bright line of foam. Slowly the estuary widened, to narrow again ere the sea was reached; and the *Seafowl* was soon a mile from either shore, steadily making way. Valley after valley, clothed in the rich green of early spring, opened and closed on her as she passed. As the throat of the fjord was neared, the terraces on the hills at the entrance came into view, terraces which continue in a series of steps under water, each step marking an old beach line when ice filled the valleys. The straits were soon left behind, and the little ship headed boldly to sea.

'Stand by to make sail,' said Godwulf, as soon as he was well out in the steady north-east breeze.

And in a few minutes the huge sail was set, and the sweeps laid inboard. Let it not be supposed that the sail was a square one with the yard slung in the middle. The mainsail of the *Seafowl* differed but little in shape or setting from that on a north-country coble of to-day. It was a lugsail, with the yard at a low angle, and so slung that about three-fifths of its length lay aft of the mast, the tack being always forward. The old sail of the Vikings has now gone aloft, and developed into the square header of the modern yacht.

The *Seafowl* carried several passengers, all, with one exception, armed and ready for attack or defence. Yarl Godwulf was in command, with the tall, blue-eyed, flaxen-haired Fridgar as his lieutenant, and our friend Lilla as what we should now call second mate. Lilla had been in the fight off Bergen, and, having therein greatly distinguished himself for pluck and resource, had been promoted

to this responsible post on joining the new ship. The crew numbered thirty-eight, in addition to the cook, who, then as now, was a functionary of importance, only then he was a much more fighting functionary. The passengers were Sibald, the Jute, Eric, the Northerner, Wilfrid, who, though he had been in many a local battle, had never crossed the North Sea; and Lilla's father Cryda, with his wife and younger son.

Great was Gualla's delight as the ship heeled to the freshening breeze, and quickly left the coast. He was as busy as a bee, watching the *Seafowl's* behaviour, first on one side, then on the other, peeping over the bow and over the stern, watching how the waves were cleft, and how they closed again behind. Not that he dared say anything to the yarl, who had high notions of discipline, and would have resented being spoken to unless in answer to some encouragement. The encouragement was not long in coming, for, truth to tell, Godwulf was quite as pleased as the boy, and hugely delighted at the approving grunts and puffings in which the young hopeful gave vent to his admiration. Gualla was leaning over the weather bow, when the yarl, having resigned the helm to Fridgar, tapped him on the shoulder.

'Is that good enough for you?'

'Oh! Doesn't she go!'

'She was made to go.'

'But, yarl, all ships don't go like this!'

'Well, you can't say till you get alongside them. But she is not a slow craft.'

'Oh! Shouldn't I like a chase!'

'Wait awhile,' said Godwulf, 'wait for a day or two.'

'Why not now?'

'Give the new ship a chance to get comfortable. Let her timbers feel they can trust each other. Never fight till the crew knows the ship, and the ship knows the crew.'

'Do you think we shall fight?'

'I hope not, while your mother is on board, but we may have to.'

Godwulf walked across and looked away to leeward, and Gualla, seeing that the talk was ended for a time, made his way aft.

'Good boat this!' said he to Fridgar

'Ay!' said that hardy Norseman

'Better than the last?'

'Ay!'

'Best you have been in?'

'Ay!'

Fridgar did not shine in conversation; and it came as a relief to Gualla when his father called him forward again to look at a shoal of porpoises that had just come into view.

The patch of sea seemed alive with them as they came diving up into the air one after the other, as if bound to the spokes of an invisible wheel. It looked as though the *Seafowl* would go crash through them as they played about in front of her bows. To count them was impossible, although Gualla tried his hardest, and when he tried to time one of them he had also to give up the task in despair, for it is not easy to identify a porpoise. The shoal remained in view for about half an hour, and then swiftly slipped behind.

'Well, Wilfrid, what think you of the ship?' asked the irrepressible, as the conversation provoked by the porpoises began to languish.

'It smells so new,' said that captious critic.

'How are you to help that?' asked Cryda, whose bulky form and round genial face contrasted strongly with the lanky figure and long fastidious features of his companion.

'You need not use such tar unless you choose,' said Wilfrid. •

'Tut, tut, man!' said Cryda, 'you don't mean it. The boy asked you how you liked the ship, not how you liked her tar.'

'She is so small,' said Wilfrid, with a drawl. 'There is no room to stretch your legs'

'Tell you what, Wilfrid,' said the cheery voice of the yarl; 'if you don't like her, you can get out and walk.'

Whereupon there arose a loud laugh, to which Wilfrid added a feeble smile, as if the joke were only just a joke and almost too weak to be visible.

That afternoon the crew were put through their drill. Gwalla was much interested in what took place. He had never been on a ship at sea, and all he knew of the various exercises was from hearsay. Now that he learnt the reality, and saw the serious air with which the work was done, a new feeling stole over him. He grew conscious that a warrior's life was not all a joke; and that danger was not to be played with. As he found himself side by side with his father, firm and steady and prompt in obedience to the short, sharp words of command given by Fridgar, it soon dawned on him that that man of little speech might prove a doer of great deeds. His own father, as he went through the drill in all respects the same as himself, appeared in quite a new light to him, and became more of a big brother. Old Sibald

had forgotten his failing strength as he repeated the well-known motions with the ease of perfect knowledge. Eric, the Northerner, the hero of many adventures, with grizzled hair and flecked grey beard, looked a very man of iron. Wilfrid had cast his growler's skin, and stood revealed as a trusty friend and terrible foe. All round him his shipmates seemed to have been lifted to their true characters by the power of discipline, and from easy-going seafarers, each doing as he pleased, had been converted into an indomitable brotherhood, whose trade was war, and who worked at their trade as with one will and as one man. During the drill Lilla was at the helm, and the yarl close by him, watching every movement of Fridgar and his men. And all did their best, for Godwulf would stand no slovenliness where he held command.

The next day, as the ship still slipped along with the wind on the starboard quarter, and nothing appeared in sight to break the monotony of the voyage, the conversation turned on the land they were making for. Sibald had been singing the praises of his own kingdom of Kent, and Eric had been magnifying the riches of the fertile vale of York, when Godwulf broke in with a good word for the home of King Redwald, adding, 'And we ought to know it best, for we have been there for more years.'

'Not so very many more,' said Sibald.

'Well, nearly two hundred,' said Godwulf. 'I have been told that one of my forefathers was chief of the ships when Caraus won the seafight over the Latins.'

'Who was the Latin?' asked Lilla.

'Some fellow with a long name was then their king. Do you know, Eric? you have been to Rome.'

‘Dio—something!’ said Eric.

‘But did our forefathers beat the Latins?’ asked Lilla

‘I don’t know about your forefathers, but mine did,’ said Godwulf. ‘The sons of Odin did not all go to the new land from where we live now. Most of them went from Sibald’s land, and from the south of it. They were English before they started. But we are all the same race, and have nearly the same ways. The English have had a home all down the far shore of the North Sea for ages, and they helped not a little to clear the Latins out. Caraus lived a hundred and fifty years before Hengest’

‘I was not thinking of Hengest,’ said Sibald; ‘I was thinking of the same days as you, Yarl Godwulf; and the men of Kent say they were as near Old England as those to the north of them, and were in the new land but little later.’

‘Then they lost their tongue,’ said Godwulf, ‘for they spoke Latin when Hengest came.’

‘No, they say not; but I care not.’

‘Are you not a man of Kent?’ asked Cryda.

‘No, I was born in the land of the Jutes, and went to Canterbury when I was a boy, about the same age as Gualla.’

‘You were in the first fight with the West Saxons, were you not?’ asked Godwulf.

‘Yes, I was; the fight at Wibbandune.’

‘What did you do there?’ asked Eric. ‘That is where your boy-king Ethelbert got such a thrashing from King Ceawlin.’

‘It was—and he deserved it.’

‘Was it a big fight?’ asked Gualla.

‘Yes, the first ever fought between men of our blood

in the new land, the beginning of all these wars that are now the curse of the English'

'Tell the boys what you know about it,' said Godwulf, 'it will please them mightily.'

'Well,' said the old man, 'when our Ethelbert grew to be sixteen years old he was very proud, and he thought he was stronger than King Ceawlin, and that he ought to be over-lord in place of old Ælle. And so he sent to Ceawlin and asked him to greet him as over-lord. Now Ceawlin was a true leader of men, and sent back Ethelbert's messengers, saying he would have none of his overlordship. At this Ethelbert was wroth and sent again. And again Ceawlin told him he would have none of it. So then Ethelbert called us in ting, and told us how his messengers had failed; and the earls Oslak and Cnebba said all that the king said was true. And they so worked on our men that they had their way.'

'And they should bear the blame,' said Cryda.

'Yes; but the king was unwise,' continued Sibald. 'And so we were marched into the land of the West Saxons. We did not march far, for Ceawlin was ready for us. We kept along the banks of the Thames for a while, and then struck off by the road which leads to the bridge which Claudius built half a mile this side of the ford. On the hill there is a strong place with a mound and a ditch; and to it there goes a cross road coming in from the south. Now that cross road has to pass by an old camp, as they call it, which some say Claudius made, though others say it was there for years before him. Anyhow we found that Ceawlin had reached these camps with his men, so that we could not go past. I had been sent with others to spy out the way, and

we saw Ceawlin's men first at the river which they now call the Wandel. And all along this river had



Ceawlin his outer guards, which he, knowing his plans better than King Ethelbert, allowed us to drive back.

We hunted them up the eastern slope of the hill, and when we reached the top we found what I have told you. There was one wing of Ceawlin's in the camp by the river, and the other wing in the great camp to the south. Had we taken the small camp we should have done no good, for then Ceawlin could have cut us off. So the earls told Ethelbert he should march against the big camp, and leave a few to keep the men near the river from doing us harm. Away through the heath we went, and the fight slowly grew thicker as we neared King Ceawlin, who was waiting for us on the slopes round his stronghold, with the brook in the valley to the west of him. It would have done your hearts good to see the axes going and the swords at work, and hear the clash of the steel, but it would have made your hearts bleed to think that Ceawlin's men and ours were brothers in blood, and that our foes were only too glad to see us killing each other. When the Saxon fights the Kentish man the fight is long, and he who is best led wins. As the fight grew tougher, Ethelbert brought up all his men, and then the Saxons from the river camp, many more than we thought, slipped out unseen; and as we were driving Ceawlin up the hill to his mound, these came slashing in behind. It was in vain that Oslak tried to withstand them. We were overmatched, and began to falter, and then down on us like a fireflood came King Ceawlin. Cnebba on the left called his men together; and as Ceawlin knocked our main body into little bits charging down the hill, he charged up. But it was no good, for before he reached the top King Ceawlin swung round to the right, and swept our folk before him like chaff. Oslak was killed by the spring, and Cnebba was cut

down as he reached the foot of the mound. And our boy-king gave the word to run, and he ran himself, and, leaving the brooks red with blood, we were sent flying across the heath and down the slope to the Wandel, and so home. And very glad was I to get there.'

'And what did King Ceawlin do?' asked Eric.

'He told King Ethelbert he might keep his kingdom of Kent, and if, when he grew older and knew better, he would like to have another try for the over-lordship, the Wessex folk would be ready for another day's work on the common at Wibbandune'

And the old man sighed as he ended his story.

How strangely fit the challenge sounds to us! Thanks to Mr. Manyinitialled Drax, the old camp has almost gone; but another camp has taken its place, and every year, in the spirit of King Ceawlin, the descendants of his people have their try for quite another over-lordship on the battlefield of Wimbledon.



CHAPTER IV.

HOW ERIC WENT TO ROME.

THAT evening, as the *Seafoul* kept on her western way under the starlight, Eric, at the yarl's request, related how he went to Rome.

'I was only seven years old,' he said, 'when Sibald was fighting at Wibbandune, for I was born at York in the second year after Ælla, the son of Iffa, won the kingdom of Deira. My father was killed fighting the Welsh in Elmet, and my uncles went the same way, and it seemed as though I was to follow them. That is neither here nor there, though, now. I had a rough time of it, I was up and down and knocked about as much as any lad I know; and when I became three-and-twenty I knew my trade as well as most men. I had fought and lost, and fought and won pretty often, and I had kept my eyes open. I had become fairly well off, and I had married, and an only child had been born to me—a daughter. This was in my twenty-fourth year. I lived on the coast not far from Flamborough, and I spent much of my time

on the sea. One wintry night, during a storm, a ship was cast ashore not far from my home; and I went to the help of those the waves had left. Only one could I find, clinging to a rock round which the tide was rising and threatening with each wave to sweep him away. At great peril to myself,—I say it, though perhaps I should not,—I went out to him and got him ashore. He was a good-looking fellow enough, of good birth and breeding. and’—

Here Eric was silent for a minute.

‘Well,’ he continued, ‘this nothing—for such he was—tried to win my wife from me; and I drove him from my door, and would have fought him, but he escaped me. One night, about a month afterwards, when I came in from a fishing cruise, I found my house burnt to the ground, and my poor wife lying dead with her baby by her side. I followed the footsteps to a small bay to the northward, where I found two ships at anchor. I was thinking what I should do, when I was suddenly seized from behind, bound, gagged, and carried on board, and flung below among other prisoners that had fallen into the same hands. The ship put to sea. All that night I lay sleepless, and in the early morning I heard a voice giving orders. It was the voice of the nothing I had saved! With the other prisoners I was given food and drink, and from our guards we learnt we were going south. Seven days were we kept below, seeing nobody but our two guards,—rough, heartless old brutes as ever you need wish to see. On the eighth day we heard overhead that we were alongside another ship. One after the other, my fellow-prisoners were led away, and, I could hear, were put on board the strange craft. At

last came my turn As they lifted me my guards gave another twist to my bonds, and, seeing I was safe, they took me up between them. As I came into the sunshine I looked round for the owner of the voice At first I could not see him ; but, as I was hoisted on board the new ship, there he was to welcome me—the man whose life I had saved ! He stood there stroking his hands and beard, and sneeringly greeted me with the feigned hopes that I had found things to my liking I felt I could have wrung him limb from limb, but my hands were bound, as he well knew ’

‘ I am sorry,’ said Godwulf, as Eric again stopped silent, —‘ I am sorry I asked you to tell us your story I did not know of this.’

‘ Thanks, good yarl, I know your kindness. It is better you should know all ’

‘ Then let us hear you out ’

‘ Well I was a slave, and the new craft to which we were taken was a slaveship. And my wife’s murderer had sold me, and I was to be taken to Italy to make sport for some wretched Roman My handsome gaoler told me this with many a little gibe, thanked me for saving his life, thanked me for putting it in his way to earn a few scillingas to make up for the loss of his ship. He then bade me farewell, laughed at his own wit, went back to his own ship, and we sailed away for the south. From that day to this I have not set eyes on him.’

‘ Does he still live ?’ asked the yarl

‘ I know not ; but I feel that he must, and I feel that we shall meet again ’

‘ The sooner the better !’ said Godwulf, ‘ and may I be there to see !’

'We sailed south, and for three weeks we were at sea, and then we landed at a port whose name I knew not, and were handed over to another ship, a Roman galley; and in her we were taken to Italy. There were ten of us in all, three of us mere boys, all of us from the same coast, though all unknown to each other. In the Italian ship we were chained; and in chains we were sold to a dealer, and by him marched into the slave-market at Rome six-and-twenty years ago.'

'Ah, I know what follows!' said the yarl; 'so does Sibald. But go on.'

'The first day we were unsold. The second day we were unsold. The third day, as we stood in the market-place, a Christian priest passed by. He was a man, you could see it in every line of him, with a noble look, and an eye that pierced to your brim. A good man, if ever there was one in this world. Would there were more like him in Rome. But there are not!'

'You mean you did not meet them,' said Sibald.

'I say there are not!' replied Eric. 'He passed by us as we stood there amid the bright stone walls, with the white sun blazing down full on us out of the cloudless sky, and then, seeing the little crowd of boys that were gazing at us, he came back. He looked us through and through, and as his eyes met mine I thought if I must have a master I wished for no other. As we liked his looks, so he liked ours. But he was not a buyer of slaves. He asked the greasy dealer who had us for sale where we came from, and the know-nothing Italian, instead of saying we came from England, told him we came from Britain. This was too much for the priest, who could see we were not Britons, and so he asked again whence

we came, and the dealer told him we were English ; and then the priest's eyes twinkled, and he said something about English in another meaning, for in the Latin tongue there is not much to choose between an Englishman and an angel—and Sibald can tell you what an angel is. When the priest had spoken of the angels, he asked further whence we came, and the slaver told him Deira. Whereupon the priest said something about Deira which was as good in its way as what he had said about the English. And his eyes twinkled again, and, of course, the folk around began to laugh ; and the dealer laughed loudest of all, because he thought the priest was going to buy. But the priest did not say these things only for the sake of the joke, he had far other thoughts. Looking kindly at one of the boys, he laid his hand on him, and, as he stroked his hair, which was very long and soft and yellow, he asked him how his king was called. The boy did not know what he said, and the dealer did not know what he asked, and, as I knew both, I answered him, "Ælla." And then the priest with the clear bright eyes said, "Alla"—something,—which was another joke,—and walked off. And the dealer and the Romans liked him for his jests, which they thought had been made at our cost, and we liked him for the looks he had given us, and we read him as a good and fearless man, who was thinking much about us, and whose jests bore no sting for any, and kept the lazy crowd in good humour.'

'He was a great man !' said Sibald,—'none greater !'

'Well, I don't go as far as that,' said Eric ; 'but there was none greater among the Romans !'

'Is he dead, then ?' asked Cryda.

'Yes,' said Sibald.

‘Who was he?’

‘Chief of the house on the Cælian Hill’ said Sibalð
‘and five years afterwards our Pope of blessed memory,
Gregorius,—Gregorius the Great!’

‘I thought your other man came from the Cælian Hill,’
said Godwulf.

‘So he did,’ said Sibalð.

‘Go on, Eric,’ said the yarl, ‘tell them how you got out
of that hole.’

‘Hardly had the priest gone than a fat, squat little
man, with a nose like a sickle and an eye like a fish, and
stinking of sweet odours, as he thought them’—

‘Sunt you, Wilfrid!’ said Gualla

‘Hush, hush!’ said the yarl. ‘His turn will come soon
enough’

‘Well, this man came, and, looking first to see that I
was safely chained, he opened my mouth and counted my
teeth and punched me in the ribs, and jabbered away to
the slaver. And then I was put aside from the others,
and in the afternoon a guard of half a dozen little folks,
all shield and helmet, took me in charge and walked me
off through the forum, where there is a lot of buildings
and things all tumbling down because the Romans have
not wit enough to keep them up. That night I had to
sleep by the side of a great road, wider and straighter than
any I had seen. And next morning with the dawn
we were off again, leaving Rome far behind us. We
walked for a week, and then reached a port where I was
put on board a galley, which I thought was to be my
home. The galley was anchored not far from the shore,
and there I was kept for three days with a lot of slaves
from many lands. On the fourth day the man who had

bought me came on board, and we put to sea ; and it suddenly got rather rough, and my fat little yarl grew very sick before we could row back into smooth water. He was one of their leaders ; and, like the men who had guarded me, all of whom were with us, he wore a big helmet, and a bold breastplate and backplate, and steed down his thighs, and a short sword, and looked very warlike—and he was very sick all over his nice bright clothes. I thought of what the good priest would have said had he seen him ! How his eyes would have twinkled, and what a laugh there would have been !

‘A sea-sick Cæsar ! Poor old Roman !’ said the yarl, in a tone of the deepest sympathy. Whereupon Gualla laughed out, as did the others.

‘We hung about for a day or so,’ said Eric, ‘and when all seemed safe to our brave leader we made another start ; and, keeping close to the shore, cruised away to the southward. It was not long before we were caught in another squall. After the squall had passed all was clear overhead for a while, but in an hour things changed, and a gale came on from the south-east, which nearly settled us. The chief, Quintus somebody, was quite helpless ; and, as we were drifting dead to leeward, he at last made signs for me to be brought to him. I learnt from what he said that he wanted me to get the galley out of danger, as the dealer had told him I was a good seaman. I asked him what he would give me if I did, and he said he would set me free. “Then,” said I, “take off these irons !” and they did. Luckily for me, the gale had lulled and the tide was on the turn, and when I got the boat’s head round I edged her out till we cleared the headland on which we would have struck. As soon as

we were clear, Quintus thought better of what he had said, and told them to put on my irons. "No, no," said I, "I will not wear them." Quintus grew fierce, and thundered out to his men to do his will; and, seeing there was no hope, I sprang from them as they stepped up to me, and, giving Yarl Quintus a knock in his mouth that sent him overboard, I plunged in and swam for my life. A gust swept down on the boat as I left her, and that gave her crew quite enough to do to look after themselves. After a long, tiring swim I reached the rocks, and I never saw the galley again. The storm came on fiercer than ever, and lasted till daybreak, and I think she must have sunk during the night.'

'And how long were you in Italy after that?' asked Lilla.

'Not long,' replied Eric. 'When I awoke'—

'Sail ho!' came a shout from the bows.

'Where away?' asked the yarl, hurrying forward.

'Dead ahead!'

And a narrow speck on the sharp line of the horizon was just rising into view



CHAPTER V.

THE COMING OF AUGUSTINE

SLOWLY the speck grew in the distance To Gualla it seemed as though pursuit were hopeless.

‘We shall never catch her!’ said he.

‘Why not?’ said his father. ‘We are sailing three feet to her two, I reckon.’

Could she be a friend? All on the *Seafowl* took it for granted she was a foe, and prepared accordingly.

Unfortunately the wind dropped and grew shifty, and as soon as the sweeps were out a white fog came rolling over the sea and wrapped everything in its cloak of mist.

‘How will you know your way now?’ asked Gualla of his brother, who was taking his trick at the helm.

‘The yarl will see about that. Watch what he is doing.’

Godwulf took a deep wooden bowl, shaped very like a

cask, and filled it a quarter full of water, and on the water he floated a flat, round ring, about an inch broad, and of just sufficient circumference to swim clear of the side. Then from a roll of fine cloth he took a straw an inch shorter than the inner diameter of the floating ring. And this straw he dropped on to the surface of the water.

Gualla watched the straw swing round so as to point diagonally across the boat; and he noticed that when Godwulf moved it once or twice to try that it swung freely, it each time went back to the same position.

'Well?' said the yarl, looking at him and giving him the hint to speak.

'What is that straw for, yarl?'

'To tell us our course.'

'How does it do that?'

'No matter how the ship steers, that straw always points to the same spot in the sky.'

'Is it a magic straw?'

'If you like to call it so.'

'What makes it always point to the same place?'

'The iron that is in it.'

'The iron that is in it!' said Gualla, in astonishment.

'Yes,' said Godwulf, with a laugh

Picking the straw out of the water, he held it up for Gualla to see, and there, down the centre, was run a thin needle of iron.

'Is that iron, and nothing more?' asked the boy.

'It is iron, but I cannot say about the nothing more. This came from the side of Arendal, and it was given to me by an old man we picked up off the Swedish coast, who said it had never failed him till then.'

'Then it is magic?'

‘No, I think not. Many ships have these straws, and the iron which swings to the north is found on many a hillside in our own land. If I tie a string to its centre it will still swing.’

‘Why don’t you always use it?’

‘Because the stars can never lead us wrong, and this thing may. Away at sea all may be well, but when we are close to the shore, and there are such rocks at hand as this is made of, it has oft misled those who trusted in it’

‘But now can you trust it?’

‘There is no other guide, and, though the straw has failed others, it has never failed me.’

And Godwulf put back the iron-cored straw into the ring which kept the water from splashing in the bowl. And, watching it for a moment, he lifted the rude compass to Lilla’s feet, and gave him his orders how to steer.

For an hour and a half the sweeps continued their steady strokes, and then Godwulf called them in. He was evidently in no hurry to fight, and would rather have an uneventful voyage if he could.

‘Never seek a fight in a fog if you can help it,’ said he to Lilla. ‘It is all luck then, and it always ends badly. He who gets the worst sheers off, and there you are as you were.’

A good look-out was kept fore and aft, but in vain. The fog lasted into the night, and when the sun rose, and, with the rising wind, chased the mist away, there was no sign of the ship. Either she had gone ahead, or changed her course, or dropped behind them in the fog.

All day long the horizon was swept in vain for the sign of a sail, but nothing broke the long level line where sea met sky. Towards noon the breeze freshened, and the

Seafowl began to show her paces. By three o'clock the wind had grown to half a gale, and shifted a couple of points to the westward, and in the ragged North Sea rollers, with the 'white horses' of foam racing over them, the new ship had her first chance of proving that her boulder and crew did not trust her in vain. Gracefully and easily she took the waves, cleaving them sweetly, meeting them as they came threatening across her, and quietly ploughing them off before they could rise to board her. Compared to the vessels that now cross in her track she was but a pigmy, but in fitness to keep the sea she was quite their equal.

The Hjaltlands were reached in due time, and the course became a southerly one; the Pictish coast was run down at a great pace, and the ship, keeping just within sight of land, soon left behind the Firth of Forth, the Tyne and the Tees, and was off the mouth of the Humber.

'Enc,' said the yarl, as the little group sat aft in the evening, 'those boys would like to know how you got out of Italy.'

'Ah!' said the Yorkshireman, or rather the Deiraman.

'And we should also like to know what the man was called who wrought you wrong, and what you did to find him.'

'To me he called himself Eomer, but I know not if he had right to do so.'

'Whence came he?'

'He told me he was a Jute, born in Wight.'

'And you never saw him after he shipped you off to Rome?'

'No. Nor can I find him.'

'Tell us what you have done, and first say how you went for your long cruise alone.'

'I left off where I gave Yail Quintus his due. I was tired out by my swim, and glad enough to have a quiet sleep under shelter a few yards up from the shore. In the morning I began to look about me, and, after walking for a mile, I came to a fishing hamlet at the back of a little creek. There were three boats on the beach, and one of them was being got ready for a cruise. I saw the stores brought down and put on board, and then the food and drink duly stored away, and then the old owner and his son go back to their home to have, I think, a good meal before they were off. You may guess what I did. As soon as I saw them safe indoors, I stepped down to the boat, and with one shove would have been afloat, had not the keel stuck fast. I pushed all I could, but the boat would not move, and the rattle of the shingle made the old man come to his door to see what was up. It did not do to be caught if I could help it, and so I made a big try to start the keel. Luckily it gave, and went flying off so quickly that I stumbled, and only just scrambled in as the fisher-folk came running after me. Once afloat, I was all right, and, though I was sorry to take the boat, I could do nothing else but slip off as fast as I knew how. At first I pulled, but soon the other boats were manned and sail hoisted on them to chase, and then, when I saw how the sail was worked, I set up mine, and with a good start and the faster craft bade Italy and the Italians good-bye. A nice unwieldy sort of a boat she proved, but I ought to be thankful to her, for she carried me safe for the week during which I ran to the south-westward, for, you see, I stood off, and changed my tack as soon as night fell. Sailing alone was wearying work, as I had to snatch my sleep when I thought it

safe, and very little sleep I had. The longest spell was the last. In the middle of the night I was run down, and just woke in time to catch on to the side of the ship that had struck me. As she grated past, I gave a leap for life, and safely landed on her. Luckily the watch was asleep when I was run down, and the crew knew not whence I came; so I could say what I chose.' And I said but little, and only enough to save me from being thrown to the fishes. The best luck of all was that the ship was bound to West Wales, and almost in sight of port we fell in with Yarl Anna, who took us without a fight.'

'Then when did you get back to Flamborough?' asked Cryda.

'Not for a long time. I was asked to be one of Anna's men; and for three years we cruised about off the English coast, keeping a sharp look-out on all comers. Foes we fought, and friends we helped, and during those days, though we saw hundreds of ships, yet never did I meet with Eomer's.'

'When did you leave Yarl Anna?'

'The year King Ælla died, and the next year I was in the fight when Ethelric, Ida's second son, came into Deira and drove out old Ælla's sons.'

'How old then was Edwin?'

'He was then but three years old, and since then he has been a wanderer. With him went his elder brother, who the next year became the father of Hereric, whose daughter was born the year before last.'

'And did you fight for the sons of Ælla?'

'Till they fled; and then with the others I fought for King Ethelric until he died in the fourth year after he had come to us.'

'And then you followed his son, the great King Ethelfrith?'

'Under him I fought against the Welsh at Cattracth, and seven years thereafter I was with the men that fought the Scots at Degsæstan, where I received this scar.' And he pointed to a long deep dimple on his chin.

'And after Ethelfrith beat the Scots there was peace?' said Sibald.

'Yes, with the Scots,' answered Eric. 'But ere four years had gone, Ethelfrith drove the Welsh back to Chester on the Dee, and there he crushed them.'

'Were you hurt at Chester?' asked Gualla.

'I was not there. But I was told all about the fight, how the Welshmen had a crowd of monks from Bangor to pray for them as they fought; how King Ethelfrith said, "If these men pray to their God that we may be beaten, it is all one as if they were fighting against us," how he smote the monks, and slew them first of all, as many as twelve hundred; and how he then smote the Welshmen, and swept Cadvan and Bronemaël before him as if he were mowing them as grass with the scythe.'

'Strange folk are those Christians!' said Wilfrid. 'They will soon have fewer men to fight than they have to pray.'

'They are a poor set!' said Sibald.

'But are you not a Christian?' asked the yarl, in surprise.

'Wilfrid said those Christians,' replied the old man. 'And I am not a Welsh Christian. I am an Englishman like Eric, though, unlike him as yet, I have found the true faith.'

Eric smiled grimly at the 'as yet,' and asked, 'Is not the faith the same, then?'

'No,' said Sibald, 'the faith of the Welsh is the faith of the old Legionaries who lived in their land in the days before us, while ours is the new faith brought to us by the thought of Pope Gregorius'

'Then was it the good priest whom Eric liked at Rome who sent this faith to the men of Kent?' asked Gualla.

'So they say,' said Eric. 'And if he himself had come to Deira, all men would have believed in him.'

Godwulf frowned.

'It is not a light thing to change,' said he.

'Did Gregorius go to Kent?' asked Lilla.

'No,' said Sibald 'He sent to us Augustinus, the chief of his own house on the Cælian Hill. I see him as well as though it were but yesterday, as, in the rear of his forty monks, he came singing the litany into Canterbury'

'Was that very long ago?'

'It is nearly twenty years since, and it was eight-and-twenty years after Ceawlin won the fight at Wibbandune. Ah, it is a long time to look back, and yet the years go fast enough! It was not till Ceawlin died that King Ethelbert was held as over-lord. He had married Bertha, from the land of the Franks. She was a Christian—the first Christian lady of the English. She brought with her her own priest, and they used to worship in the church on the hillside. But no one thought of him or cared for his faith, till, in the third year after Ceawlin's death, Augustinus was sent by Gregorius to preach to those of whom he had first heard in the market-place at Rome.'

'I think he had heard of us,' said Eric, 'but never seen us.'

'If he had heard of us he had never heeded us,' said Sibald; 'but it matters not. One morning the news came to Canterbury that some Latin monks had the evening before landed at Ebbsfleet, and were waiting there till King Ethelbert would see them. So Ethelbert sent that they should bide in Thanet till he came. In a few days he went forth to meet them. With him went many of his men, and I was one of them. The king feared magic, and met the monks in the open air on the green hill-top in the bright warmth of the summer sun. As the monks came up the hill, carrying before them the silver image of the Lord on the Cross, they sang a litany, and sweet was the sound of the voices as it grew upon us, seemingly rising from the rippling sea. Though I liked not the monks, I liked the song they brought. And when they came to the king, the litany ceased, and the swarthy Augustinus was left facing Ethelbert, as his friends wheeled off to the right and left of him. By the priest's side stood two Gauls that he thought could speak English, for he could not. Augustinus preached to the king in Latin, and what he said the Gauls told us in the strange tongue that the Gauls ever take for ours. But the king understood something of what they said, though it was long, and he grew weary. And when Augustinus and the Gauls had ended, he said to them, "Your words and promises sound good to me, but they are new and strange among us, and I cannot believe them at once, nor can I leave all that I and my English folk have believed so long. But you have come from far to tell us what you think to be truth, and you may stay in the land if you will, and I will give you a house to dwell in. And you may preach to whom you will, and if any believe as

you believe, I hinder them not!" And we went back to Canterbury And the monks followed; and by the road I stood to see them pass, and listen to the sweet song which they had again raised, as, with the silver cross in front of them, they slowly walked along. And what they sang I afterwards knew to be, "We pray Thee, O Lord, let Thy anger and wrath from this city and Thy holy house be turned away, for in Thy sight we have sinned. Alleluia!"

'That,' said Eric, 'is what the priest said when I told him Ælla was our king!'

'And,' continued Sibald, apparently rather shocked at Eric's interruption, 'before the year was out King Ethelbert and ten thousand of his folk had left their old faith at the preaching of the monks, and the old churches that the Welsh had left when we drove them out were made sound again, and more churches were built, and the more the churches grew the more the folk believed. And soon Augustinus went to Gaul, where he was made bishop of the English, and then he came back, and, clearing out the ruins of the old Latin church in the vale, he there fixed his seat, and founded Christ Church in Canterbury, the chief church in our land.'

'Strange,' said the yarl, 'that folk should change their faith so easily.'

'And some changed back again before long,' said Eric.

'No one of any mark,' said Sibald.

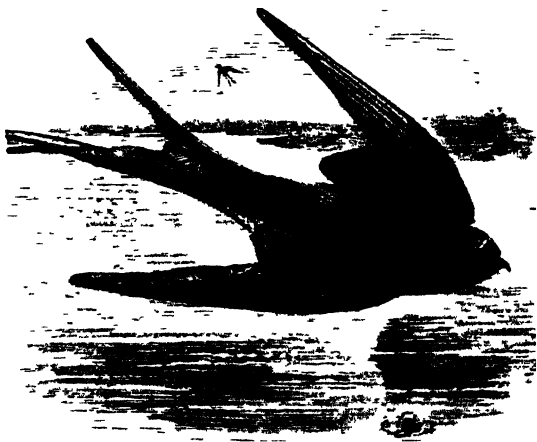
'Why, King Ethelbert himself!' exclaimed the north-countryman.

'Oh no! When Bertha died, Ethelbert changed for the worse, we know, and he now has a wife of the old faith; but he himself is still a Christian'

‘ Well, I heard not And his sons have changed ’

‘ The king in his manhood was better than in his boyhood or his old age,’ said the yarl, as he rose to go forward.

As the day broke two ships were sighted by Fridgar, who went and roused the yarl. The *Seafowl* was kept on her course, and as she gradually came up with the vessels the men were at their quarters, and all was ready for



battle. Just as Godwulf took no steps to force on a fight with the first ship he sighted, so now he did nothing to avoid one, although a third sail had also been descried. It was evident that to him a fight more or less made little difference. His course was laid out for him, and woe betide the man who got in the way.

In the few days' trial he had gained every confidence in his ship, and he knew he could trust his crew. And

they trusted him; and the boys felt quite proud as they stood by his side, as, prepared for either fortune, he quietly and keenly watched with his eagle eyes every movement of the vessels ahead.

The *Seafowl* seemed to wake into life as she neared the stranger. She slipped along bowing from the breeze, and at each recovery she seemed, between the lulls, to shoot even faster than when the sail was under its full pressure.

Fortunately the first to be caught proved to be the *Swallow*, bound to Dunwich like herself. Godwulf kept alongside for an hour, exchanging news, and then went on in chase of the others, about whom he could glean nothing.

They had been standing more to the eastward, so that they were rather out of the *Seafowl's* true course.

'I shall not worry about them,' said Godwulf. 'If they get out of the way we will leave them.'

Soon a fourth sail was sighted, heading so as to cross the *Seafowl's* track.

'There will be something to do at last,' said Wilfrid, as he stroked his moustache.

Godwulf eased a little, so as to cut off the stranger. As they neared her she proved to be a merchant ship, and they soon learnt she was bound from Ebbsfleet to Bam-borough.

'What news do you bring?' hailed the yarl.

'Great news! King Ethelbert is dead!'

'You were right, Wilfrid,' said Sibald, 'there will be something to do at last.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROMISE.



AND so the *Seafowl* crossed the North Sea without adventure, and Yarl Godwulf appeared at King Redwald's court at one of the most important epochs of our history.

Edwin, the son of Ælla, after seven-and-twenty years of wandering, had come to the king of the East English, bringing with him his young wife, Cuenburga, and their two boys, Osfrid and Egfrid. Seven years before he had wedded the Mercian's daughter, and

now he was to lose her. She was sick unto death, and as she lay on her death-bed messengers arrived from Ethelfrith, the Northumbrian, demanding that Edwin should be delivered up

A great man was the son of Ethelric, though now sunk into much darkness. 'A most worthy king,' says the Venerable Beda, 'and ambitious of honour, he governed the kingdom of the Northumbrians, and ravaged the Britons more than all the great men of the English, insomuch that he might be compared to Saul, once king of the Israelites, excepting only this, that he was ignorant of the true religion.'

Ethelfrith the Fierce—such was his name—held the north at his will, feared by his neighbours, English, Scotch, and Welsh alike, and Ethelbert, though calling himself Bretwalda, very prudently forbore to trouble the active Northumbrian. Both were now well on in age. Ethelfrith had reigned twenty-two years, while Ethelbert's had been one of the longest reigns on record, he being then in the fifty-sixth year of his kingship. Redwald, who of late had been subordinate to Ethelbert only in name, could not help seeing his opportunity. The king of the Kentishmen was ending his reign as badly as he had begun it, and was but the shadow of his manhood's self; and the grand old tiger in the north would soon have run his course. There was therefore nothing in the way of his own supremacy, if he but struck at the right moment. And, with this object in view, the powerful king of the East Angles, as it is the fashion to call him, had for some time been strengthening his forces, calling together tried warriors from all parts, and among others inviting to his standard several of the most renowned of the kings of the sea.

The arrival of Edwin gave Redwald the pretext he sought. If he could place him on the Northumbrian throne, he could at one blow get rid of a rival and make such terms as would ensure his over-lordship. And when

Ethelfrith's embassy arrived, the illness of Cuenburga proved a convenient excuse for giving an evasive answer.

She had been buried but a month when the news came to King Redwald that Ethelbert was dead, and a week afterwards there had appeared a second embassy from King Ethelfrith, demanding Edwin's immediate surrender. This had brought matters to the crisis during which Godwulf arrived.

He was warmly welcomed, and, when received by the king, was given to understand that there was work in store for him. And he was told to hold himself in readiness for instant service.

Earl Agelbert, Godwulf's friend, being informed that Cryda wished to settle in England, bestirred himself somewhat, and procured for him a grant of land on the usual terms, and the like he promised to do for Wilfrid as soon as that worthy had provided himself with a wife. Sibold's duty was done, and he was required to return to Canterbury on a message to King Eadbald, who had begun his reign by endeavouring to set up the old religion.

It was the third day of Godwulf's arrival, and Ethelfrith's ambassadors were on the morrow to receive their answer. The king was in council when the news came that a third embassy from King Ethelfrith had arrived, come by sea instead of overland like the other two. For a time the council was adjourned, and after due interval the envoys were admitted to audience. The message was what we should now call an ultimatum.

'Slay me Edwin, and I will give thee such gifts as thou hast not seen or heard of, but if thou wilt not slay him or deliver him into my hand, then will I fight against thee, and smite thee and thy people with a great slaughter.'

The ultimatum was received much as we should now receive it ; it became rumoured abroad, and denied and confirmed, and all men were busy over it. And the king took counsel with his leading men ; and nothing apparently was done. Nothing, indeed, could be done till the morning, for such a message could only be answered by the nation assembled in what we now call Parliament. Although, however, nothing could actually be done, opinions could be formed and preparations made.

It was a moonlight night, and the moon was bright and full. The streets of the old town were silent, and lay in lines of black shadow and silvery light. The radiant orb was at her highest, and from the hill in the high street, looking down over the country, all was still and beautiful. The night breeze was of the slightest, the air was soft and sweet, warm from the sea, and cooling and refreshing as it moved over the land.

Midnight passed, and the air grew cold ; and the light seemed more glaring as the shadows darkened. Suddenly a footfall was heard on the high street, and down the darkened side there moved a soldierly figure, seemingly on a message from the king. To the end the man went, and turning sharply round he made his way in to the back of the last house. Beyond and around were fields ; on the one side lay the town, near by ran the river, and by it grew a band of trees, gaunt and black and spectral.

In a few minutes two men came out of the house. One was the messenger, the other was of somewhat slighter build and a trifle taller.

‘I tell thee, Edwin,’ said the messenger, ‘that Redwald thinketh it best to hand thee over. He is still afraid that the time has not come for him to strike. His wish is to

be in the place of King Ethelbert, and they have told him that Ethelfrith is old and cannot live long, and that Oswald would be the same to him in every way as thou wouldst be. "Why fight for the son of Ælla?" they



say, "when all thou canst gain from him thou canst get from the son of Ethelfrith?"

'And does no one say aught on my side?'

'Only Rainer, and his father does not heed him. No, Edwin, thou art in peril. Come with me; I can get thee

away before the sun rises safe on board a ship bound for London, where the sons of Sebert have now thrown off the yoke of King Eadbald'

'Bassus, I thank thee,' was the reply. 'But I will stay? What safety is there with the sons of Sebert, what safety is there with Eadbald, what safety is there with Cwicheim, what safety is there in Mercia? To the Welsh I cannot again go, and over sea I care not to go. Bassus, I thank thee, but I will trust to King Redwald's word. He is but thinking which is best for those that follow him, and he will not yield me to Ethelfrith'

'He is thinking only of himself, and that which he thinketh best for himself he will do.'

'Then that which is best for himself is to keep his plighted word'

'So saith Rainer, but the others do not.'

'Well, Bassus, it is you who are then in peril for coming here to warn me Go! I thank thee. Farewell!'

And Bassus sorrowfully saluted his friend, and strode away.

Edwin watched him out of sight, and stood by the doorway lost in thought. A man of noble presence was the future king of Northumbria, the greatest king amongst Englishmen until Alfred His long years of exile had familiarized him with adversity; but the peril and the grief, instead of brutalizing, as they do with common ore, had proved his truer metal, and left their traces in his noble feature-lines. He had been through the fire, and had been refined instead of being debased into slag.

For a time he stood there, thinking of his dead wife and of his two little ones—the eldest then but six years

old, the youngest but four. Then he thought of Redwald, whose duty as a man might have to yield to his policy as a king. And then his thoughts wandered off to Cadvan and Cearl, and the other kings with whom he had taken refuge. Hardly knowing what he did, he left the doorway and strolled down towards the trees; and in the shadow of an oak he sat down on a stone.

Suddenly from the riverside a man strode into view. Full in the light he walked towards the fugitive. Tall, stooping, black-haired, with slender aquiline nose, and dark eyes glowing like coals of fire from out the thin worn face, there could not well be a greater contrast to the fair-haired, broad-built Englishman, as, wrapped in an ample cloak, the nervous, wiry figure swiftly neared him. Not a sound was heard as he trod the soft turf. Edwin knew not of his approach.

He stood within a yard of the stone, and for a moment looked the Englishman up and down.

'Wherefore,' said he—and Edwin started and stood up ready for fight, with his hand on his seax,—'wherefore dost thou,'—and the voice was hurried and foreign, and the words were curiously intoned,—'while other men sleep, sit thus alone and sad on a stone?'

'What is it to thee,' answered Edwin, looking at the strange dark face, with its beard of three or four days' growth, and wondering at the cloak, the like of which he had never before seen,—'what is it to thee whether I abide this night within the house or without it?'

The dark eyes sought the eyes of the Englishman to read them.

'Think not that I know thee not who thou art, and why thou sleepest not. But tell me, what wilt thou give

him who shall free thee from thy sorrows, and say to King Redwald that he shall neither do thee harm nor hand thee over to those that seek thee for Ethelfrith ?’

‘All that I have will I give to him that shall do this thing for me.’

‘And what wilt thou do if a man shall tell thee of a truth that thou shalt smite thine enemies and reign in their stead, and be a mightier king than were any of thy forefathers, yea, or any of the kings that have ever reigned over the English ?’

‘Verily, if a man shall do this, I will give him such a reward as shall be fitting for his good deeds.’

‘And now,’ said the stranger, and the dark eyes seemed ready to burst into flame, ‘when this thing hath come to pass, what wilt thou do if he that told thee all these things shall tell thee of a new life and a new law better than any that thou and thine have known? Wilt thou then believe him, and trust him, and obey him, and do such things as he shall speak to thee for thy good?’

‘Verily, if such a man shall bring me out of my sorrows, and set me on my father’s throne, I will believe him, and trust him, and obey him in all things whatsoever he shall say unto me.’

‘Then when this sign shall come unto thee, bethink you of this night and thine own words, and do that which thou hast said.’

And the strange figure reached out his hand, and on the Englishman’s head he made the sign of the Thor hammer without the leftward feet. And he passed into the shadow of the oak; and when Edwin looked round he was gone!



CHAPTER VII.

THE RECOGNITION

AT noon the next day the Folkgemot assembled to consider the messages of King Ethelfrith. The meeting had been called on receipt of his second demand, and it could thus deal with it and his last at the same time. No more important parliament was held in East England.

About a mile from the town was a wide open space, on a gentle rise, whereon was a circle of stones, among which the slaves and serving-men had been busy since nine o'clock making the needful preparations. The larger stones were already in position, but the smaller ones had to be set up at measured intervals, and required a good deal of arranging. By the time all was in readiness, and the rope run round the outer circle, the guard had appeared in sight.

Four deep they marched along, each having on his shoulder the double-bladed Danish axe, whose broad semi-circular blades flashed dazzlingly in the sun. Then came the folk in full armour, with sword and shield, and all in due order, from the simple freemen up to the

belted carls. Last of all came the Northumbrian envoys, and King Redwald and Rainer.

Edwin was also there, but he stood apart from the



rest. Much he wondered what his fate was to be. Since his strange interview of the previous night he had been of hope that all would be well, for the vision had given him confidence. Little did he then know on what a

thread his life had hung, little did he think that he owed his safety to Redwald's wife, who, when she was told that the fugitive was to be given up, made noble answer in the historic :

'Sell not, O king, for gold thy friend that is in trouble, and do not for the sake of wealth lose thine honour, which is of more price than all jewels.'

Under the wide canopy of heaven the great council of the nation was held, with all the grandeur and reverence that could give it solemnity and add weight to its decisions; with nothing between the people and their sovereign god but the deep floor of Valhalla, in the centre of which the lord of day, then mounting to his highest, glowed like a shield of flame. When all had taken their places, and the earls were at the head of their men, who stood in strict order of precedence behind them, the priest came forward in his white embroidered robes, with the figure of the golden sun on his breast. And the white horse was led in; and the rope that begirt the circle was knotted; and the ring was complete. And then, with much ceremony, the horse was brought forward.

The worthiest of the animals was the white horse esteemed even in the old Aryan days. Thirteen hundred years at the least before King Redwald, it had been written in the Veda, the sacred book of another people: 'The gods killed a man for their victim, but from him thus killed, the part which was fit for a sacrifice went out and entered a horse; thence the horse became an animal fit for being sacrificed.' And in the Brahmanic ritual there is no more ancient rite than that of the Asvamedha, where the horse is sacrificed by the king who is desirous of attaining universal sovereignty.

The white horse, then, as the substitute for man, and the victim strangely appropriate for the occasion, was duly thrown and slain on the doomstone, and the priest, who had been at the morning council, proclaimed that from what he could see in the horse's inside, the late period of depression had ended, and much prosperity was in store. Then the slaves came forward and took away the body, and cleaned away the mess.

And then King Redwald mounted the doomstone, and addressed his people. A sturdy man was Redwald, beardless and broad-faced, with small mouth and determined lip, straight-nosed and low-browed, with eyes keen and restless and rather close together,—not a bad-looking man by any means, not so king-like as he might have been, perhaps, but shrewd and capable, and bearing himself well, as with his hand on his sword he stood there, well-knit and heavily built, with the sunshine glinting off the rings of his armour, and blazing on the broad gold ring round the helm, from beneath which straggled and moved in the breeze his long, grey-streaked sandy hair, and above which rose the eagle's pinions that told of his descent from Odin.

We need not give the king's speech, although it was of a much more stirring kind than its emasculated development. The business before the nation was mainly this of King Ethelfrith's demand; and, touching on Ethelbert's death and Eadwald's return to the old faith, and foreign matters generally, Redwald gradually worked round to the greatness of the East English in performance and promise, and his earnest desire that they would support him in resisting the unheard-of pressure of the Northumbrians, in declining flatly to surrender Edwin, and in marching

with all their strength to send Ethelfrith flying over the Firth of Forth, and place the son of Ælla on the northern throne

An eloquent man was Redwald, and a politic. Years afterwards, when he became a Christian, and found that his people were not enthusiastic in the matter, he fitted his temples with Christian and Pagan altars side by side, so that the worshippers could take their choice. Thus did he solve the religious difficulty in a way that kept things quiet during his life, though it by no means commended itself to his descendants. All his troubles he soon surmounted. He always had his way, and he had his way now. As soon as he had ended, there rose such a tempest, as the swords thundered on the shields, as he had never heard before, and told him that he had done wisely in heeding his wife and saving his honour.

None of the *Seafowl* people took part in the gemot. Fridgar was in charge of the ship, and Godwulf had been down to see about some matters of provisioning, and, having been longer than he expected, did not get back until it was too late. Cryda and Gualla were on the hull as spectators only. Wilfrid, who, like his friend, had not yet been received into Agelbert's ban, had stayed away, as 'there was nothing worth seeing'. And Lilla and Eric were busy about one of the boats that they were bringing up for some special service required by Agelbert.

While the gemot was on, nearly the whole town had turned out to join the pageant, or to watch it. About the time Redwald was beginning his speech, Lilla and Eric came rowing up the river in their boat; and, knowing it would not be wanted for an hour, they rowed on past the ford, and between the banks with the fringe

of trees that lay beyond Edwin's house. Passing farther up stream, they came to a bend in the river, and there for a time they rested and looked about them. Thinking they had idled enough, they turned the boat's head, and, taking things easily, drifted along with the current.

As they came round the bend, Lilla noticed the stern of another boat sticking out of the bank under the trees

'Was that boat there when we came past?'

'No,' said Eric. 'I am sure it wasn't.'

'It is a funny spot for a boat to be run into. What does it mean?'

'Don't know; but the boat, as far as I can see, is the one that was towing astern of the *Westerfalcon*, that came in last night.'

'Are you sure?'

'I'll swear to the cut of that stern.'

'Where does the *Westerfalcon* hail from?'

'I did not hear. From Ugly Island, I should think, to judge from the faces of her crew. I never saw such a set of ruffians, even in Italy.'

'What do the ruffians want up here, then?' asked Lilla. 'They must have followed us. Suppose we run in for a few minutes, and watch.'

And their boat was run ashore about fifty yards above the other. The bank was cut back a trifle, so that Lilla let her swing round out of sight of the craft below.

Standing up, after a cautious survey, they found that the boat had been left to take care of itself, and that a man was on guard just on the fringe of the field, while two others were on their way to the house. The three men were fully armed, and one of those just nearing the door wore the eagle wings.

'Three men come in the boat,' said Lilla, 'and one left on guard to keep the retreat open.' What does that mean ?'

'It means mischief,' said Eric, giving his byrnie a tug and looking down at his sword, so as to be ready for emergencies.

'Who lives in that house ?'

'No friend to Westerfalcon.'

'Is that Westerfalcon ?'

'I think so ; but I am not sure. I only saw his back for a minute yesterday, and that looks very like it.'

The two men disappeared into the house. Suddenly a stifled shriek was heard. Westerfalcon—for Eric was right—came hurrying out of the door with a boy in his arms and a woman clinging to his waist.

As he stepped to the ground, he freed his right hand for an instant, and with his clenched fist knocked the woman senseless. Behind came his companion with a smaller child, wrapped in a cloak to smother its screaming, and held by the back as if it were a rat. Hurriedly they ran down the field to their companion, the boy in the leader's grasp struggling to be free. A few yards from the stone on which Edwin had sat, he got his mouth clear, and at the top of his voice gave a shrill shout of—

'Help ! help !'

In clutching at him more firmly, Westerfalcon stumbled over the stone, and the little fellow for a moment escaped his grasp. Instantly recovering himself, the man turned in pursuit, and in a few strides caught him again.

'Come !' said Lilla ; 'we can't be wrong.'

'Three to two. I'll go for the guard. You take the man with the bundle ; and Westerfalcon will have to let his laddie slip.'

A shout from the man with the bundle told the guard of his danger. Turning, he was only just in time to meet Eric's attack. At the same moment the bundle was brutally thrown forward towards the boat, reckless of the child within. Luckily it fell on a bush softly, as if on a feather bed, as it hooked on a bough and hung, swaying a foot from the ground.

The plan of attack proved a failure. As he heard the shout, Westerfalcon turned, let go his boy, and, sword in hand, in an instant faced Lilla, while Eric found the two men left for him to deal with at the same moment. A man used to emergencies was the north-countryman. Feinting at the guard's sword-arm, and giving him a chance too quickly for it to be taken, the old warrior brought his blade full force on his enemy's helmet and knocked him limp and senseless to the ground. With the return swing of his sword he was ready for the second foe.

And then began a desperate fight between the two old men-at-arms, apt at every cut and guard, skilled in every trick of fence, with sinews and muscles of iron, and each blessed with that wondrous power of arm and shoulder derived from constant rowing and sailing. Sword clashed on shield, and shield met sword, and each held good, though each rang sullenly, as if it could bear no further blow.

And if Eric found his work cut out for him, so did Lilla. He was but a young hand compared with the man who now attacked him. With a concentrated fury that almost drove him to the ground, Westerfalcon rained blow upon blow on his youthful antagonist. But every blow was met, and sword and shield held good.

An evil face had Westerfalcon. It was regular, and it had once been even beautiful,—an evil beauty that repels rather than attracts; a beauty that a man hates in spite of himself, and feels uneasy with himself for hating, because he can give no reason for being in the right. It was a perfect contrast to the face of Edwin—one lined with nobleness, the other lined with depravity, both faces telling the same old story of how a man's inner life moulds his features; of how indulgence becomes habit, and habit nature, and the face becomes a gauzy mask with the true character showing through.

As blow after blow was parried or met, Westerfalcon grew more and more angry. Every minute he was detained fighting here under the trees decreased his chance of escape. The boy had fled, running full speed towards the road and shouting his shrill cry for help. Lilla saw his advantage, and fought purely on the defensive. Once only did he take advantage of an opportunity, and, striking in, delivered a blow on the adversary's helmet that sheared off one of the eagle wings, and shook his foe severely. It did not cut through the steel, but it deeply dented it.

The clash of arms and the shouts of the boy eventually brought assistance. Wilfrid, the miserable, doing nothing but growl at the heat of the weather, came sauntering down the hill to the river, away from the assembly.

'I don't see the use of these things,' said he to himself. 'They are fine old customs, but they are all cut and dried beforehand. The earls know what they are going to do, and we shall know soon enough.'

And pondering thus, he was passing the door of his lodging. Suddenly he heard the sound of the steel, and, pricking up his ears like an old warhorse, he rushed in,

seized his axe and shield, and set off to inquire into the noise, which every now and then seemed closer, as the breeze rose and fell. Coming round the low wall, he caught sight of his two friends in difficulties ; Lilla barely



withstanding the gigantic Westerfalcon, and Eric evenly matched with the one foe, while the other was returning to consciousness.

• A sluggish man Wilfrid was not. He bounded across the field like a greyhound as he saw the fellow at Eric's

feet was fully awake and ready for attack. The man rose as Wilfrid neared him. Eric would be cut down from behind before he could reach him. The enemy's blade was already in the air, when Wilfrid, swinging his axe as he came, flung it six yards ahead. It hit the man full in his face, and, crashing into his head, laid him lifeless. It was only just in time. The sword descended and just grazed Eric's shoulder. Instantly his other adversary took advantage of the diversion, and slashed the north-countryman badly near the ear. It was his last stroke. As it fell, Eric was himself again, and, heedless of his ear, he brought his blade down full on the man's helmet, and, cutting through leather cap and steel band, cleft him to the chin. As his friends fell, Westerfalcon at last broke down Lilla's guard, and, splitting his shield, reached his head. Lilla staggered to his knee, but, before the huge Viking could strike again, Wilfrid and Eric were upon him. Eric, wearied with his wounds and weak from loss of blood, was behind. As Wilfrid closed, he came up, and for the first time caught sight of Westerfalcon's face. He started, turned pale, and flushed.

'By Thor, I know thee!' he gasped. 'Stand back, Wilfrid! this is my matter!'

But as he raised his sword he swooned; and Westerfalcon, feigning a retreat, leapt past Wilfrid, and, running to the boat, was in an instant off into mid-stream, and rowing full speed towards the sea.

Wilfrid stood doubtful what to do. Should he look after Lilla, or Eric, or the men who seemed to be dead, or should he follow him with the single eagle's wing? The man who hesitates is lost, and Wilfrid did nothing. He stood looking first at one, then at the other. Soon,

however, he was recalled to himself by the little boy who had shouted for his help, and had remained at a safe distance watching the fight.

The manly six-year-old came running across the field to him.

‘That’s my brother.’

‘Which?’ said Wilfrid.

‘That,’ said the little fellow, pointing to the bush on which the bundle still hung, and from which some feeble sobbing was audible.

Wilfrid found his senses immediately. Seizing the bundle, he untied it, and bound with a scarf was a little fellow of four crying quietly to himself

As soon as he found he was with friends, he dried his eyes with his fist and sobbed out,—

‘All’—sob—‘right’—sob—‘Osfrid!’

‘Osfrid!’ said Wilfrid. ‘Who then are you?’

‘I am Osfrid, the son of Edwin, the son of Ælla, and this is my brother Egfrid.’

‘Then,’ said Lilla, who was just recovering himself, ‘you had better take the boys to their father.’

‘No,’ said Osfrid. ‘It was you who saved me—you and that man. You must take me; and you,’—and the little fellow seemed to command as if born to it,—‘you can come with them and say how you saved your friends who saved us.’

Meanwhile the alarm had been given, and, now the fight was over, some women and old men came hurrying across the field. And a messenger had gone off straight to Edwin to tell him of the attempt to rob him of his children.

The women had hardly reached the scene of the fight

before Yarl Godwulf was noticed coming along the road. Osfrid ran off to call him, and he soon joined the group.

'No good looking at you, youngster,' said he to Egfrid. 'You must keep. How are you, Lilla? Let me look at your head. H'm! hard knock, bad bruise; no skin broken; you'll soon be well. Now, Eric! What! Gone?'

'No, good yarl,' said Wilfrid. 'He has lost much blood from the last cut.'

The yarl undid the helmet as gently as if he were handling a child. Then he looked keenly at the wound, and satisfied himself it was not dangerous. And then he handed over his charge to the women, under whose superintendence Eric was carried up into the house.

Then he walked up to the two Westerfalcon men, and listened to what Lilla and Wilfrid told him as he looked them over. The two boys, who had gone in with Eric, now came back, bringing their father and Earl Agelbert.

'That's Lilla,' said Osfrid. 'He fought the big fellow that had me! And that's Wilfrid, who threw the axe! And that's the wing that Lilla cut off! And that's the brute that wrapped up Egfrid and threw him into the bush.'

'Yarl Godwulf, thou should'st be proud of thy men! Lilla, I thank thee for thy thought and bravery. Wilfrid, I thank thee.'

And with a cordial handshake Edwin invited our friends to follow him, and, giving orders to have the bodies removed, he led the way up the field.

'Is this the work of Ethelfrith or of Westerfalcon?' asked the yarl.

'I should say of Westerfalcon, who thought by it to please his master.'

'Then be it my task to follow this Westerfalcon!'

'Not yet. We will go to King Redwald. Look, there is Rainer come!'

And the king's son, a warrior of six feet six in height, came striding to meet them.

The greeting was cordial, and the questions sincere. There was a true ring in Rainer's voice that showed the firm friend. With him there was none of his father's shiftiness. He had his mother's looks, and his mother's spirit.

'This is a plot of Ethelfrith's,' he said.

'No,' said Edwin. 'I am loth to believe it!'

'The king is coming. He will think with me.'

And Redwald's approach was announced.

'This is Ethelfrith's work!' said Rainer, as soon as they had told the king.

'No, no, my boy,' said his father. 'It is a nothing's work, and better say it is this Westerfalcon's. Who is this Westerfalcon? The envoys have gone, but they said they knew him not, except as having been the pest of the west coasts for the last twenty years.'

'Let mine be the task to chase him,' said Godwulf.

'Not yet,' said Redwald. 'You are wanted for worthier work. When that is ended we will see what can be done.'



CHAPTER VIII.

SPURN HEAD AND RETFORD.



THE 'worthier work' was to take command of five ships, and with them guard the Humber so as to prevent Northumbrian vessels passing south.

'You are to fight all comers,' said King Redwald 'We trust to you to keep our land from attack by sea. Should you come up with this West-falcon, you can do

your best to bring him to me, and if he resists you can slay him; but you must not leave our coasts in peril for the sake of chasing him.'

Godwulf received his instructions at four o'clock, and

at five he was on his way to the *Seafowl*, accompanied by Lilla, Gualla—who begged so hard to go that he had not the heart to refuse—and Eric.

‘He cannot be moved,’ said Edwin.

‘He will soon get well on board ship,’ said the yarl, ‘the sea breeze will be life to his nostrils. We can drop down by boat, and the moving will not hurt him.’

And so with many farewells and good wishes the boat pushed out into the stream.

‘Now, boys, give way!’

And the boat flew through the water.

Fridgar saw her coming from afar. Before she was alongside he had everything ready to cast off. An hour or so before he had noticed the *Westerfalcon’s* boat go past, and with his great blue eyes had placidly watched the ship slip out to sea. It is not too much to say that there was not a plank or a rope to be seen about her that he would not recognise any time thereafter for the next seven years.

When the yarl came on board, he reported what he had seen, and astonished Godwulf by remarking that the *Westerfalcon* was an old acquaintance.

‘Are you sure you have seen her before?’

‘Ay!’ said Fridgar. ‘She is the ship that lost us in the fog.’

‘That may be,’ said the yarl; ‘but I do not see how it can help us.’

And when the *Seafowl* was well under way, he went forward to Eric, who was in charge of Gualla, and asked him what he knew of the man or the ship.

• ‘Is this man’s name *Westerfalcon*? Did he give his name to the ship, or did the ship give her name to him?’

'The ship must have given him her name.'

'Why?'

'His name is Eomer.'

'Eomer! What, your Eomer?'

'I knew him when he faced me.'

'What right has he to the eagle wings?'

'None that I know of. Lilla took one from him, and I'll take the other!'

'Take care of yourself; and the sooner you are well the better I shall like it.'

And the yarl walked away.

The *Seafowl* cruised off the north coast of Norfolk, and there waited for her consorts, who all joined within the week. And then, with his full strength, Godwulf kept the sea between the Humber and the Wash. The time passed, and Eric grew well, and all were eager for battle. Eric had no scruple about fighting against his countrymen. Was not his enemy the friend of the enemy of Edwin? Ships arrived from Redwald with messages and provisions, but the orders remained unchanged. As more danger was to be found in the north than the south, it may as well be said at once that nearly all the yarl's attention was levcted to what is now the coast of Lincolnshire. And his constant watch was eventually rewarded.

One grey morning, when the *Seafowl* was off Spurn Head, Gualla, who had been placed on the look-out, sighted six sail to the northward. The yarl instantly wore, and signalled up his consorts; and then the squadron rounded the Head, and, standing out to sea, cut off the advance of the enemy. Bringing his ships into line, Godwulf offered battle; and the challenge was not declined.

The enemy had six ships ; and one of these, as Fridgar announced, was the *Westerfalcon*. Let it not be supposed that Ethelfrith had instigated the attempt to kidnap the sons of Edwin. That enterprise had been conceived and carried out by *Westerfalcon* at his own risk. He saw the chance of a ransom from either Redwald or Ethelfrith, and had deliberately followed the Northumbrian envoys with the intention of seizing the children. For years he had been the terror of the Irish Sea, now acting on behalf of his native Wessex, now, and more often, acting for himself. Familiar with every form of outrage and rapine, he had quailed at nothing ; and there is no blacker name in the black book of early piracy than that of *Westerfalcon*. By assuming the name, he had concealed his identity with the unscrupulous Eomer, who years before had been the scourge of the eastern coast. Owner of one of the best ships that ever ploughed the sea,—a ship obtained on the principle of the survival of the fittest, by rejecting his own vessel for his prize, whenever his prize happened to be superior,—he had bidden defiance to his pursuers, and until now escaped unscathed.

As soon as he failed in his last attempt, he had fled to his ship ; and before any orders were given to arrest him he was safely out of sight. Steering north, he had sailed to Bamborough, and there reported to Ethelfrith what he had done. The Northumbrian king was strictly logical. As he slew the monks for praying against him, so he rewarded *Westerfalcon* for acting against his enemies. ‘He who is against my foe is with me,’ was his motto, and, though the brave old monarch held the man in abhorrence, he availed himself of his services, and, putting a few ships under his command, despatched

him to create a diversion on Redwald's coast. And Westerfalcon was on his way there when Godwulf met him.

On neither side was there a thought of shirking the battle. It was now bright and sunny, and white in the sun the lazy gulls skimmed the restless waves. Bowling along under the eastern breeze, the fleets approached each other. The enemy's line consisted of five ships sailing nearly level, with the *Westerfalcon* by herself in the rear. Godwulf's line consisted of his four ships, the *Swallow*, the *Seahorse*, the *Swan*, and the *Swordfish*, and the *Seafowl* in reserve. The sea was too rough to admit of the sweeps being used, and they lay stored amidships on the crutch. The fight was to be fought under sail. When within a couple of miles of the Northumbrians, the yarl boarded each of his ships in turn and gave his final orders, and it was only when close to the enemy that the *Seafowl* dropped into her station.

The enemy's attack soon developed itself. His ships all headed up, hoping to strike each of Godwulf's vessels on the port bow, leaving *Westerfalcon* at liberty to help which he pleased. He had reckoned without his host, for the yarl's first and third ships, the *Swan* and the *Swallow*, suddenly shortened sail, and the second and fourth went on alone, so as to give the Northumbrians a broadside of arrows as they passed. The *Westerfalcon* and her cover were thus left out in the cold, for the *Swan* and *Swallow*, instead of following the *Swordfish* and *Seahorse*, diverged right and left, and grappled the flanking ships; while the *Seafowl*, steered by Fridgar, shot up to windward as if bewitched, and as she fell off again fastened on to the *Osprey*, the outside Northumbrian, already

grappled by the *Swan*. 'All hands to board!' roared Godwulf, so as to be heard on both ships; and in an instant the unfortunate Northumbrians were assailed furiously on both sides. Dodda led the attack from the *Swan*, Godwulf led that from the *Seafowl*, and so irresistible was the double onset that before rescue could come the north-countrymen had surrendered,—that is to say, what was left of them, for of her fifty men only three were unwounded.

A remarkably quick piece of business was this capture of the *Osprey*, and a fortunate one, as it proved. For Westerfalcon, hoping the resistance would be stubborn, had brought up all his ships to attack the *Swan*. At full speed he steered straight for Dodda, his second ship, the *Petrel*, leading the way. Dodda was equal to the occasion. Slackening off the grapnels, he threw his mainsail aback, and the *Osprey*, forging in front, was rammed full on the starboard bow by the *Petrel*. The crash was terrific; a hole was knocked in her from her rail to her water-line; and, filling like a bath, she sank with all on board, except the prize crew, who swarmed in over the *Petrel's* bow as the *Seafowl* men boarded her on the one side and the *Swan* men on the other. Tough was the fight and wild the shouts, as the Petrels stood stoutly to their arms. The ships rolled and pitched in the seaway, and inch by inch of the heaving, never-resting deck was fought over. The Northumbrians had been in the bow ready to leap on the *Osprey*, and there the struggle was keenest. And every detail of the fight could be seen from all the ships, for in those days there was no powder smoke to spread its veil of mystery; and the only sound was the ring of the steel, the thud of the wood, and

the rattle and groan as the vessels ground against each other.

Godwulf's fleet had all come round on the other tack, so that he now held the northern position. Westerfalcon had been completely surprised. For twenty years his white falcon on the black field had been the terror of all he met; and when of the four advancing ships two suddenly shortened sail, he attributed their manœuvre to hesitation. He thought he would have an easy prey. Great was his confusion when they almost instantly steered straight for the outside vessels which their comrades had passed. As the *Swan* bore up, and the *Seafowl* shot round almost in the wind's eye, he discovered Godwulf's plan; he saw that by taking his weakest ship the fight would be equalized, and he saw that he had lost all the advantage of his odds and position. Great was his chagrin when the *Osprey* was captured before he could get to her rescue, and when she was deliberately sacrificed to the *Petrel*, the anger at the audacity of the men who presumed to fight him became tinged with the fear that he had found his master.

As he went about with his four remaining ships,—for the fifth had been securely grappled by the *Swallow*, and with her was fighting a duel to the death,—he found that the *Swordfish* and *Seahorse* had also tacked, and, closing up by the *Swan*, would soon be in line with her. Taking advantage of his opportunity, he slipped along to the stern of the *Petrel*, and, with his followers at his stern in like manner, gave the yarl's three ships a tremendous raking fire of arrows and javelins.

The effect was not in proportion to the effort. The ships came on, and the *Seahorse* headed for his bows.



'THE LOOK HAS TURNED!'

For the first time since the battle began he felt easy. Ship to ship he feared no one, but handling a fleet was a different matter. He was conscious of being out-manceuvred, and, what was fatal to his success, he did not trust his friends. It was therefore with a sigh of relief that he saw the *Seahorse* steer down on him. He was destined to be disappointed. Suddenly she lost her mast and swung on to his leading ship.

‘The luck has turned!’ said he.

But, when the *Seahorse* men leapt on the *Petrel’s* deck, swept the last Northumbrians into the sea, and came storming over his bows, while the *Seafowl* forged down on his starboard side, and the *Swordfish* came crashing into his port quarter, it became apparent to him that the yarl with the black and red diagonal did not fight as other men. Fortunately for him, he kept off the claws. In vain Godwulf tried all he could to grapple the *Westerfalcon*. There was nothing left unprotected for him to fasten on.

Meanwhile the other Northumbrian ships had not been idle. The *Griffin*, following the *Westerfalcon*, had dropped off and engaged the *Swordfish*, which had been just as unsuccessful with the grapplings, while the *Bear* had come up to windward of the *Westerfalcon* and was edging in between her and the *Seafowl*. As the ships of the leaders rolled apart in the rising sea, she slipped in between them, and, lashing her to the *Seafowl*, her men scrambled on to Godwulf’s deck.

And then for a time raged a struggle to which what had gone before was mere child’s play. The attack from the *Petrel* on the *Westerfalcon’s* bows had failed, the stormers had been driven back, and the ships were clear.

The *Seahorse*, with her mast gone by the board, could do little in the growing storm, and had drifted to leeward. The *Swan* also had suffered much from the *Petrel* men, and the *Swallow* and *Swordfish* were still engaged in their duels, though both were prospering. Godwulf had thus to deal not only with the *Bear* but with the *Westerfalcon*. And splendidly did the Northumbrian crews do their duty.

For a time they cleared a part of the *Seafowl's* deck, but the yarl at the head of his men stayed the tide, and axe in hand drove them steadily back. By his side fought Eric, strong and ruthless as ever. On his left Lilla bore the brunt, and, stronger and more skilled than formerly, proved himself a terrible foe. On to the *Bear* came the *Westerfalcon* men to help their comrades, and every inch forwards proved harder for Godwulf to win. But forwards he went.

The end seemed long in coming; though if he could but last, there was no doubt what the end would be. The cheers from the *Swallow* told of her victory; and she with her prize, and the *Swan* with her prize, and the *Seahorse*, would soon be at work helping the *Swordfish* and the *Seafowl*—the only two ships now in action.

Suddenly an axe hurled from the *Bear* cut through the *Seafowl's* weather shrouds, and at the same moment, with the heave of the sea and the pressure of a strong gust of wind, the mast snapped. Mast, sail, and tackle fell to leeward on to the *Bear*.

Fridgar saw the chance at a glance.

With a, 'Come on, lads! follow to board!' which was quite an oration for him, he cleared the bridge. Gualla, who, much to his disgust, had been stationed in the rear

with the silent Norseman, was after him, and with him on board the *Bear*, almost before he finished his speech. Three others followed. The Northumbrians, pressed in front and suddenly attacked in flank, gave way. Westerfalcon, hearing the shouts of victory from the *Swordfish*, and seeing the fight was hopeless, called his own men on board and sheered off, leaving the *Bear* to her fate. An endeavour was made to stop him as he bore round to the north, but it was in vain; to follow there was against orders, and it was useless. The *Seafowl* was mastless, and the rest of the fleet had nothing like the speed of the flagship. And so Westerfalcon got clear away.

He was still in sight, reaching swiftly northward, when a sail was sighted to the south. Then another, then another, came into view. In half an hour the first ship was alongside. She was a warship, and her consorts were laden with stores and provisions. She had come as a reinforcement, and bore orders from King Redwald for Godwulf to take his squadron up the Humber and down the Trent, so as to protect the right flank of the army then on the march for Deira.

The fleet was soon busy burying the dead and repairing damages. The result of the action had been the sinking of one ship and the capture of four. The *Osprey* had gone down with all hands, and only three were saved out of her crew, but with the other ships the case was different. In the four—the *Petrel*, the *Bear*, the *Griffin*, and the *Eagle*—there were some eighty prisoners, all trained men and all Northumbrians. For Westerfalcon had throughout the fight kept his own ship and crew as much out of danger as he could. His intention had evidently been to let Ethelfrith's ships do the dirty

work, while he secured the prizes. At least this is what Godwulf told the prisoners, as he went from ship to ship and gave them the option of fighting for Edwin—an invitation which they all accepted. And when the yarl was under way again, steering westward into the Humber mouth, he was leading a fleet of twelve ships, whose crews amounted to two hundred and seventy men-at-arms, a true naval brigade available for service on sea or land. To the Trent mouth the fleet sailed, and then, when the river was entered and the southerly course begun, the twenty-foot oars were got out. And here, steadily stroking past the Isle of Axholme, we will leave the *Seafowl* and her brood, while we take up the story of King Redwald's advance.

Redwald's preparations were leisurely and complete. He knew he had no light task before him, and he had left not a stone unturned to ensure his success. Bearding the northern lion was a risky business, and he knew it.

Edwin's proclamation that he was marching to fight for his father's crown had a wonderful effect. For years Ethelfrith had been the terror of the land, and all his neighbours were glad to anticipate his downfall. And as the army went north, volunteers for Edwin came pouring in, so that he was soon at the head of a little army of his own. What with Redwald's men and Edwin's men, there was, however, not anything like so numerous a force as that which, to their surprise, they found posted in their path not far from Retford. For old Ethelfrith had resolved to anticipate their coming, and at the head of his men was in full march to the south when they came upon his camp by the banks of the river Idle. The surprise was mutual, and that evening the armies remained facing each

other. In the morning the men were awake by the dawn, and as the sun rose the signal for advance was given, and there began the most important battle in England since that between Ceawlin and Ethelbert at Wimbledon.

King Redwald led his centre in person ; Rainer, his tall son, led the right wing ; Edwin led the left. In Edwin's ban was Earl Agelbert, with whom, of course, had come Cryda and Wilfrid. The battle took place among the marshes—the ground flat, and fringed and dotted with osiers, with here and there a little knoll like an island in the waste.

'Nasty field for a fight,' said one of our old friends, it need not be said which. 'We shall get up to our necks in mud and blood.'

'Well, do your best to keep out of the mire. Pick your way.'

'How can you pick your way? We shall have to go straight as we are told. And just look !'

• The prospect was not a pleasing one. In front of them was a small brook, with a marsh on each side of it, which was now being churned into thick black gruel.

'I don't think it will last long !' said Cryda.

But it did. It lasted all the morning. The men were drawn up in such a morass, and fought steadily in it, and it was not until noon that they reached solid ground.

The fierce Northerner was not the man to wait for his foe. As Redwald's men started across the swamp, he was on his way to meet them. His host came on in two divisions, and he led the left. And he was actually the first to strike the first blow.

• A grand figure was this fine old man of seventy. In his lifetime he had thrashed the Scots and Welsh so

bitterly that they waited for his death before they dared utter a sound. King Aidan had withstood him in vain at Degsæstan, and King Cadvan's army had been shivered like glass at Chester, and neither king in his wildest moments cared again to face King Ethelfrith. Fearless and fierce, he welcomed death as his guide to the halls of the blest, and he longed to die, not only with his armour on, but with his sword in the flesh of his defeated foe. Tall, spare, wiry, with even his face hard and sinewy, with only a few straggling hairs shining beneath his winged helmet—hairs, like those of his long thin moustache, as white as snow—he seemed the very spirit of cruel war, heedless of everything but the victory. To him Mars was but a poor weak creature who had mistaken his profession. A god of war, forsooth! A mere Italian tinkler, whom the Northumbrian would have gripped in his left hand, shaken like a rat, and contemptuously flung lifeless behind him.

What a job Rainer had can be realized, as the wild wedge moved down on him. All that man could do he did. Seeing the king at the point of the Northumbrian phalanx, he took up his station to meet him, and boldly faced his fate. It was not long in coming. The old man leapt like a tiger on him. He defended himself with his shield, and cut back—a mighty cut that sliced off a quarter of the shield that met it, cut through the shoulder steel, and was only stopped by the leather. But in some marvellous way, quicker than ever he had seen before, or "was to see again, Ethelfrith grasped his axe, swung it up to his right, to his left, to his head, and, before he could come to the guard, sent it shearing through his helmet and his skull; and Rainer knew nothing of this world.

On Redwald's left things went differently. There Edwin headed his men, and solidly led them on to victory. There was none of the lightning strength of King Ethelfrith, but the advance was just as sure. Stubbornly every yard was fought, and doggedly was Oswald driven back. Retford battle was like many



battles, the opposite wings met opposite fates, and the fight swung round the centre. In one respect, however, Retford was a battle by itself. Ethelfrith not only drove back his enemy's right, but he ground it to powder, and then he turned to demolish his rival Edwin, who, proud of his victory, had come to challenge him.

How he would have fared none can say. It is pleasantest to assume that he would have won. Perhaps he would; perhaps he would not. At any rate, he had no chance to try. For, as Ethelfrith turned on him, there was a cry in the east, and from out of the osiers marched Yarl Godwulf and his Vikings.

Ethelfrith, supposing he had to deal with the vanguard of a numerous army, turned to bay, and, cheering on his men, attempted to serve Godwulf as he had done Rainer. Alas! The yarl eyed him as he might do a madman—watchful of every moment, alert, confident, cool; with all that Ethelfrith had and more. Both were pagans, both lived and died pagans, but what a difference! The old man sprang, and was caught on the shield; the axe gleamed, but its handle was shattered; the sword was drawn and swung in the air; and then, with an up cut of the battle-axe, the king's wrist was shorn off, and with the down cut his head fell from his neck, and the trunk followed it to the ground.

Into the wedge the yarl rushed like a devouring flame. Edwin was attacked furiously on all sides, to slay him before his friends could help. Godwulf fought through the throng to his side. Fridgar, the personification of athletic stolidity, widened the path through the purpling mud. Lilla and Gualla, with the battle fever full on them, forced onwards their way; and Eric glowed in fierce delight as his countrymen went down.

Long had the slaughter lasted; for the seven sons of Ethelfrith were of their father's spirit, and all were in the fight. Redwald had brought his own men, sorely shaken by the first charge, again together, and led them into the thick of the battle with a vigour and a valour

that were worthy of the over-lord of the English. Foot by foot the field was won from the Northerners.

Suddenly, above the uproar of the fight, came the sound of a mighty voice.

‘Ethelfrith, the son of Ethelric, is dead ! Behold his head ! There is now no king but Edwin !’

And on the point of a javelin there was lifted up, with the silver hairs dank and slimy beneath the golden circlet from which rose the draggled eagle-wings, the head of the fiercest of the English kings who held the faith of Odin.

Sulkily the strife ceased And on a shield, borne shoulder-high, the son of Ælla was carried to a neighbouring knoll, and there, led by Redwald, the cheers broke forth.

‘ All hail, King Edwin !’



CHAPTER IX.

THE CHASE OF THE 'WESTERFALCON.'



And so Edwin became king of Northumbria, and there was none left to dispute with him, for the seven sons of Ethelfrith—Oswald, Oswine, Oslac, Oswid, Ossa, Offa, and Oswy—all fled into the land of the Scots, where they all became Christians. For the Scots, like the Welsh, held the Latin faith as originally brought to Britain by the Legionaries.

King Edwin and King Redwald marched to York, and thence to Bamborough, Sir Lancelot's Joyous Gard, which had been the capital of the north ever since it had fallen to Ida the Flamebearer. On the battlefield Yarl Godwulf had been thanked for the service he had done, and King Edwin had asked him and his people to become his men.

'I will give you what lands you will,' said Edwin, 'for such brave hearts are a kingdom's wealth. The Northumbers will be proud to find you with them'

'And I, King Edwin, will be proud to join them. Never met I men who fought so well, nor any I can love better. It is said that the nearer the north the truer is the gold, and of a truth I think it is so. But I have another task before I go to Norway to bring my folk to their new home.'

'And what is that, Yar! Godwulf?'



'To chase and slay this Westerfalcon, who wrought your sons such wrong, and who wrought a deeper wrong to him who helped to save your sons.'

'Is that so?' said King Edwin. 'We will talk of this to-night. Meanwhile, I hope that Eric and Lilla, who risked their lives for mine, will also dwell among us.'

'Eric is your man by birth,' said Godwulf; 'and he it is who seeketh Westerfalcon.'

'Then I will help him.'

'Lilla, as Cryda's son, had thought to serve King Redwald.'

'And so had Wilfrid,' said the king; 'but now he, like Cryda, follows me. Lilla, you will come with me and be my friend, and I will make you one of my trusted thanes.'

'I thank you, king,' said Lilla; 'but first, I pray you, let me be with Godwulf until we have found this Westerfalcon.'

'All for Westerfalcon!' laughed King Edwin. 'Be it so. But let us first to Bamborough. To-night, Yarl Godwulf, come to me, and tell me of Eric's wrong. Till then King Redwald claims you.'

That night Godwulf sat with the kings, and told them how Eric went to Rome; and it was arranged for Redwald to release Godwulf, Wilfrid, and Cryda and his sons from their recent promises, so that they could settle in the north. In the morning Godwulf and his men departed to Gainsborough to rejoin their ships, and begin their voyage to Bamborough, which they made without adventure. And Godwulf held Bamborough for Edwin until the army came.

The *Seafowl* was beached and thoroughly overhauled. Her hull was rubbed down, every damage was repaired, and a new mast stepped, and under the yarl's personal care she was made as good as new, or rather better, for she had been tried and seasoned.

With all due ceremony Lilla, then only eighteen, was made one of the king's thanes; and at the same time

Godwulf received his land, and Eric, Cryda, and Wilfrid became his men. And a few days afterwards King Edwin gave Godwulf his orders to chase the *Westerfalcon* from the seas.

And the *Seafowl* took in her stores, with her spare sails, and a great cargo of provisions, and everything for a long cruise. The vacancies in the crew had been filled up, for more than half had been killed in the recent battles, so that she started with twenty new men, all Northumbrians, and all as good as the Norsemen.

'I must come,' said Gualla.

'And so you shall,' said Godwulf.

In the early morning the king came to the harbour to see the *Seafowl* off. With him were several of his yarls. Godwulf was given his final orders, and with many good wishes and much cheering the little ship stroked out to sea. The course was laid to Conisborough, where Cryda and Wilfrid, who were on board as passengers, were to be landed, Wilfrid to take up his quarters, and Cryda to slup for the south and bring back his wife to the new home.

Conisborough was soon reached, and the latest news obtained of *Westerfalcon*, who was said to be cruising among the Farne Islands. Cryda bade farewell to his sons, and was on the beach with Wilfrid as the boats were putting off to the *Seafowl*. Wilfrid looked more miserable than ever.

'Well,' said the yarl, 'what is the matter now?'

'I feel so much better when I am at sea. Do you know, yarl, I would rather come with you than stay in this cheerful hole.'

'You would find it so crowded on board,' said Godwulf.

'I don't think I should mind that now.'

'You have work to do here.'

'But I work so much better when you are looking after me. Pray, let me come!'

'What say you, Fridgar? Shall we take him?'

'Ay!'

'Come on then,' said the yarl.

'Good-bye, Cryda.'

'You'll never come back.'

'Worse luck! I shall. I feel it. This is just the place to die in. Rana will never get me while Conisborough is Yarl Godwulf's.'

As Rana was the Norse Davy Jones, a laugh went round when the yarl replied,—

'Then I'll keep it till you growl again.'

And off for the Farnes went the *Seafowl* on the wings of the wind. There the news was that the ship had been sighted that morning bearing north-west. And north-west went Godwulf up to what is now the Firth of Forth.

Soon he got on the direct track, for at night a fire was sighted on the sea, which, when reached, proved to be a ship in flames. Sailing up to her, Godwulf was about to lower a boat to board, when Wilfrid, who had 'seen a fire before,' and was looking in the very opposite direction, suddenly shouted,—

'Sail ho!'

And there, coming down on the *Seafowl*, was another ship, either attracted by the fire or attracted by the quarry that the fire had snared. The wind was southerly, and the stranger was running before it at a tremendous pace.

Godwulf turned to look, and one glance sufficed.

'Westerfalcon!'

'Ay,' said Fridgar.

'All hands wear ship.'

Round went the *Seafowl*, and away to windward she went to meet the enemy. The men sprang to their arms. Making but a short leg to the coast, the yarl took the helm.

'Ready about,' said he, in his quiet, clear, bell-like voice, and he whipped her round without losing way for a moment, and on the starboard tack slipped her straight down on Westerfalcon's bows.

By the light of the fire he could see the black flag with its white falcon, and at the helm he recognised the man they sought. And by the same light the pirate recognised the *Seafowl*, with her black and red diagonal, and on her he saw Godwulf, who had beaten him off the Spurn, Eric, whom he had sold to slavery, Lilla, who had shorn off his eagle-wing; and Wilfrid, from whom he had run for his life; and with them a stalwart crew, equal to his in numbers, and man for man superior in skill. What was he to do? Only in one point did he excel, and that was in his ship. Hitherto none could live with her; not a vessel she had met but what she had outpaced. Why not then trust to his ship, and fly from those who evidently had come seeking his death? Conscience doth make cowards of us all, and though but little of his conscience was left, that little was just enough to make him try to escape. The ship in flames was a merchantman he had taken after a severe struggle, and many of his men were wounded. He had been waiting off and on, trusting that some other victim would be snared by the fire. And behold, the fire had brought the ship he dreaded most!

He had but little time to decide. Fortunately he was well obeyed. As the *Seafowl* came up, he put his helm

a-starboard, and dropped off so as to let Godwulf by without touching him. As the ships passed, a shower of arrows and javelins shot between, which, as always, did but little harm, owing to the shields. And there were shouts of derision and defiance, which hurt nobody.

Swiftly the *Seafowl* went round, and again made for the foe; but the *Westerfalcon*, flying before the wind, was now many lengths ahead, and instead of a battle there was to be a chase. All through that night did Godwulf carry on doing all he knew to close up the gap, but not an inch did he gain. All the next day he went with the southerly wind, and still in front of him was the *Westerfalcon*. The ships seemed chained together; one seemed to be towing the other with a mile of rope. The breeze fell, and in the light wind the *Westerfalcon* gained, but the next day the wind grew to a half gale, and the *Seafowl* held her. On went the chase to the north, unrelenting, unceasing, so close that even in the darkness the fugitive dared not change her course. But the pursuer neared not the pursued.

'The *Seafowl* has met her match,' said Gualla

'Yes,' said the yarl, 'before the wind. But if I mistake not he is going north about, and then you'll see!'

'But will you follow if he goes all round the northern isles?'

'Our orders are to catch him, and we'll catch him Twice before he got away, because I did not choose to follow. This is the third time, and either I have him or he has me.'

Round Duncansby and into the Pentland Firth went the *Westerfalcon*, and after her came the *Seafowl*, untiring and relentless. There was no shaking her off nor leading

her astray. And as the wind got more and more a-beam, the less became the gap between the ships!

Fate, however, seemed to fight against Godwulf. No sooner was Cape Wrath rounded in the night than the wind dropped, and when it rose again it was blowing from the north-west. In the morning the *Westerfalcon* was almost hull down as she flew through the Minch, but before sunset the *Seafowl* had almost regained what she had lost. The north-wester lasted for two days, and the chase led without incident down through the North Channel. Off the Mull of Cantyre the wind died out in the afternoon. A fog came on, which lasted for an hour, and when the flag began to float again the wind was in the south-west!

'Now we shall see!' said the yarl.

The rising wind cleared off the fog like magic, and the *Westerfalcon* was still in sight. Tack and tack went the ships into the Irish Sea, in the swiftly growing wind; and at every tack the *Seafowl* gained. But she was not quick enough. The darkness set in when it seemed as though the next board would bring her alongside, and in the darkness the *Westerfalcon* escaped.

During the night the storm grew; and in the morning Godwulf was off the Isle of Man, and there was no sign of the ship he had chased so keenly. In the gale and heavy sea all his skill was required to keep afloat; and, sighting a sheltered bay on the south-west of the island, he took the *Seafowl* into safety, resolving to keep a good look-out on the sea from the lofty cliff close by.

Lalla and Gualla were soon ashore, and on their way up to the look-out. It was a long pull, for the hill was steep; the cliffs a rugged wall broken into but little, and rising sheer from the sea for six or seven hundred feet.

When the top was reached they found in a shallow gully a small hut made of sods about a sword-length square—just such squares as the one Godwulf had cut from his own home and carried in the *Seafoal*, that wherever he went a piece of his native land might be with him. The hut was full of ropes, made of plaited horsehair and strips of salted cowhide, such as were used by the egg gatherers. But there was no living thing there, and no one was in sight on sea or land. No ship was to be seen.

Rather should it be said, 'at first no ship was to be seen.' For while they looked there drifted round the mighty buttress that bounded the bay beneath them a ship in distress.

Her mast had gone ; she lay a helpless wreck—all was in confusion ; but there was no mistaking her. She was the *Westerfalcon*

'Run, Gualla, run to the yarl, and tell him. She cannot get out of this '

Away went Gualla, and Lilla was left alone to watch the *Westerfalcon* drifting to her doom.

Soon he began to think of his own peril on the fjord, soon the thought of Sigmar stole over him. 'Give me a chance !' Up to now he had not done so badly. He had fought his way faithfully, and was now a king's thane, with a great future before him. He had had his chance ; why should not these men beneath him have theirs ? Their doom, without help, was certain. Against the wall of rock the ship would be crushed into splinters. Should he give some of them a chance of their lives ? From doubt he advanced to certainty. 'I will give them a chance !' But how ? Suddenly he remembered the ropes in the hut. He hastened there and pulled them out. He tried them and

tied them together. Rope after rope he knotted,—Carrick bend,—and then, hitching one end to a rocky pinnacle, he threw the other over the cliffs where the gully cut down into their height. There was no one near, but he knew that Gualla would soon bring some one along the cliff; and so, in full trust for his own safety, he let himself down the scarp hand under hand.

The wind was raging furiously, and again and again was he blown against the hard hackly face of the slippery rock, whose greys and purples shone deep in hue, varnished by the showering spray. It seemed to him as though he would never reach the bottom; and with every fathom he sunk his chance of return looked more hopeless. Bigger and bigger grew the waves, higher and higher flew the foam, as nearer them, with his tiring arms, he dropped, and dropped, and dropped. At last he reached his goal, a platform of rock, some six feet by three, against whose side the surge came thundering, and on whose surface swept a restless oily film of curded foam. As he reached it, there was a deafening crash above the wild roar of the wind and sea, and against the rocks around came all that was left of the *Westerfalcon* and her crew. In vain the bodies smote against the heartless stone.

Lilla, clinging to the rope, again and again was swept off his feet, as the waves rolled over his standing-place. At last a man was lifted on a crest, and knocked his legs from under him. The man seized him. With one hand he clutched him, held him, saved him. And then he looked at his face.

He had saved Eomer!



CHAPTER X.

THE TREACHERY AT EASTERTIDE.



GUALLA had lost no time in his down-hill run to Godwulf. He told the yarl how he had seen the ship, and the sort of place in which she was being driven to destruction.

‘Better bring a rope or two,’ said the yarl. ‘We may save something from her, if it is only that falcon flag he was so proud of.’

And so, each man taking a coil, Godwulf, Gualla, Eric, Wilfrid, and two of the men started up the hill. It was, as we have said,

long and steep, and the afternoon was closing in when

they reached the hut. Nothing could be seen of the ship. This was only what they expected, but they were surprised to find no sign of Lilla. What had become of him? Luckily Gualla remembered the ropes in the hut, and, going to look for them, found more than half of them gone.

Eric soon solved the mystery by noticing the rope round the rock, and tracing it down the gully, finding it lead down over the cliff. Throwing himself on his face, he tried to look to the end of the rope, but to him it seemed to hang in mid-air. The yarl soon proved that this could not be the case by trying to haul it in; and then another vain search was made right and left looking down to the sea.

At last Gualla offered a suggestion

‘Let me down by the other rope. If there is anything wrong I can but come up again, if Lilla is there you can pull him up. And if you leave one rope down till one of us comes back, we shall be safe’

So the rest of the fowling ropes were tied together, and these were knotted on to the ship’s ropes, and in a bowline Gualla was lowered, using the first rope as a guide. Down he went, looking straight at the rock for fear of dizziness.

It seemed an age to him before he reached the sea. At last he could restrain himself no longer, and, peeping between his legs, he saw on a ledge of rock a few feet below him his brother struggling for his life. Slowly the rope lowered. Suddenly it stopped. Was it too short? Was he never to get within reach of his brother? He shouted, and the only result was to make the struggle more desperate. There was he, six feet above his brother, and six hundred feet below his friends, and unable to help or signal. What could he do?

Suddenly the rope thrilled. It began to lengthen again. Slowly, very slowly, it dropped him to his brother's help. He stepped on the rock, and with one blow of his clenched fist on the temple knocked his enemy senseless. Instantly he seized him and hitched his rope over him. And he had only just finished when the rope tightened, and away aloft went the seemingly lifeless man.

Godwulf was at the edge of the cliff above. From the difference in the weight on the rope he knew that Gualla had either brought up some one with him, or else had sent up a heavy man. When slowly Westerfalcon rose into view, he was speechless with astonishment. For once he was at a loss what to do. His first impulse was to cut the rope and let the wretch drop into the sea. But the thought of the boys below, and of the peril Lilla had been in, checked his hand. Much against his inclination, he clutched the man whose touch he felt to be defilement, and, dragging him over the cliff edge, passed him on.

Wilfrid was the first to speak.

'Phew! All that blessed work for this!'

Then Eric looked at the face.

'Bind him! Keep him! And when he is well I will slay him!'

And so Westerfalcon was bound, his hands behind him back to back, thumb to thumb, little finger to little finger. And the rope was lowered, and after due interval Lilla appeared, almost too exhausted to speak.

As Godwulf was lowering the rope a third time, he found strength to say,—

'Gualla is on the other. Pull that.'

'I think not,' said the yarl. 'It is almost frayed away. We'll lower, and he can hang on to both.'

And Gualla was safely brought to the grass, as the last ray of the setting sun was quenched by the driving clouds.

Down the hill to the ship they went, thinking little of danger, but prepared for it should it come. And it did come !

As they reached the beach there swarmed down on them from the low woods around hundreds of the British soldiery. These, like all the Britons of those days, were armed in the Roman fashion, with Roman helmets, shields, and swords, drilled in the Roman manner, and with even the words of command in the Latin tongue. For Man was the Mona—not Anglesey—which was then the sacred seat of the Britons. There were two Monas, hence the strange mistake of Polydore Virgil in ‘combining his information.’

‘See what time can do,’ says he. ‘The island of Mona is now remote from the land twenty-four miles, which in old times was scarcely one mile distant from Anglesey, and joined on to Wales !’

The fight was short and sharp. Helped by Fridgar from the ship, the yarl cut his way safely through the Welsh. One of the first to be struck by a javelin was the prisoner, who seemed to be dying. There was no time to spare, as the enemies were thickly gathering round. And the retreat was continued to the *Seafowl*, and Westerfalcon was left for dead in the hands of the Britons, who pounced on him like so many hawks.

They carried him off in triumph, and, fortunately for him, he fell into the hands of the monks, who dressed his wounds, and with great difficulty revived him. On coming to himself, and finding amongst whom he had

fallen, he took in the situation at a glance. There was only one chance for his life. And he scrupled not to use it.

That he was an Englishman or a Norseman the monks could see, and he at once assured them that he was not a Christian, but would be glad to become one. The monks eagerly seized on the chance of making a convert to their peculiar order. He was 'converted' forthwith, and joined the community, and his companions were very proud of their convert, until one miserable morning he disappeared, bound, although they knew it not, for the mainland.

Godwulf had made sure he was dying, and treated him as dead, and all who were with him were of the same opinion, and so the *Seafowl* was soon under way beating out of the bay in the dying storm. The sea was terrific, but the good ship rode the waves like a cork, and safely bore those who trusted in her. No further incident marked the long voyage home round the Land's End. And on his return to Bamborough the yarl reported to King Edwin how the chase had ended, and Lilla told the king how when Westerfalcon recognised him on the rock he strove to strangle him, and how the long struggle was at last finished by Gualla.

'You have done well,' said the king, 'none could have done better. When we have beaten the Welshmen near us, we will go to this island, and you shall lead the way.'

Godwulf then went off to Norway with Gualla and Eric, and Lilla was ordered to attend the king, with whom he grew daily in favour. In the campaign against the British kingdom of Elmet, which then extended round Leeds, he bore a distinguished part, as he did in all the fighting that followed with the Scots and Welsh. And

when seven years afterwards Edwin went forth to welcome Ethelburga, Ethelbert's daughter, come to him from Kent to be his wife, he was one of those nearest the king. And glad was he to spy amongst her train his old friend Sibald, who was walking side by side with a tall, thin-faced man, who, he was told, was Paulinus, the Christian missionary, newly consecrated 'Bishop of the Northumbers,' come to minister to the queen, who belonged to the new faith.

A great man was this Paulinus, a born persuader of men; and it was not easy to persuade our northern forefathers. Instead of declaring that his opponents were all in the wrong, he began by admitting they might be in the right. For a time he did little but teach by example. To all that could be said for the old faith he listened, and to all that was said against his countrymen he assented.

'Yes,' said he. 'It is true your faith teaches you to recognise an over-ruling Providence. It is true you ought to honour women as superior beings, whereas our Mediterranean peoples treat them as toys and slaves. It is true you ought to shun immorality in a way many of our southerners believe to be impossible. It is true you ought to hate fraud and lies, while many of my countrymen rejoice in them. It is true you ought to reverence your word of honour, while we hardly know what it means, and require an oath to strengthen it. But'—

And there proved to be quite an unexpected force in the 'but.' Nevertheless for ten months Paulinus made not a single convert. It was not till Eastertide that his opportunity came. And he did not miss it.

There then was perpetrated one of the most dastardly crimes that disgraced our old English kings. Cwíhelm

of Wessex had become jealous of the growing power of Northumbria, which threatened to absorb all England. Edwin advanced from victory to victory unchecked, organizing and drilling into obedience as he went. The Welsh and the Scots, who, on the death of Ethelfrith, had thought their time had come to be busy again, found they had completely mistaken their man. By the battle of Chester Ethelfrith had carried the English possessions right across the island, and cut off Wales from Strathclyde; but the new territory was merely a conquest, and rather a source of weakness than of strength. Edwin seized on it with a grasp of iron, secured it for ever by capturing the isolated kingdom of Elmet, and proceeded to rule it. Each time his neighbours attempted to damage him, he simply enlarged his borders at their expense; and his enemies saw to their dismay that the more they troubled him the bigger he grew. Even the men of his own race began to fear for their independence.

Cwicheim resolved to rid himself of the danger by assassination—a suggestion, it is only fair to say, originally made to him by a certain Rigan, who, hating all things Northumbrian, had during the last few years wormed himself into his confidence. This Rigan was no other than Westerfalcon or Eomer, who, after his adventures in the Isle of Man, had made a new start under a new name. Being thorough in his work, he soon figured in the front. He was now in his sixtieth year, and every year he had thickened his crust of iniquity. Slowly and surely life had built up a character that shrank at nothing in the way of sin. It required a bold villain to carry out the plot, and he was just the man for the enterprise; and, with the aid of a strong guard of attendants and the cou-

nivance of the disaffected amongst the Northumbrians, who still thought of the house of Ethelfrith, it offered good promise of success.

At Eastertide 626, then, Edwin was by the banks of the Derwent, expecting no evil. With him were his two sons Osfrid and Egfrid—Osfrid now a well-grown lad of sixteen. With him also was Paulinus, in attendance on Queen Ethelburga, and among the company were many of our old friends, including Lilla in charge of the body-guard, Godwulf and his son Ulfrea; Fridgar, now a Northumbrian yarl; Guala, like his brother, one of the king's thanes; and Eric and Wilfrid, who had come on a message to Godwulf and were to return to Conisborough on the morrow. With them were Frodhera and several of the great men of the north, including a few who were in the plot and prepared for what was to happen.

It was a bright spring morning, just upon high noon, when a herald was announced, demanding immediate audience for messengers from King Cwicheim, who had come on matters of urgency that brooked not delay.

'We will hear them,' said the king.

And in a few minutes there came up from the river the chief ambassador, with four companions close at his heels, while a few more of the Wessex men were seen approaching at a little distance.

'Rigan, the son of Fridric' was introduced by the herald, and advanced to the king.

'I bring tidings to thee, O king, from my lord, King Cwicheim.'

Something in the voice, something in the face, something in the movements of the four men, caused Lilla to look at the ambassador.

‘And these be the tidings that I bring!’

Instantly he drew a two-edged dagger and leapt at the king. As the blade gleamed, Lalla, quick as the flash, threw himself before it. And the thrust was given, and the steel passed through the thane’s body, and its point, issuing from his back, gashed and drew blood from King Edwin as he fell beneath his faithful friend.

As the blow was dealt the Wessex men sprang at the king’s sons; and the plotters, supposing the king was killed, rushed into the fray. Frodhera dashed at the assassin, who withdrew the dagger and stabbed at him, and flung him aside as Lalla lay gasping in his death agony.

‘Eomer! Eomer!’

At the instant Eric recognised him. With a yell he flew at his foe, clutched him by the fleshy part of the dagger arm, and drove his seax through his throat. As the hilt squeezed into the flesh, Yarl Godwulf’s sword laid low the foremost Wessex man, and rose to strike again. Cwichehm’s friends would have fled when they saw the king had escaped. The seething crowd closed round them.

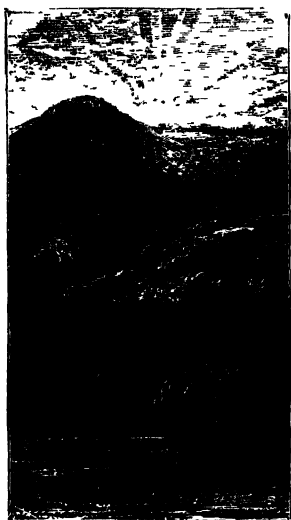
‘Mercy! in the name of Christ!’ shouted Paulnus.

‘Vengeance! in the name of Thor!’ roared Godwulf. And the men followed Godwulf.



CHAPTER XI

THE TRIUMPH OF PAULINUS.



NOT a man of King Cwiclelm's escaped.

The dagger had been poisoned. Edwin's escape had been marvellous. He owed his life to one of the noblest acts of self-sacrifice in history. 'Lilla, the king's thane,' had had his chance, and he now lives known to us all as having saved the life of one of the greatest of our kings.

That night Edwin had a daughter born to him; and he gave thanks to his gods. And Paulinus told him that he also had been worshipping, praying to the Lord Christ.

'O king, I have prayed to my God whom I serve, and He hath granted thee this child, and hath given thee the queen, thy wife, safe and sound'

And then Edwin told him that he was going forth against King Cwichelm, and if he returned in peace he would believe in the gospel

'And as for the babe that the queen, my wife, hath borne unto me, thou mayest baptize her as thou and her mother are baptized.'

And so on Whitsunday the baby, Eanfled, was baptized, with eleven of the king's household. And Edwin, marching south, defeated the men of Wessex, as he had defeated all the others who had opposed him

On his return he temporized. He left off the worship of Odin, but he did not become a Christian. Conversion was not a matter to be settled hastily, and he set himself earnestly to work to inquire into such matters. And to be free for a time from the bustle of his capital, he went to Conisborough.

There one night, as he sat in sight of the sea, there came from the shadow into the full light of the brilliant moon the tall figure of Paulinus. Swiftly the king's thoughts flew back to his night of peril with King Redwald. It was the same figure in the same cloak that had then vanished from before him. How blind he had been! It was the same aquiline face, with the same dark eyes glowing like the fire-coals. It was the same voice! Solemnly the bishop came to him, speaking not a word till he stood before him. Then, with his eyes burning deep into the king's, he said,—

'Verily, if such a man shall bring me out of my sorrows, and set me on my father's throne, I will believe him, and

trust him, and obey him in all things whatsoever he shall say unto me.'

Then, pausing but for an instant, he asked,—

'Knowest thou this sign?'

And he reached out his hand, and over the king's head he made the sign of the cross

Overcome by his thoughts and emotion, Edwin sank to his knees

'Be of good cheer,' said the bishop 'The Lord whom I serve hath delivered thee out of the hand of thy foes, and hath given thee the kingdom which thou didst desire. Bethink thee of thine own words, and do that which thou hast said.'

And so the king sent and gathered together the great council of the nation, and to them Paulinus preached; and Edwin and most of his people became Christians. And on 12th April 627 he and his chief men were baptized in the wooden church hastily built at York, which soon gave place to the present cathedral

Edwin's power waned not till his death. By the defeat of Wessex he had become over-lord—our fifth Bretwalda. Redwald's power had long been eclipsed, and the year after the baptism at York he died, having accepted the new faith.

The new over-lord ruled with much pomp and ceremony, and extended his dominions until they reached to the Firth of Forth, where, on the old hill camp, he built the Queen of the North, the city since named after him, Edwinesburgh, now Edinburgh. The year after Redwald's death he led his expedition against the Welsh, fought them in Carnarvonshire, captured Anglesey, and redeemed his promise to Godwulf to seize the Isle of Man. Under

him the old yarl led the fleet, and we need hardly say that the flagship was the *Seafowl*. With them went Gualla, now a great man in the world, and with a wife he was justly proud of—no other than the demure little damsel whose silver voice had given the *Seafowl* her name!

Gualla was a Christian. So was his wife. So was Wilfrid, who retained to the last his peculiar gift of being most useful when he was least gracious. Eric died in the old faith, so did Fridgar. And Godwulf refused to believe other than did his forefathers, much to the scandal of the religiose, who viewed with dismay his intimacy with Paulinus.

And the *Seafowl*? The fine old ship became the property of Ulfrea, who gave her to Sigurd, who parted with her to Westgar, for whom she formed the tomb. In her, in the deep blue clay of Sandefjord, was the Viking-buried, with his gold brocaded shirt and his weapons, and all his ship's fittings, including the cook's copper kettle and the wooden plates and drinking-cups, and the draughtsmen with which he beguiled the tedium of his voyages. There she slept for a thousand years, to wake to life in 1880, and form the chief attraction of the museum of Christiania University, where all can see her who choose to go.

