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Vikings

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HARALD FIRST
OF THE VIKINGS

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THE STORY OF HERWARD

THE CHAMPION OF ENGLAND

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POGÁNY.



*Harald slays King Arvid.
(page 86)*

HARALD

FIRST OF THE VIKINGS

BY

CAPTAIN CHARLES YOUNG

AUTHOR OF "THE LAST OF THE VIKINGS" "THE SHARK HUNTER"
"TALES OF A RED-JACKET" ETC.

WITH SIXTEEN FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS BY

GERTRUDE DEMAINE HAMMOND R.I.



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Contents

	PAGE
PROLOGUE	11
CHAP. I. OF HARALD'S BIRTH, AND VARIOUS PREDICTIONS THERE- ANENT	15
II. OF SOME EARLY ADVENTURES	22
III. OF HARALD'S FIRST SEA-FIGHT	34
IV. OF HARALD'S CELEBRATED OATH	47
V. OF HARALD'S FIRST CAMPAIGN	57
VI. OF THE BURNING OF THE UPDALE WOODS	66
VII. OF THE TWO BATTLES OF SOLSKIEL	79
VIII. OF THE BURNING OF KING VEMUND	88
IX. OF THE MURDER OF AKI.	97
X. OF METHODS OF PEACEFUL PERSUASION	107
XI. OF THE BATTLE OF THE STAKED RIVER	116
XII. OF A GREAT DROWNING.	125
XIII. OF A VISIT TO A SEA-ROVER'S STRONGHOLD	133
XIV. OF THE BATTLE OF HAFUR'S FJORD	144
XV. OF THE SWEEPING OF THE WESTERN ISLES	153
XVI. OF THE BATTLE IN CAITHNESS	165

6 Harald First of the Vikings

CHAP.	PAGE
XVII. OF HARALD'S NEW NAME	174
XVIII. OF ROLF THE GANGER	178
XIX. OF THE MURDER OF THOROLF	183
XX. OF SNAEFRID THE FINN	190
XXI. OF THE DOINGS OF TURF EINAR	196
XXII. OF THE DOINGS OF ERIC BLOODY-AXE	204
XXIII. OF THE SHARING OUT OF THE REALM	214
XXIV. OF HARALD'S DEATH AND MOUNDING	221
APPENDIX I.—THE POLICY OF KING HARALD FAIRHAIR	227
APPENDIX II.—THE EARLY VIKINGS	233
LIST OF AUTHORITIES CONSULTED	239
INDEX OF PROPER NAMES	241

WOLFF
L. J. W. M.
W. J. W. M.
W. J. W. M.

Illustrations

HARALD SLAYS KING ARNVID	<i>Frontispiece</i>
“REJOICE, O KING AND QUEEN!”	PAGE 18
“IT IS GOOD TO BE A VIKING!”	28
“NOW TELL TO KING HARALD THESE MY WORDS”	54
THE SPY SHIFTED HIS FEET, AND LOOKED UNCOMFORTABLE	88
“I GIVE HIM TO YOU TO BE YOUR LOYAL SERVANT”	104
“WHAT IS HARALD TO YOU?”	110
“WHAT MAKE YOU OF HER, ULF?”	138
“TO THE FAITHFUL AND GALLANT SERVANT THE REWARD!”	162
“HENCEFORTH AND FOR ALL TIME YOU SHALL BE KNOWN AS HARALD FAIRHAIR!”	176
ROLF AND THE KING’S DAUGHTER, GISLA	180
HE FORGAT HIS KINGDOM AND ALL THAT BELONGED TO HIS KINGLY HONOUR	192
“BUT I WANT TO GO A-VIKING!”	204
THEY BROUGHT GUNNHILD TO ERIC	212
“WHAT IS THIS CHILD?”	218
HARALD BROUGHT ERIC TO THE HIGH-SEAT	224



NORWAY IN THE TIME OF HARALD

*The hardy Norseman's home of yore
Was on the foaming wave ;
And there he gain'd great renown,
The bravest of the brave.
Ah, ne'er should we forget our sires,
Wherever we may be ;
For they did win a deathless name,
And ruled the stormy sea.*

Harald

First of the Vikings

Prologue

“The hollow oak our palace is,
Our heritage—the Sea!”

WHAT a fascination lies in the very name “Viking!” And why? Well, personally I suppose, because all Englishmen are Vikings—by blood, by circumstance, by inclination; and we look to the sea-kings of old for the prototype we would fain picture ourselves as Sons of the Sea.

Breathes there a boy, who has once either read a stirring tale of deep waters, listened to the details of a gallant rescue from shipwreck, or dwelt beside and tasted the breath of the Great Mother and Guardian of us all, and who has not felt his pulses bound and his very being yearn after the Sea? “Thalatta! Thalatta!”¹ did Xenophon’s ten thousand cry in rapture when, after many perils and difficulties surmounted, they at last caught sight of its blue waters from afar.

We read of Columbus discovering America: not he! Five hundred years before his time Vikings had seen it, coasted along its shores, landed thereon. Just think for one moment what these hardy adventurers dared, when

¹ “The sea! The sea!” *Stories from Xenophon*, by H. L. Havell, p. 193.

12 Harald First of the Vikings

they launched out in their comparatively tiny vessels on Mother Ocean!

In the ninth century their marauding and conquering expeditions filled the whole world with terror of their name. They subdued England, seized on Normandy, laid siege to Paris, conquered a considerable portion of Belgium, made extensive inroads into Spain.

In 861 A.D. they discovered Iceland, and soon after peopled it. Thence they penetrated still farther West and discovered Greenland, to which they originally gave the name of Gunbiörnskär (from Gunbiörn, the discoverer), and colonised it. Proceeding southward, they struck upon the coast of North America, about the State (it would seem) of Massachusetts: this was towards the end of the tenth century. They called it Vinland hin Goda, or Vineland the Good, and this coast was still visited by them in the twelfth century.

They made expeditions to the shores of the White Sea, which they named Biarmaland, and one of their leaders, Ruric, seized on Novgorod in 862 A.D., and thus became the founder of Russia and of a line of Czars. From Russia they made their way to the Black Sea, and in 866 A.D. appeared before Constantinople; in which metropolis, from the year 902 until the fall of the Empire, they formed a bodyguard to the Eastern Cæsars—the celebrated Varangian Guard.

If ever the child is father of the man, the Scandinavians were the fathers of the English. They have bequeathed to them their love of war, their pioneering instincts, their passion for the sea. The Englishman has the same love as they for martial daring and fame, for the Ocean that girdles his island home, for discovery, for colonising, for subduing savage peoples. “And these tall, blonde men, with their defiant blue eyes, who obeyed their kings while they had confidence in them, and slew them when they had forfeited their respect, were the ancestors, too, of the Normans who, under William the Conqueror, invaded England and founded the only European State which has since reached the highest civilisation, combined with

the widest liberty, through slow and even stages of orderly development.”¹

Well—they are legendary now, those old-time Vikings. We tell of them, now and again, either in pride, as ancestors, whose actual patronymics remain in our land to this day, or with curious admiration as an old, old race, long since fallen from its high estate ; men who were kings of the Ocean, and who loved to live thereon and to die thereon.

In examining the lives and weighing the deeds of those old Vikings we must remember the spirit of the age in which they were born, lived, and died. We cannot judge them from our twentieth-century standpoint. They lived in rude, barbarous times, when might was right, when a strong arm triumphed over what little law there might be beyond the force of public opinion.

When beauty of person, strength of body, and wit of mind, combined, were the essential requisites demanded for its leader, what wonder that this was a nation of heroes ? And to be the leader of such heroes, to be the acknowledged superior of such men, to excel in each and all of those attributes,—what sort of man, think you, must he have been who was acknowledged by them as chief and king ?

Time calls for the man, and God appoints him ; the man for his time was the subject of my book, Harald Fairhair—“ Hårfager,” as his countrymen called him—a man who dominated the age in which he lived by the sheer force of his personality and will. He was, to put it in one epithet, the First Great Viking or King of the Sea. Sea-born Englishmen should be proud of such an ancestor. How many have ever heard his name ? And yet, on the foundation of his deeds, and the deeds of such as he, England has built her Empire of the Sea.

¹ Boyesen.

Chapter I

Of Harald's Birth, and Various Predictions thereanent

IN Ringerike, of Norway, once lived a king named Sigurd Hiort. The kings, so-called, of those days, occupied a position, with regard to rank and power, somewhat similar to the petty potentates of the German Empire—if so high. They were constantly at war with their neighbours, by sea and by land, murder and rapine were so prevalent as ordinarily to excite little beyond a passing local interest, and men held their property and lives by virtue only of the strength of their own right hands and the uncertain tenure of the loyalty of greedy relations and jealous friends.

Sigurd was a tall, strong man, true to his word and just in his dealings, and consequently held in respect by most of those who came in contact with him. He was married, and had one son, a youth named Guttorm, who gave promise of growing up to be like his father, and one daughter, Ragnhild, now in early womanhood and celebrated all the country round for her grace and beauty.

One day when Sigurd was out hunting on his estate, the principal peaceful recreation of those turbulent times, he was suddenly attacked by a well-known Berserk named Hake, with thirty followers. The assault was so violent and unlooked for, that Sigurd's few attendants were speedily cut down, but he himself made a desperate stand against overwhelming odds

16 Harald First of the Vikings

Challenging the leader of the marauders to single combat he succeeded, in spite of the frantic fury with which Hake fought, in getting the better of him, cutting off his left hand, and disabling him for the time being. But Hake's men, furious at the discomfiture of their chief, fell upon Sigurd in a body, and after a gallant defence, in the course of which he slew or disabled twelve of their number, the king was ringed round and finally killed by the sword and spear thrusts of the survivors.

Hake's wounds having been attended to, and the bleeding stump of his arm bound up as well as occasion would allow, the band rode off to Sigurd's house, seized the persons of Guttorm and Ragnhild, plundered the place of all the valuables that could be conveniently carried away, and departed in haste for fear of pursuit, leaving the dwelling in flames. Hake's intention had been to marry Ragnhild at once—for it was purely to obtain possession of her that the raid had been conceived and carried out—and as her husband to secure a certain immunity for his act of violence, but his exertions caused his wounded arm to become inflamed to such a degree, that for a time his life was despaired of. The respite thus afforded to the helpless girl not only saved her from a dreadful fate, but brought about the events which lead directly to my tale.

A month or so later Halfdan the Black (or Swarthy), who was the most powerful king in Norway, came down at Yuletide to feast in Hedemark, close by where Hake dwelt; while here the report of the unprovoked attack on, and murder of, King Sigurd came to his ears, he inquired into the details, and determined to at once punish the deed.

That night he sent a hundred armed men, under the leadership of one of his most trusted warriors, Haarek Gand, to carry out his intentions. They arrived at their destination in the early morning, when the whole household were asleep; then, having posted sentinels to warn them of any outside interference, they broke into Hake's

dwelling, searched the sleeping rooms and found Guttorm and Ragnhild and the stolen property, removing them to a place of safety outside; and then, in accordance with the strict orders of King Halfdan, they set fire to the house, surrounding it closely so that none of the inmates should escape.

Roused from his sick bed by the crackling of the flames and the wild shouts and screams of his dependants, Hake sprang up, grasped his sword and shield, and rushed into the forefront of the fray. Wounded and weak though he was, so desperately did the Berserk sustain his reputation, that he broke through the encircling ring of his assailants; but seeing Ragnhild, on whose account he had ventured all, being driven off in a sledge, he lost heart, threw himself on his own sword, and so died.

Haarek and his party, having carried out the king's instructions, now returned to report their success and the fate of the Berserk; and when King Halfdan saw the beautiful Ragnhild, she made such an impression upon him that he forthwith married her.¹

She, my reader, was the mother of our hero—Harald Fairhair.

Strange legends cluster round the birth and early childhood of Harald. Such tales are often the offspring of later imaginations, shaped and woven from trivial facts of pure fancy to suit the characters concerning whom they are told; although, therefore, the following cannot be strictly defined as actual fact, they may possibly be accepted, as being embodied in the earliest authentic history of our hero of which we have any written record, as tinged with truth.

One night, then, Queen Ragnhild dreamed that she was standing in her herb-garden, when she espied a thorn sticking in her shift and plucked it out; but while she was holding the thorn in her hand, it grew rapidly until it attained the proportions of an enormous tree of great girth, one end of which struck down into the earth

¹ Ragnhild was Halfdan the Black's second wife.

18 Harald First of the Vikings

and became firmly rooted, while the other end towered so high into the air that she could scarcely see to its summit. The roots and lower portion of this tree seemed to her to be of a deep blood-red colour, the trunk upward for a great height was of a beautiful green, while the topmost branches appeared to her view white as snow. There were many and large limbs or boughs to the tree, some high up and others low down, and so dense and wide-spreading was the entire foliage, that it seemed to Ragnhild as though it shadowed the whole country round as far as she could see—"even over all Norway!" runs the tale.

When the queen related her vision to King Halfdan, he was vastly perplexed as to the signification thereof, for dreams were in those days believed to be directly inspired by the gods. Seeking relief from his anxiety, he laid the matter before one of his councillors, a man named Thorleif the Wise; and he, after some deliberation over the dream, delivered the following interpretation, which was currently adopted:—

"The tree that grew out of the thorn," said Thorleif, "is a son that shall shortly be born to the queen. Great shall he be, and wide and far-reaching his name and renown. The roots and lower portion of the trunk being the colour of blood, signify that he will be a mighty warrior, that his footsteps shall be marked with blood and conquest, and that he shall slay all those who oppose him. The stem being green and beautiful, implies that his kingdom shall flourish and prosper exceedingly. The crown of the tree showing white as snow, tells that he shall reach a white-haired old age; while the numerous branches and off-shoots, and the wide-spreading foliage, show forth his posterity spread over the whole land. Rejoice, O king and queen!" he concluded, "for of your race, of this your son who shall be born, shall Norway ever have a king."

Naturally enough, this prediction gratified Halfdan and Ragnhild exceedingly, and it seems that King Halfdan, anxious in his turn to be favoured with a dream



"Rejoice, O King and Queen!"

which should further enlighten them as to the auspicious event, consulted Thorleif the Wise as to the means whereby that desirable end might be achieved.

"Never," quoth he, "do visions visit my bed. Tell me, then, what I shall do."

Thorleif, the narrative continues, advised him to sleep in a swine-stye, which Halfdan did; and that very night he, too, dreamed a dream.

He thought that his head was covered with a growth of the most beautiful hair, all in ringlets. Some of these were so long as to reach and even trail upon the ground; others fell only to various parts of his limbs and body, while some clustered close to the scalp of his head. These ringlets were of all colours as well as lengths, but one surpassed the others in beauty, lustre, and size.

On his submitting this dream to Thorleif, the latter replied:—

"Thy vision, king, signifies that from thee shall spring a noble posterity, and thy descendants shall rule over countries with great, but not all with equally great, honour. One, however, of thy race shall be glorious and celebrated above all the others."

Much gratified, King Halfdan related his dream and its interpretation to the queen, and the two visions soon became generally known. It was the opinion of many people, in later years, that the long ringlet betokened King Olaf the Saint; but at the time, coming at the period it did and taken in conjunction with that of Queen Ragnhild, the popular belief was that the king's dream, so far as the longest ringlet was concerned, pointed clearly to the child that was soon to be born.

Shortly after this the queen gave birth to a son, who was named Harald. This was in the year 850.

Of Harald's youth until he was past the age of nine years there appears to be no record worth retailing, save that he is said to have been much loved by his mother, but not to have stood so high in his father's affection. He was probably brought up in accordance with his

20 Harald First of the Vikings

rank, and trained, as was the custom of the day, to handle weapons in attack and defence, to ride, and to thoroughly acquaint himself with the management of ships of war. Beyond this, hunting, swimming, the ordinary games and pastimes of youth must have fully occupied his time ; and it is not until his tenth year, as I have said, that we can take up his career in earnest, albeit again with a legend.

At this period King Halfdan was celebrating Yuletide in Hadaland, when suddenly all the food and drink that had been served up at the feast, including the vessels they were served in, disappeared from the table. Everyone present was astonished and dismayed, but as nothing could be done the guests finally took their leave and departed to their homes ; only the king remained sitting at the bare table, gloomy and full of wrath. The following day he instituted inquiries, but not being able to ascertain the reason of the remarkable occurrence, he caused a Finn, who was popularly supposed to be a diviner, or sorcerer, to be seized, and put him to the torture to elicit through him the name of the man who had inflicted this shame upon him before his guests.

Young Harald was present, and the Finn in his extremity appealed to him to save him from the unjust punishment ; and the boy, disobeying his father's commands, freed the Finn, and fled with him to the neighbouring mountains to hide until the king's anger should have spent itself. The Finn led the youth to a spot where they found a number of men, with one who appeared to be their chief, feasting uproariously on the viands and drink that had so mysteriously disappeared from King Halfdan's supper table. Here the Finn and Harald are reputed to have remained until the following spring, when Harald concluded that it was time for him to return home. As he was going, however, his host said :—

“ Your father was angry because I took some meat and beer away from him last winter ; now, for what you did on my behalf, I will reward you with good tidings.

Of Harald's Birth

21

Your father is dead. You will go home and inherit his kingdom. But, in a day to come, you will be the King of all Norway."

Harald thanked him for the auspicious prophecy, and when he reached home, he found the news to be true. His father, returning from a feast in Hadaland, was crossing a frozen lake, when the ice broke under him and Halfdan and a number of his men were drowned.

"Halfdan the Black was forty years of age when he died."

Young Harald now (860 A.D.) became King in his father's stead, with Guttorm, his mother's brother, as regent and guardian; and from henceforth his authentic career may be supposed to begin.

Chapter II

Of Some Early Adventures

SINCE Harald's time many sovereigns have inherited the weight of a crown at an equally tender age, and like our hero have been placed under the guardianship and tutelage of a regent ; but there the resemblance ends. The life of such others has, as a rule, been spent, until they actually ascended the throne and assumed the reins of government, in a state of pupildom and education upon lines calculated to assure their devotion to the continuous (generally speaking) policy of their country. But the life of Harald, from the date of his father's death, demanded a good deal more than that ; it was the active existence of a Viking of the Age wherein he found himself, limited only by very few and trivial conditions ; and following a precedent which we see adhered to by him in later years in the case of his own son, Eric Bloody Axe, he seized the first opportunity afforded him by his uncle Guttorm to claim a ship and crew, and permission to go a-Viking on his own account.

Well pleased at the lad's spirit, Guttorm immediately granted his request. A fleet of four stout galleys, manned by picked captains and crews, was rapidly fitted out ; and within a fortnight the little squadron set sail on its errand, young Harald being placed, to his great delight, under the charge of the commander of the whole in the vessel that led the van.

It was night, and the stars shining like lamps in the

deep velvety black of the sky were reflected a thousand times in the ever restless ripples that covered the surface of the sea. Far away to the north, quivering tongues of many-coloured fire flared and darted heavenward at intervals, and at their base a pale, rosy glow shot with orange told that these were the Northern Lights, and not some great earthly conflagration; while close at hand, motionless, dark, and silent, lay the forms of four large war galleys, not a sound save the occasional creak of spar or beam as they lifted on the gentle swell issuing from them to betoken that they were crowded with human beings.

In the cabin of one of these dragon ships (as they were termed) sat a party of five armed men—or rather, four men and a boy; and as they carried on their conversation in hushed tones, it was evident, taking also into consideration the perfect quiet that reigned on board, that their design was secret, and that they deemed themselves in a situation where silence was imperative. They were the captains of the four galleys and the young King.

“What need of more talk, Asbiorn?” broke in the boy impetuously, disregarding a hasty sign made to him by the man he addressed to lower his voice, this latter seeming from his mien and apparel to be the senior of the others; “we are here, and they are there,” pointing in the direction of the land. “We are ready, to a man; they are feasting, and unsuspecting. Now is the time, if ever, to carry out our plan.”

“True, my lord,” replied Asbiorn; “the time is indeed at hand. But to ensure complete success you must bridle that unruly tongue of yours, or you will mar everything. Grimm,” he continued, speaking to a dark, heavily built captain, “do you go aboard your ship and muster your men; we will follow, and join you almost immediately. The other two ships shall act as support to us, if we need it.”

Without a word all the occupants of the cabin rose; and while Grimm departed on his errand in a tiny skiff that was swinging alongside the ship by a line, the

24 Harald First of the Vikings

others leant over the side watching him fade into the gloom.

“And now,” quoth Harald, straightening his tall, lithe form, that seemed more like that of a youth of eighteen than a boy of fourteen years—“now to work.”

Rapidly the crew were set to haul up the anchor and sweep the galley towards Grimm’s ship, and when the sides grated together the other captains stepped aboard, passing over to their own vessels that were lying close alongside. The lashings were cast off, leaving each free to act independently.

“Stand closer in, in our wake,” quoth Asbiorn after them ; “but see there be no unnecessary noise, and keep your eyes and ears open.”

“Ay, ay,” responded the others, as they too disappeared ; and then the two galleys that were to lead the way swung gently forward and floated, impelled with the greatest caution by the rowers, until their keels grated softly on the shelving sand of the beach.

“Overboard, Asbiorn’s men !” said their leader ; and leaving the oars swinging, one by one, gripping axe, sword, and spear, the eager Vikings dropped over almost noiselessly into the shallow water, wading through it to the shore, and forming up there to await their leaders and comrades.

When fully satisfied that all were present, Asbiorn and Harald led them forward again, and they pressed steadily on until, turning the shoulder of a low-lying hill, they came in sight of a brilliantly illuminated village. Hence arose the sounds of feasting and revelry, while at its further extremity towered a black mass, sparkling here and there with lights that moved to and fro.

“That is our mark,” quoth Asbiorn to Harald—“the castle. You, Grimm,” turning to the other captain who accompanied him, “rush the village, and drive the folk inland. Scare them thoroughly, so that they wont return to interrupt us, and then clap on all sail, and come and help your lord and me at our job. We lead the way. Come on, men !”

And thrusting forward, he and Harald led their men at a brisk pace straight up the one street, the houses of which seemed full of shouting and drunken roisterers, and rushed boldly in at the castle gate ; while almost ere they reached it a terrified clamour in their rear told them that Grimm and his men were carrying out their orders with characteristic zeal. But neither Asbiorn nor Harald found leisure to listen or conjecture ; they had their hands full of their own business. The garrison of the castle was composed of picked men belonging to the ships of the over-lord, a celebrated rover of the name of Gunlaugsson, who had gathered around him many noted outlaws and desperate men ; and feast and revel though they might when they reckoned themselves safe from molestation, yet the instincts of a life of piracy and warfare impelled them to do so with their weapons ready to hand in case of alarm.

As the inrush of the assailants surged into the courtyard, the hall almost simultaneously vomited forth a crowd of yelling, half-mad ruffians, jostling each other in their eagerness to strike into a fray ; in a moment the two bodies of men smashed into violent contact together and a pell-mell conflict ensued, blows and thrusts being given and taken with equal ferocity on both sides.

Headed by their chief, a huge, red-haired, one-eyed fellow, the pirates shrieked and screamed as they made their onslaught after their fashion when fighting at sea, striving desperately the while to burst through the solid ranks of Asbiorn's men ; but the discipline of the latter, their trained skill, and the knowledge that they were fighting in company with and under the eye of their future King, lent them a vigour and dash that were superior to the mad ferocity of their opponents.

Foot by foot these were forced to give way, until they had fallen back to the open doors of their banqueting hall ; but here they made a desperate stand, and rallying all their energies drove back the assailants a space. But their strength was oozing out of them and their courage waxing fainter, as the shouts of "Harald!"

26 Harald First of the Vikings

“Asbiorn!” grew more fierce and loud. At this critical moment their leader, who had exchanged several blows with Harald, was smitten to the ground by a downright, sweeping blow from Asbiorn, who interfered in the unequal combat; and suddenly, as if a common impulse had seized them, they turned and ran in all directions, striving, like hunted rats, to seek some corner wherein to hide until danger might have passed them by.

It was a vain hope, however, for now Grimm’s men came streaming in through the open gateway, adding their numbers to those who were already searching with sword and spear every nook and cranny of the castle, surrounding buildings, and court-yard; and ere long every hiding wretch had been prodded out and slain, while the guard at the gateway barred the way with shouts of merciless laughter to the few hunted survivors who, escaping temporarily from the blades of their pursuers, rushed frantically round and about the enclosed space, seeking vainly for refuge or mercy, and finding none.

It was not the custom of those days for the conquerors to burden themselves with captives, except from motives of policy, and in this case that incentive was lacking. Asbiorn’s men, therefore, made a clean sweep of the band of pirates who inhabited the castle, since the only man who might have been spared for a brief period—their leader—had fallen fighting in the heat of the conflict; but discriminating between them and the villagers, comparatively harmless hangers-on, they inflicted no punishment on the latter beyond the scare they had already received from Grimm’s men.

On ransacking the stronghold, it was found to be full of the booty gathered in many voyages and forays; consequently the aid of the two ships’ crews in reserve was called in and the place stripped bare. The furniture, bedding, hangings—everything inflammable—was now piled high in the great hall and oil freely flung over it; and then, applying torches to the mass and carrying

their wounded and the plunder with them, the gleeful Vikings under Asbiorn and Harald marched down to the seashore and embarked on their ships. These were pushed off, and all sail made for home; while, flushed with success and singing joyously as they went, the victors feasted high on the wine and victuals they had wrested from the pirates, toasting the courage of their young leader who watched them at their boisterous revelry.

In public Asbiorn commended Harald for his skill and courage, but in private he blamed him for his rashness; for the lad, fired with the spirit of his forefathers, had thrust himself into the forefront of the fray, and, as we have seen, had actually exchanged blows with Gunlaugsson himself, a venture that would undoubtedly have terminated disastrously for him, had not Asbiorn struck in with his powerful aid and disposed of his formidable adversary.

"Spirit and skill are all very well, my boy," said he, "but remember that size and strength also tell in a fight; and swords are no respecters of persons, be they kings or peasants. Your muscles are not yet set, and you are no match for a man like Gunlaugsson. That will come with time; but fly not at too strong a quarry until you are grown more of his size."

"That is easy to say, Asbiorn," retorted Harald, "but not so easy to think of when everyone around you is giving and taking blows. How can one pick and choose one's opponent then?"

"That is precisely what you have to learn to do," replied his uncle. "It is a matter of no concern for the common men whom they fight with, though even they, you will find, when they have been some years at it and learnt their trade, will, as you say, pick and choose; but for the leaders it is very different. The leader must have his head clear, his wits about him, and his passions under control. If not, he is no good as a leader. He must, of course, for his own honour, do his share of the fighting, but the men look to him for direction and

28 Harald First of the Vikings

command. Anyone can fight ; it needs a cool brain to be a chief of men."

"I see," said Harald, thoughtfully ; "still, you were the real leader, and—it was my first fight."

"True," assented his uncle ; "and you bore yourself bravely and well. I would but have you remember that recklessness is not true courage, though it may be useful at times. But you are a born fighter, lad !" he broke off, laughing. "Why, you sprang at Gunlaugsson's throat like a wild cat. When you are full-grown and your thews are set, you will be a match for any man. Hark to the men singing your praises."

A roar of rough voices broke in with a rude impromptu sea chorus in honour of the young King, who reddened with pleasure.

"It is good to be a Viking !" he said, briefly.

In two days the little fleet reached home, and the booty was taken ashore and divided. Harald chose for himself nothing but the large sword that had been wielded by his gigantic adversary, throwing all the rest of his share into the common fund for the men. Who now so lauded as he, who had added the royal trait of generosity to that of courage ! The crews told tales of his daring ; the women praised his fair face and fine figure ; and the scalds united to sing praises in his honour.

He himself, though his head was not turned by all the adulation he received, was anxious to taste again as soon as might be the joys of a rover's life, and he frequently besought his uncle to give him another chance ; but Guttorm insisted strenuously on other points of his training not being neglected, and held out for three months on shore to one cruise at sea, averring that Harald himself would be the first to thank him in later years for this decision.

One day, when Harald was by the shore gazing into the distance and longing for his next Viking voyage, he suddenly spied a galley coming round a projecting cliff, a mile or so away. His keen glance noted at once that she had been in a fight, from the fact that there remained



"It is good to be a Viking!"

only the stump of a mast, that half the side shields were missing, and that her oars were evidently only half manned; in addition she laboured sluggishly along as though nearly full of water.

Several skiffs instantly put out towards her, for other eyes besides his had noticed her plight; but as they neared the vessel she gave a heavy roll and then, diving forward, disappeared clean under the waves. The men in the skiffs redoubled their exertions, and were presently on the spot where the ship had sunk, rowing hither and thither and looking about them for survivors; but shortly, giving up the quest, they came paddling back to the shore where Harald had run down to meet them.

“Any saved?” he cried eagerly.

“Three only,” replied a seaman; and beaching his boat he indicated a man lying at the bottom of it, adding: “There are two more in the other boats.”

“Carry this one up to the house,” said Harald, “and have the others brought there, too. We must get to the bottom of this.”

Then he strode away to find his uncle.

When the survivors from the wreck had been attended to and were sufficiently recovered to answer the questions put to them, they were brought before the Regent and Harald to tell their tale. A short, thickset, dark-bearded man, who claimed to be the master of the sunken galley, stood forward and spoke in reply to Guttorm’s question of “Who are you, and how did you come into this plight?”

“We are traders,” said he, “and come from the seas to the south; last from Cornwall with tin and other wares, and bound for your more northerly ports where, as you know, such a cargo sells for a good price. Peaceful folk are we, meddling with no man and sticking to our merchant ventures; but if interfered with, or attacked, ready to fight for our goods as ye would fight for your honour.”

A hum of approbation from those around seemed to hearten him, for he went on in more assured tones:—

30 Harald First of the Vikings

“ We had visited several ports and there disposed of about half our cargo, when some twenty miles south of here we fell in with a strange vessel in the fog, and she bade us lay to ; to which we replied that we were traders and not pirates, that we were bound on our peaceable way, and that, in short, we had neither mind nor time to tarry—for we suspected her. Whereat they raised a shout, and stormed at us under full way of oars and sail. My men were handy fellows, and we contrived to give them the slip for the time being, though with a badly damaged hull and broken mast ; but the fog lifting, they spied us again and gave chase, killed half my crew with arrows, and would at last have boarded and, I make no doubt, have cut the throats of every man of us, but that the fog dropped down again and we got away, in sore case. That was barely eight miles south of here. We made shift to struggle on, crippled in hands as we were, for your port, which one of my men knew of old. But the leak in our hull gained on us apace, what with the straining at the oars and the motion of the sea ; our cargo—what remained of it—was not of a kind to keep us afloat, like timber ; and as we rounded yonder point the poor ship made her last plunge and went to the bottom like a stone, carrying with her all that were left of my crew save these two, the tin that was in her hold and was to bring us a goodly return, and all the worldly goods that were mine.”

“ Your tale rings true,” remarked Guttorm, who had watched his face intently while he was speaking. “ It seems, then, that you have lost all you possess. If that be indeed so, we must put you in the way of making good your loss ; and if, in so doing, you should chance to get even with those who were the cause of your present misfortune, it would not run contrary to your notions regarding peaceable trading, eh ? ”

“ Only give us the chance ! ” replied the man, his dark eyes gleaming at the suggestion. “ I warrant my mates will stand by me, for we don’t forget our poor comrades, now food for the fishes.”

“What say you, Harald?” asked Guttorm, turning to his young ward, who had stood quietly by listening to the sailor’s tale.

“Give me a ship, uncle,” replied Harald eagerly. “These three can come and pilot us, and a few days should see us back again, probably with a full hold.”

“Good!” quoth Guttorm. “Take Asbiorn and his dragon, and these three stout fellows, and let these poachers in our waters know that the King’s hand can reach both quickly and far. If I know Asbiorn, he is already getting his men on board.”

Such was indeed the case. As Asbiorn was well aware, Vikings had their privileges, one of which was that on the high seas everything was fair game until a stronger came by and picked up the hunter; but he was also well aware that to pursue an enemy into another man’s waters—to poach, as one might say, on the king’s preserves—was a very dangerous game to play and one that always met with short and sharp shrift. Guttorm was intensely jealous on this point; and therefore, a hint of the tale having reached Asbiorn from one of the rescuers, he was making ready for sea as fast as able and willing hands could compass the matter.

A messenger interrupted him in the middle of his work, to bid him come before the Regent and receive his instructions; and within two hours from permission having been granted, the *Hawk* was speeding southward as quickly as oars and sail would carry her, and on board was our hero, almost dancing with delight at the thought of his first sea fight being so close within his reach.

“Think you, Asbiorn, they will fight, or run?” he inquired eagerly of the old chief.

“Hard to say, my lord,” replied the latter; “but I should say, run. You see, they will guess who we are, and our errand, for they know well they have poked their rascally noses into a perilous place; and as the *Hawk* is a fair ship of her size, they will note the number of

32 Harald First of the Vikings

oars we pull, and form a shrewd suspicion of our strength. Of course, they may fight from sheer despair, but I should decidedly say they will run at first."

"But we shall catch them?" urged Harald. "Don't you think so?"

"Certainly. Barring accidents of wind and weather we shall be up with them some time to-morrow morning, and then you will probably have your fill of fighting, for they know they will get no mercy. It will be a boarding business, lad, not long distance shooting; and I would have you keep cool, and mind you don't fall overboard between the two ships when we grapple, for if you do the chances are you'll go to the bottom. Measure your distance with your eye when you jump, and hang on tight to rope, spar, or side till you find your footing on deck. Then go to work as hard and fast as ever you like."

"What! and not pick and choose?" said Harald, laughing.

"Oh, ay! so long as you don't pick out a second Gunlaugsson," returned Asbiorn, meeting his laugh. "But remember, lad, I am responsible for you to the Regent, and don't be too venturesome."

"Not if I can help it!" cried Harald, laughing loudly and springing through the door to go forward and peer ahead for the chase.

"I don't doubt you," quoth Asbiorn to himself. "If I am any judge, you'll pick out the biggest man you can see, and go straight for him like the young wild cat you are. Well, well; if only you live, you promise to make a fine king. Good luck go with you!"

But he thought it just as well to make certain, so far as he could, that human agency should assist Fortune; so he spoke quietly to several trustworthy men of his crew, bidding them keep a watchful eye on their young lord, and at any rate see that he got over the difficult job of boarding the other vessel in safety. Once on her decks, thought he, he himself would see to the

immunity of his young charge while sword, strength, and skill held out.

The night came down, the stars flashed out, and the galley sped untiringly on her way ; and watchful eyes—be sure young Harald's were among the number—peered eagerly through the darkness ahead and around, each watcher longing to be the first to sight the chase and give the welcome news "Sail-ho !"

Chapter III

Of Harald's First Sea-fight

ALL through the night the *Hawk* threshed through the water under sail, for the sea had become choppy owing to the wind having veered from north to east; towards dawn, however, the breeze failed entirely, a mist veiled the surface of the sea, and the crew of the galley were compelled to take to their oars in order to continue the pursuit.

"This fog is a nuisance!" exclaimed Harald to the master of the wrecked ship, who had given his name as Cyrus, and who was standing beside him on the fore-castle endeavouring to peer through the clammy, eddying mist-wreaths. "We may pass the chase at any time now in this thickness, and shall have had all our trouble for nothing."

"Scarcely that, my lord," replied Cyrus, "for we are now on their cruising ground. You see, just about here they are midway for all traffic, north, south, east or west, being, so to speak, in the fairway; we may overshoot them, doubtless, but we shall have them in the end, especially if they are foolish enough to betray their presence."

"How do you mean?" inquired Harald.

"Well, you see, sometimes the rogues are too lazy to bore holes in a ship's bottom and scuttle her, after taking out all they want and killing her crew, and to leave her drifting about would be to leave a witness above water that might some day get them into trouble. No: some of the more reckless ones just chuck a lighted torch into

the hold and set fire to the vessel ; and then—why, if you were to see a pillar of smoke rising ahead of you where you knew there was open sea, what would you say ? ”

“ A ship on fire,” replied Harald.

“ Quite so ! And you would probably be curious to learn how she got a-fire ; and if you knew there were pirates about—eh ? ”

“ I see,” said Harald thoughtfully ; “ and they couldn't be far distant if she were still blazing. We must keep a sharp look-out, then, fog or no fog, and hope for luck.”

“ There's a deal depends on luck at sea, young master,” observed Cyrus ; “ but there's a deal more in observation. Not a wreath of mist, or a curl of cloud, or a shade of colour in the water, but tells a tale to the mariner. That comes by experience. Never be ashamed to pick up a hint anywhere, my lord, especially as regards matters at sea.”

Harald nodded his head gravely, and his eyes wandered restlessly around as he gazed at the encircling fog-bank.

“ What does your observation tell you here ? ” he inquired suddenly, making a sweeping gesture with his hand.

“ The wind was southerly,” replied the sailor, “ when we ran from the pirate three days since, and we had fog then. It shifted into the east, and the fog broke up for awhile. Yesterday what breeze there was came from the north, and this morning back it went to the east. Now it has dropped. The next slant, taking into consideration the season of the year, will be from the south, I reckon. That will shift the fog, anyway for a space ; and if it only holds, we should sight our men by noon.”

“ Now,” remarked Harald, “ I am right curious to know whether your forecast is true or only guesswork. If true, you are a seaman of no mean order, and I should be glad to have you as my sailing master when I come to have a dragon of my own. What say you ? ”

The man laughed.

36 Harald First of the Vikings

"I am a peaceful trader, my lord," quoth he bluntly; "and moreover, my ways and speech are rough and untutored, not such as might befit a king's court."

"That is a matter for me to decide," said Harald. "But I see you would have time for reflection. We will leave it for awhile; perhaps neither you nor I will be alive to-night."

And he turned on his heel, to seek Asbiorn and tell him of the sailor's prediction as to the weather.

"Most seamen," said Asbiorn, when he had heard, "are weatherwise, my lad; in fact, if they are masters of vessels they are so of necessity, or else they and their cargoes would soon part company. The men—well, some are more observant than others; and I have met those who could interpret the signs of the sea and sky as though they themselves had put them there. Said this man aught to you concerning the lair of these same pirates?"

"No, not a word. How should he know anything about them, seeing that he only ran across them by chance in the fog, and then fled like a wounded duck?"

"Nevertheless," remarked Asbiorn, smiling, "I will wager he has not emptied his budget. Time will show. Let him tell us what he knows when he feels inclined; all he now has to do is to bring us within sight of the rascals: we will do the rest."

By now the day had fully broken, and the fog was as puzzling and dense as ever; but while Asbiorn and Harald were snatching a hasty meal, Cyrus put his head in at the door.

"I think," said he, "we are in for a shift of weather. The fog seems shredding away aloft, and I notice the swirls of the lower layers come more frequently and mostly in the same direction."

"And that?" asked Asbiorn.

"Drifting north—a puff or two of wind from the south," replied the seaman, looking at Harald with a smile. "It is difficult to make much of it just now, for we are driving ahead through it at a good rate; but I

have been on the watch for some hours now, and can see a difference."

He disappeared, and the two resumed their meal in silence. When it was concluded, they went on deck; but neither of them, as the master had hinted, could perceive much difference in the surrounding thickness or see any indication of wind.

"Best turn in for awhile, my lad," quoth Asbiorn; "I shall do the same myself, as soon as I've been round the ship. We've got a long day before us."

Harald obeyed in silence; and shortly after he had lain down he dropped into a heavy slumber, for he was quite worn out with the long night watch and the eagerness of suspense.

He awoke suddenly with a loud cry ringing in his ears, and at almost the same moment that he opened his eyes was springing out of his berth and rushing on deck. As he emerged he cast his eyes aloft and around—there was a clear sky and horizon; but the cluster of men on the forecabin—what were they pointing at? In a few bounds he joined the group, and was greeted by the old master.

"Yonder she goes!" said he, indicating a tiny spot on the line where sea and sky met, which, to the lad's gaze, seemed almost indistinguishable from a distant hovering bird. "It's a case of muscle now, young sir. As you see, the wind—what little there is of it—is against us both, so we must trust to our oars. Those rascally pirates are always full of men, but they're better at fighting than at rowing; and as for their slaves at the oar-benches, well, they're sturdy fellows, no doubt, and accustomed to the work, but I think our men are the better crew. Still—a stern chase is a long chase."

"Don't you think he'll fight?" asked Harald anxiously.

"I'll tell you what I think, young master," said the seaman, lowering his voice; "I think he's either pushing for home, where he'll find reinforcements and probably get behind stone walls and give us a lot of trouble, or

38 Harald First of the Vikings

else he expects to pick up a consort hereabouts to help him tackle us on the open sea. We shall soon learn which."

"Had you not better tell Asbiorn this?" asked Harald.

"Tell Asbiorn?" repeated the sailor with a smile; "he's up to every trick on the board, my lord, and wouldn't thank me for presuming to think otherwise. He knows far better than any of us what those fellows yonder are up to, and can meet any move of theirs with a smarter one. You watch and see. Still tongue, wise head!"

Hour after hour went by, and still the chase stood on her way; but all of a sudden, one of the look-outs shouted: "She's coming round! She'll fight, after all!" and there was an immediate rush to verify his words. Sure enough, as was instantly apparent and satisfactory to all on board, the pirate had swung round and, heading straight for the *Hawk*, was coming down upon her at the full speed of oars and sail combined.

"Well, that fellow's got some pluck, anyway," remarked Harald to Asbiorn, as they stood watching the approaching galley, while the crew mustered rapidly to quarters under their immediate officers.

Asbiorn smiled. "He's got a friend somewhere behind the horizon, you may be sure," said he. "He's been running for her, and having picked her up has now rounded on us, thinking the two of them together may turn the tables. We shall have a sharp fight of it. Run and get ready, lad, while I see to the men."

The pirate ship came boldly down with the wind, and the crew of the *Hawk* stood by prepared for the onset; but ere the two vessels approached within arrow flight of each other, the old master touched Harald's elbow and whispered: "See there, my lord—just under that speck of cloud." And peering, Harald spied the thin line of mast of another galley coming up to join in the fight.

"The more the merrier!" quoth he. "Now, lads,"

he cried aloud ; “ show these rascals what manner of king's men you are ! ”

A rousing cheer greeted his words, and weapons were brandished and fierce faces grew fiercer still with the joy of anticipated battle as the enemy neared them. The *Hawk* had in no way slackened her speed, and as the two vessels drew close together Asbiorn shouted : “ Now, men ! give them a volley ! ” and a storm of arrows was poured into the pirate. Simultaneously, and evidently acting on a prearranged plan, a knot of archers concentrated their fire on the helmsman of their antagonist, killing him and throwing his ship into confusion, and the whole starboard bank of oars on the *Hawk* was backed, and the port side pulled vigorously.

Round spun the *Hawk* as if on a pivot, receiving a hail of missiles in the manœuvre. “ All together, now ! ” yelled the overseer of the oarsmen ; and with one united effort every oar-blade dug into the water, and she shot forward at racing speed into the broadside of the pirate.

The heavy iron beak of the *Hawk* bit into the unprotected planking with the force of some tremendous engine, wedging itself deep into the fabric, and the stricken ship reeled over—over yet ! to the impact. Her crew were flung headlong, some into the water to drown, and some against the bulwark with broken limbs, while the uproar of the collision, the rending of timbers, and the varied clamour of shrieks, yells, and cheers was deafening ; and then the *Hawk* backed out to several of her own lengths from the wreck and lay to, rocking gently on the waves, while her archers renewed their fire against the demoralised mob of wretches that staggered and fell about the slanting deck.

Suddenly—so suddenly as to hurl prostrate almost every man that was left standing—the vessel surged back with a heavy roll to an upright keel ; the waves poured tumultuously with a roaring sound into the jagged chasm that gaped in her hull, sweeping the bodies of living and dead before them ; and with one ponderous plunge she disappeared, bows foremost, under water, dragging down

40 Harald First of the Vikings

with her in the vortex almost every soul that had been on board.

“Back water, men—quick!” roared the overseer to the oarsmen of the *Hawk*, who responded promptly to the order and speedily impelled their ship away from the dangerous vicinity.

The waves bubbled and boiled furiously for a few moments where the wreck had vanished, and then a huge volume of water was vomited to the surface from the depths below, bringing with it bodies, spars, and numberless articles from the shattered vessel that had lain loose about her; and at Asbiorn’s command a few of his men jumped into a little skiff and rowed up to the wreckage, to endeavour, if possible, to secure a survivor or two from among the numerous bodies that floated amid the debris scattered over the sea.

Two only were discovered who seemed to have any life in them, and these were hurriedly dragged into the boat and flung unceremoniously in the bottom to await the leisure of their rescuers, who now pulled their hardest back to the *Hawk*. The boat was hauled bodily on board and, while a couple of sailors proceeded with the task of reviving the saved pirates, the rest quickly resumed the work of preparing to meet the second enemy, now about a mile distant.

But the men aboard the latter had perceived the catastrophe that had overtaken their consort, and rested in doubt on their oars. Then seeing that the head of the *Hawk* was being swung round in pursuit their hearts failed them, and turning, they sped southward again whence they had come, hotly pursued by the unrelenting avenger.

The whole of the foregoing had not occupied half an hour, and Harald, who had expected and hoped for hand to hand fighting, was much disappointed at the ease with which victory had been secured.

“It was exciting enough while it lasted,” said he to Asbiorn as, everything once more shipshape, the *Hawk* rushed on her way, throbbing to her very keel with the

strong, steady rhythm of the long oars ; “ but still, it was almost too short and sharp to please me.”

“ Patience awhile ! ” quoth Asbiorn ; “ the chase is not ended.” Then calling to Cyrus, he bade him bring one of the surviving pirates into the cabin before him. This man was questioned on various matters, after the manner of the day ; he was then taken away, and his comrade similarly interrogated ; and at the conclusion of the inquiry the two were again relegated to confinement and a guard set over them.

“ I like to do things thoroughly, and in order,” remarked Asbiorn. “ First to catch our friend ahead, and then to make use of the information we have obtained from the two rogues we have on board. You will probably have all the fighting you look for, my lad.”

“ That is well,” replied Harald. “ I, also, do not care to return home leaving the work unfinished.”

The day wore on, and the unremitting exertion of pulling against the wind, slight though that was, was beginning to tell on the crew of the *Hawk* ; but it was also evidently telling on the chase, for towards afternoon, presumably despairing of escape from their dogged pursuer, they faced round and prepared to fight.

A murmur of content ran through the *Hawk* as the pirate thus plainly evinced his determination, but the pace did not slacken in the least ; a rustle of preparation as the fighting men stood to their arms and took up their positions was the only apparent change. The two vessels closed rapidly, but mindful of the fate of her consort the corsair kept at such a distance from her adversary as to preclude the chance of a surprise such as had lately proved so disastrous.

As they came within long range the bow-men loosed their shafts in a cloud, each side striving to disable the helmsman of the other. For some little time the vessels manœuvred to and fro, each attempting to gain some advantage, but without avail ; and resolving at length to resort to ding-dong hand to hand work, Asbiorn shouted an order to the master of his rowers, the *Hawk* spun

42 Harald First of the Vikings

round on her heel, and amid a storm of cheers swooped upon her enemy with all the speed strong arms and tough oars could give her.

As she rushed up alongside, the oarsmen dropped their oars, leaving them trailing in the water, and grasping their weapons sprang to join their comrades on poop, forecastle, and amidships. The pirate crew crowded to the side of their own galley to meet them; a voice roared: "Heave!" in tones that rang high above the gathering din, and three grapnels were flung over from the *Hawk* into the opposing vessel; and then, with an echoing shout of: "After me, Asbiorn's men!" the entire fighting strength of the *Hawk* sprang for their adversary's bulwark after their young chief and his captain, and in a trice both sides were involved in a desperate conflict.

It was evidently the intention of the pirates to overwhelm their opponents by numbers and sheer force of arms—for they were nearly half as strong again as the crew of the *Hawk*—wherefore they made a furious attack in a body upon them, striving to bear them back over the side into their own vessel; but they had to do with a consummate master of his trade in Asbiorn, and the very frenzy of their onset played into his hands.

Acting on a plan carefully explained during the chase, the crew of the *Hawk* worked their way as a wedge into the ranks of their enemies, dividing them into two bodies and pressing the one aft the other forward. A small knot of archers, posted in bow and stern of Asbiorn's galley, kept up a continuous rain of arrows upon the packed masses of the pirates that were being slowly forced towards either extremity of their own ship; but these were soon obliged to stay their hands for fear of hurting their friends, for the two parties had become mingled together, and they stood, eager but unable to join in the fray, not daring to stir from their posts for fear of incurring the censure of their commander.

At this juncture Harald, who had been fighting with the reckless *abandon* that had caused Asbiorn to liken

him to a wild cat, caught a glimpse of the score or so of men who thus stood idle on forecastle and poop, and his quick brain suggested to him a stroke by which he might possibly decide the issue of the action.

Extricating himself from the press he sprang back over the side into the *Hawk*, and beckoned to the men to join him ; and having with their assistance dropped the two little skiffs belonging to the ship into the water, he sent one party to board over the forecastle head of the pirate, himself taking the other to her stern, intending thus to take each body of the enemy in rear.

Owing to the tumult of the fighting and to the fact that the boats were lowered on the side furthest from the fighting, his plan was not perceived by the pirates until it was too late to counteract it ; and the dismay of these latter may be conceived, when two parties of men came clambering over bow and stern and flung themselves into the fight with loud shouts of " Harald ! Harald ! "

Still they would not yield, for surrender implied just as certain a death as any to be met in battle ; and Asbiorn saw with anxiety that his headstrong charge had wilfully cut himself loose from the bodyguard he had detailed to see to his safety, and was in desperate straits on the farther side of the foes that were between them.

Mindful of the great responsibility that rested on him for the preservation of his future king, Asbiorn became possessed with a fury that seemed to endow him with superhuman strength. Swinging his huge axe round his head he flung himself upon the interposing crowd of combatants and, backed by Cyrus and a small body of his own men who rallied to his shout : " To me, Asbiorn's men ! " he cleft his way through the pirates as though he were pressing through a thicket of saplings.

The vigour of this onset brought the end of the fight. Into the gap cloven by Asbiorn rushed the immediate wedge of his personal backers, followed instantly by the bulk of his party ; and in a very few moments all the individuals composing this particular body of the

44 Harald First of the Vikings

pirates was hurled to the deck, dead or dying, and Harald and his few, almost overpowered in their gallant assault, were rescued from a perilous situation.

But neither he nor Asbiorn paused to congratulate themselves, for the fight was still raging furiously at the forward part of the ship.

“Charge into the bows!” cried Asbiorn, waving his ponderous axe, now dripping red from head to handle.

“To me, Harald’s men!” shouted our hero, springing with the elasticity of youth over the groups of prostrate bodies that cumbered the decks, and flinging himself with headlong dash into the fray.

This fresh access of assailants swept the struggling survivors of the pirate crew, still fighting with the frenzy of despair, into separate knots of two or three men each, who were almost instantly overwhelmed by the shower of blows that fell upon them from all sides; and thus it came about that, within a few minutes of Harald’s boarding the vessel fore and aft, the day was won.

Wiping his dripping forehead with his sleeve—his helmet had been knocked off in the struggle—Asbiorn turned to Harald and shook hands heartily with him.

“It was a tough fight,” quoth he, “and might have lasted a while longer. There are some alive among our lads, who would now be lying among those” (he jerked his head sideways towards the piled corpses), “but for you. It was a good idea of yours and smartly carried out, though somewhat risky.”

“It just came into my mind,” laughed Harald; “and it was so easy to do. The men backed me up loyally.”

“You’ll hear more of the affair to-night,” remarked Asbiorn with a smile. “The men are sure to make a song about it and you. Now let’s see to the wounds of our lads, and then look if there be any of these rogues still alive. I want one of those who held authority among them.”

A careful search brought to light one who would now

be termed the second officer of the pirate crew; and from him, later on, Asbiorn extracted information that led him to hesitate whether he should (as he had said) finish the job thoroughly, or go back for reinforcements. But Harald opposed this proposition at once and strongly.

"The men won't care for any others to share the honour and the plunder," said he; "and as far as my opinion is concerned, I say let us make a clean sweep of the rogues. We have wiped out two shiploads of them singlehanded, and I doubt if those remaining in this castle the prisoner speaks of can withstand us. Muster the men, and ask them what they would like. Let them speak out their minds, like free Vikings."

Well pleased with the spirit of the lad, Asbiorn gave way at once; and the men having been mustered, he laid the case plainly before them.

"It lies with you," he concluded. "I tell you—I, Asbiorn—that it was I who hesitated; but your young lord—well, you all know him!—he scouted the idea at once, and was for taking the stronghold of these rascals singlehanded."

A roar of delighted applause broke in upon his words.

"We will follow our lord!" "Harald! Harald!" "Skall to the Viking!" echoed from every lip.

Asbiorn smiled, contented.

"Have your way," he said; "I cannot blame you. We will clear out the rats' nest together."

After a brief consultation with Cyrus, the galley's head was turned to the eastward, and sail was made; food and drink were served out and partaken of, the wounded seen to, and the dead dropped overboard. The pirate vessel was manned by a mixed crew of slaves and free men: she might prove useful later on; and the two ships bore on their way, till the night came down and the Northern Lights flared and flickered in the sky.

The men feasted and drank at leisure, singing after their custom impromptu songs concerning the recent action, and, as Asbiorn had predicted, extolling the deeds of

46 Harald First of the Vikings

their young chief ; and Harald, Asbiorn, and Cyrus held deep counsel together in the little cabin, at which an occasional prisoner was compelled to attend, and worked out the plan by which they hoped to achieve their object and acquire much spoil.

Chapter IV

Of Harald's celebrated Oath

TWO men were leaning against the upper battlement of a small, but massive, castle that stood on the seaward extreme of a narrow promontory. Their garb was gaudy enough as to colour, if rude in fashion; and each wore a skin coat over all, open down the front and belted round the middle with a broad sash into which each had thrust a weapon—axe or sword. The one was tall, fair, and blue-eyed: evidently a Northman; but his companion's face had the swarthy hue of a Southerner's complexion, and his eyes and hair were black as night. Neither was ill-looking, but about eyes and mouth were graven lines that seemed to indicate violent temperaments and passions, latent now, but ready to spring to life at a moment's notice.

"They should have been back ere this, Thord," remarked the dark man to his comrade. "It is now ten days since they set sail, and the chief assured us six would see him returning."

"Ay, Simon," replied Thord; "I like it not. Methinks it bodes ill."

"Well," said Simon gloomily, "it is no use waiting up here after sunset. I will but bid the warder keep a watchful eye for lights at sea, and then we may as well go down to ale-hall."

Speaking thus the two men moved away, and presently disappeared into the interior of their keep, which was the identical sea-rovers' castle alluded to in the preceding chapter.

48 Harald First of the Vikings

About this same hour two ships, that were lying moored in a secluded fiord some three miles to the north of the castle, were the scene of considerable bustle and movement. Half-naked and securely bound, a number of men were lying in the bottom of each, securely guarded; other men, to the accompaniment of much laughter and gesticulation, were donning the gaudy garments that had evidently been stripped from the prisoners; and yet other parties of men, fully armed and accoutred, were lounging about, talking amongst themselves and glancing occasionally at a small group of four individuals, who stood apart discussing some subject with eager interest.

“The scheme is simple,” quoth Asbiorn, “and easily carried out by those who do not shirk a trifle of sharp hand to hand work. Our prisoners’ accounts agree that there cannot be more, at most, than fifty men in the castle itself, now that we have scored two full ships’ crews off their fighting strength. Once inside, our lads, together with the score or so of galley-slaves whom we have liberated and who have old grudges to pay off on their late masters, should be quite sufficient to deal with this scum, however desperate their resistance. The odds are slight, the plunder is vast, the punishment is a justifiable one. What more do brave Vikings desire?”

“Nothing,” replied a very broad and thick-set man who, with Harald and Cyrus, completed the quartette—“nothing; but if the plan fails, through any hitch, what then?”

“Why talk of failing?” broke in Harald impatiently; “surely you are not—”

“Nay,” interrupted Asbiorn, ere the unforgivable word “afraid” had passed his young lord’s lips—“nay, Asgurd means but to look on both sides, as a careful warrior is bound to do. But in this case we must forget there is another side, and just make the plan succeed. Its very simplicity will carry it through. It is time to start,” he added quickly, as though to check further argument and impress his claim to command.

The other three followed him as he strode towards

the waiting groups, who, forsaking their rough jests and lounging attitudes, drew together into solid formation as he advanced.

"All ready, men?" he inquired. "Well, then, Asgurd and Cyrus, do you take charge of our prisoner and his escort"—nodding towards those of his men who were now attired in the clothing of the pirates—"and march just ahead of us until we are close to the castle, when you know what you have to do. If the prisoner makes any attempt to escape or give the alarm, cut him down at once. The lord Harald and I will follow close in your footsteps; and my word to you all is—"Silence!"

A brief pause ensued, and then the force started on its errand in the order indicated, and ere long the darkness had swallowed them; while the few Vikings who were perforce left behind to guard the ships and the prisoners, relieved their injured feelings and gave expression to their disgust by bestowing sundry hearty kicks and curses on the helpless wretches who lay groaning in their bonds.

The warder at the castle gate was idly humming a song and wishing that his tour of duty were done that he might join his comrades at ale-hall, when a subdued whistle at the gate below stiffened all his faculties at once into alertness.

"Who goes there?" he demanded.

"It is I—Red Peter," replied a voice that he thought he recognised.

"The word?" he asked again.

"Wild-fowl!" replied the voice.

"Right enough," remarked the warder; "but I must see a little more of you ere I let you in." And he descended from the wall by a stone stair to the postern, through a wicket in which he scanned the party that had gathered round the gate to await its opening.

"'Tis you, indeed, Master Red Peter," said he at last, seemingly satisfied with his scrutiny of the leader,

50 Harald First of the Vikings

who had stood forward in front of his men, the gaudy garments of whom were visible enough by the smoky flare of the flickering torch though their features were indistinguishable ; “ but why come thus stealthily to the gate, instead of sounding your horn cheerily as a bold sea-rover should do ? ”

“ Hush, fool ! ” replied Red Peter. “ We have lured two ships into the fiord below ; and as our one ship is not strong enough to capture both—for we know not whither our comrade the *Walrus* has gone—the captain has sent me up privately with a few men to get some of you to come down and lend a hand. Open the gate : quick, now ! ”

Convinced that all was right, the warder complied without further delay, and the party filed in ; but no sooner were they well within the portals than the hapless fellow found himself seized, gagged, bound, and thrust into a corner, where he lay listening in dismay as a large body of men marched swiftly and silently in, locking the gate behind them, and proceeded straight into the interior of the castle.

In a few moments a very Babel of uproar arose ; and as shouts of “ Harald ! ” and “ Asbiorn ! ” rose above the frenzied yells of the surprised robbers who, having been taken unawares and unarmed, were utterly unprepared for such an onslaught, the unhappy warder realised in despair that his comrades at sea must have been defeated, and that a day of reckoning had arrived for him and his fellow freebooters on land.

Asbiorn had stowed the key of the gate on his own person, and, to prevent possible treachery, had rebound his captive guide and tossed him aside to await his leisure ; then, at the head of his men, he had stormed through into the hall and burst, flushed with eager anticipation, upon the unsuspecting robbers. These were almost instantly overpowered and cut down ; and at the shout : “ Scatter, men ! ” the Vikings broke off into separate parties, and hurried through corridors and rooms in search of further victims.

Cyrus stood by the door of the great hall with a few men, as a guard to prevent any fugitives escaping by that exit; Harald and Asgurd ranged through the building, slaying (as was the custom of the time) without mercy any of the robbers they encountered; but Asbiorn sought to take the commander of the castle alive, for he was old in such warfare, and had heard of and explored secretly hidden hoards of treasure—hidden by the chiefs from their own men. So he gave the strictest orders to secure alive, if possible, the persons of those he sought, and, as he was in the habit of doing, saw to it himself that his orders were obeyed.

For nigh on an hour the hunt went on without ceasing, and then the Vikings came crowding down from various parts of the castle into the great hall, laden with booty of all sorts and laughing and joking boisterously amongst themselves at their success.

“Have you found the leaders, Asbiorn?” inquired Cyrus.

“Not a trace of them,” replied Asbiorn, disappointment visible in his features. “Have in that guide of ours—he may know something; and do some of you fetch up that warder by the gate.”

Several men hurried off on the latter errand, while a couple unbound the guide and brought him before Asbiorn, who was now joined by Harald, Asgurd, and Cyrus.

“Is there a secret hiding-place in this castle?” asked Asbiorn, bending his brow sternly on the prisoner.

“There is, my lord,” replied the latter; “but if any have taken refuge there, and escaping learn that I have revealed their whereabouts to you, you might as well slay me out of hand.”

“They will not escape or trouble you,” remarked Asbiorn grimly. “Lead us to the place without more ado. Forward!” And a party of them moved off, the prisoner leading the way.

The secret chamber proved to be a very simple contrivance within the hall. A stone, moving on a pivot,

52 Harald First of the Vikings

when a cunningly concealed spring was touched, swung back, disclosing to view a small inner room containing a number of large chests ; and in the middle stood, with drawn weapons in their hands, the two men, Thord and Simon, whom we first saw conversing on the battlements.

These, seeing the game was up, and that for them there would assuredly be no mercy, made a furious dash to slay at least one of their foes ere they died themselves ; but they had no chance among so many, and were instantly cut down. Then the party entered the room, and the chests were forced open. Here was stored all that was most valuable in the eyes of the pirate chiefs—jewellery, silver cups and utensils, heavily ornamented weapons, and bags containing coin of all nations ; and Asbiorn, bidding his men find ropes and make the chests fast again, sent Asgurd to the out-buildings for transport.

Several carts were found, but curiously enough no horses or cattle, the latter being possibly kept at some farm further inland ; so the Vikings with much jesting and laughter rapidly loaded up all the plunder that the vehicles could contain, and constituted themselves beasts of burden for the time being.

When all that was of value had been cleared out of the castle, torches were applied to various parts of the building ; and leaving it wrapt in flames behind them, Asbiorn and his followers moved away towards their ships, dragging the carts containing their plunder in their midst. The warder and Red Peter were cast loose and bidden run for their lives ; and thankful for the unexpected reprieve the two rascals fled inland at best speed, amid the merriment of their captors.

An hour brought these to their galleys, on board of which the plunder was speedily stowed ; and then, unmooring, the Vikings rowed down the fiord to the open sea, where they hoisted their wide square-sails and headed homeward before the favouring southerly breeze.

“ Well, Cyrus,” quoth Harald, the evening before they made their port, “ you have had your revenge on the

rascals for the loss of your ship and crew, and your share of the spoil should set you up again in the world."

"True, my lord."

"And how about my proposal to you? When I see Guttorm, I shall ask him for a dragon of my own, as I have now a right to do. Will you be her sailing master?"

"The honour is too great for me, my lord," replied Cyrus. "I am, as I have said, but a rude sailor——"

"That is my affair," quoth Harald. "Come man! Ay, or no?"

"Ay, my lord, and with thanks. I will be true to you as haft to blade. Bear only with me, when I hold to my own opinion on matters I believe myself to know something about."

"That will be your duty," replied Harald; and so the bargain was struck, and for many a long year Cyrus served his master, faithfully and stoutly, meeting his death at last as he would have wished it—in battle on the ocean he knew and loved so well.

When Harald proffered his request for a long-ship to Guttorm, his uncle, who had been much pleased with the report he had received from Asbiorn concerning his ward, agreed at once; and thus, when he was barely fifteen, did our hero find himself in command on his own deck, though naturally enough he had capable and experienced officers with him to whose advice he very wisely gave ear.

From now on, Harald entered upon the strenuous life that was to harden him for the still more arduous years when he was to be fighting his way to the throne of all Norway, and the almost more trying times that were to beset him when, sole ruler of that country, he should hold his own against every plot and combination that should harass him, some even to be conceived and carried on by his own sons and their adherents.

Fate was welding and tempering the weapon wherewith Norway—a collection of petty, quarrelsome tribes of one race—was to be shaped into a great nation that

54 Harald First of the Vikings

was to leave its impress on the history of the world ; and the memory of which was to sparkle, while that world should endure, with legend and tale of deeds that lifted their doers into the highest ranks of men.

There was a king in Hordaland, named Eric, and he had a daughter called Gyda. This girl was now (871 A.D.) about sixteen years of age, and celebrated all the country round for her beauty and wit. Eric had placed her, when quite an infant, as foster child in the house of a great "bonder" in Valders, and here she was being brought up in safety and contentment, far from the anxieties and dangers which in these troublous times centred around the court of a petty king.

Harald had ere this formally taken over the government from his uncle, though Guttorm retained almost all his old influence over his young sovereign, and exercised wellnigh as powerful an authority, albeit not openly. The fame of Gyda's beauty and spirit came to Harald's ears, and with Guttorm's approbation he sent messengers to the girl, asking her hand in marriage.

Now Harald's name and renown were by this time widespread throughout Norway, while his personal beauty and generosity were the theme of many a scald ; consequently, both he and Guttorm anticipated that an alliance with him would be one not lightly esteemed by any woman, especially as his descent was clear and undoubted from the Yngling race.

When the messengers arrived in Valders they inquired for Gyda, and on being shown into her presence they delivered their message from the young king, expecting there and then a favourable reply. To their surprise, however, Gyda thus addressed them :—

"Tell your master," quoth she, "I esteem myself too highly to throw away my person and take a man for husband, king though he term himself, who rules over only a few districts of this great and noble land. And methinks," she continued, "it is wonderful that no king here in Norway will make the whole country subject to



"Now tell to King Harald these my words."

him, in the same way as Gorm the Old,¹ did in Denmark, or Eric in Upsala."

The messengers, astounded at this blank refusal of what they, naturally enough, considered a great honour, remonstrated with her, but in vain; and as they dared not employ force, they finally turned to leave the house and report the failure of their mission to their master. Gyda, however, followed them out, saying:—

"Now tell to King Harald these my words. I will only agree to be his lawful wife upon the condition that he shall first, for my sake, subject to himself the whole of Norway, so that he may rule over that Kingdom as freely and fully as King Eric over the Swedish dominions or King Gorm over Denmark; ¹ for only then, methinks, can he be called the King of a People."

The messengers returned home and delivered the reply to Harald and Guttorm, making faithful report of all that had passed between them and Gyda, and repeating her words exactly as she had spoken them; and they added that, in their opinion, the girl who so flouted a king, and sent him so insolent a message, ought to suffer severe punishment. But to their surprise Harald, after a few moments reflection, expressed disagreement with this opinion.

"This girl," said he, "has not spoken or done so much amiss that she should be punished, but rather she should be thanked for her words. She has reminded me of something which it appears to me wonderful I did not think of before. And now I make the solemn vow, and take that God to witness ² who made me, and rules over all things, that never shall I clip or comb my hair until I have subdued the whole of Norway with scat (land-tax) and duties and domains; or, if not, have died in the attempt."³

¹ King Gorm had not then conquered Denmark, though Gyda said he had.

² Did Harald actually, I wonder, use this adjuration in a dimly Christian sense, or did he refer to the particular God out of all the heathen mythology in whom he, personally, believed?

³ Heimskringla.

56 Harald First of the Vikings

Guttorm, whether from policy or ambition, praised the vow, and added that it was royal work to fulfil royal words. The sentiment appealed to Harald's subjects and retainers, and from one reason or another all espoused his cause and extolled the grandeur of its conception; and thus, taking fire at the words of a girl of sixteen, Harald began the enterprise which occupied him arduously and incessantly for twelve years, and bore him, at the end of that period, on the crest of a sea of blood and intrigue, to the thorny throne of Norway as the sole ruler of that country.

Chapter V

Of Harald's First Campaign

WHEN King Harald made his celebrated vow—which, as previously noted, is about the only thing generally known of him in these days—he probably realised the magnitude of the task before him. At any rate, the vow seems to have been couched in such solemn and deliberate terms that he could not possibly, save under the penalty of forfeiting his authority, rank, and good name, avoid making the first steps upon the path leading towards the attainment of his aspirations; and when once his feet were on that path he knew, and so did every man in Norway who heard the tale, that he must reach his goal or die. It speaks well for the character (even then) of our hero that, aware of the serious, almost desperate, nature of the enterprise, his immediate subjects rallied round him with one accord to aid him in his endeavour.

The first of his rivals upon whom the brunt was to fall is said to have been a King Gandalf, who, however, seems to have drawn his fate upon him by attempting to seize the realm bequeathed to Harald by his father, Halfdan the Black. He gathered allies unto himself and set out upon his quest; but in the end—"One by one five kings were killed . . . last of all Gandalf, and King Harald took all the latter's kingdom as far south as the Glommen."

But to our tale.

"Strike first, threaten last!" quoth Guttorm, speak-

58 Harald First of the Vikings

ing at the conclusion of a council of war that had been called almost immediately after Harald had uttered his vow ; “ strike hard and sharp, and so will you succeed.”

“ Say you so ? ” responded Harald ; “ who, then, is to be the first at whom we shall strike ? ”

“ My word,” replied Guttorm, “ is for King Gandalf—or, indeed, the nearest of him and his allies. Conquer one, and you will have no need to choose a second. The other lesser kings will choose for you, and you will then have to meet the gathering storm.”

“ Send round the war arrow ! ” said Harald. “ I will march on the third day from now.”

And the council broke up, and dispersed to their several duties connected with the projected expedition.

When Harald and Guttorm set forth to begin the campaign that was to endure for twelve long years, they found themselves menaced by no fewer than five kings and princes. On the one side there was King Gandalf, and with him Hogni and Frodi, the sons of King Eystein of Hedemark ; Hogni Karason, another prince, was marching and ravaging far and wide through the province of Ringerike ; and lastly, King Hake Gandalfsson got together a force of three hundred men, and set out for Westfold, going by infrequented inland tracks through scarce-known passes, with a view to taking Harald by surprise ; “ but King Gandalf abode with his host in his own land, with intent to put across the firth, he and his army, into Westfold ”—to take Harald in flank and rear.

Harald and Duke Guttorm heard through their spies of the intended strategy of the invaders, and, as the latter had advised, struck first and hard, being determined to destroy their foes in detail. They marched up country to intercept Hake, and by means of good generalship and trusty guides found him when in the act of traversing a narrow dale. Guttorm at once pressed forward and barred his exit, holding him in check, while Harald turned off with a part of his army and, skirting an intervening hill, fell upon Hake’s rear as he was hotly

engaged with Guttorm. The action was desperate, but brief ; for, penned in by forces that were each numerically larger than his own, King Hake and a great part of his men fell where they stood, quarter being neither asked nor given. Only a very few escaped by bypaths from the general slaughter ; and " the place has been sithence called Hakesdale."

But scant time had King Harald to rest after the fight, for other foes were thronging around and into his dominions. Back he marched into Westfold, where, taking advantage of his absence, King Gandalf had by now entered and asserted himself ; and as both parties were eager to come to conclusions, battle was joined without delay.

Harald sent Guttorm on in advance and, keeping a body of men in reserve, bade him fall on with all his might. Nothing loth, the duke carried out his instructions, and was met with equal fury by his opponents. Both sides exhausted their store of spears, and then the hand to hand fighting of the day ensued ; and as King Gandalf's forces were somewhat in excess of Guttorm's, the latter was slowly but gradually driven back.

]At this juncture, above the tumult of the confused struggle, arose a swelling roar of " Harald ! Harald ! " and, emerging from behind a wood that had shielded their approach from detection, the reserves burst suddenly in impetuous charge upon the exposed flank of their enemy. Taken by surprise and driven in upon each other, the latter lost heart ; Guttorm rallied his retreating soldiers, and renewed his attack with all the vigour of which they were capable ; and Gandalf and his men, overmatched and hopeless of retrieving the day, broke and fled in confusion.

Gandalf got safely home to his own country, where he remained for a time brooding over his defeat, but still resolved on further action ; but his followers were too disheartened by their recent ill-success to do aught more than insist on returning to their homes—for a while, at least.

60 Harald First of the Vikings

When these tidings came to the ears of Hogni and Frodi, the sons of King Eystein of Hedemark, they were in dread of Harald's host now marching in their direction; so they sent off speedy messengers to Hogni Karason and Hersir¹ Gudbrand, their allies, and appointed a meeting at Ringsacre in Hedemark for the purpose of considering what next was to be done. They had not expected such prompt and decisive action on the part of Harald, and realised that, if they themselves would save their lives and property, they must be equally prompt and decisive in countering his blows.

But Harald and Guttorm knew the value of correct and early information, and the date and locality of the proposed meeting was known to them ere ever it took place.

"The one blow," remarked Harald to his uncle, "will suffice for the four. Let them come together, and then we will smite. Now, Guttorm, do you take your men and I will take mine, and we will wend to Ringsacre, reaching there at night time; and then, hey! for a flare, the flames of which shall tell the news to the whole country-side."

"We will go this very day," said Guttorm; "but it were wise to tell none of our intent until we are near the spot. As matters now stand in Norway, many men are undecided which king they will serve: hearts can waver and tongues can wag."

"Both hearts and tongues can be stilled," responded Harald; "but your words are wise."

That evening the two forces set out and marched all night, having trusty guides. The next day they lay hid among the woods, proceeding on their course only when darkness had again fallen; and near midnight they arrived at their destination. So warily was the manœuvre executed, that they linked hands and surrounded the position wherein the kings were sleeping before the sentinels were aware of their approach; but at the first alarm all thought of concealment was cast

¹ See p. 232 for "Hersir" = Baron.

aside, and the concerted plan was carried into effect with stunning finality.

A dense body of men encircled each house that held a leader and applied fire to it, and in a brief space the flames were roaring to the sky. The alarmed inmates, roused thus suddenly and unceremoniously from their slumbers, grasped their weapons and strove frantically to fight their way out into the open, but with scant avail. Hogni Karason and Gudbrand never emerged from under the blazing roofs that covered them: they and most of their men perished miserably in the mass of burning material that fell in upon their heads; but the sons of Eystein succeeded in rallying a sufficient number of followers to force their way out, and fell frenziedly upon the foes that hemmed them in, attempting to hew their way to liberty. The effort was vain; they were overwhelmed by numbers and cut down; "and there fell both Hogni and Frodi."

Having thus effectually disposed of his four rivals, Harald left the spot and marched backward and forward through the country-side, the terror of his name going before him; but as it was ever his policy (and Guttorm's) to treat leniently those who submitted to his rule, the rumour of his mild intentions spread rapidly, and one province after another declared for him as king. Guttorm issued many proclamations, promising immunity and reward to loyalists, but scant mercy to malcontents; and these, and the knowledge of the swiftness of the punishment that had overtaken the four leaders aforementioned, enabled Guttorm ere long to rally round his royal master's standard the population of Ringerike and Heathmark, Gudbrand's-dale and Hadaland, Thotn, Raumrick, and all the northern parts of Vingulmark.

Only King Gandalf abode still in his own land, wild with rage and disappointment, and gathering to him numbers of folk from the more southerly parts of the country to try and make head against the conquering king. But his day, also, was at hand.

62 Harald First of the Vikings

"There remains now but the one king," remarked Guttorm, "of all those who wended forth to seize your kingdom, my lord."

"Ay," responded Harald; "King Gandalf is he. I have not forgotten that it was he who set the light in the thatch."

"He gathers men fast," suggested Guttorm; "why not press him hard now, ere he gains strength to do much mischief? The south-landers flock to his banner, and it were well to give them some news to carry away with them into their own country."

"Far-seeing as ever, Guttorm," said Harald heartily. "Your counsel is good, and we will follow it forthwith. See to it."

Within the week an army was on the march to challenge Gandalf to battle; and the latter, believing himself strong enough to achieve success, set out to encounter Harald. But he had underrated his enemy; for Harald and Guttorm withstood him so vigorously by day, and harassed his camps so incessantly by night, that, driven from point to point and exhausted with broken rest, his men began to desert in large numbers, and finally Gandalf, seeing all was lost, rallied a few faithful adherents and made a desperate onslaught on his persevering enemy.

The battle was severe, and lasted for some time; but eventually Gandalf was slain, and his men, disheartened by the fall of their leader, dispersed in all directions for safety. "So Harald got to him all Gandalf's realm south away to Raumelf."

This disposed of the first confederacy against Harald, and opened a broad path to future conquest. By the advice of his uncle Guttorm he now assumed the initiative, marched into the Uplands, "and so north through the Dales, and thence north over the Dovrafell." When he arrived in the more thickly populated country, Harald found it bitterly averse to his plans and his rule; following, therefore, the established custom, he spread sword and devastation everywhere. Those who were

able to do so escaped, some to Orkadale, some to Gauldale, and some to the woods and mountains ; but those who could not flee came in and submitted, and Harald treated them well, replaced them in their possessions, and enrolled them as his subjects.

He pushed on and came to Orkadale, but here a certain King Gryting had gathered an army and opposed his further advance. Rapidly assembling his forces, Harald gave battle, and with the usual result. Gryting's array was broken and dispersed, many of his men being slain ; but he himself was taken prisoner, and on being given the option of death or swearing fealty to his conqueror, he accepted the latter choice and became Harald's man. "Thereafter all the Orkadale folk submitted them to King Harald and became his men."

By now the cause of Harald was being widely espoused from all sides, either from favour or from fear. It is related that Earl Hakon Griotgardsson came from the west, from Yriar, with a large following, to offer his services to Harald ; and as the earl was a great man and of much weight in the country, the new accession was of much value to the king. He marched on into Gauldale and, meeting with opposition, fought and killed two kings and took their domains—the Gauldale folk and the Strind-folk ; and as some recompense to his new adherent, he gave him the earldom over the Strind-folk.

Then Harald swept into Stiordale, fought another battle and won it, and subjected the people of that province also. The up-country Thrand-folk, seeing their neighbours eaten up piecemeal, gathered together, led by four kings, and essayed to stem the tide of invasion. But it was all to no effect ; for Harald met and fought them, gained the victory, dispersing or slaying his opponents, and in the end brought into subjection to himself the whole of Thrandheim. "King Harald had eight battles in all, yea, or more, in Thrandheim."

There is a quaint story told of two brothers in this

64 Harald First of the Vikings

campaign. While Harald was conquering the Numedal district, the two king-brothers thereof, Herlaug and Hrollaug, abandoned all hope of withstanding his arms. Herlaug, despising the notion of surrender and preferring death, got into a "howe" (or mound with a small, internal chamber) with eleven men and some food and drink, and was covered in; but Hrollaug, who had resolved on submission and life, gave a typical exhibition of what was considered a descent (in rank) from king to earl.

He had a king's high-seat arrayed on the summit of his brother's grave-mound, and seated himself therein; then he ordered pillows to be laid on the lower place where earls sat below the king, tumbled himself down from the king's seat on to the earl's seat, and declared himself thereby earl. He then went out to meet Harald, told him what he had done in token of submission, and formally tendered him his kingdom and fealty. Harald, to complete the formality, girded a sword round Hrollaug, hung a shield round his neck, named him earl, and inducted him into his high-seat. "Then he gave him the Naumdale folk, and made him earl over them."

After this, Harald marched back to Thrandheim into winter quarters. The place pleased him, and he built there his "stead" or palace, making it his headquarters; he named the stead "Ladir." That same winter he married Asa, the daughter of Earl Hakon Griotgardsson; and in consequence Hakon became one of the most prominent men in the rising kingdom.

Most of the winter was devoted to shipbuilding, for Harald was well aware that he must subdue the coast-folk of Norway and set trusty men in charge of the coast provinces, if he wished for peace; also he knew that the numbers of the Vikings, who were formerly only a small body of sea Ishmaelites, were being swelled by the constantly increasing accessions of those emigrants from Norway who were determined not to submit to his rule. A large and strong fleet was a vital necessity—that was apparent to both him and his councillors—and therefore

Harald's First Campaign 65

he set about the task of building one with his usual energy, being resolved, the ensuing spring, to carry his banner southward by sea along the coast, and leave the land-folk to recover, after their recent chastisement, under the fostering care of his own earls and liegemen.

Chapter VI

Of the Burning of the Updale Woods

IT is a well-known truism that “ the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley ” ! and Harald was speedily to learn that amid such a turbulent race there would always be some bold spirits who would bitterly resent all authority, and on whom, if he wished to preserve intact the possessions he was battling so strenuously to gain and hold, he was bound to keep a very watchful eye.

He had met and defeated King Gryting of Orkadale, inflicting severe punishment on his army ; Gryting himself had been taken prisoner, and had submitted, with (as the chronicle says) all the Orkadale folk, to Harald’s power ; and his broken host had dispersed to seek their safety in all directions. What more reasonable, then, than for Harald to turn his attention to the building of his fleet and his plans for the subjugation of the coast-folk ?

But he deceived himself. Possibly, had King Gryting died valiantly in battle, his army would have stood their ground and died with him ; but the rumour that he was taken prisoner alive, seems to have prejudiced him in their eyes and affected them in another way. They broke and fled, many of them to the woods and mountains, and there brooded over future revenge ; and as Harald swept rapidly through Orkadale the dalesmen, who deemed themselves betrayed by their king and scorned to submit, retreated before him, seeking shelter, like their brethren, in the woods and mountains, and here they

Burning of the Updale Woods 67

quietly bided their time until Harald should have departed to his own home.

When he was fairly out of the country, the leaders of these scattered bands of fugitive Orkadalers met and held counsel together. On one point they were all agreed :— submission was out of the question. Free men they had lived, free men they would die, and there must be many of the same way of thinking. So they sent round the war arrow in secret, and drew recruits from every corner of Orkadale to their banners in the hilly, wooded country; then, when their ranks had swelled to formidable proportions, they chose the time when Harald was most occupied in his ship-building, and openly proclaimed defiance.

It was the depth of winter in Norway—no light season for weaklings; but these men were bold and hardy, accustomed to bitter weather, and desperate in their resolve. If Harald conquered others, he should not conquer them—at least, not without a stern struggle; the dangers and difficulties of their mountain recesses were as great, if not greater, for him and his troops as for them; so they steeled their hearts, swept the countryside for provisions, and dared him to come and try conclusions with them in their wooded fastnesses.

Now, as Harald's designs for the spring would necessitate the taking of most of his available forces with him, it would be distinctly dangerous to leave upon his borders a powerful and threatening foe. His capital, his obedient provinces, now recovering from the ravages of war, would lie at their mercy, and when he returned he would probably find rebellion and discontent seething everywhere, and his work would have to be done over again. Such a thing was not to be thought of for a moment! Therefore, he gathered his army around him, and, accepting the challenge, set out to bring the insurgent Orkadalers of the Updale Woods to their senses.

Earl Asbiorn, Thorkill, and Grimm, old friends of ours, went with him; but Cyrus he left behind in Thrandheim to superintend and push on as best he

68 Harald First of the Vikings

might, with diminished gangs of workmen, the task of getting his fleet built; and Guttorm remained as regent, to oversee matters of State and keep him informed of the progress of affairs.

"A tough job, this, Thorkill," remarked Grimm to his companion as they sat by a fire in camp; "Harald is more determined to give these Orkadalers a sharp lesson, than I have ever yet known him to be about anything."

"No wonder," responded Thorkill. "They have chosen the very worst time for us that could be, and Harald is well aware that they have done so on purpose."

"This talk," continued Grimm, "of living and dying free men, seems to me merely a pretext. How has Harald interfered with the common folk? In no way, save to give them greater security and prosperity; and if he bids them pay a tax to ensure that, who shall say it is not earned?"

"True. It is the petty kings and the chiefs, who live by plundering others—these same common folk among them—who make all the outcry. But leaving that matter, how does he intend to conduct this expedition we are now engaged in? A country swept bare of provisions, and covered with snow; rugged mountains, yawning defiles, dense woods to be traversed in search of men who know their every goat track. It is no child's play, this."

"As to the provisions," replied Grimm, "we may be sure Harald has already established a line of communication, and we shall get what we need: that is the first thing he is sure to have thought of. As to the snow, we have all seen snow before, and are not likely to shiver and shake at the thought of marching through it; but as to those same mountains, defiles, and woods, I too am at a loss to guess how the campaign will be carried on. Still, I believe in Harald, and so do you; and we may be quite sure he will find a way."

"I am of your opinion," quoth a voice, and Earl Asbiorn stalked out of the darkness and flung himself

Burning of the Updale Woods 69

down by the fire. "So you cannot fathom his strategy, either of you?"

"I have racked my brains to no purpose," replied Grimm, greeting his old comrade; "and I am as far from a satisfactory result as ever."

"And you, Thorkill?" asked Asbiorn.

"Well," said Thorkill, "were it summer, I might come near to guessing; but being winter—h'mph!"

He shrugged his shoulders, stared into the fire, and was silent.

"See now," smiled Asbiorn, "how little his best men know our Harald. Think awhile! I will put you on the track. Does he ever do things as other men expect him to do them?—Is he content to do the usual thing?"

"Not if he can find a newer and better way," replied both.

"Then seek for the most simple method, which, very often, is the last thought of, just because it lies under your very nose."

Both stared at him, at each other, and then into the fire, but could come to no conclusion; so Asbiorn rose to leave, saying with a laugh:—

"Take all the rest you can: you'll need it; meantime, have either of you ever housed a wolf in his den? If so, and you did not wish, for any reason, to come to close quarters with the brute, how would you get him? Think it over. Good night."

And he strode away, still laughing.

The two looked at each other.

"Ay! wolves they are, no doubt," said Grimm at last, "and housed they may be, for they have nothing like our numbers; but what means Asbiorn?"

"Starve them out, I suppose," replied Thorkill. "Pen them in till they're weak with hunger, and then knock them on the head quietly and without any fuss. That's it, comrade! But it will be a long and wearisome task, and Harald wants to get back to his fleet-building. Well, we had best do as Asbiorn advised, and get our rest."

70 Harald First of the Vikings

The king's force pushed on until it reached the foot of a tall mountain, thickly girdled with pine woods and marking the beginning of a long range of similar heights, where it halted. That night, Harald sent for Thorkill and Grimm. They found a stranger with him—a peasant, by his dress.

“I want you, Thorkill,” said the king, “to take your division and go with this man as guide where he will lead you. When you reach the spot, you will have an open view of the plain here; and when you see two fires lighted, one close beside the other, press forward in the direction your guide will indicate and act as circumstances may require. Follow my instructions closely, and on no account move forward until you see the signal.”

Thorkill saluted and left the tent, the seeming peasant bearing him company.

“Now, Grimm,” continued Harald; “you also will be provided with a guide, and you will proceed with your men along the plain until you come to a certain defile running up into the mountains. Follow that route, and take post where your guide will show you as though you were lying in ambush for an enemy. I am not sure, but I think it likely you will have fighting. If you meet Thorkill without either of you having seen a foe, send a party down to me here to report at once.”

Grimm departed, and Harald turned to Asbiorn, who had sat silently by while the foregoing instructions were given.

“You think it will work out as I hope?” he inquired.

“It is,” replied Asbiorn, “the only way I can see to success; but the final move will have to be quick and decisive.”

“I intend it to be so,” remarked Harald, grimly.

About noon on the following day the two fires were lighted, close together, on an open space clear of the camp.

“The signal,” said the guide, touching Thorkill on the shoulder.

Burning of the Updale Woods 71

“ Good ! ” replied the latter. Rising, he called an officer to him, and said : “ Pass the word along for the whole line to advance slowly, moving eastward, and scour the mountain thoroughly. I doubt if there will be any resistance as yet, but if there be, it must be met and pushed back. You all know your orders and understand the general plan. Go ! ”

In accordance with instructions furnished by the guide the entire division, strung out over the mountain side, pressed forward, keeping well in touch and covering a large extent of ground. As they advanced up the rocky ascent, they constantly saw human forms flitting before them among the trees, and were occasionally greeted with a flight of arrows or spears ; but they moved steadily on, their agile foes ever retreating before them, until the evening drew in.

By now they were near the summit, and the line had contracted, owing to the narrowing of the range, until it was far denser in formation than at setting out. The word ran along to halt, light fires, and bivouac on the spot for the night, especial orders being issued to prevent the breaking of the cordon by any attack ; and the troops, wearied by the climb, settled down to rest as they might, the whole line being strongly picketed in front. No interruption occurred, however, save from such minor assaults as might have been expected, and the following day, as soon as daylight permitted, the advance was resumed.

When the summit was reached, Thorkill obtained a wide view. He saw Harald's camp far below, to all appearance undisturbed ; he looked everywhere for Grimm and his force, but could perceive no signs of them ; then, taking up their march again, he and his men pressed steadily down, in the direction indicated by the guide. But suddenly a great noise of shouting was heard directly ahead, and from right and left came answering cries from his own men. Thorkill grasped the truth before his companion, who turned to him with a smile, could explain.

72 Harald First of the Vikings

"They have run into Grimm's arms!" he exclaimed.

"Ay, have they," said the man; "and they are trying to break back. Stand firm, now, or all your labour will be thrown away."

"Trust me!" responded Thorkill; and he shouted orders to that effect to be passed along.

And now, as the men pushed on, they encountered serious resistance. Again and again fierce rushes were met and repelled, and casualties were becoming frequent on both sides; and at last, emerging on a plateau that terminated abruptly in a precipitous descent, the whole situation was made clear.

The line of retreat for the Orkadalers from this particular mountain was by a narrow, saddle-back ridge, connecting it with another steep, wooded range that towered in front; but on the further side of the neck, barring the way of escape for the fugitives by that path, was planted a body of armed men under Grimm, who mockingly invited the Orkadalers to come across, promising them a hearty welcome. In the rear of these latter stretched the serried, steadily advancing arc of their pursuers under Thorkill, precluding all hope of doubling back.

The "drive" was complete!

"Surrender, or die!" cried Thorkill, addressing the crowd of stupefied men before him.

Shouts of "We surrender!" arose, and were speedily joined in by nearly all the rebels; but two or three, rushing forward, essayed to clamber down the cliff.

A flight of arrows settled matters so far as they were concerned, and now Grimm shouted across: "Fools! the way is blocked even there. Throw down your arms."

The order was instantly complied with, and moving forward Thorkill detailed a party to gather up the weapons; then, marshalling the prisoners, he drove them over the ridge into the midst of Grimm's soldiers, who promptly secured each batch as it arrived. Last of all Thorkill and his men crossed, and the combined

Burning of the Updale Woods 73

parties, halting on the spot, sent a report to Harald of their success.

Some hours later the messengers returned with fresh orders. This time Grimm was detailed to "drive" the range before him, while Thorkill was ordered down to the plains with the prisoners, where he would find an escort for the latter and be guided to a fresh rendezvous; and after this manner, with varying success, the sweeping of the Updale Woods was carried on for nearly a fortnight, the camp below keeping pace with the advance.

But as body after body of rebels succumbed to these tactics and were slain or captured, the remainder grew more wary and difficult to hem in; their numbers also dwindled rapidly, as the suspicion of treachery crept into their midst; and finally, pressed into a corner some few square miles in extent, there were left but a thousand or so of the most desperate and irreconcilable, and Harald, apprised of the fact, determined to end the operations at one blow.

That night he moved his whole camp and, making a wide detour, arrived on the further side of the wooded district wherein lurked, or toward which were retreating, the last survivors of the Orkadale rebels. Without halt he extended his entire force, bidding them surround until they came in touch with the advancing Grimm and Thorkill; "and," added he, "give no quarter."

"This is the end," quoth Earl Asbiorn.

"Not yet," returned Harald, glancing aside at him.

The earl wondered, but said no more; and Harald, calling for his horse, bade Asbiorn mount and follow, galloping off to see that the manœuvre was being carried out to his satisfaction.

The range of mountains terminated here in a few minor acclivities, covered densely with pine woods, seamed with cracks and ravines, and rising in the centre to a series of bald peaks and ridges, of small size but so steep that only here and there the snow contrived to adhere in patches. A strong wind had been blowing some days previously, sweeping the powdery, white covering

74 Harald First of the Vikings

from the branches of the trees and piling it in places beneath them in deep drifts ; thus to those on the plain all was dark forest, with partially naked peaks peeping out above it. During the last forty-eight hours the wind had completely dropped, all was still, and a keen frost had come with the cleared sky.

Harald drew rein at a spot whence he could view the connection between this last little spur and the range from which it sprang.

"See," said he, pointing with outstretched hand ; "if your eyesight equals mine, Asbiorn, you can see where Thorkill and Grimm are advancing. Mark those moving dots ; they are the Orkadalers making for these woods. They do not know we are here—yet ! Now to make sure the gate is effectually barred."

And he resumed his gallop along his extended line of men.

Asbiorn paused a moment to gaze. Far in the distance, traversing a white spot on the distant mountain side, that probably indicated a snow-field, he noted a number of black dots, moving rapidly in his direction ; but he dared not linger to watch for the emerging from the darker patch of forest behind them of the pursuing force, as Harald might need him, so he wheeled and galloped off after the king.

Nothing more of note occurred during the ride, though once Harald scanned the sky, and asked him : "Think you there will be wind to-night, Asbiorn ?" and on receiving an answer in the negative, rode on in thoughtful mood. Presently they reached headquarters, and the king entering his tent signified a wish to be alone.

"Call me if anything occurs that requires my presence," he said. That was all.

Asbiorn retired, wondering what Harald had in mind. That he was evolving some plan, he was sure ; but he thought, himself, the strength of the encircling force would be amply sufficient to net the remnant of the rebels, and as the king had ordered no quarter to be given, the matter ought to be settled in a day. The

Burning of the Updale Woods 75

news of the punishment would circulate far and wide, and probably deter others from imitating the Orkadalers.

What fools the latter were, he thought, to allow themselves to be driven like sheep—or wolves. They should have scattered over the surrounding provinces, and then, if they still held to it, have amalgamated again when Harald was gone. But it would just end in the usual way; Harald would get them in his grip, and how could they die better than fighting, if they were bent on death? It was the right and fitting end for a Northman: the usual way.

And then flashed across his mind the question he had put to Thorkill and Grimm: "Is Harald content to do the usual thing?" It struck him like a blow. Then leapt up the other puzzling little trifles—"Will there be wind to-night?" . . . What was in the king's mind? Asbiorn could think of but the one thing—Fire! Yes: that was what he intended; he would fire the forest! But would it burn? Well, why not? The trees were of wood—resinous—the snow had been blown off them—the wind and frost had dried them. Houses would burn in winter, he knew well: why not pine-trees?

But what a vengeance! To burn a thousand men at once! Well, it was a drastic cure for rebellion, certainly, but it would put an effectual stop to any more little risings of the kind. It was a stroke after Harald's own heart—terrible, sure, and sudden—ha! had not the king said the end would be sudden? Filled with admiration, with a touch of awe mingling in it, he lay down to rest awhile, ordering the officer on duty to call him should need arise.

It was night, and, as Harald had hoped and expected, a breeze had sprung up from the east. He and Asbiorn were riding slowly down the fringe of soldiers that guarded the line of the forest.

"Any alarm?" he inquired, as he passed along.

Only here and there was he met with the reply that

76 Harald First of the Vikings

there had been an abortive attempt to break through. Most of the officers who reported this, hinted that the fugitives, finding themselves surrounded, might concentrate and make a desperate attack on some one point, possibly forcing a way; but Harald only smiled and rode on. The hours crept on till nigh midnight.

"Asbiorn," said the king; "by now my orders have gone round the whole circle. In a few minutes you shall see what I intend. It may surprise you."

Asbiorn had guessed already, but dared not hint his comprehension. The king called; an officer appeared.

"Pass the word by both flanks to carry out my instructions at once."

"Ay, my lord!" and he was gone.

Almost simultaneously twinkling sparks began to spring up along the verge of the woods, moving and growing, with here and there a sudden red spurt of flame.

"Fire, my lord?" exclaimed Asbiorn.

"Fire!" assented Harald. "I will smoke these rats in their holes, and the tale shall never die. They would none of my mercy: they shall taste of my wrath."

He was silent, watching the myriad shifting points of light that shone as far as eye could see, girdling the forest with a starry zone.

Presently the element began to assert its power. Fanned by the breeze, first a few of the drier trees caught, and kindling, communicated their blaze to their close-packed brethren. From one to the other, slowly at first, and then with a rush, the flames leapt and stretched their ardent fingers, gradually gaining an ascendancy; and finally, with a mighty roar and a belch of suffocating smoke, they suddenly sprang into resistless being, and rushed fast and furious on their devouring way. A clamour of voices echoed the sound, as the soldiers shouted at the success of the scheme; and with appalling suddenness the entire forest (as it seemed) for miles around burst into a sheet of flame that towered high into the sky.

Burning of the Updale Woods 77

“What of Thorkill and Grimm, my lord?” asked Asbiorn.

“They have their orders,” replied Harald calmly. “If they obey those, not a hair of their heads will be scorched; but they will probably have some tough fighting, and the troops are now swarming round to help them.”

This was indeed the case. Once the conflagration was under way, there was not much fear of the rebels facing it and attempting to force their escape in that direction; they would break back for the hills they had just left, and it was to prevent that that Harald was pouring reinforcements round to the further side from either flank as fast as possible to strengthen the resisting power of Grimm’s and Thorkill’s men. The Orkadalers were fairly trapped!

Putting spurs to their horses, Harald and Asbiorn galloped away to reach the spot where the rush of fugitives was likely to be felt most heavily: the path back to the snowy range; and on their way they noted many isolated attempts being made by the despairing wretches to break through the encircling cordon. But the order had been given: “No quarter”; and they were slain on the instant, or thrust back with spears to encounter a more horrible death.

Harald and his Jarl arrived at last where a dense, swaying crowd betokened the main pressure of the human torrent that was striving its utmost to burst the impending barrier; and riding up, they surveyed the struggle from a short distance.

It did not last long, for those fugitives who had been swept into the embrace of the heated soldiery were almost instantly overpowered and killed; but occasionally an unhappy Orkadaler broke out and fled, only to be overtaken and struck down by some of the troops who hovered round the swaying mob of their comrades.

Presently, having evidently completed their task, the mass of men broke up and, by order of some of the officers near by, again extended into more open forma-

78 Harald First of the Vikings

tion and awaited the advent of more fugitives. None appeared, however, the flames were now roaring in close vicinity, and it seemed likely that those Orkadalers who had been too tardy in taking flight had been overtaken and consumed by the forest fire.

At this juncture, a strong breeze blew aside for a moment the dense veil of smoke that hung close over the tree-tops ; and a simultaneous shout and gestures from all present indicated some matter of interest in the heart of the conflagration.

Gathered on several of the bare peaks that emerged above the forest were about fifty miserable Orkadalers, some struggling frantically to scale the highest points but slipping back into the flames that leapt and snapped at them from below, others tossing their arms with frenzied gestures as though appealing for the aid that no human being could afford. It was but a momentary glance ; and a unanimous groan ran through the watching crowd as the heavy smoke pall swooped down once more, enveloping its helpless victims in its smothering embrace, while the flames quivered and darted through the blackness like living tongues licking out to their prey.

There was silence, save for the triumphant roar of the fiery element ; then Harald turned his horse's head for camp, remarking to Asbiorn as they quitted the spot : " Think you this lesson will ever be forgotten ? "

Asbiorn could find no word to reply.

Chapter VII

Of the Two Battles of Solskiel

WITH the spring came news on the breeze from the south, that stirred men's hearts to battle ardour and turned their eyes with longing to Harald; and the king, never at any time backward in his younger days when the scent of war was in the air, set his face southward with a great host of dragons, galleys, and cutters, and sailed for Möre. In the fleet were many large ships, and many men of renown; but Harald's dragon and her crew, especially the bodyguard and the berserks, attracted all eyes and were the theme of the scalds. So went Harald south to war, leaving Guttorm his uncle in his place to rule the realm.

The king at that time of the Möre folk was one Hunthiof, and he had a son named Solvi Klofi. They were great warriors, on sea and land, and their fame had spread far and wide; and they joined unto them in alliance Nockvi, the King of Raumsdale, who was the father of Solvi Klofi's mother. Now when the tidings of King Harald's expedition came to their ears they sent round the war arrow, gathered all their available ships of every kind, and sailed to meet him. The two fleets encountered each other off Solskiel (an island in the parish of Aedo, North Möre), and the weather being favourable joined battle without delay.

Harald led the way for his own men in his splendid dragon, his banner upheld by Egil Ullserk and streaming in the breeze, his chosen band of berserks around him,

80 Harald First of the Vikings

and his hird-men ¹ standing in the prow, ready to board at the first collision. Hunthiof laid his ship straight for Harald, and a fine vessel it was ; but not so splendid nor so well manned as the king's. Earl Asbiorn, on the *Hawk*, kept close by Harald, in readiness to carry orders to any part of the fleet ; and right and left towered many great ships commanded by earls and princes, who fought that day as Harald's liege-men.

Behind these again came rank upon rank of vessels of all sorts and sizes, full of fighting men eager for the fray, chanting their war songs, and, to emphasise the rhythm of the sonorous words, striking their shields with their weapons as they sang. Opposite them, in full battle array, with standards flying and war horns booming, advanced the fleet of the allied kings, numerically equal and almost of the same tonnage. Here, too, the men sang and smote their shields, while the rowers urged the vessels through the gently swaying swell, and the boarding parties in the prows shouted defiance. The roar and clamour of voices, and the splashing of innumerable oars, sent the wild-fowl wheeling overhead in shrieking confusion, as the ships rushed gallantly forward to meet each other.

“ Crash ! ” the leading ranks have closed at full speed, and masts, oars, and planking are rent and splintered by the terrible shock, men being flung overboard or prostrate on the decks, unable to keep their footing. “ Crash ! ” again, into the confusion drives a second rank and a third ; and now all are huddled into a dense mass, the smaller vessels hovering round and about to assist in whatever way they may, while over all fly clouds of arrows and spears to fall in perilous hail on the combatants below.

Harald and Hunthiof met in full career, and the shock of the collision as the two ships drove into each other's stems with trailing oars was so violent as to cause them to rebound and hurl every man off his feet. But springing up, the sailors rapidly lashed the dragons together,

¹ For explanation see p. 86.

and the fighting men rushed to meet their opponents. Now set in a combat fierce and fell, as axe and sword smote shield or body; the gulls screamed overhead at the men shouting and raving below, and the vessels drifted lazily on the tide.

Once Asbiorn's heart got the better of his head, and he sprang aboard Harald's adversary, leading his men in a desperate charge; but their numbers were too few to be of much avail, and they were speedily driven back to the *Hawk*, where Harald himself shouted down to them from his lofty poop to bide.

To and fro swayed the struggle, now surging over into one ship and now into the other; but it was slowly becoming apparent that the king's men were the stronger and better disciplined, and were steadily wearing Hunthiof's resistance down. At this juncture a fresh combatant rushed up at the full speed of her oars and crashed into the other side of Harald's dragon, diverting his attack on Hunthiof, and obliging him to employ a portion of his berserks to repel boarders in that quarter also.

Asbiorn, in the *Hawk*, noting her advance, had already made his way to the nearest king's ship and informed her commander of the perilous position of his lord; and he, turning his prow, was speedily pouring men into Harald's second opponent and compelling her, in her turn, to face a new antagonist. And now ship after ship came tearing up, as if there were some magnetic attraction at this spot; and gradually round the king's vessel gathered the entire strength of both fleets, each combatant devoting itself to the nearest adversary, and reckless of what was going on around so long as its own particular part in the action was creditably maintained.

Hark! there is a cry: "Hunthiof is slain!" His dragon is backing out of the press, affording a momentary respite to the king. Again, a cry peals out: "Nockvi—Nockvi is down!" And the second opponent, likewise,

82 Harald First of the Vikings

has hastily manned her oars and is pushing and pulling her way to the open.

“To me—Harald’s men!” It is the king’s voice, hoarse with shouting, but recognised by those near by; and the rallying battle cry swells and swells till it dominates every other sound, and the ships of the allies are seen to be extricating themselves from the crowd, and scattering as best they may for safety.

A galley makes out of the press and speeds after the dragon bearing Hunthiof, which is now in full flight. It is the *Hawk*; and her gallant commander, Asbiorn, is making a desperate effort to capture or cripple the leader of the enemy’s fleet. But see! rushing in his wake, impelled by twice the number of oars and overhauling him with every stroke, comes another dragon; and with shouts of “Solvi—Solvi Klofi!” she rams the little galley with such force that she rolls her completely over, a shattered wreck, and sweeps on her way leaving the daring Asbrion and his crew struggling in the waves amid the fragments of their once trim craft.

There are, however, too many cutters about for such a warrior as Asbiorn to be left to perish unheeded; and indeed, Harald himself had, from the first, marked his attempt to overtake King Hunthiof and had sent assistance after him. One of the small craft skims up, friendly hands are stretched eagerly towards the survivors, and one by one they are hauled in, Asbiorn being the last to accept succour; and as he mounts the side of the king’s dragon, in obedience to an imperious hail from Harald himself, Asbiorn, casting a glance around, sees that the battle is indeed won and the ocean is dotted everywhere with the shapes of fleeing and pursuing craft.

In this first sea fight near Solskiel both the kings, Hunthiof and Nockvi, were slain, but Solvi Klofi escaped to work more mischief to Harald later on. King Harald stayed all that summer among the North Møre folk, settling the land; and when autumn came he sailed away northward to Thrandheim, having first

Two Battles of Solskiel 83

made Rognvald, Earl of Möre, who had that summer sworn allegiance to him, lord over the two peoples of North Möre and Raumsdale in place of the dead kings. He strengthened the earl's hands with trustworthy men of high and low degree, and gave him ships that he might protect the land against wars from without. Rognvald was called the Mighty, or the Wise, and folk declared the names to be appropriate.

So King Harald returned victorious to Thrandheim and abode the winter there, reinforcing his fleet and settling his kingdom and the laws thereof.

Solvi Klofi fled from the battle of North Möre, furious with rage at his defeat, and sore grieved for the loss of his father and grandfather; and not knowing where else to turn for safety, he headed his ship straight out into the open sea and thence to the Western Isles, where for a time he bode amongst the Vikings. During the winter, while Harald was at Thrandheim, Solvi frequently raided the shores of Norway, and harried the lands of Earl Rognvald in North Möre, slaying, robbing, and burning with all the bitterness of hatred; but tiring at last of this work which, however profitable it might be in a small way, yet brought him no nearer to his heart's desire, which was to wreak a broad vengeance on Harald himself, he sailed to South Möre and sought refuge there for a while with his kinsman, King Arnvid.

Now, naturally enough, his doings did not escape the notice of Harald; indeed, there was scarcely a week during the whole winter in which some fresh news of murder or rapine on the part of Solvi Klofi was not laid before the king and his council. Exasperated at this defiance of his authority and the wanton persecution of innocent folk, Harald "gathered a mighty host" in the spring, and set sail for South Möre to see if he could not put an end once for all to the misdoings of the audacious Viking.

This action on his part had been anticipated by King Arnvid and Solvi Klofi, and they had utilised the interval

84 Harald First of the Vikings

in beating up recruits, getting together a fleet, and hoisting the standard of defiance; and as most, if not all, of the folk of South Møre both hated and feared King Harald, their efforts proved highly successful. Solvi Klofi, however, determined to leave nothing to chance, sailed south into the Firths to King Audbiorn, who ruled there, and besought his assistance, laying the state of affairs plainly before him and explaining, to the best of his ability, Harald's plans for the subjugation of the entire nation.

He pointed out that, so surely as had that of others before him, Audbiorn's day of death or submission would come to him at the hands of the all-conquering, ambitious king, and that he would bitterly regret, when he stood single-handed face to face with his destiny, that he had not at least striven with others, when the chance was offered him, to break or stem the power that was so surely and irresistibly gathering the whole country into its merciless grasp.

"For," he concluded, "it is now clear that we all have but one course to take, and that is to rise, as one man, against King Harald, for we have strength enough, and Fate must decide the victory. As to the other condition of becoming his servants, that is no condition for us who are free men and no less nobly born than this Harald. My father thought it better to fall in battle, as a king fighting for his kingdom, than to go willingly into Harald's service and not to abide the chance of weapons, like the Numedal kings."¹

King Audbiorn admitted the force of Solvi Klofi's arguments, collected a large army, and set out with him to join Arnvid; "and a full mighty host they had," says the old chronicle. The entire fleet set sail, and met with Harald "inward of Solskiel"; and here, confident of success because of their numbers, the allies opened the battle with a direct charge upon the king's ships, which rowed forward to meet them.

Harald here put in practice a manœuvre of which he

¹ Heimskringla

was very fond, and which was frequently employed to great advantage by his famous descendant, Harald Hardraade. As the enemy rowed straight forward to encounter him, the ships in the centre of his line swerved off to either side almost at the instant of impact, and a large number of the enemy streamed in through the gap without being able to arrest their progress; and thereupon those ships that had swung aside and others with them, who were but awaiting the right moment, closed rapidly in on either flank of the incomers and practically surrounded them, thus cutting them off from the rest of their comrades, while the two wings of Harald's force smashed in amongst the opposing wings and gave them too much to do to be able to go to the assistance of their friends.

When these latter were overpowered, which was very quickly, those of Harald's ships which remained fit for action at once joined either wing, and flung themselves into the most fiercely contested part of the fight; and the new accession rarely failed, by the sudden and vigorous nature of its attack, in finally turning the scale of battle in Harald's favour. This manœuvre, then, in which the king had carefully trained his men, he now put in practice with, in the end, excellent results.

King Arnvid and King Harald had laid their ships alongside each other, and there lashed them fast; and as the crews were very evenly matched, the combat that ensued was fierce and prolonged. Again and again the boarding parties took possession of their opponents' forecastles, only in turn to be driven back on to their own, followed by those they had just repelled; and at last King Harald, impatient at the delay in obtaining a decisive advantage, and warming up with the excitement that inspired all around him, flung himself in person into the middle of the fray on the forecastle where, just at that moment, Arnvid and his berserks had gained a footing.

Heralded by shouts of "Harald!" he pressed forward

86 Harald First of the Vikings

so fiercely, backed by his hird,¹ and berserks,² and dealing dreadful strokes with his enormous two-handed sword, that he not only succeeded in driving the enemy off his decks, but in following him on to his own ship; and there his men seconded him so stoutly, that with his own hand he slew Arnvid, and his men accounted for a large proportion of the latter's crew. The remainder jumped overboard in panic, or begged for quarter, and the dragon was taken; and the confusion spreading from ship to ship, Audbiorn's fleet broke up and fled south, hotly pursued by Harald's host.

In this battle fell, of the allies, King Audbiorn, as well as King Arnvid, but Solvi Klofi escaped again. He fled to the Western Isles and took to Viking, in which pursuit he became a mighty chief; and for many years after this he plundered and harried along King Harald's coasts without being captured or slain.

On Harald's side fell Earl Asgaut, our old acquaintance Earl Asbiorn, and Griotgard and Herlaug, brothers of the king's wife and sons of Earl Hakon of Ladir. Egil Ullserk, the king's standard-bearer, was severely wounded, but refused to relinquish his charge, upholding it stoutly to the close of the day; and many other chiefs and men of valour received wounds, of the which some of them died.

The said Egil Ullserk (or Wool-sark), who was a very large and strong man, lived to a great age, and fell at last, as he had ever desired, in battle in hand to hand combat with King Gamli Ericsson, while serving under his old royal master's son, Hakon the Good. His grave-mound was erected, with those of his comrades who fell with him, by King Hakon himself, south of Frædisberg: "High standing-stones there are by the howe of Egil Wool-sark."³

¹ A body of picked men, chosen for strength, skill, valour and discipline.

² Warriors who in battle worked themselves into a frenzied state. Sometimes they tore off their mail and "fought bare-sark," *i.e.*, in their shirts.

³ Heimskringla.

Two Battles of Solskiel 87

After this battle King Harald overran and subjugated South Møre, while Vemund, brother of the slain Audbiorn, became king of the Firth folk. Not wishing to stay after the opening of autumn, Harald appointed Rognvald Earl of North and South Møre as well as of Raumsdale, and left with him many men and ships to help him preserve peace; then he turned his face northward again and bode, as was his custom, in Throndheim the winter through.

But he and Cyrus often spake together of Earl Asbiorn, whose death the king lamented sore.

Chapter VIII

Of the Burning of King Vemund

KING HARALD was nothing if not thorough; and this trait was emulated by those of his subjects who wished to stand high in his favour. We have seen how, before sailing for his winter quarters in Throndheim, the king had placed Earl Rognvald in charge of North and South Møre and Raumsdale, and also that Vemund, brother of that King Audbiorn who fell at Solskiel, had possessed himself of his brother's kingdom—the Firths, or the Fjorde district—and proclaimed himself king in his stead.

Now Earl Rognvald had joined Harald at about the same time as did Earl Hakon Griotgardsson and others. He was “one of the mightiest men in the land,” courageous, and wise, and he helped the king in every way that lay in his power, and “was a friend most well-beloved of King Harald, who held him in great honour.”

What more natural, therefore, than that Earl Rognvald should have determined to follow in his lord's steps in the matter of thoroughness? He was Harald's representative in that part of the land, and close by to the south was a veritable thorn in the flesh—Vemund, King of the Firths, and his defiant subjects. This was not to be endured: the thorn must be eradicated at the earliest convenient date; and shortly after Harald left him in sole command he proceeded to carry out the task after a method of which he was sure the king would approve.



The spy shifted his feet, and looked uncomfortable.

The Burning of King Vemund 89

The winter had drawn in, and the earl, having got his new district fairly in hand, was moving about the southern portion thereof, hearing complaints and deciding law cases that were brought before him. When, in his opinion, common rumour had sufficiently credited him with being fully occupied with internal matters connected with his government, he slipped quietly across an inner neck of land and so southward to the Firths, taking with him a force strong enough for his purpose and keeping his movements secret. But he had sent out trusty spies to bring him tidings of the whereabouts of King Vemund, and we find him on a certain night interrogating one of these men.

“The king sleeps this night at Notsdale,” the spy was saying; “a bare six miles hence.”

“So; and has he many followers with him?” asked Rognvald.

“Some ninety men, my lord. He is in guest-quarters, and makes merry.”

“How is he regarded among the people?”

“They have but scant knowledge of him, my lord, as a ruler; and in the days of his brother Audbiorn, he came rarely amongst them, but concerned himself with his own affairs, faring chiefly a-Viking.”

“Ay; but do they love him?”

“It is yet early days for that, my lord; but he is the king’s brother.”

“And the people themselves—what say they of Harald?”

“Many, that he is a king to serve, for the fame of his valour and generosity has gone abroad; but others say that they have a king of their own already, and need no Thrandheimer.”

“And what is said concerning myself?” asked Earl Rognvald, humorously.

The spy shifted his feet, and looked uncomfortable.

“Nay, man, speak out! It is not your words, but theirs, that I ask for.”

“Then, my lord, they say: ‘Audbiorn’s hand was

90 Harald First of the Vikings

heavy, and Vemund's is like to be heavier still ; but the gods defend us from Rognvald, the Mere Earl ! ' ”

Rognvald laughed aloud.

“ Good ! we shall see. Get some food, now, and when you have eaten be ready to guide me to Notsdale. Keep a still tongue. Go ! ”

The spy went, and Rognvald summoned the chief of his fighting men.

“ Get the men together, Olaf,” quoth he. “ In half an hour we march. We go to kindle a fire at King Vemund's merry-making in Notsdale ; but that news is only for your ears at present. No noise, no cheering ; get the men together quietly, and see that they be well armed. There may be fighting.”

Olaf saluted, and departed on his errand ; and within the time specified Earl Rognvald and his men, numbering some hundred and fifty in all, were on their way to the stead where feasted the unsuspecting King Vemund.

Along bypaths, through dense woods, and over low-lying hills the scout led his master ; he had suggested bringing planks, in case they should be needed for crossing streams or soft places, but the frost was intense and the ground was everywhere frozen hard, so they were not needed. Still, the way—though a bare six miles only—seemed long, for it was new to them all save the spy, and on several occasions men stumbled into snowdrifts and their comrades had to stop to haul them out ; it was, therefore, past midnight when the little force approached Notsdale, which they found hushed in repose.

Cautiously Rognvald and his followers advanced, the scout leading them, until the man halted ; then, indicating a house larger than those which stood near it, he whispered :—

“ Under that roof sleeps Vemund.”

“ And under that roof,” responded Rognvald grimly, “ shall he sleep long and soundly. Forward, men ! surround the house, and Olaf—you know what to do. You have fire to hand.”

The Burning of King Vemund 91

Olaf nodded, and the men spread out, pushing forward and round until a complete circle was formed around the building, the whole manœuvre having been executed in profound silence, for the snow deadened their footsteps. The moon shone brightly in a clear sky, and their shadows had glided in black silhouettes across the dazzling white carpet ; but either there were no sentries posted, Vemund deeming such precaution unnecessary in his own country while Earl Rognvald was so fully occupied with his affairs in South Möre, or these had joined the revel and drunk so deeply as to be incapable of performing their duty.

“ Now, Olaf,” quoth Rognvald ; “ pass the word to fire the house, and then stand by to meet the rush.”

He was instantly obeyed. Arrows, tipped with flax soaked in oil, were lighted and shot on to the thatched roof ; torches were laid to the lean-to's that stood against the outer walls ; and in a few minutes the flames caught hold of the building, rising with a crackling roar into the stillness of the frosty night.

“ Burn, rats ! burn ! ” shouted several voices, as a wild clamour arose within from the awakened inmates, who, some grasping weapons and others unarmed, poured jostling towards every exit to escape from the smothering smoke and licking tongues of fire.

“ To me ! to me, Vemund's men ! ” resounded inside the building ; and a band of personal attendants, with Vemund in their midst, made a desperate dash for safety.

But they were met by an impassable barrier of bristling spear-points, gleaming redly in the flaring light, and hailed by the mocking laughter of relentless enemies. Behind and above them, from every loop-hole and cranny spouted fire, scorching and reducing to shapeless black masses the half-naked forms that leapt and screamed for mercy only to fall overpowered within that ring of gloating foes. The roof and timbers fell in with a prodigious crash, flinging a brilliant cloud of sparks and embers high into the air ; and then succeeded a thick,

92 Harald First of the Vikings

bellying smoke, that hung over the devoted building like a pall.

The last shrieks had died away into silence, but the surrounding circle still kept its ranks; and Earl Rognvald, stepping forward to view the scene as closely as the radiating heat would permit, was in the act of beckoning Olaf to his side, when a loud hail arrested his hand.

“Hollo! who goes a-burning in Fjorde land?”

Every man turned to see who the intruder might be, who had the hardihood thus to interrupt the earl in his work of slaughter.

A tall figure appeared from the out-lying shadow and strode up, the ranks parting before his commanding presence, to Earl Rognvald.

“Who may you be, and what do you here?” asked the latter abruptly.

The newcomer laughed in reckless fashion, as he gazed around.

“Kari of Berdla, am I,” he answered; “and men call me the berserk Berdlukaare. I was coming to seek you—if, as I guess, you be the Earl Rognvald—in Möre. I go to enlist under Harald’s banner; he is the man for me!”

“Good! you have found me,” said Rognvald; “but what do you here?”

“Why, to say truth,” replied Berdlukaare, “I had an ancient grudge against this same Vemund, who now lies a-roasting ’mid those ashes”—pointing; “and as I was passing by to find you, I thought I would turn in and pay him a visit. You have saved me the trouble,” he added, bursting into a great laugh; “death clears all scores.”

“And now,” said Rognvald, “what is your purpose?”

“I, and my men will go hence with you,” responded Berdlukaare; “and if you will have us, we will stay with you till the spring. After that, hey for north of Stad and Thrandheim, where we may become Harald’s

The Burning of King Vemund 93

men! They are all stout lads, mine," he added, "and they have need to be."

Rognvald had heard before of Berdlukaare, but had not previously seen him; and what he now saw of him pleased him well. So he gathered his men together and put himself at their head.

"And now," said he, "if your men are close at hand, Berdlukaare, summon them, that we may have a word together before we become comrades."

Then Berdlukaare blew his horn, and his men came running up; seventy of them there were, all tall and strong.

"Say," quoth Earl Rognvald, as they fell into rank and halted before him; "are you all willing to serve under me till the spring, and then go north and serve King Harald?"

"All! all!" they shouted, clashing their weapons against their shields.

"There are thirty more of them on board of my galley," quoth Berdlukaare, "and all of the same pattern. She lies some five miles hence, and, as I guess, will hold us all if we go by water to Möre; but if by land, we will march with you, and you can send the ship and her crew to meet us where you will."

Then Rognvald the earl spake again to Berdlukaare's men, and they swore to serve him during the winter in all things, and to be true comrades to him and his men; but after the winter, they said, they must go north and be Harald's men, for to that end only had they come. So the two bands joined together and away they marched to Berdlukaare's long-ship, got on board of her, and sailed north to Möre.

Earl Rognvald took all the ships that King Vemund had possessed, and plundered what he could of his property; and after the winter "Kari of Berdla went north to Thrandheim unto King Harald, and became his man; he was a mighty berserk."

Now Berdlukaare bore a message from Rognvald to the king, that he had taken all their ships from the

94 Harald First of the Vikings

Firth folk, and that the country lay open to him to add it to his kingdom ; for the earl was too wise to conquer it himself outside of his personal duty, which was to guard his own domain. So Harald took Berdlukaare and his men with him, to test them, and sailed south with his fleet until he came to the Firths ; and there he landed, and made ready as though to march through the land. But the people consulted together, and their chiefs came and tendered their submission to the king ; and he pardoned them and confirmed them in their possessions, and then sailed along south, and then eastward until he hove-to off The Wick. But he left Earl Hakon Griotgardsson behind, at his own request, as over-lord of the Firth-lands.

When Harald had departed southward Earl Hakon, who was puffed up with pride of his position since his daughter Asa had married the king, sent a message on his own account to Earl Atli the Slender, who was ruling at Sogne and with whom he had a private feud, bidding him give up his lordship of that province and retire to Gauldale—where he had previously been lord—for so, said he, had Harald ordered. But Atli returned for answer that Harald had placed him in Sogne, and that he would hold both that district and Gauldale until he could see the king and lay the matter before him.

Then Earl Hakon, being very wroth, got together a fleet and sailed away to challenge Atli to uphold his cause in battle ; and Atli, being, though a small man, very courageous, and conceiving himself to have right on his side, was no ways loth. So he also gathered a fleet and set out to meet Hakon, encountering him at Fialir in Staffness Bay. Hakon had the heavier vessels, but Atli the larger number, many of them belonging to Vikings, with whom he dealt much in foreign goods, and whom he protected when they sought shelter from rough weather on his coasts.

Hakon charged into the midst of Atli's ships, hoping to sink them by ramming ; but Atli, having many very skilful seamen with him, Vikings, eluded these charges

The Burning of King Vemund 95

every time, and set his lighter and faster galleys to harass Hakon with spears and arrows from all sides.

The action raged all day with great fury, and many men were slain on both sides; for Hakon's crews, maddened by the incessant showers of missiles from the light-heeled foes who flitted continuously around them, fought as if each man were a berserk. But it did not stand them in much stead that they shouted and raved defiance, for Atli's men wheeled constantly about them, darting in whenever they saw a chance to deliver a volley and then fly, as a pack of wolves harass a mountain bull.

Then Earl Hakon shouted to Atli, and challenged him to come aboard his ship and fight him singlehanded in holm-gang (duel) while his men looked on: he should have fair play, he said; but Atli mocked him, and replied: "The quarrel was none of my seeking—you forced it on me. Fool should I be, to throw away an advantage when I have it!" And his men shouted and laughed, while Hakon and his men roared with fury.

At last, as evening drew in and the shadows came down, all on both sides determined to make an end. At a signal from Atli his ships closed in and surrounded those of Hakon, two or three to each; and they drifted on the tide, all fighting and struggling together and nearing each other, until the whole were mingled in one dense mass. Now came Hakon's chance, but his men were very weary; still they summoned up all their strength, and the battle was more desperate at this time than it had been hitherto.

Earl Atli thrust his dragon through the press, shouting continually for Earl Hakon to meet him, and Hakon ever sought Atli; and when the combatants were well-nigh spent, the two ships ground their sides together, and the sailors lashed them there.

Axe in hand sprang Hakon forward to slay Atli, and Atli faced him with a sword. The men on both sides slashed and hewed, but ever in the middle of the strife,

96 Harald First of the Vikings

regardless of any but themselves, and enclosed as in a living ring, smote the two principal leaders.

It was now dark, but the moon shone fitfully between drifting clouds ; the wind was rising, and with it the sea. The decks of Atli's ship were slippery with blood and cumbered with fallen bodies ; but to and fro, striking at each other with all the force their spent energies would allow, staggered the two earls, deaf to the uproar around them, and bent only on slaying or being slain.

At length Hakon's foot slipped—he fell prone—his axe flew from his hand. Atli reeled towards him, and with a hoarse yell of triumph thrust his sword through his prostrate body, falling at the same moment, exhausted with loss of blood, over his enemy's corpse.

The cry arose on both sides : “ Atli is down ! ”
“ Hakon is slain ! ”

A squall came tearing up from out of the west, cresting the sea with foam, shrieking as it came, and driving the vessels towards a lee-shore studded with breakers.

“ Cast off ! cast off ! ” resounded on all sides ; and hurriedly unlashng their ships, the sailors of both fleets thrust themselves clear and made off into the night for such safety as they could find, bearing their dead with them.

Thus perished the great Earl Hakon, in a drawn battle brought on by his own imperious temper and in no righteous cause ; and Atli, wounded to death, was borne off in his own ship, which his men steered for shelter to a little bay under the lee of a small island, where he died and was wounded. Hence this island was called ever afterwards “ Atli's Isle.”

Chapter IX

Of the Murder of Aki

KING HARALD had never yet visited the province of Viken. He had been four years in Thrandheim, but never had he gone to The Wick, for he deemed that part of the land too securely under his sway to require his personal attention; moreover, he had his hands too full with one event after the other nearer home, to strike far afield leaving discontent and rebellion smouldering behind him.

Now, however, he had gathered in district by district, receiving the sworn allegiance of their rulers, remodelling the country on his own system administered by men of his own selection, and never, if possible, leaving behind him any spot unattended to that might, without such care, prove a source of danger or weakness in his rear.

With Earl Rognvald on the north-west, and Earl Hakon—for the news of the latter's death had not yet reached him—on the west, he considered himself fairly safe from troublesome interruptions, so he sailed along eastward into Wick to pay his first visit there, and laid up his ships at Tunsberg, which was then a trading town. It is probable that news had reached him that King Eric Eymundsson of Sweden had made proclamation of his sovereignty over Vermeland, and was taking scatt from all the forest settlers; Harald now heard that Eric had named the whole country north to Swinesund and west along the sea, "Westgothland," had formally

98 Harald First of the Vikings

annexed it as legitimate part of his kingdom, and was exacting tribute there likewise.

Nor was this all. It seemed that Eric had placed a certain Earl Hrane Gotska—who was a renowned warrior and capable man—in authority over his newly acquired territories, to hold them for him against all claimants ; and Harald learned further that the Swedish king had openly avowed that he would not rest until he had as great a kingdom in Viken as Sigurd Ring of old, or his son, Ragnar Lodbrok, had possessed, and that was Raumerige and Westfold right away to the Isle Grenmar, and also Vingulmark and all that lay south of it. To put the seal to this list of grievances that Harald considered he held against King Eric, the latter had, by various artifices, persuaded or compelled many chiefs and other men of mark in the above-mentioned provinces to give in their adherence to his cause.

In justice to Eric it should be mentioned that the kings of Sweden had, from of old, claims on that part of Norway called Viken—the country about the present Christiania Fjord, also Vermeland and southward. King Eric was merely asserting this ancient claim when he took the opportunity of Harald's absence in the north to invade Vermeland, Ranrike, and portions of Vingulmark.

When all this was laid before Harald, and clearly proved to be true, he waxed very wroth, summoned a Thing at Folden, and preferred charges of treason against those of whose complicity he believed himself to hold proof ; still, as he was ever a fair-minded man when his anger had cooled, he recognised that the unfortunate bonders and others were to a great extent helpless in the matter. Consequently, before pronouncing any judgment—which, it must be remembered, he was now in a position to enforce—he consulted long and deliberately with certain of his own following on whose commonsense he relied.

Among these was Cyrus ; and it chanced that his opinion was the more especially valuable at this juncture,

as he had traded several times to the town in old days, knew the temper of the folk, and had heard a good deal privately about the methods of King Eric and his officials, Earl Hrane Gotska in particular.

“The bonders¹ are not so much to blame, my lord,” quoth he to Harald, when the latter asked him to state what was in his mind; “they were between the devil and the deep sea. Consider awhile the position. North of them and by west lies a stubborn population, to whom you have even yet not taught the lesson of the strong hand: that is to come. West of them lay the Fjorde district and South Möre, and there—at that time when King Eric was moving in this matter—Audbiorn, Vemund, Arnvid, and Solvi Klofi swayed the minds of all against your rule. Eastward lay King Eric with smooth face and words, but, as they very well knew, with also an iron purpose underneath that would work heavy scathe to those who hearkened not to his tale. The chiefs of the province were all, or nearly all, at loggerheads with each other, the common people followed one or the other leader, and the land was rent and heaving with dissensions.”

“’Tis ever so with these petty kings,” remarked Harald. “They think not of the good of the country as a whole, but look to their own personal interests. ’Twiht hammer and anvil, the hand that is to help in time of need is broken. Well?”

“This being the case, my lord,” continued Cyrus, “the strong man sees the opportunity—as well you know—and King Eric grasped his. Promises, threats, an occasional sharp punishment, and, like a mutinous crew of sailors tackled by a resolute captain, the disunited sections of the provinces were brought into line. Blame the chiefs for their folly and selfishness, if you will, but lay not scathe on the poor ignorant folk who did but go where they were driven. Show these whither that path leads, and they will return to their allegiance; but show them mildly, not with harsh words and threats.

¹ Wealthy yeomen.

100 Harald First of the Vikings

“You speak well and truly,” quoth Harald; “but we have not yet come to the count against King Eric.”

“It is not for me to meddle between kings,” remarked Cyrus with significance.

“Speak your mind,” returned Harald impatiently, “and fear not. Yours is the best and truest rede I have heard for many a long day.”

“Then I say,” quoth Cyrus, “speak Eric fair, as one great king to another. Put before him temperately what he has done, and ask him plainly what he would do were another to act toward him as he has acted toward you.”

“And all folk, including Eric,” said Harald in some disdain, “will say I fear him.”

Cyrus smiled.

“Nay, my lord, that can no man say with truth. You are strong, and can afford to speak him fair. Be-think you, it will be said: ‘The land was in disorder, and helpless between two kings; and Harald, when he had the power in his hand, stayed it, and dealt calmly, wisely, and with moderation. Eric had stretched out his grasp over Harald’s possessions; and Harald smote not, but appealed to reason.’ The law, common sense, the judgment and favour of all right-minded men will thus be enlisted on your side; and should Eric refuse to relax his grip, they will throng to your banner to cast him and his underlings out and back to their own country in contempt. I have spoken.”

Harald pondered awhile; then he looked up, and said:—

“Cyrus, I know you to be a faithful friend, and I believe you to be as careful of my honour as of your own. Tell me, as between friends, not as subject to king: Do you believe the course you advise to be consonant with my dignity and honour?”

“My lord, I do,” replied Cyrus firmly.

“Then I will follow it. Punishment there must be, for those who deserve it; but I will state in open Thing

the reason therefor, and will let all men know what I purpose doing with regard to Eric."

"So will you cut the ground from under his feet, my lord, and your name will stand higher than ever before as a mild and just king, swift to see reason, but equally swift to deal out deserved punishment."

Harald was as good as his word, and, much to the general astonishment—for such lenity was not usual in those days of the strong hand, nor was it anticipated in this particular instance, seeing the grossness of the offence and the armed force that lay behind the king—much to everybody's astonishment, I say, he proclaimed in open Thing a general pardon (save in a very few especially bad cases) of the treasonable lapse into which the folk had been betrayed. Even where punishment was dealt out, it was only by fine of money or land; and, when public opinion had had a little space to form a conclusion, the universal verdict was, that here was a king for men to serve—just, and strong, and reasonable: no tyrant, but above all mild to the poor folk.

Thus the event proved Cyrus to have been right, so far as the matter had yet gone; and Harald, noways backward in recognising such services, sought occasion to advance him. But no reward would Cyrus accept, either in lands or rank or money; and he told Harald plainly that, as he had spoken when the latter was but a lad, so he spoke now when he was a mighty king—he would be his blunt, plain-dealing shipmaster, true to him as haft to blade, and no earl to bite the hand that fed him. And therewith was the king obliged, perforce, to be content; but he honoured Cyrus all the more in his own mind, and would never hearken to a word against him; and when he died in battle, fighting as he had ever done under his lord's banner on the deck of his dragon, Harald gave him a great mounding and grieved sore over his loss.

So the king laid up his fleet there at Wick, and let run far and wide the news of how he had dealt at the Thing

102 Harald First of the Vikings

at Folden. In the summer he went about the land, enquiring into grievances, redressing them, and seeing that law and order were fully established; and he left men of his own whom he could trust in charge of such places as Eric's men had held, for these fled away at his approach into Vermeland to seek their lord and tell him what things were being done.

As the autumn drew nigh Harald advanced in Raumerige, doing there as he had done elsewhere, and the people came to him and told him all things concerning themselves and the country, and he reassured them and spake them fair; but he had never need to employ force at any time, for his name had gone before him, and the counsel of Cyrus, to which he constantly turned, bore fruit a thousandfold. Much did Harald wonder that a rough trading sailor should have such knowledge of men's minds, and often did he speak with Cyrus thereof; but the shipmaster laughed and turned the question aside, saying merely: "My lord's profit and honour are also mine own."

Now when the winter laid its icy fingers on the land, it came to Harald's ears that Eric rode abroad feasting in guest-quarters with his Court in Vermeland. Since the Thing when Harald had spoken his mind freely and openly to all folk present, and had declared in what manner he would speak to Eric, the King of Sweden had said no word. He was wise enough to see that wind and sea were against him, while Harald rode on the crest of the tide of public favour.

When his dispossessed officials fled back to him, full of the tale of their grievances, he put them aside, saying: "A time will come"; and they were fain to be content with that, for it profits not arguing with kings—especially when those kings stand in such a position as did Eric then, worsted and discredited. But he could do nothing at this time, for Harald's grasp was extending far and wide, and what he clutched he made sure of and held. An uncomfortable doubt gnawed ever at Eric's heart that he would be compelled to quit Vermeland, but he

put it from him and strove to forget it in feasting and merriment.

There was a very wealthy and influential bonder, named Aki, living in Vermeland, who was very old, and with years he had gathered much wisdom and discretion. All news of the country reached him, for people came to seek his advice, and he had heard and deeply considered the doings of Harald and Eric of Sweden; with reflection came decision, and he inclined towards the cause of Harald.

But of this he said nothing to anyone, for as yet Eric was supreme in his part of the country, and Aki feared to express his opinions openly. But he wished much to see Harald before he died; and therefore, as Eric was in the neighbourhood and Harald not far distant over the border, it appeared to him that a judiciously contrived meeting between the two, under truce, might bring about a favourable understanding for the good of the country.

Aki, therefore, sent messengers to Harald, bidding him to a feast in his house and explaining his motives; and he also sent to Eric, to the like effect, inviting him for the same day. Both kings accepted; and as treachery under truce was unthinkable to the Northman, Aki had strong hopes that his well-meant scheme might be productive of the best results for all concerned. Little did he dream of the disastrous ending of that coming day of festival which fate held in store.

Aki now set in hand the preparations for the feast. He owned a large guest-hall, but it was very old, and moreover he had not intended to accommodate both kings in the one apartment for fear of unpleasant complications. He therefore ordered a new one to be erected, of the same size and dimensions as the old one, and fitted up in precisely the same manner; the old hall was hung with old draperies and ornamentations, but the new one was bedecked with fresh appointments of every kind.

When the guests arrived they were marshalled, King

104 Harald First of the Vikings

Eric and his Court in the old hall, and King Harald with his train in the new hall. On the tables before the former Aki had placed all his old drinking goblets, beakers, and horns, but they were gilt and curiously and beautifully carved; while for the use of Harald and his men in the new hall were new drinking vessels, "all done about with gold, fair graven withal, and shining as clear as glass." But in the matter of food and drink both parties of guests were treated alike, and it was the very best that Aki could provide.

Probably there was some private conference between the two kings, though we are not told that it was so; but if there were, it could have come to no satisfactory conclusion, for Eric had evidently felt himself slighted by the difference between his and Harald's reception rooms and table-gear. A slight thing; but little matters lead to great. Eric, considering himself king of Vermeland, looked upon Aki as his vassal, and therefore deemed that he should have had the preference in all things; but Aki could not forget that in the old days he had been the liege-man of Halfdan the Black, Harald's father; and this, with the respect he had conceived for the latter and the admiration of his achievements, so worked in his mind, that when he saw the son of his old master his former feelings surged up anew in his heart, and he vowed allegiance silently to Harald.

When the feasting was ended, the guests prepared for departure and the horses were saddled. Then Aki approached Harald, leading by the hand his little son of twelve years of age, Ubbi by name, and craved a boon.

"Say on," replied Harald.

"If you, my lord," then said Aki, "think me worthy of your friendship, and would return me a kindness for my hospitality to you, pay it to this my son Ubbi. I give him to you to be your loyal servant, trusting that you will charge yourself with him and his future."

"I accept the gift," returned Harald, "and will deal well by the lad. To you also I renew the friendship



"I give him to you to be your loyal servant."

that once was between my father and yourself ; and so, greeting and farewell."

Then Aki brought forward rich parting gifts, which were graciously accepted by Harald ; " and therewithal they kissed, Aki and the king."

Then Aki went over to King Eric, who was dressed and ready for departure, but looking moody and ill-tempered. Aki presented him also with rich gifts and spoke fair words ; but the king answered little and mounted his horse, so Aki walked along beside him, trying to divert his anger with friendly talk. There was a wood close to Aki's house, and the road ran through it ; and as they went, Eric spoke softly :—

" Aki, tell me your reason for making a difference between Harald and myself."

" In what way, my lord ? "

" You know well in what way. I and my men had not such good treatment in your old hall as Harald in the new. Such behaviour is not to my liking, seeing you are my man."

Now Aki the bonder was, as I have said, very old, very wealthy, and much respected in the land ; and such men do not relish being chidden, even by kings, much less when the king who blames is sovereign only by usurpation. So Aki spoke up stoutly, being also full of joy and pride at the friendly manner in which King Harald had treated him.

" I certainly thought, my lord," quoth he, " that no tittle of welcome or respect was lacking in my greeting to you and your men, neither was I chary of my hospitality wherein both you and King Harald fared alike. The reason why I gave you my old table-gear was because you are yourself old, and like goes to like ; for the same reason, that Harald is in the very flower of his manhood, I gave him the new. But in the matter of my being your man, King Eric, it passes in my mind that I am as much that as you are mine."

Thus spoke Aki, in the flush of his pride and the joy of his heart ; but while the words were yet in his mouth,

106 Harald First of the Vikings

Eric drew his sword and smote him that he fell backward on the road and never spoke more. Then the king rode on in gloom and wrath.

Now when Harald was ready to mount and begone, he remembered a thing concerning which he desired to enquire of Aki ; so he sent some men running after the bonder to call him back. These men, following the road, came upon the dead body, and guessing what had happened, sped back with the news to the king.

The grossness of the deed appealed forcibly to Harald ; and calling on his train to follow, he galloped at full speed to overtake Eric and wreak vengeance upon him. But the latter heard the clatter of pursuing hoofs, and fearing to stand before Harald in his wrath, he put spurs to his steed and, accompanied by all his Court, fled for his life.

Pursuers and pursued rode until they reached the wood that constituted the border line between Vermeland and Gotland, and here Harald drew rein, having fairly driven his rival out of the country he claimed as his own ; but he sent off orders at once for troops, and then, returning into Vermeland, he ordered parties far and wide in every direction to hunt up Eric's men. Where he found them, there he slew them without mercy ; and this he did to avenge Aki's death as far as in him lay.

Having executed this task as a matter of personal vengeance for the treacherous and dastardly stroke that Eric had dealt his late host, Harald marched rapidly hither and thither through Vermeland, claiming the allegiance of all ; and he let know, plainly and firmly, that should the province dare again to admit Eric or any of his officers, he would revisit it with fire and sword. And they knew that he would keep his word.

This done, King Harald marched back to Raumerige, and stayed there awhile.

Chapter X

Of Methods of Peaceful Persuasion

IT was not long ere Harald was again in movement. Winter though it was, he called his men together, provisioned his ships, and set out southward along the Firths. He landed and advanced into Vingulmark, and entered upon a regular campaign in that province. Here, however, he met with serious resistance from the population; for not only were their neighbours, the Gotlanders, among the most determined of his enemies, but both these and many emissaries of King Eric had inflamed the minds of the country folk of Vingulmark against him, by spreading false information as to his progress towards unity, and exaggerating the minor checks he had met with hitherto.

The nearer Harald approached to what he believed to be the realisation of his ideal, the more severely he dealt with armed resistance. Where the point at issue was argued out in debate, openly, as at the Thing at Folden, he was always ready to hear reason, and, viewing the disputants as his future subjects, was willing to use methods of peaceful persuasion; but where, without hearing his explanations, war was declared against him, he usually accepted with cheerfulness the arbitrament of battle—invariably with ultimate success.

The news of Harald's approach had travelled before him, and almost immediately he found himself subjected to a series of persistent guerilla attacks from small bodies of the enemy, who harassed his flanks and front while permitting—even tempting—him to advance

108 Harald First of the Vikings

farther and farther away from his ships, and made nightly rushes at his camps, cutting off sentries and outlying pickets, and disturbing the much-needed repose of the main body.

Unwilling to move far from his base as yet, Harald put in force the usually effective plan of "eating up" the country as he advanced: burning farms and homesteads, slaying every man found with arms in his hands or dwelling, and generally devastating the country around; but this system of warfare, naturally enough, excited the enmity against him to an extreme point, and he soon learnt that he would have to pursue different tactics if he did not wish to become lord of a depopulated, barren land.

"What can I do," he asked Glumm (one of his councillors who had taken the place of Asbiorn) one day, "with this people? Willingly would I spare them, but that they will not allow me to do. Their leader, Sigfrid, from all I can gather, is a brave and capable man, but he has been misinformed about me. He and a few others sway all Vingulmark by their opinion, and it is exasperating to think that all this havoc is being wrought, when very possibly a few words of explanation might not only stem the tide but turn it."

"War," replied Glumm, "is the natural element of the Northman. Letting blood sometimes heals disease."

"True, in small quantities; but continue the process, and the patient dies. I wish to be sovereign of living subjects, Glumm."

"You have sent out peaceful proclamations again and again, my lord, and what has happened? They have been torn down and spat upon. Your messages of peace have been treated with scorn and contempt. I am a warrior; my answer to such insults lies in my sword. What says Cyrus?"

"I have not yet asked him," replied Harald.

"Then do so, my lord, and at once, before the gear is past mending. For a sailor, he is the wisest counsellor I know."

Methods of Peaceful Persuasion 109

“Send him in to me,” quoth Harald ; and accordingly Cyrus was sent for, and the state of affairs laid before him. He pondered awhile.

“Most of this,” said he at last, “I have heard of before ; and I have feared lest matters should go too far for mending. I see but one course, my lord.”

“And that ?” queried Harald and Glumm eagerly.

“Nay, that I keep to myself for the present. But first, if I am to take the thing in hand, you must give me permission to quit your service for a time—not for long, I hope ; and in the second place, my absence must not be remarked on or in any way thrust into public notice. If any questions be asked, the best answer will be that I have returned with orders to Thrandheim.”

“This is not difficult,” said Harald ; “is there anything more ?”

“Ay, and the last clause will be the hardest to stomach, my lord. You must draw in all your far advanced posts, fix your headquarters and camp in the fleet and close by on shore—of course protecting yourself against outside attack—and steadily ignore all endeavours on the part of the enemy to tempt you out. They will mock you rarely, no doubt ; but you must put up with that, and remember that the last laugh is generally with the conqueror.”

Harald and Glumm gazed at him and at each other with an expression of disgust on their faces.

“Nay, my lord,” continued Cyrus, “if you wish to keep some at any rate of your subjects in this province alive, you will do as I say until you hear from me again, which may be in a few weeks ; but if you incline to the strong hand, why—you must try other methods, that is all.”

“I like it not,” said Harald ; “nor will the men like it. Would I knew your scheme, Cyrus.”

“It is a peaceful one, my lord, but—I confess it—full of danger for me. I had rather you did not know it.”

“Act as you will, then, Cyrus ; but if you return not

110 Harald First of the Vikings

within one month from now, or if you fail, I shall act in my own way."

"It is a promise, my lord. I start to-night."

When darkness came down, Cyrus' galley, which all day had been receiving lading in articles of merchandise from various ships near by, slipped her moorings; and by the following morning Cyrus was far on his errand, while Harald and Glumm were proceeding with the execution of their share in the scheme as indicated by him.

Several men were drinking and talking in a rude bothy, situated near the banks of a creek that ran up into a part of the province of Vingulmark. The spot was some thirty miles distant from the actual scene of the war, but the topic now being discussed was that only.

"I cannot see," quoth one, bluntly, "what is your object in fighting this Harald. I am a merchant man, master of my own craft and cargo, am a Southern born, and owe allegiance to no man. So long as I have an open harbour, light dues, and a free sale for my goods, I care not a snap of the fingers whether Harald, or Eric, or any other rule. The man is not going to live here in Vingulmark, with a crowd of greedy Court hangers-on to suck the blood out of you, is he? Why, then, all this pother?"

"Were you Northern born," replied one, "you would understand that we are free men, and suffer no man to be lord over us save him whom we choose."

"How do you choose him?" asked the merchant.

"In open Thing."

"For what qualities?"

"Strength, courage, wisdom, and the like."

"Then, by all the Asar! why choose ye not this Harald? Is he not strong, brave, and wise?"

"What is Harald to you?" asked one who had not yet spoken, suspiciously.

"As much as he is to you," replied the merchant sturdily. "I go into his ports, none hindering; I pay



"What is Harald to you?"

110

Methods of Peaceful Persuasion 111

there my harbour dues—less than anywhere else I know, mark you ; I get protection in return, while in port, and my customers pay me my prices, in money or kind, without brawl or drawing of weapons. This under Harald ; and you ask : “ What is Harald to you ? ”

“ Why come you here, then ? ” enquired the suspicious one.

The merchant laughed loudly, and hammered with his horn on the rude table as he shouted for more ale.

“ You are no trader, friend, that is easy to be seen, or you would not ask such a question. Do you and yours not need food and warm clothing ? I guessed that this was so, as soon as I heard your coast was blockaded ; so I ran the gauntlet of Harald’s cruising cutters, and bring you the goods you need. What, man ! who will pay me the better price for such—those who are well fed and warmly clothed, or those who are shivering and starving ? No, no ; I shall get the better prices from these who need them ! ”

“ And how if we cut your throat, and take your goods without payment ? ” pressed the other.

“ Why,” said the merchant composedly, “ in the first place I doubt if you could do it so easily as you may imagine ; and in the second, would it not be a fool’s trick on your part to stop further supplies from coming in ? Why, when once the folk who furnished me with these same goods had reason to suspect foul play, pouf ! down the breeze goes your chance of any more outside succour : you may just sit and starve of hunger and cold. Ho ! ho ! ” and he laughed loudly. “ But come,” he continued ; “ I was told you were leaders of some sort among your folk, and would buy my wares. Come down with me to the galley : she lies hard by ; and it will prove strange if you do not find there all you wish for.”

The whole party rose and, all suspicions banished by the hearty manner of the merchant, accompanied him the mile or so that lay between the drinking bothy and the ship. Arrived there, it was not long before the

112 Harald First of the Vikings

men—who really were leaders of note, and had been attracted by news sent inland of the galley's advent—discovered that what they most required, clothing, food, and drink, were stowed aboard in welcome quantities; but, as they said, looking round at the numbers of the sturdy crew that moved about the deck, they had neither authority nor coin to pay for the goods.

“Then get it, in Thor's name!” quoth the merchant.

There was a whispered conference between the men.

“How long do you intend to bide here?” they enquired.

“Three or four days. If you don't want my wares, I'm off down the coast. I don't wish to be caught napping by one of Harald's surprise parties.”

“We will bring our chief,” said one of the men after slight further discussion. “He will buy all you have, and will be here on the third day from now.”

“Good!” quoth the merchant; “and now, as you are to be my customers, you shall taste of our Southern wines. They are better stuff than the brew you swill at your inland drinking booths.”

The men assented eagerly; and so pleasing to their palates was the savour, that they vowed their leader and his chief men ought to have their share.

“Get them here, then! Let them take a holiday from this fighting business, and they shall drink till their heads ring again. The more the merrier, say I. And hark ye! Every man who comes shall have a gift from me, over and above all. Fill again!”

A message was despatched to the bothy to be forwarded to the chief, and the rest of the night was spent in revelry; until finally, not being so hard-headed as the trader, the guests collapsed and were put into sleeping places. On the third day, in the evening, a party of men came striding down to the creek.

“Are you the master of this galley?” enquired one.

“That am I,” replied the trader.

“My name is Sigfrid. I am the chief of this uprising, and these are some of my thegns. We hear you have

Methods of Peaceful Persuasion 113

goods for sale such as we require, and have come to see and buy."

"Right!" quoth the trader; and calling some of his men, he bade them trundle a few bales aft for inspection, and ushered his visitors into his cabin. The Spanish wine was produced, and a few brimming beakers thereof were hailed with unfeigned appreciation by Sigfrid and his companions.

"By the hammer of Thor!" exclaimed he, "this is rare good stuff. If this is what you merchants drink when afloat, I for one should not object to go a cruise with you."

"Nor I!" "Nor I!" echoed his comrades.

The merchant laughed boisterously.

"Better shipmates," quoth he, "I would not wish for. Here's to our cruise together—some day!"

All laughed, and pledged the toast; and the night wore on amid merriment and revelry. In the early hours all his visitors were sound asleep, but the merchant and his crew were very wide awake. Deftly and rapidly they secured the new-comers, depriving them of their arms and stowing them away separately in the lower depths of the galley; and then, unmooring and pushing off, they swept the ship down the creek and out into the open fjord as fast as they dared propel her by moonlight.

The next day, it being rough weather, the condition of Sigfrid and his followers, unaccustomed to seafaring as they were, can be more readily imagined than described. Cyrus—for of course the reader has guessed at the identity of the merchant ere this—covered them warmly enough and made them as comfortable, consistent with safe keeping, as circumstances would allow; but he could not control the lively motions of the galley, and his unhappy passengers suffered agonies of seasickness, imploring the master to put them ashore.

"Any port you choose," groaned Sigfrid, in reply to Cyrus' remark that there was but one handy, and that the one where Harald's fleet lay moored.

"Say you so?" quoth Cyrus; "then I will try to

114 Harald First of the Vikings

meet your wishes." And accordingly the galley's head was turned and she ran for the shore, steering to make Harald's headquarters where the masts of his shipping now showed over the horizon.

The surprise of the king may be imagined when he received a message brought by a sailor requesting him to come on board Cyrus' galley, which, said the man, had just come in; and greater still was his surprise when, with all due precaution, Cyrus introduced him to his involuntary passengers. It was impossible to avoid laughing at their ludicrous predicament; and the interview, thus begun, terminated satisfactorily. Harald's own boat was brought alongside, fully manned, and he carried off Cyrus and his guests to his private quarters, where Earl Glumm was speedily called into council.

Matters were fully discussed. Harald was in a generous mood, for the situation appealed to his sense of humour; his visitors were only too anxious to return safely to their homes, and were at a loss how to explain their absence to their followers, save by accepting Harald's terms and giving out that they had gone on an embassy for the good of their fellow-countrymen to obtain favourable terms from a dangerous and powerful enemy. Whenever they seemed inclined to be obstinate, a gentle hint from Cyrus as to another cruise at sea was quite sufficient to bring them to reason.

Sigfrid was created Earl of Vingulmark; his followers received each appropriate rank and power in the province; a general amnesty was proclaimed, on condition of present swearing of allegiance and future good behaviour; and king and subjects parted on the most amicable terms, both parties having formally and solemnly sworn in public, by the most sacred oaths, to observe the treaty faithfully in every particular. Suitable escorts were furnished to each of the new officers; and they marched out of the camp they had entered as prisoners, with every mark of respect and favour.

Methods of Peaceful Persuasion 115

Harald, confident that they would adhere to their oaths, left Sigfrid and his new officials to heal the wounds of his new province, and set out on another campaign—of which more in the next chapter; but he never forgot the clever and daring ruse of Cyrus, and often asked him, when at his own table, if he had lately tasted any Spanish wines.

The manner, however, in which the principal leaders of the rebellion in Vingulmark were peacefully persuaded into coming to terms, was never allowed to become public. It was religiously reserved by Harald as an especial *bonne-bouche* of a jest for himself, Cyrus, and Earl Glumm, and was always regarded as partaking of the nature of a State secret.

Chapter XI

Of the Battle of the Staked River

WINTER was dying out, and the spring coming in. The news of the submission of the men of Vingulmark had fallen like a stunning blow on the Gotlanders, for these had confidently expected that the former would stand by them in their opposition to Harald. Now, they learned, they must fight their own battle unaided, and the crisis was at hand. The summons to arms flew round the province, and for the past month "the Gotlanders" (as the old chronicle says) "had been drawing together throughout all the country-side."

Right into the heart of their land gaped the path of the Gotha Elv, open to the advance of Harald's fleet. From one side to the other the Gotlanders staked the river, effectually preventing the passage of the ships beyond that barrier. But they must have cherished a very poor opinion indeed of their foe, if they believed that this would deter him from prosecuting his design; and the issue, as the result proved, was barely even delayed by this expedient, effective though they presumed it to be.

On a day in early spring, the masts of a great fleet were perceived bristling at the mouth of the estuary; the rattle and roll of long oars and the chant of the straining rowers swelled out into the air, startling the wild-fowl; and messenger after messenger came galloping up stream, shouting the news to everybody they passed that Harald and his Northmen were at last in their land.

Accompanying the fleet in its progress flocked many

hundred Gotlanders, shaking their weapons in defiance at those on board, and howling challenge and insult. But the king's orders were strict that under no provocation was a single ship to act on her own initiative as yet, no foot was to be set on land, no notice to be taken of the clamouring horde, until Harald gave the word; and steadily, without pause or swerve, dragon followed dragon and long-ship followed long-ship, the smaller fry tailing out on flank and rear, and the fleet pressed up stream on its way until the barrier of stakes showed its jagged teeth above the surface of the water.

Giving themselves room to swing with the flowing tide without impaling their hulls on the threatening fringe, the ships anchored, rank by rank, making fast to each other so as to present the similitude of an immense floating fortress, only the cutters being left free to ply back and forth about the serried array; and one by one the larger vessels grated alongside each other till, covered by the bow and spearmen of the fleet, a massive floating bridge stretched from shore to shore.

Then a sharply worded order, and the soldiery sprang to life. Outward they streamed, to either flank, and after an hour's desperate fighting established themselves on either shore. Here they proceeded to erect a fortified camp and plant sentinels; and the close of day found Harald securely settled in an almost impregnable position, resembling nothing so much in shape as a gigantic, flattened dumb-bell, astride the river, with both ends firmly planted on shore.

That night his position was subjected to a virulent attack from all sides, the most persistent being one that was made by light boats coming down stream to the vicinity of the stakes, and on the further side of them, where Harald's lighter shipping could not get at them; but the assailants did not press the attacks home, especially that by water, and an efficient barricade of planking and shields was speedily erected by the sailors to protect those on board from the galling cloud of missiles. The following day a sufficient number of stakes

118 Harald First of the Vikings

were hauled out by combined action to permit of the passing in single file of a number of light cutters; and henceforth the nightly repose of the main body on the ships was not seriously interfered with.

Harald now landed strong parties of troops, and sent them inland to burn and destroy. The country-side was stripped bare, the houses and steads committed to the flames, and a series of desperate engagements took place between the invaders and the exasperated Gotlanders. Sometimes one side was victorious, sometimes the other, and as no quarter was given the warfare was of the bitterest nature. The country folk often lay in ambush and cut off parties of Harald's men, the latter retaliating by slaying every man they could lay hands on and burning everything that could by any possibility take fire; thus on either bank of the Elv a wide and festering sore ate into the vitals of the land, and the councillors of Harald began seriously to consider whether at last their lord had not encountered an enemy who would stay him in his career.

But Harald thought far otherwise. That the Gotlanders might delay him in the achievement of his scheme was possible, but they could not prevent its ultimate success. He did not wish to break his army in two, and march thus disunited through the land, inviting a disaster from an agile foe who might defeat him in detail; so he set himself, of stern purpose, to harry and destroy until, exasperated beyond the bounds of prudence, the Gotlanders should rally all their strength in one spot and give him battle in full force. Then, being able to transfer his entire army to whichever side of the river he chose, he might meet them face to face, and with one bold, supreme stroke decide the campaign for good and all.

Of this purpose of his he said nothing, even to Glumm or Cyrus, but persisted in the system of petty guerilla warfare, knowing that ere long the whole strength of the enemy, stung into concerted action, would confront him; and of this course on their part he was

daily—hourly—awaiting tidings from certain of his spies.

“What think you of the situation?” asked Harald of Glumm one day, when the two were pacing the deck of the king’s dragon together.

“A stubborn, stiff-necked people, my lord, on the one hand, and—and——”

“And a stubborn, stiff-necked king on the other, eh, Glumm? Well, you are right; but such was not my meaning. How long, think you, are we to go on with this indecisive warfare?”

“Why, my lord, until we wear them down by superior numbers.”

“That might answer with some, but not with these Gotlanders, Glumm. Is it possible you have not guessed my tactics? You have hunted a wolf ere now, have you not?”

“Ay, my lord.”

“What was the end of the chase?”

“The animal turned to bay, and I slew him.”

“Why, there! Apply that here. I have hunted and harried these folk until now, at last, I learn they are gathering their numbers to turn at bay and give me battle.”

“I am glad to hear it, my lord. I weary of inaction.”

“Fear not; when this business is finished, I have something in my mind that will recall old days to us both. But this will be a tough fight. I hear the Earl Hrane Gotska commands in person; and as he is one of Eric’s men, and has a backing from him as well as his own forces, we have our work cut out for us, for he is a stout warrior.”

“The more honour in meeting him, my lord.”

“True; yet I am impatient to have done with it and turn my ships’ prows northward once more. Now, see to it! I look, first, for a combined attack by land and water, on both flanks and in front; then, when that is beaten back—as it will be—the two wings will unite,

120 Harald First of the Vikings

and offer battle in mass. Which side of the river they will choose, I know not, neither does it matter, for we can quickly transfer our men to either; but mind this: whichever side bears the brunt, the other must be left strongly protected, for were I in Earl Hrane's place I would make a heavy attack upon it during the height of the battle, in the hope of taking it by surprise while attention was fully engaged elsewhere. If the enemy broke in there the result would be disastrous, for we should be taken in rear and our fleet stormed; therefore, place a good man—say, Thorkill—in command there, with a strong backing."

"I will see to it, my lord."

"I think that is all. I will let you know any further news when it comes in—possibly to-night or to-morrow."

Glumm quitted the deck to seek Thorkill, who, he knew, would be disappointed at being debarred a share in the general battle; but, as he reflected, that officer would be in charge of a vital point, and might very probably have to encounter a good deal more responsible hand to hand fighting, even, than if he were with the bulk of the army.

"Anyhow," thought Glumm, "he has had quite his share of hard work of late, so he should not be jealous if it is now the turn of others."

It was early dawn, and Glumm, after a watch that had lasted all night, was snatching a few hours' well-earned rest. He was awake by an officer shaking his shoulder. Instantly he sprang into life, every faculty on the alert.

"What is it?"

"The look-outs on all sides have been sending in to report that they are sure the enemy is gathering for an attack in force."

"From which quarter?"

"From every side," replied the officer; and he added: "I have taken it on my own responsibility to order a couple of scouting cutters up stream, with strict

Battle of the Staked River 121

injunctions to be wary and not get cut off, and to recall the rest to their post close to the stakes."

"You have done well."

Glumm hurried out on deck, and bent his ear to the whispering voices of the night. From far away, and as it seemed to him from every direction, floated a barely audible, sustained hum, somewhat resembling the continuous muffled roll of distant surf.

"They are in force," he murmured. "Pass the word along to be prepared, but there must be no confusion or noise. Let them believe they are going to catch us napping."

As he spoke, a dim form slid out of the vaporous veil that lay over the water, from up stream, and glided gently up to opposite the king's dragon.

"On deck, there!" hissed a voice.

"Ay, ay!"

"The enemy are coming down on both flanks and by water. They are about a mile and a half away. Their shipping is of no size—only light canal boats of sorts—and with half a score of our cutters we can give a good account of them. We are prepared for our share."

"Good! the king trusts you to do your duty," replied Glumm.

The form disappeared again, and the earl turned to rouse his master. In a few minutes the two were on deck together, and a low, monotonous rumble all around as the men crowded to their stations was the only sound audible in the king's fleet.

"The land forts can hold their own?" asked Harald.

"Well, my lord; but I took the precaution, a few minutes since, of telling off supports in case of need."

"They will bear the brunt," quoth the king. "When the attack is fully developed and we have light to see by, these Gotlanders will find they have got more on their hands than they bargained for. See, Glumm, the mist is lifting. They will have to be quick if they intend to begin before daylight."

122 Harald First of the Vikings

"Another half-hour, my lord; time for much to happen."

"True! Now, Glumm, go you round to half a dozen of the rearmost galleys and detail six hundred men for shore duty. When the fight rages fiercest round our forts, let three hundred slip ashore quietly on either bank and take the enemy in flank. I leave the precise moment to the judgment of the leaders; but the surprise must be sharp and sudden."

The earl turned and went at once, leaving the king staring eagerly up stream. Presently he returned, remarking quietly:—

"It is done, my lord."

"Good! then all is ready. They can come when they will."

The pause before an action is ever a trying one, and few are so hardened as not to feel the suspense and to wish in their hearts that "the business would begin." So it was in this case; and the restless shuffling of feet, occasional clearing of throats, the rustle and clink of shifting armour and weapons, stirred through the atmosphere in a ceaseless undertone. The gloom that precedes the dawn seemed to brood deeper and darker on river, land, and distant sea; and in its womb lurked, as all felt, the imminent menace of the yet unborn storm.

From the far distance rose the faint, quavering note of a single horn. Suddenly, with instant response, a deafening, prolonged roar of war horns and human voices burst forth; and, shaking the ground with the thunder of their tread and rending the air with ear-splitting screams and whistles, a horde of savage Gotlanders, wrought to frenzy by hate and long delayed hope of vengeance, rushed raving and gesticulating upon the forts that lay on either bank of the Elv quietly awaiting their attack.

But the startling transition from silence to uproar, from calm to fiery activity, shook not the nerves of Harald's seasoned soldiery. Warned of the impending emergency they were fully prepared for it, and met the assault

Battle of the Staked River 123

with a steadfast, disciplined front that nothing appeared capable of shaking. In vain the tribesmen surged in frantic waves against the mound and palisades that barred their way, striving to tear down the obstacles with their bare hands and roll in crested flood over the demolished fragments; fierce, helmed faces stared down at their maddened onset, bristling weapons met their every rush with deadly stab and thrust, while sword and axe plied in between; and the human wave burst shattered against the immovable human rock that confronted it, falling back in a spent swelter of dead and wounded on the bloody ground outside.

Again and again the assault was renewed, and each time it was so sternly repelled that flesh and blood could scarcely longer endure the strain; but the end was at hand. As the Gotlanders were sullenly falling back after one of these repulses, dispirited, broken, and blinded by the very excess of their fury to all but the unachieved task before them, a dreadful shout resounded in their ears; and ere they had time to rally their disordered ranks and present some sort of a face to the new attack, the flanking parties of Harald's men burst into them, aglow with the joy of hand to hand combat that thrills every soldier soul, and in a trice the whole crowd was driven back upon itself in tumultuous confusion, and tribesman and warrior were blended in a desperate death struggle.

To and fro swayed the mob, splitting up momentarily into fragments as exhausted men stumbled and fell before the blows of fresh, unbreathed adversaries; and in a few minutes the unequal strife was terminated by the headlong flight of every survivor who could muster energy enough to escape, and the land attack had ended in complete disaster for the Gotlanders. On both flanks of Harald's position the fighting and its result had been the same; and the king sent parties down from the ships to bring in the wounded and relieve those who had sustained the brunt of the day.

The river attack had proved most ineffective. The

124 Harald First of the Vikings

skirmishing boats of the enemy made half-hearted attempts to come close enough to distract the attention of those on the ships ; but the light cutters, manned by stalwart and skilful seamen, easily ran them down, destroying them in detail, until the few that were left fled, like the scared wild-fowl of their own marshes, far up stream, thankful only that they were able to escape the fate which had overtaken their brethren.

The whole attack had failed miserably ; and, as Harald remarked to Glumm that evening :—

“The Earl Hrane Gotska will have realised his mistake. He should never have divided his force into two. Now he will gather for the final assault—for the one to which he will pin all his hopes of success—and will deliver it on one side of the water only. Then, Glumm, we will crush him absolutely ; and then—northward ho ! for Thrandheim.”

Chapter XII

Of a Great Drowning

HARALD now resumed his guerilla operations in Gotland ; and to carry them farther into the country he passed a large number of his lighter ships through the stakes, and sent them up stream bearing troops who were to act from them as a base. The population resisted as best they might, and with varying success ; but at last the counsel of their principal chiefs prevailed, they gathered together again into one large army under Earl Hrane Gotska, and determined to risk all on the one throw. The war arrow summoned every available man, and, their ranks swelled to vast proportions, they streamed down to give King Harald battle.

At the first indication of their advance that cautious commander drew in all his out-lying forces. He had made up his mind to put his full strength into this final argument, and he saw to it that, for at least forty-eight hours previously, his soldiers had a sufficiency of food and rest, and did not fritter away their energies in futile preliminary skirmishes. He caused the news to be promulgated among all ranks that this was to be the conclusive stroke of the campaign ; he appealed to them to summon all their powers to completely crush the armed resistance that detained them here so long and so far from their own homes ; and he avowed his absolute confidence in their loyalty and obedience to assist him in carrying out his plans to a successful termination.

126 Harald First of the Vikings

His troops responded to the call as he had hoped and expected. They were weary, for a while, of campaigning, and longed to be back in their own provinces ; besides, they had amassed plunder, most of them, and were eager to realise their share and blazon forth their tales of the war to admiring friends and relatives. Harald, then, waited calmly for the advent of his foes, secure in his preparations, his intended strategy, and the temper and numbers of his men.

Evening was drawing in when the advanced scouts of the Gotlanders came in sight, and later on the whole plain twinkled with fires, indicating that their army was camping for the night. The king flung out pickets to guard against surprise, and at the same time saw himself to the distribution of a large portion of his force on shore. The formation was simple : the tactics even more so, in the main. He intended to draw up his men in a wide arc, the ends of which should rest on the river, covering the fort on the side on which the enemy lay ; against this he would permit the undisciplined hordes of the Gotlanders to exhaust their strength, and would reserve the energies of his own men, both on shore and on the ships, for the moment when he should deem it opportune to attack in turn.

When the sun was fairly up, the Gotlanders advanced in one deep line, thickest towards the centre ; and, a novelty here to Harald's troops, many of the enemy were mounted on hardy ponies, scouring in scattered bands from centre to flanks, and streaming out in long, shifting trails across the level plain. Harald, thinking that possibly the horsemen might unite and charge his line, caused the word to be rapidly passed down that, in that event, the " shield-wall " was to stand firm in two or three ranks, with projecting spears, to meet the shock, while the bow and spearmen plied their assailants with their several missiles.

The battle opened with a scattered charge of horse, who galloped at full speed up to the stationary ranks

of the Northmen, hurling javelins and loosing arrows at them as they came within range ; but the glittering bristle of spear-points daunted them, they wheeled hastily in their tracks, and, pursued by flights of arrows and jeering laughter, they scoured away back whence they had come.

But now the main body, composed of footmen, enraged at the repulse of their comrades, came on at a run. Raising their war-cries, and directed by leaders on horse-back, the vast mob of men, forming a line of nearly a mile in length, rolled forward like a tidal wave, the very ground trembling beneath the tramp of many thousand feet, and the din of their voices and war-horns booming in an unceasing, thunderous roar.

“ Hold firm, men ! ” shouted Harald, who, standing on a slight elevation in the centre of his shield-wall, could survey the whole advance.

From lip to lip the caution ran ; the spears trembled, inclined to the front, and rested firm in a fourfold bristle of shining, keen-edged points, jutting far out beyond their base ; and then, with hideous yells, shouts, and screams, the mighty moving mass was upon them.

The shield-wall, where the heaviest portion of the enemy's centre struck it, bent and wavered beneath the impact, but a supporting body flung itself, at a wave from Harald's hand, against its rear. Thrust forward by the shock of their comrades, and pressed backward by the weight of the assault, the ranks became a solid mass of humanity. The howling mob outside raved and hewed at the spear-points, some of which remained steadily fixed in an impenetrable hedge, while the rest were continually darting forth and back like deadly stings, as the men in rear thrust incessantly into the opposing bodies, inflicting heavy slaughter.

The whole of Earl Hrane's army was now wrapt densely about the stubborn arc of Harald's soldiery, striving frantically to force a way through or over the serried ranks ; and as the mountain torrent swathes itself around an obstructing heap of rocks, leaping and

128 Harald First of the Vikings

snapping in its wrath as it endeavours to wrench it from its base and roll it from its path, so the assailants clung and swayed in a seething swirl around the solidly-planted soldiery, clutching at the spears with bare hands to tear them away, leaping, gesticulating, and snarling with impotent fury at the continued baffling of their efforts.

There is a roar of "Harald!" and from both flanks, where fresh troops have been landed from the fleet, two wedges of nearly a thousand men each smite heavily into the backs of the struggling mob, stabbing and hewing desperately but with disciplined energy and array. Instantly a crowd of Gotlanders envelops each reinforcement, striving wildly to bear them down and destroy them; but though here and there a single man is whirled out of the ranks and trodden under foot, the spear-points quiver out on all sides, and thrusting and jabbing viciously each wedge moves hither and thither, as the sway of the surging, encircling multitude impels it, and ere long the assailants have learnt to keep their distance from these deadly weapons wielded by such determined men.

A messenger comes dashing across the bridge of ships to Harald.

"The enemy are attacking the fort on the other bank, my lord. The Earl Hrane is believed to be with them."

"I expected it," is the reply. "Glumm, go across with supports from the ships and take command; and as you go, hark you!"—he whispered a few words.

Glumm nodded in comprehension, and strode rapidly away; and he had not been gone five minutes ere it became apparent that a new move was in progress on the part of Harald.

The two ranks of ships nearest to the bank on which the main issue was being fought out, were dropping quietly away from their comrades and down stream; a few minutes more, and a wide gulf of some twenty yards of swirling water yawned between the nearest line of shipping and the shore; and Harald, seeing that

all was ready for the *coup*, sent orderly after orderly to various portions of his line and to the fort on the bank, moving himself with his Staff towards the near flank.

The result is not long in declaring itself. The outermost curve of the shield-wall—the central part of the arc—has up to now borne the heaviest brunt of the attack; what, then, more natural for the leaders of the enemy to suppose, than that their efforts are at last being rewarded? See! it is wavering! It bends—more and more—it reels—and suddenly, like the two leaves of a violently burst in gateway, it breaks asunder and falls back on either flank; and instantly through the broad-flung breach pours the maddened mass of foes, swept onward in full career by the accumulated weight of these in rear, as the pent up masses of a timber-jammed river whirl madly forward before the finally overpowering force that has heaped up behind them, and streams in full flood into the open space that gapes in front.

Look! Simultaneously the whole of Harald's shield-wall is in motion. The two wedges are lengthening into line, enclosing the surging stream of Gotlanders that pours, unable to check itself, through the funnelled gap. They press forward, shouting, smiting, and literally driving their foes before them. The flanks of the arc have faced inward, and are standing immovable in their ranks awaiting but the word. Another few minutes, and it is given; and with one steady, irresistible closing movement the great net—the gap now corked by the enveloping, extended wedges—sweeps forward, keeping the enclosed horde of men on the run straight for the river.

Utterly unable to halt, these latter are hurled forward against the fort. Like a maddened mob of cattle fleeing before a pursuing, devastating fire, they strike and divide at the obstacle, streaming round either side of it; and then—one long, wild yell of fury and despair rends the skies as, impelled by the resistless power of their own

130 Harald First of the Vikings

momentum and weight, as well as by that in their rear, they are swept into the swirling chasm of the river that yawns to receive them.

The scene that ensued is indescribable. Break through the encircling net they could not. The path up stream was barred by the stakes they had themselves planted, and guarded by armed cutters that met any attempted evasion that way with effectual resistance. In their front gaped twenty yards of deep, black, rushing water, and over against it towered the massive rampart of Harald's dragons, manned with rank upon rank of bow-men who plied their missiles with deadly certainty. Down stream, again, hovered a crowd of light-heeled galleys, who watched for every fugitive, and smote unsparingly. Death—death everywhere!

It was soon over. The last shrieks of the drowning wretches had died away, and once more the dragons were warping up to resume their formation; and directly this was accomplished, Harald hurried on board to transfer his attention to the fighting on the further bank.

But this was already concluded. The appalling tragedy on the river had first arrested and then paralysed the efforts of those who, under Earl Hrane, were attempting to capture the fort. Taking advantage of the pause, Earl Glumm had sprung to the front and personally engaged the Gotlander chief; and after a desperate duel, in which he himself was severely wounded, Glumm succeeded in slaying his opponent.

The Gotlanders at once broke and fled in utter rout across country; and Harald, arriving at this moment, forbade further pursuit, and Glumm was carried on board his own dragon to have his wounds seen to.

“The campaign is at an end,” said Harald to the Earl, when, bandaged up and made comfortable, the latter was able to converse with his master over the events of the day; “but your being wounded alters my plans. See, Glumm. If you think you can stand the tossing,

I will send you in my dragon, under charge of Cyrus, to Thrandheim. There you will bid Duke Guttorm hand over his duties to you until I arrive to reassume them, and come to me here at best speed. I will place him in command here and elsewhere, and myself march northward to the Uplands."

"There are still disaffected districts hereabouts, my lord," ventured Glumm.

"I know; but with the force I shall leave under him, Guttorm will be able to bring them into line. Bethink you, too, Glumm: to-day's lesson will have a lasting effect."

"Think of me as you will, my lord, I am glad I was not present at the end."

"They brought it on themselves," remarked Harald, curtly. "Well," he continued in a lighter tone, "when think you you will be fit to start?"

"To-morrow, my lord. Already I seem to sniff the salt sea breezes of the North, and I yearn to get to windward of the Stad."

"Good. I will see Cyrus, and settle the matter."

Accordingly the next day, escorted by six great ships, the king's dragon dropped down stream, bound for Thrandheim; and as Harald bade Glumm and Cyrus farewell, he added:—

"Get cured of your hurts soon, Glumm. You know what I told you the other day of a venture I have in my mind. Take care of him, Cyrus; and both of you await my arrival. Bid the Duke hasten, for I wish to be gone."

In due time Guttorm arrived, and to him Harald handed over the government of Gotland, "all the land north of the Gotha Elv and west of the Venner water, and all Vermeland." He left the Duke in charge with "a great company," and explained his own future movements; and then, taking with him a force sufficient for protection, Harald "turned towards the Uplands, and dwelt there awhile. Then he fared north over the Dovrafell

132 Harald First of the Vikings

to Thrandheim. And now began children to be born to King Harald. By Asa he had these sons :—Guttorm was the eldest ; then Halfdan the Black and Halfdan the White—twins ; and Sigfrod, the fourth. All these were nourished in Thrandheim, in great honour.”

Chapter XIII

Of a Visit to a Sea-rover's Stronghold

THE most bitter as well as persistent enemies that plagued Harald, during his twelve years' campaign in Norway, were the Vikings from distant parts of his own coasts and from the Western Isles—Shetland, the Orkneys, Faroes, and Hebrides; the cause was a plain one and not far to seek. His ideal of a feudal State under one head, to whom all should owe fealty and submission, was intolerable to the men of rank and birth who, and their sires before them, had been their own men, and who relied on the strength of their own right hands and the loyalty of their clansmen to uphold their independence.

These nobles, especially those who dwelt in or ruled over provinces on the coast-line, had for certainly a century depended on the profits of Viking raids to replenish their exchequers and furnish them with human labour for home and farm duties; they maintained, according to circumstances, a smaller or larger fleet of ships, and enlisted under their banner the stoutest and most skilful mariners they could attract by offers of plunder or fame.

When, therefore, Harald drove through the land on his victorious path, bearing down all who opposed him and swelling his forces, as the mountain torrent swells its volume with every rivulet and stream that joins it, with constant accessions from all sides, these nobles found themselves in a position where they had but three

134 Harald First of the Vikings

choices to consider, and that quickly—to fight, to fly, or to submit.

Fight, they could not: Harald was too strong for them; submit, they would not: they spurned the idea as degrading; and therefore they chose flight, abandoning home, lands, everything save what they could transport in their ships, and fled to seek new homes in the Western Isles.

Of these Isles they had often heard, and many had even sailed there. The climate was the same, almost, as that of their own lost home; the scenery, alas! was different indeed, save for rugged cliffs and the encircling, ever restless sea. The wide stretching purple hills, the towering mountains scarred with rocky ravines and seamed with leaping waterfalls, the dense and beautiful pine forests, haunts of wolf and bear—were no longer theirs; they had abandoned them for years to come, if not for ever, and—it was Harald's doing! What wonder, then, that they were his most determined foes?

Every year, chiefly in the summer, they made daring dashes upon his coasts, retreating laden with booty, time and again, to shelter in their distant islands, some even in hiding-places on the coast of Norway itself; and every summer, leaving trustworthy men in command to carry on his plans at home, or sending such in his stead to carry out his designs, Harald made counter attacks on his agile persecutors. His ships swept hither and thither, searching the isles, the promontories, and the inlets along the coast; but whenever the Vikings heard of his approach they fled like hunted sea-birds, mostly out into the open ocean, until the danger should have passed by, when they would again return to recommence their provoking assaults.

Harald and Glumm (now recovered of his wounds) sat together in the palace at Throndheim, where the former had fixed his royal residence.

“This time I go myself,” exclaimed Harald, striking the table with his clenched fist. “These pestilent

sea-robbers need a lesson, and it would be well I should give it them in person. Nay—I know what you would say, Glumm, but I tell you it is best; and I will explain why, though I should have thought you would have seen it for yourself. Matters are drawing to a head; the close of the campaign is at hand; and I purpose to tempt all who still stand out against me into one net. Then—then, Glumm—one last and strong blow, and the crown is won!”

“The scheme is like yourself, my lord, bold and sagacious,” said the councillor; “it is, however, my duty to point out any obstacles that may suggest themselves to me. First, while you are absent, I guiding and ruling in your stead, how if our foes suddenly gather head and force an attack? You are absent——”

“A swift ship will always find me,” interrupted Harald. “The distance is not so great but that I can return with equal speed; and as to a sudden attack—content you, Glumm! they will not fall on me, but I on them. I shall sweep them all, I say, into the one net, and I can even tell you where the net will be spread.”

“Where, then, my lord?” said Glumm, incredulously.

“Why, man!” exclaimed Harald; “where are your usually keen wits to-night? Is not the whole country, north, east, and west, mine, or nearly so? The march of events is towards the south; therefore the final issue will be decided in the south. Where? why, where but on the sea, where, if defeated—as I swear they shall be—they can try for escape out into the ocean. And whereabouts on the southern coast, exactly? Ah! there I am not quite so sure, but I believe it will be off Joederen: that remains to be seen; but it will not be till after my return. Have you any more questions?” he continued, smiling.

“Nay, my lord,” replied Glumm, returning the smile; “you counter them all so neatly. I do but wonder whence you got your knowledge of men and matters.”

“In the school of stern experience, Glumm,” said

136 Harald First of the Vikings

Harald ; “ and now, call in the men who wait without, and your last lingering doubt shall be dispelled.”

Glumm rose, and going to the door called aloud ; then he resumed his seat. Presently two men armed were ushered in by an attendant.

“ Ha ! Thorkill and Grimm,” exclaimed Harald ; “ there is work toward. Are the ships victualled as I commanded ? ”

“ Ay, my lord ; eight of them,” replied both.

“ And do any know of our destination ? ” continued Harald.

“ As to knowing, I cannot say,” answered Grimm bluffly ; “ but we should be fools if we did not guess.”

Harald laughed aloud.

“ Well, you are victualled and ready. Get the men aboard, both of you, and stand by to sail directly I give the word. I come myself on the *Seagull*, Grimm ; the royal galley must bide at home this voyage ”—he glanced at Glumm—“ lest some lurking spy should guess my presence, and get away with the news in time to frustrate our plans.”

Both officers smiled at the idea ; but Harald’s tones were convincing as he continued : “ What ! unbelieving ? Nay, then, we will pick up the man himself. Thorkill, take a light galley, and run round at once to the north side of the fjord. You will there see a small ship, ready for sea ; but let not your presence be perceived. Lie in wait close by on shore, and you will trap the man who takes the news that our fleet sails without the king’s long-ship—and presumably, therefore, without the king ; but if you capture him, you must also capture the ship without fail : see to it ! Go, and return before early dawn.”

Thorkill saluted and disappeared, while Grimm seemed dumbfounded by the revelation. Only Glumm smiled, for he of all men understood his royal master best, and knew that whether the ship or man were taken or not mattered little, owing to the king’s precaution ; that Harald had but intended to impress upon two of his most

trusted officers that his knowledge was wide, fully aware that the tale would spread and have its effect.

The night wore on, and to all seeming the inmates of the palace—save a few guards—were asleep and thinking of nothing less than setting out within a few hours on a warlike expedition to chase Vikings; and should any spy be desirous of reporting the king's personal intentions as regarded the fleet now lying in the fjord, he would be most likely to forward the news that, in accordance with his usual custom, Harald was staying at home to carry on the land war, while a few ships under the command of trusted officers scoured the neighbouring waters for Vikings: which intelligence was exactly what Harald desired should be spread abroad—for a few days, at all events.

In the middle of the first watch two figures, closely shrouded in heavy cloaks, passed out of a back gate of the palace and, bidding the sentry on duty await their return, walked leisurely down to the shore. Here they entered a skiff and pushed off, pulling quietly alongside the *Seagull*, which lay a little distance out and separate from her consorts, answered a low challenge in a similar tone, and swung themselves aboard.

"Well, Thorkill," were Harald's first words, as he recognised that officer standing near by; "why here, and not on your own galley?"

"To report, my lord. I took man and ship, both where you said they would be found."

"Ah!" returned Harald; "then another time you will believe me. What did you with them?"

"Why, my lord, I chanced to run across Cyrus; and as he knows the business we are on—which I did not wish to miss—he took over charge of the prisoners."

"You will have to deal with them, Glumm," quoth Harald, turning to his companion. "Keep them in durance for a day or two and then let them go, after carefully explaining their own intentions to them. After all, they are only little fish, and we will net the big ones later; but show them we are not so ignorant as they

138 Harald First of the Vikings

deem us : it may do good. Now, Thorkill, get aboard your own craft and follow our lead. Grimm, get your sweeps out, and make for the open sea ; there we'll catch the breeze and make sail."

Glumm slipped into his skiff with a farewell hand-shake from his lord, and departed to seek Cyrus, with whom, a little later, both shrouded in their sea-cloaks, he walked past the sentry at the back gate and re-entered the palace ; Thorkill disappeared into the gloom to pass the word to the other ships and carry out the orders he had received, and Grimm and his men led the way out of the fjord ; once clear of the land they ran up sail, the little fleet headed away on its quest, and Harald and those who, like himself, were in want of rest rolled themselves in their cloaks and were speedily unconscious of all around them.

Two men were leaning against a moss-grown rock on the verge of a low cliff, peering under their hands at a single vessel running in for the land. It was fine, clear weather, but the waves were tumbling rather boisterously out at sea under the influence of a steady northerly breeze.

"What make you of her, Ulf ?" quoth one, still peering ; "she seems to me one of our own kind making a port."

"More like a merchant-man to my mind," replied his comrade ; "but we shall soon know, for she'll be in with the land in half an hour. There are many things we need, Gorm, stout cloth and furs for next winter most of all. Send she be a trader, full of such commodities, for they are wanted for all of us."

"Well, let us go down," said Gorm, after a pause ; "the others will have made her out by now."

Turning, the two men began to pick their way down a precipitous track that skirted the face of the cliff, to a small, sheltered bay below. Here stood a village, composed of huddled dwellings of various sizes, none of them large ; but further inland, half-way up a rocky



“What make you of her, Ulf?”

ravine and screened by the projecting side of the ascent from view from seaward, was perched a more imposing edifice resembling a fortress, capable of containing some three or four hundred men.

This was one of the main headquarter resorts of the Vikings of the Isles near by, and seemed, from its size and massive construction, well calculated to afford the sea-robbers protection against any ordinary foe. Great part of it appeared to be quite ancient; but by whom erected in the first instance, or with what intention, troubled the Vikings who discovered its ruins but little. A few months' hard labour had sufficed to repair it sufficiently for their purpose, and captives brought by their galleys added to and strengthened its defences. Generally it held a full garrison, though at the present moment there were only some two hundred men in the fort; the rest were away on their usual summer raids, and until they returned their comrades bided at home to keep watch and ward.

When the two look-outs reached the strand they found many of their comrades and the inhabitants of the village congregated there, watching the vessel that was now quite close to shore. She stood boldly into the bay, lowered her large sail as she lost the influence of the wind owing to the intervening hills, and rowed straight for a rough wood and stone jetty that jutted out some yards into the water. Here a waiting sailor hove a rope to one standing in the bows of the new-comer, who instantly made it fast; the vessel came to a standstill, and was promptly boarded by half a dozen men in authority, who desired to speak with the master.

"Where are you from?" was the first question addressed to this individual, a regular rough old sea-dog.

"From Bergen, last," he replied curtly.

"What news of Harald?"

"The same as usual. He is eating up the tribes, one after another. Most of Norway is his now; only those in the south are holding out."

140 Harald First of the Vikings

“ Good luck go with them ! ” cried all in unison.

“ So say I, ” remarked the skipper ; “ though it matters little to me, who come and go, who is master, so long as the harbour dues are not too heavy and I can sell my cargoes, no man hindering. ”

“ What have you now in your hold ? ” they asked eagerly, for though these Vikings might be robbers on the high seas and in other lands, they treated merchants who sought them out with some consideration and gave them fair prices for their goods, knowing that they thus secured a steady trade for necessaries.

“ Cloth, ” replied the master to this question—“ cloth, fine and woollen, foot-wear, grain, wine from the Southern Sea, tin and copper from Cornwall, some weapons and what not—a mixed cargo, ” he concluded, abruptly.

His auditors gave vent to exclamations of delight, and one of them spoke out decisively :—

“ Come up to our place yonder ” (pointing towards the ravine) “ and see the commander. If you are wise you will bring samples of your wares, and it will be strange if you sell not the whole of your cargo ; and hearken ! forget not a cask of your best wine. ”

“ Ay, ay ! ” growled the sailor in his beard ; “ I’ll see to it—I and some of my lads. Only send someone to show us the way, and we’ll follow you as soon as we have broken bulk. I warrant the wine’ll be to your taste. ”

The Vikings hastened away to inform their commander and comrades of the stroke of luck that had befallen them, and to organise some sort of festival for their visitors ; while the master and his crew turned to without more ado to get out those articles of cargo which they designed to transport to the fortress for inspection.

“ Easy, there, with those casks of wine, now, ” growled the master ; “ if they get stove in there’ll be more harm done than can be undone, and I would’nt care to stand in your shoes afterward. ”

The sailors, who had been laughing and joking as they broke out the wine casks, evidently took the significant hint to heart, for they worked on in comparative silence and slung the barrels out with the greatest care.

"Lash those two to a couple of short spars each," quoth the master, indicating the ones he intended to take with him; "some of you others make up a few loads of cloth and other samples from the bales further aft, and lash them into single loads. Smart, now, for here comes one to show us the way up."

As he spoke a man stepped on board and, roughly saluting, intimated that he was indeed the promised guide; "and," added he, "they are all as eager up there to see your goods as ever were youngsters to turn over a pedlar's pack."

"We are doing our best," replied the master. "Another ten minutes or so, and I am with you."

True to his word, the sailor started in about the specified time, walking himself with the guide and followed by eight men, four bearing the two casks of wine, and the others shouldering heavy bales each.

Half an hour's rough walking—during which the seamen grumbled loudly over their job and were handsomely rated by their skipper—brought the party to the foot of the ascent that led up to the gate; but here the men protested vehemently that they could not carry their burdens any further, and the master, evidently sympathising with them, spoke up to the guide.

"See here, friend," quoth he; "if your mates want to taste and handle my goods, they had best come and help us up with them. What, man! are we goats, to scramble up there? Hail some of the lazy lubbers to lend us a hand."

The man grinned, but complied; and presently half a score came running down the path and relieved the sailors of their loads, transporting them up the track with the ease bred of frequent use. The master, however, walked beside those who bore the wine casks, constantly

142 Harald First of the Vikings

urging gentle usage and care lest the contents should be muddied by overmuch shaking; and so, amid much laughter and a fair amount of urging, the party reached at last the castle gate and passed within.

“Whither away, now?” queried the master.

“Straight ahead,” answered a Viking. “Make for the great hall, man—yonder. H’mph! two casks among all of us! Rather short allowance.”

“Hold your foolish tongue!” quoth another; “these are for the officers, not for us. Say, comrade; are there more stowed away in your hold?”

“Some sixty or so,” replied the master.

“Ha! then our turn will come.”

With such talk the party entered the hall, where a large number of Vikings were assembled; and these gathering around, the bales were speedily opened to their eager gaze, and luckily proved to contain the right sort of stuff for their requirements.

“That’ll do,” said one who seemed to be in command; “roll them away to the side wall, there. Now, friend, come and have some supper, and open your news budget. One of you spile a cask, and let’s taste the wine. Gurth, lock the outer gates and see to the sentries, and then come and drink your share. Here are the keys: haste, now!”

As he spoke all seated themselves save Gurth, who hurried away to finish his duty and return ere he should find most of the good liquor gone; and the master and his men, loosening their doublets and giving themselves a hearty shake to get comfortably settled in their clothing before joining the revellers, complied with the invitation and took their places at the board.

“Ale for me and my boys,” quoth the skipper, waving aside a proffered cup of wine; “none of your wines. Good ale and plenty of it for us traders, until the time comes to knock off trading and using the sea, and then we can settle down and drink our fill of the best. Were we to begin sampling our own wares, who knows when or where we should stop!”

A hoarse shout of laughter greeted his words.

"The more for us, then," responded several; and without more ado the meal was begun, and the newcomers were retailing to the Vikings what news they could think of over well-filled platters and brimming horns.

Chapter XIV

Of the Battle of Hafur's Fjord

IT is night, and the bay, the village, and the fortress seem sleeping, all bathed in the white radiance of the moon. The rugged path up the ravine is blotched with deep, black shadows, but surely—the shadows, or some of them, are moving? And there was, last evening, but one strange vessel in the bay? Strain your eyes, and lying in the heavy obscurity cast by the embracing cliff to the north, you will discern seven others.

Yes—a strong body of men is coming up the pass—some hundreds of them, silently; and all are armed, for the moonbeams flash on sword, helm, and axe. Steadily they stream along, the light rippling over the points of spears or links of mail shirts, and now—they mount the hill whereon stands the fortress; they disappear into the blackness under the wall—they are gone—they have entered the Vikings' stronghold!

As will have been already surmised, the merchant vessel was one of Harald's fleet, disguised as to crew and rig, and laden with merchandise to support the very purpose that had been achieved. The wine, however, had been drugged, and in consequence when the feast in the hall drew to a close, most of those present (except of course the master and his men) were lying about the floor in various stages of unconsciousness, and it only remained for one of the so-called traders to take the keys from the warder's belt and cautiously open the gate.

The Battle of Hafur's Fjord 145

The guard, of whom there were but two, had stolen in to obtain a drink of the wine, and were lying overcome at their posts; as to the rest of the garrison, who had as usual retired to their rest in perfect assurance of safety, they were unarmed and unprepared to resist. In a word, the surprise was complete and almost bloodless.

Harald was in no way cruel, where occasion did not demand it. He demolished the rovers' castle after plundering it, and the village, in the usual manner—by fire; he gave all his prisoners the choice between swearing allegiance to him, or being cast adrift in any kind of craft that would float that could be found among those lying in the bay, to discover a landing-place or home anywhere else on the coast whither they might chance to drift; and then he stretched out to sea with intent to intercept the home-coming fleet of the absent Vikings.

Pursuing a course suggested to him by one of his prisoners, he came in sight of five vessels on the third day after sailing, and after a brisk chase was successful in bringing them to bay. The rovers fought fiercely, but despairingly, for they had to face heavy odds, and Harald's men, when attacking, shouted to them the news of the destruction of their stronghold. In the end two of the vessels were sunk and three taken.

Harald followed the same course with his prisoners as on the former occasion, and some days later he was back at Thrandheim, laden with booty, and with an accession of two hundred and fifty stout warriors for judicious distribution among his forces. These men, it may be added, owing to his unlooked-for clemency, developed into loyal adherents of his cause.

"Well, Glumm," quoth Harald on meeting his councillor, "what news?"

"Such, my lord, as you foresaw. Tidings have reached me that the gathering in the south swells day by day, and that our enemies' hopes are high in proportion."

146 Harald First of the Vikings

“Be it so,” said Harald; “they will fight the more valiantly. It will be a great battle, Glumm, but it will be the last; and I shall break them in my grasp, as I break this spear.” He snapped the light shaft over his knee, and cast the fragments aside. “Who,” he continued, “are the most prominent leaders? Have you any names beyond those we know?”

“Many, my lord; and among the greatest is King Eric of Hordaland.”

“Ha!” interjected Harald. “Gyda’s father—well?”

“Then there are Sulke, King of Rogaland, and his brother, Earl Sote; Kiotve the Rich, King of Agder, and his son, Thor Haklaug (Thorir Long-chin); also two brothers from Thelemark—Roald Ryg and Hadd the Hard. These are only some few of the most notable men, but there are many others of renown; and they draw a great gathering after them in the south.”

“The more the merrier!” laughed Harald. “Send round the war arrow far and near, rally every ship and man to my banner, notify every Jarl in every Fylki that owns my rule to send levies and appoint chiefs to them. Issue all necessary orders for provisioning a great fleet, and see to it that there be no lack of armour and arms—especially javelins and arrows. Within one month from now will I set out; and whosoever does not answer to the call of his king had best quit the country, for if I lay hands on him, woe betide him!”

“This very day,” responded Glumm, his eyes gleaming at the prospect—“this very day shall all be set in train.”

“Send Cyrus to me,” continued Harald, “and Egil Ullserk, my banner-bearer; also Berdlukaare the berserk, chief of my hird.”

Glumm signified assent, and withdrew to carry out his lord’s commands.

During the previous winter King Harald had ordered the construction of a large and very splendidly fitted-out “Dragon,” or warship. In order to man her suitably, he sent round to every Fylki in his kingdom for

The Battle of Hafur's Fjord 147

the best "all round" men who could be obtained; a course which, naturally enough, resulted in his enlisting such a selected hird or banner-guard as had never before been seen.

With them he placed his berserks, of whom Berdlukaare was chief; "and a dreadful berserk he was!" says Snorro.

On this dragon, then, which he named *The Raven*,¹ Harald placed his hird and berserks, and they were stationed in the prow, where the brunt of the fighting usually took place.

Harald sat long in council with Cyrus, Egil Ullserk, and Berdlukaare, discussing every detail of the duties that would fall to their share; at last he dismissed the two latter, confident that they would see to everything as he wished, and then settled down to a long conversation with his ship-master as to the course to be steered, and the tactics he intended to adopt when he had found his foe, for Harald generally struck out a new line for himself. Finally, this council of war also came to an end, and Cyrus left his presence feeling convinced that the stroke his royal master designed would be the concluding argument of the long campaign.

All that month the levies poured in, ships were manned and armed, and underwent thorough inspection; while from various points on the coasts, between Thrandheim and the south where his enemies lay, came news of reinforcements of both men and vessels awaiting but the arrival of the king to join his banner. From the south, too, came reports of great preparations being made to oppose him; and it seemed as though both sides realised that the decisive moment was at hand, which would end in the final defeat of one or other of the contending forces.

That it would be a desperate struggle, every one knew; the princes and chieftains who had opposed Harald had,

¹ The raven was specially honoured in the North as the messenger of Odin. See "Told by the Northmen," by E. M. Wilmot-Buxton (Harrap).

148 Harald First of the Vikings

so far, accomplished nothing but their own ruin ; those who still held their lands had concluded that, separately, they could never hope to prevail against him, and the Nation was now, therefore, divided, as it were, into two broad camps—for, and against, the King. This fact seemed to impart the greater energy to Harald and his men, from highest to lowest, and to inspire them with redoubled resolution.

At last, all preparations complete, the royal fleet sailed out of the fjord and headed southward ; and as it swept majestically along, from out of every sea-coast town and creek streamed vessels of all sizes, eager to join in the fray and enthusiastic in Harald's cause. The wind blew fair, the skies were clear ; and thus, with all the pomp of martial array and the clang of martial music, the vast flotilla swept on to the coming Salamis, finally dropping anchor in the Hafur's Fjord—a little inlet, west of the present town of Stavanger.

Now King Eric, who was hovering round Stad (the most westerly point of the mainland of Norway), and indeed all the allies, had been well informed of Harald's movements, which in truth the latter did not attempt to disguise, for he was bent on the open arbitrament of battle ; and consequently, so soon as news of the sailing reached him by one of his scouting vessels, Eric hurried south to meet the reinforcements of his friends there and from the east-land. When they had all united their forces they moved slowly northward, and finally sailed deliberately into Hafur's Fjord, where Harald lay awaiting their coming. Harald's men were nearly all of his own country ; but we are told that "with the army of Kiotve the Wealthy were English, French, and Scotch men-at-arms from the West Countries."

There was no shiftiness shown in the fighting on that day. Both fleets, on sighting each other, rowed straight into action, every vessel charging at its nearest opponent, and in a few minutes the engagement was general ; but while Eric's fleet moved swiftly forward as it had advanced into the fjord, probably in column, as though to

The Battle of Hafur's Fjord 149

bear down its adversary by sheer weight, Harald's met it in wedge formation, his own and some of his best and heaviest dragons forming the apex, and the base of the wedge broadening out and circling round on either wing like the "horns" of an attacking Zulu impi, driving their assault deep into the flanks of the on-coming allies, splitting them up, and detaching portions of them from the main body.

The din of war-horns, voices, and colliding ships was tremendous; and so fierce and determined was the first shock that many vessels were cut down to the water's edge by the sharp iron stems of their antagonists, or rolled clean over by the mere impact to sink on the spot with most of those on board. In the hottest of the fight was Harald's great dragon, and standing on the prow, the foremost man on the ship, was Thorolf, son of Kveld Ulf, the two brothers Olve Nuva and Eyvind Lambe supporting him on either side.

Thorir Long-chin (one of the allies), who was a mighty berserk, raged through the battle in his ship, steadfastly cleaving a path towards King Harald's dragon, for no other opponent would satisfy him; and through the showers of spears, arrows, and stones that fell around and upon him he won his way until, with a roar of shouting and a final desperate dash of oar-strokes, the beak of his dragon thrust itself forward over Harald's forecastle, the two vessels smashed violently into each other, the grapplings were made fast, and the boarders on both sides met in furious hand-to-hand conflict.

"Follow! Follow!" screamed Thorir, waving a huge, bloodstained axe round his head as he sprang over the side.

"To me, Harald's men!" replied Thorolf and his backers, as they met and resisted the assault.

The struggle was indescribable. The two vessels rocked gently on the swell, grinding their sides together in their lashings, and the foemen swayed first from one into the other and then back again into the first. So closely packed were they, that often a dead man would be

150 Harald First of the Vikings

held up by the press of those around him ; others, in leaping over the bulwarks, missed their footing or were struck in mid-air and fell between the hulls, to be crushed between the groaning timbers. Again and again a fresh reinforcement would hurl itself into the fray, to be met by one from the opposing side and driven back.

“ Harald ! Where is the King ? ” was the constant cry of Thorir Long-chin, who yearned to measure weapons with the leader of his foes. “ Stand forth, Harald, and fight me for thy kingdom ! ”

But had Harald possessed the strength of twenty men, he could not have forced his way through the densely packed mass of combatants to his challenger. His own berserks, led by Berdlukaare, frenzied with the lust of blood, stormed forward foot by foot, their fury increasing with the spread of the battle as ship after ship dashed up and joined in the fight, flinging its company of maddened men from deck to deck, to be engulfed in the seething whirlpool that surged around the king’s dragon.

For long the issue of the action trembled in the balance—now it inclined to this side, now to that ; men were falling in heaps, thrust aside or overboard, chiefs sprang out to smite or be smitten, and the strife swayed slowly to and fro.

At last the wild fury of Harald’s berserks, combined with the instinctive discipline of all his men, caused a shifting of the motion of the crowd, and gradually, but with increasing strength, the yelling, striking multitude was borne backward on the forward surging wave ; until finally, amid a hurricane of mingled clamour—of hoarsened voices, clattering shields, clanging axe and sword-strokes—Thorir Long-chin’s mixed crew were forced back pell-mell over the side of Harald’s dragon, and the arena of strife transferred itself to his own.

Hewing and yelling, boiling with blood-thirst, Berdlukaare and his berserks smote their enemies front, flank, and rear ; a desperate five minutes cleared the ship of

The Battle of Hafur's Fjord 151

every living opponent, Thorir himself being cut down and hurled overboard in the tumult ; and the men from other ships around, overwhelmed by the tremendous fury of this final assault, broke, fled back whence they had come, and rapidly sheering off attempted to make their escape while it was yet possible to do so.

But all around them came crowding rank upon rank of Harald's vessels, each vomiting forth its band of stormers who swept the decks before them, men flushed with the glow of victory ; and ever outside the central core of the struggle hovered the swift, light galleys of the creek-men who had joined Harald on his way south, cutting off stragglers, and overpowering those that drifted helplessly out of the fight with but few left to man their oars.

Suddenly a dragon burst out of the crowd, heading for the mouth of the fjord and running down two lighter vessels that dared to obstruct its way. It bore Kiotve the Wealthy, badly wounded, despairing of success, and wild with grief at the loss of his gallant son, the berserk Thorir ; and then, as if this had been a signal, the whole host broke up and scattered, pursuers and pursued, some making for the shore and some for the open sea.

Kiotve escaped to a small island, where his men abandoned him and fled for their lives ; Eric, Sulke, and Sote fell fighting in that dreadful carnage on and around Harald's dragon, where many other valiant chiefs were slain ; and those of the survivors who were fortunate enough to reach the land made southward over the country of Joederen, seeking safety wheresoever it might be found. King Harald here won, according to the Sagas, one of the greatest battles ever fought in Norway ; from that day the neck of the opposition to him was broken, and from that day he might with truth be said to have become supreme ruler of his country.

Among the wounded on Harald's side were Thorolf "and all who had stood before the mast," by which I

152 Harald First of the Vikings

conclude is meant that not one of the hird or band of berserks came off scatheless ; and this is scarcely to be wondered at, considering the central position they occupied during the battle, the leading part they played therein, the time the fighting lasted, and the desperate fury with which it was waged.

Chapter XV

Of the Sweeping of the Western Isles

“ King Harald heard that, far and wide, . . . ravaged the Vikings, who, during the winter, stayed west of the sea.”—(Harald Fairhair's Saga.)

THE goal was practically won, and after twelve years of incessant fighting Harald was at last king of all Norway, and had gained the crown which the scornful words Gyda had thrust before his ambitious soul. Yet the work was not complete. Many of those who had left the country in despair or disgust were living peaceably in other lands ; but there were others, wild, reckless spirits, the breath of whose nostrils was war, turbulent coast-dwellers from that land of gallant seamen, whose last thought was of peaceful submission, and who, having once tasted the delights of a sea-rover's life, had determined to hold fast to it until the ravens of Odin should come to summon them away.

These were the Vikings of the Western Isles ; and, not content with forays into the lands further south, one of their greatest delights was to swoop down unexpectedly on the shores of the country now ruled over by the man who had driven them forth, and after ravaging and harrying far and wide, to retreat as swiftly as they had come to their rocky eyries in the Western Sea. Veritable thorns in the flesh were these to the King of Norway—dangerous pests to be got rid of at any cost, lest they should tempt his lately-conquered vassals into the belief that their Sovereign was either powerless to aid them, or too busily occupied with more pressing affairs to do so.

154 Harald First of the Vikings

Harald therefore assembled a large fleet and, leaving trustworthy regents to administer in his absence the pressing affairs of state, he set forth to make a clean sweep of the ocean wasps that had dared to sting him into action.

It was a lovely summer's day at Throndheim, and the broad fjord lay bathed in sunshine, reflecting from every ripple and fold the "many-twinkling smile" that is so alluring and yet so mocking, when one remembers how quickly that same bright, calm smile can change into the black fury of wrath and storm. Everywhere, on the blue waters of the bay, rocked vessels—long-ships, dragons, cutters, galleys of all sizes and descriptions—and to and fro the shore plied innumerable small boats bearing men, stores, and munitions of war to their respective ships.

The strand was crowded with seamen and warriors in every species of mail and crested helm, their arms and armour glittering bravely in the sunshine, and their faces all aglow with the joy of anticipated plunder and fighting. The past twelve years had been stirring ones in the land, and many of those now present had participated in almost every battle or skirmish that was worth telling of to those at home; while others again, comparatively young soldiers, thirsted for the chances that had been afforded to their luckier comrades, and vowed in their hearts that now or never would they show the stuff of which they were made, and either gain a glorious name or perish in the endeavour.

The occasion, too, was an exceptional one—or so they deemed it. King Harald, vexed beyond endurance by the persistent raids of the Vikings of the Western Sea on the coasts of his kingdom, had determined to take the matter in hand once and for all and, with his customary finality, extirpate as far as possible the troublesome clan from their distant fastnesses.

Thirty massive dragons and long-ships, their towering prows crested with gilded figures of bird, beast, or man,

The Sweeping of the Western Isles 155

peering dumbly yet fiercely into the far distance of the ocean, their sides glittering with the numberless shields of the warriors and chieftains on board, and manned by the stoutest and most reliable of the king's troops, lay in the bay awaiting the signal to set out; and a large but compact force of smaller galleys, for "cutting-out" expeditions, rocked gently on the swell at a slight distance from their heavier and more majestic sisters, their decks teeming with gallant and reckless spirits who yearned to be let loose against an enemy—what matter if he were their own countryman!—to slay or be slain.

On board of Harald's own dragon, the *Raven*, was scarce a movement to be seen. The oarsmen sat at their benches with poised oars, eager for the word; the fighting men were gathered in array under their respective leaders, prepared to salute their king the moment he should set foot aboard of his own ship; the royal standard was made fast ready for hoisting, and its gorgeous folds lay heaped at the feet of the man who grasped the halliards and stood watching, with expectant eye, for the wave of the hand wherewith the master should bid him give it to the breeze and signify to all the presence of his Sovereign. The discipline was perfect; and yet scarcely more so than that of the other vessels composing the heavier portion of the fleet, for it was by a strict attention to such details that Harald had gained and held his supremacy.

"This cruise will be new ground to you, Cyrus?" suggested a chief, evidently our old acquaintance, Thorkill.

"Ay, will it," replied Cyrus, who had now for many years been trusted sailing-master of Harald's own ship; "I know better the south-west coast of England than these northerly Scottish Isles. Still, there are many aboard of us who have sailed thither, and we lack not pilots. Is all well on the *Seagull*?"

"All well, and eager for the start," replied Thorkill.

"I wait but for instructions Harald wished me to take from him in person at the last moment."

156 Harald First of the Vikings

“So I guessed by your presence here,” said Cyrus. “The king has not forgotten his youthful days in our company, and always contrives to find some especial bit of work for the *Seagull* and her commander.”

Thorkill smiled at the sly hint.

“I know no more than you what it may be, Cyrus,” said he; “but I shall not be long in hearing. See! yonder he comes.”

A roar of voices announced the departure of Harald from the shore, and every strung nerve in the fleet quivered responsive to the sound. The gaily ornamented galley, with its ranks of stalwart, standing warriors, swept alongside; the king sprang aboard his ship—a splendid figure, splendidly equipped; and as his foot touched the planking away soared the royal standard aloft, to be accompanied in its ascent by every bit of bunting on the assembled vessels, and hailed by a thunderous shout of welcome that echoed to the skies.

“Ah, Thorkill,” quoth Harald, “come hither.”

He led the chief apart and spoke a few words in his ear, Thorkill listening the while respectfully.

“You fully understand?”

“Quite, my lord.”

“Then away with you! You know the place of meeting.”

Thorkill saluted, dropped over the bulwark into a little skiff that was in waiting, and in two minutes was on board of the *Seagull*; and he had barely disappeared over the side when her oars fell with one splash into the water, and the galley shot out of the encircling crowd of shipping and headed away for the open sea, as fast as her men could drive her.

“Thorkill is ever prompt,” remarked Harald, turning to Cyrus.

“Ay, my lord,” said the other. “It was like old days, he and I waiting for you. He is off on some congenial errand, I doubt not?”

“You want to know everything,” returned the king with a smile; but Cyrus was an old and privileged

The Sweeping of the Western Isles 157

favourite, so he added: "I will tell you his errand later on. Now sound the call for the officers."

When these were assembled, Harald spoke amid a breathless silence; and so still was the atmosphere, and so resonant his voice, that his words reached the ears of wellnigh every man on the vessels rocking lazily around his own.

"Chiefs and men," quoth he, "we sail on an errand of righteous punishment. These Western Vikings have plagued us too long. They harass and slay their own countrymen, they ravage what has once been their own country, but which has long since cast them out as rebellious children. There will be fame and booty to satisfy all; but one word—you know me, and I know you. Bravery I will reward; cowardice—but I never met a coward Norseman yet! Men—obey your chiefs, as your chiefs obey me. Make sail."

The roar of cheering was renewed, and amid its clamour vessel after vessel moved out seaward to get an offing, the *Raven* lying motionless to mark and criticise the bearing of each as it rushed past, lowering its flag to the royal standard. The little fleet of smaller galleys skimmed by in the wake of the larger vessels, three abreast, eliciting an approving wave of his hand from the king; and when all were clear of the bay the *Raven* herself swept majestically after them, gradually gaining on her consorts and taking her station in the van as they headed to the south-west.

"Now, Cyrus," said Harald; "come into the cabin and aid me with your counsel. Here," he continued, as soon as they were seated, spreading a parchment out on the table, "is a plan made for me by one whom I believe I can trust. I am for Shetland first—this island; Thor-kill goes to gain some details of information, and will meet us off the north point—here. Then we move as events may decide. Personally, I should like to strike down the west coast of England, round by Cornwall, sweep along the southern shores, and so up by the East Coast home; but it would be scarcely wise to venture so much

158 Harald First of the Vikings

and to be absent so long just now, in the present state of Norway. What say you ? ”

“ Why, my lord,” replied Cyrus, “ Shetland, the more southerly Isles, and a look in at Caithness in Scotland may well fill our holds with booty and thin our ranks. Though I would fain see Cornwall once more, yet I say with you that it were not wise to be away too long from home.”

“ Well, well, we shall see,” quoth Harald, rolling up the plan. “ And now, set our course, as soon as night falls, for the most northerly point of Shetland. Until then, bear southward ; and send half a dozen light galleys to scout well ahead of us, but not out of sight. We want no news passed on ahead.”

Cyrus saluted and disappeared ; and presently Harald was aware from certain orders and bustle that his instructions were being carried out. But he himself sat on alone in the growing darkness in the cabin, pondering deeply ; and weighty must his thoughts have been, and high, for to what had he not attained and to what might he not further aspire ? The Sovereignty of the Western Isles—of Scotland—nay, of England itself, where now Alfred lurked hiding for his life in a swamp, while all his land was in a turmoil for lack of a strong hand and firm will ?

The night came down, the stars twinkled aloft, the Northern Lights flickered and danced their mysterious measure far astern. But still the king sat on alone, immersed in the wide-reaching web of dreams his agile, capable brain was busily spinning ; and ever around him outside sounded the unceasing lip and ripple of the sea as the dragon shore her steadfast way through the waves, the measured hiss and splash of innumerable oars, the undefinable murmur that accompanies the presence of a large body of humanity. Hearing, the king smiled ; and smiling, he clenched his hand and—frowned.

For some days the fleet pressed on without pause ; and as comparatively few knew how they were heading

The Sweeping of the Western Isles 159

or for what particular spot, there was plenty of surmise. But as it is obviously impossible to carry my readers on more than one, or at most two, ships, I will practically confine myself to the *Raven* and her scout, the *Seagull*. It was the fifth day since the two had parted company, and we find the latter lying motionless in a deeply indented bay surrounded by low, barren hills, behind which the sun was just sinking.

“The fleet should be off the land to-night,” quoth Thorkill to his sailing-master; “at least, it is quite time they were, and every hour of delay makes for the spoiling of the scheme.”

“You will see the lights on the *Raven* when dusk falls, be sure,” responded his companion. “Harald is not one to dally.”

“When it is dusk we must put to sea,” continued Thorkill. “I trust we may not be seen, or if we are that we shall be deemed but a merchant ship that has lost her bearings.”

“Another hour,” said the master calmly; “it will soon pass.”

Two hours later, the *Seagull* was thrusting her beak to the north-east towards half a dozen low-lying, twinkling lights; and ere long Thorkill had boarded the *Raven* to make his report to the king, and the fleet was following its pilot, the *Seagull*, back to her hiding-place. A conference was held in Harald’s cabin, and ship after ship trailed into the bay; but the lighter galleys, it might have been noticed, divided and sheered off, one wing to the west and one to the east of the land, moving slowly but steadily, and well clear of the ragged shore-line.

There was not much sleep for anyone that night. One ship and then another disgorged its array of fighting men, who, as soon as they debarked, were moved off by their own officers, evidently in accordance with a pre-arranged plan; and at dawn a small army of nearly four thousand men in two divisions, one marching east, and the other marching west, was strung out, like beads on a

160 Harald First of the Vikings

necklace, in two long lines that reached for miles across the country.

Meanwhile the heavier portion of the fleet had again set out, with only sufficient of a crew aboard each vessel to ensure her safety; and dividing, like the smaller galleys, into two wings, moved slowly down the coast parallel with the advance of the land forces and keeping pace with them. Summer sea and skies aided the invaders; and wherever a stranger galley, or a harbour with shipping in it, was espied, the one was chased and made prisoner if overhauled, while the other was thoroughly investigated, and if hostile every vessel of whatever size or description set on fire.

The land forces moved rapidly along, sweeping the country like a huge drag net, and ever the fleet moved parallel to their march, the lighter ships darting here and there into the various creeks and openings along the shore that excited their suspicion, and keeping touch with their heavier consorts that swept slowly in their rear.

Most of the Vikings of whom they were in search dwelt, naturally enough, in castles or villages on the coast, and to these particular attention was paid, for Harald concluded, no doubt rightly, that the inland folk were more likely to be peaceful agriculturists and farmers than wild sea rovers. As soon, therefore, as one of the looked-for Viking eyries was discovered, the word was rapidly passed along the line, and a cloud of men streamed in towards it; and as Harald had given strict instructions that the corsairs were to be summarily treated, the general procedure was the same—they were smoked out of their hiding-places like rats, and killed with as little delay as possible.

Harald was riding with two or three others, chieftains who might be termed his Staff, when a messenger dashed up to him.

“Thorkill sends greetings, my lord, and he has discovered the main stronghold of the Vikings.”

“Good,” replied Harald; and pressing his pony into

The Sweeping of the Western Isles 161

a canter, and accompanied by his Staff, he turned off to the left, the messenger keeping pace with him.

A wave of his hand as he passed along directed a portion of the line of advance to follow where he led ; and ere long he arrived within view of the sea, where he saw six large dragons lying in a semi-circle facing the shore, while several galleys were darting to and fro, engaged in chasing others that seemed to be trying to escape from the menace of the larger vessels. A thick cloud of smoke, slashed with flame that burned pale in the sunlight, bellied up from the strand, proceeding from various vessels and buildings that had been set on fire ; and towering over the tiny village at its feet stood a castle, built partly on the crest of a slope that shelved up to a cliff and partly on the cliff itself, its upper battlement wall crowded with the heads of those who had taken refuge there.

A few brief orders, and a body of men ran rapidly along the summit of the height to a spot whence they could plainly see the castle below them, and where, in case flight were attempted in that direction from the rear of the fortress, they would be favourably posted to intercept fugitives. Then Harald rode on with the rest of his force to the strand.

“ Thord,” quoth he, addressing one of his Staff, “ get a boat, and bring ashore every man who can be spared from the ships. Grimm,” turning to that worthy, “ go into the village, and bring hither every cart and bit of fire-loving stuff you can find—oil, pitch, no matter what. Thorkill, skirmish up the slopes to the gates of that castle and see what they are made of ; make sure of the approach to it, smoothing and levelling quickly where necessary, but on no account attack. Leave your men surrounding the place out of bow-shot, then come back and report.”

In a few moments all was in motion. The last of the fleeing boats had been sunk, and the galleys were resting on their oars ; but as Harald’s messenger reached them and passed the order along, one after another was beached,

162 Harald First of the Vikings

and the crew sprang out and came hurrying up to the king.

Presently Thorkill returned to report that the gate was of wood clamped all about with iron, and that the path had been cleared as directed ; and at the same moment Grimm and his party emerged from the ruins of the still smoking village, dragging and pushing half a score heavily laden carts.

“ Now,” said Harald ; “ run those carts up the slope to the gate, knock in the heads of the tar barrels, and set a torch to them. Jam the carts hard up against the wood-work with poles or anything handy, and keep them blazing there till the gate is burnt through ; then clear out those rats ! But the castle is not to be fired, understand. Take every man here with you, Grimm, and show me how well you can carry out my orders.”

With a ringing cheer the men dashed forward, led by Grimm and hauling the lumbering vehicles, which they speedily forced up the roughly smoothed track, and with an uproarious sailors' chorus the carts were run up against the massive wooden gates of the castle, and jammed there notwithstanding a hailstorm of arrows, spears, and stones from the Vikings above.

“ Clear a way there—clear a way ! ” roared Grimm, as he thrust into the crowd with a lighted torch in his hand, which he applied to the nearest burst tar-barrel.

Instantly a sheet of flame spouted up, and the assailants started aside, tumbling over each other in their haste, and shouting rough jokes as they shielded their faces from the flying flakes of fire.

A yell of consternation from the walls betokened the feelings of the besieged, and they were seen hurrying away, some, doubtless, to seek safety in flight, but others to rally in the courtyard and fight the matter out to the bitter end when the gates were down.

“ The rats are scorching ! ” laughed Harald, as their cries reached his ears ; and he moved up the slope nearer to the scene, to note the individual details of the conflict so soon as ingress should be obtained.



“To the faithful and gallant servant the reward!”

The Sweeping of the Western Isles 163

The carts blazed furiously, the besiegers pushing them always closer against the gates as they flared, until at last the massy wood-work itself had caught and the end was assured. But now no flames or obstacles could hinder Harald's men. Battering with axes, thrusting with poles and spears, even hurling heavy stones, they thundered at the tottering gates! They shook—they yielded—they were down! And in over the glowing embers and through the still spurting tongues of fire swarmed the maddened king's men, to be met face to face by an almost equally fierce mob of despairing Vikings.

A few breathless minutes of excited hand-to-hand fighting ended in the extermination of the sea-rovers to the last man; and then the victors, shouting and whooping in their glee, spread through the castle to hunt down any who might yet be surviving.

"You have done well!" quoth Harald to Grimm, as the latter, scorched, panting, and bleeding freely from a cut on the face, stood before him to report the capture of the stronghold. "Bind up that cut, get a drink of water, and then come with me."

He strode into the castle, pausing in the courtyard to bid some of those around him see to his own wounded, and took his seat in the great hall. Here he issued orders for all the valuables that could be found to be brought in for his inspection: "after which," he added, "they are to be taken on board the ships, and stored there for distribution when we return. Meantime, bring before me all the weapons you can find."

This was speedily done, and a large and varied assortment of swords, spears, axes, helmets, mail, and other articles of war was piled before him. One sword in particular rivetted his attention. It was a huge, two-handed weapon, with a blade extremely broad near the hilt and tapering away to a sharp point, exquisitely inlaid and worked in the steel, and evidently of ancient and valuable make. Harald brandished the weapon lightly around his head, exclaiming at its perfect poise

164 Harald First of the Vikings

and balance, and then laid it on the table beside him ; then, taking his own shield from its bearer and unbuckling his own sword, he called to Grimm, who was standing close at hand, almost unrecognisable from the bandages tied across his face.

“ I hang this shield around thy neck,” said Harald, suiting the action to the word, “ I bind this sword to thy side, and hereby I create thee Jarl. To the faithful and gallant servant the reward. When we reach home again, I myself will place thee in thy high-seat.”

Confused and gratified, Grimm saluted and fell back, proud to his very heart's core that the king had dowered him with his own sword and shield, and regarded by all with envy and applause.

That night the expedition moved forward again, leaving dead bodies, blackened and bare walls, and white ashes, where that same morning had been happy homesteads and many a living being.

Chapter XVI

Of the Battle in Caithness

RIGHT through the Shetland Isles, sweeping the country-side with his long line of foot-men and encircling the coasts with his fleet, marched Harald. Resistance on the part of the Vikings was futile ; indeed, it was only when overtaken and hemmed in that, from sheer despair, they turned to bay and died fighting. Every sea rover that could do so grasped at the slightest chance of escape (and there are many unforeseen chances at sea) and fled south, east, or west for bare life—to the Orkneys, the Hebrides, or even into the open ocean—until this devastating scourge should have passed them by ; but the cordon of Harald's ships had closed round and kept tightening its coil, and only a few fortunate fugitives found a loose link and got safely away to tell the tale.

Leaving Shetland almost depopulated behind him Harald now moved steadily on to the Orkneys, where he repeated his tactics by land and sea. Every islet was investigated, every creek and dwelling thoroughly searched, and the same remorseless punishment overtook every unhappy loiterer or doubtful prisoner who could not prove that he was peaceful farmer ; and at last the expedition, flushed with success and already laden with the plunder from many lands and ships that had been discovered in the various Viking haunts it had sacked, arrived at the extreme southern point of the Orkneys, re-embarked on the ships, and stood across for

166 Harald First of the Vikings

Scotland, coming to anchor one evening in Thorso Bay, Caithness.

By now, the news of Harald's retaliatory campaign had spread far and wide. Those of the Vikings who, abandoning all, had fled before him, were filled with rage and consternation; and forgetting that they had brought upon themselves the punishment which had overtaken them, they moved as firebrands among the folk to whom they had escaped for succour and defence, and set the whole of Caithness in a flame against the king.

That this would be so must have been patent to Harald from the first; but doubtless it was part of his policy to permit the fugitives to rally and gain a head, and then to deal them a crushing blow that should paralyse their activity for years to come. He could not permit the coasts of his newly acquired kingdom to be constantly harried and his subjects robbed and slain, neither could he afford to absent himself repeatedly to inflict punishment upon such agile aggressors. We may be sure, then, that he welcomed the news now brought in by his spies that a very large force, composed of Scots and Vikings, was advancing to resist his landing.

That night, several of the most prominent leaders of the host were assembled in Harald's cabin to confer on the measures to be adopted; and after a brief exposition of the situation and the necessity for a decisive blow to be struck at this juncture, the king closed all argument in his own way.

"Two days from now," quoth he, "I will join battle. Thorkill, do you and Grimm take ten long-ships and twenty-five galleys, with a thousand fighting men besides the sailors, stand right round the northern point of the coast here, and find a safe but secluded spot on the other side where you can land every available man and take the enemy in rear. I shall meet them—remember, on the morning of the second day from now—and after a couple of hours' fighting shall gradually fall back, as if overpowered and anxious to retreat on board my ships.

The Battle in Caithness 167

They will follow in impetuous confusion, filled with hate and thoughts of vengeance, and then will be your opportunity. You must be there to smite, and smite hard. Take no prisoners, but slay every man. Your advance must be secret, your attack sudden and overwhelming; then I will also turn upon them. Fail, and—but no need to speak of failure! Go now, and justify my belief in you.”

The two leaders saluted and retired, well pleased; and although no noise or lights beyond the ordinary were remarked that night, when the dawn broke it was clear to the eyes of the seamen of the fleet that many of their number had disappeared during the dark hours. This excited no surprise, but only an expectant curiosity. They had absolute faith in their leader, so they quietly, if eagerly, awaited developments.

The second day from then had dawned, and Harald was landing his entire remaining force. For thirty hours past the shore and surrounding heights had been thronged with the natives, who did everything imaginable to provoke the invaders. But the king had his men well in hand; the disappearance of the ships convinced them that some wily move was in progress; so they furbished and sharpened their weapons, vowed vengeance against the enemy who was insulting them, and patiently bided their time.

As the troops landed they pushed forward, on both flanks and centre, up the steep hills that fronted them; and although the numbers of the natives seemed to predominate over those of the invaders, they made but slight attempt at resistance, falling back gradually, yet not hurriedly, towards the country inland. Harald's men followed, keeping strictly in touch with each other, until at about three miles from the shore the enemy came to a halt and showed signs of advancing to the attack.

The wings of Harald's force closed rapidly in on the centre, in obedience to orders from their chief; and then

168 Harald First of the Vikings

was apparent to all—though Harald had probably anticipated it from the first—what had been the motive of the retreat inland of their opponents. In response, as it seemed, to a single word the hills and gorges around vomited forth swarms of half-naked foes, yelling and screeching at the full vigour of their lungs, and brandishing their weapons and leaping wildly in the air as they streamed tumultuously down upon Harald's men.

These now presented a compact mass or square, bristling with long spears and fenced round with shields, over which floated Harald's banner and a number of lesser standards, and stood calmly awaiting the onset; and as the disorderly mob rushed howling forward at racing speed, intent only on overwhelming the stationary body of men by the mere weight of their impact, from the centre of the shield-wall sprang a cloud of arrows, so dense in its flight that it might almost be said to have spread a drifting sheet of shadow on the ground as it flew, and smote the crowded masses of the frantic charge as the cyclone strikes the trees of a forest.

Down went those in front, the dead and dying mingled in one long shuddering swathe of humanity; and still the storm smote on, and still the victims fell in heaps on every side until, dazed and terror-struck by the pitiless hail that beat upon them, they turned and fled out of bow-shot to regain breath and courage for a second assault.

There was a pause; and then the square moved slowly and ponderously forward, passed the piles of fallen, halted beyond them, and again awaited attack.

This was not very prompt in coming. The first repulse had been so staggering that it required all the eloquence and energy of their chiefs and the Vikings present to induce the natives to advance anew. At last they appeared to have made up their minds, and approaching within arrow flight, began to ply their own bows and harass the square, as stoutly as lay in their power; while still, from every hill and ravine, streamed fresh parties coming up to reinforce their fellows—all

The Battle in Caithness 169

eager to destroy the North-man and capture his ships with the rich booty they expected to find in their holds.

This interchange of missiles continued for some little time, but the gradually increasing numbers of the enemy soon heartened them afresh; and consequently, with ear-splitting war-cries, they massed together, and made another desperate assault upon the solid ranks that calmly awaited them.

This time they succeeded in driving the attack closer home, and a dense mob of yelling savages surrounded the square, jostling and leaping, thrusting and hewing with undisciplined fury; and the defenders, presenting a barrier of shields and bristling spear-points to the attack on every side, held their ground for some minutes and then, in obedience to orders from Harald that ran round the ranks, began to retreat slowly but with perfect steadiness in the direction of the seashore.

When the assailants realised that their opponents were actually giving back, they rent the air with their yells of triumph and, not unnaturally concluding that this was the beginning of the end, pressed their attack with even more impetuous fury. But rage as it might against the formation that resisted like a rock, the surging wave could make no impression upon it. Faces glared in other faces—forms sprang up leaping and gesticulating wildly—only to recoil and fall, breathless, bleeding, and exhausted from the frenzy of their effort, while the square stood as impenetrable as ever.

Back and forth swayed the whirlpool of humanity, swirling and beating madly upon the human rampart that defied its endeavours to sweep it away. But see! what means that? Above the square floats the royal standard, upheld by Egil Ullserk, the king's own banner-bearer, and it seems to rise and tower yet higher above those that bear it company. It is in the hands of its royal master, and he is evidently elevating it as some sort of signal to men afar!

And now an order flies from rank to rank, obeyed instinctively by all, for in that uproar commands can

170 Harald First of the Vikings

barely be heard even when shouted in the ear. The lines seem to stiffen—a shiver runs through the whole formation—it has halted in its retreat! Now it is moving forward again, buffeting its way into the press as a strong swimmer breasts the tumbling waves.

Hark! above the frenzied tumult rings a cheer—another! The Northern “Aoi”! comes pealing down the breeze; and ere the bewildered enemy can turn to meet this new foe, Thorkill’s and Grimm’s men are crashing into their rear, hewing wildly with axe and sword, to the strenuous war-cry of “Harald! Harald!”

The square breaks up as though by magic, for in spite of the fact that no orders can be heard the various leaders are running outward to either flank, and instinctively their men follow them. In a few moments the densely packed mass has thinned into a long line, the shields lying on the ground where the men had stood; and then, storming forward with the responding cry: “Harald! Harald!” the long line enwraps the crowd of struggling fugitives in a close embrace, its two ends swinging round to meet the advancing line of comrades, and the natives and their allies are enclosed in the unpyting circle.

The scene of slaughter that now ensued is beyond description. Harald was resolutely determined to impress upon his adversaries’ minds the fact that, by aiding those who had flouted his authority and harried his subjects, they had brought upon themselves the wrath of one who was pitiless in his vengeance.

The unhappy victims of that day might have been counted in thousands; no quarter was given; and the men of Norway continued to pursue and slay until their arms were weary and the night rolled down. No wonder the old historian termed it “a great battle!” It was so, even for those days; and it was rather a one-sided affair, all things taken into consideration. Of the Vikings who had joined with the natives of Caithness to oppose him, only a few escaped from that disastrous field; and of the natives, so many were slain that terror of the mere name of Harald fell upon them, and for years

The Battle in Caithness 171

after they fled inland from the approach of a Viking ship as though it bore a pestilence.

Thorkill and Grimm gained great credit for their punctual performance of the important duty assigned to them, and to the day of his death Grimm was in favour with the great king. He died in battle some years later, fighting gallantly to the last, and Harald accorded him a public funeral.

Harald now sailed for the Hebrides, whither the tale of his ruthless doings had flown on the wings of rumour before him. "Here," says the Saga, "dwelt many Vikings who before had ruled over warriors," and consequently hard fighting was to be expected. Nor did the event falsify the expectation. Harald, we are told, "fought there many battles, and was always victorious"; but as tactics in those days were fairly simple, and the main issue generally depended on hand-to-hand fighting, one conflict was much like another. Harald invariably proved himself superior to his opponents and justified his reputation as the great Captain of his Age. He drove his erstwhile subjects to the extreme of despair, teaching them a lesson the moral of which endured for at least his own lifetime and until a milder ruler—his son, Hakon, styled "the Good"—smoothed away the bitterness between the Mother Country and her emigrant sons, and "restored to his subjects their rights."¹

Harald, then, swept the Hebrides almost as thoroughly as he had swept Shetland and the other Isles, slew many Vikings, chased many others away into the Western Ocean, and amassed much spoil. In one of his battles here fell Ivar, the son of Earl Rognvald of Möre, the king's loved and intimate friend; and the king mourned his loss, for he was a gallant and promising young warrior. Then Harald sailed down the coast of Scotland, landing occasionally where convenient, and plundering—as was the old custom—right and left, his reputation flying before him; and so he came finally to the Isle of Man.

¹ Conybeare.

172 Harald First of the Vikings

The inhabitants here had evidently considered discretion the better part ; for we read that, gathering all of their belongings that were portable, they had fled to Scotland, “and the land was left entirely bare !” Here the fleet rested awhile, and Harald held consultation with his chiefs and sailing-master.

“For my part,” quoth Cyrus, “loth as I am to turn back without a look-in at Cornwall again, I say let us return to Norway. The folk everywhere have fled ; nothing but a few half-starved cattle and empty dwellings greet our eyes ; the alarm has spread, and we shall gather no more fruit. Let be for a time.”

Some of the chiefs talked of fame, and the disgrace that would attach to the idea of turning back.

“Nay,” said Grimm ; “the king set out for a definite purpose. That purpose he has achieved. Our holds are crammed with booty, and——”

“The wind is fair !” struck in Cyrus, with shrewd seaman’s wit.

This last argument, slight though it might appear, was opportune and appealed to Harald.

“To-morrow,” said he decisively, “we turn our prows homeward. Tell the men, and get aboard what provisions you can lay hands on. The word is ‘Northward’ !”

Few were discontented at the decision, for the love of home was, and always has been, a prevailing sentiment with the Northern race ; Harald’s orders were promptly carried out ; and the following morning saw his fleet heading up the North Channel on its way to Norway.

Northward with a favouring wind ran the ships, skirting the rugged coast of Scotland and piloted skilfully through the intricate channel between the Isles ; and the first sight of the Aurora bred joy in the hearts of all on board, for it betokened their approach to the well-loved land of their birth. The seas were bare, or if other vessels were sighted they disappeared, none pursuing, as fast as sails and oars would impel them ; and shortly the precipitous, pine-clad hills of Norway loomed up

The Battle in Caithness 173

before their straining eyes, and the cheery shout "Land ho!" re-echoed from lip to lip through every vessel in the fleet.

In due course Harald re-entered port, and his first task was to ascertain how matters had gone during his absence. Contrary to his expectation, nothing of an inauspicious nature had occurred to even temporarily weaken his authority, and he was thus enabled to turn his whole attention for the time to the due distribution of the spoil and to the bestowal of rewards on those who had especially merited them. One of his earliest acts was to seat Grimm (personally, as he had promised) with all formality upon his high-seat as Jarl; Thorkill, also, and Cyrus, came in for their share of honour; and many lesser chiefs, who had deemed themselves overlooked or forgotten, were now to learn that the eye of their royal master never failed to notice, nor was his memory slack or his hand unready to reward.

The main result of this expedition was to relieve the king of much anxiety and trouble from outside, and enable him to devote his whole mind with greater energy to home affairs; and as he now had the bulk of the population with him, and was in high favour with his troops and sailors, his efforts met with only slight opposition, and his ideal of an United Nation seemed about to be realised.

Chapter XVII

Of Harald's New Name

THE vow was fulfilled, Harald was sovereign lord of all Norway, so, as was most fitting, he bethought him of the royal maiden whose words had given birth in his heart to that vow. He sent messengers to her, bearing right royal gifts, reminded her of her speech, and commanded that she should be brought before him ; and when she came, he thanked her for her wit and spirit, and they were married. We read : " These were their children—Alaf (a daughter) the eldest, then Roerik, then Sigtrygg, then Frodi and Thorgils."

Harald married, as has been said elsewhere, many wives, and had many children. Those of Asa have already been named ; and, by the way, it may be noted that Duke Guttorm took her eldest child, sat him on his knee in accordance with ancient custom, and became his foster-father. He sprinkled the little lad with water, gave him his own name, and took him away with him into his Government, which was all the country about the Wick and the Uplands in Harald's absence.

The sons of another wife — Swanhild — were Olaf Geirstadaalf, Bjorn, and Ragnar Ryckil ; and his children by yet another — Ashild — were Dag, Ring, Gudrod, Skiria, and Ingigerd. Harald's children were always fostered and brought up by their mothers' kindred in their own country.

When Harald returned from sweeping the Western

Isles, Earl Rognvald returned with him. It will be remembered that a son of this Earl, named Ivar, fell in battle during that expedition; and, as some slight compensation for the loss of the gallant youth, Harald gave Rognvald rule over the Orkneys and Shetland. But the Earl of Møre would not part so easily from his royal master and friend; so with the latter's consent he transferred the government of those islands to his brother Sigurd, who accepted gladly, being a Viking of an adventurous nature and foreseeing opportunities for profit to a man of energy, and Harald confirmed Sigurd as Earl of Shetland and the Orkneys in his brother's place before he sailed back to Norway with Rognvald.

Sigurd, it seems, no sooner found himself in sole command, than he entered into partnership with two other Vikings—Thorstein the Red (son of Olaf the White), and Aud the Wealthy; and these three, gathering a goodly company, went a-Viking to Scotland.

Here they overran and subdued Caithness, and all Sutherland "down to the Oikel Bank." This spot, termed elsewhere "Ekjals-bakki," is on the banks of the river Oickel, which falls into the Frith of Dornoch; and here Earl Sigurd slew a Scotch Earl named "Tusk-Melbrigda," slinging the head of his foe as a trophy to his saddle-bow. Riding along, however, the head struck against the calf of his leg, and the projecting tooth from which the Earl had gained his name made a deep scratch thereon. The wound inflamed, Sigurd died, and was "laid in howe" (buried) in Oikel Bank: possibly the mound is still there.

Sigurd's son, Guttorm, ruled his father's possessions for a year, dying childless; and eventually the lordship of the Islands reverted to Earl Rognvald.

When Harald and Rognvald had returned to Norway after their great expedition to the Western Isles, Harald was one day feasting with the latter in his castle in his

176 Harald First of the Vikings

province of Möre. He had gone down on a tour of inspection to visit, among others, the Earl, and according to the custom in all times was being royally entertained—he and his following. Noticing, when they chanced to be alone together, that Rognvald sat thoughtful and moody, the king challenged him:—

“Whither do your thoughts wander, Earl?”—said he.

“My lord,” replied Rognvald, seriously, “I have somewhat to say, and crave pardon beforehand for my words. The matter lies heavy on my heart, and must out.”

“Say on,” quoth Harald. “I know you for a true friend, and can bear much from such an one.”

“Do you remember your oath, my lord?”

“Seeing all that has come about since I swore it, ’twere strange did I not.”

“Ran it not thus?” continued Rognvald: “‘I take that God to witness who made me, and rules over all things, that never shall I clip or comb my hair until I have subdued the whole of Norway or died in the attempt!’ Were not those the words?”

“Yes, truly,” said Harald, thoughtfully; “thus, indeed, it ran. What now, then? Have I not conquered all Norway?”

“This morning, I was walking in the courtyard, and overheard two soldiers talking. They were quarrelling about a girl; and one said to the other: ‘Thou! thou to think of such a handsome wench, when folk give thee Harald’s nickname!’ ‘And what is that?’ asked the other. ‘Why, “Lufa” (frowsy-headed), thou shocked vagabond!’ At this my heart was sore, and I came softly away.”

“What matters it what such drunken rascals say?” laughed the king—though, to be sure, he reddened somewhat.

“It matters much, my lord, because—it is true! Now let my lord pardon me if I clear my mind. I serve a king who is the biggest of all men, the strongest, and the fairest in face to look upon: a wise man, and very high-



*“Henceforth and for all time you shall be known as
Harald Fairhair!”*

minded. Is it to be borne, then, that such a nickname should cling to him? Nay! with my own hands will I remove the cause. Lord king! I pray you, let me be your barber."

Now Harald laughed aloud, for he was well pleased.

"So be it!" quoth he, in high good-humour; "but see to it, Earl, that I do not give you a nickname in turn, and call you the king's barber."

"Seeing that I shall have removed the sole blot upon my lord's person, and fully revealed his beauty thereby, the name would like me well," replied Rognvald; "for then all men would couple our names together, and what better fortune could I wish for?"

"This very day—now! if you will—you shall do it," exclaimed Harald, for the notion had taken his fancy.

Then Earl Rognvald ordered the large guest-bath to be heated. With his own hands he washed and combed the king's head, which for nigh upon twelve years had not been combed, and clipped the hair into proper shape. He anointed it with sweet-smelling oils and perfumes, and combed it again and again, until the smooth, rolling locks shone in the light like glittering gold; and then, leading the king before a brightly burnished shield that served as mirror, bowing low, he said:—

"Men have called you Harald Shock-head; now I Rognvald, by your favour Earl of Möre and your friend—and barber!—give you another name. Henceforth and for all time you shall be known as Harald Fairhair, for great is the beauty of your locks and bright their shine."

And Harald surveyed himself in the mirror and smiled, well pleased; "and all who saw him said that that was most soothly named, for he had both plenteous hair and goodly."

Chapter XVIII

Of Rolf the Ganger

NOW Earl Rognvald had married Hilda, daughter of Rolf Nefia, and their sons were Rolf and Thorir; other sons he had, namely, Hallad, Einar, and Hrollaug and all three were grown men when their half-brothers were still children. Of Thorir, Hallad, and Einar we shall read later; Hrollaug probably went a-Viking, as did so many mettlesome lads, and was slain or cast away; and on Rolf, the eldest of Earl Rognvald's later sons, we will now fix our attention, for his story is assuredly worthy to be recalled by every Englishman.

From his early years Rolf cherished a passion for the sea. Nothing would serve but that he must go a-sailing; so his father—the Mere Earl, as he was termed in those days, before he swore allegiance to Harald—recognising the call of the blood, as a true Northern parent was bound to do, yielded to the boy's entreaties, and placed him under the care of one of his most trusty captains.

His early days—save for one memorable voyage—were spent in cruises in the East Sea, or the lands on the south side of the Baltic. Here he found free scope to indulge his reckless and adventurous nature to the top of its bent; and ere the down had budded on his chin, he was already grown so big that men would stare after him in port or wherever they came across him, and wonder “when he would stop growing.”

As time went on he waxed so large of bulk that no horse could be found to carry him, and he earned the

name of Rolf the Ganger, or Wendafoot; his name had become a well-known one all round and about the coasts of Norway, and his spirit yearned to seek adventures further afield; he therefore claimed from his father the gift to which every Northern lad of birth and mettle considered himself entitled—a long-ship, well manned—gathered to his side certain of his followers and a ship-master whom he had proved, and set sail for the shores of England.

Down the East Coast he sailed, landing here and there, fighting, plundering, and harrying, until, having passed right round the south coast, he came to Cornwall; and here, having struck up a friendly alliance with a kinglet of his ship-master's acquaintance, he learned some news that set his heart aflame. He had expressed his admiration of the sturdy race that delved for tin and other metals in the bowels of the earth, and had wished that he might be the leader of an army of such; and his host, catching fire at his enthusiasm, and pleased with the Viking's appreciation of his countrymen, said:—

“Why not? Here, such a thing cannot be; but over sea and close at hand lies the very material you seek.”

“Where?” questioned Rolf, eagerly.

“Why, some hundreds of years ago, the peoples north of here made a great expedition into our land. Many folk were killed; but those who survived and had the courage put to sea in whatever craft they could borrow or steal, and trusted themselves to the mercy of the winds and waves. Often, since then, I have heard that many of them got safe ashore in a country south of here, some days' sail distant; and there, so runs the tale, their descendants still bide, free men, of our blood, and still adhering to the old speech and customs.”

“I have never heard of this,” quoth Rolf. “What say you, master?”

“Oh, ay! my lord,” replied the old sailor; “I have heard the tale, but have never landed on those shores. Men call them Valland, a name twisted from the old-

180 Harald First of the Vikings

time local name of Valer, meaning men of Wales and Cornwall.”

“By the horn of Odin!” exclaimed Rolf, “I will go thither and see for myself.”

Accordingly, a day or two later he set sail, and a fair wind soon brought him to the coast of what is now Brittany. He did not commit any act of war here, but asked many questions of the people, particularly as to who was their sovereign lord. Having obtained all the information he required, he sailed south and went plundering and fighting in the South Sea.

When he returned home after a long absence, about the year 874 A.D., he found all Norway in the grip of Harald, and his father the most intimate friend and chosen adviser of the king. His free life, coupled with the ideas in which he had been brought up in early youth, had not predisposed the young and headstrong Northman to submit to the authority of any man; and the deference which had for so many years been accorded to him, on account of his great repute as a warrior, he did not feel inclined to abate by rendering homage to another—even were that other a king.

His father’s advice was coldly listened to; his mother’s fears and forebodings fared even worse; and the gallant, but self-willed, young man boarded his long-ship, and once more set out a-Viking in his favourite haunts in the East Sea, or the Wick, although his father had solemnly warned him that that was the one offence Harald had sworn never to overlook.

Rolf was returning from a raid in the East-lands, and coming to the Wick he landed there and indulged in a cattle foray to provision his ship. Now, as it happened, King Harald was in the Wick at that time, and news of this very quickly came to his knowledge. Highly indignant at the flouting of his strict order, Harald assembled a Thing, and declared Rolf Ganger outlaw from all Norway.

Neither his father’s influence nor his mother’s prayers availed to bring about a reversal of the decree. To the



Rolf and the King's daughter, Gisla.

first, Harald declared that the fact of Rolf's high birth only made the offence a more heinous one; and to the latter, he avowed his intention to be the more obdurate because he knew that she had warned her son beforehand of the risk he ran. Hilda prophesied ill-luck would come to the king in return for his action, and went back home, sore at heart.

Rolf, however, cared little for Harald or his decree. Westward he sailed, and down to the Western Isles; and after gathering what plunder he could in his progress, he pushed steadily on for the land of his dreams—the land he had vowed to rule from the day he first set eyes on it—Valland. He brought with him a large fleet of Vikings who, attracted by his fame and the promises he made them, flung themselves whole-heartedly into the enterprise; and landing on the west coast of France, Rolf entered upon a series of extended expeditions into the country, designed to strike terror of himself and his Northmen into the peaceful agriculturists, and to lead gradually to the acquisition of as much territory as might properly be termed a kingdom.

Charles the Simple was at that time King of France. He had heard of Vikings before, and the northern parts of his country had already felt the weight of their hand. Fight the new-comer he could not, and leave a warlike invader within his boundaries to rend his kingdom from him piecemeal, he would not. He sent an embassy to Rolf, greeting him in friendly fashion; and the matter was settled by Rolf being created Duke of Normandy—or Northman's land, as he called it—and taking in marriage the king's daughter, Gisla.

There is a quaint tale told of the marriage. It seems that, unwilling to quit the confines of his newly acquired kingdom, Duke Rollo (as Rolf was now to be designated) sent one of his chief Northmen, with a suitable escort, to represent him at the Court of King Charles and to wed the princess Gisla by proxy. The independent bearing of the Viking gave offence to the more ceremonious Franks, and it was intimated to him that he

182 Harald First of the Vikings

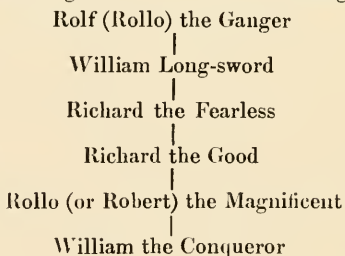
would be expected to kiss the foot of the king in token of homage.

This the free spirit of the Northman rebelled at, and he refused indignantly to comply ; but on the courtiers pressing the point, he appears to have made up his mind to give them a sample of Northern ideas on the subject of submission. Striding up to where the king was seated he bent, and grasping his foot, raised it so roughly that Charles was overturned and sent sprawling on the ground.

There may be very little truth in the tale, but it well illustrates the disdain the free Vikings ever manifested towards regal, or indeed any, authority which was not of their own choosing.

Gisla died childless ; but Rolf married again, and from him sprang the Norman kings of England, and also the Earls of Normandy.¹ He ruled his Duchy with an iron hand, and as he attracted to it large numbers of Northmen it very probably needed a strong ruler. Robbers he hanged without trial ; and it is said that, so great was the security of property in his day, peasants could leave their tools and implements in the fields over night, certain that they would be found safe in the morning.

¹ Genealogical Table of Rolf the Ganger.



Chapter XIX

Of the Murder of Thorolf

WHEN Earls Hakon Griotgardsson and Rognvald, among others, espoused the cause of Harald, and aided him with all their power to establish a feudal system, the men of the great Rafnista family were less eager to accept his overtures. Kveld Ulf (Night Wolf), one of the most celebrated of their warriors, was approached by the king, who hoped by means of enticing offers to be able to persuade him to exert his vast influence in his favour; but, as with many others of high rank, Harald's plans were highly distasteful to Kveld Ulf, who, however, not wishing to become an exile in his old age, or to be crushed by the powerful hand that was steadily enclosing the whole country in its iron grip, was politic enough to plead the weight of declining years and to regret his inability to personally assist the king's cause.

Much disappointed—and probably angered, though for prudential reasons he did not openly display his resentment—Harald sent again to Kveld Ulf, accepting his excuse for himself, and suggesting that his son, Bald Grim, would be a fitting representative of the family.

“Let him come and join me,” said Harald; “and if he will swear allegiance as my vassal, he shall have as high dignities in the land as it is in my power to bestow.”

This proposal was embarrassing and more difficult to evade; but the young man himself, being consulted by his perplexed parent, soon found a plausible way of evading the call.

184 Harald First of the Vikings

“Tell Harald,” said Bald Grim to the messengers, “that I can accept no rank or dignity that places me above my own father.”

Harald’s wrath was kindled, and he would very probably have sent bidding Bald Grim come and serve without rank, or go into exile, when Olve Nuva, Kveld Ulf’s brother-in-law, who was in the confidence of both parties, intervened. Harald accepted his mediation; and by dint of patience and much argument it was at last arranged that Kveld Ulf’s second son, Thorolf, should represent his father and join the king’s army.

At the time Thorolf was out on a Viking cruise with Olve Nuva’s brother, Eyvind Lambe, but on their return a month or two later, the young men were convinced of the wisdom of joining Harald’s cause, and formally swore allegiance to him.

Harald is said to have liked both his new recruits, but took an especial liking to Thorolf, on account of his intelligence, beauty, and courtly manners, and the young fellow soon became a warm favourite; but the old and far-seeing Kveld Ulf looked with suspicion upon the intimacy, and always declared that no good could come of a friendship between king and subject. Subsequent events certainly justified his prediction.

At the battle of Hafur’s Fjord, which practically completed Harald’s long and arduous campaign and won for him the sovereignty of Norway, Thorolf, with the brothers Olve Nuva and Eyvind Lambe, stood at the prow of the king’s dragon, among the hird, and excited universal admiration by his gallantry. He was severely wounded, and Harald, in recognition of his bravery, loaded him with lands and wealth, intimating that greater honours were in store for him.

When he was fully recovered of his wounds, the king arranged a rich marriage for him and, as an especial wedding gift, appointed him his “syssel-mand” or bailiff in the province of Halogaland. Who now so envied as Thorolf? And to be envied at Court, implies enemies. His wealth, acquired by the king’s favour,

The Murder of Thorolf 185

a rich wife, and an equally rich inheritance that fell to him about that time, prompted him to live in a princely style and, naturally enough, gained him many so-called friends; while his zeal and success in collecting taxes from the reluctant Finns ensured him much open praise from the king.

His generosity and zeal, however, were to entrap him to his undoing. The style in which he lived, and his liberality, caused envious tongues to whisper in the king's ear that his subject was aping royalty; his zeal and success in his office were alluded to with hints of oppression and cruelty, and he was accused of retaining for his own use a greater proportion of the revenue than was his legal right.

These persistent insinuations were not without effect upon the king's mind. Unwilling to prejudge his favourite, however, and not wishing to permit his doubts to become apparent, Harald determined that, during an approaching tour of inspection, he would visit Thorolf in Halogaland and decide for himself.

When the time came round the king set out with his company, and when he arrived in Halogaland was greeted with much heartiness and ceremony. The latter he always insisted upon, as a matter of policy, for his sovereignty having only recently been established, he deemed it wise to impress the population with a sense of the deference due to him by their own immediate rulers whose authority was derived from him.

Thorolf had fitted out a large corn-barn, the only building he possessed capacious enough to contain all the guests expected to be present in the style which, in those days, was considered suitable. Long lines of trestle-tables stretched from end to end, with rows of benches for the revellers; at the head was a separate table placed crosswise to accommodate the king, those of his more favoured companions he might desire to have with him, and the host; and round the walls were suspended trophies of shields, weapons of every description, and drooping banners.

186 Harald First of the Vikings

When the king arrived at the guest-hall he brought in his train three hundred men ; but he was not pleased to find that Thorolf had assembled five hundred to meet him. This certainly savoured of display, and gave colour to the accusation that Thorolf kept greater state than his sovereign. When Harald, then, sat down in the high-seat and looked round the crowded hall, noticing the comparative slenderness of his following “ he grew,” we read, “ red in his face, but said nothing, and all men saw that he was angry.”

All men, it appears, save the one most deeply concerned, who probably stood behind him to serve his lord ; but Harald’s mood speedily became apparent, even to him, for, “ to Thorolf’s astonishment, he sat dark and silent in the high-seat, seeming ill-pleased.”

For three nights the king stayed with his host, as he had intimated he would, but his demeanour was gloomy. On the day of his departure, however, Thorolf prayed him to come down to the seashore with him ; and there, floating close by, was a splendid war dragon, fully equipped, and fitted out with tents and hangings and all the various details proper to a royal ship.

“ My lord king,” said Thorolf, “ it was the mere accident of my having the honour to fight under your own eye on your own ship, that gained me your favour and led to my advancement in your service. In memory of that fateful day, will you be pleased to accept this dragon from your grateful servant ? ”

Harald, well-pleased, for he ever loved a good ship, went on board, and inspected her thoroughly ; and while thus engaged and when they were alone, Thorolf took the opportunity to allude to the king’s manner at his feast—the cause of which had evidently been hinted to him—and to beg him to believe that so large a number of guests had been invited for the purpose of doing him honour. Harald appeared to accept the explanation, and the two parted, to all outward seeming, as friends.

But the poisoned sting of jealousy remained to rankle in the king’s heart ; hints and open accusations, accom-

The Murder of Thorolf 187

panied with every slander that envy and malice could devise, were poured into the royal ear; and not long after this visit, Thorolf was deprived of his office and ordered to reside quietly on his own estate at Sandness. Grieved at the loss of his master's friendship, but quite unsuspecting of the extent to which Harald had been stirred up against him, Thorolf complied; and although warned by friends and relatives, especially by his more worldly-wise father, of his danger, he persisted in disregarding it, confiding in his own innocence and the king's innate sense of justice.

Enjoying the peaceful life of a private individual, free from official cares, Thorolf employed himself in overseeing his lands and attending to the needs of his tenants. He was awoke one night by loud shrieks within the dwelling, and his terrified retainers rushed into his chamber to inform him that the house was in flames, while without stood a ring of armed men in the king's livery, among whom they declared was Harald himself.

Roused to fury no less by the imminence of his fate than by the injustice of the man who had ordained it, Thorolf sprang from his bed and rapidly armed himself, bidding his servants do the same; then, shouting his battle-cry, he rushed through leaping flames and falling rafters and dashed out of his doors into the open, resolved at all events to die the death of a warrior and not of a burned rat.

The first figure that caught his eye, as he rushed forth brandishing his axe, was that of the King!

Excited to frenzy by the sight, he burst through the opposing ranks of soldiery, disregarding the hail of spears that met him as if they were so many reeds, and made straight for Harald, shouting loudly to him to meet him face to face. The King's banner-bearer interposed his own person, but was instantly buffeted aside; and then, succumbing to the countless wounds that rained upon him, the gallant Thorolf sank exhausted on his face at the very feet of his erstwhile friend, crying with his dying breath: "By three steps, only, I failed!"—and so died.

188 Harald First of the Vikings

Harald gazed sadly at his former friend, for the memory of olden intimacy stirred him; and when one of his soldiers passed by, busily bandaging a slight hurt, he remarked: "That wound Thorolf did not give thee; for differently did weapons bite in his hands. It is a great pity that such men must perish."

It was bruited abroad that Harald himself gave Thorolf his death-wound, and later he confessed to old Kveld Ulf that such, indeed, was the fact. When the latter first received the tidings of his son's death, he was prostrated with grief, although he had long anticipated this conclusion to his career, and took to his bed; but when he learned that the king had slain him with his own hand, and that Thorolf had fallen prone at his slayer's feet, he rose up, well-pleased, for if a dying man fell on his face it was held to be a sign that he would be avenged on him who slew him.

Whether Harald meditated any further proceedings against the family in general, or whether he decided to let the matter rest where it was, is doubtful; the fact remains that he made no move against Kveld Ulf or any of his kin, and when the latter collected all his goods and sailed for Iceland, he took no steps to prevent them. But this was far from being the end of the unhappy affair.

Kveld Ulf and his son Bald Grim lingered quietly along the coast of Norway, hoping to meet some of Harald's kindred on whom they might retaliate; and Fate favoured them. Two sons of Duke Guttorm were sailing northward to visit the king, their cousin, and not fearing any attack had brought but a small following with them. As they proceeded unsuspectingly on their way, the vengeance of the murdered man's relatives fell like a thunderbolt upon them.

There was a brief but bloody fight; and when it was over, the king's cousins lay dead on the deck of their ship, and the survivors of their following were prisoners. Then, wild with exultation, Bald Grim mounted the prow of the captured vessel, and sang:—

The Murder of Thorolf 189

“Now is the Hersir’s blood-feud
On the king fulfilled.
Wolf and eagle tread on
Yngling’s children.
Seaward swept flew Halvard’s
Sword-shent corpse ;
And the eagle’s beak
Tears Snarfare’s wounds !”

Disdaining to wreak further vengeance on the prisoners, the captors released them, and bade them go tell Harald what they had done, and why ; then they resumed their course to Iceland.

“From this time forth there was a blood-feud between the Yngling race”—of which, as has been told, Harald was a direct descendant—“and Kveld Ulf’s descendants ; and the famous Saga of Egil, Bald Grim’s son, tells of a long chain of bloody deeds which originated in the king’s treachery to Thorolf.”

Such is the plain tale of practically the only deed which seems to be recorded against Harald Fairhair as violating the rude code of honour of his times. Most of his other actions were those of his Age, but the murder of Thorolf was undoubtedly opposed to the sentiment of his people, although it is undeniable that in many countries, since Harald’s time, there have been instances of similar sentiment instigating similar action.

Chapter XX

Of Snaefrid the Finn

AMONG the wives of Harald Fairhair, we find mention of one called Snaefrid ("Snow-fair"), the Finn. I have drawn attention in a former chapter to the unholy reputation of the Finns for wizardry. The sons of Snaefrid were four in number—Sigurd Rise, Halfdan High-leg, Gudrod Gleam, and Rognvald Straight-leg, and two at least of these are intimately concerned with our tale; but the story of Snaefrid's appearance on the scene, her married life, and her death, are so quaintly typical of the legendary superstitions of the times, that I have ventured to set it down here as certain to prove of interest.

Queen Ragnhild the Mighty was dead—she only lived three years after she came to Norway—and her son Eric, whom it may be remembered, Harald "loved most of all his sons," had been sent to the Firths to be fostered by the Hersir Thorir, son of Roald.

On a certain winter King Harald went to the Uplands, in guest-quarters, and ordered his Yule-tide feast to be prepared at the farm Thopte—now Tofte, near the head of Gudbrand's-dale. As usual, he had a great company of men with him, nobles of his Court, scalds, and others, and many folk heard of his coming and gathered to meet him.

It was the eve of Yule, and the king and his following were about to take their seats at supper; but before

the festivities began, a man came in and expressed a desire to speak with him.

“ Say on what you have to say,” responded Harald.

“ There is one at the door, who wishes to have a word with you, my lord.”

“ Tell him to come at a more fitting season. I am just sitting down to meat with my guests.”

The messengers went, but speedily returned.

“ Well, what is it now ? ” asked the king, now angry at the interruption.

“ My lord, the man is insistent and will not be denied. He bids me say he craves a word with you at the door.”

Now some of those present laughed, while others suggested the intruder should be whipped away ; but the seriousness of the messenger’s mien had not escaped the notice of the king. He waved his hand for silence.

“ Who, and what, is this man ? ” he inquired.

“ My lord, he is a Finn. He bids me say his name is Swasi, whom you have promised to visit at his house on the other side of the ridge ; and, by that which he and you alone know, he claims the fulfilment of your word, now and without delay.”

The king’s face grew serious, and he pondered awhile in silence. Then he rose from his seat.

“ Continue your feasting without me, my guests,” said he ; “ needs must that I go with this man.”

Some protested, and others insisted that the king knew his own business best, but none dared openly object, so Harald strode from the hall, and vanished into the darkness with his strange visitant.

The Finn led him in silence through the snow, until at last they arrived at his hut ; and there, to greet Harald, stood the loveliest woman he had ever seen, holding in her hand a cup of mead, which she tendered to her royal guest.

“ Who is this woman ? ” asked Harald, curiously.

“ I am Swasi’s daughter, and my lord’s servant,” replied the girl. “ Let my lord the king drink of the cup I offer.”

192 Harald First of the Vikings

Harald stretched forth his hand ; but as their fingers touched, " it was as if a hot fire went through his body," and he immediately felt as though he must marry this woman or die.

" How are you called, maiden ? " he asked.

" Snaefrid is my name," she replied.

Harald paused for a space. His sudden infatuation for the girl well-nigh overwhelmed him, but he knew well that such a connection would be displeasing to a degree to his subjects in general and to his nobles in particular. His hesitation did not last long. Was he not the king !

Surely, he thought, he could despise public opinion in such a matter ! He flung all prudential considerations to the winds, and betrothed himself to the lovely Snaefrid, and they were wedded : " and with such longing he loved her, that he forgot his kingdom and all that belonged to his kingly honour."

Well, it was not the first time man had done such a thing, nor would it be the last.

After the last of her sons was born, Snaefrid was seized with a mortal illness. She died, yet seemed as though she lived, for she lay on her bed with the red and white hues still in her cheeks, and looked as lovely as ever ; and the king, unable to realise that life did not still linger in her heart, sat by her side, grieving for her yet awaiting her awakening. He neglected all public business, would speak to no man, nay ! scarce would he eat and drink, for the grief and the longing that he had after Snaefrid ; and she changed not, but smiled ever as in life with crimson lips, as she lay still as a statue carved in marble.

Then at last, after three years, the great nobles of the kingdom, wroth that the king's beguilement should still continue, while internal troubles vexed the land and the people sorrowed sore, sought counsel from Thorliof the Wise, who had served King Harald's father and yet lived, though now very old ; and after much thought he approached the king and spoke to him with soft words, as if sympathising with his grief.



*He forgot his kingdom and all that belonged to his
kingly honour.*

“Your sorrow, lord king,” said he, “is noble and praiseworthy, for a right fair woman and a loving was Snaefrid. Yet it appears to me not seemly that for all this time she should lie there without change of raiment. Fitting also were it to move her, and lay her on sweet, fresh cloths.”

The king, roused from his lethargy by words that appealed to his pride in his lovely wife, agreed to the suggestion. “But lo! so soon as she was turned, out of the bed sprang up ill savour, and all manner of unseemliness. Speedy were they with the bale-fire, and therein was she burned; but first her body waxed all blue, and thence crawled worms and adders, frogs and paddocks, and all creeping things. So sank she into ashes; but the king strode forth into wisdom, and cast his folly from his heart, and stoutly ruled his realm, and strengthened him of his thanes and waxed glad of them, and his thanes of him, and all the land of them both.”

And this was the end of Snaefrid the Finn.

The disenchantment of Harald was complete; but when he came to consider upon the length of time the delusion had endured, the mischief it had engendered in the land by reason of the general slackening of the reins of Government while he had been under its influence, and the contempt it had caused to lie upon his name among the people as a whole, he was filled with indignation. Anxious to rid himself of all that might bring Snaefrid to recollection, he bade fling her sons out of doors to live or die as Fate might decree; but Gudrod Gleam went to his foster-father Thiodolf, and asked him to intervene between them and the king's wrath—for he was a well-loved friend of Harald's.

It was late in the evening, and the king was in the Uplands with his company. There was feasting going on in the hall, and men were merry together; but the king sat in his seat, moody in heart and sad in face, for strive as he might he could not thrust the memory of the beautiful Snaefrid from him. So he sat lonely

194 Harald First of the Vikings

and unmirthful, muttering to himself that his warriors, once so forward in fight, were now content to bide at home and drink. Then he espied on a lower bench a number of figures wrapped in cloaks, with large hats drawn down over their brows to hide their faces.

“What! come the old here also, to rejoice and make merry?” quoth he bitterly. “How many more of you?”

Then one of those he addressed stepped up to him and said:—

“Our heads bore oft in old time
Hard strokes from out the edge-play,
Along with the wise gold-waster;
And were we *then* o’er many?”

And taking off his hat, the king recognised Thiodolf and greeted him warmly, for he loved him and his heart yearned just then to an old friend.

“What do you here, Thiodolf?” he asked.

“I come to beg you to right a wrong, O king.”

“What wrong is it, and whose?”

“It is a wrong committed by you against your own flesh and blood, my lord. Bear with me, while I tell it you. What evil have the sons of Snaefrid done, that they should be cast out like dogs from your doors?”

“They are the sons of a sorceress,” replied Harald, gloomily.

“Is that their fault, or thine, lord king? Bethink you, it was not they who chose her for their mother, but you; and although they be her sons, they are none the less yours also.”

“The mother’s sin is visited on the children,” replied Harald.

“And the father’s sin, my lord? Snaefrid is dead, and the memory of her will soon be as a dream; but cast your sons out into the cold, for no other fault than that they had a sorceress for mother, when could they have spoken they would doubtless have asked you for a better-born parent, and it will be a sin that will ever lie heavy on your heart and smirch your name.”

“What would you have me do?” asked Harald.
“I believe your interference to be well-meant.”

“Gudrod is my foster son; him will I take home with me and foster. Send the others elsewhere to other fosterers.”

The king pondered awhile, and then agreed. So Thiodolf had Gudrod home with him, Sigurd and Halfdan were sent to trustworthy folk in Ringerike, and Rognvald to Hadaland, and the king bade keep them from his sight and presence. They grew up sturdy men and bold, but, as will be seen, with a certain strain of cruelty in them, allied with cunning and treachery, that was to lead to their future undoing. Yet, strangely enough, though Harald rejected Snaefrid's children after her death, and although several of them came to an untimely end in the flower of their age, it was this branch which endured the longest, and from which is descended a long line of kings.

“So sat King Harald at home in his own land, amid good peace and plenteous seasons.” His senses had come back to him, and again he guided the ship of State with a steady hand. But trouble was in store for him; the clouds were gathering, that were soon to break over his head; and the walls of peace, contentment, and prosperity, wherewith his prowess and sagacity had endowed his country, were soon to fall before the breath of his own mouth, letting in bloodshed and rapine to run riot through every province in the kingdom.

Chapter XXI

Of the Doings of Turf Einar

IT has been told how Sigurd, brother of Earl Rognvald, was created Earl of Shetland and the Orkneys in his brother's stead, and how he met his fate in Scotland. Afterward his son Guttorm ruled his father's possessions for one year, dying childless; and, after that, "many Vikings, Danes, and Northmen sat them down in his lands."

Now Rognvald heard of all these happenings, and did not desire that Harald should deem him ungrateful or disloyal in thus permitting the Isles to slip from his hands and afford shelter to the marauding sea-rovers who were the king's greatest bane. So he called Hallad, the eldest of the three half-brothers of Rolf the Ganger, to him, pointed out where the only honourable course lay, and declared that on him (Hallad) rested the responsibility of action in the matter.

"I name you Earl in my stead of the Isles," said he, "and I will furnish you with ships and men to uphold your position and authority. Get you to the west, and clear me my lands of these Vikings."

Hallad agreed, and presently sailed as his father bade him; but he does not seem to have possessed either the courage or the energy requisite to enable him to efficiently perform his duty, for we read that "when he came to the Orkneys, he sat him down in the land." Naturally enough, when the Vikings realised the weakness of the new ruler, they took advantage of it; and from one end to the other of the Isles, in spring, summer, and

The Doings of Turf Einar 197

winter—regardless of the seasons—they plundered and slew and made strand-hug, *i.e.* [slaughtered cattle indiscriminately for provisions.

Hallad, evidently aware of his own incapacity to govern, and probably reminded of it somewhat rudely by those of his father's train about him, resigned his Earldom and took ship to Norway, declaring he would rather be a franklin and live in peace at home, than dwell amongst such a turbulent crew, no matter with what dignity; but his father met him with scorn, and reproached him, saying:—

“Little did I think that a son of mine would hold such thoughts. Will all my sons shame their forefathers after this fashion?”

Then up spoke Einar who was present, and said:—

“In this house I have found but little love, and scant is the honour I have had from my father. But if it please you to give me some small help, forth will I fare west to the Isles; and I will promise you one thing, at which I know you will rejoice, and that is that never again will I return to Norway.”

“Go you shall,” replied Rognvald in wrath, “and well content shall I be never to see your face again. How could I ever expect that your kindred on my side should be proud of you, when all your mother's folk were thralls?”

Father and son parted in bitterness, Rognvald giving Einar a long-ship fully manned; and when autumn came in, west over the sea sailed Einar, heading for the Orkneys. When he got there he was encountered by two celebrated pirates of those parts, Thorir Wood-beard and Kalf Scurvy. Einar at once engaged them, and after a long and desperate battle captured both ships, killing their commanders. This taste of his mettle was sufficient to establish his reputation; and for long afterwards the song was sung:—

“Tree-beard to the trolls he gave there,
Scurvy there Turf Einar slaughtered.”

198 Harald First of the Vikings

He is said to have earned his name from the fact that, pressed by necessity owing to there being scant fire-wood obtainable in the Isles, he discovered the utility of peat and brought it into general use. It did not take him long to assert his supremacy, and he quickly assumed the title and authority of Earl over Shetland and the Orkneys. "He was an ugly man, and one-eyed, howbeit the sharpest sighted of men." And so we leave him in his government, for the time, to return to him later.

When Harald was forty years old, many of his sons had attained an age which, in those days (and even later), was a time of turbulence; being, too, the sons of the Sovereign, they allowed themselves, and were encouraged by those about them in, a good deal more licence than was pardonable.

One spring, Halfdan High-leg and Gudrod Glean, two of the sons of Snaefrid, gathered together a large company of men and set out to accomplish a deed which jealousy had long caused them to premeditate.

Earl Rognvald had never forfeited the favour with which Harald had honoured him. His power and influence never waned, for he misused not the one and presumed not on the other. The king could not forget how Rognvald had given him his new name, and held him in such high esteem that, as Harald's sons grew older, they regarded the earl as a supplanter and a man to be got rid of when occasion could be found.

Halfdan and Gudrod heard that Rognvald, unsuspecting of any evil, was lying in guest-quarters at a place they knew of; so, after the simple but terribly effective manner of their race, "they came unawares on him, took the house over him, and burned him with sixty men." Thus miserably perished the great, wise Earl, friend and adviser of Harald Fairhair, at the hands of two of the king's sons.

Fearing the consequences of their deed the murderers fled, Halfdan westward over sea with three long-ships, and Gudrod, strangely enough, to "the lands that

The Doings of Turf Einar 199

Rognvald had aforetime owned"—probably North Møre. Harald, when the news reached him, was exceedingly angry and grieved, and immediately set out with a large force to capture Gudrod; and the latter, being unable to find any man to stand by him, so great was the general indignation at the deed, gave himself up to his father and was promptly sent away in safe keeping to Agder.

As some sort of amends the king installed Thorir as Earl of Møre in his father's stead, and gave him his own daughter, Alaf, to wife. "So Earl Thorir the Silent had the same rule that his father had before him."

Earl Einar was sitting at meat in his house in the Orkneys, when there was a bustle at the door, a man in rough seaman's clothing forced his way through the obstructing crowd of servitors, and running up the hall fell on one knee before the earl.

"My lord," he exclaimed, "news has but now arrived by a swift galley that the king's son, Halfdan High-leg, with a great fleet, is making for this coast."

Now there were many things that Einar had done, which he knew well the king would not approve of; and also he was well aware of the latter's habit of striking without warning.

"Man every ship of mine," he cried, springing to his feet; "lade on them all the valuables that can be gathered in a short space; and send round the word to all who fear to meet the king's wrath to gather at Caithness in the harbour we wot of."

His orders were obeyed by his men with the promptitude born of emergency; and in a few hours he and all those of his followers whom he could get together were at sea, making the best of their way with oar and sail for the northern coast of Scotland.

Yet was all this but a false alarm. When Halfdan set sail out into the open sea, he had not the slightest idea what landfall to make: all he knew was that somewhere in that direction lay Shetland and the Orkneys.

200 Harald First of the Vikings

He calculated that Einar, owing to the feud between himself and his father, would not be inclined to visit the latter's blood too heavily on his head, when the tale was told and blood-wite offered ; and even if he refused compensation, and claimed blood for blood, Halfdan thought that with his three well-manned long-ships he could hold his own : in any case, flight was left him to the south. So he trusted to chance, and sailed straight on.

But the deed was spread abroad ere the embers of the fire that consumed Rognvald were cold ; and a trader, hoping for reward, put to sea and out-sailed Halfdan, bringing, as we have seen, the news of the latter's approach to Einar. But he had not calculated on the effect of his words ; and it might have been dangerous to conclude his tale and undeceive the earl, after giving him such an effectual and public scare. So the trader bided his time, picked up what valuables he could find after Einar sailed, and slipped away southward, hugging the coast, to continue his voyage to more peaceful countries.

Halfdan, on arrival, fathomed the situation and took advantage of it. He remained in Einar's headquarters, enjoying himself to the utmost the country afforded, and careless of the morrow ; but the sword of Fate fell suddenly.

Earl Einar, in Caithness, soon received tidings of his father's murder, the manner of it, and the identity of the murderers : ill news flies fast. He also realised that he had fled, with all his stout Vikings, before the mere report of one man's advent, and that man his father's assassin ; that that same man was a fugitive from justice, with a following who, doubtless, held scant respect for him in their hearts, king's son though he was. He must make amends for his flight or for ever lose the respect of his countrymen. "He came back again" (to the Orkneys) "in the autumn, and fell, unawares, on Halfdan."

The memory of what had gone before sharpened the

The Doings of Turf Einar 201

wits and nerved the arms of himself and his men. The numbers of the contending forces were fairly equal; but, while Halfdan's men were what might be termed a "scratch lot," and cared little for the cause they championed, Einar's crews were hardy Vikings, their future welfare was linked to that of their lord, and they were burning with resentment at the remembrance of their cowardly flight in the spring.

The battle was desperate, but brief; and at its conclusion Halfdan had fled, most of his men were slain, and the rest of the survivors scattered in every direction. Einar and his Vikings encamped on the field that night, and with the dawn they were out in search of the fugitives. No mercy was shown to these: every man was killed where he was found; but for a long while no trace could be discovered of Halfdan.

At last Earl Einar, calling to some of his followers, pointed sea-ward.

"I know not," said he, "what that is on Rinan's Isle yonder, whether it be a man or a bird. Sometimes it rises up, and sometimes it seems to fall. Get a boat, and we will go and see."

So they put across, and there they found Halfdan, wounded. Then Earl Einar, filled with fury, drew his sword and cut a "blood-eagle" on the unfortunate fugitive's back, thrusting the blade into the hollow by the backbone, and with a drawing motion laying the whole body open; and in this wretched wise died Halfdan.

The earl buried him where he lay, and again took up the reins of government in the Orkneys; but when the tidings reached Norway, Halfdan's brothers and kindred besieged the king with petitions for punishment on his slayer. Harald, although his sense of justice revolted at acceding to their demands, found himself unable to resist the pressure put upon him; and accordingly he sailed for the Orkneys.

Einar, knowing that resistance would be useless against the king's force, fled to Caithness, and thence sent messengers to the king, pleading the justice of his

202 Harald First of the Vikings

revenge for his father's murder and offering to pay the customary "blood-wite" for Halfdan's death. The matter was threshed out at a public meeting, and the king laid a fine of sixty marks of gold on Earl Einar and his subjects. The bonders among the latter protested at the amount, so the earl offered to pay the whole sum himself if they would mortgage their "odal" lands to him for their share. So the fine was paid, and Harald returned to Norway; but the odal lands remained in the possession of the Earls of Orkney for many years, until Sigurd Lewisson gave them back to the descendants of the original owners.

It is now necessary to hark back to Duke Guttorm, whom Harald had left in charge of the Wick after the disastrous battle in Gotland by the Gotha Elv, where Earl Hrane Gotska fell and the obstinacy of the Gotlanders was quelled—for a time.

The duke, it will be remembered, adopted Harald's eldest son, gave him his own name, and took him to live with himself. The lad abode with him at his headquarters in Tunsberg; and as soon as he was of an age to endure the severities of active service, he was allowed to accompany Guttorm on his various expeditions and taught the art of war.

During the whole of the lad's youth the Vikings gave much trouble to the duke by incessant forays into his dominions, and young Guttorm saw his share of the fighting that went on—mostly at sea—with these provoking sea rovers. Also, while King Eric of Sweden lived his emissaries constantly stirred up the turbulent Gotlanders to rebellion. But Eric died about the year 886, leaving the kingdom to his son Biorn, and the latter does not seem to have been so active against Harald as was his father; and the duke dying some years later in his bed at Tunsberg, Harald placed his own son Guttorm—now full-grown to man's estate—in charge of all the government the duke had held, with the rank of earl.

The Doings of Turf Einar 203

He found it an unpeaceful and harassing holding. His father's old enemy, Solvi Klofi, not being able to measure his strength with Harald himself, devoted all his energies to the pleasing task of harrying and plundering the territories committed to the son; night and day the watch fires burned along the shores of the Wick, and houseless folk would clamour at Guttorm's doors for protection and revenge.

At last, when he was lying in wait one day at the mouth of the Gotha Elv, hoping to entrap some Vikings who had ventured up the river on a raid into the neighbouring country, Solvi Klofi came upon him with a superior fleet. It is quite possible that that experienced old warrior had lured him there. A battle ensued, and was fiercely contested; but in the end Guttorm was slain and his ships dispersed.

Guttorm's two younger brothers, the twins Halfdan the White and Halfdan the Black, had, as was usual, taken to the sea, roving in many lands plundering and gathering wealth. But at last they also came to the Eastlands—it seems to have been a very Debateable Land for Vikings—on a cruise, and began harrying there; but joining battle in Esthonia with an enraged population they were defeated, Halfdan the White being slain, and his brother escaping with the rest of his men back to his own province of Thrandheim.

Chapter XXII

Of the Doings of Eric Bloody-Axe

ERIC, Harald's son, was now pestering his foster-father to let him try his wings; and, mindful of his own young days and of the early age at which Harald himself had made his first flight, the Hersir Thorir forwarded the lad's request to the king. The reply arrived in the shape of five fully armed and manned long-ships, under the command of skilled and trusty captains; and with this gallant company the youth sailed forth in search of adventure.

"The king's command, my lord," said the grizzled old chief of the expedition, "is that first we should try our luck in the Eastlands, and after that——"

"But I want to go a-Viking," protested Eric, all afire for the whistling winds and rushing seas, the chase plying every oar to escape, the hurried dash alongside, and the scramble and excitement of boarding; "these are *my* long-ships!"

"Pardon, my lord," smiled the veteran, "the king but sets you to the same task that was set him; and I would ask you to remember that he has himself given me my instructions, and that I am answerable to him for the due performance of them. Can you not trust your father and me? You shall have all the fighting you have a mind for, I warrant you."

With this Eric was obliged to be content; and it was not long before he confessed that the old sailor had given him good advice. Away they sailed to the Eastlands, and his first brush was with the hastily assembled force



"But I want to go a-Viking!"

204

The Doings of Eric Bloody-Axe 205

of a small Viking settlement, who objected to intruders. These gathered on the shore to dispute their landing, and resisted stoutly. Eric, quite regardless of any danger, flung himself over the ship's side to wade to shore; and falling into water too deep for him, had a hard struggle to win a footing.

Once on land, however, he dashed into the fray, sturdily wielding the axe to which he had been accustomed—a weapon which he always preferred to any other—and contrived to push his way into the very front. But here, his strength not being equal to his spirit, he found himself in very rough company; and had it not been that a number of men, realising the situation, instantly rushed to his assistance, his career might have been ended almost before it began. As it was, he received a severe wound on the left arm that incapacitated it for some little time; and after the Vikings had been driven back and the landing fairly established, the old captain spoke gravely to him.

“Rashness, my lord, is not courage. Many years of sea-roving are before you; why throw them away by recklessly exposing yourself, before you have come to your full growth, to the chance blows of rascals like these? Go gently, fare far. Take it easy at first, my lad,”

Eric long remembered his words.

The little fleet bode not long in any one spot. The chief had been furnished with a list of ports and places where disaffection was believed to exist, and here he was bidden look in and use his own judgment. Herein found Eric much that was useful to him later on, when he took over command of his own ship, for he learnt how to deal with traders, harbour-masters, and the like; and after some months spent in the Eastlands, they turned their ships' prows southward towards Denmark, Friesland, and Saxland.

Here was rich hunting-ground, and here, too, hunted war hounds of all nations. Eric fought his first sea fight in these seas with a mixed Viking fleet of six ships, manned by Norsemen, English, Scotch, Danes, and

206 Harald First of the Vikings

Frenchmen; and as they were homeward bound with laden holds, the fight was a stiff one.

The outland Vikings met the Northmen face to face with equal courage, and their ships swinging inward as they closed and grappled, both the outer ships of the latter had two combatants to deal with. Eric was in the centre vessel and, as usual, thrust himself prominently forward. He was barely thirteen, but as sturdy and well-grown as many lads of eighteen. The Northmen developed early; it was a peculiar trait of the race.

Swinging his axe in one hand, he made a leap for the enemy's deck, but jostled in his spring by a comrade, he fell short and amongst the oars that trailed, mixed in a clump, alongside between the two hulls. Luckily for him he fell across two; had he fallen between, he would probably have been ground between the swaying ships and drowned.

"Out you come!" roared a voice in his ears; and he was grasped by his foot, which chanced to be the nearest hold, and jerked upward until he could clutch the bulwark of his own vessel.

"Thanks; I'll do as much for you, comrade!" he cried, as he essayed the spring again, with better success this time.

Landing fairly on the enemy's decks, he cast himself into the thick of the fray, dealing his blows vigorously on every side; but pausing for a moment to take breath, and happening to glance sideways, he thought he perceived the flank ship nearest him just being boarded by the outermost of her antagonists.

"To me, Eric's men!" he cried.

Some dozen instantly extricated themselves from the struggle and ran to him.

"Lower away those boats—quick!" he exclaimed, "and follow me."

Hastily lowering and tumbling into the skiffs, the little party pulled and pushed themselves clear of the turmoil around them and, guided by Eric, arrived in a few

The Doings of Eric Bloody-Axe 207

moments at the side of the now deserted Viking, her crew having forced their way on to the deck of the Northman.

“Cut her loose and give her a tow for a few yards,” quoth Eric. “She’ll soon drift clear, and then we’ll board and help our men.”

The plan was carried out quickly and deftly; and before the Vikings realised that their retreat was cut off, Eric and his comrades came scrambling over the side and, with loud cheers, fell upon them, smiting right and left.

Even the momentary pause produced by the sudden surprise was fatal. A fresh surge of Northmen drove the Vikings against the low bulwark of the vessel and, almost before they knew it, the momentum sent them tumbling over the rail by twos and threes to drown miserably or be transfixed with spears and arrows as they strove to keep afloat. The loud cheers of the victors animated their own comrades; and in a few minutes four of the Viking ships had thrust themselves clear of the press and were making off at best speed, while the ship Eric and his men had cut adrift, and another, were abandoned to become the prey of the Northmen.

The little feat gained Eric much credit, for it showed that even in the height of a hotly contested fight he could plan and act quickly; and as he did not presume in any way upon it or his rank, it increased his popularity amongst the sailors. The two captured vessels, with the booty found in them, were sent back to the care of the Hershir Thorir, and the sailors in charge were bidden select the best of the two, fit her out completely, and manning her for war to rejoin their comrades and continue the cruise; and in this manner did Eric spend four years, harrying those coasts and sending home much spoil, while tales of his prowess and daring travelled frequently to his father’s ears.

What most of all delighted King Harald, however, was the name bestowed on his favourite son by his companions. Eric always used an axe in battle, probably

208 Harald First of the Vikings

because the action and swing of the weapon afforded him full scope for his increasing strength ; and the term " Bloody-Axe " testified to his able performances in the estimation of his fellows.

Four years were past and over, and Eric wished to try a wider flight. This had often been spoken of between him and those in command among the little fleet who had, in their numerous forays, stretched further afield ; but what probably put the seal to his determination was a summons brought to him from his father. Harald desired to see and speak with this well-loved son of his, who was emulating his own deeds, and whose name and fame, even at the early age of seventeen, were bruited widely abroad.

So Eric and his men fared to Thrandheim, picking up, we may be sure, enough of prize-money from Thorir's coffers on their way to enable them to flaunt it with the most well-to-do ; and the king greeted them with favour and honour, taking the refitting of the fleet on his own shoulders ; and when the day arrived to set sail on their new cruise, the masters of the ships could have had their pick of the bravest warriors and most skilful seamen, for all were anxious to fare forth with Eric Bloody-Axe.

Away west over the sea sailed the fleet, bound for the shores of Scotland ; and here, with varying success, were repeated the adventures of the past four years. By now Eric was rapidly hardening into manhood. His frame already showed promise of his great stature in later years ; for we read of him that " he was a big man and a fair, strong, and most stout of heart, a mighty warrior and victorious, fierce of mind, grim, unkind, and of few words." The description is terse, and places him clearly before our mind's eye.

He touched here and there on the shores of Scotland, but the booty was small and he won little save hard blows. Proceeding to Wales, he met with fighting to his

The Doings of Eric Bloody-Axe 209

heart's content, and a little more plunder, though much of this was in the form of heavy, albeit useful, ingots of tin and copper. Thence he went to Ireland, but there he found less gain than as yet, though the people made up for the lack by exchanging buffet for buffet; and so, fighting and plundering, he found his way at last down to the coast of Normandy, where, his mood changing, he resolved on paying a visit to Duke Rollo and his Court, which was largely composed of northern kinsmen.

A message to the Duke brought a speedy invitation; for Rollo, although banished from Norway by Eric's father, yet nursed no grudge against the man who had, as he said, enabled him to win a kingdom for himself. Besides, he ever cherished in his heart a deep love for his Mother Country, and always welcomed those of his race who sought his friendship or protection. In particular, the fame of Eric Bloody-Axe had reached him and he wished to meet with so kindred a soul.

Leaving their ships in port under the guardianship of the duke's officers, clad in their costliest and bravest apparel, and bearing with them rich and suitable gifts. Eric and his men marched away up country on their visit to Duke Rollo. Hearty was their welcome, merry the feasting, and blithe the spirit that animated the hunting parties and the rough national sports that formed the round of their daily pleasure while their stay endured. Many were the old tales that were told, the old Norse songs that were sung round the festal board or the glowing log fires; and when the day of departure arrived, lords and ladies alike, praising the manly excellence of their parting guests, joined in the farewell toast proposed by their lord in open hall: "Skall to the Viking!"

Well pleased at their reception and speeding, Eric and his men marched back to their ships, and set forth again on their cruise; this time, homeward.

A favouring wind filled their sails as they ran up the coast, but they saw nought that seemed to them worthy of chasing until they neared the northern shore of

210 Harald First of the Vikings

Denmark; but here two large ships were sighted, which, espying their wide square-sails, at once showed them their heels, heading away north up the coast.

“After them, men!” quoth Eric. “Goodly ships have goodly cargoes.”

And away in pursuit sped the fleet, past the Firths and so on and on, until the Stad lay to southward of them and Thrandheim loomed not far distant on the star-board bow. But here, at the very close of the long voyage that had now lasted nearly four years, was like to have been trouble; and had it not been for Eric's tact, backed up by his grim determination to be commander of his own fleet, there might have been a mutiny. The sailors, and even some of the officers, were for abandoning the chase and pursuing their way to Thrandheim: “We have had enough for a while of hardships and sea fare. Let us taste the pleasures of ease and home life while we may. Surely we have gained enough booty?”

But Eric urged that, having begun the chase, it stood not with honour to abandon it because it led past their open doors.

“The very girls would laugh at you at home, if the tale got abroad!” quoth he. “One more fight,” he added; “it shall be the last, and my mind tells me it will be a rare one!”

So indeed it was, though not as he thought; but by these and other arguments he overcame the reluctance of the malcontents, and so won upon them that they strained every nerve to come up with the chase.

Northward ever they raced, now gaining, now losing ground, but still the fugitives kept ahead and up the coast of Norway; and still they followed, until at last they came to the very northernmost parts of Finmark, even to Biarmaland, and there fairly brought the chase to bay.

But they had been observed from the shore. Signal fires had blazed, notifying their advent and accompanying their progress; and when they stormed into the port

The Doings of Eric Bloody-Axe 211

where lay the two ships they had so persistently pursued, they found themselves faced by a hastily gathered army which challenged them to battle.

Flight was out of the question. Such an ending to their chase seemed to them cowardly in the extreme, and unworthy of their name; and so, flinging defiance at their foes, recking little of their numbers, and trusting to their luck and their discipline, Eric and his men rowed straight for the shore and, hastily forming up, dashed gallantly at the opposing force.

In a few minutes they were the centre of a surging crowd of half-naked savages, who brandished the rudest weapons (which yet, in desperate hands, could inflict deadly wounds) and clutched in groups at single men to tear them in pieces with their bare hands, yelling, raving, leaping with frenzied gestures the while.

But Eric's men had encountered their like before in their many battles; so they stood closely together, rank linked to rank, and the swords and axes fell, the spears darted in and out, and a constant hail of arrows and javelins streamed forth fan-wise from the centre of the sheltering shield-wall. In vain the Finns shrieked and flung themselves wildly against that solid formation; steadily and persistently it stood its ground, permitting them to exhaust their strength against the serried ring, while the day wore on and the heaps of dead outside the circle piled higher and higher.

At last the mad ardour of the assailants showed signs of slackening, their charges were not so frequent or so frenzied, the fury had almost spent itself and them. The keen eye of Eric noted the change, and he was swift to take advantage of it. A command ran rapidly round; the long, loud blast of a trumpet was heard above the din; the ringed shield-wall suddenly rolled outward, until there was a line of men where before there was a circle; and with a thrilling shout of "Eric Bloody-Axe!" the array broke into a run, and smashed heavily into the disorganised groups that barred its way.

Before their tremendous blows of axe and sword the

212 Harald First of the Vikings

breathless and exhausted tribesmen went down almost unresistingly. Those who still retained energy sufficient for flight turned to flee inland as fast as worn-out limbs would carry them; while those who remained, unable either to fight or flee—well, those were not merciful days!

There is a quaint legend told of what occurred to Eric during the brief stay which he made in the little port while resting his tired men. Some of the number, roaming the neighbourhood in search of plunder, came upon a lonely hut, and here they discovered a very beautiful woman, evidently from her features and bearing of high birth. In reply to their questions, she said that her name was Gunnhild, and that her father dwelt in Halogaland.

“What then? Are you prisoner here?” they inquired.

“Nay,” she replied; “but I came here to learn wisdom from two Finns living here, who are celebrated for their cunning. They are now away hunting, and they are so clever that they can follow any trail, howsoever hidden; also, they never fail to hit what they shoot at, nor can any living thing stand before them when they be wroth. Should they return and find you here, you are dead men; but if you follow my advice we may slay them and get away, which I should be right glad to do.”

So Gunnhild hid the men in the hut, and strewed ashes about the floor; and when the Finns came home and inquired who had visited the hut, they were much surprised to learn that no one had entered, for the foot-trail ran up to the door and yet the ashes on the floor within were untrodden.

Then they had supper; and after supper slept so heavily that they were not to be aroused. So Gunnhild slipped two sealskin sacks over their heads, tying them fast under their arms, and then beckoned to Eric's men to come from their hiding-place. These came, and speedily slew the two Finns and flung their bodies out



They brought Gunnhild to Eric.

The Doings of Eric Bloody-Axe 213

of the hut ; but so tremendous a thunderstorm followed on the heels of the deed, that they were afraid to venture out to return to their ships.

In the morning, when the weather had cleared, they brought Gunnhild to Eric and told him her tale. He marvelled much thereat, and asked her if she would go with him and be his wife, for she was exceeding fair ; she agreed, and Eric took her south with him when he sailed.

Here came to an end, for the time, Eric's Viking cruises, and he stayed with his father, being much beloved of him. Also he obtained the consent of Gunnhild's father and wedded the maiden according to custom.

She is said to have been "the fairest of women, wise and cunning in witchcraft." It is interesting to note, in connection with Eric's action towards his brother Rognvald, later on, that she was "glad of speech and guileful of heart, and the grimmest of folk"—probably vindictive, or unrelenting in her hatred.

Their children were Gamle, Guttorm, Harald, Ragnfrod, Ragnhild, Erling, Gudrod, and Sigurd Slaver ; "and all Eric's children were fair and full manly." But they were turbulent to a degree, and wrought much scathe in Norway.

Chapter XXIII

Of the Sharing out of the Realm

KING HARALD was now (A.D. 900) fifty years of age. Many of his sons were grown men, some of them were dead; those who lived proved to be troublesome, and counted themselves, as sons of the Sovereign, greater than any subject in the land. They committed acts of great violence in various parts of the country, killing or ousting from their holdings the earls whom the king had placed in charge; they even sought each others' lives, whenever occasion offered.

Unable to restrain them, the king called a Thing at Eidsvold in the South Country, to which he summoned all the people of the Uplands. At this Thing he gave all his sons the title of king, and made a law that his descendants in the male line should each succeed to his father's kingly title and dignity in that portion of Norway where he had held rule, but those in the female line should inherit only the title of earl. Then he proceeded to portion out the country between them and he allotted to his sons half of his own dues, in their several provinces, and decreed that in rank they should be lower than himself but above his earls. One condition Harald had made. His sons should, after his death, acknowledge him whom he should choose as their overlord. Each of his sons cherished the hope that he would be the one chosen to sit in his father's high-seat, but Harald had secretly resolved that Eric should succeed him.

This division of government gave little satisfaction to any, and dissensions were rife from the very beginning.

The Sharing out of the Realm 215

The dissatisfaction spread through all classes, and those who cared not for a fixed rule, or deemed themselves slighted, helped themselves to long-ships and went out into the world to fight for their own hand.

Thorgils and Frodi, sons of the great-hearted Gyda, begged long-ships from their father, and so up and away a-Viking into the West and round about Scotland, Wales, and finally Ireland. They are supposed to have been the first Northmen who held rule over Dublin; but Frodi is said to have died there of poison, while his brother reigned a long time as king in Dublin, being at last betrayed to his death by his Irish subjects.

Death, in various shapes, was striking hard and fast among the sons of King Harald. Gudrod Gleam, his brother's accomplice in the murder of their father's old friend, Earl Rognvald, had put to sea in wintry weather and had been drowned with all on board his cutter off Jadar.

To Gudrod's brother, Rognvald Straight-leg, had been allotted Hadaland; and, impelled probably by the tendencies of his mother's and grandfather's Finnish blood, he took to witch-craft and "became a spell-worker."

King Harald, having doubtless still in his mind his ancient grudge against Snaefrid and her father's enchantments, was a deadly foe to wizards of all kinds; and word being brought to him of a celebrated wizard who dwelt in Hordaland, one Vitgeir by name, Harald sent this man a warning to cease from his practices, or he would come and make him rue the day. To this Vitgeir replied that it ill befitted such a king as he thought himself to punish poor folk, when his own "dear son, Rognvald Straight-leg," a far greater offender, was to go scot free.

Stung by the reproach, Harald sent Eric to the Uplands with an armed force to burn his brother Rognvald in his house; and Eric, nothing loth, carried out the order with such success that he penned Rognvald and eighty other wizards with him into the one building and made an end of them all. "And much was that work praised!"

216 Harald First of the Vikings

The next violent deed of Eric against his own blood-brothers did not meet with such universal approbation. Biorn, a son of King Harald and Swanhild, seems to have been of different character from the majority of his brethren. His father had allotted him the rule over Westfold; and taking up his residence at Tunsberg Biorn lived a quiet life, governing his people mildly, and being much beloved by them.

Tunsberg was a port of some consequence in those days, and many ships came trading there, not only from the Wick and thereabouts, but also from the North and even from Denmark and Saxland in the south. King Biorn, himself, possessed a fleet of merchant vessels, which he sent on voyages to far distant countries; and they brought him in return many rarities and wines and goods that he desired, and generally increased his wealth, so that his brothers were wont to call him scoffingly "Biorn, the Merchant-man."

"He was a wise man and a peaceful, and was deemed to have in him the makings of a good lord; he wedded well and meetly, and had a son named Gudrod."

Into the midst of this peace and prosperity came the firebrand, Eric, all of a sudden. It had been the custom as laid down by Harald himself, that all the scatt and dues that accrued to him from the revenues of Westfold should either be brought to the King by Biorn in person, or, if he could not come, by reliable men appointed by Biorn. Eric appeared from the East lands with a fleet of warships and a great number of men, and demanded that his brother should surrender to him the dues he held for the king.

Biorn explained how his duty stood, but Eric would not listen, repeating that he needed the money and he needed victuals, tents, and drink. The brothers came to hot words, but Biorn held to his point; and in the end Eric went off furious, vowing vengeance.

Biorn departed out of the town that same night to Seaham, hard by, where he was to hold a feast; but in the midst of the merriment and revelry there arose

The Sharing out of the Realm 217

an uproar outside the house, and voices were heard clamouring to Biorn to come out and fight for his life. Eric had returned with a body of men, followed up his brother, and was bent on having his will by foul means since fair would not avail.

Not lacking in courage, Biorn and his train accepted the challenge and issued out to meet their foes ; but, although they fought bravely, Eric had the advantage of numbers, besides that his following were trained men of war which his brother's were not, and the end of the matter was that Biorn and many of his men were killed. "Eric took great booty there, and so went north—away up country."

It was a dastardly deed, and was recognised as such. The people of the Wick in particular were very indignant, and said many hard things about Eric, besides complaining to Harald ; but the latter would hear nothing against his favourite, so they got scant comfort there. It was generally said that King Olaf (own brother to Biorn) would some day avenge his brother's murder ; but Eric was slain some years afterwards while on one of his raids in England, so that came to naught. Biorn was buried "in Sea-farer's mound at Seaham."

Eric, however, was very near having the tables turned upon him on an occasion during the winter following the incident above related.

He had gone to Möre, and was in guest-quarters at a place called Solvi. Halfdan the Black, indignant at the misdoings of his young half-brother, and not knowing when his own turn might come, hearing of his whereabouts, came secretly to the place with a party of retainers, surrounded the house, and set it on fire. But Eric chanced that night to be sleeping in an out-building ; and awakening at the noise of the assault, he crept warily away with four other fugitives and gained the shelter of a wood hard by. Thence he fled with all haste to tell Harald what his brother had done.

The king, furious at the attempt upon the life of his favourite son, assembled his fleet, and set out to find

218 Harald First of the Vikings

Halfdan ; and the latter, having gathered a large force, sailed to meet his father. They encountered each other near the Stad, and both sides made ready for battle ; but many nobles intervened, saying it was not seemly for father and son to seek each other's blood. Yet the king would not be stayed, nor was Halfdan willing to be the first to consider terms.

In this deadlock a man named Guttorm Sindre, a noble by birth, who had formerly been in Harald's service but was now in Halfdan's, interposed, and said that until a claim he held on both had been satisfied, they were not at liberty, in honour, to fight. It seems that he was a noted scald, or poet, and he had once composed and sung a song about Harald and Halfdan with which they were both well pleased ; but when they wished to reward him he refused, craving that if in the future he should ask a boon of them they would grant it, and to this they assented.

He now reminded Halfdan of his promise, and going over to King Harald, brought the matter to his recollection also.

"Now," quoth he, "grant me my boon. It is that you two, father and son, both of whom I have served and loved, should be friends again."

Guttorm's request, being backed by many of the noblest men in the land, prevailed, and peace was made. Halfdan was to retain his rank and possessions as aforetime, declared his father, but he was not to interfere with his brother Eric. These terms being agreed to, the storm blew over.

The story of Harald's last son, the child of his old age, is a very romantic one. When he was born, Harald was nearly seventy years old, and it fell to the lot of Earl Sigurd, son of Earl Hakon Griotgardsson, to choose him a name. For it was the custom of old, with a child of noble blood, that in the father's absence some man of rank should sprinkle the babe with water and give it a name. So Sigurd bethought himself of the friendship



"What is this child?"

The Sharing out of the Realm 219

that Harald had ever borne to Earl Hakon, and he deemed it proper that the boy should be called by the name of his father's faithful servant.

The young Hakon was early fair to look upon, and King Harald let the lad abide with his mother for a while.

In those days, Athelstan had just mounted the throne of England, and the tale is told that he sent men to Norway to King Harald, bearing for gift a sword whereof hilt and scabbard were richly and beautifully wrought about with gems. When the bearer was admitted to the king's presence, he stretched out the sword, hilt foremost, and said :—

“King Athelstan sends thee this sword with his greeting.”

The king, surprised and pleased, and wishing to examine the weapon closer, put out his hand and grasped the hilt.

“Now,” quickly added the messenger, “thou hast taken the sword as from our king; therefore art thou henceforth his vassal.”

Harald was very angry at being mocked, but it had been his custom for many years to permit his wrath to cool before he judged any matter; so, finding his Council all of one mind with himself, he dismissed the messenger courteously and without harm. But he bided his time to pay back the unseemly jest with interest.

The following summer he summoned to him a great friend and noted warrior, Hauk Haubrok (Hawk High-breech), and sent him to England as commander of a fine war dragon. Ere they parted they held secret converse together, and the king committed young Hakon, his son, into Hauk's hands.

Hauk sailed away, and fared to London, where he found the king holding a feast. He bade his men cover their weapons with their cloaks, but be ready to fight if need should arise; then he strode up to Athelstan and saluted him, and the king bade him welcome.

“What hast thou under thy cloak,” quoth he, “that thou carriest with such care? Is it a gift?”

220 Harald First of the Vikings

“ Ay ! ” replied Hauk ; “ and a king’s gift.”

Therewith he flung back the cloak, showing that he bore a child, and laid the burden on Athelstan’s knee.

“ What is this child,” queried the latter curiously, “ and wherefore hast thou laid him on my knee ? ”

“ King Harald bids thee foster the child of his bond-woman,” returned Hauk, curtly.

Then Athelstan was very wroth, snatched up his sword, and drew it as though to slay the child. But Hauk said boldly :—

“ Thou hast knee-seated him, and may’st murder him if thou wilt, but not thus wilt thou make an end of all the sons of King Harald.”

At this significant hint the newly crowned king held his hand, for the fear of the Northmen was very general ; so Hauk and his men got back safely to their ship and on home to Harald, leaving the lad Hakon with Athelstan. Harald was pleased with this counter-thrust, for the fosterer was always reckoned less noble than the man whose child he fostered.

King Athelstan bore no grudge to the child. He had him christened and brought up as though he were his own flesh and blood, and Hakon was much loved by him and by all who came in contact with him. He grew into a big, strong man, wise, courteous, and a good Christian. King Athelstan gave him a sword, gold-hilted and well-mounted ; “ yet was the brand itself better, for therewith did Hakon cleave a quern-stone¹ to the eye, wherefore was it called sithence “ Quern-biter,” and it was the best sword that ever came to Norway ; and Hakon kept it till his death day.”

Hakon returned to take his father’s crown as soon as the news of Harald’s death reached England ; and he bore so striking a resemblance to his father in the latter’s youthful days, that men who saw him said :—

“ Here is Harald Fairhair come back, grown young a second time ! ”

¹ Quern-stone=small hand-mill stone of Shetland, Orkney, and Hebrides.

Chapter XXIV

Of Harald's Death and Mounding

WE now come to the close of Harald's career, and remembering the energy and devotion shown by him in his pursuit of the great ideal of a united nation, it is with a sense of bewilderment that we view the overthrow of his great work in the closing years of his long life. The acts which brought about the disaster to his policy when he had, as it seemed, planted it firmly as an enduring principle of the state, are, however, clear to all who will read the records of that stormy time. So clear are they, indeed, that it almost seems that Harald deliberately wrecked the structure which he had laboriously erected with the expenditure of so much blood and toil.

We read, "Queen Ragnhild left one son, Eric, whom Harald loved most of all his children," It was the love of this favourite son which induced Harald, in his fiftieth year, to call the Thing at Eidsvold, at which he virtually undid the great work of his life.

"In this disastrous act of Harald lies the germ of the civil wars and terrible internecine conflicts which ravaged the kingdom he had established, and exhausted its powers, until for four hundred years it sank out of sight and its name seems to have been blotted out from among the nations. It seems incredible that the wisdom and energy, which had built up a great State, could be coupled with the unwisdom and the weakness which in the end broke it down again. Harald evidently looked upon the royal office as a piece of personal pro-

222 Harald First of the Vikings

perty which he had by his sword acquired, and which all his male descendants had an equal right to inherit.”¹

It was not simply the fact that Harald loved his son that led up to the wrecking of his life's work, but that “he loved him most of all his children.” He was the favourite; and once committed to the espousal of his cause, his father was irresistibly impelled to many fatal acts which his own sober judgment would have condemned.

“When Harald was eighty, he became very heavy and unable to travel or do king's work. Then he brought Eric to the high-seat, and gave him power and command over the whole land.”²

Infirmity of body alone might have caused him to retire, but I think that the burden on the man's soul, shaken and torn by the stormy succession of events in the later years of his life, was very probably the main cause of his abdication.

His sons had long derided his authority, broken his laws and disturbed the land with their private feuds, fought with and slain each other; some he had been obliged to banish from the country, and he had even been compelled by his sense of justice to send one son to burn another alive in his house.

Hakon, the child of his old age, he was compelled to commit for safe keeping to the hands of Athelstan of England; and, to anticipate later history, this very Hakon eventually drove Harald's favourite Eric out of Norway, forcing him into exile in Northumbria; while later still, Hakon himself was slain in the battle of Stord fighting against the sons of that brother Eric, eight sons of Harald Fairhair having perished in fratricidal combat ere he fell.

Old, lonely, and worn out with warfare and filial ingratitude, Harald Fairhair was glad to cast off the

¹ Boyesen.

² “Heimskringla.”

Harald's Death and Mounding 223

cares of sovereignty, and he retired to one of his favourite great farms in Rogaland, where, three years later, he died in his bed at the age of eighty-three.

When word went forth that Harald had brought Eric to the high-seat, Halfdan the Black placed himself in a king's high-seat and took the rule over all Thrandheim, the Thrand folk supporting him in his action, which was a defiance to Eric. Then the men of Viken heard the news, which sped like wild-fire over the land, and they chose Olaf to be king over the whole of Viken—a course which was exceedingly galling to Eric, who was powerless to prevent it.

Harald Fairhair had taken Eric's eldest son, and promised that the boy should be king after his father. He could not keep his word—and he knew it; he was helpless. Those last three years, between his abdication and his death, must have been years of bitter pain and grief to the Great King.

There are, naturally, various estimates of the personal character of Harald Fairhair. Polygamy was a weakness with him, and as the chronicle says, "he had many wives." It is told that he put away nine wives when he married Ragnhild. No doubt he was usually influenced by considerations of policy in his marriages. These matrimonial alliances with important families often aided him in his ambitious plans, especially in the support thus obtained in outlying portions of his realm.

It is stated in the "Heimskringla" that Harald was "very generous to his men"; but another authority says: "In his relations with men, Harald was no more faithful than with women. He was a man of indomitable will and courage, wise and far-seeing, shunning no means to accomplish his ends. He could not, however, endure those characteristics in others which he valued in himself. His jealousy, once aroused, was not easily allayed. Like tyrants, he was apt to humiliate most those whom he had most exalted, and suspect often those who least deserved it. The first victim of his jealousy was Thorolf, who, after

224 Harald First of the Vikings

his behaviour at the battle of Hafur's Fjord, had stood very high in his favour."¹

This is a formidable indictment, at first glance; but we must not view the man of a thousand years ago through twentieth century spectacles. Harald's treatment of Thorolf is, undoubtedly, the great blot on his fame, but the other failings are those of a man of supreme rank of the tenth century, who has carved out his own fortune, towards those whom he suspects of being wishful to undermine his supremacy.

Again, we read that Harald, having amassed much wealth from confiscated estates, kept up an exceptionally splendid Court. He was—in common with all his countrymen—fond of song and story, and maintained many scalds who, we are told, sang his praises. Naturally they did, if their living depended on it; and I cannot attribute much blame to Harald for encouraging them. It is quite possible, regarding him from an impartial standpoint, that he attached no more real importance to such flattery than do most monarchs of modern days.

Elsewhere it is stated: "He was generous, when occasion demanded, scattering gold profusely; but in little things he was mean, and his courtiers complained they did not get enough to eat." We cannot fairly blame him if he tempered generosity with discretion; and we do not as a rule hold the Sovereign personally responsible for the quantity of food served to his Court.

Snorro says: "With all his stern inflexibility to men, he was easily deceived by women." If that is to be cited as a fault against Harald, I am afraid the same can be said of the generality of mankind since the Fall; and it suggests a certain amount of trustfulness and feeling of chivalry towards the weaker sex, some of whom possibly took advantage of it.

To sum up, it seems to me that Harald Fairhair was a man of very great fibre with one weak strain in him—excess of natural affection. Nothing can excuse the

¹ Boyesen.



By Denmark Hammer 12. 11.

Harald brought Eric to the high-seat. 224

Harald's Death and Mounding 225

Thorolf murder, therefore it must remain for always a permanent blot on the king's name; making due allowance for this, and accepting as proven the minor failings of humanity that are alleged against him, the fact remains that he was the Man of his Age.

Harald Fairhair died in Rogaland, and was mounded at Hougår in Kormsund. South of the mound a gravestone, thirteen and a half feet high and two ells broad, was erected to the king's memory. There is a footnote to Laing's translation of the "Heimskringla" which reads:—

"The stone and some remains of the mound are still to be seen at Gar, or the Gaard, the principal farm-house in the parish of Kormsund."

Appendix I

The Policy of King Harald Fairhair

“There are many and strong threads of connexion between English affairs and Norse” (Carlyle—“Early Kings of Norway”).

WHEN Harald made his celebrated vow, it is doubtful whether he designed more than, after having subdued all his rivals, to reign as supreme King of Norway as had his ancestors before him ; but he possessed a bold and astute councillor in his uncle Guttorm, who, it is more than likely, had marked during the years of his regency the struggles for supremacy among the ruling classes of his country, and who had probably already conceived the policy which later he recommended to his young sovereign.

A judicious fostering of Harald's aspirations, by frequent references to the predictions preceding his birth and the consequent expectations of his subjects, may have stirred the latent spark of ambition in his youthful mind ; the political training at home, and the frequent draughts of excitement on his early Viking cruises, fanned the flame that was quickening into life ; but beyond all doubt it was the words of the girl Gyda that gave birth to the great designs that were to animate his soul, and so enabled Guttorm, the wise, far-seeing craftsman of State, to fire his royal master with the conception of a feudal system and an absolute monarchy.

The result, though doubtless well for the world in general, proved disastrous to Harald's own country in

228 Harald First of the Vikings

particular, for it denuded the land of its best blood and manhood.

During the twelve years that elapsed, from 872 to 884, Harald and Guttorm pursued their project undeviatingly and without pause. Even in the beginning, some, more far-sighted than others, saw what was in the air, and fled before the coming storm.

The immediate cause (says one of my authorities) of the emigration that streamed towards Iceland and the British Isles from Norway, at the end of the ninth century, was the discontent engendered in the home country by the attempt of Harald Fairhair to establish a feudal monarchy. The revolution brought about by his policy seems to have thrown Norway into a convulsion, moral and social, as well as political . . . and the Danish invasions of England are the outcome of this unrest.

In Norway, the consolidation of small, independent States into a strong monarchy was carried out by Harald Fairhair with remorseless finality. This policy struck straight at the passion for freedom cherished in the soul of every man in Norway. It excited fury, and at last despair, and in the end was the cause of a wholesale emigration from the country.

“It was, indeed, an emigration *en masse*, and that, too, not of the meanest portion of the population; but on the contrary, the noblest and worthiest of the land, the most peaceably disposed, the most cultivated, formed the great bulk of the emigrant host. While the most warlike of the nation sailed southward, and founded a new kingdom in Gaul.”¹

About the year 884, “many great people and low” left the country to settle in Iceland, the Faroe Isles, and Shetland, while others adopted a roving life and went a-Viking into the West Sea. These latter wintered in the Orkney Isles and Hebrides; but in the summer they sallied forth, marauded in Norway, and did much damage.

The former class was constituted of those who, seeing

¹ Conybeare.

Policy of King Harald Fairhair 229

no choice between submission or destruction if they remained at home, preferred to begin life anew elsewhere, where they might still retain the freedom of which they had been so jealously tenacious; but the latter, being composed of the more turbulent, adventurous spirits, adopted a retaliatory policy towards the man who had driven them out (Harald), and for many years to come—especially in one notable instance—this course of theirs entailed much misery and suffering on the class first mentioned, whose only wish was to be allowed to live in peace as free men.

As Harald swept one obstacle after another from his path, he pursued one broad policy with rigid determination. Those kings who, realising the futility of resistance, acknowledged his over-lordship, he first formally deposed, and then as formally reinstated as earls in the same dominions; those who stubbornly refused to submit, he disposed of summarily—they were slain.

These earls were governors and representatives of the king's authority; they administered justice in his name, and collected taxes, retaining one-third of the amount thus realised for themselves on condition that they maintained a standing force of sixty warriors for the king's service. Each earl had under him four, or more, "Hersir," or sub-vassals, who held in fief a royal estate of twenty marks on condition of keeping up twenty warriors to serve the king, if required; "but by so much had King Harald increased the taxes and land dues, that his earls had more wealth and might than the kings had had aforetime. So when this was heard of about Thrandheim, then many rich men came to King Harald and became his men."¹

"The feudal principle was the basis of Harald's State."² All the land was declared to be the property of the Sovereign; and the cultivators thereof, from having been free proprietors, became the tenants of the king, and retained possession of inherited estates by feudal right only. Thus the monarch could levy a tax

¹ "Heimskringla."

² Boyesen.

230 Harald First of the Vikings

on all land property, and everyone refusing to pay forfeited his title. Harald, by the way, is said to have exacted a "personal" tax—derisively termed by the lower classes "nose" tax, because it was levied in each household according to the number of noses—which was the cause of much dissatisfaction.

There is no doubt that, apart from sentiment, the actual position of the formerly so-called "kings" was greatly improved now that the shadowy rights and privileges they had adhered to so obstinately were exchanged for the vastly more substantial status of "earl," holding directly under the Sovereign; but they rarely cared to exchange the shadow for the substance, because they deemed it "dependence."

But it was among the class of free yeomanry—a class very similar to our old type of Kentish yeoman—whom the feudal land tenure affected so strongly—that antagonism was fiercest and most prolonged. To them—as to the men of Kent—it was intolerable that free men on their own land should quietly accept enforced obedience to any man, even though he were their king; and it was from these that Harald met with the most protracted opposition to his authority, on a smaller or greater scale, during quite half of his reign, if not longer.

Many provinces were so permeated with the spirit of rebellion against his feudal system, that he was compelled to conquer them twice before he could feel that he had them in hand, even under earls and men of his own choosing. It was only his enormous superiority in numbers, the promptness and severity of his punishments, and the supreme energy and resolution that he exhibited, that enabled him finally to weld into one Nation all these scattered, predatory, naturally hostile tribes.

The emigration of discontented chieftains and yeomen removed the last obstacle to the organisation of Harald's feudal State. Eight hundred heads of families are believed to have gone to Iceland, the Scottish Isles, and elsewhere, abandoning estates which were promptly

Policy of King Harald Fairhair 231

confiscated by the king. Anticipating this action on the part of the disaffected, Harald had early proclaimed that anyone buying an emigrant's property from him should be held thereby to have avowed himself hostile to the king; and thus it came about that an enormous amount of land property and wealth accrued to Harald, who was enabled therefrom to reward his friends and adherents.

He chose officials from among his immediate dependents to superintend great landed estates. There were stewards of Crown lands, who took charge of, and remitted his share of, the income for the king; earls, who held land in fief, and among these it was customary—though not claimed as a right—for their sons to inherit in tail in due course from father to son; and yeomanry, who paid taxes and were regarded as nominal tenants of the king, living unmolested on their own lands so long as they acknowledged the absolute authority of the Sovereign.

“Harald Fairhair named Jarls” (a Jarl-dom was an office given by the king for life) “for every Fylki” (county or district) “to govern on his behalf; but this was never completely carried out, even in his own time, for his sons became sub-kings.”

In Harald's time there seems to have been a certain ceremonial attached to the creating of a Jarl. Briefly, a sword was fastened to his belt, a shield suspended round his neck, he was led to a high-seat,¹ and there formally named “Jarl.”

“King Harald established a law that no man should take up more land than he could walk over with fire in one day with his ship-companions. They were to light fires when the sun was in the east, which were to burn until the night; then they were to walk until the sun was in the west and make other fires; the smoke was to be seen from one fire to the other.”²

¹ The right of sitting in the high-seat conveyed with it the right to rule over household and land.

² Egil's Saga.

232 Harald First of the Vikings

The dignity of "Hersir" was hereditary, and of great antiquity: it was roughly equivalent to the title of "Baron." The Hersir was the head of the community, chief in war, administrator of justice. In worship he was formerly styled "Godi," and took charge of the temple, religious ceremonies, sacrifices, etc. Probably the change of the ruler's name from Godi to Hersir points to a period when temporal and spiritual authority were united. By Harald Fairhair the independence of the Hersir was wellnigh annihilated.

"Never has Norway been herself since that time. These men" (Hersir), "who could not bear the yoke of this royal despot in whom they found but little to admire except his personal bravery, migrated into different parts of Europe."

The position of the Godi among the Thing-men was of a special nature, and was grounded on birth or privilege, such as purchase; the only thing above them was the Law.

It may be interesting to note here, as a justifiable inference to be drawn from a close study of the subject, that when Harald Fairhair became king of all Norway, his idea seems to have been that the royal power established by him ought to be exalted far above existing laws, and from it every change in those laws ought to emanate for the future; a conception whereto the student of History can easily find parallels in other lands.

Appendix II

The Early Vikings ¹

THE first intelligence we obtain concerning Vikings is probably the following. In or about the year 777, a Saxon chieftain of the name of Widerkind was cited by the Emperor Charlemagne to meet him at a place called Paderborn. Having, presumably, committed some act for which he feared punishment, and surmising therefore that the summons was but a preliminary to an (for him) unpleasant termination, Widerkind fled northward, and sought refuge with his Norse co-religionists, "who were called Vikings." The king of these latter at that time was Sigfrid, an Yngling ancestor of Harald Fairhair; he received the fugitive hospitably, and sheltered him from pursuit.

Up to the middle of the eighth century the Norsemen had played no part in the world's history. Their very existence had been unknown, or only vaguely known, to the rest of Europe; but towards the close of the eighth century, the adventurous spirit that seems to have been confined (probably from natural causes) to the exploring and ravaging of the raggedly indented coasts of their own country suddenly burst into a meteoric flame, and they broke like a destructive tempest over the more civilised lands, spreading desolation in their path.

These were the Vikings proper. For a hundred years to come Norway was to be the home of many so-called kings, each bearing rule over his own district or pro-

¹ My sources of information are mentioned on page 239.

234 Harald First of the Vikings

vince. Of these, naturally enough, the ones who possessed a coast-line utilised it, and a race of bold and hardy seamen sprang into being, of whom the most adventurous and prominent characters of the day became the leaders.

The wild and stormy North Sea had from the earliest times imbued these coast-dwellers with all the qualities requisite for true seamen ; their bitter struggles to exist necessitated the incessant raids on their neighbours and countrymen up the numerous fiords and " creeks "—whence originated the term " Viking "—and gradually bred in them the spirit of hardy and reckless fighters ; and at last, seeking ever wider fields for plunder and conquest, the leaders of these petty irregular bands joined themselves together under some chieftain more renowned than his fellows, and stretched boldly out in their comparatively tiny galleys into the unknown in search of what Fate might send them.

Pirates ? Well, yes ; we are civilised enough to call them by that name to-day. But wherein did they differ from the famous seamen of the Elizabethan era—Drake, Hawkins, Frobisher and the others ?

As one expedition after another returned home, laden with booty and clamorous with accounts of new countries and wealth beyond belief to be won over seas, the living spark of the adventurous spirit that brooded in every listener awoke, stirred, and leapt into irrepressible flame. A torrent of recruits for wealth and fame poured to the front ; the numbers of the sea kings—in contradistinction to those who ruled at home over a fixed domain—increased by leaps and bounds ; and in an incredibly brief space of time, what might be termed a separate race, called Vikings, sprang, full-armed like the fabled dragon's teeth, into the front ranks of the Nations, shaking its sword in wide-circling menace over the confines of the entire world.

War was, with them, the most honourable occupation. With them, as Tacitus says of their kinsmen the Germans : " They deemed it a disgrace to acquire by

sweat what they might obtain by blood." To these men of old, death was but one of the phases of their lives; it had no terrors for them, and they faced it smilingly, bravely, and contentedly. It was, in their eyes, preferable to dishonour or the humiliation of defeat.

It is related of a Frisian chieftain, who was about to be baptised, that he suddenly turned to the priest and asked him:—

"Where are my brave forefathers, who died unbaptised?"

"They are in Hell," replied the priest.

"Then," said the chief, flinging off his baptismal robe and stepping out of the water, "I will rather be in Hell with Odin and my forefathers, who were brave and noble men, than in Heaven with cowardly Christians and bald-headed monks."

Revenge, with the Northman, was a duty. Even in killing a foe (as Dasent expresses it), there was an open, gentleman-like way of doing it, to fail in which was shocking to the free and out-spoken spirit of the Age. Also, to kill a foe, and not bestow the rights of burial on his body by throwing sand or gravel over it, was regarded in the light of murder.

Old chiefs, dying in their beds, caused their breasts to be gashed with a spear, so as to avoid, as they believed, going to Hela (Hell) and to gain admission to their fighting heaven—Valhalla. The idea probably arose from the disgrace which was supposed to attach to a man who died a "straw-death," that is, from natural causes. Odin, himself, is said to have initiated and sanctioned this practice.

The contagion of successful adventure spread like a devouring flame. We learn from the Frankish annals of the period of Charlemagne and his sons that the Swedes and Danes—who were also called "Northmen" by the chroniclers—invaded and overran ancient Gaul in every direction. They captured Paris and many other important cities, devastated a great part of present Germany, and extended their expeditions to the Alps.

236 Harald First of the Vikings

Norsemen invaded England with hostile intent for the first time in the year 787. A band of Vikings made their appearance in the neighbourhood of Dorchester, killing and plundering, but were eventually driven off. We next hear of them on the coast of Northumberland in 794. An incessant stream of Norse Vikings poured southward, in the first half of the ninth century, visiting the shores of the Baltic and the Mediterranean, but only a few seem to have found their way to England. A typical Viking was Hasting, who sailed up the Loire in 841 with a large fleet, burned the city of Amboise, and besieged Tours.

Iceland is said, by one authority, to have been discovered in 861 by a sea-rover named Naddod, while another gives the credit to one Ingolf, in 871—ten years later; about 861, also, the Hebrides, Dublin, Caithness, the Shetlands, Orkneys, and Faroes were all discovered, as too was Normandi in Valland.¹ In 871 the Danes invaded Wessex. In 872, when Harald had been nominally King in Norway for twelve years, the stream of emigration from that country, which later on assumed such extensive proportions, began to trickle toward these western and southerly islands; and many a Viking rendezvous was held there, and many a bold sea-rover learned to love the rugged, wind-swept Isles with the same fervour that he had loved his native land.

During the next hundred years the adventurous Vikings fought their way south, overland through Russia, and oversea through the Mediterranean, to Constantinople, conquering peoples, founding or buttressing Empires, plundering, colonising, serving, commanding everywhere, until the whole world rang with their name and fame.

In 985 a Norwegian chief, Thorvald, and his son, Eric the Red, driven by the thirst for exploration of the unknown which impelled the Norsemen to every part of

¹ The west coast of France, particularly Bretagne; from "Valer," inhabitants of Wales and Cornwall, expelled by Saxons from Britain in the sixth century.

the world, and which they have bequeathed to us, discovered Greenland and planted a settlement there.

In 986, one Bjerne Herjulfsson, an Icelander, is said to have discovered America. Then Leif, son of Eric the Red, set out on a voyage of discovery and found, first Labrador, next Nova Scotia, and finally struck the mainland of America somewhere about Cape Cod or Fall River, Massachusetts. We read in the Sagas of five distinct expeditions to America between 986 and 1006, the most famous of which was that of Thorfinn Karlsefne in 1006-7.

In relation to the future discovery by Columbus of America, there is a curious story told. About the year 1000, Christianity had obtained a strong hold upon the Icelanders, and many priests had taken up their abode there. Between the two, the one preserving legend and history by oral report with the accuracy that usually accompanies that custom, and the other gathering and treasuring every scrap of documentary tradition or tale of adventure that they could accumulate—between the Icelanders and the priests, Iceland was destined to become for centuries the sanctuary and preserver of the grand old literature of the North, in song and Saga. In the year 1477 Columbus was in the island, met and conversed with the bishop of Skalholt and other learned men, and must there have heard—and perhaps read in their records—of the great country beyond the Western Ocean.

To conclude this brief survey of Viking history and discovery, let me quote the fitting words of an undisputed authority:—

“All that is or has been of value to man in modern times as a member of society, either in Europe or in the New World, may be traced to the spark left burning upon our shores by these Northern barbarians. Our English writers . . . scarcely acknowledge the social influence of the admixture of their Danish conquerors—of that fresh infusion in the tenth century, from the same original stock, of the original spirit, character, and

238 Harald First of the Vikings

social institutions . . . forgetting that a much nearer and more natural source of all the social elements they are tracing back to the forests of Germany in the time of Agricola, was to be found in full vigour among the people who had conquered and colonised the kingdoms of Northumberland and East Anglia (reckoned equal then to one-third of England) and had held them for several generations, and who conquered and ruled over all England for nearly half a century¹ immediately previous to its final conquest by their own Norman kinsmen ” (Laing).

¹The Danish *dynasty* in England reigned only twenty-five years (1017-1042).

List of Authorities Consulted

I ATTACH a list of the authorities whom I have consulted in writing this book. The greater part of the narrative, indeed, is true, so far as reliable research can be depended upon. For the rest, I have endeavoured to make it readable for a modern public.

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Laing's translation of "The Heimskringla."

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Index of Proper Names

Aedo, 79
Agder, 146, 199
Agricola, 238
Aki, 97, 103-105
Alaf, 174, 199
Alfred, King, 158
Alps, The, 235
Amboise, 236
America, II, 237
Arnvid, King, 83-86, 99
Asa, 64, 94, 132, 174
Asbiorn, 23-27, 31, 32, 36-46, 48, 50-53,
67-70, 73-78, 80-82, 86, 87, 108
Asgaut, Earl, 86
Asgurd, 48, 49, 51, 52
Ashild, 174
Athelstan, 219, 220, 222
Atli's Isle, 96
Atli the Slender, Earl, 94-96
Audiorn, King, 84, 86, 88, 89, 99
Aud the Wealthy, 175

Bald Grim, 183, 184, 188, 189
Baltic Sea, The, 236
Belgium, 12
Berdlukaare, 92-94, 146, 147, 150
Bergen, 139
Biarmaland, 12, 210
Biorn, 202
,, (son of King Harald), 216, 217
Bjorn, 174
Black Sea, The, 12
Britagne, 236
Britain, 236
Brittany, 180

Caithness, 158, 165, 166, 170, 175, 199,
200, 201, 236
Charlemagne, Emperor, 233, 235
Charles the Simple, 181, 182
Christiania Fjord, 98
Cod, Cape, 237
Columbus, II, 237
Constantinople, 12, 236
Cornwall, 29, 140, 157, 158, 172, 179,
180, 236

Cyrus, 34-36, 41, 43, 45, 48-53, 67, 87,
98-102, 108-110, 113-115, 118, 131,
137, 138, 146, 147, 155-158, 172, 173

Dag, 174
Dasent, 235
Denmark, 55, 205, 210, 216
Dorchester, 236
Dornoch, Frith of, 175
Dovrafell, 62, 131
Drake, 234
Dublin, 215, 236

East Anglia, 238
Eidsvold, 214, 221
Einar, 178, 196, 197, 199, 200-202
Empire, The Eastern, 12
,, The German, 15
England, 12, 158, 219, 222, 228,
236, 238
Eric Bloody Axe (son of King Harald),
22, 190, 204-217, 221-223
,, King of Hordaland, 54, 146, 148,
151
,, the Red, 236, 237
Ericsson, King Gamli, 86
Erling, 213
Esthonia, 203
Europe, 233, 237
Eymundsson, King Eric of Sweden,
55, 97-107, 110, 202
Eysteinn, King of Hedemark, 58, 60,
61

Fall, River, 237
Faroes, The, 133, 228, 236
Fialir, 94
Finmark, 210
Fjorde land, 88, 92, 99
Folden, 98, 102, 107
France, 181, 236
Franks, The, 181
Frødisberg, 86
Frobisher, 234
Frodi, 58, 60, 61
,, (son of King Harald), 174, 215

242 Harald First of the Vikings

- Gamle (son of Eric), 213
 Gandalfsson, King Hake, 58, 59
 Gar (or the Gaard), 225
 Gaul, 228, 235
 Gauldale, 63, 94
 " -folk, 63
 Geirstadaalf, Olaf, 174
 Germany, 235, 238
 Glommen, 57
 Glumm, Earl, 108-110, 114, 115, 118-124, 124, 128, 130, 131, 134-138, 145, 146
 Gorm, 138
 " the Old, 55
 Gotha, Eiv, 116, 118, 122, 131, 202, 203
 Gotland, 106, 125, 131, 202
 Gotlanders, The, 107, 116-119, 121-123, 126, 128, 129, 130, 202
 Gotska, Earl Hrane, 98, 99, 119, 120, 124, 125, 127, 128, 130, 202
 Greenland, 12, 237
 Grenmar, Isle of, 98
 Grimm, 23-26, 67-75, 77, 136, 138, 161-164, 166, 170-173
 Griotgard, 86
 Gryting, King, 63, 66
 Gudbrand, 60, 61
 Gudbrand's dale, 61, 190
 Gudrod (son of King Harald), 174
 " (son of King Biorn), 216
 " (son of Eric), 213
 " Gleam, 190, 193, 195, 198, 199, 215
 Gunbiörn, 12
 Gunbiörnskär, 12
 Gunlaugsson, 25, 27, 32
 Gunnhild, 212, 213
 Gurth, 142
 Guttorm, 15-17, 21, 22, 28-31, 53-62, 68, 79, 131, 174, 188, 202, 227, 228
 " (son of Eric), 213
 " (son of King Harald), 132, 202, 203
 " (son of Sigurd), 175, 196
 Gyda, 54, 55, 146, 153, 215, 227

 Haareck Gand, 16, 17
 Hadaland, 20, 21, 61, 195, 215
 Hadd the Hard, 146
 Hafur's Fjord, 144, 148, 184, 224
 Hake, 15, 17
 Hakesdale, 59
 Hakon (Earl of Ladir), 86, 94, 95-97
 " (son of King Harald), 219, 220, 222

 Hakon the Good, 86, 171
 Halfdan High-leg, 190, 195, 198-202
 " the Black (son of King Harald), 132, 203, 217, 218, 223
 " the Black (or Swarthy), 16, 17-21, 57, 104
 " the White (son of King Harald), 132, 203
 Hallad (son of Earl Rognvald), 178, 196, 197
 Halogaland, 184, 185, 212
 Harald (son of Eric), 213
 Hardraade, Harald, 85
 Hasting, 236
 Hauk Haubrok (Hawk Highbreech), 219, 220
 Hawkins, 234
 Hebrides, The, 133, 165, 171, 220, 228, 236
 Hedemark, 16, 58, 60
 Herjulfsson, Bjerne, 237
 Herlaug, 64, 86
 Hilda, 178, 181
 Hiort, Sigurd, 15, 16
 Hogni, 58, 60, 61
 Hordaland, 54, 215
 Hougar, 225
 Hrollaug, 64
 " (son of Earl Rognvald), 178
 Hunthiof, 79-82

 Iceland, 12, 188, 189, 228, 230, 236, 237
 Ingigerd, 174
 Ingolf, 236
 Ireland, 209, 215
 Ishmaelites, 64
 Ivar, 171, 175

 Jadar, 215
 Joederen, 135, 151

 Kalf Scurvy, 197
 Karason, Hogni, 58, 60, 61
 Karl of Berdla, 92, 93
 Karlsefne, Thorinn, 237
 Kent, 230
 Kiotve the Rich, King of Agder, 146, 148, 151
 Klofi, Solvi, 79, 82-84, 86, 99, 203, 217
 Kormsund, 225
 Kveld Ulf, 149, 183, 184, 188, 189

 Labrador, 237
 Ladir, 64

- Laing, 225
 Lambe, Eyvind, 149, 184
 Leif, 237
 Lewisson, Sigurd, 202
 Lodbrok, Ragnar, 98
 Loire, River, 236
 London, 219

 Man, Isle of, 171
 Massachusetts, 12, 237
 Mediterranean Sea, The, 236
 Möre, 79, 82-84, 87, 88, 91-93, 99, 175-177, 199, 217

 Naddod, 236
 Nefia, Rolf, 178
 New World, The, 237
 Nockvi, 79, 81, 82
 Normandi, 236
 Normandy, 12, 181, 182, 209
 Normans, The, 12
 North America, 12
 Northumberland, 236, 238
 Northumbria, 222
 Norway, 15, 16, 18, 53-57, 60, 64, 67, 83, 133, 139, 148, 151, 153, 158, 170, 172, 174, 175, 176, 179, 180, 184, 188, 190, 197, 201, 202, 210, 213, 214, 219, 220, 227, 228, 232, 233, 236
 Notsdale, 89, 90
 Nova Scotia, 237
 Novgorod, 12
 Numedal, 64
 Nuva, Olve, 149, 184

 Odin, 153, 235
 Oickel River, 175
 Oikel Bank (Ekjals-bakki), 175
 Olaf, 90-92
 " , King (brother to Biorn), 217, 223
 " , the Saint, King, 19
 " , the White, 175
 Orkadale, 63, 66, 67
 Orkneys, The, 133, 165, 175, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 220, 228, 236

 Paderborn, 233
 Paris, 12, 235

 Ragnfrod (son of Eric), 213
 Ragnhild (daughter of Sigurd Hiort), 15-18
 " (daughter of Eric), 213
 " , the Mighty, Queen, 190, 221, 223

 Ranrike, 98

 Raumelf, 62
 Raumerige, 98, 102, 106
 Raumrick, 61
 Raumsdale, 79, 83, 87, 88
 Red Peter, 49, 50, 52
 Richard the Fearless, 182
 " , the Good, 182
 Rinan's Isle, 201
 Ring, 174
 " , Sigurd, 98
 Ringerike, 15, 58, 61, 195
 Ringsacre, 60
 Roald, 190
 " , Ryg, 146
 Roerik, 174
 Rogaland, 146, 223, 225
 Rognvald, Earl, 83, 87-93, 97, 171, 175-178, 183, 196-200, 215
 " , Straight-leg, 190, 213, 215
 Rolf the Ganger (or Wendafoot), 178-182
 Rollo (or Robert) the Magnificent, 182, 209
 Ruric, 12
 Russia, 12, 236
 Ryckil, Ragnar, 174

 Saga of Egil, 189
 Salamis, 148
 Sandness, 187
 Saxland, 205, 216
 Saxons, The, 236
 Scandinavians, The, 12
 Scotland, 158, 166, 171, 172, 175, 196, 199, 208, 215
 Seaham, 216, 217
 Shetland, Isle of, 133, 157, 158, 165, 171, 175, 196, 198, 199, 220, 228, 236
 Sigfrid, 108, 112-115
 " , King, 233
 Sigfrod, 132
 Sigtrygg, 174
 Sigurd (brother of Earl Rognvald), 175, 196
 " , Earl (son of Hakon Griotgardsson), 218
 " , Rise, 190, 195
 " , Slaver (son of Eric Bloody Axe), 213

 Simon, 47, 52
 Sindre, Guttorm, 218
 Skalholt, 237
 Skiria, 174
 Snaefrid the Finn, 190, 192-195, 198, 215
 Snorro, 147, 224

244 Harald First of the Vikings

- Sogne, 94
 Solskiel, 79, 84, 88
 Sote, Earl, 146, 151
 Spain, 12
 Stad, 92, 131, 148, 210, 218
 Staffnes Bay, 94
 Stavanger, 148
 Stiordale, 63
 Stord, Battle of, 222
 Strind-folk, 63
 Sulke, King of Rogaland, 146, 151
 Sutherland, 175
 Swanhild, 174
 Swasi, 191
 Swinesund, 97

 Tacitus, 234
 Thelemark, 146
 Thiodolf, 193, 194, 195
 Thopte (or Tofte), 190
 Thor, 112, 113
 Thord, 47, 52, 161
 Thorgils, 174, 215
 Thor Haklaug (Thorir Long-chin),
 146, 149-151
 Thorir (son of Roald), 190, 204, 207,
 208
 ,, the Silent, Earl (son of Earl
 Rognvald), 178, 199
 ,, Wood-beard, 197
 Thorkill, 67-75, 77, 120, 136-138, 155-
 157, 159, 161-162, 166, 170, 171, 173
 Thorleif the Wise, 18, 19
 Thorolf, 149, 151, 183-189, 223, 224
 Thorstein the Red, 175
 Thorvald, 236
 Thotn, 61
 Thrandheim, 63, 64, 67, 82, 83, 87, 88,
 92, 93, 97, 109, 124, 131, 132, 134,
 145, 147, 154, 203, 208, 210, 223, 229

 Thurso Bay, 166
 Tours, 236
 Tunsberg, 97, 202, 216
 Tusk-Melbrigda, 175

 Ubbi, 104
 Ulf, 138
 Ullserk, Egil, 79, 86, 146, 147, 169
 Updale Woods, 66, 67, 73
 Uppsala, 55

 Valer, 180
 Valdars, 54
 Valland, 179, 181, 236
 Varangian Guard, 12
 Vemund, 87-93, 99
 Venner, River, 131
 Vermeland, 97, 98, 102-104, 106, 131
 Viken, 97, 98, 223
 Vingulmark, 61, 98, 107, 108, 110, 115,
 116
 Vinland hin Goda (Vineland the Good),
 12
 Vitgeir, 215

 Wales, 180, 208, 215, 236
 Wessex, 236
 Westfold, 58, 59, 98, 216
 Westgothland, 97
 White Sea, The, 12
 Wick, The, 94, 97, 101, 174, 180, 202,
 203, 216, 217
 Widerkind, 233
 William the Conqueror, 12, 182
 ,, Long-sword, 182

 Xenophon, 11

 Yriar, 63

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