

STORIES FROM
OLD FRENCH ROMANCE

E. M. WILMOT-BUXTON

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BY

E. M. WILMOT-BUXTON, F.R.HIST.S.

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THE FIRST STORY
THE STORY OF AUCASSIN
AND NICOLETTE

(From the *Conte-Fable of Aucassin and Nicolette*)

CHAPTER I

THE TROUBLES THAT BEFELL THEM

“Who will list a tale to hear,
That was an aged captive’s cheer,
Of youth and maiden fair and sweet,
Aucassin and Nicolette?”

ONCE upon a time it so fell out that a certain Count Bougars of Valence made war upon Count Garin of Beaucaire; he attacked his castle, burned his estates, laid waste his country, and killed all his men.

Count Garin was an old man, old and frail; and he had one son whose name was Aucassin. Golden-haired was Aucassin, and his eyes grey-blue; his face was bright and merry, and he had many good gifts. But he had fallen deep in love with a fair maiden, and cared for nothing else in the world but only for Nicolette.

Then said his parents to him, “Son, take up arms and mount thy horse and go fight at the head of our men.”

But Aucassin replied, “I will not mount horse, nor will I go to battle nor strike a blow, if you give me not my sweet friend Nicolette to be my wife.”

Now to this his parents would not agree, for Nicolette had been brought as a captive from a strange country by the Saracens. None knew whence she was, but the

Viscount of the neighbouring town had bought her, and baptized her, and made her his god-daughter, intending one day to give her to a youth of humble birth, who should honourably earn her bread. So his father blamed Aucassin for his choice, saying, "Let Nicolette alone; and if thou wish to take a wife, I will give thee the daughter of a King or a Count. There is not so great a man in France but, if thou wished to have his daughter, he would gladly give her to thee."

But the youth replied, "There is no high place upon the earth that Nicolette would not adorn. If she were Queen of France or of England it would be little enough for her; so true is she and gentle and gifted with all good gifts."

When Count Garin of Beaucaire saw that he could not win his son away from the love of Nicolette, he betook himself to the Viscount, who was his vassal, and said to him—

"Sir Viscount, away with your god-daughter if you wish to save her life. For she has bewitched Aucassin, who will not take up arms nor fight nor do anything that he should; and if I can lay hands on her, I will burn her in a fire; and great harm shall come to you also in the end."

Then was the Viscount very sore afraid, and began to assure the Count that he had nothing to do with the matter; he promised, moreover, that he would send the girl away to a land where the eyes of Aucassin should never behold her; and so they parted.

Now the Viscount had a great castle in the midst of a garden, and in the castle was a high tower. In a room at the top of this tower he had Nicolette put, and an old woman with her for company, and plenty of food and wine. Then he had the entrance sealed, so that there was no way to go in there nor to come out, save that there was a tiny window looking towards the garden, through which came to them a little fresh air.

In this gloomy chamber sat the golden-haired Nicolette and gazed sadly at the woods below. She saw the roses blossom and the song-birds fly, and cried aloud, "O wretched that I am, that I must live my life within these prison walls! For thee, my Aucassin, for thy sake am I here! Yet it will not be for want of will if I do not escape before long."

Now the report soon went through all the land that Nicolette was lost. Some said she had fled out of the land, others that Count Garin had had her done to death. Then was Aucassin beside himself with grief; he tried all he knew to win the secret from the Viscount, and when that failed, he returned to his father's castle and sat him down within his chamber to weep and lament for her loss.

Meantime Count Bougars had by no means made an end of the war, but was calling forth his men, horse and foot, to besiege the castle of Count Garin. While the assault was in full force, and when it seemed as though the walls must shortly give way, Count Garin again betook himself to his son's chamber, crying, "Son, if thou lose this castle, thou art disinherited, and may go forth into the world a beggar. Come now, take arms and mount horse and defend thy land and help thy men. For if thou dost not do this thing, men will call thee coward."

"I care not what they call me," said the sad youth; "nor will I mount horse nor go to the fray if you do not give me Nicolette, my sweet friend, to be my wife."

"Son," said his father, "this cannot be. Rather would I lose all that I have than that thou shouldst ever wed her."

He turned away, but Aucassin cried after him, "Father, come back: for I will make agreement with you. I will take up arms and go to the fray on this condition, that if I come back safe and sound, you will

let me see Nicolette, my sweet friend, and speak two or three words to her, and kiss her only once."

To this the Count agreed, and Aucassin was happy.

Then he called for his armour, and they made him ready with hauberk and helmet and gold-hilted sword; and he sprang upon his war-horse and reached for his shield and spear, and spurred away beyond the outer gate into the thickest of the fray.

Tall and strong and well-knit was the boy, and the horse on which he sat was fiery and eager; but his mind was so full of Nicolette that he forgot all that he ought to do. So the horse plunged forward unchecked into the very midst of the enemy, and hands were stretched out on every side against him; and they wrested from him shield and lance and took him prisoner on the spot, and began discussing by what death he should die.

Then Aucassin at length realized his foolishness and how, if his head were cut off, he would never speak to Nicolette again. He had still his sword in his sheath and his good horse under him, and suddenly began to cut right and left and make a havoc round about him, so that he overthrew ten knights and struck down seven; and he pushed out of the press and came galloping back to the castle.

Now as he went, the Count Bougars, having heard that they were about to hang Aucassin, his enemy, came forth from the camp to see this done. Him did Aucassin meet in the way, and struck him on the helmet so that he fell stunned to the earth; and the youth put forth his hand and seized him and led him captive to his father, saying, "Behold your enemy who has caused you such trouble! Twenty years has this war lasted, and never could be ended by man."

"Fair son," said the Count, well pleased, "such deeds as this shouldst thou do, and not waste time on folly."

"Father," replied the boy, "now say no more, I pray

you, but keep your agreement with me, and let me see fair Nicolette; for this was the promise you made to me."

"I?" said his father. "I promised thee naught. And if she were here I would burn her in a fire, and you too should not escape unhurt."

Then was Aucassin very wroth, and in his anger he took Count Bougars, whom he had made his prisoner, and set him on a horse and gave him his freedom. But when Count Garin saw that his son would never help him again nor ever forget sweet Nicolette, he had him seized and bound and set in an underground dungeon, whose walls were all of grey marble; and there lay the youth, lamenting his evil fate.

Now it was in the month of May, when the days are warm and long and the nights still and clear, that this hapless pair of lovers lay in prison. And one night, as Nicolette lay in bed and heard the nightingale sing, she thought much of Aucassin and of the ill-fate that might come upon her at the hands of Count Garin, and so determined to make her escape.

She saw that the old woman, her attendant, was fast asleep, so she arose, put on a soft silken gown, and taking the bed-clothes and towels, tied them together and made a rope as long as she could. She fastened this to the post of the window, and let herself down into the garden. Right fair the maiden looked as she walked through the dewy grass, and so very white was her skin that the daisy flowers that bent under her foot-fall looked dark against her ankles.

Through the postern gate she passed, and, moving within the shadow, kept on until she came to the tower where her true love was.

The tower was old and supported with buttresses, and she crouched down beside one of these and wrapped herself in her cloak; and she put her head to a chink in the tower and heard her lover weep within and make

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great lament for the sweet friend whom he loved so much.

Now when she had listened for a while, she began to speak and said, "O, my true love, stay thy laments, for since thy father hates me so, he will never be at peace with thee till I am far away. Now for thy sake I'll cross the sea and wander in a strange land." With these words she wept, and cut off a tress of her hair and cast it through the hole into the dungeon; but Aucassin implored her not to go away, saying that this indeed would surely kill him.

Now while they talked together, they were marked by the Warden of the Tower; yet he, being a man of kindly heart, pretended not to see or hear them; for he was grieved for them both. So he held his tongue and said nothing when the patrol of the town came along that way; but he saw they had drawn swords in their hands ready to kill the maiden; for so Count Garin had commanded should be done if she should ever be found to have escaped.

So he began to sing a song, as though he were singing to himself, and this was what he sang—

"Little maid with grey-blue eyne,
Head of golden hair ashine,
Hear me now and understand:
Hide thee from the hireling band;
They are coming thee to slay,
They will harm thee every way,
Hide while yet thou may!"

When Nicolette heard this song she understood all, and thanking him softly for his courtesy, she wrapped herself in her dark cloak and stood in the shadow of the buttress till the patrol had passed by. Then she whispered farewell to Aucassin and ran on till she came to the wall of the castle.

The wall had been broken down, and she climbed up it till she stood between the wall and the dry and stony

moat below ; but the moat was very deep and sheer, and she was sore afraid.

“What shall I do?” she cried ; “for if I let myself fall I shall break my neck, and if I stay here they will take me in the morning and will burn me in a fire. Yet would I rather die here than be stared at with great wonder by all the folk to-morrow.”

So she let herself slip down the moat ; and when she came to the bottom her pretty hands and feet were bruised and covered with blood ; but she thought nothing of this, for her great fear was that she might not be able to climb up the other side. But she found at the bottom a sharpened stake, and with this aid she took one upward step after another until at length she reached the top, and there she sat herself down for a while to rest and consider what she had best do next.

CHAPTER II

THE ADVENTURE OF NICOLETTE IN THE FOREST

NOW when Nicolette had made her way a little from the castle, she found herself on the edge of a great forest, in which were serpents and savage beasts, and of these she was very sore afraid. Said she to herself, “If I seek the thick forest, wolves will seize me for their food, and the lion and the wild boar will tear me in pieces ; and if I wait here until daylight I shall be taken and burnt alive. Now therefore I choose the forest with all its dangers.”

So she passed into the wood, but daring not to go far, she crouched down in a dense thicket and went to sleep. She slept till dawn of day, when the herd-boys came forth from the town and drove their beasts between

the forest and the river. On they passed till they came to a fresh spring, which was at the edge of the forest, and there they spread a cloak and laid their food upon it.

When Nicolette awoke and saw this, she arose and came to them, saying, "Fair youths, may God be your help!"

"God bless you!" answered one who was more ready of tongue than the rest, for they were dumb with astonishment.

"Fair youths," said she, "do you know Aucassin, son of Count Garin of Beaucaire?"

"Yes, well do we know him," said they.

"Then go, in God's name," said she very earnestly, "and tell him there is a beast in this forest that he should come and chase; and tell him that if he could take it, he would not give one of its limbs for one hundred gold sovereigns, nor for five hundred, nor for any money."

As she said these words all the boys looked hard at her and were filled with wonder at her beauty. At length their spokesman exclaimed, "I tell him such a thing? Not I indeed, for there is not a word of truth in what you say. There is not a beast of any value in the forest, not one whose limbs are worth more than two or three pence at the most. But we see that you are a fairy, and may be a wicked one. Go your way, therefore, since we have no liking for your company."

"Ah, fair youth!" she cried; "know you not that Aucassin has a deadly hurt, from which he never will be cured till he find this beast? Here have I five pennies in my purse; take them and tell him that he must chase the creature and take it within three days, or he will never be cured of his hurt."

"Faith," said he, "we will take the pennies, and if he come here, we will tell him; but we will never go to seek him."

"As God wills!" replied Nicolette meekly, and taking her leave of the herd-boys, she passed on her way.

Through the wood she went by an ancient pathway that wound among the trees, until she came to a place where seven roads lay in seven different directions. And as she knew not which way to go, she determined to stay awhile that she might make sure whether Aucassin really were true to her. So she took oaken saplings and twisted them together with green leaves interlaced, and made and decked with flowers a fair bower in that spot, saying, "If Aucassin should ride past this bower and not tarry and rest awhile for his love's sake, he shall never be my true lover."

Then she hid herself near the bower in a thick bush to see what Aucassin would do.

Meantime the report had spread through all the land that Nicolette was lost. Some said she had run away and others that Count Garin had done her to death.

Then Count Garin ordered that Aucassin his son should be taken out of prison; and he sent for the knights of the land and the damsels of noble birth, and made a very fine feast wherewith to comfort the unhappy youth, who now believed that he should never see fair Nicolette again.

When the banquet was at its height, Aucassin managed to slip away through the window on to a balcony, and there he leaned upon the rail, all bowed down with woe. Suddenly a strange knight, who had been watching him for some time, came out and spoke to him and said, "Aucassin, of the same hurt that you have I have myself been wounded. And now, if you will trust me, I will give you good counsel."

"Sir, much thanks!" said Aucassin. "For good counsel I would be greatly beholden to you."

"Then mount horse," said he, "and go along the edge of the forest to amuse yourself; and you will see the flowers and the grass and will hear the little birds

sing. Perhaps there you may also hear a word of which you will be the better."

"Sir," said Aucassin, "I thank you, and I will do it."

So he stole away from the hall and passed down the stairs and into the stable where stood his horse. Saddle and bridle he put on, and set foot in stirrup and mounted and came out from the castle. On he went till he came to the spring, and there he found the herd-boys about three o'clock in the afternoon; and they had spread a cloak on the grass and were eating their bread with very great mirth. And as they ate they sang this song—

"God give Aucassin his aid
And that little dainty maid,
She that hath the golden hair,
Eyes so clear and face so fair,
She who gave us pennies bright
Which shall buy us cakes to-night,
Knives with sheaths and whistles clear,
Little clubs and flutes to cheer,
Also little pipes that squeal—
May God him heal!"

When Aucassin heard this song he thought at once of his sweet friend Nicolette and wondered if she had been there.

"Fair youths," said he, "sing again the song you sang just now."

"We will not sing it," said he who was more ready of tongue than the rest. "Sorrow be to him who shall sing it to you, fair sir!"

"Do you not know me, boy?" said Aucassin; and the other, who was a teasing wag, replied, "Yes, we know well that you are Aucassin, our young lord, but we are not yours, but the Count's."

"Fair youths, you will do so, I pray you."

"Why indeed should I sing for you if it does not suit me?" asked the lad pertly.

"Surely you will," cried Aucassin, "if I give you these ten pennies."

"Sir," replied the boy, rising with a bow of mock politeness, "we will take your money, but we will not sing for you, for we have sworn it. But I will tell it to you if you like."

"Well," said Aucassin, "I would like it told better than have nothing."

"Sir," said the boy, "we were here quite lately between six and nine o'clock in the morning, and we were eating our bread beside this very spring; and there came out to us a maiden, the fairest thing in the world, so that we thought she was a fairy and that she ruled over all this wood. She gave us money, and we made agreement with her that, if you came here, we would tell you that you should go hunt in this forest; that there was a beast therein so precious that you would not give one of its limbs for any money, for the beast has such a remedy that if you can take it, you will be cured of your wounds. But you must catch it within three days or else never more shall you see it. Now chase it if you choose, or leave it if you choose, for I have done all I promised her."

"Fair youth," said Aucassin, "you have said enough. May God grant I find this beast."

Then Aucassin hastened within the forest, and his charger bore him at a great pace from path to path. The brambles tore him so that the blood poured forth in many places, and one could have traced his path by the red drops that fell on the grass. But he thought so much of Nicolette, his sweet friend, that he felt neither pain nor wound.

All day he went through the forest without ever having news of her, and when he saw that evening drew near, he began to weep because he had not found her.

Then, as he rode along an ancient grassy way, he

saw before him in the middle of the path a youth of very strange appearance. He was big and very ugly; his large head was blacker than a coal, and there was more than a hand's-breadth between his two eyes; he had great cheeks, and a very big, flat nose, wide nostrils, and thick lips, with very large yellow teeth. He wore leggings and shoes of ox-hide bound by strips of bark over the knee; his cloak was of rough untanned leather, and he was leaning upon a big club.

To him Aucassin hastened, but when he looked on him he had great fear.

"Fair brother," he said, "good even to you!"

"God bless you!" growled the other.

"What do you here?" asked Aucassin.

"What does it matter to you?" replied the other.

"Nothing at all; I only ask you in friendly wise."

"But why do you weep?" asked the other curiously. "Sure, if I were as rich a man as you are, all the world would not make me weep."

"Why, do you know me?" cried Aucassin.

"Yes, I know well that you are Aucassin, the son of the Count; and if you tell me why you weep, I will tell you what I do here."

"Surely," said Aucassin, "I will gladly tell you. I came this morning to hunt in this forest, for I had a white deerhound, the most beautiful in this world, and I have lost it; for this I weep."

"What!" cried the youth. "You weep for a wretched dog! Black sorrow be his who pities you, seeing that there is not a rich man in this land who, if your father asked of him twenty dogs, would not send them very willingly, and be glad to do it. But it is I who ought to weep and lament."

"And for what, brother?"

"Sir, I will tell you. I was hired by a rich farmer to drive his plough, and he had four oxen. Now, three days ago I happened by great misfortune to lose the

best of my oxen, and I go seeking him. And I have neither eaten nor drunk for three days past, for I dare not go back to the town, lest the farmer put me in prison, since I have not wherewithal to pay him. Of all the wealth in the world I have nothing but what you see upon me. A poor old mother I have, and she had nothing but a wretched mattress; and that the farmer dragged away from under her, so that she now lies on the bare straw; and for her I grieve much more than for myself.

"For money goes and comes; what I have lost now I shall gain another time, and I shall pay for my ox when I can; I shall never weep for that. But you weep for a wretched dog! Black sorrow be to him who shall pity you for it!"

"Surely," cried Aucassin, "you are a good comforter, brother! What was your ox worth?"

"Sir, twenty shillings they ask me for it—no less."

"Now take twenty that I have here in my purse and pay for your ox," said Aucassin.

"Sir," he replied, "much thanks! And may God let you find that which you seek."

He parted from him and Aucassin rode on. The night was beautiful and very still, and he wandered on until he came to the place where the seven ways forked; and there he looked before him and saw the fair bower that Nicolette had made.

With flowers she had decked it without and within, and it was the most beautiful ever seen as it lay in the clear moonlight.

"Ah!" cried the boy, "Nicolette, my sweet friend, has been here, and has made this with her own fair hands. For her sweet sake I will now dismount, and will rest therein for the remainder of the night."

So he took his foot out of the stirrup to come down, and the horse was big and tall. Weary as he was, and with his mind full of Nicolette his most sweet friend,

he let himself slip, and fell on a stone so hard that he put his shoulder out of place.

Hurt as he was, he did the best he could, tied his horse with the other hand to a thorn tree, and crawled into the bower.

Then he looked through an opening in the bower and saw the stars in the sky, and one among them brighter than all the rest. And he began to sing this song—

“Thou star that shinest clear on high,
The moon doth strive to draw thee nigh;
My Nicolette is with thee there,
My little love with golden hair.”

When Nicolette heard these words she came running to him, for she was not far away, and clasped him in her arms, crying, “Fair, sweet friend, how you are welcome!”

And he answered with joy, “Fair, sweet friend, well found!”

Then they embraced all over again, and great was their happiness.

“It was but now,” said Aucassin, “that I was much hurt in the shoulder, but I feel neither pain nor grief since I have you.”

Then she felt him about and soon found that his shoulder was out of place; and she handled it with her skilful fingers, and so pulled it that, as God willed, who loves all true lovers, it came back to its place. And then she took some flowers and some fresh grass and green leaves and tied it up with a bit of her petticoat, and he was soon quite cured.

“Now, Aucassin,” said she, “take thought for tomorrow. For if your father has the forest searched in the morning, and I am found, whatever may happen to you, I shall be put to death.”

“Nay, sweet friend, for I will never let them take you,” cried Aucassin, and at once he mounted his horse,

took his true love in front of him, and so set out towards the open fields.

They pass the hills, they pass the downs,
They pass the villages and towns,
They come at daybreak to the strand,
And there alighting on the sand,
 They doubtful stand.

CHAPTER III

THEIR ADVENTURE ACROSS THE SEA

NOW as Aucassin and Nicolette were wandering along the shore, they saw a vessel with merchants aboard passing very near the land.

He beckoned to them, and they came to him and were persuaded to take them on board the vessel. But when they were upon the high seas a great and terrible storm uprose, which drove them from land to land until they reached a strange country and entered the gates of the Castle of Torylory.

Then they asked whose land it was, and they told them that it all belonged to the King of Torylory. So they asked what manner of man he was and if he made any war, and they said, "Yes, and a mighty war too."

So Aucassin took leave of the merchants, mounted his horse, girded on his sword, took his true love before him, and went along until he came within the castle walls.

He asked where the King was, and they told him that he sat within the bower working a fair piece of tapestry. "Where then is his wife?" asked Aucassin, and they answered that she, with all the other people in the land, was with the army.

Thereat they marvelled greatly and dismounted from the horse, and while Nicolette held the bridle, Aucassin

went upstairs to the bower where the King lay stretched upon a settle at his ease. Then was Aucassin very wroth ; he called the King ill words, and taking a stick, he beat him until he swore that he would never again sit at ease while his wife went forth to the war. When he had thus sworn, Aucassin said, "Now, sir, lead me to the place where your wife is with the army." So the King and Aucassin mounted their horses, but Nicolette stayed in the chamber of the Queen.

Now when they came to the battlefield, Aucassin found that the weapons wherewith the soldiers fought were roasted crab-apples, and eggs, and fresh cheeses.

He halted therefore, greatly wondering, and staring at this strange warfare. "Sir," said he at length to the King, "are these your enemies?"

"Yes, that they be," said he.

"And would you have me avenge you upon them?"

"Yes, gladly," replied the King.

So Aucassin set his hand to his sword and rushed among them and began to strike right and left, killing many of them.

But when the King saw this he caught him by the bridle saying, "Stay, fair sir, do not kill them utterly."

"What!" said Aucassin, "do you not wish that I avenge you?"

"Sir," said the King, "you have done too much already. It is not the custom that we should kill one another."

By this time the foe had turned and fled ; and the King and Aucassin returned to the Castle of Torylory.

Now after a while the people of the land became so fond of Nicolette that they bade the King drive Aucassin out of the country and keep her for his heir, for they said they were certain she was of very noble birth.

But of this Nicolette would hear not a word, being well content to wait upon the Queen so long as she might see her true love Aucassin and speak to him at times.

After they had lived for some time in peace and happiness at the Castle of Torylory, there came one day a fleet of Saracens from over the sea and attacked the castle and took it by storm. They carried away all the booty, and many of the men and women to be their slaves. Nicolette and Aucassin they took and bound hand and foot, flinging him into one vessel and Nicolette into another. Nor was that the end of their ill-fortune, for a storm arose which parted the vessels widely from one another.

The ship in which Aucassin found himself drifted so far over the sea that it came at length to the castle of Beaucaire and lay a wreck upon that coast. And the people of that country ran to the wreck, and rejoiced greatly to find Aucassin, their young lord, therein. For his parents had died during his long absence and he was now their Count; so they took him to the castle and all became his men, and he held the land in peace. But his heart was heavy day and night for love and sorrow for Nicolette, his sweet friend, saying—

“True love, maid of sunny face,
 Now I cannot guess thy place;
 God never made that kingdom yet,
 No land, no ocean hath he set,
 But I would search it if so be
 I might find thee.”

Meantime it so happened that the ship in which Nicolette lay belonged to the King of Carthage and his twelve sons; but she knew it not. When they saw how very fair was the maiden, they treated her with great honour; and often they asked her who she was, for they were sure that she was a very noble lady and of high lineage. But she could not tell them anything save that she had been carried away from home as a little child. “Yet,” she said, “I was not so young but that if I saw my country again I should know at once whether it was my home or not.”

So on they sailed till they came to the city of Carthage; and when Nicolette saw the walls of the castle and the country round, she remembered at once that it was her birthplace, from which she had been carried away, and she described the castle of the King and the rooms in which she had been brought up and the woman who had tended her. And she began to lament, saying, "Woe is me that was born daughter to the King of Carthage and cousin of the Sultan, who now am the captive of a savage tribe. Oh, would I might see Aucassin again and be delivered by him!"

When the King of Carthage heard her speak thus, he drew her near to him and said very kindly, "Sweet friend, tell me who you are and do not be afraid of me."

"Sir," said she, "I am daughter of the King of Carthage, and I was carried away as a little child, just fifteen years ago."

When he heard her speak thus, he knew in truth that she was his long-lost daughter; and they all made very great joy over her, and took her to the palace with very great honour as the daughter of the King. Very soon they wished to marry her to a great Saracen chieftain; but she only thought by what means she could find Aucassin. Then finding that they would not let her be, she took her viol and stole away one night till she came to the seaport town, where she lodged at the house of a poor woman on the shore.

Then she took a herb and smeared her head and her face until she was all stained dark. She next had a coat and a cloak and shirt and breeches made, and dressed herself in fashion of a minstrel boy. Then she took her viol and persuaded a seaman to take her on board his vessel, and they sailed far over the high seas till they came to the land of Provence.

There Nicolette left the ship and took her viol and went playing through the country until she came to the castle of Beaucaire where Aucassin dwelt.

Now Aucassin sat one day upon a balcony beneath the tower of Beaucaire with all his barons around him ; and he saw the grass and flowers around him and heard the little birds sing. But his heart was heavy, for he could think of nothing but Nicolette, the kind and brave, whom he had loved so long and well.

Suddenly a minstrel youth appeared below, who touched the strings of his viol and thus began to sing—

“Listen, noble lords, to me,
 Ye of high and low degree,
 An ye care to hear a stave
 Tell of Nicolette the brave
 And of Aucassin the true ;
 Loving bonds between them grew.
 He sought her in forest deep,
 Then from Torylory’s keep
 Paynims bore them both away.
 Of Aucassin I nothing say,
 But Nicolette, the brave and true,
 Doth in Carthage live anew ;
 There her father, who is King,
 Loves her more than anything.
 They wish that she shall marry yet
 A king not loved of Nicolette ;
 She loveth only one young knight,
 He who Aucassin is hight ;
 In the name of Heaven she swore
 Ne’er will she have lover more,
 If she may not find that lord
 By her adored.”

When Aucassin heard this song he sprang from his seat, and taking the minstrel aside said, “Fair sweet friend, do you know anything of this Nicolette of whom you have sung ?”

“Sir, yes ; I know she is the truest maiden and the most gentle and wise that ever was born. She is daughter of the King of Carthage, who took her prisoner when Aucassin was taken, and brought her to the city of Carthage, until he discovered that she was his very own daughter. Then he made great joy over her, and wished every day to give her for husband one of the

greatest kings in Spain; but she would sooner be hanged or burnt than marry such an one, however rich he was."

"Ah, fair friend," cried Count Aucassin, "if you will return to that country and tell her to come to speak to me, I will give you as much of my money as ever you care to ask. For I will not take a wife, however high is her birth, but I wait for her; and never will I marry at all if I may not have her. If I had but known where to find her, I should not have to seek her now."

"Sir," said the minstrel, "if you will do this, I will go to seek her for your sake and for hers, whom I love much."

This he vowed to the minstrel and put money in his hands, and when he turned away he wept. Then was the heart of her who seemed a minstrel softened, and she said, "Sir, be not dismayed, since in a little while I shall have brought her to you in this town and you shall see her."

So she left him and went to the house of the Viscountess, where she had been brought up; for the Viscount, her godfather, was dead. There she revealed herself and told all her story; and the Viscountess received her with joy, and made her bathe and rest for eight whole days. Then she rubbed her with a certain herb, which made her as fair as ever she had been, and dressed her in rich silk cloth; and she sat down in the chamber on a quilted coverlet of silk, and called the Viscountess and asked her to go for Aucassin her love.

This she did, and when she came to the palace, she found Aucassin weeping and grieving for Nicolette his love, because she delayed so long. Then the lady called him and said to him, "Aucassin, lament no more, but come with me, and I will show you the thing you love most in the world; for it is Nicolette, your sweet friend, who has come from a far country to find you."

Thereat Aucassin made no further stay, but ran to the chamber where Nicolette was awaiting him; and then were both of them happy indeed.

And on the morrow Aucassin married his sweet maiden and made her lady of Beaucaire, where they lived many years in delight and happiness.

So endeth the story of Aucassin and Nicolette.

The verse quotations in this story are from the translation of M. S. Henry.

THE SECOND STORY

THE STORY OF CONSTANS THE EMPEROR

(From the *Dit de l'Empereur Constant*)

ONCE upon a time there lived a certain Emperor whose name was Musselin; and he ruled over the city of Byzantium, which is now called Constantinople.

Now this Emperor was learned in the science of the moon and the planets and the stars; and he knew much of sorcery and of witchcraft, as did most of the pagans of that day. And it came to pass one clear moonlight night that he went forth, with a single knight for company, through the midst of the city; and as he passed along, he heard the voice of a man on a high tower praising God aloud, because a child had been born to him at that particular hour.

Then the Emperor and the Knight went in unto the man, and asked him why he praised God with such exceeding joy for that the child had been born at that particular time. And the man bowed low to them and answered (not knowing who they were), "Sir, I am a man learned in the course of the stars and of the planets, and I feared that if my child had been born an hour ago he must needs be burned or drowned or hanged; for so was it written in the sky. But now that he is born at this particular time, I know that all is well with him; and for that reason I praise God."

"But how is it well with him?" asked the Emperor; and the man answered, "Know, sir, that the boy just born shall one day marry the daughter of the Emperor of this city, who was born a week ago; and in good

time he shall be Emperor of this place and lord of all the earth."

"Fellow," said the Emperor, "this can never come to pass."

"Sir," replied the man, "it is written in the stars that thus it shall be."

Then was the Emperor very wroth, though he made no sign, and departed thence with the Knight. But when he reached the street he bade the Knight pass in secretly to the man's house and bring the child to him. And the Knight passed in secretly, and finding the babe lying, wrapped in linen clothes, upon a chair, he took him and put him on a board and brought him to the Emperor without being seen by any man.

Whereupon the Emperor took his knife and gashed the child's breast, saying that this peasant's son should never marry his daughter, nor come to rule after him. But when he would next have killed him outright, the Knight intervened, saying, "Sire, it is not meet that you should do this thing; and if it came to men's knowledge it would bring shame on you. Let the babe be, for he is dead already; but if you will make sure without more bloodshed, I will carry him down and drown him in the sea."

"Do so," said the Emperor, "for I hate him with all my heart."

So the Knight took the child and wrapped him in a silken kerchief and carried him down to the shore; but on the way his heart was touched with pity. Now it so happened that he had to pass by the gate of a certain abbey, in the church of which the monks were singing their matins; and the Knight, when he heard them sing, placed the child on a heap of rubbish before the gates and left him there.

It was not long before the monks had left their singing and had heard the crying of the babe; and one of them went out and brought him in to the Abbot. And

when the Abbot saw that he was a fair babe, and had been cruelly ill-treated, he sent for doctors to heal him, and declared that he should be brought up within the abbey. And because the surgeons required a large sum of money to heal the child, he was christened Co(n)stans, because it cost the abbey many coins before he could be healed.

Now the little Constans speedily grew in health and beauty, so that every one said he must have come of high kindred and would win great renown. When he was seven years old he went to school, where he soon became a fine scholar; and when he was twelve, he was so clever and so fair to look upon, that the Abbot chose him to ride behind him as his page. After that time it came about that the Abbot wished to speak with the Emperor concerning a wrong which had been done to the abbey by some of his followers. So he sent him a noble gift and asked leave to visit him at his castle, some miles away; and to this the Emperor agreed.

Then the Abbot rode forth with his train of followers, and close beside him rode the boy Constans; and when he reached the castle, the boy drew near to him to hold his hat in the presence of the Emperor. But when the latter saw the lad, and marked how fair and gentle he was, he could not take his eyes off him, and began at once to ask the Abbot who he was and whence he came.

"All I can tell of him," replied the Abbot, "is that nearly fifteen years since, our monks heard the voice of a crying child as they came out from their matins; and when they brought him to me I saw that he was fair, and gave orders that he should be nourished.

"But when I unwrapped him, I saw that he had been cruelly mistreated; for his breast had been gashed with a knife, and the mark of it remains unto this day."

Then the Emperor knew at once that it was the child he had tried to kill, and he eagerly asked the

Abbot to give him the lad. The Abbot replied that he could not do this without the consent of his monks, and, returning to the abbey, told them of the Emperor's wish. They, however, being in great fear of the Emperor's anger against them, desired him to send the boy to the Court at once; and so Constans was sent away in haste to the Emperor.

Now the Emperor was glad to get the boy, for he hated him very sorely, and was determined that he should not escape him a second time. But he was very anxious that none should know of his evil intention, and so went warily to work.

It happened at that time that the Emperor had business on the borders of his land, about twelve days' journey from Byzantium; and he departed thither, taking the boy Constans with him. And after he had taken much thought as to how he should put an end to the lad, he sat him down and wrote as follows:—

“I, Emperor of Byzantium and Lord of Greece, give this clear command to the officer whom I have left in my place for the guarding of my land; that so soon as thou seest this letter, thou shalt slay or cause to be slain him who shall bear this letter to thee, directly he has given it into thy hands. See that my commands are obeyed, as thou valuest thine head.”

Forthwith he gave the letter into the hands of the fair child Constans, and the lad set off, little knowing that he was bearing his own death-warrant.

Hastening on his way, the boy reached the city in less than fifteen days; and as it happened, the time that he arrived was the hour of dinner. So he desired to wait until the folk had finished their meal, and meantime, because the sun was very hot, he rode into a long garden, where there was shade on the green grass, unbridled his horse that the animal might graze, and sat himself down beneath a tree. And there he presently fell fast asleep.

Now it so happened that when the fair young daughter of the Emperor had finished her meal, she went into the garden with three of her maidens; and they began to chase each other about the place. And as they did so, the Emperor's daughter came of a sudden to the tree where Constans lay sleeping, and she saw him and looked on him with delight, saying to herself that never had she seen so fair a youth. Then she called to her one of the maidens whom she loved best, and sent the others from the garden; and she showed him to the maiden, saying, "This is the handsomest man that ever I have seen on any day of my life. See, he bears a letter in his pouch, and gladly would I see what it says."

Then the two maidens drew nigh to the lad, and took from his pouch the letter, and the Princess read it to herself; and when she had so done she began to weep and lament. Then her companion begged her to tell her the cause, and when the Princess had made her vow to be true to her, she told her what the letter said.

"Lady, what will you do?" cried the maiden in dismay; and her young mistress answered—

"I will put in his pouch another letter, in which the Emperor, my father, bids his officer to give me to this fair boy as his wife, and to make a great feast at our wedding, seeing that the lad is of high and noble birth."

"But, lady, how wilt thou have the seal of thy father?" asked the maiden; and the Princess, nothing daunted, replied that she had in her coffer four blank scrolls, already sealed by the Emperor, which he had given her in case she needed to borrow money to make ready an army during his absence. One of these she took, therefore, and wrote thereon—

"I, King Musselin, Emperor of Greece and of Byzantium my city, command thee, my officer, left in my place for the guarding of my city, that ye give to the bearer of

this letter my fair daughter in marriage; for he is of noble birth and well worthy to have her. And for that reason make ye great joy and a feast to all them of my city and of all my land."

In such wise wrote the daughter of the Emperor, and when she had so done, she crept back to the garden with her maiden and put the letter in the pouch of the sleeping youth.

Then they began to sing and clap their hands to waken him, and when he opened his eyes, he was much confused to see those two fair maidens. And when they greeted him, he sprang to his feet, and bowed low, and answered them as behoved a courteous knight; but he could not take his eyes from the fair face of the daughter of the Emperor. Then she asked him his errand; and when he told her that he bore a letter to the officer in charge, the Princess told him she would bring him in to him; and she took him by the hand and brought him to the palace.

When the officer heard that he was come from the Emperor, he paid the lad much honour, and, kissing his hand, received from it the royal letter. But when the Princess heard the contents she pretended great surprise; as for the officer, he was astonished beyond measure, and said in trembling tones to her, "Lady, we must indeed do the will of your father, or otherwise we shall be blamed exceedingly."

But the maiden made pretence of anger, saying, "How can I be wedded without my lord my father? That would be a strange thing indeed, and I will do it in no manner."

"Say not so, lady," cried the officer in fear, "for thus thy father ordains, and we must not gainsay it."

"Sir," said the Princess, "you shall speak unto the chief men of the kingdom and take counsel of them. And if they agree I will not go against it."

This the officer made haste to do, and showed them

the letter, and they all agreed that the will of the Emperor must be done. So they wedded the fair youth Constans to the fair daughter of the Emperor; and a great feast was made to all the people for the space of fifteen days.

Meantime the Emperor, having finished his business, returned to Byzantium, and while he was still two days' journey distant from the place, a young man came out from the city and met him on the way; and the Emperor asked how they did there. When the young man told him that they made good cheer there and did nothing but eat and drink during the last fifteen days, the Emperor asked the reason.

"But surely, sire, thou knowest wherefore they do this?" cried the astonished youth. "Thou sendest a lad, exceeding fair and noble, to the officer, bidding him wed him to thy daughter. But she would not have him till all thy chief men had agreed that thy commands must be obeyed in this matter. Then were they wedded right happily, and such joy has been in the city as none might wish it better."

Then was the Emperor mightily astonished, but all he said was, "Since it is so, I must abide it, for there is naught else to be done."

So he rode on to Byzantium, and when he drew near, his fair daughter came out to meet him by the side of her young husband, and a more lovely pair it had been hard indeed to find. The Emperor, being a wise man, pretended to feel great joy and received them both with honour and regard. Then he asked to be shown the letter, and when he saw it with his seal affixed, he pondered much upon these things. All that night he sat deep in thought, and at length he said to himself that he had striven in vain against the things that had to be.

Thereupon he made Constans a knight and appointed him his heir after his death. And Constans

bore himself wisely as a valiant and a hardy knight and defended him full well against his enemies.

Not long afterwards the Emperor died and was buried, and Constans became Emperor in his stead. And the Emperor gave great honour to that good Abbot who had nourished him and saved his life, and in his days did all the people of that land become Christians.

A fair young son was born to Constans and his wife, whom they called Constantine; thereafter was that city known as Constantinople, which was called Byzantium at first.

And this is the end of the story of Constans the Emperor.

THE THIRD STORY
THE STORY OF ROLAND AND
OLIVER

(From *Le Chanson de Roland*)

NOW it came to pass in the days of Charlemagne that the Emperor had a feud with one of his great vassals, Count Gerard of Viana. The cause of it was as follows: The Count with many others had come to Aix to do homage for his land and to petition Charlemagne to grant him also the dukedom of Burgundy in return for his services in the late war. So he stood before the Emperor and his Queen, who sat upon two thrones upon a raised dais, and bent to pay his homage by kissing the foot of the King. But as he did so he caught his own foot in the rushes which lay spread upon the floor and, stumbling forward, pressed his lips to the dainty white shoe of the Queen instead.

The surrounding peers gave a shout of laughter at this mistake, but as the Count made no apology, standing flushed and angry at the jesting, with his hand upon his sword, Charlemagne's hot temper flared forth, and he declared that the land of Burgundy should be reserved for one who better knew the laws of courtesy. At that Count Gerard called his men together and left the palace in a rage, declaring that he would never do homage for Viana at all.

So he strengthened his castle and openly defied the King; and there came to his assistance his brother, Duke Miles, and his son Rainier, with many armed followers. But with Rainier came also the two children of the latter, the maiden Aude, beautiful as the dawn,

and Oliver, that valiant young knight, who in former days had been sworn brother-in-arms to Roland, the nephew of Charlemagne.

Now when the Emperor heard that Duke Gerard had defied him, he swore a great oath that he would never forgive him nor leave him in peace until he had him on his knees before him. He gathered his great army forthwith, marched upon Viana, and closely besieged the castle. But the latter was so well fortified and provisioned that there seemed little chance of success.

Oftentimes during the long siege the fair maiden Aude would come upon the battlements and look down upon the tents below, stretching wide to the banks of the Rhine ; and there was she seen one day by young Sir Roland, who thought her the loveliest thing in all that land and longed to find favour in her sight. But he knew not that she was the sister of Oliver, nor did he dream that his former brother-in-arms was one of those who so valiantly protected the castle.

Month after month the siege continued. All the hard winter-tide the soldiers of Charlemagne kept their tents and endured miseries of cold and hunger ; and many of them might well wish themselves elsewhere. When springtime came there rode messengers into the camp, bringing news that Marsilius, the Moorish King of Spain, had crossed the Pyrenees and was ravaging the South of France with fire and sword. And all the people of that fair region called aloud upon Charlemagne to come to their help without delay.

Then the peers of Charlemagne, when they heard this news, came to him in council and prayed him to raise the long and hopeless siege and set them free to march against the Moorish foes. But Charlemagne shook his great beard at them, saying, "Can the King break his oath? Have I not sworn not to forgive Count Gerard nor leave him in peace until I have humbled him to the dust?"

In vain they reasoned with him; nothing would move him from his resolve until the wise Duke Naymes made his proposition.

“Let God decide this matter,” said the Duke, “and let us leave Him to settle it by single combat. We will choose one of our knights by lot, and let Count Gerard be asked to do the same; and the winner shall decide whether the Count does homage or whether we ride away and leave him at peace.”

This idea seemed very good to the Emperor and his peers, and an embassy was at once dispatched to Count Gerard with the proposition.

Now the Count and his followers were just as weary of this long and profitless siege as were those in the Emperor's camp. So they gladly sent word back that they would agree to do as had been proposed; and both sides prepared to draw the lot.

On the side of Charlemagne this fell upon Roland; and at this all men save the traitor Ganelon rejoiced; for Roland was both young and valiant and very eager to prove his prowess in the sight of the Emperor. So he buckled on his good sword Durandal, and the strong new buckler that the King himself had given him, and mounted his war-horse and rode forth to victory. The place of the combat was an island in the midst of the River Rhine, and there Roland found waiting for him a well-made young knight in shining armour, whose face was hidden from him by the visor of his helmet.

On one side of the river stood the hosts of Charlemagne opposite to the hosts of Count Gerard on the other, and both watched eagerly for the result of the fight. Among the watchers on the castle side stood the maiden Aude and looked with eyes of approval at the handsome form of Roland as he approached his adversary.

Pale blue and white was the robe she wore, and pale blue and white were the ribbons that fluttered from the

helmet of the stranger knight whom he was now about to encounter.

Then the fight began. At the first furious onset the lances of both the combatants were broken against each other's shields. They fought then on foot for all the rest of that day, but not a single advantage did one gain over the other till the evening, when the sword of the stranger knight was shattered to atoms by a furious blow against Roland's helmet.

The latter at once lowered his own point, saying, "The champion of Charlemagne fights not against an unarmed man. Stay therefore until the morning, for night draws on apace, and to-morrow choose another sword and let us come fresh to the fray."

So the combat ended for that day and the champions retired to rest. Next morning the fight began again with renewed vigour, and all day long were these two knights exactly matched until the evening, when Roland's shield was split from top to bottom by the sword of Gerard's champion. At once the latter dropped his sword and bade his adversary retire till the morning and then come with fresh armour.

So in this same manner that strange combat continued for five days, neither gaining a fair advantage in the fight and each scorning to get the better of his foe by an unfair one.

At length, as the fifth day drew to its close the two knights waxed desperate and drove hard at each other in hopes to bring the strange combat to an end. At precisely the same moment that the sword of the stranger knight broke off short to the handle after a terrible blow on Roland's shield, the sword of Roland buried itself up to its hilt in the shield of the stranger knight so that it could not be withdrawn.

Both were now defenceless save for their fists, and with these they were about to rush upon each other when a strange thing happened. A bright cloud

suddenly fell between them from the sky and in its midst stood an angel with uplifted hand bidding them cease their strife. At this wonderful portent each of the young knights cast off his helmet and bowed his head in awe; and when they looked up again, behold, the angel had vanished and each was gazing at a well-known face.

“Roland!” “Oliver!”

“I yield!”

Exactly at the same moment came the cry from each as they rushed into each other's arms in a long embrace.

Deep was the wonder of the armies on either side of the river at this remarkable development, and messengers were hastily dispatched for an explanation.

This was soon forthcoming, and so strong was the tie between all brothers-in-arms in chivalry that both sides joined in a cheer of congratulation. And because the combat had been so wonderfully equal between them there grew up from that time forth a proverb—“Give a Roland for an Oliver”—which means the same as “Tit for tat.”

Now this incident did not actually settle the feud with Count Gerard, though it went a long way towards doing so by creating a spirit of goodwill on both sides; but in the meantime the army of Charlemagne was growing more and more discontented with its position, and more and more eager to fight the forces of the Moors, those ancient foes of France.

At length one count after another began to collect his forces and slip quietly away towards the devastated region of the south, sometimes giving as his reason that he must go and look after his property in that part, sometimes saying nothing at all, but taking “French leave”—which means no leave at all.

And still Charlemagne made no sign, though inwardly his heart misgave him.

Then it so happened that one day as he went to the chase he found himself suddenly surrounded by Count Gerard's men, who had been lying in wait for him. Brought before the Count, the Emperor heard a traitor knight speaking eagerly to his captor and advising that he should be put to death.

Then arose old Count Gerard and smote down that traitor knight even to the ground, and cried aloud, "Never will I take advantage of my liege lord thus! Rather will I pay him homage for my lands."

So saying he knelt humbly before the Emperor and placed his hands between those of Charlemagne, who raised him to his feet, crying, "Now is my oath fulfilled in strange fashion, and gladly do I declare this feud at an end. Let all be forgotten and forgiven between us, and to-night will I feast with you in your castle of Viana."

So the peers and knights on both sides met in peace and goodwill at that banquet; and Roland sat with Oliver on his left hand and the fair Aude on his right. And in days to come, when Roland had fought and vanquished a great giant of the pagan Moors, he claimed the hand of fair Aude in marriage. But before the wedding came that sad and terrible day at Roncevalles, when Roland so bravely laid down his life for the cause of Christendom.

But of that we shall read in the next story.

THE FOURTH STORY
THE STORY OF THE DEATH OF
ROLAND

(From *Le Chanson de Roland*)

CHAPTER I
THE MESSAGE OF MARSILIUS

SEVEN long years had Charlemagne the King fought against the heathen host of the Moors in Spain, until he had conquered all the land down to the seashore itself. One fortress only withstood him yet, and that was Saragossa, which, perched upon a rocky mountain-top, defied all efforts to subdue it. And within the fortress of Saragossa lived Marsilius, the Moorish King, who feared neither God nor man save only Charlemagne.

Within the walls of the city sat Marsilius under an olive tree and held council with his nobles and his warriors. "What shall we do?" said he. "For seven long years has Charlemagne fought within our borders and has won to himself all our land save only Saragossa. And now he will come to take that also from us, and we are no match for his warriors when he comes. What, then, shall we do to save ourselves and our land?"

Then rose up the wise counsellor Blancandrin and said, "One thing is clear. Too long already has Charlemagne been in the land of Spain, and now 'tis high time that he be got rid of. Now, since we are too few to drive him forth, we must have recourse to strategy. 'Tis easy to make promises, and none here is bound by them in after days. Let us therefore

choose out an embassy, and let them go to Charlemagne and speak to him after this fashion: 'Marsilius sendeth humble greeting to the great Charles. Likewise he owns thy power, and sees that it is of no avail to strive longer against thee. He would therefore make a covenant with thee. If thou wilt depart in peace from this land, Marsilius will be baptized and all his host, and will pay thee homage and hold the country henceforth, or such part as may please thee, as thy vassal.

"And thus shall the covenant be fulfilled. If thou wilt go to thy castle at Aachen and keep there the feast of Michaelmas, thy vassal Marsilius will journey thither and will bring with him the tribute. Many dogs and lions will he bring, with seven hundred camels and a thousand falcons; he will also bring four hundred harness mules and fifty chariots full of gold and silver.'

"Thus shall the ambassadors say to Charlemagne, and he, being simple of heart, will hear them readily, and so will depart from the land."

He finished speaking, and Marsilius, pulling his white beard doubtfully, replied, "Mayhap this Charlemagne is not so simple as to trust so easily the word of a Moor. Suppose he demand hostages?"

"Let him have them!" cried Blancandrin. "Let him have ten or twenty of our sons. He is welcome to mine at any rate. What matters so long as our land is rid of him? For he will go with all his host to Aachen, and when the feast is held and we do not appear, he will slay the boys in his wrath at finding he has been tricked. But what matters that? Better that our sons should die than that our land be lost for ever."

Then all the council arose and cried, "Blancandrin has spoken well. Let this now be done."

So Blancandrin and nine others of the Moorish peers went forth on ten white mules, whose bridles were of gold and their saddles trimmed with silver; and they

held olive branches in their hands in token of peace and good fellowship. Thus equipped they set out for Cordova, which city Charlemagne had just taken, and before which he now held high festival.

Beneath a pine tree twined about with brier-rose sat Charlemagne upon a golden chair, inlaid with ivory. Very white and long was his beard, his face was bronzed, and his eyes bright and blue; and though his years were many, his back was not bowed nor his great strength brought low.

Scattered upon the green lawn on which he sat were some of the noblest of the peers of France; and nearest to himself stood Roland, his nephew, and captain of his host. Not far off lay Oliver, the friend of Roland, and Geoffrey of Anjou, the King's standard-bearer, stretched upon the white cloth which was spread upon the grass; others were tilting with each other upon the green; while the elder knights gathered round the tables where some of their number were playing at chess.

Into the midst of this noble company came the Moorish ambassadors and bowed themselves low before the King; and when he had given permission to speak, Blancandrin spoke these words—

“God save the glorious King Charlemagne, the ruler of the earth. My master Marsilius sends me to thee to beg that thou wilt make peace with him, for he can withstand thee no longer. If thou wilt get thee to Aachen, thy royal city, Marsilius will follow thee there to keep the feast of S. Michael with thee; for he will seek baptism there, with all his host, and will worship from henceforth the God of the Christians. Gifts will he bring of bears and lions, hounds and camels, falcons and jewels, and chariots full of gold and silver. And he will pledge his word to be thy man henceforth and to hold Spain under thy command, yea, all that he hath he will hold of thee. Thy servant hath spoken it.”

Now after these words were said a great silence fell;

for Charlemagne spoke never in haste, nor changed his mind when he had once spoken. At length he raised his great white head, saying, "How shall I know that King Marsilius will keep his word, seeing that he is mine enemy?"

And the messenger replied, "O King, he offers thee hostages of good faith, ten or twenty children of our noblest chieftains. But he prays you to treat them well, seeing that at the feast of S. Michael he will surely come to Aachen to redeem them, pay his tribute, and receive baptism."

Then the Emperor Charlemagne arose and gave orders that good lodging be given to the Moors for the night; and when the morning came he sent them away, promising that he would consider well the words of Marsilius and let him know his decision ere long.

So, after their departure, he called a great council to consider the matter. Thither came Count Roland, and Oliver his friend, with Archbishop Turpin, Olger the Dane, and many another noble lord. With them also came Ganelon the traitor, who hated Roland his stepson and was ever on the look out to work him evil.

Now when the King had showed them all the words of Marsilius and had asked their advice, the Franks replied at once, "Beware of Marsilius, O King."

Then Roland spake, saying, "Trust him not, sire, however fair his words may be. Remember how he slew Count Basant and Count Basil, whom we sent to him beforetime upon a peaceful errand. Rather let us summon the host and march upon Saragossa with all our might, that we may conquer the last of the Moorish strongholds and so win Spain outright."

But Ganelon the traitor stood behind the King's shoulder and murmured in his ear, "Heed not the words of this young babbler. Consider rather how Marsilius offers you his all—his faith, his goods, his service. What honour will you gain by waging war

upon a fallen man? This Roland is puffed up with pride and thinks of naught but to gain renown upon the battlefield ; and to do this he will risk all our lives."

Then Duke Naymes, a good and valiant baron, hearing his words, spake out and said, "Ganelon has spoken wise words, though he needeth not to lay blame upon our good Count Roland. But what glory indeed is there in fighting a vanquished foe? We cannot trample on him who lies grovelling at our feet. Let us make peace, therefore, and end the long and weary war."

All the Franks answered and said, "His words are good."

"Who then," said Charlemagne, "shall go up to King Marsilius at Saragossa, to bear my glove and staff and make agreement with him?"

"I will go," cried Duke Naymes at once ; but the Emperor answered, "Nay, for thou art my wisest counsellor, therefore I cannot spare thee."

"Send me, I pray thee," urged Count Roland, kneeling on one knee before the King ; but before he could reply, Count Oliver, his friend and best-beloved, cried, "Roland to go upon a peaceful errand ! Why, with thy hot blood and impatient tongue, thou wouldst spoil any hope of peace. Let the King send me."

But Charlemagne waved them both aside, saying, "Peace ! Neither of you shall go."

Then arose Archbishop Turpin, full of zeal, saying, "I am very eager to see this heathen host and to baptize them with their King ; therefore let me be the one to go."

But the Emperor answered, "Not so fast, good Turpin ; let them first make peace with me and then shall they be baptized. Now, noble Franks, look around you, and choose me a worthy man to make agreement with Marsilius."

Then Roland answered, "Send Ganelon, my step-

father"; and the Franks acclaimed him, saying, "Yes, Ganelon is the man, for there is none more cunning in speech than he."

When Ganelon heard their words his heart within him turned to water, for he remembered too well the fate of those who had before that time gone as messengers to Marsilius. But chiefly was his anger kindled against Roland, his stepson, so that all who were present saw it, and in his wrath he stood up against him, saying bitterly, "Wouldst thou thus openly show thy malice against me? Thou art a fool to do so, though we know that there is little love between us. But wait thou until I return again, and if I live I will repay thee for this."

To which Roland answered with a laugh, "No malice was there in my words, as all these men know well. 'Tis an honourable task that lies before thee, and one that needs a skilful man and wise of speech. Thou shouldst be proud indeed if the King selects thee for it."

"I go not at *thy* bidding," cried the angry Ganelon, "for thou hast never gone or come at mine. Thou art not my son, nor am I thy father; but if Charlemagne command me, I will do his service. Yet the day shall come when thou shalt repent of thy words."

And again Roland laughed aloud, and many of the peers laughed too.

Then Ganelon, though black with inward rage, bowed himself before the Emperor, saying smoothly, "Sire, ready am I to go up to Saragossa, although no messenger has ever returned from Marsilius alive. One thing I would crave in return, and that is that thou wouldst care for my young son Baldwin; see to it that he inherits my land and honours, and train him among thy knights when I return no more."

But Charlemagne replied, "Ganelon, be not so faint-hearted; look not on the dark side, but take my staff

and glove and do my bidding, since the Franks have chosen thee."

"No choice of the Franks is this," cried Ganelon, "'tis Roland's doing. All my life have I hated him and his companion Oliver; and as for the champion peers of France, in whose eyes Roland can do no wrong, I defy them to their faces."

"Thy humour is ill indeed, Count Ganelon," replied Charlemagne, smiling; "and if thou wert as valiant with thy sword as with thy tongue the peers of France might tremble. But, behold, they laugh. Take no heed of them, however, for in this matter thy tongue may do us better service than their swords."

Then the King drew the glove from his right hand and held it out to him; but Ganelon, discomposed and wrathful, missed it so that it fell upon the ground. Then all the Franks muttered low to each other, saying, "This is an ill omen, indeed." But Ganelon hastened to pick it up, saying, "Fear not; ye shall hear more of it anon." Then the King gave to him a letter, signed and sealed, and delivered to him the staff, saying, "Depart in the name of God and in mine own."

CHAPTER II

GANELON THE TRAITOR

WHEN Ganelon had ridden some miles along the countryside he perceived in front of him the messengers of Marsilius, who had made their journey slowly, and were now halted beneath an olive tree to rest themselves.

To them Ganelon quickly rode and joined himself to their party. They talked to him of Charlemagne and of his many conquests and of the grandeur of his court; but he spoke bitterly to them of Roland and of

his eagerness for battle, and of how he was fiercest against the Moors of all the King's peers.

So, when they rode on again, Blancandrin drew Ganelon aside from the rest, and talked warily to him, saying, "Thinkest thou we shall have peace?"

And Ganelon answered, "He that asks for peace often seeks occasion for war."

To which Blancandrin replied, "And he who bears the message of peace to his master's enemies often desires to be avenged on his own."

Thus each of these two knew the other to be a rogue, and so they made friends together and opened their hearts and spoke freely, laying their wicked plans.

Now when they came to Saragossa, Blancandrin led Ganelon into the presence of King Marsilius, saying, "We have borne thy message, O King, to the haughty Charles, but he deigned to answer us never a word. He has, however, sent to us the noble Count Ganelon, from whose lips we shall hear whether we shall have peace or no."

Then the wily Ganelon, instead of giving the letter of Charlemagne, said thus: "God save King Marsilius. The mighty Charlemagne sends to thee these words by me, his messenger: 'If thou wilt become a Christian forthwith, I will give thee the half of Spain to hold from me as my vassal, and thou shalt pay me tribute and be my servant. If not I will come upon thee like a whirlwind and will take thy land by force and bring thee to Aachen, to my court, and there thou shalt be put to death.'"

Now when the King heard these words his countenance darkened, and he snatched up a spear as though to cast it at the messenger; but Ganelon bowed his head and said again, "Great King, I was bound to deliver my message—let now the messenger die if it so please thee. Yet what shall it profit thee to kill me? Will that bring a softer message? And will not Charles

be avenged of my blood? Read now, I pray thee, his written words."

With that he handed to Marsilius a parchment that he had prepared exactly like that which Charlemagne had given him; and the King broke the seal and read aloud the letter.

"I, Charles the King, remember how thou slewest Basant my messenger and his brother Basil; therefore, before I will make peace, I order thee to send me thine uncle the Caliph, thy chief minister, that I may do with him as I will."

Then was the King's son so enraged that he drew his scimitar and rushed upon Ganelon, saying, "It is not meet that the bearer of such words should live."

Hard would it have gone with Ganelon, then, had not Blancandrin, who had waited but for this moment, cried out, "Do the Frank no harm, my lord, for he has pledged himself to be on our side and to work for our profit only," and with these words he took Ganelon by the hand and brought him before the King.

Then the King spoke kindly to him, saying, "I was wrong to be wroth with thee, O Ganelon; and now will I give thee five hundred gold pieces to make amends."

And Ganelon replied, "He that looketh not to his own profit is but a fool, O King; nor would I now be so ungrateful as to refuse thy bounty."

So they began to talk together, and Marsilius said, "Charles is now a very old man; many are the years he has passed in conquest, and great are the honours and riches he has gained. Is he not yet weary of war, nor satisfied with what he has got?"

"Charles is indeed weary of war," answered Ganelon smoothly, "but Roland, his captain, is a covetous and greedy man, and he, with the twelve peers of France, in whose eyes he can do no wrong, are for ever stirring up the King to war. And these do whatever they will with the King, though he is feeble and weary, and would

rather rest. If these men were slain the world would have peace. But they are mighty warriors, and have with them twenty thousand men, the flower of the French host, and who can prevail against them in the open field?"

"Yet I," said Marsilius, "have four hundred thousand warriors, the best that ever were seen; would not they be sufficient?"

"No, indeed," said Ganelon; "it were folly to think so. A wiser plan would be mine. Send back with me the hostages to Charles, so that he will gather his host and depart from Spain, and go to Aachen to await thy coming. But since they are many he will leave his rear-guard of twenty thousand, led by Roland and Oliver and the twelve peers, to follow later. Upon these, since they suspect no danger, thy warriors must fall, so that not one of them escapes. When these are once destroyed thou mayest make thine own terms of peace, for the power of Charles will be broken and he will fight no more. Now this rear-guard will march by the pass through the narrow valley of Roncesvalles; see, therefore, that thou surround the valley with thy host and take them by stratagem; then, though they will sell their lives dearly, they cannot escape."

Thus did Ganelon the traitor do treason against Charlemagne his lord, and received from Marsilius much treasure of gold and precious stones. Also Marsilius handed to him the keys of the city of Saragossa, promising that he should rule over it after these things had come to pass, and that he would also give him ten mules' burden of fine gold of Arabia. Thereupon Ganelon departed from him in great goodwill, and the twenty hostages journeyed with him to Charlemagne.

Now when Ganelon came into the presence of the great King, he reported well of his mission, saying that Marsilius was ready to do all that he had promised,

and had even now set out upon his journey to Aachen to do homage and to pay tribute and to be baptized. And at that Charlemagne raised his hands to heaven and thanked God from his inmost heart for so blessed an ending to the war in Spain.

That same night, after the King had lain down to sleep, he dreamed a strange dream. He thought he stood in the pass of Roncesvalles with no weapon in his hand save an ash spear; and this spear Count Ganelon snatched from his hand as he passed by, and broke into a hundred splinters. And he awoke and knew it was a dream.

Then he slept again, and dreamed that he was in his royal city of Aachen, where a viper came and fastened on his hand; and while he was trying in vain to shake it off a leopard sprang upon him and would have torn him in pieces, had not his favourite hound leapt upon the beast and torn off his ear. Then an awful fight began between the dog and the leopard, but which of the two was getting the best of it he could not tell. He tossed and tossed upon the bed in the horror of it, and suddenly awoke to find the sun was shining, and knew it was a dream.

So Charlemagne arose and gathered his host together to march to Aachen and to keep the feast there. And he made Olger the Dane his captain of the vanguard, to go with him in the forefront of the host; and to Ganelon he said, "Whom shall I make captain of the rear-guard which I leave behind?"

And Ganelon answered smoothly, "Roland thy nephew; for there is none like him in all the host."

When Roland heard that he rejoiced, and said unto the King, "Give me now the bow that is in thy hand; I will not let it fall as Ganelon did thy glove." So he was left captain of the rear-guard, and with him remained behind Oliver, his dear companion, and the twelve peers, and Turpin the Archbishop, and twenty thousand

warriors. And Charlemagne said to Roland, "Good nephew, I have left half of my army in charge of thee. See thou keep them safe."

"Fear nothing, sire," replied Roland, "I will render good account of them to thee."

So they embraced each other, and the King departed with his face set to the borders of Spain. Many a gloomy valley and dangerous mountain path had to be traversed before his men beheld their own lands again, and even the heart of Charles grew heavy with forebodings as he thought of his evil dreams. Again and again, too, he spoke to Duke Naymes of his fears that Ganelon had wrought some treason to him, and that ill-fortune was at hand.

CHAPTER III

THE PASS OF RONCESVALLES

NOW Marsilius had sent to gather all his chieftains and their men, and had assembled them to the number of four hundred thousand in the valley of Roncesvalles; and some of the most valiant of the Moorish barons bound themselves by an oath to attack Roland in a body, and to fight with none other until he was slain.

Meantime the rear-guard of Charlemagne's army had climbed the steep mountain-side, and looked down upon the valley below, through which they had to pass; they saw that it was as full of spears as the fields are of grass, and the murmur of the Moorish host was like the roar of the sea upon the shore. Then Roland looked on Oliver and said, "This is the work of Ganelon the traitor."

And Oliver said, "What then shall we do? For the number of the Moors is greater than we have ever

faced before, even with the whole host; and we are but a small portion thereof. And their intention is to give battle."

"God grant they may!" cried Roland. "Let us but do our duty. We will rest for a while and then we will go forward."

"Be wise, my friend," replied Oliver, "for we are far outnumbered by them. Take then your horn, the horn that Charlemagne gave to you, and sound it; it may be that he will hear and return with his host to our aid."

But Roland answered, "The fewer we are the more glory shall we gain. God forbid that I should sound my horn and bring Charles back with his barons, and lose my good name and bring dishonour on us all. Fear not what may befall us, for these pagans are as good as dead already."

Then Oliver climbed up into a great pine tree and saw how vast was the multitude that came up against them, and again he prayed Roland to sound his horn, or at least to come up and see the numbers for himself. But still he would not, saying that it would be time enough to count them when they were slain. So he bade his men make ready for battle.

Then the good Archbishop Turpin mounted his horse and rode before the soldiers, saying to them, "Charles has left us here to do our duty, and truly 'tis a fine thing to die for the kingdom and our holy faith. Remember too that if you die you shall wear the martyr's crown and be rewarded in Paradise, where we shall all meet. Kneel then and confess your sins, that God may have mercy on your souls."

Then all the Franks knelt as one man upon the ground and confessed their sins; and the Archbishop blessed them and bade them rise, and for their penance go strike the pagan to the ground.

To and fro in the front of the host rode their leader

Roland upon his good horse Veillantif, and by his side hung his tried sword Durandal.

He gazed upon the Moorish host and his face grew hard and stern, and then upon his own warriors and his face was kind and gentle.

“Good comrades,” said he, “gentle and simple, let no man grudge his life to-day, but only let him sell it dear. I have promised my lord Charlemagne to render good account of you, and of that have I no fear, for what I cannot say, the battlefield will say for us.”

And they looked on him and loved him unto death, and were willing to follow wherever he would lead them.

Then “Forward!” he cried, and touching the side of Veillantif with his golden spur, rode down the mountain-side into the valley of Roncesvalles, while Oliver, Archbishop Turpin, and the twelve peers of France pressed close behind.

Fierce indeed was that fight, for the spear of Roland alone pierced through the bodies of fifteen men, before it brake to pieces in his hand and he was forced to draw Durandal from its sheath. With equal valour fought the twelve; nor did any man of that twenty thousand count his own life dear to him. The Archbishop, spurring his way into the thickest fight, cried, “Thank God to see how the rear-guard fight!” and Oliver, found fighting with the handle of his broken spear, shouted when Roland bade him draw his sword, “Not while a handful of the stump remains, for weapons to-day are precious.”

At length full two hundred thousand of the foe lay dead, not to speak of those who had sworn to fight with none but Roland, all of whom lay round him in a ring, stone-dead. But though not a Frank gave way before the foe, many thousands of them now were slain, and of the valiant twelve, two only remained.

Suddenly as Marsilius, panic-stricken, saw his host begin to fall back before the onslaught of the Franks,

he heard the loud blast of trumpets close at hand. And behold! twenty strong regiments of Saracens had come to his aid and were pouring down from the mountain-side upon the Franks.

When they saw this the Moorish host recovered itself and closed fast round the dwindling band of Franks. Yet still Roland and his comrades fought so bravely, hurling back the foe with grim jest as though it were but sport to them, that the foemen stood in great fear of them and knew not what to think. But meantime the Franks were falling fast around their leader. The twelve were dead and all the flower of the host, and very few were left when Roland at length said to Oliver, "Comrade, now will I sound my horn, if by chance Charles may hear and come to us."

But Oliver was angry with his beloved friend, and said, "'Tis now too late. Hadst thou but heeded my words the women should not have lost their husbands, Charles his valiant rear-guard, nor France her Roland."

"Talk not of might-have-beens," cried Archbishop Turpin, "but sound thy horn at once. Charles cannot save our lives now, but he can and will avenge them."

So Roland put his horn to his mouth and blew a mighty blast. From hill to hill it echoed and from rock to rock, until Charles heard the faint sound full thirty leagues away, and started up within his hall and said, "What is that I hear? Surely our men do fight to-day!"

But Ganelon made answer, "How can this thing be? 'Tis only the sighing of the wind among the pine trees."

And even as he spake the battle was raging fiercer round Count Roland, and he himself was wounded very sorely in the head, so that the blood poured forth from his temples.

Weary with the fight, he withdrew himself for a moment from the press and took his horn and blew with all his strength a very long and mighty blast

And when he heard the echoes far away beyond the mountains, Charles leapt from his chair and cried, "Hark! 'tis the horn of Roland. He is in battle or he would never sound it."

But Ganelon replied, "He is too proud to sound it in battle; perchance he is hunting in the woods. A pretty jest it would be if Charlemagne were to gather his host and take the warpath, to find Roland at the sport, hunting a little hare!"

Meantime the fight waxed closer yet, and now nearly all save Roland were slain. And when he found the blood running fast down his face and his strength all but gone, the Count lifted his horn once more to his mouth and blew a feeble blast. Far away in his palace Charles heard the dim wail, and started up and cried with bitter tears, "O my brave Roland, too long have I delayed to succour thee. By the wailing sound I know that thou art in sore peril. To arms! to arms! For straightway we will go to help him."

But when Ganelon would have spoken again, he thrust him away and ordered him to be bound fast in chains until he returned in peace. So they threw Ganelon into prison, and Charlemagne and his host set out with what speed they might to the succour of Roland.

Far away in the valley of Roncesvalles the tiny company that was all that was left of the rear-guard still fought desperately till one by one they fell beneath a pile of the slain foemen. In one part of the field Roland espied Oliver fighting one to seven, and even at that moment he was struck a mortal wound in the back. Yet even in his last moments, when his eyes were dim with death, Oliver did not cease to wield his sword and shout his war-cry with failing breath. Then Roland hastened to his help, and cutting down the Moors for a wide space around him, came to lift his comrade from his horse, saying tenderly, "Dear friend, I fear thou art in evil case."

And Oliver replied, "Thy voice is like the voice of Roland, but I cannot see thy face."

"'Tis I, thy comrade," cried Roland.

And he answered, "God bless thee, friend; God bless Charles and France!" And with these words he fell upon his face and died.

Then was Roland heavy of heart, and little cared he for life now that Oliver was dead. He stood and looked around him for the rest, and behold! only two were left beside himself. So those three, Turpin the Archbishop and Count Walter and Count Roland, determined to sell their lives dear; and when the pagan warriors rushed upon them, Roland slew twenty, Count Walter six, and Turpin five. Then all the remnant of the pagan army, forty thousand strong, charged down upon the three. Count Walter fell at the first onset; the Archbishop was brought from his horse, and brought wounded to death upon the ground; yet had Roland never a scratch upon his body in all that fight, though the blood poured again from the temples of his head.

Then once again he took his horn and tried to sound it. Very feebly it echoed among the hills, but Charlemagne heard it on his rapid march and cried, "Good barons, Roland is in sore distress; I know it by the sighing of the horn. Spare not spur nor steed, I pray you, for Roland's sake."

Then he gave word to sound the clarions loud and clear; and the echoes rolled among the mountains and were plainly heard in the valley of Roncesvalles.

Great was the panic of the pagan host when they heard that sound. "'Tis the army of Charlemagne," they cried. "Lo, he comes upon us and we shall have to fight this battle all over again. Let us depart quickly before he appear, for there is but one man more to slay."

So four hundred of their picked men rode at Count Roland; yet they feared to go too nigh, for they said, "There is no man who can slay this warrior." But each

of them flung his spear, and his good horse Veillantif, stricken in twenty places, dropped dead beneath him. Under him fell Roland, and lay stunned by the fall ; but though his armour was riddled with spear-holes, yet had he never a scratch upon him. But the pagans came and looked at him, and giving him up for dead, made all haste out of that valley before the advancing host of Charlemagne, and fled away to Spain.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEATH OF ROLAND

NOW at length, when all the pagan host had vanished among the mountains, Roland came to himself and found that he was left alone among the dead. Scarce could he drag himself to his feet for the anguish of the wound in his head, but he looked around upon that dreadful field and said, "The rear-guard will give in its own account to Charles when he comes."

He came to the place where Oliver lay, and took him gently in his arms and made lament over him, saying, "Dear comrade, thou wast ever a kindly friend to me, and I repent me that once and once only I listened not to thy wise counsel. And now, God rest thy soul, for no man ever had truer comrade than thou."

As he spoke thus, he heard a faint voice near by, and turning saw the brave old Archbishop Turpin dying on the ground ; and in the midst of his great suffering he raised his shaking hands and blessed the dead who lay around him in the name of God. And to Roland he cried, "Dear son, thank God the field is ours this day !" and with that he clasped his hands in prayer and died.

Now Roland knew that his own end was near, so he crept away to a green mound on which were four marble steps and lay down on the lowest of them, with his horn

in one hand and Durandal, his good sword, in the other. And as he lay there fainting in his pain, a certain thievish Moor came by, thinking to plunder the dead; who, seeing the glitter of the jewelled hilt of Durandal, put out his hand and tried to draw it from the sheath. Just as he did so Roland opened his eyes, and seeing the thief bending over him with the sword in his hand, raised his horn and dealt the fellow such a blow that he fell, and never moved again.

Then he took Durandal in his own hands, praying that it might never fall into those of his enemies, and he caressed the good blade, saying, "O Durandal, how keen of edge thou art! How many lands hast thou conquered for Charles since first he girt thee at my side! And now, though it grieves me sore, I would rather break thee to atoms than that pagan hands should turn thee against France."

Then, exerting all his remaining strength, Roland smote the blade, point downwards, upon the marble step. The hard stone splintered, but the blade remained unhurt—not even its edge was turned. He smote the second step, but though the blade cut through the stone, it was neither blunted nor broken. Then he struck the third step with all his might, so that the stone fell to powder, but the blade rebounded, quite unhurt. And Roland repented that he had tried to break the blade and said, "O Durandal, I am to blame, for God will keep thee safe for Charles and for France."

So having laid his sword and horn beneath him, Roland fell back under the shade of a pine tree and turned his face towards Spain, that men might know he died a conqueror. Many things he remembered in that last hour, and much he thought of Charlemagne, his hero and his lord, who had brought him up from infancy. "He will see that I have rendered good account," he murmured as he looked around at the heaps of slain. He thought of his beloved France, the land he held so

dear, and his heart grew very tender. Then lifted he his hands to heaven and closed his eyes; his soul departed from his weary body and so he died.

Fast and faster still rode the host of Charlemagne as the mist came down and the night began to fall. Again and again his clarions sounded from peak to peak, but there came no answering call. Down through the gloom they rode, and saw the silent field and the quiet dead; and all those who saw it lifted up their voices and wept.

But when the Emperor found the body of Roland, his well-beloved, whom he had nourished from a babe, his heart was wellnigh broken, and he sat upon the ground beside him and wept very bitterly. And even while he mourned came Duke Naymes to him, saying, "As I came down the pass I saw a cloud of dust rising from the other side of the mountains. Methinks it was the pagan host fleeing to Saragossa."

Then Charlemagne immediately arose, and having left four knights in Roncesvalles to guard the dead, he set out after the foemen.

Hard and fast rode the host, and came upon the Moors in a field, where they were hemmed in by a wide river on one side and the Franks on the other. And there Charlemagne cut the pagan army to pieces; none escaped save only Marsilius and a few of his followers, who had gone by a different way into Saragossa. Nor did he escape for long; for after Charles had returned to Roncesvalles to bury his dead, he returned to Saragossa and slew King Marsilius, and broke down the gates of the city and took possession of all Spain.

Thus was the death of Roland in the valley of Roncesvalles avenged. As for the traitor Ganelon, he was torn to pieces by wild horses, for that he had done the deadliest sin of all, and had betrayed his master's host and the fair land of France into the hands of the enemy.

THE FIFTH STORY
THE STORY OF WILLIAM AND
THE WERWOLF

(From the French of *William of Palerme*)

CHAPTER I

HOW WILLIAM WAS CARRIED OFF

THERE once lived in the land of Apulia a certain king whose name was Embrons, and whose wife was the daughter of the Emperor of Greece. At the time this story begins they had one son, a little lad of four years old, whose name was William. He was a very beautiful child in those days, and dearly loved by his father and mother. And in order that he might be well looked after in every way, he was put into the charge of two ladies of the Court, who seemed to be everything that his parents could desire.

Now King Embrons had a very wicked brother, who had a strong desire to reign in his stead. To that end he made a plot to poison both the King and his son; and this plot he set on foot by persuading the two ladies who were his attendants to put an end to the little Prince.

One day the King, the Queen, and their little son William, as they were making a stay at the town of Palermo, happened to enter a beautiful orchard, surrounded by a high wall. But, although they had no idea of it, this place was infested with dangerous wild beasts.

The child William had begun to gather flowers, and was sporting about from path to path, when, before the

very eyes of the parents, a huge wolf leapt in at the open gate, plunged through the bushes, and as they, horror-stricken, ran aside to avoid it, snatched up the child in his mouth and noiselessly made off.

A terrible cry arose from the Queen as she saw her darling disappear. The King, half mad with grief, sent for horses, and galloped off in the direction the wolf had taken, and was quickly followed by almost all the inhabitants of the town.

Harder and harder rode the King, but the wolf, with his great leaps and bounds, travelled faster still, and though he often heard the wails of the terrified boy, the King could not overtake him.

At length they approached the Straits of Messina, and caught sight of the wolf standing at the brink of the water.

There they made sure they would seize him, but, to their dismay, the creature leapt into the water and soon was lost to sight.

Very sad and sorrowful was King Embrons as he returned to Palermo city, which was filled with lamentation and woe for the loss of the Prince. The Queen mourned for him all day long, saying, "Little son, sweet love, tender lips, rosy colour, who would believe that beast could drown you? Where are now thy beautiful eyes, so innocent and clear, thy fair forehead, thy hair like fine-drawn gold? What is become of thee? Now art thou food for that horrible wolf."

Meantime the wolf had carried the child in his mouth both by day and by night without a pause, until he reached a great forest in the neighbourhood of Rome. There, being by this time very weary, he rested for eight days, providing the boy the while with everything he could possibly need for his comfort. First he made a den, hidden away among thick green bushes, and lined it with grass and ferns. Then each day he brought him food, bread and meat, from some

mysterious source, and all night long he lay close beside him, so that the child could nestle against his shaggy coat and be kept quite warm. By this time William had quite laid aside all his terror of the gentle creature, and was well pleased to be carried about and tended by him.

Then one day the wolf set off to seek for food, leaving the boy safe and happy in his shady den.

Now there lived in the forest an old cowherd, who, on that selfsame day, happened to sit down near the wolf's den, in order to mend his shoe. Meantime the little boy within had grown weary of being left alone, and looking out, he saw bushes and trees so green and fair in the May sunshine and heard birds singing so lustily, that he crept out and began to play and to gather flowers.

But the cowherd's dog quickly spied him and began to bark and leap up at him. At this William, screaming with fright, ran back to the den; but the cowherd had heard the noise of the child, and following the dog, came to the opening of the place; and inside, as he peeped, he saw a beautiful little boy richly dressed in cloth of gold.

Greatly wondering at this, the cowherd rebuked the dog for his noise and tried to persuade the little one to come out. He offered him flowers and apples and all such things as children love, and at length William crept out of the cave and ran up to him. Then the cowherd took him in his arm, kissed him and thanked God that he had found so beautiful a treasure, and carried him home to his wife.

"What is your name, pretty one?" he asked; and the child replied, "I am called William."

Now the cowherd and his wife had no children, which grieved them very much, so that they gladly received the boy, and determined to adopt him for their own.

Meantime the wolf returned to the den, carrying

food for the child; but when he entered he found it empty as a last year's nest. Overcome with grief, he howled aloud, rent his skin, and fell down in a kind of fit.

When he recovered he began to examine the ground very carefully until he found the track of the cowherd, and following it up, soon came to a small cottage.

Creeping up to the tiny window, he looked through and saw the cowherd's wife sitting with the child on her lap, bathing him and giving him sweet milk for his supper. When he saw this and knew how well they were caring for the child, the wolf turned aside and went upon his lonely way.

Now this animal, as you may have guessed, was no ordinary one, but was indeed a "werwolf," that is to say, a man changed into a beast.

He was the son of the King of Spain, and his real name was Prince Alphonso. When his mother died, his father, the King, had married a lady named Braunde, a princess indeed, but also a witch.

Now Braunde was jealous of the beauty and goodness of Prince Alphonso, and fearing that her own child would never be king, she plotted to work harm to her stepson. So she made a very powerful ointment, and with this she anointed him one day, with the result that he became a werwolf. Yet his heart remained that of a man, tender and kind, so that he suffered all the more. At first he tried to spring on Braunde and kill her, that she might do no similar injury to his father; but she cried to the servants to help her against a fierce beast. At that the werwolf fled away to the land of Apulia, and Braunde told his father that Alphonso had been drowned by accident as he was bathing.

CHAPTER II

THE ADVENTURE OF THE TWO WHITE BEARS

THE wife of the cowherd treated William with the greatest kindness, so that he grew up happy and healthy as a child should be. He learnt to shoot well, to bring home plenty of rabbits and hares for supper, and to know the ways of all animals in sickness and in health. Sports, too, he had in plenty with the children of neighbouring cowherds, and his generous spirit soon made him a great favourite with all.

Now one day the Emperor of Rome was hunting a great boar in that forest, and it so happened that he lost his way and went riding along looking for some one to direct him. Suddenly he saw in front of him a werwolf chasing a deer, and so rode hard after them, hoping to kill one or both. But the animals disappeared in the undergrowth, and in their place he saw in the pathway a very noble-looking boy, so fair to look upon that the Emperor said to himself, "Surely this child has come from fairyland!"

Pulling up his horse, he asked the boy his name, and who were his kith and kin. And William, for he it was, replied that he knew not who they were, but that he lived with a cowherd and his wife, whom he dearly loved.

Then the Emperor sent for the cowherd, who came in fear, knowing what the end might be.

"Is the child yours?" asked the Emperor; and so the old man told him the whole story, saying that none knew from whence he came.

"Then the boy shall go with me," said the Emperor.

Deeply grieved was the cowherd at these words, but he dared not refuse, though he cared little for the Emperor's promise to reward him, when he thought of

losing the child. Calling William aside, he bade him farewell, and gave him three pieces of advice.

First, to be no teller of tales.

Second, to always take the part of a poor man.

Third, to be always faithful and fair of speech.

Then he set William upon the Emperor's horse, so that the boy in his pleasure at riding so high forgot to grieve at parting from him.

So the Emperor rode away with William, and the cowherd returned with the news to his wife, who wept and would not be comforted because she had lost the child.

The Emperor of Rome had one fair daughter named Melior, to whom he brought young William, saying, "Here is a rich present I found for thee in the forest!" Then they took the boy and dressed him in beautiful clothes, and he became Melior's squire. As he grew older and came to man's estate, he so far excelled the rest of the youth of Rome in looks and manners, as well as in courage, that the young Princess fell very deeply in love with him and he with her. But knowing how angry the Emperor would be if his daughter married any one but a king, or at least a prince, they were forced to plight their troth to one another in secret.

In those days the Duke of Saxony made war on Rome, and in this war William fought so well that he was made a knight. Soon after he had conquered the Duke and taken him prisoner, an embassy appeared from Greece asking that a marriage might be arranged between Melior and the son of the Emperor of that land.

A great assembly was held, at which the two emperors met and talked about the matter, and agreed that the wedding should be held as soon as possible. But the Princess and William were filled with dismay when they heard what was proposed; and after much

thought they decided that the only thing to be done was to run away from the palace and to keep in hiding till all idea of the marriage was over. The great difficulty was how to get out of the city unseen.

With the help of Melior's waiting-maid they determined to disguise themselves as animals. There had been a great hunt that day, and the maid was able easily to procure the skins of two white bears, in which she sewed each of them up. That same evening, therefore, two grizzly bears were seen to pass into the belt of forest that lay near the palace; but no one guessed for a moment who they really were.

For many hours they wandered through this forest, until they were too tired to stand upright, and sank down exhausted with fatigue and want of food underneath a tree. Now, although they knew it not, the werwolf had watched and followed them all the way, and seeing their condition, he now galloped off to find food. Presently, on a highway near the forest, he came upon a man who carried some bread and some boiled beef in a bag. In a flash the werwolf sprang upon him, seized the bag and made off with it. Hurrying back to the two fugitives, he laid the bag before them, and disappeared before William could exclaim in astonishment at seeing him again.

Presently, as they were joyfully eating, he appeared before them again, dropped two flagons of wine at their feet, and ran away once more. In this way, by dint of carrying off food from travellers and bringing it to them, the werwolf kept Melior and William excellently fed. But still they had to be very careful. They slept generally in the daytime, and travelled by night, going on all fours that they might not betray the fact that they were human beings.

Meantime, when he heard of their escape, the anger of the Emperor knew no bounds. He sent men out in every direction to hunt for them, but they could nowhere

be found. Most of his men were glad this was so, for they could not endure to think that William, whom they all loved, should be in danger at the Emperor's hands. At length the latter, who feared that the Greeks would make war upon him because the marriage had not been accomplished, heard that two bears had been seen escaping from the garden on the very night that two skins were missing from the kitchen. Hounds were sent out at once to track them down; but as the animals got on their scent, the werwolf suddenly appeared before them in the way. Immediately they followed him, and were led by him a long distance in quite a different direction from that which the fugitives had taken. Then, having thrown them completely off the scent, the werwolf slipped away and returned to Melior and William.

He next made the lovers understand that they must now follow him as their guide. At first they had been terrified at his appearance, but his constant kindness in providing them with food had quite won their hearts, and they now trusted him completely. So he brought them into the land of Apulia, where, finding they were near an ancient city, they hid themselves in a quarry and slept there, while the werwolf kept guard.

When morning dawned, the Werwolf went off to find food; and during his absence, some workmen came to the quarry and found therein two white bears fast asleep. They at once remembered the hue and cry raised by the Emperor of Rome, and, without waking them, went off to the provost of the town and told him of their discovery.

The provost guessed directly who they were, and calling together a large band of men and horses, set off for the quarry, taking with him his little son to see the fray.

Meantime the fugitives had roused themselves, and looking towards the city, they saw a number of horsemen

riding in the direction of the quarry. Filled with alarm, they hurried away, but when he found that their shouting pursuers were gaining fast upon them, William begged Melior to show herself in her proper form, so that no harm might befall her. This, however, she refused to do, as she knew that William might be killed, and so she declared that she would die with him.

Just at that minute the werwolf appeared on the scene. With one bound he sprang upon the provost's horse, and snatching at the child who was in front of him, ran off with it in his mouth. At once the whole attention of the troop was turned upon the wolf, and all of the men followed the provost, who galloped hard after the animal, forgetting the very existence of the two white bears.

All day long the werwolf kept them in pursuit, sometimes appearing at the top of a hill, sometimes lost to sight on the other side. The screams of the boy spurred on the father still faster to his rescue, but not until they were many a long mile from the two disguised lovers did the wolf pause. Then he dropped the child gently on the ground where the horsemen would be sure to find him, and galloped off on a side-track to William and Melior.

They, meantime, had travelled fast and far from that dangerous region, and had taken off their bearskins to avoid discovery. At evening-time, when they were quite exhausted, the werwolf appeared before them carrying a bag of food in his mouth. He too was so worn out with fatigue, that he lay down near them under a tree and at once fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER III

THE ADVENTURE OF THE HART AND
THE HIND

THIS last adventure had ended in such a narrow escape for William and Melior that they began to consider what safer means of disguise they could contrive, now that most people knew the secret of the two white bears.

While they were thinking it over, the werwolf, who had gone away at daylight, appeared again before them, dragging behind him the body of a fresh-killed hart of very unusual size. As they stood wondering at it, he disappeared again, to return ere long with a large dead hind. Then, sitting back on his haunches, he gazed eagerly at them until at length they understood his plan. At once they skinned the creatures and sewed each other up in the skins, after which they went their way disguised as hart and hind.

The werwolf now became their guide over William's native country, though the latter little knew it at the time. At that period the land all lay waste because of the great war. For during the last few years Embrons, William's father, King of Apulia and Sicily, had died, and his wife, William's mother, ruled the land. Meantime William's only sister Florence, just three years younger than himself, had grown up to a fair maidenhood, and had been sought in marriage by the son of the King of Spain.

Now this young man was the werwolf's stepbrother. When he found that Florence would have nothing to say to him, the King of Spain invaded the country and besieged the Queen in the Sicilian town of Palermo.

Now the Queen was very sad, for she had neither husband nor son to advise and help her. So she asked

the invaders to grant her a truce of fourteen days, at the end of which time she promised to surrender the town on condition that she and her daughter might depart in safety. But in her own heart she hoped and trusted that before the end of the appointed time, help would come from her father the Emperor of Greece.

The King of Spain, however, refused to grant her conditions ; so she and the Princess Florence retired to their palace in great doubt and distress.

Meanwhile the werwolf had guided the hart and the hind to Reggio, where, in order to reach Sicily, they would be obliged to cross the Straits. They lay hidden till nightfall, but when all was dark they made their way down to the ships in the harbour, and there the werwolf, creeping quietly hither and thither, found one ready to sail, on board of which all the sailors were asleep.

Very quietly they crept on board and hid themselves behind casks of wine. Presently the wind began to rise, the sailors awoke and set sail, and the ship raced merrily over the waves. At dawn they were close to the shores of Sicily, and when he saw this, the werwolf sprang from his hiding-place, leapt across the deck, and disappeared over the side.

The sailors, greatly excited, seized their oars and struck at him ; one, indeed, hit him so hard that he sank to the bottom, but quickly recovering himself, he rose again to the surface and swam ashore.

The men immediately threw out a plank to the landing-place and ran after him, leaving only a bare-legged boy on board. Now all this had been carefully planned by the werwolf to distract the attention of the seamen from William and Melior, who now came up on deck. But the bare-legged boy was terrified to see a hart and a hind walking upright upon their hind-legs, and in his dismay he struck at Melior with an oar, so that she would have fallen overboard had not

William caught her in his arms and carried her ashore. Once there, they hastened to find a hiding-place, and as they hurried along, much disturbed in mind, they said one to the other, "May no harm have come to our beloved werwolf!"

Before long, however, the werwolf, safe and sound, was with them once again, but only in order to warn them of approaching danger. For the bare-legged boy had been so astounded to see the hart pick up the hind and run off with her, that he had told the sailors of his strange experience on their return, and so every one was on the look out for them. Therefore they left the neighbourhood in haste and followed the werwolf to Palermo, the very same place from which William, as a tiny boy, had been carried off by the werwolf.

It was in this city of Palermo, you will remember, that the mother and sister of William were being besieged by the King of Spain.

That night, and for several others, the hart and the hind lay hidden in a park close by the palace, and the werwolf brought them meat and drink.

The first night on which they there lay hidden, the Queen-mother of William had a curious dream. She thought she was walking in the park with her daughter, when she saw, fighting with one another, a hundred thousand leopards and bears. Then there came a werwolf and two white bears and attacked the leopards, but suddenly the white bears changed into a hart and a hind wearing golden crowns. By this time the leopards, being conquered, had fled away. Then, in her dream, she went up to a high turret in the palace, and stretched her right arm over Rome, her left over Spain.

When the Queen awoke, she sent for a wise man and asked him what might be the meaning of the dream. And after much thought the wise man answered and said, "There shall come a knight who shall be king of this realm; and a werwolf shall deliver the King

of Spain from a great danger. Through that same werewolf you shall hear of your long-lost son, who shall also govern Rome ; and your daughter shall be Queen of Spain."

These words gave the Queen much to think about, and as she sat gazing from her chamber window, deep in reflection, she caught a glimpse of a hart and a hind at the edge of the forest. To her great surprise, she saw the clothes of human beings peeping out through holes in their skin, for the sun, blazing fiercely upon them, had cracked their hides.

Much alarmed, the Queen again sent for the wise man, who had not yet left the palace, and asked him if he knew what this strange thing meant.

And the wise man, soothing her terror, told her that these were two runaway lovers, fled from Rome, and that it would be greatly to her advantage if she would bring them in secret to the palace.

To this the Queen at once agreed, and, sending to the kitchen for the skin of a newly killed hind, she dressed herself in it and crept down to the park. She was able to get quite near them before they noticed her among the deer always grazing in that spot ; and she heard William say how much he wished that the Queen knew that he was a knight of Rome, and that she would provide him with a horse and armour, that he might fight in her cause.

At this the Queen presented herself before them, saying she knew who they were, and implored William to help her in her distress, promising that if he would conquer her enemies he should be king and Melior queen.

Very gladly did William agree to do all in his power for her, though he little knew that she was his own mother ; and forthwith they followed her to the castle, where the Queen stripped off their hides and herself prepared fragrant baths and rich clothes for their use. When

they came forth into her bower much refreshed, the Queen was considering what device William should bear upon his shield. They consulted together, and William decided that it should be the figure of a werwolf.

Then the Queen gave orders that her husband's horse, upon which no man had ridden since his death, should be brought out for him into the courtyard. And thereupon a strange thing occurred; for the horse remembered William, whom everybody else had forgotten, and knelt down before him as he approached and stood at his side. And at this all the people wondered greatly.

CHAPTER IV

HOW THE DREAM OF THE QUEEN CAME TRUE

WHEN all was ready for the conflict with the King of Spain, William, dressed as a knight, rode at the head of the troops of Palermo, encouraging them with brave words; and he was the first to strike a blow.

Now the Spaniards who were against him were thirty thousand strong, and those who fought for the Queen of Palermo but few in number. Yet, encouraged by their leader, they fought most bravely, and before long the Spanish steward, a man of high rank and importance, fell before William's onslaught.

Still more fiercely raged the fight, and presently William found himself face to face with the nephew of the slain steward, in single combat. At length he too was overcome, for William struck him dead to the ground and sent his horse to Melior as a present. By this time the Spaniards had lost so many of their warriors that the rest of them turned and fled.

Then was there great rejoicing at the palace for a while. But while William and Melior were sitting at a window in the Queen's bower and resting after the conflict, there appeared the werwolf just outside, who held up his forefeet as if in prayer, bowed to William and then ran quickly away. The Queen, much surprised asked the reason of this strange thing, but all William could tell her was that to them it was a sign of good.

The sight of the werwolf recalled to the Queen the story of her little son, and with tears she told it to William and Melior, saying that she had been told that in the end the poor child had been drowned. This story reminded William that he himself had been found in a forest and that he had been brought thither in a mysterious fashion, but since the Queen was sure her son had been drowned, he would not recall her grief by talking about it, and only promised to be a son to her in his place.

The son of the King of Spain now vowed vengeance upon William for his defeat; and since he knew that the mishaps of Spain were entirely due to him, he declared that he would have the head of the man who bore the device of the werwolf on his shield, or take him alive as his prisoner.

Once more they met in single combat; but before long William had unhorsed the Prince and would have struck off his head had not the Spaniards rushed forward to his rescue. Then a deadly conflict followed in which William's troops began to retreat, but once more their leader managed to seize the Spanish Prince and to bring him into the town as captive. Then was there again great rejoicing in the palace, where all the ladies-in-waiting hastened to disarm the prisoner. But William hurried to join Melior and the Queen, and was in the act of embracing his wife when the Queen was struck of a sudden with his likeness to Embrons, her dead husband.

The remembrance made her weep, and her heart began to cry out that William was her son ; but he, not knowing what was in her mind, strove to cheer her with descriptions of the victory. And as they talked together, once again the werwolf came up to the window, knelt and bowed, and went his way.

Now when the King of Spain heard that his son was taken prisoner, he was filled with wrath ; and especially did his anger flame out when he knew that all was owing to the prowess of one knight, that one who bore a werwolf on his shield. Then he decreed : “ He shall be taken and hanged before the city gates, and the city shall be burnt.”

So the two armies were reassembled, and William addressed his troops in these words : “ To-day shall see the end of this warfare, for God will defend the right. My work shall be to take the King prisoner, as I have already done his son. See that you do your part.”

The King, on the other side, said, “ Where is he who bears the werwolf on his shield ? Whosoever brings him to me shall be made my chief steward.”

Then the fight began, and soon a Spanish soldier managed to wound William, but was killed by him before he could do him further hurt. Before long the Spaniards began to give way, while many threw down their weapons and ran for their lives.

But William and his troops pursued after them, and in the confusion the King was taken and brought back in triumph to the palace. Then was the relief and joy of the Queen so great that she would have knelt before William to give him thanks, had he not caught her up, saying that an Emperor’s daughter must not kneel to a plain soldier.

A great banquet was then made ready. On one side of the Queen was placed the King of Spain, and William on the other. Then the Spanish Prince was brought in, and before he would seat himself at meat, both he and his

father confessed that they had treated the Queen very ill in thus besieging her, and offered to make amends by holding their lands in future only as her tenants, or by doing anything else she pleased.

While she was giving them gracious and kindly answer, the door of the hall suddenly opened ; the werwolf entered, and going up to the raised platform where they sat, kissed the feet of the King of Spain, bowed to the Queen, to William, and to the young Prince, and went his way.

Upon this the servants, who had hitherto stood motionless with astonishment and fear, snatched up their weapons and made as though they would destroy the animal ; but they were promptly stopped by William, who declared that if any one hurt the werwolf he would kill him with his own hands.

The sight of the werwolf at once recalled to the mind of the King of Spain the story of the fair young son who, his wife had declared, was drowned. And as he sat thus plunged in thought, William asked him why he sat so silent in the midst of the feast ; to which he made answer, "Once on a time I wedded a fair lady, and to us was born a sweet son, whom we named Alphonso. But my wife died and I married again, a lady lovely to look upon and learned withal, and our son was the Prince who sits before you. But this lady had an evil mind, and because of her jealousy towards her young stepson she changed him into a werwolf, who soon afterwards, she told me, had been drowned in the sea. Now when this animal came before me and kissed my feet, I was filled with a strange and strong desire to embrace him ; so that I would fain believe that he may be my son after all, though my wife assured me that he was drowned."

"For my part," said William, "I firmly believe that your suspicion is really the truth, for the wolf has from the first shown the mind of a good and noble man.

Now if your wife is wise in witchcraft she can surely turn him into a man again. Until this is done therefore you shall neither of you be set free. Send at once and bid the Queen come hither, or I will myself fetch her by force."

So the King sent a company of his lords with an urgent message to the Queen of Spain. But when she heard that the King wanted her to turn a werwolf into a man, and that only thus could her husband's release be earned, she fell into a deep swoon. On her recovery she set off for Palermo with a great company, and was met at the entrance gates of the city by the Queen and William, together with her husband the King and the Prince of Spain her son.

They brought her to the hall and led her to a seat on the dais, where she sat with the King and Prince of Spain, the Queen of Palermo and her daughter Florence, and also with Melior and William, while a great banquet was made ready. Meantime the werwolf had been brought by William into his own bedchamber, which opened out of the hall; but when the animal heard the voice of the Queen of Spain, he rushed into the hall, the bristles rising on his neck and back, and flew at her with howls, snapping with his teeth.

She, on her part, screamed for help, and before all that company confessed that she had deserved death and begged for life.

Then William caught the werwolf by the neck and drew him back, saying, "Trust me, dear beast. For your sake alone I sent for her. And now unless she takes the enchantment off you, she shall be burnt as a witch; so do her no harm in the meantime."

And the werwolf kissed William's feet and was glad because of his words.

Then the Queen of Spain rose up and came and knelt before the werwolf, saying, "Sweet Alphonso, the people shall soon see thy handsome face again

Now therefore spare my life, though I have sinned greatly against thee."

So when William had joined her in asking that mercy might be shown, the werwolf consented to forgive her if she would give him back his proper form.

Going into a private room, the Queen drew forth a magic ring in which was a stone against which no witchcraft could avail; this she tied by a red silk thread round the werwolf's neck. Then, opening a book of magic spells, she read them over him; and then, all in a moment, he turned into a man again. With great delight William took him, bathed him, and dressed him in royal clothes; and when this was done he embraced William warmly, saying, "I am that werwolf who saved you from so many perils"; and William returned his embrace with the deepest affection.

When Prince Alphonso returned to the hall, looking now like a very noble knight, he gave them all courteous greeting, and bade them tell him the origin of the war which was the cause of their trouble.

So they told him all the story, and when they had ended he laid his hand on William's shoulder, and turning to the assembly, said—

"Lords and ladies, you will be surprised to hear that this young knight, who has remedied all your woes, has brought also help and safety to his own mother!"

Then was there amazement among the company, and one asked another, "What means he by this saying?"

So Alphonso said, "I was the werwolf who carried off young William as a child to save him from the plots of his wicked uncle, who had bribed his two nurses to poison him."

When he had told them the whole story, William, filled with gratitude towards Alphonso, implored him to ask for some reward for all his tender care.

So Prince Alphonso, who had long loved in secret the

Princess Florence, the sister of William, asked that he might be permitted to pay his court to her, and if she were willing, to become her husband.

This was gladly granted, and soon the joyful tidings of William's return were spread far and wide throughout the land. And first there came to William those wicked ladies who would have poisoned him as a child, dressed in sackcloth and begging for mercy, which he granted them on condition that they would go and live in a hermitage for the rest of their lives.

Then messengers were sent to the Emperor of Rome, asking him to come to Palermo for the grand celebration of his daughter Melior's wedding-feast.

On that joyful occasion the Princess Florence was also married to Alphonso, once a werwolf; and among the most honoured guests were the poor cowherd and his wife, who had been William's foster-parents, to whom he now gave a fine castle, and made the old man an earl and his wife a countess.

As the years passed on the Emperor of Rome, Melior's father, died, and William became Emperor in his stead, and ruled his kingdom well. Alphonso, too, in time became King of Spain; and thus was the Queen-mother's dream fulfilled; for William, her right arm, was Emperor of Rome, and Florence, her left, was Queen of Spain.

And so the story of William and the werwolf comes to an end.

THE SIXTH STORY

THE STORY OF THE ENCHANTED KNIGHT

(From the *Epic of Charlemagne*)

CHAPTER I

HOW OGIER THE DANE BECAME A KNIGHT

IN the golden days when Charlemagne lived and ruled upon the earth there reigned over Denmark a certain King named Godfrey. And it so fell out that the wife of this King Godfrey died when her little son Ogier was born, so that the women-in-waiting took him from her dead arms and laid him in a silken cradle in pleasant chamber of the castle.

Now as the child Ogier lay there, quietly sleeping, there entered the room and drew near the cradle six beautiful fairies, each bringing a gift to console the motherless babe for his loss.

The first took the child in her arms, and kissing his brow, said, "My gift is to make you the bravest and strongest knight of your day."

The second said, "I will see to it that you have the chance of many battles to fight."

"And I grant that you shall always be the conqueror of your foes," cried the third.

"My gift to you is gentleness and courtesy," said the fourth.

"And mine that you shall be dear to all women and happy in your love," said the fifth.

But Morgan le Fay, who was the Queen of Fairyland, held him long in her embrace before she spoke at all, and then she said, "Dear child, there remains little for me to give after these promises that my sisters have made to you. Yet this I can grant: never shall you see death like other men, but when you have finished a noble life on earth you shall be mine for ever in Avalon, the Islands of the Blest."

With these words the people of Fairyland flitted from the room and vanished.

Now, when this child Ogier had grown to be a handsome boy of ten years old, there came messengers to his father's Court from the Emperor Charlemagne, who bade the King of Denmark appear before him to do homage for his lands. But the proud King Godfrey sent answer back, "Tell Charles I hold my lands by right of my own sword; and if he doubt it, let him come and see. For never to him will Godfrey the Dane do homage."

Then Charlemagne came up against the rebellious King of Denmark with all his mighty host, and prevailed against him. And Godfrey was forced to promise that at Easter each year he would appear before him to do homage, but as a pledge that he would keep his word the Emperor made demand that his son, young Ogier, should be given up to him as a hostage. So when Godfrey had made unwilling agreement, the boy Ogier was carried off to the Emperor's Court and became one of Charlemagne's favourite pages.

For three years running did Godfrey of Denmark appear faithfully at the Frankish Court to do homage for his lands, but after that time he failed to come and was seen there no more. For he, meantime, had married another wife and had now another son; and his wife had persuaded him to break his pledge to Charlemagne, saying within herself as he did so, "When the Emperor hears that he refuses to pay homage, then will

he put Ogier to death, and my son shall thereupon be heir to the throne of Denmark."

Now, according to custom, when Godfrey failed to appear at the appointed time, the hostage Ogier was thrown into prison, in the castle of St. Omer, until they should find out why his father the King of Denmark had broken faith. But the keeper of the castle, and his wife, and her fair daughter Bellisande, loved young Ogier from the moment they set eyes upon him, and instead of casting him into a dungeon, they placed him in the finest rooms, richly furnished and covered with tapestry, and treated him like a prince.

Meantime the messengers of Charlemagne had arrived in Denmark, where they met a cruel fate. For Godfrey, unmindful of his son as of his broken faith, slit their ears and noses, shaved their heads, and sent them back disgraced.

Filled with anger, these men appeared in shameful wise at Charlemagne's Court, crying aloud for vengeance upon Godfrey of Denmark and upon Ogier his son.

So the Emperor, hearing of their woes, sent word to the castle of St. Omer, saying that Ogier must die.

Then was the keeper of that castle full of grief for young Ogier, and made special petition to Charlemagne that at least the lad might appear before him at his Court and be told why he must die. So one day, as Charlemagne was making festival with his nobles, came the handsome youth, tall and fair-haired, with the keen blue eyes of the North, and kneeling at the Emperor's footstool, laid his young head low on the ground before him in abasement for his father's pride and perfidy.

Then was the great heart of Charlemagne stirred with pity and compassion, and he would fain have spared the boy's life; but the messengers, hot for vengeance, cried out upon him and would fain have slain Ogier as he knelt

there, had not Duke Naymes, that mighty lord of the Franks, withstood them.

Meantime the lad himself stood humbly before the Emperor and said, "Sire, you know that I have always rendered you willing obedience and am not really to blame for my father's fault. Grant me my life, therefore, and I will atone for his broken faith by devoting my days henceforth to your service. As for these messengers, to them also I will atone, not by my death, but by a life of devotion to you, if you will but use me as your own."

Then all the barons who stood round began to intercede with the King on behalf of the lad; and while they strove with him and with the messengers, there rode a knight in haste into the hall, crying, "Tidings, ill-tidings, my lord! The Saracens, with the Grand Turk and Dannemont his son, aided by Caraheu, Emperor of India, have taken Rome by storm and put to flight Pope, cardinals, legates, and all. The churches are destroyed, the Christians put to death; and now the Holy Father calls upon you, as Christian king and Champion of Christendom, to march to the aid of the Church."

Up then sprang Duke Naymes, and kneeling before Charlemagne, prayed him to let him be the first to start on the expedition against the Saracens, and to give him the lad Ogier to be his squire.

"And what if he should flee away to his own land?" asked the Emperor.

"Then," replied the Duke, "I will give up both my lands and my liberty, and go as prisoner in his stead."

So the Emperor gave his leave, and all the barons of his Court hastened away with him to prepare for the coming conflict. But though Duke Naymes was eager to be the first in the fight, he gave leave to Ogier to hasten to the castle of St. Omer that he might say farewell to those who had been his benefactors. And there

in haste was Ogier married to the fair Bellisande, who loved him so tenderly. Sad indeed was she at so sudden a departure, but Ogier comforted her, saying, "Weep not, my dear one, for God hath given me life, and thou hast given me love; and these two gifts will be my strength in the day of battle."

Then Ogier rode away with Duke Naymes and his companions; and they, marching almost constantly by day and night, found themselves at length on a hill before the city of Rome, with a large army encamped at their back. Below them the Saracen host filed out against them, and Ogier, his ears full of the din of battle, longed sorely to follow Duke Naymes and his kinsmen to the fight; but they forbade him, telling him to remain among the tents.

So Ogier stood upon the hill-top and gazed longingly at the plain below. He saw the armies clash together in the first onset; he saw the golden standard of Charlemagne in the thickest fight, surrounded by a circle of his bravest lords; he saw Duke Naymes, his master, riding beside the Emperor himself. Suddenly all was confusion, the group of barons scattered, the standard wavered — fell — recovered itself — then fell again; and Ogier perceived that Sir Alory, the standard-bearer, panic-stricken by the repulse that Charlemagne's body-guard had suffered, had turned his horse's head from the fight and was fleeing for his life.

Seizing a battle-axe, Ogier dashed down the hill, caught the bridle of Sir Alory's horse, and raising the fallen standard, cried, "Coward, go hence and hide thee among the monks and women at home! But leave the banner of the Franks with me."

Then, hastily disarming the trembling knight, Ogier called upon a squire to dress him in Sir Alory's armour, leapt upon his horse, and sword in one hand, banner in the other, flung himself into the thick of the fray. Hewing a path through the enemy's ranks, he found Duke

Naymes and many other nobles had been taken and held as prisoners in the rear. To them he rode, cut their bonds with a touch of his sword, and hewed a way through the closing ranks of the foemen for himself and them. It seemed as though none could stand against the onslaught of the mighty young Dane.

Suddenly a cry of horror ran through the Frankish host. Charlemagne himself was down, his horse killed under him, and he himself hard pressed by Dannemont the Saracen prince. Swooping down upon them, Ogier waved the standard on high in one hand, while he cut down Dannemont with the other, and kept the foemen back while Charlemagne was mounting a fresh horse. Three times that day was the Emperor face to face with death, and three times was his life saved by the good right hand of Ogier the Dane.

At length, with Ogier waving the standard at their head, the Frankish host dispersed the Saracens and drove them in disorder to the gates of Rome.

Directly the fight was over, the Emperor ordered that the standard-bearer should be brought before him; but no one knew that it was Ogier, for he wore his visor down. Then said Charlemagne to him, "Alory, though you fled at the first onset, you have most nobly redeemed your honour, and no reward can be too great for this day's work. Choose, therefore, any province of my kingdom, and you shall be its ruler, and shall also be at my right hand to do battle for me in all my quarrels."

But a squire who stood by, and who heard him speak thus of Alory, said, "Sire, this is not that Alory of whom you speak. For *he* let fall the colours and fled at the first onslaught, to save his own skin; but this knight, whom I know not at all, seized the standard from Alory's hands and bade me dress him in his armour; and it is he who has fought so well."

Then, as all stood wondering, Ogier took off his helmet and knelt before Charlemagne, saying, "I have

pity, sire, on Godfrey, King of Denmark, and let his son atone for his ill deeds and be your faithful vassal in his stead."

And Charlemagne kissed his brow and said, "My anger towards you and your father is altogether turned to love. I grant you your request. Rise, therefore, Sir Ogier the Dane, henceforth to be champion for France and Charlemagne, and God be with you."

Thus did Ogier receive his knighthood on the field of battle, and all the peers of France came about him to salute him. Then also, flushed with joy, did he once more make a rush upon the enemy, so that they all fell back before him. For as sure as the Frankish host fell into disorder or wavered before the foe, so surely did the fair-haired Danish knight ride into their midst upon his great black horse and cheer them forward to the fight again, cutting and hewing down the foe on either side, and waving the banner of the Franks with a great shout of "Ogier the Dane is upon you!"

Panic-stricken at this sight, Sadonne, the officer of the King of India, rode in haste to Dannemont the Prince, bidding him hold the field at all costs, since Caraheu, King of India, with thirty kings, was coming to his help.

But as he rode he was met by the Saracen army in full flight, crying out in terror, "Flee now and save thyself, for Michael the Archangel fights against us all."

Finding himself face to face with the fair-haired knight on the great horse, Sadonne promptly threw away his arms and begged for mercy.

"Who are you that I should grant it?" asked Ogier, and when he answered that he was the chief officer of the King of India the Dane replied, "On one condition only will I grant your life. Bid Caraheu meet me in single combat, and so let us determine the issue of this war."

Next day came Caraheu with a gorgeous train of followers, and with him came Gloriande, his affianced bride, the fairest woman in the Eastern world, whose hair was like spun gold and fell in a shower to her feet, and whose wonderful gown of pearl-embroidered damask had taken nine years to weave.

Then did Caraheu, Emperor of India, make proclamation, saying, "Where is Ogier the Dane, that I may fight with him in single combat? For that am I come hither, and Gloriande, my promised bride, shall be the prize of victory."

But Charlot, the son of Charlemagne, looked darkly on as they made ready, saying, "It is not right that an Emperor should contend with my father's bondsman, but only with me."

To which Caraheu replied, "I fight not with boasters, but with brave men. Sir Ogier here can rule men's hearts, which is far nobler than ruling their lands."

"Nay, noble sire," said Ogier, "though I should be loath indeed to give up this conflict, yet Charlot is the Emperor's son, and worthy to fight with the bravest."

"He may fight with Sadonne, my chief officer," said Caraheu. "For me, the conflict is with you alone."

So a double combat was arranged, to which Gloriande came to look on. In the fight between Sadonne and Charlot, Sadonne killed Charlot's horse, and being a man of honour, dismounted from his own, that they might fight on equal terms; but Charlot only pretended to fight until he could reach the place where stood the steed of Sadonne, upon which he leapt and basely fled away.

Meantime Caraheu with his wonderful sword Courtain had cut through Ogier's shield and armour and would have pierced him to the heart, had not the Dane, with a vast effort, borne the Indian monarch to the ground, where he lay helpless. Yet Ogier would not kill him, for he admired his courage; but as he stood by him

and helped him to rise, there rushed upon the Dane some three hundred Saracens whom Dannemont had hidden in the bushes near that place.

Vainly did Ogier fight, and Caraheu too, full of wrath at their treachery, and crying, "Traitors, better death than shame like this!" fought at his side. But being overpowered and disarmed, the life of Ogier was only spared at the pleading of Gloriande, and he was led away to prison, loaded with heavy chains. Yet in vain did the Saracens hope to win the approval of Caraheu their former ally. So full of fury was he at their treachery that he went over, with all his host, to the side of Charlemagne, until the Saracen host should atone for their conduct towards Ogier.

But meantime Gloriande, who, according to the fairy gift, had loved Ogier the moment she set eyes upon him, came in secret to the prison and loosed his bonds, so that he escaped to the camp of Charlemagne and Caraheu.

Then all three, together with the peers of France, fought against the Saracen host and prevailed against them and drove them out of Rome. Gloriande meantime had been rescued by Ogier from the foe and given to Caraheu to be his wife; in Rome were they baptized and wedded, and returned to India as Christian man and woman. But first he gave Courtain, that famous Damascus blade, to Ogier, saying, "By conquering me in fair fight you won my life and also my bride, and both have you given back to me. Take therefore this sword, offered in friendly wise, as a pledge that I owe all to you."

CHAPTER II

HOW OGIER CAME TO FAIRYLAND

WHEN Ogier the Dane returned to France, he found that his wife Bellisande had died, leaving him a pretty babe named Baldwin, of whom he soon became extremely fond. During the years in which the babe was growing into childhood at the king's court, came the news that the pagan hosts had invaded the lands of Denmark, and that King Godfrey was hard beset by them in the only town that yet remained in his hands.

At length the King and Queen, knowing they could hold out alone no longer, looked at each other with eyes of fear, saying, "See what has come upon us because of Ogier, our son, whom we left to a cruel fate!"

So, being brought very low, they wrote a letter to Charlemagne the Emperor, imploring him to pity them, to forget the past, and to send them succour. But Charlemagne coldly replied, "Since Godfrey holds his lands by right of his good sword, let him hold them still. I will not raise a finger in his aid." And turning to Ogier, he added, "You, surely, would not wish me to aid a traitor who refused to do me homage and who left you to suffer for his broken troth?"

But Ogier bent his knee before him, and said, "Sire, as your vassal I kneel before you; but Godfrey is my father and I must go to his aid. The Emperor will not forbid a son his duty."

So Charles said, "Go, but go alone, with your own servants. For mine shall not fight in a rebel's cause."

Then Ogier hastened to his father's city with thirty of his servants, but when he reached the walls he found the foemen fighting over Godfrey of Denmark's lifeless body. Few as were his followers, it was not long before Ogier had put to flight the pagan host, and with the aid

of his good sword Courtain, had swept them from the land. So all the people rejoiced to have him King of Denmark, and there he stayed five years, governing well and wisely. And when all was firmly established there he returned to the Court of Charlemagne at Eastertide, and came and knelt before Charlemagne, saying, "The son of Godfrey, of his own free will, pays homage to the Emperor for the land of Denmark."

Then Charlemagne embraced him warmly, and bade him once more take his seat among the peers of France.

Meanwhile his son, young Baldwin, had grown into a fair-haired boy, full of fun and spirit, and beloved by all at the Court save one. That one was Charlot, the Emperor's son, who had ever been jealous of Ogier, and was now full of spite against his child.

Now it so fell out one day, when Ogier was out hunting, that Charlot sat and played chess with Baldwin in the palace; and the boy, having easily defeated him, laughed in pleasure at his triumph. Then the Prince, beside himself with sudden rage, snatched up the heavy chess-board and beat out the child's brains.

Rage and misery took possession of Ogier's heart when he returned to find his little son lying dead and cold. Taking the lifeless body in his arms, he laid it before the Emperor's footstool, saying, "Sire, look upon your son's foul work."

Then was the Emperor sorely grieved, so that he vowed he would give half his kingdom to undo that deed. "But," said he, "well I know that there is nothing can repay so great a loss."

"Truly," said Ogier, "there is nothing can repay, but there is a penalty that can be paid. Let me therefore fight with your son, and so avenge my boy's death."

"Nay, Ogier, that cannot be," said the Emperor; "for how could my son fight against you and live?"

"What matter!" cried the knight. "Why should

your son live more than mine? Give him then up to me."

"I cannot do it," said the Emperor.

"Then, sire," cried Ogier in great anger, "till you learn justice, we are foes."

So saying, he left the Court forthwith, and came to Lombardy, whose king was then at war with the Emperor, and Ogier fought on his side against Charlemagne.

In this land did Ogier once again win a great name for courage and daring; and there it was that men would turn pale at the mention of Ogier the Dane, and of Courtain his sword, and of Broiefort, his great black war-horse. And when the hosts of Charlemagne came up against Desiderio, King of the Lombards, Ogier prevailed against them, even as in the days of old he had prevailed against their foes.

At length Charlemagne himself, hearing that the French were murmuring loudly against him because of the loss of their champion, marched forth himself against the rebel. And when he heard of his approach the heart of Ogier the Dane smote him, for always he loved his master, though he would not fight for him again till justice was done. But Desiderio, King of the Lombards, was full of fear, dreading what would happen when Charlemagne appeared. And this is how a poet tells the story of his coming.

Ogier the Dane and Desiderio,
King of the Lombards, on a lofty tower
Stood gazing northward o'er the rolling plains,
League after league of harvests, to the foot
Of the snow-crested Alps, and saw approach
A mighty army, thronging all the roads
That led into the city. And the King
Said unto Ogier, who had passed his youth
As hostage at the Court of France, and knew
The Emperor's form and face: "Is Charlemagne
Among that host?" And Ogier answered, "No."

And still the innumerable multitude
 Flowed onward and increased, until the King
 Cried in amazement : " Surely Charlemagne
 Is coming in the midst of all these knights !"
 And Ogier answered slowly, " No, not yet ;
 He will not come so soon." Then, much disturbed,
 King Desiderio asked : " What shall we do,
 If he approach with a still greater army ?"
 And Ogier answered, " When he shall appear
 You will behold what manner of man he is ;
 And what will then befall us, I know not."
 Then came the guard that never knew repose,
 The Paladins of France ; and at the sight
 The Lombard King, o'ercome with terror, cried :
 " This must be Charlemagne !" and as before
 Did Ogier answer, " No ; not yet, not yet !"

And then appeared in panoply complete
 The Bishops and the Abbots and the Priests
 Of the Imperial Chapel, and the Counts ;
 And Desiderio could no more endure
 The light of day, nor yet encounter death,
 But sobbed aloud and said : " Let us go down
 And hide us in the bosom of the earth,
 Far from the sight and anger of a foe
 So terrible as this !" And Ogier said,
 " When you behold the harvests in the fields
 Shaking with fear, the Po and the Ticino
 Lashing the city walls with iron waves,
 Then may you know that Charlemagne is come."

And even as he spake, in the north-west
 Lo ! there uprose a black and threatening cloud,
 Out of whose bosom flashed the light of arms
 Upon the people pent up in the city ;
 A light more terrible than any darkness,
 And Charlemagne appeared—a Man of Iron.

His helmet was of iron, and his gloves
 Of iron, and his breastplate and his greaves
 And tassets were of iron, and his shield.
 In his left hand he held an iron spear,
 In his right hand his sword invincible.
 The horse he rode on had the strength of iron
 And colour of iron. All who went before him,
 Beside him, and behind him, his whole host,
 Were armed with iron, and their hearts within them
 Were stronger than the armour that they wore.

The fields and all the roads were filled with iron,
And points of iron glistened in the sun,
And shed a terror through the city streets.
This at a single glance Ogier the Dane
Saw from the tower, and turning to the King,
Exclaimed in haste, "Behold, this the man
You looked for with such eagerness!" and then
Fell as one dead at Desiderio's feet.

For, in spite of all, Ogier could never lose his love for his old master, though he fought against him and his followers with all his might.

At length the Franks, weary of being beaten by him whenever he appeared upon the scene, plotted together how they might take Ogier the Dane by trickery.

So they waited their chance, and finding him one day lying exhausted with a long fight fast asleep under a fir tree, his good sword fallen from his hand, they bound him hand and foot, led away his great black war-horse Broicfort, carried off his sword and lance and shield, and brought the knight before the King.

Now Charlemagne was so wroth with Ogier for fighting against him, that he would have slain him there and then, and so made sure that the life of his son Charlot would no longer stand in danger of his arm. But it so happened that amongst those who had taken Ogier prisoner was Archbishop Turpin, who now intervened, saying, "Sire, for the sake of you and your followers I forced myself to take prisoner the noblest knight in Christendom, but for the sake of no one in the world will I stand by and see him put to death. Now therefore, since I took him prisoner, I claim him as my captive, and will keep him in prison so that he does no further harm to France."

So Turpin led Ogier to his castle, where he was treated with the greatest kindness and consideration.

In the days that followed, while Ogier lay in prison, an evil fate fell upon the Franks, for Bruhier, a Saracen giant, invaded France, marched against Charlemagne

and his army, and utterly defeated them. Again and again they rallied against the foe, but in vain; and at length the peers of France, utterly disheartened, came before Charlemagne, saying, "Send, we pray thee, for Ogier the Dane, since he alone can stand against this terrible foe and deliver us out of his hands."

Then Charlemagne bowed his haughty head and went himself to the castle of Archbishop Turpin, and prayed Ogier to come out and to lead the hosts of the Franks against the Saracen, as in the days of old.

But Ogier made answer, "Not so, unless you will first deliver up your son Charlot into my hands."

So the Emperor departed in silence, for he would not sacrifice his son. At length, however, after another terrible defeat, the soldiers themselves crowded round him, saying, "Is it nothing to you that we die by thousands in this vain struggle? Give up your son; for what is his life against so many?"

Very sadly did Charlemagne agree, and with heavy heart brought out the wretched Charlot and delivered him into the hands of Ogier. And Ogier, blinded by the remembrance of his fair boy, so cruelly done to death, would not think of mercy, but clutched him by the hair and drew his good sword Courtain, meaning to cut off his head.

At that moment came a clap of thunder and a vivid flash of lightning, in the midst of which sounded a voice from heaven, which said, "Stay, Ogier! Slay not the son of the King."

Then Ogier's hand relaxed its grasp and Courtain was returned to its sheath; but when the Emperor hastened forward to thank him for his mercy, the proud Dane answered, "Thank Heaven, sire, not Ogier the Dane. He does but do the will of God."

But Charlemagne would not be repulsed; and he spoke gentle words to Ogier, so that the knight's heart melted within him, and he embraced his former master

with tears. And that day were they made friends again.

Now when Ogier would ride forth to do battle against the Emperor's foes, he called for his good horse Broiefort. But Broiefort had been quite lost sight of during the seven long years of Ogier's imprisonment, and men believed him to be dead.

"You shall have my charger in his place," said Charlemagne, and caused a mighty horse to be led out; but when Ogier leaned upon his back, the creature bowed to the earth under his weight. Ten other fine animals were led forth in turn that he might try them; but none of them were strong enough to bear the stalwart Dane.

"'Tis clear I must go afoot for the rest of my life," said Ogier in rueful wise; but even as he spoke there came to him one who said, "I have seen Broiefort dragging stones for the building of an abbey ten leagues away."

Then they hastened to that place and found indeed the good horse Broiefort, but so old and worn that no one but his master would have recognized him. Yet when Ogier came and leaned upon his back, the old charger bowed not, but straightened himself beneath the weight; and when he knew his old master, he whinnied and snorted with joy, and lay down on the ground before him like a dog.

So once more Ogier went forth to battle, and wherever he went the foes of France made way before him. Year after year passed away, and still the champion of Charlemagne fought for him and for his land. Grey and old he grew, but yet his arm remained strong and thousands still fell before his good sword Courtain. When he was very old in years he went forth to fight in the Holy War and took many a city of Palestine. Then, weary at length of so much fighting, he left his officers to rule there in his stead and with a great fleet set sail for France.

Now after some days there came down upon that fleet a terrible storm, which tossed the vessels hither and thither and left them at the mercy of the waves. The ship in which Ogier sailed was utterly wrecked, and having lost mast and sail and oars, was driven out of its course into an unknown ocean, through which it was rapidly carried and finally dashed upon a reef of rock and broken to pieces. The sailors leapt in the sea and were crushed to death against the iron rocks; Ogier the Dane alone stood firm upon the sinking deck and gazed through the darkness into the face of death.

Suddenly a voice from the air cried, "Ogier, we wait for thee. Fear not, but trust thyself to the waves."

So he cast himself into the sea, and immediately a huge wave seized him and threw him high upon the rocks. Then as he staggered, blinded with spray, to his feet, a pathway of light shone out before him, showing steps cut roughly on the face of the cliff. Up these he climbed, following the light, till at length he found himself outside a marvellous palace, invisible by day, but glowing bright in the darkness. Its walls were of ivory and gold, and its gateway of silver stood wide open to welcome the sea-tossed wanderer. Within the decorated hall Ogier found a marvellous horse named Papillon, snow-white in colour, with shoes of gold. This beautiful animal trotted towards him and motioned him to follow towards a room in which stood a table covered with a dainty banquet.

He then fetched water in a golden basin and knelt before Ogier that he might cleanse his hands before eating; and after the meal was over the good horse carried him to a bed surrounded by tall golden candlesticks in which sweet-smelling tapers burnt all night.

So Ogier slept in peace in the strange silence of that palace; and when he awoke the palace had faded all away in the light of the sun and nothing of it was to be seen.

The place where he now found himself was an exquisite garden lying in the midst of the land of Avalon in the realm of Fairyland. There never rain or snow is seen, nor breath of frost or fire or hail, but everlasting sunshine and a soft, sweet sky above, which smiles upon flowers that never fade and fruits that never decay.

While Ogier the Dane was looking in bewilderment round about him, there came to him the shining figure of Morgan le Fay, Queen of Fairyland, who took his hand and said, "Long have I waited, dear knight, for your coming. And now you shall never leave this fair spot, but in youth perpetual shall abide with me for ever."

So saying she placed upon his finger a magic ring, which had the effect of at once making Ogier young and strong as in his early prime. And on his head she placed a wreath of myrtle and olive leaves, calling it the Crown of Forgetfulness. From that moment all his past life vanished from his mind; no more did he remember Charlemagne or his Court or the long warfare of past days, but, as one born again, he took up his new life in Fairyland. And as he wandered with her hand in hand through that fair region, he came upon the great King Arthur, healed now of his deadly wound, and Sir Lancelot and other brave knights of the Table Round, with whom he jousting in friendly wise as in the days of yore.

Thus passed away two hundred years as they had been a day or a week, for nothing was known of time in Fairyland.

CHAPTER III

HOW OGIER THE DANE RETURNED

MEANTIME, things had gone very ill in the land of the Franks. Great Charlemagne had passed away, and there was no man to lead forth the armies of France against the country's foes. Again and again the land cried aloud for a deliverer, but there was none to help.

Far away in the land of Faery at length was heard the echo of that cry, and the kind heart of Morgan le Fay melted with pity for the Franks. For, though she sorely grieved to part with her beloved knight, she decided that he must return to the land of mortals once again, to fight for France and for Christendom.

So one day, as she kissed his brow, she lifted from it the wreath of forgetfulness and bade him listen to that distant cry. Then at once Ogier sprang up as one aroused from sleep, and cried, "Too long have I stayed in this peaceful land. See! the cry of battle is in the air, and it may be that Charlemagne, my lord, calls for Ogier the Dane to go forth as his champion. Now let me go at once, but tell me first—have I been long in this fair resting-place?"

Then Morgan le Fay smiled sadly, saying, "The time has not been long to us, dear knight"; and forthwith she brought out Courtain his good sword, led forth Papillon to be his charger, and raised up the long-dead Benoist, his squire, to bear him company.

Then, as she prepared to leave him, she gave him a torch saying, "Take heed that you kindle this not, for if it remains unlit you shall live for ever; but if by chance it should begin to burn away, take great care that the flame be preserved, for when the last spark of the torch has died out, then shall your life come to an

end. Guard also, my beloved, the magic ring upon your finger, for while you wear it, your health and youth shall never fade away."

After these words she threw Ogier into a deep sleep and wafted him away by magic spells to the land of France. And when he awoke, he found Courtain lying ready to his hand, and Benoist the squire holding Papillon ready for him to mount. Then all those years in Avalon seemed to him but a dream, and leaping upon his horse he rode into the nearest city.

"What city is this?" asked Ogier of one whom he overtook.

"Montpellier," answered the man.

"I should have known that, indeed," said Ogier, smiling, "though methinks it hath changed of late. My kinsman indeed is governor of this city; perhaps you know him—Lascaut is his name."

"You are jesting," said the man in some surprise. "It is full two hundred years since the days of that same governor. But he is still remembered here, for, as no doubt you know, he wrote the romance of Ogier the Dane. A good story is that same, and is still sung by one who goes about the city, singing the old tales of long ago."

At this Ogier rode on, but the man lingered till he was overtaken by Benoist, to whom he said, "Who is your master?"

"Surely he is not unknown to any one in France?" replied Benoist. "He is Ogier the Dane."

"Rascal!" cried the man. "How dare you jest with me! All the world knows that Ogier the Dane perished in a shipwreck some two hundred years ago."

Meantime, Ogier had ridden on to the market-place of a neighbouring town, where stood an inn, well known to him in old days, and kept by one Hubert.

"Can we find lodging here?" he asked of the man who came out to greet him.

"Certainly, sire," replied the latter, looking with interest at his attire.

"Then send me Hubert the innkeeper," said Ogier, preparing to dismount.

"Sire," replied the man, "I am the innkeeper, and my name is William."

"Do not try to deceive me!" said Ogier sternly. "I know this inn too well to believe that, unless by chance Hubert hath died of late. But if so, where is his son?"

At that the landlord slammed the door in his face, and having secured it, appeared at an upper window and called to those passing below, "Here is a madman, or one possessed with a devil, for he wishes to speak with Hubert, my grandfather's grandfather, who has been dead these two hundred years. Seize him, then, and send for the Abbot of St. Faron, that he may come and drive out the evil spirit from him."

A rough crowd quickly assembled about the inn and began to throw stones at both knight and squire. Soon the excitement grew beyond all bounds, and an archer on the outskirts drew his bow and shot poor Benoist through the heart. Upon that Ogier lost all patience, and leaping upon Papillon, he laid about him with Courtain his sword till the market-place was covered with the dead. But meanwhile the heat of his passion had kindled the magic torch that lay in his breast, and it burnt now with a steady flame.

Then Ogier rode hard from that place till he came to the Abbey of St. Faron, which he himself had built and endowed before he went to the Holy Land. There he met the old Abbot, to whom he said, "Surely you will know me, good father, for I am the founder of this Abbey, and it was at my word that you were appointed at its head. Is not your name Simon?"

"Not so," said the Abbot, "my name is Geoffrey; but tell me, I pray you, to whom I am speaking."

"I am Ogier the Dane," he replied.

The Abbot fell back a step and gazed at him with amazement.

"There *was* a Simon who was abbot of this monastery long, long ago, and true enough, he lived in the days of the great Ogier," he said; "but that was two hundred years ago, and Simon's bones had fallen to dust long before I was born."

Then Sir Ogier gave a loud cry of wonderment.

"What, Abbot Simon gone? And Charlemagne and the peers of France? Where are they all? Not dead—surely not dead!"

"Dead and buried two hundred years ago," said the Abbot solemnly; and at that Sir Ogier threw himself from his horse and implored him to hear his story. Together they sat in the great dim church, and the Abbot listened and marvelled, but believed and rejoiced to think that the champion of France had returned once more.

Then Ogier gave into his charge the magic torch, which he placed beneath the church in an iron chest, so that very little air might enter, and the flame, diminished to a spark, might smoulder on for many years. Now when this was done the Abbot prayed Ogier to let him see the ring which had been given him by Morgan le Fay, but directly it was drawn from his finger the knight became at that moment a shrivelled, feeble old man, a very skeleton, and almost without life. Hastening to put it on again, he once more found himself young and vigorous, and leaping upon Papillon, he rode off against the enemies of France.

Black was the outlook for the Franks that day, for the heathen host had scattered them on every side. Suddenly was seen in their midst a huge fair-haired knight riding on a milk-white horse, and wherever he went the foes of France fled before his path.

"Surely," cried at length one old Frankish warrior,

mindful of the tales his grandfather had told him, "'tis Ogier the Dane!"

The word was repeated from rank to rank, and from one part to another the cry went up of "Ogier! Ogier the Dane!"

And with this battle-song on their lips the Franks rushed upon the foe as in the days of old and put them utterly to rout.

This happened every time the Dane went forth to victory, until at length the heathen host was driven from the length and breadth of the land of France. And while he fought, the watchful Abbot of St. Faron noted that the torch within the iron safe burnt fiercely, but when he was at rest it sank once again to a mere spark.

Now when at length the foes of France had been put to silence, Sir Ogier the Dane came to the Court of the Queen of France, for the King had been long dead. And then once more the effect of the fairy gifts was seen, for both the Queen and her chief lady-in-waiting fell in love with him. But the latter, finding that he did not return her love, determined to have her revenge. One day, when she and the Queen of France were passing through an ante-chamber, they happened to find Ogier sleeping upon a couch; and the Queen, mindful of the legends that were told about him, drew the magic ring softly from his finger in order to see what would happen. To the horror of the two ladies, the handsome young knight turned at once into a withered skeleton before their eyes. Before he could awaken, the Queen hurriedly slipped the ring on again, and Ogier at once regained his health and youth, but not before the lady-in-waiting had seen her means of revenge.

When it was openly announced that Ogier was to marry the Queen and to sit upon the throne of Charlemagne, the lady sent thirty strong knights to seize him

as he rode out from the palace and to take from him his ring; but Papillon, the fairy horse, saved his life that time, and leaping lightly over their heads, sped fast away.

So the bridal arrangements were made, and a very great ceremony prepared. All the greatest peers of France came to the church to see the wedding and the coronation of the famous Ogier, and a vast crowd stood in waiting outside.

Suddenly, as Ogier and his bride knelt before the chancel steps, a dazzling light shone through the church, and in the midst of a rainbow cloud Morgan le Fay appeared, clasped Sir Ogier in her arms, and both vanished together in the mist with which the place was filled.

Never again was Ogier the Dane seen by mortal eye; yet men say he is not dead, since the magic torch still burns within the vault of the Abbey of St. Faron. Far away in Avalon he dreams away the years; but one day, so say the Franks, the trumpet-blast will call him back again to his adopted land, and then amidst the hosts of foemen will be heard his battle-cry, "Ogier the Dane!" and with his good sword Courtain he will appear again, riding upon the white horse Papillon, and driving before him the foes of France, as in the days of old.

THE SEVENTH STORY

THE CASTLE OF MONTAUBAN

(From the *Geste de Doon de Mayence*)

CHAPTER I

THE FOUR SONS OF AYMON

ONCE again in the days of Charlemagne there lived a certain bold knight named Duke Aymon. This noble married the sister of the Emperor, the fair maiden Aya, and in due course were born to him four comely sons—Renaud, Allard, Guichard, and Richard.

Turbulent youths were they when they grew up, and ever ready to take up arms in a quarrel. Nor was it long before they had their opportunity in a great family feud that began to exist between Charlemagne the Emperor and their own house. For their uncle, Sir Bevis, being a knight of hot and passionate blood, refused to do homage to Charlemagne for his broad lands, and when Lothair, the son of the Emperor, came to demand his fealty, he killed him unawares.

This led to open warfare, in which Duke Aymon and his sons, rebels at heart all their lives, gladly took the side of Sir Bevis. But the warriors of Charlemagne were the stronger, and defeated the followers of Sir Bevis, and took him and his brother Duke Aymon barefooted and bareheaded into the presence of the Emperor.

Humbly they knelt before him and humbly sued for pardon, and so, after bitter upbraiding for their disloyalty, Charlemagne bade them go in peace. Then crept up that evil-minded Ganelon, always an ill adviser

to the Emperor, and reminded him how Sir Bevis had slain his son.

"Wouldst thou forgive the murderer of Lothair?" he questioned. "Surely then will all Charlemagne's lords turn rebels and cut-throats."

Thus he continued to speak in the ears of Charlemagne, and poisoned his mind so that he repented him of his mercy, and sent messengers to lie in wait for Sir Bevis and kill him as he set out upon the homeward path.

Now, when this thing was known, the sons of Aymon and the Duke himself swore great oaths that they would never pay fealty to Charlemagne again nor be at peace with him till they had avenged their kinsman. At that time there were in France many discontented barons who were always ready to rebel against the Emperor, and these now joined Duke Aymon in a long and fruitless war against their King. But after a while the Duke grew old and weary of warfare; Charlemagne too had no desire to keep up the long feud. So when the latter sent messengers to bid the old man end the war and return to his allegiance, Aymon replied that he would be ready to do this if Charlemagne would pay six times the weight of Sir Bevis in gold.

And so the feud came to an end for a time.

No long time passed, however, before the daring and rebellious spirit of the sons of Aymon broke out afresh.

It so happened that Charlemagne made a great tournament at his city of Aachen, and bade the four young men repair thither to test their strength against the other youths of the Court.

So they took their way to the city on horseback, and of the four Renaud the eldest rode first, upon the back of Bayard his famous charger. Now Bayard was a fairy horse, of great strength and size, and none could excel him in speed. He had more wit than many a man, and often had delivered his master in time of peril.

No sooner had the tournament begun than it was quickly seen that none could hold their own against the sons of Aymon save only those renowned knights Roland and Ogier the Dane. In vain did Charlot the Emperor's son and Bertholair his nephew challenge them to the combat. Each time they did so they were brought to the ground in shame and dishonour. At length Bertholair made a plot with Charlot to play a trick upon Renaud which should bring him to confusion. He challenged the young man to a game of chess, making a bargain that whoever won should become the owner of Bayard the famous horse.

Now half-way through the game Renaud perceived that he was being tricked in that play and that Bertholair was about to cry "Checkmate!" Springing to his feet in a gust of sudden fury, he drew his sword Flamberg from its sheath and struck off the head of Bertholair so that it rolled upon the ground.

At once all the knights in the place sprang to their feet and surrounded the four brothers, who set their backs against an oak tree hard by and prepared to sell their lives dearly.

Suddenly into the space between them and the angry courtiers bounded the great horse Bayard and lowered his head before his master. Shouting to his brothers to follow his example, Renaud sprang upon his back. The knights rushed forward and strove to pull him off and prevent the other three from joining him; but Bayard plunged and kicked and bit to such effect that the former were obliged to fall back. Then the other three young men leaped up behind their brother, who shook the bridle, crying, "Bayard!" and immediately the good horse sped away like the wind and was out of sight before the discomfited courtiers could think of pursuit.

For the next seven years the four sons of Aymon lived as outlaws in the wild woods that clothed the hills of the Ardennes. At length, growing weary of this kind of

life, they determined, since they might not fight in the cause of Charlemagne, to serve his enemies the Moors in Spain.

So they took service under a Moorish chief named Ivo, and won such high renown that he gave to Renaud his eldest daughter as wife and permission to build on the top of a mountain among the Pyrenees a beautiful castle of pure white marble.

And this was the Castle of Montauban, where Renaud soon gathered many of the discontented nobles of France and bade them fight on the side of the Moors against Charlemagne the Emperor.

But the wisest of all who came was an ill-shapen dwarf called Maugis, who was cousin to Renaud and one of the cleverest magicians to be found from East to West. So much did men fear his power that, wherever he chose to go, they did not seek to question or prevent him. And so he was sometimes in the camp of Charlemagne, sometimes with Renaud, sometimes with the Moors, and came and went just as he pleased.

Now in due time it came to pass that the anger of Charlemagne was kindled afresh against his nephews the four sons of Aymon, when he heard of the lordly castle which Renaud had built at Montauban; and he gathered his host and marched through the mountain passes until he stood beneath its white and gleaming walls. But the castle was so strongly fortified and its position so secure, since it could be approached only by steep and narrow goat-paths, that the Emperor's army was powerless before it.

At length the patience of Charlemagne gave out; and he sent for Roland and gave orders that the word should be given for retreat, since they were but wasting time. But Roland, to whose advice the King was always willing to listen, said, "Let us, before we retire for good, try one stratagem upon them. Let us pretend to withdraw our forces from before the castle. In

all probability Renaud and his men will follow us in their pride of heart, and then will we turn upon them and slay them."

So Charlemagne acted upon this advice, and next morning the watchers on the walls of the Castle of Montauban saw the iron-grey hosts of the Emperor turn their backs upon the mountain and slowly wend their way towards the road which led to France.

At this news there was great rejoicing among the brothers, some of whom were for making a sally and harassing them in the rear. But Maugis the Dwarf shook his big wise head, saying, "'Tis but a stratagem, and if you sally forth you will be doing the very thing for which they have planned. By all means let them go and keep fast yourselves within your walls; and when they see this they will get tired of attacking so wary a foe and take themselves off for good."

Then Renaud arose and said, "The words of our kinsman Maugis are good words and should be observed. There is, however, one thing that we must do, regardless of risk or danger, now that we are no longer shut up within these walls. 'Tis now ten years since I have seen my mother, Aya the Emperor's sister, and I long to speak with her again. Let my brothers, if they will, come with me; and for greater safety we will go in disguise."

Now this was no light adventure to undertake; for Aymon their father had taken an oath to Charlemagne that if his rebel sons appeared beneath his roof at Dordon he would have them cut to pieces. Therefore the four knights dressed themselves in pilgrim's garb, with slouched hats and large worn cloaks, and went barefoot to the Castle of Dordon.

It so happened that their father, Duke Aymon, was absent on a hunting expedition when they arrived, and as pilgrims in those days were always received with respect and hospitality, they found no difficulty in making their entrance to the castle.

The Lady Aya herself hastened to receive them in the great hall, saying, "Tell me, good sirs, what you lack of food or clothes, and I will gladly provide them for the love of the Lord, Who I trust will guard my own four sons and bring them back to me before I die."

So they sat them down to meat, but could hardly touch the food for the love and desire that was in their hearts towards their mother. And she, looking earnestly upon them, noticed on Renaud's forehead a wound mark received in a tournament when he was but a child. Rising to her feet, she cried, "Fair sir, if thou art Renaud, speak to me now at once, for my heart tells me that thou art my son."

Then Renaud took her in his arms and embraced her with tears of joy, and the others kissed her a hundred times over.

"But how poorly you are dressed, my sons!" she cried at last; "and where are your horses that you walk barefoot?"

Then they told her of the danger in which they stood because of the nearness of the hosts of Charlemagne and because of their father's oath. So she put good food before them and bade them eat in peace.

Scarcely had they finished, however, when the noise of horns and horses was heard at the gate, and a page-boy hastened in to announce the unexpected return of Duke Aymon; and before they had time for more than to draw their pilgrim's hoods over their faces as they sat the old man had tramped into the hall.

"And who are these men?" he cried after he had greeted his wife. "By their garb they seem to be penitents."

Then came his sweet wife and put her hands upon his broad chest, saying, "Penitent indeed are they for the trouble they have cost you, for they are our own four sons, and they have come to seek harbourage with

us till the morn. Now surely thou wilt soften thy heart towards them and repent thee of thine oath."

But the Duke looked sadly on his sons because of his oath's sake and said, "Children, this should be ill coming for thee. For I have sworn to Charlemagne that I will not let you hide under the same roof as myself, nor give you help or protection in any wise."

Then said Renaud, "The Emperor has pursued us even to my Castle of Montauban to seek our hurt, and now he would put enmity between father and son. But this shall not be. Weary and barefoot as we are, we will but embrace our mother again and depart at once."

"Not so," at length said the Count, who had been sitting with his head bent sadly on his hand. "True and loving are ye towards your mother, and great is the risk you have run for her sake. I will therefore leave the castle myself, for my oath's sake, this night, and will sleep in my hunting-lodge, that ye may depart at dawn in peace."

Now all that night long, while her four sons slept soundly before the great hall fire, the Princess Aya sent messengers throughout the country round about, bidding all valiant knights who had a grudge against the Emperor to come to the Castle of Dordon at break of day. So when morning dawned seven hundred knights in full armour sat on horseback before the gate, ready to escort the four sons of Aymon in safety to their castle among the mountains. And they, who had come in pilgrim garb, barefoot and unarmed, returned in shining armour proudly on horseback, clad in the finest cloth and linen by the hands of their mother Aya.

Now when Charlemagne heard of the success of this daring expedition, and how seven hundred of his discontented knights had joined the forces of Renaud in his mountain castle, he was very wroth and prepared to

take vengeance upon him. Then came to him the traitor Ganelon, and suggested that this could best be done by bribing Ivo the Moorish chief, who was the friend and ally of Renaud, to betray him. With so mean a plot Roland would have naught to do; but the Emperor, weary and worried by news of a threatened rebellion in the north, yielded to the tempter's voice and made his arrangements with Ivo forthwith.

Now it was well known that at that particular time the chieftain Ivo was on terms of alliance with Charlemagne the Emperor, and it was no matter of surprise to the sons of Aymon when Ivo appeared at the Castle of Montauban as his ambassador of peace. They gave him hearty welcome too, for their minds were ever ill at ease because of the feud between themselves and the Emperor and between themselves and their father.

"All shall be sacrificed to make peace with the Emperor," they said, "save our honour and our lives."

"'Tis but a small thing he asks of you," replied Ivo. "He would have you dress yourselves as pilgrims as you did just now when you visited your mother, and that you ride thus, barefoot and unarmed, to the presence of the King in his Castle of Falkalone, and there ask his pardon and do homage to him."

"That will we gladly do," said Renaud, and so said they all.

Not long after they had thus agreed with Ivo, the four brothers dressed themselves in pilgrim's garb and prepared to mount the mules which should take them over the mountains to the Castle of Falkalone. But as Renaud was saying farewell to his wife Clarissa, the daughter of Ivo, she hung about his neck and prayed him with tears not to go alone and unarmed upon this undertaking.

"For," said she, "I have a foreboding—knowing my father as I do—that he is in the pay of Charlemagne for this matter, and that in going to Falkalone you are

but walking into a trap. Hear me, then, and either go not at all or fully armed."

But Renaud shook his head and chid her gently for her want of faith in Ivo her father. "Say no more," said he. "I will hear nothing said against the truth and goodwill of my old ally."

So he strode off to mount his mule; but his wife called Allard softly back, and gave him four swords, and among them good Flamberg, the famous weapon of her lord. "You will have need of these, good brother," she said. "Take them, therefore, and hide them beneath thy robe. But see you say nothing of them to my lord till the right time comes."

So Allard took and hid the swords beneath his cloak, and forthwith the four brothers set out upon their road down the steep mountain-side. Not far were they from Falkalone when suddenly, as they were passing through a deep and narrow valley, there was a shout, a clash of arms, and three-score mounted men of the troops of Charlemagne threw themselves upon them. In a trice Allard pulled out three of the swords and threw them to his brothers, but even when armed the odds against them were far too many. Richard, Allard, and Guichard were soon taken prisoner, and Renaud was only saved by the oncoming darkness, which enabled him to cut down his confused and blundering foes, and to make a way for himself up the mountain-side. And so at length, weary and bloodstained, he made his way back to the Castle of Montauban.

CHAPTER II

THE GOOD STEED BAYARD

WHEN Renaud, a sadder and a wiser knight, had made his return to Montauban, he fully expected that the army of Charlemagne would quickly reappear before his walls to begin the siege anew. But just as the Emperor was about to give orders to this effect, a messenger arrived hot-foot from Paris, with news of a serious rebellion in the region of Northern France, so that he was obliged to turn his face in that direction without further delay. In order, however, to serve as a lesson to the rebels of the north, he ordered the three prisoners, Richard, Allard, and Guichard, to be carried thither in chains in order that they might be hanged on the walls of Paris.

Deep was the distress within the walls of Montauban when this news was brought by one of Renaud's spies.

"I cannot leave my brothers to such a fate," cried Renaud. "Bravely here they stood by me, and now go I forth to rescue them."

And to this his fair wife readily agreed. So Renaud mounted upon his good horse Bayard and rode forth alone in the track of the Emperor's army.

Now the weather grew very sultry about the noontide hour, and Renaud became extremely sleepy and would lay him down to rest. It seemed a safe part of the country; trees were scattered over a meadow which sloped to a little stream. The horse put his head down to crop the tender grass, and his master, slipping from the saddle, lay down under an oak tree and was soon asleep. Before very long the horse, as he fed, had wandered some distance from his master, whose form was almost hidden by the long grass amongst which he lay.

Presently there came by that way a little band of countrymen, with whom journeyed a certain traveller who had seen something of the world and was not unlearned in the art of magic.

This man had often heard of Bayard, the wonderful fairy horse, and now, as he looked about him and saw the straying steed busily crop the grass, he stopped short and exclaimed, "Surely that is the famous horse of Renaud, the rebel knight?"

"Not so!" said his companions. "Renaud is safe in the Castle of Montauban; he would never venture as far north as this. But 'tis a very gallant steed!"

"Renaud's or another's, I care not," said the traveller. "See how rich is his harness and his stirrups of gold! Let the man who catches him take him to Paris and make a present of him to the Emperor. Methinks that man shall have a rich reward."

At once the countrymen attempted to catch the horse, who threw up his head, ran a few paces off, and continued to crop the grass. This he repeated whenever they approached him, until at length they had to confess that theirs was a hopeless task. Then the traveller, who had watched their attempts with jeers, drew near the horse, and waving his hands, uttered some magic spells, while at the same time he threw over his head a fine white powder. The creature stood still with bowed neck, quivering in every limb, and the traveller, seizing his reins, sprang upon his back and set off at a speed like the wind towards Paris.

When the Emperor arose next morning, word was brought him that a matchless horse stood in the courtyard before the palace and that its owner craved audience of the King.

Hurrying forth to see what this might mean, Charlemagne at once saw, with the keenest delight, that none other than Bayard, the famous horse of Renaud, stood before him.

No amount was too high to pay for such a prize ; the traveller went away rich and well content, and Bayard was led to the royal stables.

Meantime the unfortunate Renaud had awaked and discovered his loss. Everywhere he searched and called, and at length, with a heavy heart, sat down on a stone by the wayside to bemoan his loss. "Woe is me!" he cried. "First I lose my father's affection and my mother's tender care, then my brothers are taken from me, and now my horse, my beloved Bayard, has been stolen away. Why, why should I live any longer?"

"To do your duty, Sir Knight," replied a voice in his ear, which made Renaud spring to his feet in alarm.

Before him stood bowing to the ground an odd figure of a little old man, with a long white beard and bright beady eyes.

"What do you mean, old fellow?" asked Renaud somewhat peevishly.

"You are cast down, Sir Knight," replied the dwarf. "But who knows what is in store for him? The wise man does not lose hope, but looks about him for some means of help."

"And can you find me that?" scoffed the knight.

"What will you give me if I do?" asked the little man.

"Take my golden spurs—for what use are they without a horse to ride?" said Renaud, unbuckling them as he spoke.

"And what else have you to offer?" quietly asked his companion, as the priceless spurs disappeared beneath his cloak.

Then Renaud began to look displeased. "What have you to offer in return, I should like to know?" he said. "I have a good mind to offer you a sound box on the ear for your grasping spirit."

"Nay, nay, good sir, that would be unwise indeed," said the little man quietly; "for many have sought favours from me in my day, and have laid their richest

gifts at my feet in order to buy one tenth part of the help I can give to you."

"Take this cloak, then," and with these words Renaud unbuckled his rich velvet mantle, stiff with golden embroidery, which the dwarf deftly folded up and tucked under his shabby cloak.

Then he bowed again and asked gently, "And what next has my lord to offer?"

At this Renaud's wrath knew no bounds. Drawing his sword Flamberg from its scabbard, he held it threateningly over the old man's head, crying, "Now will I offer thee but one blow of my good sword, for thou art a robber and naught else."

"Is that so, Sir Renaud?" smiled the dwarf. "Then wouldst thou slay Maugis, thy cousin, who can indeed be of help to thee in time of need." And with that he pulled off his beard, threw back his hood, and stood revealed as Maugis the Magician.

"You have a good heart, my cousin," said he; "and now put yourself in my hands. Fear not; your brothers are in prison, but are yet alive, and Bayard is in the hands of Charlemagne. Only do as I tell you, and all shall yet be free as the air."

With these words he took from his wallet a shabby pilgrim's gown and hood, like his own, and bidding the knight hide his helmet in the grass, he put this upon him, so that it covered him from head to foot and only half revealed his face.

Thus disguised the two men proceeded on their way to Paris.

Three days later the streets of that city were gay with a fine procession, which passed from the palace to a field where a tournament was to be held. In the midst rode the Emperor in cloth of gold, and in front of him paced the noble steed Bayard, led by four grooms, and richly caparisoned in silk, softest leather, and fine crimson cloth embroidered with white lilies.

"Whose horse is that?" asked a bent old pilgrim of a citizen who stood near him on the bridge over the River Seine.

"That remains to be seen," replied the man. "The Emperor has promised him to the man who in the lists to-day can most easily mount and ride him; for up to now he lets no man put foot in his stirrups."

"And who gave him to the Emperor?" asked Maugis, for it was he.

Before the citizen could answer, the procession suddenly was thrown into confusion. The horse Bayard had stopped short, thrown up his head, scattering his grooms right and left, and with a loud neigh had galloped across the bridge and laid his nose on the shoulder of the taller of the two poorly clad pilgrims.

There was a cry of "Bayard!" from the peers who rode at Charlemagne's right hand, and the King himself pushed forward and caught at the horse's reins.

"Gracious sovereign!" cried the dwarf, throwing himself before the King's own steed. "A boon! A boon! I crave a boon!"

"Say on then," said the Emperor, always gentle to pilgrims, monks, and women; and the dwarf continued—

"Sire, my comrade here is deaf and dumb and blind from his birth. But a wise man hath foretold that if he could but once ride in a tournament, even though he be no knight, a miracle shall take place and he shall be healed."

"He is mad!" cried the courtiers; but the Emperor said—

"No matter if he is. Push on to the field and let us see what he can do."

Now when that tournament began, all the flower of Charlemagne's knights strove again and again to mount and ride good Bayard; but not one of them would he allow to set his foot in his stirrups. At length the dwarf

appeared again before the King, leading the taller pilgrim, and reminding the King of his promise.

"The horse will kill him. Let him try a gentler steed," said Charlemagne.

But the little man answered, "What matter if he kill him? Is his life so dear that he should seek to prolong it?"

So the Emperor gave orders that the horse should be held while others lifted the afflicted man upon his back. No sooner had the foot of the pilgrim touched the stirrup than he leaped upon him and bending, whispered "Bayard!" in his ear. Like a flash of lightning the animal sprang forward, dashed over the field into the river, swam across, and took the road to the south before the astonished onlookers could say a word. On flew the horse, swifter and swifter, never stopping till he stood panting and weary before the gates of the Castle of Montauban. And so the troubles of Renaud came for a while to an end.

CHAPTER III

THE OATH OF THE EMPEROR

DURING the uproar that followed the escape of Renaud the dwarf Maugis seemed to have vanished. Search was made everywhere for a pilgrim in worn and shabby cloak, but no such person appeared to exist within the walls of Paris.

But at midnight a little grey man slipped quietly into the gloomy prison tower that stood hard by the King's palace. Whispering a word to the sleepy warders, he passed on unchecked till he came to an iron door which seemed to open of its own accord. This led into a dark and noisome cell, where three figures, heavily chained, lay upon the damp, unwholesome floor.

“Rise, cousins,” said the dwarf quietly. “It is I, Maugis, come to set you free.”

With that he quickly unfastened their fetters with a tiny key which seemed to open every kind of lock, and the three brothers, Allard, Guichard, and Richard, dazed and stupefied, made their way out of the prison. Before day broke, all four—rescued and rescuer—were riding like the wind towards the Castle of Montauban.

This daring escape only served to increase the wrath of Charlemagne, who now swore a great oath that he would never cease the warfare until he sat at the head of the banquet in the white castle of his rebellious nephew.

So once more the army was summoned and took the road to Montauban. There was but little chance of taking the place by assault; the only hope was to starve out the garrison and play the game of waiting. But Charlemagne knew that the advantage was all on the side of Renaud as long as he had Maugis with him. For Maugis was aware of secret paths unknown even to Renaud, and there was little danger of actual starvation for the besieged, though commons might very likely run short.

Now one dark night the wise dwarf crept down the mountain-side and entered the camp of Charlemagne to spy out the land. He had no fear of danger, for when he approached a sentry, he sprinkled a fine white powder in the air which had the immediate effect of making him drowsy and dull of brain. He advanced in safety therefore right up to the tent of Charlemagne, and was about to raise the curtain that hung before it, scattering, as he did so, his powder over the man who lay stretched upon the entrance, when suddenly the latter sprang up, seized the dwarf in an iron grasp, and dragged him into the presence of the King.

His captor was Oliver, one of Charlemagne's most renowned peers, who had been on the look out for the

tricky little man for a long time, and who was one of the very few who were quite unaffected by his magic powders.

"Ho! It is thou!" cried Charlemagne at sight of him. "Now can we put an end to thy cunning and sorcery. Bind him fast, good Oliver, take him forth and fling him from the top of yonder precipice."

"Very good, my gracious liege," replied the dwarf, unmoved. "My life is one of some small value to others but of none to myself. But it is customary, I believe, to grant to dying men one boon."

"What is that?" asked the King.

"That I may be allowed to live just long enough to sit with you and your peers at the banquet once again," said Maugis, who in former days had always been a welcome guest on festive occasions.

The Emperor nodded grimly. "'Tis not much to ask," he said, "and anyhow the affair will not last long."

So all that day invitations were issued and a great banquet prepared; only Oliver could not be present, for he had undertaken to make a night attack upon some of the followers of Renaud, who he had reason to think had taken this opportunity to fetch food from the valleys.

A noble array of peers sat down with Charlemagne that night, and ate and drank and pledged each other with right goodwill, while Maugis sat at the Emperor's right hand and laughed and talked with the best of them. But no one saw that every few minutes he quietly cast into the air a certain amount of a powder, so fine that no one could detect its presence.

Gradually a strange drowsiness overtook the banqueters. Heads began to nod and eyes to close, and before the feast was over, every one save Maugis lay back in his seat sound asleep.

Waiting only till the Emperor seemed to have passed into the most profound slumber of all, Maugis jumped

from his seat, and with a chuckle of glee began to hoist him upon his shoulders. Luckily, though he was so short, the dwarf's back was very broad, and he managed thus to convey the burly figure of Charlemagne up the mountain-paths till he stood before the Castle of Montauban.

At a word from him the gates swung open, and forthwith he bore his strange burden through the midst of the astonished sentries and into the great hall, where Renaud and his followers were sitting.

"Here is a hostage for you, good cousins," quoth Maugis with a laugh. "Keep him safe, for otherwise he would have me lie to-night at the bottom of a precipice."

You may imagine, if you can, the amazement of Renaud and his brothers when they saw their lord and uncle thus lying at their mercy. But they were honourable foes, and scorned to take advantage of him; so they carried him, still sleeping, to the finest room in the castle and laid him upon a noble bed, and left him to slumber in peace.

When Charlemagne awoke at noon next day he was first overcome with bewilderment at his surroundings, and then with fury at the way he had been tricked. In vain did Renaud remind him that all was fair in love and war; finding that the Emperor's wrath only grew hotter as the discussion went on, he suggested that they should postpone it for a time, and that meantime the Emperor would condescend to share a meal with him.

This Charlemagne would gladly have declined, but as he had awakened exceedingly hungry he thought it better not to do so. So descending to the great hall of Montauban, he seated himself at table.

There all was arranged in royal fashion. Golden cups, dishes, and plates were put before the Emperor, and the most rare and delicious foods were brought in and set before him. His four nephews, in courteous

fashion, tasted the meals first themselves to assure him they were free from poison, and afterwards served him on bended knee.

All this seemed at the beginning to have a softening effect upon the Emperor, but when he had finished the meal he grew angry and morose again. Then came Renaud and knelt before him, humbly begging for peace and an end to the long feud. But Charlemagne remembered the many ways in which he had been worsted by his nephews in former times and hardened his heart against them.

"Open your gates to your Emperor," he cried, "for he will never make peace with traitors."

"Traitors are we not," replied Renaud, "and to prove it, although I have the Emperor utterly in my power, I now give him full leave to depart. Open the gates and let him go forth."

So Charlemagne departed; but his great figure somehow looked less heroic than usual as he strode unforgiving down the mountain-side, leaving his nephews looking sadly after him.

As Renaud turned back to enter the castle Maugis the Dwarf stood in his way and looked darkly at him.

"Fool that thou art, O Renaud," cried the little man, "and unworthy of my wiles! Why didst thou not keep him fast prisoner until thou hadst made what terms thou wilt? Now will I offer *him* my services, since thou makest them of so little account."

"Honour comes before advantage, O Maugis," said Renaud sadly but firmly. But this Maugis, not being a knight, could not understand.

Now when Charlemagne had returned in safety to his tent there came to him Roland, his favourite knight, and heard all his adventure. And when the story was told Roland said gravely, "Surely, sire, 'tis a pity to prolong this weary warfare with our kinsmen. Why not grant them your forgiveness on condition that they

do homage and promise their allegiance to you henceforth?"

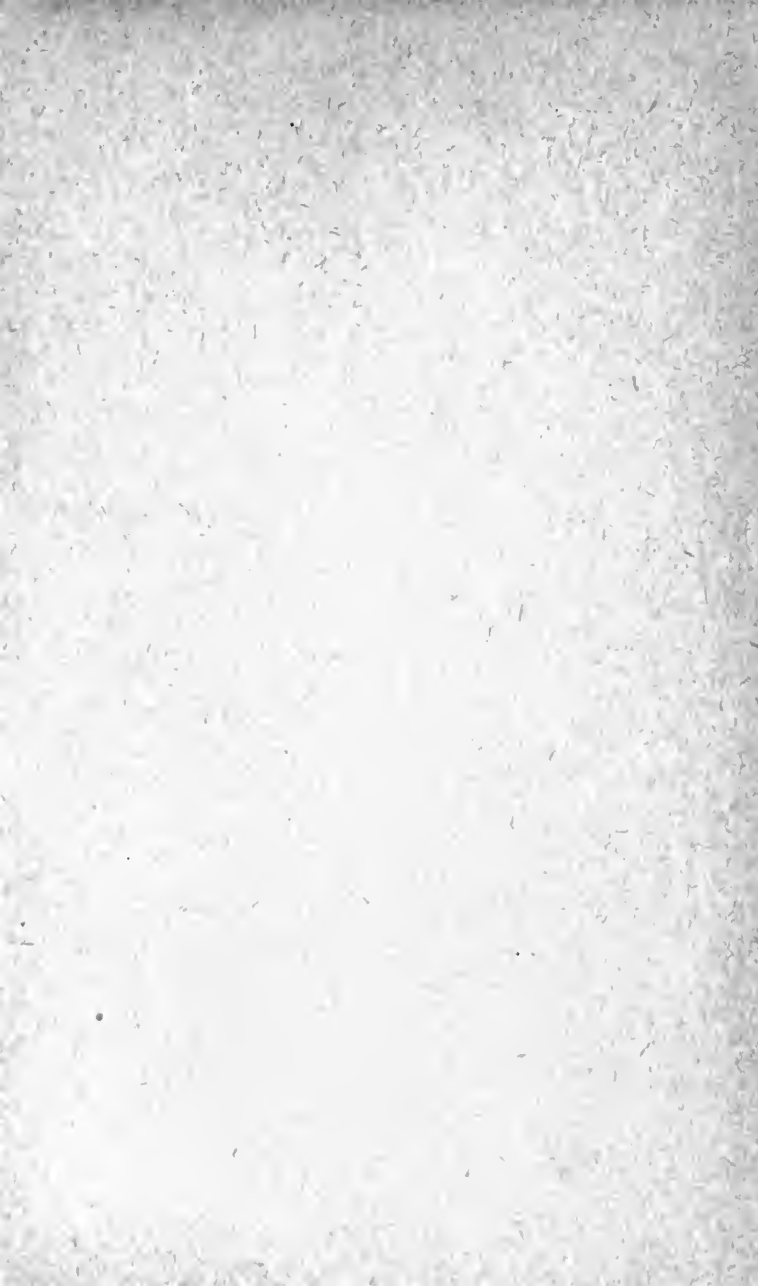
"I cannot do it," said Charlemagne, "for thus I should break my pledged word. Dost thou forget the oath that I swore that I would never cease this struggle until I should feast in the Castle of Montauban?"

"And that you have now done," said Roland calmly.

The great Emperor stood for a moment wrapped in thought. Then once more his jovial laugh rang out as in the days of old, and clapping Roland on the shoulder he cried, "Thou sayest well. My oath is now fulfilled, and thou shalt be the one to offer terms forthwith. Tell them all shall be forgiven and forgotten if they will serve under me as loyal peers of France."

And that was how peace and joy came at that time to the Castle of Montauban.

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