

ERLING THE BOLD



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Chapter 1 - In Which the Tale Begins Somewhat Furiously.

By the early light of a bright summer morning, long, long ago, two small boats were seen to issue from one of the fiords or firths on the west coast of Norway, and row towards the skerries or low rocky islets that lay about a mile distant from the mainland.

Although the morning was young, the sun was already high in the heavens, and brought out in glowing colours the varied characteristics of a mountain scene of unrivalled grandeur.

The two shallops moved swiftly towards the islands, their oars shivering the liquid mirror of the sea, and producing almost the only sound that disturbed the universal stillness, for at that early hour Nature herself seemed buried in deep repose. A silvery mist hung over the water, through which the innumerable rocks and islands assumed fantastic shapes, and the more distant among them appeared as though they floated in air. A few seagulls rose startled from their nests, and sailed upwards with plaintive cries, as the keels of the boats grated on the rocks, and the men stepped out and hauled them up on the beach of one of the islets.

A wild uncouth crew were those Norsemen of old! All were armed, for in their days the power and the means of self-defence were absolutely necessary to self-preservation.

Most of them wore portions of scale armour, or shirts of ring mail, and headpieces of steel, though a few among them appeared to have confidence in the protection afforded by the thick hide of the wolf, which, converted into rude, yet not ungraceful, garments, covered their broad shoulders. All, without exception, carried sword or battle-

axe and shield. They were goodly stalwart men every one, but silent and stern.

It might have been observed that the two boats, although bound for the same islet, did not row in company. They were beached as far from each other as the little bay into which they ran would admit of, and the crews stood aloof in two distinct groups.

In the centre of each group stood a man who, from his aspect and bearing, appeared to be superior to his fellows. One was in the prime of life, dark and grave; the other in the first flush of manhood, full grown, though beardless, fair, and ruddy. Both were taller and stouter than their comrades.

The two men had met there to fight, and the cause of their feud was—Love!

Both loved a fair Norse maiden in Horlingdal. The father of the maid favoured the elder warrior; the maid herself preferred the younger.

In those days, barbarous though they undoubtedly were, law and justice were more respected and more frequently appealed to in Norway than in almost any other country. Liberty, crushed elsewhere under the deadweight of feudalism, found a home in the bleak North, and a rough but loving welcome from the piratical, sea-roving! She did not, indeed, dwell altogether scathless among her demi-savage guardians, who, if their perceptions of right and wrong were somewhat confused, might have urged in excuse that their light was small. She received many shocks and frequent insults from individuals, but liberty was sincerely loved and fondly cherished by the body of the Norwegian people, through all the period of those dark ages during which other nations scarce dared to mention her name.

Nevertheless, it was sometimes deemed more convenient to settle disputes by the summary method of an appeal to arms than to await the issue of a tedious and uncertain

lawsuit such an appeal being perfectly competent to those who preferred it, and the belief being strong among the fiery spirits of the age that Odin, the god of war, would assuredly give victory to the right.

In the present instance it was not considered any infringement of the law of liberty that the issue of the combat would be the disposal of a fair woman's hand, with or without her heart. Then, as now, women were often forced to marry against their will.

Having gone to that island to fight—an island being a naturally circumscribed battlefield whose limits could not conveniently be transgressed—the two champions set to work at once with the cool businesslike promptitude of men sprung from a warlike race, and nurtured from their birth in the midst of war's alarms.

Together, and without speaking, they ascended the rock, which was low and almost barren, with a small extent of turf in the centre, level, and admirably suited to their purpose. Here they faced each other; the one drew his sword, the other raised his battle-axe.

There was no sentiment in that combat. The times and the men were extremely matter-of-fact. The act of slaying gracefully had not yet been acquired; yet there was much of manly grace displayed as each threw himself into the position that nature and experience had taught him was best suited to the wielding of his peculiar weapon.

For one instant each gazed intently into the face of the other, as if to read there his premeditated plan of attack. At that moment the clear blue eye of the younger man dilated, and, as his courage rose, the colour mounted to his cheek. The swart brow of the other darkened as he marked the change; then, with sudden spring and shout, the two fell upon each other and dealt their blows with incredible vigour and rapidity.

They were a well-matched pair. For nearly two hours did they toil and moil over the narrow limits of that sea-girt

rock—yet victory leaned to neither side. Now the furious blows rained incessant on the sounding shields; anon the din of strife ceased, while the combatants moved round each other, shifting their position with elastic step, as, with wary motion and eagle glances, each sought to catch the other off his guard, and the clash of steel, as the weapons met in sudden onset, was mingled with the shout of anger or defiance. The sun glanced on whirling blade and axe, and sparkled on their coats of mail as if the lightning flash were playing round them; while screaming seamews flew and circled overhead, as though they regarded with intelligent interest and terror the mortal strife that was going on below.

Blood ere long began to flow freely on both sides; the vigour of the blows began to abate, the steps to falter. The youthful cheek grew pale; the dark warrior's brow grew darker, while heaving chests, labouring breath, and an occasional gasp, betokened the approaching termination of the struggle. Suddenly the youth, as if under the influence of a new impulse, dropped his shield, sprang forward, raised himself to his full height, grasped his axe with both hands, and, throwing it aloft (thus recklessly exposing his person), brought it down with terrific violence on the shield of his adversary.

The action was so sudden that the other, already much exhausted, was for the moment paralysed, and failed to take advantage of his opportunity. He met but failed to arrest the blow with his shield. It was crushed down upon his head, and in another moment the swarthy warrior lay stretched upon the turf.

Sternly the men conveyed their fallen chief to his boat, and rowed him to the mainland, and many a week passed by ere he recovered from the effects of the blow that felled him. His conqueror returned to have his wounds dressed by the bride for whom he had fought so long and so valiantly on that bright summer morning.

Thus it was that King Haldor of Horlingdal, surnamed the Fierce, conquered King Ulf of Romsdal, acquired his distinctive appellation, and won Herfrida the Soft-eyed for his bride.

It must not be supposed that these warriors were kings in the ordinary acceptation of that term. They belonged to the class of "small" or petty kings, of whom there were great numbers in Norway in those days, and were merely rich and powerful free-landholders or udallers.

Haldor the Fierce had a large family of sons and daughters. They were all fair, strong, and extremely handsome, like himself.

Ulf of Romsdal did not die of his wounds, neither did he die of love. Disappointed love was then, as now, a terrible disease, but not necessarily fatal. Northmen were very sturdy in the olden time. They almost always recovered from that disease sooner or later. When his wounds were healed, Ulf married a fair girl of the Horlingdal district, and went to reside there, but his change of abode did not alter his title. He was always spoken of as Ulf of Romsdal. He and his old enemy Haldor the Fierce speedily became fast friends; and so was it with their wives, Astrid and Herfrida, who also took mightily to each other. They span, and carded wool, and sewed together oftentimes, and discussed the affairs of Horlingdal, no doubt with mutual advantage and satisfaction.

Twenty years passed away, and Haldor's eldest son, Erling, grew to be a man. He was very like his father—almost a giant in size; fair, very strong, and remarkably handsome. His silken yellow hair fell in heavy curls on a pair of the broadest shoulders in the dale. Although so young, he already had a thick short beard, which was very soft and curly. His limbs were massive, but they were so well proportioned, and his movements so lithe, that his great size and strength were not fully appreciated until one stood close by his side or fell into his powerful grasp.

Erling was lion-like, yet he was by nature gentle and retiring. He had a kindly smile, a hearty laugh, and bright blue eyes. Had he lived in modern days he would undoubtedly have been a man of peace. But he lived "long long ago"—therefore he was a man of war. Being unusually fearless, his companions of the valley called him Erling the Bold. He was, moreover, extremely fond of the sea, and often went on viking cruises in his own ships, whence he was also styled Erling the Sea-king, although he did not at that time possess a foot of land over which to exercise kingly authority.

Now, it must be explained here that the words Sea-king and Viking do not denote the same thing. One is apt to be misled by the termination of the latter word, which has no reference whatever to the royal title king. A viking was merely a piratical rover on the sea, the sea-warrior of the period, but a Sea-king was a leader and commander of vikings. Every Sea-king was a viking, but every viking was not a Sea-king; just as every Admiral is a sailor, but every sailor is not an Admiral. When it is said that Erling was a Sea-king, it is much as if we had said he was an admiral in a small way.

Chapter 2 - Introduces, among others, the Hero and Heroine, and opens up a View of Norse Life in the Olden Time.

Ulf of Romsdal had a daughter named Hilda. She was fair, and extremely pretty.

The young men said that her brow was the habitation of the lily, her eye the mirror of the heavens, her cheek the dwelling-place of the rose. True, in the ardour of their feelings and strength of their imaginations they used strong language; nevertheless it was impossible to overpraise the Norse maiden. Her nut-brown hair fell in luxuriant masses over her shapely shoulders, reaching far below the waist; her skin was fair, and her manners engaging. Hilda was undoubtedly blue-eyed and beautiful. She was just seventeen at this time. Those who loved her (and there were few who did not) styled her the sunbeam.

Erling and Hilda had dwelt near each other from infancy. They had been playmates, and for many years were as brother and sister to each other. Erling's affection had gradually grown into a stronger passion, but he never mentioned the fact to anyone, being exceedingly shamefaced and shy in regard to love. He would have given his ears to have known that his love was returned, but he dared not to ask. He was very stupid on this point. In regard to other things he was sharp-witted above his fellows. None knew better than he how to guide the "warship" through the intricate mazes of the island-studded coast of Norway; none equalled him in deeds of arms; no one excelled him in speed of foot, in scaling the fells, or in tracking the wolf and bear to their dens; but all beat him in

love-making! He was wondrously slow and obtuse at that, and could by no means discover whether or not Hilda regarded him as a lover or a brother. As uncertainty on this point continued, Erling became jealous of all the young men who approached her, and in proportion as this feeling increased his natural disposition changed, and his chafing spirit struggled fiercely within him. But his native good sense and modesty enabled him pretty well to conceal his feelings. As for Hilda, no one knew the state of her mind. It is probable that at this time she herself had not a very distinct idea on the point.

Hilda had a foster-sister named Ada, who was also very beautiful. She was unusually dark for a Norse maiden. Her akin indeed was fair, but her hair and eyes were black like the raven's wing. Her father was King Hakon of Drontheim. It was the custom in those warlike days for parents to send out some of their children to be fostered by others—in order, no doubt, to render next to impossible the total extirpation of their families at a time when sudden descents upon households were common. By thus scattering their children the chances of family annihilation were lessened, and the probability that some members might be left alive to take revenge was greatly increased.

Hilda and Ada were warmly attached. Having been brought up together, they loved each other as sisters—all the more, perhaps, that in character they were somewhat opposed. Hilda was grave, thoughtful, almost pensive. Ada was full of vivacity and mirth, fond of fun, and by no means averse to a little of what she styled harmless mischief.

Now there was a man in Horlingdal called Glumm, surnamed the Gruff, who loved Ada fervently. He was a stout, handsome man, of ruddy complexion, and second only to Erling in personal strength and prowess. But by nature he was morose and gloomy. Nothing worse, however, could be said of him. In other respects he was esteemed a brave, excellent man. Glumm was too proud to

show his love to Ada very plainly; but she had wit enough to discover it, though no one else did, and she resolved to punish him for his pride by keeping him in suspense.

Horlingdal, where Ulf and Haldor and their families dwelt was, like nearly all the vales on the west of Norway, hemmed in by steep mountains of great height, which were covered with dark pines and birch trees. To the level pastures high up on mountain tops the inhabitants were wont to send their cattle to feed in summer—the small crops of hay in the valleys being carefully gathered and housed for winter use.

Every morning, before the birds began to twitter, Hilda set out, with her pail and her wooden box, to climb the mountain to the upland dairy or “saeter”, and fetch the milk and butter required by the family during the day. Although the maid was of noble birth—Ulf claiming descent from one of those who are said to have come over with Odin and his twelve godars or priests from Asia—this was not deemed an inappropriate occupation. Among the Norsemen labour was the lot of high and low. He was esteemed the best man who could fight most valiantly in battle and labour most actively in the field or with the tools of the smith and carpenter. Ulf of Romsdal, although styled king in virtue of his descent, was not too proud, in the busy summertime, to throw off his coat and toss the hay in his own fields in the midst of his thralls (slaves taken in war) and house-carles. Neither he, nor Haldor, nor any of the small kings, although they were the chief men of the districts in which they resided, thought it beneath their dignity to forge their own spearheads and anchors, or to mend their own doors. As it was with the men, so was it with the women. Hilda the Sunbeam was not despised because she climbed the mountainside to fetch milk and butter for the family.

One morning, in returning from the fell, Hilda heard the loud clatter of the anvil at Haldorstede. Having learned

that morning that Danish vikings had been seen prowling among the islands near the fiord, she turned aside to enquire the news.

Haldorstede lay about a mile up the valley, and Hilda passed it every morning on her way to and from the saeter. Ulfstede lay near the shore of the fiord. Turning into the smithy, she found Erling busily engaged in hammering a huge mass of stubborn red-hot metal. So intent was the young man on his occupation that he failed to observe the entrance of his fair visitor, who set down her milk pail, and stood for a few minutes with her hands folded and her eyes fixed demurely on her lover.

Erling had thrown off his jerkin and rolled up the sleeves of his shirt of coarse homespun fabric, in order to give his thick muscular arms unimpeded play in wielding the hammer and turning the mass of glowing metal on the anvil. He wore woollen breeches and hose, both of which had been fashioned by the fingers of his buxom mother, Herfrida. A pair of neatly formed shoes of untanned hide—his own workmanship—protected his feet, and his waist was encircled by a broad leathern girdle, from one side of which depended a short hunting-knife, and from the other a flap, with a slit in it, to support his sword. The latter weapon—a heavy double-edged blade—stood leaning against the forge chimney, along with a huge battle-axe, within reach of his hand. The collar of his shirt was thrown well back, exposing to view a neck and chest whose muscles denoted extraordinary power, and the whiteness of which contrasted strikingly with the ruddy hue of his deeply bronzed countenance.

The young giant appeared to take pleasure in the exercise of his superabundant strength, for, instead of using the ordinary single-hand hammer with which other men were wont to bend the glowing metal to their will, he wielded the great forehammer, and did it as easily, too, with his right arm as if it had been but a wooden mallet. The mass of

metal at which he wrought was thick and unyielding, but under his heavy blows it began to assume the form of an axe—a fact which Hilda noticed with a somewhat saddened brow. Erling's long hair, rolling as it did down his shoulders, frequently straggled over his face and interfered slightly with his vision, whereupon he shook it back with an impatient toss, as a lion might shake his mane, while he toiled with violent energy at his work. To look at him, one might suppose that Vulcan himself had condescended to visit the abodes of men, and work in a terrestrial smithy! During one of the tosses with which he threw back his hair, Erling chanced to raise his eyes, which instantly fell upon Hilda. A glad smile beamed on his flushed face, and he let the hammer fall with a ringing clatter on the anvil, exclaiming:

“Ha! good morrow to thee, Hilda! Thou comest with stealthy tread, like the midnight marauder. What news? Does all go well at Ulfstede? But why so sad, Hilda? Thy countenance is not wont to quarrel with the mountain air.”

“Truly, no!” replied the girl, smiling, “mountain air likes me well. If my looks are sadder than usual, it is because of the form of the weapon thou art fashioning.”

“The weapon!” exclaimed Erling, as he raised the handle of the hammer, and, resting his arms on it, gazed at his visitor in some surprise. “It is but an axe—a simple axe, perchance a trifle heavier than other axes because it suits my arm better, and I have a weakness that way. What ails thee at a battle-axe, Hilda?”

“I quarrel not with the axe, Erling, but it reminds me of thy love of fighting, and I grieve for that. Why art thou so fond of war?”

“Fond of war!” echoed the youth. “Now, out upon thee, Hilda! what were a man fit for if he could not fight?”

“Nay, I question not thine ability to fight, but I grieve to see thy love for fighting.”

“Truly there seems to me a close relationship between the love of war and the ability to fight,” returned the youth. “But to be plain with thee: I *do not* love war so much as ye think. Yet I utter this in thine ear, for I would not that the blades of the valley knew it, lest they might presume upon it, and I should have to prove my ability—despite my want of love—upon some of their carcasses.”

“I wish there were no such thing as war,” said Hilda with a sigh.

Erling knitted his brows and gazed into the smithy fire as if he were engaged in pondering some knotty point. “Well, I’m not sure,” said he slowly, and descending to a graver tone of address— “I’m not sure that I can go quite so far as that. If we had no war at all, perchance our swords might rust, and our skill, for want of practice, might fail us in the hour of need. Besides, how could men in that case hope to dwell with Odin in Valhalla’s bright and merry halls? But I agree with thee in wishing that we had less of war and more of peace *at home*.”

“I fear,” said Hilda, “we seem likely to have more of war and less of peace than usual, if rumours be true. Have you heard that Danish vikings have been seen among the islands?”

“Aye, truly, I have heard of them, and it is that which has sent me to the smithy this morning to hasten forward my battle-axe; for I love not too light a weapon. You see, Hilda, when it has not weight one must sometimes repeat the blow; especially if the mail be strong. But with a heavy axe and a stout arm there is no need for that. I had begun this weapon,” continued the youth, as if he were musing aloud rather than speaking to his companion, “with intent to try its metal on the head of the King; but I fear me it will be necessary to use it in cracking a viking’s headpiece before it cleaves a royal crown.”

“The King!” exclaimed Hilda, with a look of surprise, not unmingled with terror, “Erling, has ambition led thee to

this?"

"Not so; but self-preservation urges me to it."

The maiden paused a few seconds, ere she replied in a meditative voice— "The old man who came among us a year ago, and who calls himself Christian, tells me that his god is not a god of war, like Odin; he says that his god permits no war to men, save that of self-defence; but, Erling, would slaying the King be indeed an act of self-preservation?"

"Aye, in good sooth would it," replied the youth quickly, while a dark frown crossed his brow.

"How can that be?" asked the maiden.

"Hast such small love for gossip, Hilda, that the foul deeds and ambitious projects of Harald Haarfager have not reached thine ear?"

"I have heard," replied Hilda, "that he is fond of war, which, truly, is no news, and that he is just now more busy with his bloody game than usual; but what does that matter to thee?"

"Matter!" cried the youth impatiently, as he seized the lump of metal on which he had been at work, and, thrusting it into the smouldering charcoal, commenced to blow the fire energetically, as if to relieve his feelings. "Know ye not that the King—this Harald Fairhair—is not satisfied with the goodly domains that of right belong to him, and the kingly rule which he holds, according to law, over all Norway, but that he means to subdue the whole land to himself, and trample on our necks as he has already trampled on our laws?"

"I know somewhat of this," said Hilda.

"No one," pursued Erling vehemently, and blowing the fire into a fervent heat—"no one denies to Harald the right to wear the crown of Norway. That was settled at the Ore Thing

The excited youth stopped abruptly, and, seizing the tongs, whirled the white mass of semi-molten steel upon the anvil,

and fell to belabouring it with such goodwill that a bright shower of sparks drove Hilda precipitately out of the workshop.

The wrongs which roused the young Norseman's indignation to such a pitch are matters of history.

The government of the country at that time involved the democratic element very largely. No act or expedition of any importance could be done or undertaken without the previous deliberation and consent of a "Thing", or assembly of landed proprietors. There were many different Things—such as General Things, District Things, House Things of the King's counsellors, and Herd Things of the Court, etcetera, and to such of these there was a distinct and well-known trumpet call. There were also four great Things which were legislative, while the small district Things were only administrative. In addition to which there was the Ore Thing of Drontheim, referred to by Erling. At these Things the King himself possessed no greater power than any of the bonders. He was only a "Thing-man" at a Thing.

No wonder, then, that the self-governing and warlike Norsemen could not bring themselves tamely to submit to the tyranny of Harald Haarfager, or Fairhair, King of Norway by hereditary right, when he cast aside all the restraints of ancient custom, and, in his effort to obtain more power, commenced those bloody wars with his subjects, which had the effect of causing many of his chief men to expatriate themselves and seek new homes in the islands of the great western sea, and which ultimately resulted in the subjugation (at least during that reign) of all the petty kings of Norway. These small kings, be it observed, were not at that time exercising any illegal power, or in the occupation of any unwarrantable position, which could be pleaded by King Harald in justification of his violent proceedings against them. The title of king did not imply independent sovereignty. They were merely the hereditary lords of the soil, who exercised independent and

rightful authority over their own estates and households, and modified authority over their respective districts, subject, however, to the laws of the land—laws which were recognised and perfectly understood by the people and the king, and which were admitted by people and king alike to have more authority than the royal will itself. By law the small kings were bound to attend the meetings of the Stor Things or Parliaments, at the summons of the sovereign, and to abide by the decisions of those assemblies, where all men met on an equal footing, but where, of course, intellectual power and eloquence led the multitude, for good or for evil, then just as they do now, and will continue to do as long as, and wherever, free discussion shall obtain. To say that the possession of power, wealth, or influence was frequently abused to the overawing and coercing of those assemblies, is simply to state that they were composed of human beings possessed of fallen natures.

So thoroughly did the Northmen appreciate the importance of having a right to raise their voices and to vote in the national parliaments, and so jealously did they assert and maintain their privileges, that the King himself—before he could, on his accession, assume the crown—was obliged to appear at the “Thing”, where a freeborn landholder proposed him, and where his title to the crown was investigated and proved in due form. No war expedition on a large scale could be undertaken until a Thing had been converged, and requisition legally made by the King for a supply of men and arms; and, generally, whenever any act affecting national or even district interests was contemplated, it was necessary to assemble a Thing, and consult with the people before anything could be done.

It may be easily understood, then, with what an outburst of indignation a free and warlike race beheld the violent course pursued by Harald Fairhair, who roamed through the country with fire and sword, trampling on their cherished laws and privileges, subduing the petty kings,

and placing them, when submissive, as Jarls, i.e. earls or governors over the districts to collect the scatt or taxes, and manage affairs in his name and for his behoof.

It is no wonder that Erling the Bold gathered his brow into an ominous frown, pressed his lips together, tossed his locks impatiently while he thought on these things and battered the iron mass on his anvil with the amount of energy that he would have expended in belabouring the head of King Harald himself, had opportunity offered.

Erling's wrath cooled, however, almost instantly on his observing Hilda's retreat before the fiery shower. He flung down his hammer, seized his battle-axe, and throwing it on his shoulder as he hurried out, speedily overtook her.

"Forgive my rude manners," he said. "My soul was chafed by the thoughts that filled my brain, and I scarce knew what I did."

"Truly, thou man of fire," replied the girl, with an offended look, "I am of half a mind not to pardon thee. See, my kirtle is destroyed by the shower thou didst bestow upon me so freely."

"I will repay thee that with such a kirtle as might grace a queen the next time I go on viking cruise."

"Meantime," said Hilda, "I am to go about like a witch plucked somewhat hastily from the fire by a sympathising crone."

"Nay; Herfrida will make thee a new kirtle of the best wool at Haldorstede."

"So thy mother, it seems, is to work and slave in order to undo thy mischief?"

"Then, if nothing else will content thee," said Erling gaily, "I will make thee one myself; but it must be of leather, for I profess not to know how to stitch more delicate substance. But let me carry thy pitcher, Hilda. I will go to Ulfstede to hold converse with thy father on these matters, for it seemed to me that the clouds are gathering somewhat too

thickly over the dale for comfort or peace to remain long with us."

As the young man and maiden wended their way down the rocky path that skirted the foaming Horlingdal river, Hilda assumed a more serious tone, and sought to convince her companion of the impropriety of being too fond of fighting, in which attempt, as might be supposed, she was not very successful.

"Why, Hilda," said the youth, at the close of a speech in which his fair companion endeavoured to point out the extreme sinfulness of viking cruises in particular, "it is, as thou sayest, unjust to take from another that which belongs to him if he be our friend; but if he is our enemy, and the enemy of our country, that alters the case. Did not the great Odin himself go on viking cruise and seize what prey he chose?"

Erling said this with the air of a man who deemed his remark unanswerable.

"I know not," rejoined Hilda. "There seems to me much mystery in our thoughts about the gods. I have heard it said that there is no such god as Odin."

The maiden uttered this in a subdued voice, and her cheek paled a little as she glanced up at Erling's countenance. The youth gazed at her with an expression of extreme surprise, and for a few minutes they walked slowly forward without speaking.

There was reason for this silence on both sides. Hilda was naturally of a simple and trustful nature. She had been brought up in the religion of her fathers, and had listened with awe and with deep interest on many a long winter night to the wild legends with which the scalds, or poets of the period, were wont to beguile the evening hours in her father's mansion; but about a year before the time of which we write, an aged stranger had come from the south, and taken up his abode in the valley, in a secluded and dilapidated hut, in which he was suffered to dwell

unmolested by its owner, Haldor the Fierce; whose fierceness, by the way, was never exhibited except in time of war and in the heat of battle!

With this hermit Hilda had held frequent converse, and had listened with horror, but with a species of fascination which she could not resist, to his calm and unanswerable reasoning on the fallacy of the religion of Odin, and on the truth of that of Jesus Christ. At first she resolved to fly from the old man, as a dangerous enemy, who sought to seduce her from the paths of rectitude; but when she looked at his grave, sad face, and listened to the gentle and—she knew not why—persuasive tones of his voice, she changed her mind, and resolved to hear what he had to say. Without being convinced of the truth of the new religion—of which she had heard rumours from the roving vikings who frequented Horlingdal—she was much shaken in regard to the truth of her own, and now, for the first time, she had ventured to hint to a human being what was passing in her mind.

At this period Christianity had not penetrated into Norway, but an occasional wanderer or hermit had found his way thither from time to time to surprise the inhabitants with his new doctrines, and then, perchance, to perish as a warlock because of them. Erling had heard of this old man, and regarded him with no favour, for in his sea roving he had met with so-called Christians, whose conduct had not prepossessed him in their favour. As for their creed, he knew nothing whatever about it.

His mind, however, was of that bold, straightforward, self-reliant, and meditative cast, which happily has existed in all ages and in all climes, and which, in civilised lands, usually brings a man to honour and power, while in barbarous countries and ages, if not associated with extreme caution and reticence, it is apt to bring its possessor into trouble.

It was with astonishment that Erling heard sentiments which had long been harboured in his own mind drop from

the lips of one whose natural character he knew to be the reverse of sceptical in matters of faith, or speculative in matters of opinion. Instead of making a direct reply to Hilda's remark, he said, after a pause:

"Hilda, I have my doubts of the old man Christian; men say he is a warlock, and I partly believe them, for it is only such who shun the company of their fellows. I would caution thee against him. He believes not in Odin or Thor, which is matter of consideration mainly to himself, but methinks he holdeth fellowship with Nikke, (Satan, or the Evil One) which is matter of consideration for all honest men, aye, and women too, who would live in peace; for if the Evil Spirit exists at all, as I firmly believe he does, in some shape or other, it were well to keep as far from him as we may, and specially to avoid those erring mortals who seem to court his company."

"The old man is misjudged, believe me," replied the girl earnestly; "I have spoken much with him and oft. It may be he is wrong in some things—how can a woman judge of such matters?—but he is gentle, and has a kind heart."

"I like him not," was Erling's curt reply.

The youth and maiden had now reached a part of the valley where a small footpath diverged from the main track which led to Ulf's dwelling. The path ran in the direction of the hayfields that bordered the fiord. Just as they reached it, Hilda observed that her father was labouring there with his thralls.

"See," she exclaimed, stopping abruptly, and taking her pitcher from Erling, "my father is in the hayfield."

The youth was about to remonstrate and insist on being allowed to carry the pitcher to the house before going to the field; but on second thoughts he resigned his slight burden, and, saying "farewell", turned on his heel and descended the path with rapid step and a somewhat burdened heart.

"She loves me not," he muttered to himself, almost sternly. "I am a brother, nothing more."

Indulging in these and kindred gloomy reflections, he advanced towards a rocky defile where the path diverged to the right. Before taking the turn he looked back. Hilda was standing on the spot where they had parted, but her face was not directed towards her late companion. She was looking steadily up the valley. Presently the object which attracted her attention appeared in view, and Erling felt a slight sensation of anger, he scarce knew why, on observing the old man who had been the subject of their recent conversation issue from among the rocks. His first impulse was to turn back, but, checking himself, he wheeled sharply round and hurried away.

Scarcely had he taken three steps, however, when he was arrested by a sound that resembled a crash of thunder. Glancing quickly upwards, he beheld an enormous mass of rock, which had become detached from the mountain side, descending in shattered fragments into the valley.

The formation of Horlingdal at that particular point was peculiar. The mountain ranges on either side, which rose to a height of at least four thousand feet, approached each other abruptly, thus forming a dark gloomy defile of a few hundred yards in width, with precipitous cliffs on either side, and the river roaring in the centre of the pass. The water rushed in white-crested billows through its rock-impeded bed, and terminated in a splendid foss, or fall, forty or fifty feet high, which plunged into a seething caldron, whence it issued in a troubled stream to the plain that opened out below. It here found rest in the level fields of Ulfstede, that lay at the head of the fiord. The open amphitheatre above this pass, with its circlet of grand glacier-capped mountains, was the abode of a considerable number of small farmers, in the midst of whose dwellings stood the residence of Haldor, where the meeting in the smithy just described took place.

It was in this narrow defile that the landslip happened, a catastrophe which always has been and still is of frequent occurrence in the mountain regions of Norway.

Hilda and the old man (whom we shall henceforth call Christian) cast their eyes hastily upwards on hearing the sound that had arrested Erling's steps so suddenly. The enormous mass of rock was detached from the hill on the other side of the river, but the defile was so narrow that falling rocks often rebounded quite across it. The slip occurred just opposite the spot on which Hilda and the old man stood, and as the terrible shower came on, tearing down trees and rocks, the heavier masses being dashed and spurned from the hillside in innumerable fragments, it became evident that to escape beyond the range of the chaotic deluge was impossible.

Hilda understood the danger so well that she was panic stricken and rooted to the spot. Erling understood it also, and, with a sudden cry, dashed at full speed to the rescue. His cry was one almost of despair, for the distance between them was so great that he had no chance, he knew, of reaching her in time.

In this extremity the hermit looked round for a crevice or a rock which might afford protection, but no such place of safety was at hand. The side of the pass rose behind them like a wall to a height of several hundred feet. Seeing this at a glance the old man planted himself firmly in front of Hilda. His lips moved, and the single word "Jesus" dropped from them as he looked with a calm steady gaze at the avalanche.

Scarcely had he taken his stand when the first stones leaped across the gorge, and, striking on the wall of rock behind, burst into fragments and fell in a shower around them. Some of the smaller *débris* struck the old man's breast, and the hands which he had raised to protect his face; but he neither blanched nor flinched. In another instant the greater part of the hurling rubbish fell with a

terrible crash and tore up the earth in all directions round them. Still they stood unhurt! The height from which the ruin had descended was so great that the masses were scattered, and although they flew around over, and close to them, the great shock passed by and left them unscathed.

But the danger was not yet past. Several of the smaller masses, which had been partially arrested in their progress by bushes, still came thundering down the steep. The quick eye of the hermit observed one of these flying straight towards his head. Its force had been broken by a tree on the opposite hill, but it still retained tremendous impetus. He knew that there was no escape for him. To have moved aside would have exposed Hilda to almost certain destruction. Once again he murmured the Saviour's name, as he stretched out both hands straight before his face. The rock struck full against them, beat them down on his forehead, and next instant old man and maid were hurled to the ground.

Well was it for Erling that all this occurred so quickly that the danger was past before he reached the spot. Part of the road he had to traverse was strewn so thickly with the rocky ruin that his destruction, had he been a few seconds sooner on the ground, would have been inevitable. He reached Hilda just in time to assist her to rise. She was slightly stunned by the shock, but otherwise unhurt.

Not so the hermit. He lay extended where he had fallen; his grey beard and thin scattered locks dabbled with blood that flowed from a gash in his forehead. Hilda kneeled at his side, and, raising his head, she laid it in her lap.

"Now the gods be praised," said Erling, as he knelt beside her, and endeavoured to stanch the flow of blood from the wound; "I had thought thy last hour was come, Hilda; but the poor old man, I fear much he will die."

"Not so; he recovers," said the girl; "fetch me some water from the spring."

Erling ran to a rill that trickled down the face of the rock at his side, dipped his leathern bonnet into it, and, quickly returning, sprinkled a little on the old man's face, and washed the wound.

"It is not deep," he remarked, after having examined the cut. "His hands are indeed badly bruised, but he will live."

"Get thee to the stede, Erling, and fetch aid," said Hilda quickly; "the old man is heavy."

The youth smiled. "Heavy he is, no doubt, but he wears no armour; methinks I can lift him."

So saying Erling raised him in his strong arms and bore him away to Ulfstede, where, under the tender care of Hilda and her foster-sister Ada, he speedily revived.

Erling went out meanwhile to assist in the hayfield.

Chapter 3 - Shows how Chief Friends may become Foes, And Cross-Purposes may Produce Cross Consequences, involving Worry and Confusion.

When Christian had been properly cared for, Hilda sent Ada to the hayfield, saying that she would follow her in a short time. Now it so happened, by one of those curious coincidences which are generally considered unaccountable, that as Ada ascended the track which led to the high field above the foss, Glumm the Gruff descended towards the same point from an opposite direction, so that a meeting between the two, in the secluded dell, where the tracks joined, became inevitable.

Whether or not this meeting was anticipated we cannot tell. If it was, the young man and maiden were inimitable actors by nature, for they appeared to be wholly unconscious of aught save the peculiar formation of the respective footpaths along which they slowly moved. There was, indeed, a twinkle in Ada's eyes; but then Ada's eyes were noted twinklers; besides, a refractory eyelash might account for such an expression.

As for Glumm, he frowned on the path most unamiably while he sauntered along with both hands thrust into the breast of his tunic, and the point of his sword rasping harshly against rocks and bushes. Glumm was peculiar in his weapons. He wore a double-handed and double-edged sword, which was so long that he was obliged to sling it across his back in order to keep it off the ground. The handle projected above his left shoulder, and the blade, lying diagonally across his person, extended beyond his

right calf. The young man was remarkably expert in the use of this immense weapon, and was not only a terror to his foes, but, owing to the enormous sweep of its long blade, an object of some anxiety to his friends when they chanced to be fighting alongside of him. He wore a knife or dagger at his girdle on the right side, which was also of unusual size; in all probability it would have been deemed a pretty good sword by the Romans. There were only two men in the dale who could wield Glumm's weapons. These were Erling and his father, Haldor. The latter was as strong a man as Glumm, Erling was even stronger; though, being an amiable man he could not be easily persuaded to prove his strength upon his friends. Glumm wore his hair very short. It was curly, and lay close to his head.

As he sauntered along he kicked the stones out of his way savagely, and appeared to find relief to his feelings in so doing, as well as by allowing his sword to rasp across the rocks and shrubs at his side. It might have been observed, however, that Glumm only kicked the little stones out of his way; he never kicked the big ones. It is interesting to observe how trifling a matter will bring out a trait of human nature! Men will sometimes relieve their angry feelings by storming violently at those of their fellows who cannot hurt them, but, strangely enough, they manage to obtain relief to these same feelings without storming, when they chance to be in the company of stronger men than themselves, thereby proving that they have powers of self-restraint which prudence—not to say fear—can call into exercise! commend this moral reflection particularly to the study of boys.

After Glumm had kicked all the *little* stones out of his way, carefully letting the big ones alone, he came suddenly face to face with Ada, who saluted him with a look of startled surprise, a slight blush, and a burst of hearty laughter.

"Why, Glumm," exclaimed the maiden, with an arch smile, "thou must have risen off thy wrong side this morning.

Methinks, now, were I a man, I should have to look to my weapons, for that long blade of thine seems inclined to fight with the rocks and shrubs of its own accord."

Poor Glumm blushed as red as if he had been a young girl, at being thus unexpectedly caught giving vent to his ill-humour; he stammered something about bad dreams and evil spirits, and then, breaking into a good-humoured smile, said:

"Well, Ada, I know not what it is that ails me, but I do feel somewhat cross-grained. Perchance a walk with thee may cure me, I see thou art bound for the hayfield. But hast thou not heard the news? The Danish vikings are off the coast, burning and murdering wherever they go. It is rumoured, too, that their fleet is under that king of scoundrels, Skarpedin the Red. Surely there is reason for my being angry."

"Nay, then, if thou wert a bold man thou wouldst find reason in this for being glad," replied Ada. "Is not the chance of a fight the joy of a true Norseman's heart? Surely a spell must have been laid on thee, if thy brow darkens and thy heart grows heavy on hearing of a stout enemy. It is not thus with Erling the Bold. His brow clears and his eye sparkles when a foe worthy of— But what seest thou, Glumm? Has the Dane appeared in the forest that thy brow becomes so suddenly clouded? I pray thee do not run away and leave me unprotected."

"Doubtless if I did, Erling the Bold would come to thine aid," replied the young man with some asperity.

"Nay, do not be angry with me, Glumm," said the girl, laughing, as they reached the field where Haldor and his stout son were busily at work assisting Ulf, who, with all his thralls and freemen, was engaged in cutting and gathering in his hay.

"Hey! here come cloud and sunshine hand in hand," cried Erling, pausing in his work, as Glumm and his pretty companion approached the scene of labour.

“Get on with thy work, then, and make the hay while I am shining,” retorted Ada, bestowing on the youth a bright smile, which he returned cheerfully and with interest.

This was the wicked Ada’s finishing touch. Glumm saw the exchange of smiles, and a pang of fierce jealousy shot through his breast.

“The cloud sometimes darts out lightning,” he muttered angrily, and, turning on his heel, began to toss the hay with all his might in order to relieve his feelings.

Just then Hilda entered the field, and Glumm, putting strong constraint on himself, accosted her with extreme cheerfulness and respect—resolved in his heart to show Ada that there were other girls in Horlingdal worth courting besides herself. In this game he was by no means successful as regarded Ada, who at once discerned his intention, but the shaft which flew harmlessly past her fixed itself deep in the breast of another victim. Glumm’s unusual urbanity took the kind-hearted Hilda so much by surprise, that she was interested, and encouraged him, in what she conceived to be a tendency towards improvement of disposition, by bestowing on him her sweetest smiles during the course of the day, insomuch that Erling the Bold became much surprised, and at last unaccountably cross.

Thus did these two men, who had for many years been fast and loving friends, become desperately jealous, though each sought to conceal the fact from the other. But the green-eyed monster having obtained a lodgment in their bosoms, could not be easily cast out. Yet the good sense of each enabled him to struggle with some success against the passion, for Glumm, although gruff, was by no means a bad man.

The presence of those conflicting feelings did not, however, interrupt or retard the work of the field. It was a truly busy scene. Masters, unfreemen, and thralls, mistresses and maidens, were there, cutting and turning and piling up the precious crop with might and main; for they knew that the