

Agnes Strickland



*Stories from
History*

Agnes Strickland

Stories from History



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066354251

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SLAVE OF AUVERGNE.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

ALFRED THE GREAT.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

BELA THE BLIND.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

PRINCE EDWIN AND HIS PAGE.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WOLF TRIBUTE.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

FUNERAL OF THE CONQUEROR;

ANSELM FITZ-ARTHUR.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNG INTERPRETER.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LORD OF BRAMBER.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

WILLIAM TELL.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WIDOW OF BRUGES.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

QUEEN MARGARET.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

A TALE OF THE ANCIENT BRITONS.

CHAPTER I.

Table of Contents

EARLY BRITAIN.—TRADITIONS.—JULIUS CÆSAR.—THE BARDS AND MINSTRELS.—KING LUD HURDEBRAS.—PRINCE BLADUD.—IS AFFLICTED WITH LEPROSY.—BANISHED HIS FATHER'S COURT.—THE DRUIDS.—STONEHENGE.—ROCKING-STONES.

The early history of England, or Britain, as it was anciently called, is involved in great obscurity. The reason of this is, that its first inhabitants, a colony from some other nation, were so much occupied in providing for the actual wants of life, as to have but very little time to spare for the purpose of preserving records of the country whence they came. They were, too, in a state of barbarism, and altogether ignorant of the arts of reading or writing. When they wished to keep a memorial of any great event, such as a victory, a treaty of peace, the death of one king, or the coronation of another, they marked the spot where the occurrence took place with a heap of stones, or set up a rough hewn pillar, and bade their children recount to their descendants the circumstance which it was intended to commemorate. An imperfect memory of certain great events was thus kept alive, and the pillar, or the heap of stones, was appealed to as a memorial, long after the people who had assisted in raising it were dead.

The traditions connected with these rude memorials are the only sources from which our knowledge of some very ancient events is to be derived. They are called *traditions*, because they were not written accounts, but such as were transmitted, or handed down, through a long succession of ages, by being repeated from father to son. Sometimes, too, these traditions were made into songs, which, being easily learned by heart, very much assisted in preserving a knowledge of the events they were intended to record.

Julius Cæsar, the great Roman dictator, or, as he is by some called, the first emperor of Rome, invaded and conquered Britain, and in a great measure brought it under the yoke of Rome. This Julius Cæsar, who wrote the history of his own wars and conquests, is the first real historian who has made mention of the Britons. He calls them barbarians,—and so, in comparison with the Romans, at that time the most civilized people in the world, they certainly were,—yet, from many circumstances which he himself mentions, it is certain that they were acquainted with the art of working mines, the use of metals, and the construction of many curious and useful articles.

The Britons also practised the arts of poetry and music. They had among them Bards, who put their histories and traditions into poetry and songs, which their Minstrels, or Singers, chanted at public festivals, and on going into battle, to the sound of the harp and other musical instruments.

It is said by some ancient historians, and by those who have bestowed much pains in examining and comparing old traditions, that several kings reigned over Britain before

Julius Cæsar landed in the country. Lud Hurdebras is supposed to have been the eighth king from Brute, whom the Bards, and after them, the monkish historians, report to have been the first monarch of Britain. I am going to tell you a story of Prince Bladud, the son of this Lud Hurdebras, which, there is reason to believe, is founded on fact.

Bladud was the only child of the king and queen, and he was not only tenderly beloved by his parents, but was also considered as a child of great beauty and promise by the chiefs and the people. It, however, unfortunately happened that he was attacked with that loathsome disease, so frequently mentioned in Scripture by the name of Leprosy. The dirty habits and gross feeding of the early natives of Britain, as well as of all other uncivilized people, rendered this malady common; but at the time in which Prince Bladud lived, no cure for it was known to the Britons. Being highly infectious, therefore, all persons afflicted with it were not only held in disgust and abhorrence, but, by the barbarous laws of the times, were doomed to be driven from the abodes of their fellow-creatures, and to take their chance of life or death in the forests and the deserts, exposed alike to hunger and to beasts of prey.

So great was the horror of this disease among the heathen Britons, and so strictly was the law for preventing its extension observed, that even the rank of the young prince caused no exception to be made in his favour. Neither was his tender youth suffered to plead for sympathy; and the king himself was unable to protect his own son from the cruel treatment accorded to the lepers of those days. No sooner was the report whispered abroad,

that Prince Bladud was afflicted with leprosy, than the chiefs and elders of the council assembled together, and insisted that Lud Hurdebras should expel his son from the royal city, and drive him forth into the wilderness, in order to prevent the dreaded infection from spreading.

The fond mother of the unfortunate Bladud vainly endeavoured to prevail on her royal husband to resist this barbarous injunction. All that maternal love and female tenderness could urge, she pleaded in behalf of her only child, whose bodily sufferings rendered him but the dearer object of affection to her fond bosom.

The distressed father, however deeply and painfully he felt the queen's passionate appeal, could not act in contradiction to the general voice of his subjects; he was compelled to stifle all emotions of natural compassion for his innocent son, and to doom him to perpetual banishment.

Bladud awaited his father's decision, in tears and silence, without offering a single word of supplication, lest he should increase the anguish of his parent's heart. But, when the cruel sentence of banishment was confirmed by the voice of his hitherto doating sire, he uttered a cry of bitter sorrow, and covering his disfigured visage with both hands, turned about to leave the haunts of his childhood forever, exclaiming, "Who will have compassion upon me, now that I am abandoned by my parents?"

How sweet, how consoling, would have been the answer of a Christian parent to this agonizing question; but on Bladud's mother the heavenly light of Revelation had never shone. She knew not how to speak comfort to the breaking heart of her son, in those cheering words of Holy Writ, which

would have been so applicable to his case in that hour of desertion: *When thy father and thy mother forsake thee, I will take thee up.* She could only weep with her son, and try to soothe his sorrow by whispering a hope, which she was far from feeling, that the day might come, when he could return to his father's court, cured of the malady which was the cause of his banishment.



Bladud receiving a
Ring from his Mother.

"But years may pass away before that happy day, if it ever should come," replied the weeping boy; "and I shall be altered in stature and in features; the tones of my voice will have become strange to your ears, my mother! Toil and sorrow will have set their hard marks upon my brow. These garments, now so brightly stained with figures that denote my royal birth and princely station, will be worn bare, or exchanged for the sheep-skin vest of indigence. How, then,

will you know that I am indeed your son, should I ever present myself before you cleansed of this dreadful leprosy?"

"My son," replied the queen, taking a royal ring of carved agate from her finger, and placing it on a stand before him, for so great was the terror of contagion from those afflicted with leprosy, that even the affectionate mother of Bladud avoided the touch of her child,—"this ring was wrought by the master-hand of a Druid, a skilful worker in precious stones, within the sacred circle of Stonehenge. It was placed upon my finger before the mystic altar, when I became the wife of the king your father, and was saluted by the Arch-Druid as Queen of Britain. In the whole world, there is not another like unto it; and, should you bring it back to me, by that token shall I know you to be my son, even though the lapse of thrice ten years shall have passed away, and the golden locks of my princely boy shall be darkened with toil and time, and no longer wave over a smooth, unfurrowed brow."

The Druids, one of whom I have mentioned, were a peculiar people, who constituted the priesthood among the heathen Britons. They dwelt in circular houses, in the recesses of dark deep groves, where they practised barbarous rites of worship, and once a year sacrificed to their idols human victims, enclosed in gigantic wicker-work figures, made in a rude resemblance to the form of man. These Druids, however, were acquainted with astronomy, or the knowledge of the stars; they possessed a certain skill in medicine and surgery, and they understood the arts of cutting and polishing stones. Curious beads and rings, made

by them from the agate stone, are even at the present time occasionally dug out of the earth, in which they have been buried for many hundred years, and are preserved in the cabinets of the curious.

Some stupendous evidences of the skill and knowledge of the Druids, as well as of the impostures which they practised on the unenlightened and idolatrous Britons, are still to be seen in various parts of our country. Among these is Stonehenge, on Salisbury Plain, consisting of huge blocks of stone, which, nearly two thousand years ago, formed part of a mystic circle, that surrounded one of their heathen temples, which has long since fallen into ruin and decay.

Among the other remains of the works of the Druids, are the great moving masses, principally found in Cornwall, and called Loggan-Stones, or Rocking Stones. These consist of a large block of stone, so finely balanced on one small point, that though it stands securely, which, in fact, it has done for many hundreds of years, yet it can be moved, and made to rock, by a very small force. These Loggan-Stones were used by the Druids for the purpose of deceiving the heathen Britons. They pretended that if the stone moved, the Gods were kindly disposed,—and if it stood still, that they were angry with the people. But these crafty Druids were provided with an instrument which, by placing it under the point or the stone, enabled them to move it, or not, at pleasure.

The Druids were, in their day, superior in learning and useful acquirements to every other class of their countrymen, and possessed more power and influence than either kings, chiefs, or populace. They were, in effect, the

secret rulers of the state, and from the profound recesses of the dark groves, wherein they concealed themselves from vulgar observation, they directed the councils of the monarch, and decided the destinies of all ranks and conditions of the people.

CHAPTER II.

[Table of Contents](#)

THE PRINCE BECOMES ACQUAINTED WITH MATH, THE SHEPHERD-BOY.—IS HIRED BY A SWINEHERD.—HIS ADVENTURES WITH THE SWINE.—CROSSES THE AVON.—THE SWINE DISCOVER THE HOT SPRINGS.

The unfortunate Bladud, having carefully suspended his mother's ring about his neck, bade her a tearful farewell, and slowly and sorrowfully pursued his lonely way, across the hills and downs of that part of England which is now called Somersetshire.

Evening was closing in before Bladud met with a single creature to show him the slightest compassion. At length, he was so fortunate as to encounter a shepherd-boy, who appeared in scarcely less distress than himself; for one of the sheep belonging to his flock had fallen into a ditch, the sides of which were so steep that he was unable to pull it out without assistance.

"Stranger," said he, addressing the outcast prince, "if ever you hope to obtain pity from others, I beseech you to lend me your aid, or I shall be severely punished by my master, for suffering this sheep to fall into the ditch."

Bladud required no second entreaty, but hastily divesting himself of his princely garments, assisted the boy in extricating the sheep from the water. The grateful youth bestowed upon him, in return, a share of his coarse supper of oaten cakes. Bladud, who had not broken his fast since the morning, ate this with greater relish than he had often felt for the dainties of which he had been accustomed to partake at his father's board.

It was a fine and lovely evening; the birds were singing their evening song; and a delicious fragrance was diffused from the purple heath and the blooming wild flowers. The sheep gathered round their youthful keeper; and he took up a rustic pipe, made from the reeds that overhung the margin of a neighbouring rivulet, and played a merry tune, quite forgetful of his past trouble.

Bladud saw that a peasant boy, while engaged in the performance of his duties, might be as happy as a prince. Contentment and industry sweeten every lot, while useless repining only tends to aggravate the hardships to which it is the will of God that the human family should be exposed.

"You appear very happy," said Bladud to his new friend.

"How should I be otherwise?" replied the shepherd-boy: "I have wherewithal to eat and to drink; I have strength to labour, and health to enjoy my food. I sleep soundly on my bed of rushes after the toils of the day; and my master never punishes me except for carelessness or disobedience."

"I wish I were a shepherd-boy, also," said the prince; "can you not tell me of some kind master, who would employ me to feed his flocks on these downs?"

The shepherd-boy shook his head, and replied, "You are a stranger lad from some distant town; most probably, by your fine painted dress, the runaway son of some great person, and unacquainted with any sort of useful occupation. Let me hear what you can do to get an honest living."

Bladud blushed deeply. He had been accustomed to spend his time in idle sports with the sons of the chieftains, and had not acquired the knowledge of anything likely to be of service in his present situation. He was silent for some minutes, but at length replied, "I can brighten arrows, string bows, and shoot at a mark."

Math, the shepherd-boy, advised his new companion, in his rustic language, not to mention these accomplishments to the peaceful herdsmen of Caynsham, (as the spot where this conference took place is now called,) lest it should create a prejudice against him; "neither," continued he, "would I counsel you to sue for service in a suit of this fashion." He laid his sun-burnt hand, as he spoke, on Bladud's painted vest, lined with the fur of squirrels, which was only worn by persons of royal rank.

"Will you, for charity's sake, then, exchange your sheep-skin coat for my costly garments?" asked Bladud.

"Had you not so kindly helped me to pull my sheep out of the ditch, I would have said to you nay," replied Math; "but as one good turn deserves another, I will even give you my true shepherd's suit for your finery." So saying, he exchanged suits with the young prince.

"And now," said Bladud, "do you think I may venture to ask one of the herdsmen of the valley to trust me with the

care of a flock?"

"Trust *you* with the care of a flock, forsooth!" cried Math, laughing; "I wonder at your presumption in thinking of such a thing, when you confess yourself ignorant of all the duties of a shepherd-boy!"

"They are very simple, and can easily be learned, I should think," said Bladud.

"Ay," replied Math, "or you had not seen them practised by so simple a lad as Math, the son of Goff. But as all learners must have a beginning, I would not have you aspire at first to a higher office than that of a swineherd's boy; for remember, as no one knows who you are, or whence you come, you must not expect to obtain much notice from those who are the possessors of flocks and herds."

Bladud sighed deeply at this remark; but as he felt the truth of what Math said, he did not evince any displeasure at his plain speaking. He, therefore, mildly requested Math to recommend him to some master who would give him employment.

Math happened to know an aged swineherd who was in want of a lad of Bladud's age to attend on his pigs. He accordingly introduced his new friend, Bladud, as a candidate for that office; and his mild and sedate manners so well pleased the old man, that he immediately took him into his service.

Bladud at first felt the change of his fortunes very keenly, for he had been delicately fed and nurtured, and surrounded by friends, servants, and busy flatterers. He was now far separated from all who knew and loved him; exposed to wind and weather, heat and cold, and compelled to endure

every species of hardship. He had no other bed than straw or rushes; his food was far worse than that which is now eaten by the poorest peasants, who deem their lot so hard; and he was clothed in undressed sheep-skins, from which the wool had been shorn. His drink was only water from the brook, and his whole time was occupied in his attendance on the swine.

At the earliest peep of dawn he was forced to rise, and lead forth into the fields and woods a numerous herd of grunting swine in quest of food, and there to remain till the shades of evening compelled him to drive them to the shelter of the rude sheds built for their accommodation, round the wretched hovel wherein their master dwelt. Bladud was sure to return weary and hungry, and often wet and sorrowful, to his forlorn home. Yet he did not murmur, though suffering at the same time under a most painful, and, as he supposed, an incurable disease.

He endeavoured to bear the hardships of his lot with patience, and he derived satisfaction from the faithful performance of the duties which he had undertaken, irksome as they were. The greatest pain he endured, next to his separation from his parents, was the discovery that several of his master's pigs were infected with the same loathsome disease under which he was labouring; and this he feared would draw down upon him the displeasure of the old herdsman.

But the leprosy, and its contagious nature, were evils unknown to the herdsmen of Caynsham, or Bladud would never have been able to obtain employment there. His master was an aged man, nearly blind, who, being

convinced of the faithful disposition of his careful attendant, left the swine entirely to his management; so the circumstance of several of the most valuable of them being infected with leprosy, was never suspected by him. Bladud continued to lead them into the fields and forests in quest of their daily food, without incurring either question or reproach from him, or, indeed, from any one, for it was a thinly-inhabited district, and there were no gossiping neighbours to bring the tale of trouble to the old herdsman.

But though Bladud's misfortune remained undetected, he was seriously unhappy, for he felt himself to be the innocent cause of bringing the infection of a sore disease among his master's swine. He would have revealed the whole matter to him, only that he feared the evil could not now be cured.

From day to day he led his herd deeper into the forests, and further a-field; for he wished to escape the observation of every eye. Sometimes, indeed, he did not bring them back to the herdsman's enclosure above once in a week. In the mean time he slept at night, surrounded by his uncouth companions, under the shade of some wide-spreading oak of the forest, living like them, upon acorns, or the roots of the pig-nuts, which grew in the woods and marshes, and were, when roasted, sweet and mealy, like potatoes, with the flavour of the chestnut. These were dainties in comparison to the coarse black unleavened cakes on which poor Bladud had been used to feed ever since his unhappy banishment.

The old herdsman was perfectly satisfied with Bladud's management of the swine, and glad to find that he took the

trouble of leading them into fresh districts for change of food, of which swine are always desirous.

So Bladud continued to penetrate into new and untrodden solitudes with his grunting charge, till one day he saw the bright waters of the river Avon sparkling before him in the early beams of the morning sun. He felt a sudden desire of crossing this pleasant stream. It was the fruitful season of Autumn, and the reddening acorns, with which the rich oaken groves that crowned the noble hills on the opposite side were laden, promised an abundant feast for his master's swine, of whose wants he was always mindful.

He would not, however, venture to lead them across the river without first returning to acquaint his master, for he had already been abroad more than a week. So he journeyed homewards, and reached his master's hovel, with his whole herd, in safety. He then reported to the good old man, that he had wandered to the side of a beautiful river, and beheld from its grassy banks a rich and smiling country, wherein, he doubted not, that the swine would find food of the best kind, and in great abundance. "Prithee, master," quoth he, "suffer me to drive the herd across that fair stream, and if aught amiss befall them, it shall not be for want of due care and caution on the part of your faithful boy."

"Thou art free to lead the herd across the fair stream of which thou speakest, my son," replied the herdsman, "and may the blessing of an old man go with them and thee; for surely thou hast been faithful and wise in all thy doings since thou hast been my servant."

That very day he set out once more to the shores of the silvery Avon, and crossed it with the delighted pigs, at a shallow spot, which has ever since, in memory thereof, been called Swinford, or Swine's-ford.

No sooner, however, had they reached the opposite shore, than the whole herd set off, galloping and scampering, one over the other, as if they had one and all been seized with a sudden frenzy. No less alarmed than astonished at their sudden flight, Bladud followed them at his quickest speed, and beheld them rapidly descending into a valley, towards some springs of water, that seemed to ooze out of the boggy land in its bottom, amidst rushes, weeds, and long rank grass. Into this swamp the pigs rushed headlong, and here they rolled and revelled, tumbling, grunting, and squeaking, and knocking each other head over heels, with evident delight, but to the utter astonishment of Bladud, who was altogether unconscious of the instinct by which the gratified animals had been impelled.



The Pigs in the Salt
Springs.

All the attempts which Bladud made to drive or entice them from the spot were entirely useless. They continued to wallow in their miry bed, until at length the calls of hunger induced them to seek the woods for food; but after they had eaten a hearty meal of acorns, they returned to the swamp, to the increasing surprise of Bladud. As for his part, having taken a supper of coarse black bread and roasted acorns, he sought shelter for the night in the thick branches of a large oak-tree.

Now poor Bladud was not aware that, guided by superior Wisdom, he had, unknown to himself, approached a spot wherein there existed a remarkable natural peculiarity. This was no other than some warm springs of salt water, which ooze out of the earth, and possess certain medicinal properties which have the effect of curing various diseases, and on which account they are sought by afflicted persons even to the present day.

CHAPTER III.

Table of Contents

BLADUD BATHES IN THE SPRINGS, AND IS CURED OF HIS LEPROSY.—DISCLOSES HIS BIRTH TO HIS MASTER, WHOM HE INVITES TO ACCOMPANY HIM TO THE ROYAL CITY.—THEY ARRIVE THERE DURING THE FESTIVAL OF THE ACORN-GATHERING.—ARE FOLLOWED BY A PIG.—ANNOYED BY THE RABBLE.—MEET WITH MATH OF THE DOWNS.

Bladud awoke with the first beams of morning, and discovered his grunting charge still actively wallowing in the oozy bed in which they had taken such unaccountable delight on the preceding day.

Bladud, however, who was accustomed to reason and to reflect on everything he saw, had often observed that the natural instinct of animals prompted them to do such things as were most beneficial to them. He had noticed that cats and dogs, when sick, had recourse to certain herbs and grasses, which proved effectual remedies for the malady under which they laboured; and he thought it possible that pigs might be endowed with a similar faculty of discovering an antidote for disease. At all events he resolved to watch the result of their revellings in the warm ooze bath, wherein they continued to wallow, between whiles, for several days.

The wisdom of this proceeding was shortly manifested; for Bladud soon observed that a gradual improvement was taking place in the appearance of the swine.

The leprous scales fell off by degrees, and in the course of a few weeks the leprosy gradually disappeared, and the

whole herd being cleansed, was restored to a sound and healthy state.

The heart of the outcast prince was buoyant with hope and joy when the idea first presented itself to his mind, that the same simple remedy which had restored the infected swine might be equally efficacious in his own case. Divesting himself of his humble clothing and elate with joy and hope, he plunged into the warm salt ooze bed, wherein his pigs had revelled with so much advantage.

He was soon sensible of an abatement of the irritable and painful symptoms of his loathsome malady; and, in a short time, by persevering in the use of the remedy which the natural sagacity of his humble companions had suggested, he became wholly cured of the leprosy, and was delighted to find himself restored to health and vigour.

With a heart overflowing with gratitude, Bladud returned thanks to that merciful Providence whereby he had been led, through hardships and sorrows, to discover this simple but certain remedy for a distemper which the most skilful physicians of his father's court had pronounced incurable. He knelt down upon the flowery banks of the smooth-flowing Avon, and poured forth his thankfulness to the Divine Source of all the blessings and mercies which are dispensed to the children of men; and most fervently did the grateful boy acknowledge the goodness of his Heavenly Father, in having healed his sore disease, and restored him to health and comfort.

After bathing, and washing away in the river the stains of the ooze, he first beheld the reflection of his own features in the clear mirror of the stream. He perceived that his skin,

which had been so lately disfigured by foul blotches and frightful scales, so as to render him an object of abhorrence to his nearest and dearest friends, was now smooth, fair, and clear.

"Oh, my mother!" he exclaimed, in the overpowering rapture of his feelings on this discovery, "I may then hope to behold thy face once more! and thou wilt no longer shrink from the embrace of thy son, as in the sad, sad hour of our sorrowful parting!"

He pressed the agate ring, which she had given him as her farewell token of remembrance, to his lips and to his bosom, as he spoke; then quitting the water, he once more arrayed himself in the miserable garb of his lowly fortunes, and guided his master's herd homeward.

The old man, who was beginning to grow uneasy at the unwonted length of Bladud's absence, and fearing that some accident had befallen the swine, was about to set forth in search of him, when he heard the approach of the noisy herd, and perceived Bladud advancing towards him.

"Is all well with thyself and with the herd, my son?" inquired the old man.

"All is well, my father," replied Bladud, bowing himself before his lowly master; "yea, more than well; for the blessing of the great Disposer of all that befalleth the children of men, hath been with me. I left you as a poor destitute, afflicted with a sore disease, that had rendered me loathsome to my own house, and despised and shunned by all men. I was driven forth from the dwellings of health and gladness, and forced to seek shelter in the wilderness. From being the son of a king, I was reduced to become the

servant of one of the humblest of his subjects, and esteemed myself fortunate in obtaining the care of a herd of swine, that I might obtain even a morsel of coarse food, and a place wherein to lay my head at night. But, behold, through this very thing have I been healed of my leprosy!"

"And who art thou, my son?" demanded the old herdsman, in whose ears the words of his youthful servant sounded like the language of a dream.

"I am Bladud, the son of Lud Hurdebras, thy king," replied the youth. "Up—let us be going, for the time seemeth long to me, till I once more look upon his face, and that of the queen my mother."

"Thou hast never yet in aught deceived me, my son," observed the herdsman, "else should I say thou wert mocking me with some wild fable; so passing all belief doth it seem, that the son of my lord the king should have been contented to dwell with so poor and humble a man as myself in the capacity of a servant."

"In truth, the trial was a hard one," replied Bladud; "but I knew that it was my duty to submit to the direction of that heavenly Guardian who has thus shaped my lot after his good pleasure; and now do I perceive that it was in love and mercy, as well as in wisdom, that I have been afflicted." Bladud then proposed to his master that he should accompany him to his father's court; to which the old herdsman, who scarcely yet credited the assertion of his young attendant, at length consented; and they journeyed together to the royal city.

In these days, many a mean village is in appearance a more important place than were the royal cities wherein the

ancient British kings kept court; for these were merely large straggling enclosures, surrounded with trenches and hedgerows, containing a few groups of wattled huts, plastered over with clay. The huts were built round the king's palace, which was not itself a more commodious building than a modern barn, and having neither chimneys nor glazed windows, must have been but a miserable abode in the winter season.

At the period to which our story has now conducted us, it was, however, a fine warm Autumn day. King Hurdebras and his queen were therefore dwelling in an open pavilion, formed of the trunks of trees, which were covered over with boughs, and garlanded with wreaths of wild flowers.

Bladud and his master arrived during the celebration of a great festival, held to commemorate the acorn-gathering, which was then completed. All ranks and conditions of people were assembled in their holiday attire, which varied from simple sheep-skins to the fur of wolves, cats, and rabbits. By some persons of high rank, the fur or wool was worn inside, while the smooth sides of the skins were dressed and curiously stained with the juice of the *woad*, a plant greatly prized among the ancient Britons on account of a fine blue dye which was obtained from it. With this colour, it was the custom of the ancient Britons to paint not only their garments, but also their faces and bodies, in stripes and stars, and various other figures. The effect of the painting was very similar to that of *tattooing*, which prevails among the savages of the South Sea Islands; and, indeed, in various other respects, there was a great similarity in many of the customs of the original inhabitants of Britain to those

of the islanders discovered in modern times in the South Atlantic regions.

Among all this concourse of people, Bladud was remarked for the poverty of his garments, which were of the rude fashion and coarse material of those of the humblest peasant. As for the old herdsman, his master, when he observed the little respect with which Bladud was treated by the rude crowds who were thronging to the royal city, he began to suspect either that the youth himself had been deluded by some strange dream respecting his royal birth and breeding, or that for knavish purposes he had practised on his credulity, in inducing him to undertake so long a journey.

These reflections put the old man into an ill humour, which was greatly increased when, on entering the city, he became an object of boisterous mirth and rude jest to the populace. On endeavouring to ascertain the cause of this annoyance, he discovered that one of his most valuable pigs, that had formed a very powerful attachment to Prince Bladud, had followed them on their journey, and was now grunting at their very heels.

The herdsman's anger at length broke out in words, and he bitterly upbraided Bladud for having beguiled him into such a wild-goose expedition. "And, as if that were not enough," quoth he, "thou couldst not be contented without bringing thy pet pig hither, to make a fool both of thyself and me. Why verily, we are the laughing-stock of the whole city."

Bladud mildly assured his master that it was through no act of his that the pig had followed them to his father's

court.

"Thy father's court, forsooth!" retorted the old man, angrily; "I do verily believe it is all a trick which thou hast cunningly planned, for the sake of stealing my best pig. Else why shouldst thou have permitted it to follow thee thither?"

Bladud was prevented from replying to this unjust accusation by a rabble of rude boys, who had gathered round them, and began to assail the poor pig with sticks and stones. Bladud at first mildly requested them to desist from such cruel sport; but finding they paid no attention to his remonstrances, he began to deal out blows, right and left, with his stout quarter-staff; by which he kept the foremost at bay, calling at the same time on his master to assist him in defending the pig.

But Bladud and his master together were very unequally matched against this lawless band of young aggressors. They certainly would have been very roughly handled, had it not been for the unexpected aid of a shepherd-lad who came to their assistance, and, with the help of his faithful dog, succeeded in driving away the most troublesome of their assailants.

In this brave and generous ally, Bladud had the satisfaction of discovering his old friend Math of the Downs. So completely, however, was Bladud's appearance changed in consequence of his being cleansed of the leprosy, that it was sometime before he could convince Math that he was the wretched and forlorn outcast with whom he had changed clothes, nearly a twelvemonth before, on the Somersetshire Downs.

Math, however, presently remembered his old clothes, in the sorry remains of which Bladud was still dressed; and Bladud also pointed with a smile to the painted vest of a British prince, in which the young shepherd had arrayed himself to attend the festival of the acorn-gathering. Strange to say, the generous boy had altogether escaped infection from the clothes of his diseased prince!

Bladud now briefly explained his situation to the astonished Math, whom he invited to join himself and his master in their visit to the royal pavilion, in order that he might be a witness of his restoration to the arms of his parents, and the honours of his father's court.

Math, though still more incredulous than even the old herdsman, was strongly moved by curiosity to witness the interview. He stoutly assisted Bladud in making his way through the crowd, who appeared resolutely bent on impeding their progress to the royal pavilion, which, however, they at length approached, still followed by the persevering pig.

CHAPTER IV.

[Table of Contents](#)

FESTIVAL OF THE ACORN-GATHERING.—BLADUD DROPS THE RING INTO HIS MOTHER'S CUP, AND MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN.—IS RESTORED TO HIS PRINCELY RANK.—TRAVELS INTO GREECE.—SUCCEEDS HIS FATHER AS KING.—FOUNDS A CITY ADJACENT TO THE SPRINGS.—MAKES WINGS, AND ATTEMPTS TO FLY.—IS KILLED IN THE ATTEMPT.

The last load of acorns, adorned with the faded branches of the noble oak, and crowned with the mistletoe, a plant which the Druids taught the ancient Britons to hold in superstitious reverence, was now borne into the city, preceded by a band of Druids in their long white robes, and a company of minstrels, singing songs, and dancing before the wain. The king and queen came forth to meet the procession, and, after addressing suitable speeches to the Druids and the people, re-entered the pavilion, where they sat down to regale themselves.

Bladud, who had continued to press forward, now availed himself of an opportunity of entering the pavilion behind one of the queen's favourite ladies, whose office it was to fill her royal mistress' goblet with mead. This lady had been Bladud's nurse, which rendered her very dear to the queen, whom nothing could console for the loss of her son.

Bladud, concealed from observation by one of the rude pillars that supported the roof of the building, contemplated the scene in silence, which was broken only by the agitated beating of his swelling heart. He observed that the queen his mother looked sad and pale, and that she scarcely tasted of the cheer before her. She sighed deeply from time to time, and kept her eyes fixed on the vacant place which, in former happy days, used to be occupied by her only son!

King Hurdebras endeavoured to prevail upon her to partake of some of the dainties with which the board was spread.

"How can I partake of costly food," she replied, "when my only child is a wanderer on the face of the earth, and, perchance, lacketh bread?"