THE STORY OF ULLA.

Told at the Edge of the Northern Sea, and Written for This Paper.

BY EDWIN LESTER ARNOLD.

CHAPTER I.

This is the story of Ulla the viking. Ulla the priest. This is the story of Ulla the proud. Ulla the strong. This is the story each sentence of which falls on the heart of the writer heavy as the hollow moan of breakers on some desolate midnight shore. And the heart of Ulla is that shore, and the pulse of the storm that is over—the storm of the life and the living—comes distant and sad as he writes with a melancholy cadence through the hush of the evening of living.

I am that viking, I am that priest, and here in my lonely home by the edge

"I SIT BY THE DIM SHINE OF MY LAMP."

of the northern sea I sit by the dim shine of my lamp, while the night wind sighs without, and across these lean, thin hands, these palsied, knotted fingers that tremble like the white aspen leaves, lies a fair braid of yellow hair. Long, long it seems since that braid was cut from the head that grew it. Long, long months of pain and days of regretting have passed since that strand was cut from its wearer; the salt sea has dimmed it, time has touched its luster, and the dark stain of blood is upon it, yet as I, the monk Ulla, raise that fair thing again and again to my lips and press it where naught but the sign of the new faith should be pressed—press it trembling and silently to those cold lips—something of the old love shoots through my shrunken veins—something of the strong passion that once nerved them tingles into those withered fingers that smooth that gleaming toy so tenderly, and a fire like mist rises to my dull eyes, and my head droops forward, and the little cell seems widening out as wide as life itself; and sad as the sound of the wind among pine trees, desolate as the beat of the tireless pulse of the sea upon the rim of the night comes to my lonely heart the echo of long ago.

It was in the time of my master, Halfdan the Black, and I was a Norway jarl and lived by the white lip of the sea in Baldersnud. I was young then, I was scarcely twenty, and had herds and men and farms all the way up the wild coast as far up as fair Hitteren, and a long ship lay in the creep by my homestead, and many men lived on my riches by my inglenook, and my bows and spears lay on the trossels, and a hundred jolly fellows drank from my flowing horns and carved my meats each day, and were proud to call me lord and leader. Three times as many stocked my yellow harvests and filled my barns. And I was strong and tall and big of limb, and although I was so young I had already been twice abroad and had harried across the wide sea in distant Fareyjar and down south to Ljodhus. I had sipped the glorious wine of battle, and watched the red flame of burning thorp and tower leap up to heaven from my footsteps. Princes had courted me and scalds had sung everything I had, everything that a bold heart could hope for or a strong hand reach—everything but one; the chair on my left hand still stood empty at the feast, no bright eyes welcomed Ulla returning victorious from a foray, no tall Norway maid tempered with her presence the rude revelry in his father's hall, for Ulla was unwed.

Yet it was not for lack of fitting choice, for our maids were straight as young spruces, supple as the yellow sedges by the farms and fair as the spring flowers of the fields when the May snow rolls back from them, and many such might I have had for the asking. Thoralla there was, for instance, whose locks were as yellow as the ripe hill barley, and Thin, whose sky-blue eyes shone wondrously kindly on her handsome neighbor when they met in shady forest path; and Thyri the slim, whose mother thought the lands of Ulla and their own would well match together, and Thora the smiler and many another. But I was wild and wayward, and as difficult to net as the free blue hawks that sail along the cliff face in springtime.

Matters were like this when my master, King Halfdan, more easily persuaded, had determined to marry the comely Ragnhild, daughter of Harold Goldbeard, and, everything having been settled by the ambassadors, one day in early summer from all the isles and fjords and every river town and mountain flat came trooping the Norway lords and chiefs to honor the ceremonial and see the show. By Frigga's self that was a day, when all those cavaliers came riding down to the plain by the southern city, and so far as the eye could see the meadows were aglisten with spear and cuirass and winged helms, and every way was blocked with mighty men in skins and golden armor, young sons of Odin with wild blue eyes, keen features, and yellow hair astream upon their shoulders and mighty muscles showing beneath their clinking armlets and bands of beaten metal. Indeed, that was a day, and I could fill here, as I sit with nothing but the blank rock wall before me, a hundred pages with the names and deeds of those heroes there, and every name should sound to you like that of a giant and princely brother, and every splendid deed I linked to every name should bring the blush of price to your cheek and the pulse of pleasure to your kindred hearts—but the lamp burns low and I am old and, therefore let these words like snowflakes pass unchronicled again into the voids of memory from whence they came.

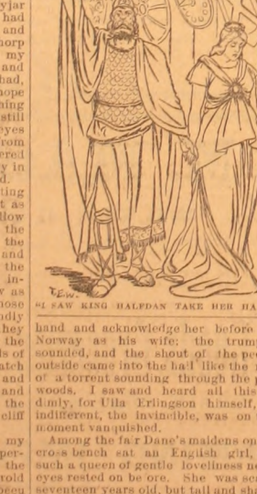
In the mid of the plain the king's men had built a hall of round hewn pine logs, so long and wide that 5,000 chiefs could sit to meat within it at once. And every vassal of the king had sent a polished buckler to deck the bride house, and these were ranged in rows along the roof and sides until all these warlike trappings gleamed together with one broad shine that men could see from Akinfell to the white pools by Flekkerfjord. And every Norway maid had bound a fillet of green spruce and golden flower, and these were ranged between the shields until a cloud of soft color wrapped the palace fair and near, and the sweet new pine smell hung warm and heavy over all.

Nor was this all. Every jarl and sea lord, every captain and rover who owned a long ship or snekja, a skeid or skuta, had brought them round to the fjord and hauled them upon rollers, and there they stood, those great navies of the vikings that had paled the cheeks of maids and matrons in twenty lands, their golden names—"Deer of the Surf," "Raven of the Wind," "Ægir's Steed," "Hawk on the Gull's Track," "Snake of the Sea," carved in runic on each steep rising prow, in two long rows a mile or two in length, with parti-colored sails all set, and red raiding flag streaming on the wind, and gilt dragon heads all turned inward, and jolly crews in bright vestments in their idle ranks of oars, and garlands of flowers about those sides which the white lobes of the sea foam were wont alone to deck.

All about the great mid hall were scores of lesser houses, so that where green grass grew a week ago was now a gay wooden city, and a thousand troops of horse stood munching Halfdan's hay, and a thousand stalwart clansmen were quaffing Halfdan's ale, and a thousand tables bent with Halfdan's provende, and a thousand trumpets sounded Halfdan's war-note, and a thousand scalds were singing Halfdan's praises that day King Halfdan married.

The great prince had chosen me to be among his right-hand men, and thus happened that which was the sweet and the bitter, the light and the darkness of my life. King Goldbeard came ashore from his ships early in the morning, and my handsome black-haired master took the sweet Ragnhild by the hand, and at the head of a long procession of princes, chiefs and ladies, all on foot, marched through the mighty concourse of the shouting people and up the long lane of dragon ships into the great hall itself. There the feudatories ranged themselves in gallant rows at the many tressel tables, while the kings and we with them went on to the further end, where stood some oaken benches. These made three sides of a square. On one sat Harold with his peers, on the other, facing him, was Halfdan—and I on his right—and four strong jarls from the corners of his kingdom to flank us. The last bench across the other two was filled by ladies, and amid them—all in white bride linen, with a splendid torque of jewels binding the loose locks across her bosom and a diadem of rough gold in her golden hair—sat the bride.

I scarcely know what followed. I saw the bride-price paid and the bench gifts made on bended knee. I saw the fair and frightened Ragnhild clinging weeping for a minute to her father's neck, and then I saw King Halfdan take her



"I SAW KING HALFDAN TAKE HER HAND."

hand and acknowledge her before all Norway as his wife; the trumpets sounded, and the shout of the people outside came into the hall like the roar of a torrent sounding through the pine woods. I saw and heard all this but dimly, for Ulla Erlingson himself, the indifferent, the invincible, was on that moment vanquished.

Among the fair Dane's maidens on the cross bench sat an English girl, and such a queen of gentle loveliness never eyes rested on before. She was scarce seventeen years old, but tall and shapely and slim, with a wondrous smooth figure and her comeliness of limb and out line was set off by a fair, clinging robe of the mystic druid green, of just such hue as you see hanging pale and tender over the strong black fields of the northern sea when the wet west wind blows at sunset. Her eyes were blue as fairy flax in summer, and shy, and clear, with a veiled light running somewhere deep down within them; her feet were sandaled with doe skin and white ermine, her middle was belt'd with a broad zone of pearls and amber beads, none of them smaller than a linnet's egg, and her hair, the crown and consummation of her loveliness, was bound up with a single fillet of red English gold.

A strand of that hair now, fifty years after, lies before me in the pale flicker of my feeble lamp. The luster has gone from it, and the dull stain of blood is on it, and it is pale with the kisses of these priestly lips, and bleached by salt sea water, and I hide my eyes a space from the silent reproach of that sweet toy, for even now I cannot look upon it without a throe of heavy grief and sorrow.

But nothing I recked of this then, and before the hungry, laughing chieftains had settled down to the marriage feast—before Ragnhild and Gunna, my sweet maid—and I as flagon bearer—had once made the circle of the hundred tables and first filled with pine-bark beer each newly feaster's flagon, I loved each thing she touched, ay, and the very air she breathed.

CHAPTER II.

Three brief days we spent in happy nearness, and I found she was the daughter of an English prince—one of those lordlings whose lands we pillaged and who had sent the maiden over under the care of a surly churl, her uncle, with a woman-gift to Ragnhild in order to enlist that great lady's mediation. The first day I spent haunting the maiden's footsteps, a prey to such fits of hot hopefulness and cold despair as I thought surely no other man had suffered hitherto. The second day we had sports and contests, and plucking up heart of grace I threw Offar, the Dane, in a wrestling bout, and hurled my spear on the first try sheer through the great iron shield of Langaness of Iceland had hung for two days and nights over the eyes of Queen Ragnhild and all her court I spread the great sail of my long ship and urged the rowers and burst through the jostling ranks of my compeers, and sailed round the fjord and back ahead of any, and won a prize and laid it on fair Gunna's knee.

And the third day, between the rising of the sun and the setting of it, I had met the maiden among the pines by the lonely shore, and had poured my heart

"I THREW OFFAR THE DANE."

to her with such eloquence as surely Frigga's self gave me, and she had blushed and sighed, and told me how wide apart were our kindred and how hostile our countries, and that it could never be, and then had blushed again and dropped a tear and slid her hand into my own, and thus Ulla was happy—happy with an incredible happiness, happy beyond expectation and knowledge.

Sweet was the breath of the pines that afternoon, pleasant the distant murmur of the sea upon the hollow rocks; soft the carpet of felted mosses, and fair the nodding flowers that fringed our path!

On the next morning I went to the tent where she lodged by the sullen old churl her uncle, and it was empty! The pennon was gone from in front; the red-haired sentinels were gone, the benches were empty and deserted, the doors were opened, and, sick at heart and fearful, I turned to one who stood near and asked where was the barbarian envoy and where the fair white girl who had come with him. Heavy as lead fell the answer on my ears. "The stranger had quarreled last night at the feast—had struck and been struck by a hill chieftain, and in a moment of drunken fury had ordered out his ships, had taken the white maid from her couch, and, scarcely giving her time to slip on cloak and sandals, had gone down to the strand, and, cursing everything Norwegian, launched into the black, midnight sea, and sailed away through the darkness to the land of the strangers."

Bitter was my grief and disappointment! For half a day I ran up and down the shore distracted, rage and chagrin alternately mastering my soul. Then I bethought me of my longship and had her dragged to the shore, and, swift as a white sea-mew before a squall, I fled out to sea, and crossing over the rough water, beat up and down the English coast for a week hoping to see them, and when that hope was vain back I came disconsolate to the vikings' shore and for many days about the islands, asking at every ship from rocky Jar to merchant Nidaros whether a ship of the foreigners with a white maid and red-haired men on board had put in there, and got laughed at for my pains, and so I came back empty-handed and empty-hearted at last to my own homestead.

Very weary were the days and months that followed. The sunshine had gone out of the world, and I shunned my jolly comrades; the light laughter of the Norway maids was bitter to me. I hated my hawks and my wolf-dogs; I no longer fed my sleek horse; my weapons rusted on their hooks; my tenantmen, unreproved, pillaged my stocks and barns, and day and night I hung, disconsolate, over the remembrance of my loss.

CHAPTER III.

Ten years had passed; I had forayed north and south and asked with every lessening hope for news of her I sought from captives and merchants, but one and all shook their heads and could tell me nothing. In many a bloody fray on the English shore and sack of thorp or castle I had borne her image in my mind hoping to find her likeness some-

"I HAD MET THE MAIDEN AMONG THE PINES."

where, and thus, I say, ten years had passed, and presently still another spring came round and we had eaten all our winter provisions and were weary of last year's concubines, and rusty with basking by winter's fires and yearnful for the breath of the free ocean, or the yet dearer breath of adventure, and thus one day I went down to the strand where my good ship lay hauled up and tented over against the storm and snow, to see the work that Skaun the carpenter and Vedrey the finisher had done upon her. And as I walked about that gallant hulk my blood took a new color and beat a quicker measure than it had done for long, while the winter sloth dropped from me and the hunger of the rover for quest and danger was born anew in my heart. A better sheid never was steered by a sea king's son, I thought. Her sides were blue—blue as last winter's ice in the shadows of June—right up from the water edge to the high gunwale, while inside the Trondhjom forest oak was scoured as white as a maiden's linen. The tall mast in the center was slim and straight as an arrow, and on either side were rowlock holes for sixty oars. A lovely ship, indeed, and cunning Vedrey had varnished her until her clinker sides glistened like the back of a new caught salmon, and had carved and gilded every oar hole with a golden scroll of twisting serpents, and here and there and everywhere had been at work so deftly that it was a day's wonder to explore the workings of the loving zeal wherewith he had adorned the vessel from glittering stem to stern. And Skaun had seen to every peg and sinew that laced her shapely sides; he had been aft and forward; above, below; had scraped the oars and set new seats for rowers, and caulked afresh each seam with red cowhair and resin—oh, a lovely ship, indeed, and in my pride and joy I thought such a one never stood on mortal slips before. Once more I would venture a cast with fortune, and in a burst of pleasure and such life as had lain asleep too long within my heart I vowed then and there to start on a foray before three days were passed, and, hot in the revulsion of my feelings, I set Skaun and Vedrey running here and there as they had never run before, and collected some of the lazy-boned villeins who had basked in my porch and snored by my pine wood fire all through the snow and frost, and made them work as they had not worked for years, I ween.

Under our busy hands the beautiful winter hulk put on her war gear and blossomed like a summer tree. We fetched out her sixty great oars, "Feet of the Sea-wolf," of ash (four men sat at each) and strapped them into their painted rowlock holes. Then we slung in the landing boats and set the great rudder aft on the starboard; we put the black leather tent on board, and under it the hudfat sleeping-bags to shield me and my jolly pillagers from the English rain. We shipped the landing planks, many were the white feet of captive girls we hoped would tread them—and a hundred stout rollers to ease our longship needed to be beached. Then we put in the arms chest and filled it to the brim with glistening swords and axes, praying all the time to Odin that their shine might be dimmed ere we returned; we put the brass kettles on board, and the provisions, and barrels of water with little bids. Next we set up the tall mast that shone in its winter coat of bear's grease and was scored and straight, and hoisted to the spar the great square sail, "Cloak of the Wind." It was the great jarl Kand of Viskerdal, my foster-brother, who gave me that sheet, and it was colored blue and white and made of woolen stuff as soft as silk. Lastly of all the glistening dragon head was put upon the prow, and the warriors' shields, black and yellow, each overlapping each, were set along the bulwarks, and there, flashing in the sun with a hundred colors, beautiful and complete from stem to stern, my sea bride sat shining on the ways!

So well had we worked that the dawn of the second day from my vow we were ready, and half the valley came to see us off. All went well with the launching and in a few minutes after the props were knocked away we slid out into the fjord and floated true and straight, and at the same instant my five score fighting men set up the hymn to Odin, the sail was spread, and the long oars began to dip, swift and strong, into the merry water that ran rippling by us. Loudly, loudly I prayed from my place by the high tiller to the three fatal sisters who live beneath the ash Yggdrasil that they would send me this time to the arms of my love, and loudly, loudly to this moment I bewail me that my prayer was granted.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Worms That Raise Tons of Sand.

Mr. Darwin a few years before his death made the nonscientific world familiar with the work of worms in passing earth through their bodies, and with the wonderful results effected by them in a comparatively short space of time. More recently C. Davison has followed up Mr. Darwin's researches in this field of science. Last year Mr. Davison examined the sands between Holy Island and the coast of Northumberland, a large flat stretch of beach familiar to most persons who travel by the east coast route to Scotland. The observer found that the number of castings of sand thrown up by the lobworms gave an average of 50,000,000 to the square mile. A portion of the castings was weighed and the total weight thrown up annually was thus shown to be, in some places, about 901 tons per acre; at other points it was a good deal less than this, but in still other parts it amounted to no less than 3,145 tons per acre. If all the sand thus passed through the bodies of these animals in the course of twelve months were spread out it would give an average thickness of not less than thirteen inches. How many and various are the changes produced in the sand by the wonderful activity of these industrious worms it is impossible to say. But it is easy to see how the presence of such creatures in large numbers operate with other forces to produce a kind of order on the surface of the earth, and to replace crudeness by beauty. The thing that strikes one most, however, is the magnitude of the results which can be produced in a short time when a large number of separate individuals work in co-operation by the same methods toward the same end.—London Hospital.

GERMAN railways now aggregate 24,600 miles and employ 12,620 locomotives, 26,008 passenger cars, 556,851 freight cars and 618,000 officials and other employes. In 1890 there were 3,088 accidents of all kinds.

C. J. BROWN,
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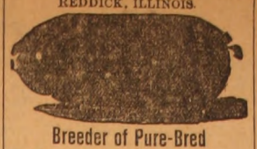

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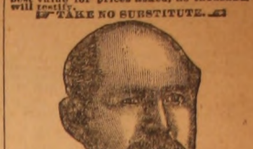

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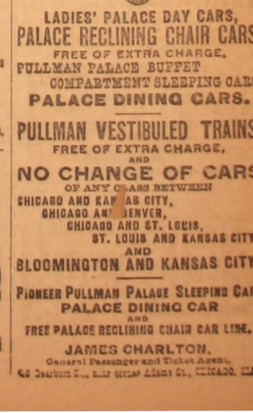

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