# THE STORY OF ULLA.

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

BY EDWIN LESTER ARNOLD.

CHAPTER IV.

We crept out by the green island of Thymnoss, where the white sheep were feeding to the water's edge, and past Goddo on our right, and the long, black shore of Bommels on the left, and so by many a green oeland and dark rock out into the spray and fresh salt wind we joyfully lurching the old Sea Wolf. The frothy pillow of the foam glittering under her prow, and behind the green wall of the Norway pines, and the gray rocks, and the sweet sea surge that tumbled forever at their feet and threw its white arms up as though, lover-like, it would entice its silver fingers with the green hair of the nodding bushes overhead. Down went our gallant shore, down peak, and pine, and point, and as the great black bosom of our mother sea opened to us, her festling sons, proudly we turned our faces westward and each eye grew bright at thought of the plunder to come, and each heart beat high as we smelt the incense of fight in the strong breath of the sea. Oh! but I was proud as, my hand on the pulsing tiller that throbbed under the racing surges not less loudly than my heart, I stood by the high stern and led the wild, free song to Odin wherewith my gallant company mocked the waves—proud! Oh, the salt spray tears again in these old eyes of mine but to remember the fierce wine of life that usurped my blood and flew here and there in my young veins that day, this cold mind of mine burns again but to recall the ecstasy of the unfettered passions that then beset me; but to think for an ungodly minute on those splendid fantasies of pride, lust and cruelty and rapine which dazed my soul.

Well! it is over, and I do wrong even to remember. No more the salt wind takes the war song of Ulla, like a herald of death, to the land of the stranger; no more for him is the joyful rattle of the target shields clattering on his vessel's side as she stoops to the deep blue valleys of the midland sea; no more the old viking's plough shall turn that frothy furrow he did once delight in; no more the lovely smoke of burning thorps shall rise from Ulla's torch to Odin's footstool; no more his stern heart shall melt to pleasure as his vessel staggers homeward through the yeast and spume, and every swirl of the cold dark water spinning enviously against her laboring side tell of rich plunder hid within. It is over for me, but it was a noble frenzy while it lasted. All that noon of our setting out we plunged before a favoring wind across the salt water, and by the second evening the wave began to wear another color as the sea shealed up to the British shore. At the same time the breeze gave out with the sun and we took to our sweeps, and all night long under the starlight the Sea Wolf crept silently and secretly into the land. In the gray of the morning that followed a breeze grew up and under the curtain of the white sea mist that lay soft and heavy as wool on the gently rocking sea we heard the sound of the waves beating on the dim North Umbrian shore. We approached as close as we dared, and then waited for the sun, taking an idle hour or two on the smooth, long back of the swell, and, in the dead silence, listening to the chatter of the wild fowl and the laugh of the kittwake on the unseen cliffs; or the chafe and creak of an oar now and then in the rowlocks and the hiss of the water swirling gently against our sides. So still lay the Sea Wolf in the shadow of the morning mist that the shy grebes and speckled divers came paddling all about her and stared with eyes bead black with wonder to see the silver mist turn on a sudden into a painted hulk with ranked oars, and great damp sail aflap against the muddy mast, and golden dragon head sniffing the chill morning air aloft, and grim warriors leaning on battle-axe and spear crowding her deck. And strange fish swam lapping round, and the swift gannet's white pinions stirred Hafdan's listless fog as she swept unheeding by through the milky haze. No man among us spoke until on a sudden the curling wavelets in the east sparkled with liquid fire the hang of shroud and sail was flushed with a yellow radiance, a strange, bright light shone through the green-crested waves, and as the free, sweet breath of the morning drifted down upon us, and each man drank of it deep and silently, the curtain of the night was lifted, and the yellow feet of the sun came striding over the black plains of the restless northern sea.

Silent and deep we laughed with pleasure, and my grim, stout fellows shook the mist-beads from their tawny lips, then—muttering a prayer to Odin—again the white water fretted under the stern of our ship and the long, slow dip of the oars fell with a pleasant sound on the calm of the morning. Round under the rugged knees of great cliffs crept the Wolf, so secret and swift that the speckled loons stood agape in rows to watch the golden dragon head go dipping by their lonely eyries, and the blue pigeon on her cavern shelf astride of her white eggs stood wonderstruck and forgot to fly—thus she went across the mouth of lovely bays and under grassy headlands and big bights fringed with endless lonely meadows and past fair estuaries where rank fields of westral crops were all awaste between neglected woodlands and southward constantly for many an hour, but nothing could we see to make or turn. Noon came and went, and the warm sweat glazed the sinewy forearms of my gallant rowers until at last I saw them begin to turn their bronze faces over their hither shoulders and angrily scan the ruined shore and swear deep between their strong white teeth; swear at the Dane who had swept this fair country so clean, swear at Biorn Grimsar, and Hakonson the avaricious, and Inge the bloody, and Guthern of Hagbard, who had pillaged here last autumn and wiped out maid and matron, croft and cattle, and left nothing for any honest viking who came after them. Ay! it was sad, we thought, to see so sweet a country so void of life, and we pulled on southward for many miles, looking now on the sunny shore made by man's toil so rich and happy, and yet had nothing on it to burn or plunder, and then turning sadly to our piles of bloodless swords and battle axes, our empty treasure boxes and untenanted rows of iron fetters for the white ankles of fair British girls. We had rowed on like this, cursing Biorn and Inge and Hakonson all the morning, and had seen nothing but the blackened ruins of a few villages upon the hillside, when, slipping by one lonely promontory, we saw upon the rocks a mad old woman, sad-eyed and lean and pinched, sole remnant of some pillaged Anglish or Welsh hamlet, who knew us for what we were upon the instant as she gathered her poor harvest on the beach and leaped upon a rock and cursed us fiercely out of the black reservoir of her despair and hatred, cursed us for pirates and tyrants, like whom were the two yellow-haired girls we stole ten years ago, where her two tall sons, where her husband and her kin, and tossed her tangled locks upon the wind and yelled and cried until, as we crept by, Thorulf of Lound took a javelin from the heap upon the deck and hurled it at her. "Wolf-you foul old sea hag! Where? Why, down in hell. Go there and look." And

"THE JAVELIN FLEW AND TOO TRUE."

as he spoke the javelin flew, and, too true, struck its mark and pierced deep into the old crone's withered bosom, and with a scream of surprise and deathless hatred she spun round upon her heels and grinned and staggered and then plunged headlong into the sea at her feet, and as we passed her crimson blood was spreading in a great red pool upon the dark heave of the smooth flowing surf.

I know not whether it were true, as some among my comrades thought, that that thin old blood split so would bring us luck, but presently it is true enough we had another sign, for a raven came flying off from the land and circled round us and fell into our wake behind, and as the black wings of Odin's friend and messenger went flapping overhead a new spirit was born in my fierce crew. They stretched their hands to heaven and shouted with one voice a verse from out the raven war song, then down they went and with new courage stretched them to their oars until the red viking flag streamed bravely out astern and the shields rattled joyfully and the water lay in a white streak along the low-dipping gunwale of the old Sea Wolf. Cape and bay and headland slipped by. We had come into a better peopled country, when on a sudden a Dane who kept our fore-watch slapped his hand upon his thigh and cried: "A burgh! a burgh! and not yet plundered!" And there, following the point of his eager finger, we saw, three miles away, a strong hall upon a rocky promontory, with trees and meads about it green and fair, and sheep upon the hills and clustering thorps below, all sweet and peaceful, and a little river—everything, indeed, that could glad a viking heart; and, truly grateful, we thanked the bird that had brought us fortune, and paused in a little creek to wait for nightfall.

All the afternoon the longship lay out of sight in the little cavern bay with cliffs, green-tasselled with hanging grasses, nearly meeting overhead, and below the smooth swell of the water heaving the long tangles of sea grass and weeds, and idly reflecting the stern faces and golden mail of that grim crew on board lolling about upon the deck or hanging over the loaded bulwark to watch the shining fishes at play deep down below. Who would have thought that pretty shadow listlessly rolling there on the heave of the wave was bent on such an errand? It was so still as we lay screened in the cover that you could hear the larks singing to themselves high up in the blue over the cliff grass, and the bubble and play of the water in the crevices of the rocks around us, but it was so still that presently this monotony grew wearisome to my fierce and heated spirit. I chafed and turned and impatiently watched the sun which seemed as though it would never set, until at last a happy idea entered into my head—I would go and spy this burgh we were to plunder, see how big and strong it was, how many men held it and how much profit we were like to come by in the venture. With this fancy in my mind I roused my handsome sleepy fellows, who, at my voice stretched their great limbs where they had lain sleeping on the rowers' benches or turned their eyes from gazing on the shining sea to look on one another and say "Ulla is mad! young Ulla Erlingson is wholly mad!" But I pointed out how the madness would vantage us, how greatly it would help us to know the lie and nature of the hold, how I could disguise myself so that my mother should not know me, and learn and see all I could and be back again with them safe and sound, "or by dangling on a gibbet above the highest roof gave them something new to fight for"—as Sarp of Reyr said—before the twilight fell.

CHAPTER V.

Like the brave fellows that they were, the hold fancy pleased them, and forthwith I was disguised as a ragged outcast, with a slouch hat and sorry coat and dirty-gartered legs, with worn wolf-skin sandals my yellow hair was knotted up and hid on in my cap, my face was daubed gray and lean with ash and mud, and with a little paint good Vedrey put a sore or two upon my naked arms such as might come by want and long travel, and with a touch of red and green made to look most hideously new a long-healed wound or two I had upon my bosom. I seemed when it was done so miserable and lean and put so pitiful a whine into my voice and leant so heavy on my long ash staff that all my folly of vikingdom fell a-laughing, and laughed so loud they hushed the droning of the blue pigeon brooding on her eggs and started the shaggy, green-eyed sea crows from their rocky pinnacles a mile away, and then they rowed me to a landing, and with jest and sage advice sent me on my dangerous errand.

It was a sweet place, that English burgh. Even now, long years after, I, old and wrinkled, still dream in the winter nights of the warm incense of that afternoon, and how the grateful sun drew fragrance from out the earth, and how sweet the yellow meadow flowers did smell about it, and how the apples blossomed on the hanger; and then across my even my vision even now there comes the black reek of its burning thatch and the hot steam of the blood in the hall by the banquet tables—ay, I conjure again all these years after in restless slumber the shine of its many roofs a-basking in the April sun, the blue-eyed children rolling in frolic sport about the grassy mounds—the twittering love songs of the new-come swallows on the roof ridge—and then athwart my sleep the black column of avenging smoke leaps to the star-lit midnight sky, the cruel tongues of leaping crimson flame spring up, and the fierce, gasping cry of stricken men, the piercing shriek of women, and the low wail of butchered little ones affright my old and unstrung ears!

Ay, it seemed a sweet place that untouched, ancient English citadel as I hobbled out from the bracken and humble and decrepit as I became me, cawed for hospitality. All inland a stretching away into the dim blue distance—lay fertile fields and woods, shining greener than any other woods can shine, with brooks and streams between them flashing in the light, and splendid herds, enough to feed an army for a year, knee deep in the many colored grasses, and then all this richness swept round by the shore of a little crescent bay to here where on a gently rising promontory the prince's castle stood. It stood upon the very topmost flat of the hill, and was approached from below by a rough track fashioned of beams laid side by side, which circled up through the gorse and fern to its outer fence. Going out upon that track I walked up the hill, secretly noting as I went each stock and stone of cover, and soon came to the first sweep of outer stockade. This was a great circle