Cian of the Chariots

William H. Babcock


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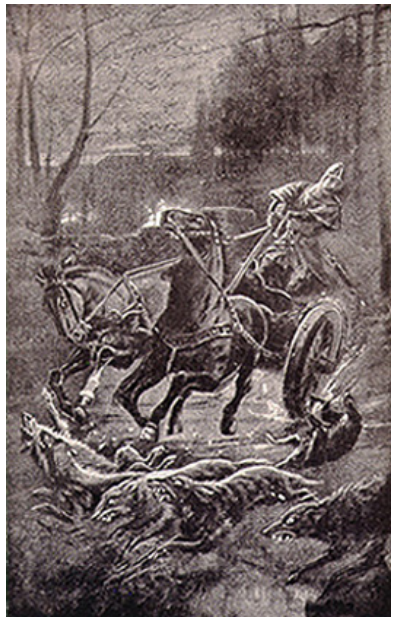
PRESS

CIAN OF THE CHARIOTS: A ROMANCE OF THE DAYS OF ARTHUR EMPEROR OF BRITAIN AND HIS KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE HOW THEY DELIVERED LONDON AND OVERTHREW THE SAXONS AFTER THE DOWNFALL OF ROMAN BRITAIN

BY

WILLIAM H. BABCOCK



"His Right Wheel Struck and Shattered."

PREFACE.

THE most romantic period of English history is surely that chronicled by Geoffrey of Monmouth, sung by Alfred Tennyson, put into modern story by Sidney Lanier, and told in pictures by Abbey—the days of the knightly and royal Arthur of Britain.

To ascertain, as nearly as may be, the real truth of that time, and embody a typical part of it in the guise of modern fiction, has been the labor of years, that has finally found expression by the writer in this romance of love and valor—the story of Prince Cian of the mistletoe crest, Cian of the Chariots.

That it may make more real the deeds of that remote and misty time when the last wave of Roman occupation was receding from Britain, when, between Rome and barbarism, between Christianity and heathendom, stood only the conquering sword of that splendid knight of the Round Table and the Holy Grail, Arthur the Emperor, is the hope of the author, who here presents the old tale in modern dress for modern readers.

It was a stirring and pivotal time. In The Two Lost Centuries of Britain we read: "The true story of the Arthurian campaigns would seem to be this. At the same time with the grand assault of Cerdic at Netley, or in the confusion following the death of Ambrose, the northern Saxons came crowding down. Arthur, issuing from Caer Lerion (formerly Ratae, now Leicester), met their army as it crossed the valley of the Glem; drove it back to the mouth of that stream, and there inflicted on the shore of the Wash a defeat whereby men chiefly remembered the campaign. The Saxons may have taken to their boats and escaped him by sea. One result of his victory was the relief of Caer-lud-coit (Lindom, Lincoln), which had long been standing isolated beyond the true border. No doubt the uplands of Lincolnshire were regained.

"At the west the border-line had been carried back to the Mersey. Chester was in danger. The young general went to its relief; took the offensive; pressed the Saxons northward to the Duglas, and struck

them a severe blow near Wigan. Perhaps for the time he drove them from the little valley.

"But they returned in greater force the next season, and the next, and the next. The bone of contention was there, in spite of indecisive victory, until at last he was able to drive them bodily north as far as Westmoreland. A final success on the Pesa made a complete clearance of all that region.

"But the Deirans of York were unbroken as yet, although beaten back along both lines of approach. They invented a third, by way of surprise, and fell into a trap, whence, by all accounts, none issued alive and free. Hardly any event made a deeper impress on the minds of that generation than this total overthrow in the haunted wood of Celidon.

"Now the scene moves to the southward. At this time Arthur may first have been formally invested with the supreme command throughout Britain. As Guledig, or Imperator, what a claim London must have had upon him; the most renowned of all his cities, though fallen into decay; the most recalcitrant, and thus in need of conciliation; the most endangered, so requiring aid. He found her with the enemy before the walls, the irrational hope of superstition in her heart."

Our story opens after the battle of the Pesa or Bassa, and while both sides were gathering their forces, and beginning to move toward that still more decisive encounter in the wood of Celidon. Arthur, already Emperor, has sent Cian and Llywarch as envoys to summon the aid of the semi-independent city.

All else that is needful will reveal itself as the story goes on.

WILLIAM H. BABCOCK.

ROCK HAVEN, NEAR GEORGETOWN,

March 12, 1898.

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CHAPTER I.

CIAN TO THE RESCUE.

Thou Guider of the chariot of Arthur.
—GILDER.

RED through the fringe of the river of mist, it shone to the eye of Cian, Arthur's fighting man, Briton of Britons, prince and poet of the north. The sunset was on him. He had halted a little over the round of the hill, where the ancient Ermine way came southward out of the woods.

He marvelled at the unwholesome ruddiness in that dying light, the parti-colored streaking of distemper, the ruinous upjutting of wall and house-top bathed in the dimming vapor. Only in one spot a white tower, delicately strong, lifted itself high above the reek. He knew it for the work of a people whom he did not love, a race that had but lately melted from the land, with its magic of beauty and of power. And still the vapor shroud flowed on above the liv-ing stream, and the town enfeebled and hidden, until it spread over the eastern marshes like an inland sea.

The soul of London seemed melting by him, and away. He called to mind the young strength and glory of Camelot, the ripe splendor of far Caerleon. Words of forecast came to him, as they came full often and strangely. He said aloud, "A city in its winding-sheet; a dying city."

A strong figure was that of Cian Gwenclan; every way memorable. Cian of the chariots, men oftenest called him; Cian of the golden mail, from the flexile body-garment,—a filmy corselet hiding the good bronze or steel,—which burned even now in the low sunbeams. Over the heart a single spray of mistletoe was wrought in silver. It had a magical look and name. This repute often befriended him.

His chariot stood near,—for almost alone among northern princes he fought and journeyed in the light rushing war-vehicle of elder Britain,—the brown horse turning from the light, the carven boar's head grinning on the front of it, the helmet and weapons glowing within where he had flung them down.

His eyes were deep, dark, and bright in that western glow, his face dark and vivid also,—a warrior-minstrel face of action and many musings. The hair fell to his shoulders in masses, fine, glossy black, gently waving. He wore the long mustache also of his time. He had the bearing and stature befitting an equestrian of Arthur's court, a veteran of rough campaigns.

There came a patter of hoofs behind; and Llywarch of Argoed, in the saddle, drew up at his side. Llywarch had the fuller outline, a trifle the lesser height. His raised visor showed a younger-looking countenance, winning and flushed. The heart shone out of it. There were mischief and waywardness in the hazel eyes, but also uprightness and clear wisdom at need. Like his friend Cian and many others of their rank, in that romantic day, he touched the harp-strings, and put words of melody to them; although not yet had suffering and loss wrung from him that enduring poetry which later ages associate with his name.

"Not the cheerfullest of places," quoth he, with a glance at the city. "Yet after all it is no more than water in the air. And you—hatching prophecy and destruction, I warrant? You look it."

Cian regained his seat, and replied: "I have been waiting for a man who has time to follow stray footmarks in the woods, when the emperor sends him."

Llywarch grew sober. "It was an archer who made that footprint," said he, "a lively fellow who can hit his mark from a swaying bough. See here," and he put his finger to an arrow-dent in his casque. "By the time I was right in the saddle again my grinning marksman was gone. I followed as far as a brookside, but that was all of him. I began to fear that he would let fly at me out of the water."

"A Saxon?"

"Not a doubt of that."

"So near the great city? When the stag weakens, the wolves gather. Listen."

They looked at each other, as the cry of a wolf indeed came lugubriously from the depth of the wood. As they rode on, it opened again, with purpose in it; then another and another, a succession of racing voices.

They were descending a tongue of the highlands which tapered very gradually into the marsh by the northern wall. On their left a depression deepened and widened into a ravine, where mist-films were drifting, and water murmured. Beyond it, farther down, they could discern the outline of some large low building. Lights were coming out in it. Beyond, masses which might be villa ruins half showed themselves. But everything grew momently thicker to the sight, and, indeed, could scarcely be seen with certainty at all, unless it stood on high ground in the very eye of the west.

They had neither met nor passed any wayfarer. The road was all their own. No sound came to them but of the wolves, the low-complaining runnel, and the uneasy soul of London, murmuring. It was a region where great wealth had been and should be again, but not the remotest wilderness could be more lonesome and desolate.

"Are they after us, I wonder?" queried Llywarch, with a smile; for armed and mailed men had no need to concern themselves at that season. It was comical to be wolf-hunted, with an emperor's despatches, into one of the great cities of the world.

"Hardly," answered Cian. "It seems rather like the purposeless demon-hunting of old tales and winter nights. Listen. See."

He pointed down obliquely to where that sinister hurrying chorus came up again from the slant of the farther side. Fancy and eye-

straining gave them vision of dim, long, swollen figures, making forward ravenously. The lights of the villa were seen in sudden motion, and voices called with anxious inquiry and dismay. The horses meanwhile made wild haste down the road, the mere presence of the wolves being more than any whip or spur.

Then from over the gulf came the scream of a child and a woman's call for aid, in evident extremity of need. They shouted back, and plunged down together, uncertain of obstacles, forcing the horses on as into the shock of battle. As they went they could hear before them exclamations of horror and repulsion, the child's broken wailing, and the ring of metal on stone; but no more call to them, for the woman knew they were coming.

Only as Cian sped up alone over the crest, a glad cry broke from her. He saw the sweep of a great weapon, and heard a brutish howl. Then his right wheel struck and shattered, the chariot spun round, pitching over, and he barely saved himself by a forward leap. That landed him among the already scattering pack, and his sword cut into them right and left, as he made his way to her.

He had not, for long, the picture before him there which abode in memory always. Where some white goddess had toppled over in the ruin of the villa garden, on the tall pedestal the lady towered above her crouching sister, the over-heavy battle-axe shearing every way in her hands, a divine maid, the very genius of armed and wrathful protection.

Instantly her enemies were gone. The mist of the deep hollow received them. With long breaths, she dropped her weapon behind her, and leaned back on the helve of it, unhurt, her brow smoothing itself, and a smile growing in her face, but weariness growing also.

"I cannot tell you how I thank you," she said, with labor, as he came near, holding out hands of aid. "Go, Sylvia," she added faintly.

Pretty Sylvia was still in the bewilderment of terror; but she glanced upward at her tall sister in new concern and surprise,—for how

could weakness be there? Then she gave herself, nestling and shudder- ing, to the arms of the stranger. When he had set her down beside him, she remained watchful and silent, except for a word of persuasion,—"Aurelia! Aurelia!"—as he reached up his hands again.

"I must be a Saxon this time, and rob the pedestal," said he reassuringly.

She waved his hand aside with a smile, then laid her own on his shoulder to descend." I would rather *not* be pulled down and broken. That is the Saxon way," said she.

But she lingered, swaying.

He watched her, fearing a fall, and ready; yet answered," I do not carry my animosity so far. Though I have little love for Roman gods, old or new."

"Then I will be Hecate no longer," she said, laughing weakly, and let herself down with a half spring.

It was her utmost endeavor. As her feet touched the ground, she bent, and would have quite fallen, but for his arm thrown around her. She had no choice but to rest against him a moment.

"The goddess of feebleness, if there ever was one!" she murmured ruefully.

I am Cian Gwenclan," he said. "Rest easy. Breath and vigor will come again."

Small wonder if he were not very eager for that revival, her face being very near his shoulder, her form close against his own. Her imperial womanliness, unwillingly appealing, carried his whole nature by storm. In all his stirring life, Cian had never felt so almost fiercely happy.

"Cian of the Chariots? Prince Cian of the golden mail, whom we have heard about?" she said after an interval; then she straightened herself, remembering that this knowledge had first come by touch. But she added frankly, "Before you spoke I knew you. My name you have heard. My father is Constantine the merchant, grandson of Constans, who was Cæsar, as you know. And to-night—but that does not matter. Our home is just above, the only one left near. But for you, the wolves would have torn us."

There was an involuntary movement toward him, but she felt the little one pulling distressfully at her tunic.

"What makes him smile so?" demanded Sylvia. "I don't like him to smile that way."

She did not mean Cian, though some such odd notion at first came into his mind. Her gaze was on a dark wolf-form which lay twitching, too low for them to see plainly. Cian took up the axe, and ended it at a blow.

"That was hardly needed," he said. "You should be a warrior maiden of olden time, such as the legends tell."

"It was the weapon," she said. "I picked up that massive thing, as I hurried out after our truant."

"Massive—yes! And I have borne arms up the hills by the Duglas, and in the deep sands of the Glem."

By this time lights and voices were wandering anxiously. She called back to them. Cian added his voice, "Ho, Llywarch!" as they with Sylvia began moving away.

For answer the horse of the prince of Argoed came and stood riderless before them. Cian gave a quick cry; then called vehemently, "Llywarch! Llywarch! Llywarch!"

In the confusion of voices now centring on them he could not find that of his friend; but a sound of savage worrying came up out of the hollow. He wavered for a moment. "Go!" said she, and he began rushing down the slope. At a little distance the answer of Llywarch halted him; and as Cian turned aside, the two were together.

"The child—the woman?" Llywarch demanded.

"Safe,—but I feared"—

"What, that the messenger of Arthur had gone to the wolves? No, man, I am all here—and rather more of me by weight than formerly. For I have been headlong into the mire, I promise you."

"But what is that?" indicating the noise below.

"I cannot say. Let us see."

Guided by ear, they came presently on a clump of dark bodies in turmoil, working away mercilessly at something on the ground. Cian had drawn back his sword, when lantern-light shone on it and its living target. Several voices called on him to forbear. "They are our brave house-guards," Aurelia explained, as she joined them. "Off, Dorwach! Here, Juno!"

They were beyond mistaking now. The body of the great mastiff was too thick and furry for any of his wild kin; and though the hound, his companion, was leaner and smoother, no wolf ever came thus gambolling about a mistress. Little Sylvia screamed, for there was blood all over their jaws, and the lamplight made it vivid, while their antics brought it very near.

"One of the wounded enemy," said Llywarch, bending over something which they had left. "Served as Caowl, the woodlander, would serve a Saxon. I have no liking for that inhuman way."

"The dogs have done well," said one of the attendants, in surly protest.

"Well for dogs with wolves," replied Aurelia. " Not so well for men with men. You see," she added, turning to the gentlemen, "our people have no wish to be the thralls of sea-robbers."

Llywarch was examining the dead wolf closely.

"A strong blow," said he. " I marvel the beast got so far. Shoulder bitten through from in front—blade-bitten. Chest laid half open. A strong blow—yet not a man's blow," he added, raising himself inquiringly.

"I remember the frightful creature," said Aurelia, quivering a little. "He was the worst of them."

"This is the lady whose father we were bidden to have speech with," said Cian, and presented his friend in due form.

"Also," remarked Llywarch, "the lady who saved herself while two fighting men of Arthur's camp were making a poor pretence of coming to her aid." He drew his face down ruefully.

"I was not stuck in a bog," observed Cian.

For indeed all the upper part of Prince Llywarch was eloquent beyond expounding, the helmet, especially, being two or three of itself in mass, notwithstanding a continual dislodgement. The domestics began laughing. Even Aurelia half joined. "Come," said she, "we who caused your distress at least will relieve it. Surely you will go no farther now."

Llywarch shook his head. "Our first charge is to deliver, somewhat within the gates," he said. "To our grief, we may not tarry—unless there be other noble damsels by the way who keep tryst with wild animals in the dark."

"You will find none," she said; "all is waste between here and the walls."

"And you linger on with the wolves?"

"We linger. But they rarely come ravening like this. It is held an evil sign."

"Of the Saxon?"

"So say our people; and there has been dreadful work eastward. However, by day all is yet safe here from man and beast. This is a rare place for play, and garden flowers run wild. No doubt Sylvia slipped off on some such quest, and lingered until the twilight surprised her. Was it not so, Sylvia?"

The child began to whimper at the remembrance. "Let us go home; do let us go home," was her imploring cry.

"Patience, darling. Yet I, too, think that would be well. Gentlemen, I urge no one from duty; but since you have errands with my father, we may perhaps hope to see you soon again."

"But is he not at the city?"

"Yes; and it is as well. Though if spared the wolf-howling and worrying"—

"He enjoys other fraternal sounds. There they are again."

From distant London angry calls came confusedly.

"Yes," she replied with a sigh; "farewell, until you return—with my gratitude."

"Ours, much rather," said Cian and Llywarch in a breath.

As they spoke she turned away with her men. From the other side the princes' horses were brought. There was a saddle on Cian's already. It was bridled also. They regained the road easily, and pressed on again.

"A surpassing woman!" commented Llywarch, after silence.

"Imperial," assented Cian. "Hence our errand, it may be." The words had an ill taste evidently.

"Cian," said Llywarch with seriousness, "it is hardly for us to judge. But the emperor will not, I deem, look outside of the house of Caradoc. He can very ill spare the right arm of his realm and host; but he knows if there were one man here such as she, London would count for Britain."

"There is her father."

"He is the last you should praise. Rome has gone. You cannot turn the stream backward. That is what Constantine seeks to do. Nevertheless, he may have a trial."

But there was more against Constantine than his worship of old. He had thriven vastly in trade, whatever his claim by birth, beginning with hidden stores put by in the great exodus with the legions, to be found by those who knew. He could marshal wealth and the wealth-bringers mightily and with skill; and very proud he was of some resemblance in feature to that great Julius who crossed the Rubicon into empire. But the dread of loss came easily to him; and he had the trader's instinct to conciliate and bargain, rather than the iron hand of the soldier, holding its purpose with firm grip unto the end.

CHAPTER II

WITH THE GUARD OF THE GATE.

Of manly disposition was the youth.
—ANEURIN.

THE two travellers passed from the high ground to the causeway which pierced the strip of marsh that lay just beyond the city wall at and near the Ermine gate. The air was foul, the fog wrapping them closely. Dim forms, which might mean anything, even fancy, brushed by them. All sounds were muffled. Those ahead, though near, had seemingly grown more distant. The wall, when at last it loomed over them, was very welcome.

Ascending a little, they entered a broad gateway. A light shone transversely. They saw before them the glint of crossing metal, and the two helmeted spearmen who thus barred their way. The customary challenge was given.

"We are friends," answered Llywarch, "and glad enough to get in out of the corpse-breath. We are officers of Arthur the Emperor, too, no matter what we may look like in this guise."

His eyes ran dismally over himself.

"Moreover, we bear a letter from him to your city rulers," added Cian.

The soldiers were opening the way, awed, yet grinning as often as their eyes met the figure of the miry Prince of Argoed; but one came forward, lantern in hand, with a light, quick step, at whose gesture the spear-points dropped again.

"Your first words," he said, "would have let you through over willingly, for a British fighting man is of all men the most welcome just now. And I do not doubt you shall have the greater honor for

slight delay. But this is matter of moment, it would seem, and must be referred to the captain of the guard. Call him;" and he turned to one of the men.

They could see that he had a slight figure, unarmored, as though he had risen in haste to make inquiry; a young subaltern, it was plain, and of a type to hold boyishness well into riper years. Close-curling hair between red and gold, a light pointed mustache, an alert, intelligent face, a mantle of rich red stuff and tossing embroidery, a general impression of quick motion and brightness,—these made up the rest of the half-shadowed picture. All his attire ran very near a delicate foppery. A two-edged sword of the old leaf pattern hung sheathed from his side. His belt bore also a dagger and an elfin-like forester's horn.

Cian looked him over, with sudden recognition.

"I know you very well, Dynan, son of the Three Shouts; it seems, though, you do not remember me."

Dynan's face lighted responsively. He stepped forward, offering his hand.

"How should I know you," he answered, " without your chariot, and back yonder in the shadow. Moreover, you have thrown something around the natural golden glitter of you," as indeed the dense fog had prompted.

"And this," he continued, "Llywarch of Argoed, surely!—in misfortune?" and he began to laugh.

"Yes, Llywarch, who swam the Duglas with you to get at certain Saxons. He would like to swim a few more rivers just now. Known at present as Llywarch the Wallower."

"We thought you had gone home," said Cian.

"Rightly," answered Dynan. "But who could stay there? By the time all my neighbors had quarrelled with me because I wouldn't make fairy gold according to my lineage, and hadn't any coin of my own, I found it best to do my fighting farther away, in town-service.

"And so you chose London!" suggested Llywarch disparagingly.

Dynan raised his eyes with a quick movement. "Not first nor most wisely," said he. "I have eaten the bread of Caer Segeint the Beautiful. I have held the gates, also, of the White Town of the Wrekon, the Shining City. But this—I call it the sulking den, the cave of unreason, the hive that quarrels inwardly, unappeasably."

"Don't snarl at the paymaster, lad. Never do that," announced a strong voice, nearing them. A hand was laid familiarly on Dynan's shoulder—a hand with a strong tendency to grip, and showing the knuckles over plainly; for this Osburn the Frank was a very oak of a man, everything about him giving the impression of rooted strength. He had a large forehead over keen blue eyes, and a way of thrusting out his long chin, as he uttered his curt sentences. His broad, bony face was bearded all over with stubble, in contrast to the mustachioed Britons.

"I am centurion of the gate," he explained." That is all just now. Where I am put, I stay. Where I am sent, I go. And I don't growl about it. I don't, if the money comes. What, then, have you brought us?"

"A letter-imperial from Arthur, our emperor," answered Llywarch formally. "It is addressed to the ruler or rulers of London, by his or their proper style or title, whosoever and whatsoever he or they—and it—may be."

Osburn's face twitched with grim enjoyment.

"The council is trying to find out," he replied dryly." They will scarce hear you to-night."

"I pray you arrange for audience to-morrow then," said Cian. "The emperor will bear no trifling."

"Amen!" responded Osburn. "A strong hand is needed. Dynan, see who is uppermost at the basilica. If Constantine, all will be well. Tell him. If not—the best you can. Shout, if beset. Any one of the three shouts,—your inheritance."

Dynan laughed. "About all of it, except a fund of tolerance for bad jokes."

Forthwith he was gone for his armor.

Following Osburn, who followed Dynan, the envoys entered, through a narrow side passage, a lighted guard-room in a bastion-like thickening of the wall. Here all seemed in practicable order and readiness. Armor, chiefly bronze, hung on the walls with a reddening gleam. Weapons were shining where they leaned together in corners or from racks that held them. Large men of divers aspects, though sufficiently alike in attire, sat about or lounged or stood. One pair of them looked up from a board of draughts, or some such game. A soldierly set, but gathered from everywhere, for a few seemed Britons.

Osburn turned to Llywarch: "Better leave your shell, it needs brightening;" and, at the word, one came forward, grimacing, to render aid. It was not possible to look at the mud-caked paladin very solemnly. He took their mirth cheerily, as usual.

Presently they were ushered into what had been a series of cells, where, on the smallest possible scale, the Roman officers had persisted of old in their elaborate bathing system. The ornaments were mostly plastered over now, and the partitions knocked down for greater elbow room; but water was to be had very amply.

Passing thence to the dining-hall, they found it absurdly narrow for its length, as the conditions compelled. The mural paintings were preserved, though fading; two long processionals, which could never

have been very good. On the board sundry Roman pieces of varying merit still held their ground amid spoils of raid or purchase, mementos brought from over sea, and chance findings of every kind, a very strange medley. A vase of coralline Samian ware, with hunting scenes winding over it, beside a green-ribbed Saxon goblet, translucent and tapering slenderly; a silver platen alive with racing nymphs under an acorn-shaped cup, older than the Celts, of polished Kimmeridge coal.

Two other officers awaited them at supper; and soon the soldiers off guard came in, taking the lower seats.

The talk began, wandered, then came to an end. All saw that Osburn was listening uneasily. At last he held up Dynan's elfin horn—transparent as the summer heaven, yet threaded with wild scrollwork of fire.

"He has left what some call his luck," said Osburn gravely, neither denying nor affirming, as became a man who had served respectfully under many gods, and knew that strange influences were astir among men.

"But we have it, and he goes on our errand," answered Llywarch.

"Do you thus read the omen?"

"God forbid that we should waste time in construing what a few minutes will reveal. But ask Cian, if you will. He has been to the Druids."

One of the lesser officers looked at Cian with heightened interest. The other made the sign of the cross.

Cian's lip twitched. "Oh, this horn is not of the devil," said he. "You know the tale."

"Not certainly," said Osburn.

"Then *my* prophecy is that Llywarch, being glib of tongue and smooth of humor, will surely tell you."

Llywarch bowed low, but fell in with their wish. "Before our time," he said, "there were dwarfs and elves and powers of enchantment in the land, as all men know; and some have lingered on in hidden places, now and then showing themselves, for good or ill, to one of our race. In deep glens and forest shadows you meet them, it is said, and chiefly by the fountains that come bubbling up with the life of the under-world.

"In such a country as this dwelt Dynan's mother's mother's mother, I know not how remote in ancestry. One day, passing through the meadows to bathe, as was her custom, in a secret pool fed by undying springs under curtaining boughs, she heard a faint cavern-muffled call from before her, and was minded to return. But coming a little nearer, she found the place quite vacant, save for dipping ouzels and water-rats that went gliding away. Having waited a while, she laid aside her garments, and stepped in through the shallows. Then again out swelled the cry, but now deep-throated, vehement, exultant, and very near, seeming to heave up the water before some bodily presence. It thrilled and wrapped and all but overcame her; yet she sprang away, snatching her clothing, and wrapping it around her as she ran. And, running thus, she heard yet a third time that voice of the under-world, but now sent after her in accents of more than human despair. Yet she had seen no form at all; and the Three Shouts was the only name she could ever give, or which might be given."

"But what is this to Dynan?" demanded Osburn.

"Why, if the story be told truly, she must have sought that pool again—overcoming her fear, or because of it, for there are strange things in enchantment. It is thought, also, she made tryst with him otherwhere. A dimness, not human nor heavenly, was seen beside her in lonely rambles; and one starlit eve she had vanished quite away. Long afterward she returned, and bore a son among her own people, with a tale of wedlock in wild, lonely places, by rites

unknown; and this magical token, wrought by no earthly hand, she showed as her voucher. When the right lips blow it, the voice of the Three Shouts will be sent abroad, and hosts of terrible power will come to the rescue. But they exact their price, and claim their own."

Cian took the horn from Osburn's hand, poising it carefully. "Shall I blow it, for trial?" said he.

"Forbear!" cried his host uneasily.

Even while he yet held it, yielding, there came a far cry to them. All looked through the wall windows toward the house-lights, which glimmered across a broad open belt.

"No distress in that!" exclaimed Osburn. "He is on the way."

"Good," said Llywarch. "Now make Cian tell you how he saved a pack of wolves this evening from a terrible lady."

"What!"

"Aurelia, daughter of Constantine," explained Cian gravely.

"So she fought the wolves?" queried Osburn.

"Protecting her little sister."

"And she hewed down well?"

"You should have seen. But the axe wearied her."

"Of course, of course!" and Osburn looked from one of his officers to another with eager appeal. "There's a woman, grand and lovely! Emperor's blood, they say. A king's daughter, at any rate! To-night will show."

Some of his men looked uncertain or indifferent, but the most were evidently with him. Cian and Llywarch turned to each other in congratulation.

"For how long?" suggested Cian.

"There you have it. That is the worst. How long?—I don't know. I don't know my own title in this place. One day I am centurion—when the Romans, as they call themselves, are uppermost. The next, I am commander of a hundred—then the Britons, so called, rule. Once Constantine has been consul; once, tribune. Now he is to be king. And there have been chiefs and princes and governors, and what not. And the factions wrangle, and the city goes to ruin, and the Saxons draw nearer, and the wolves howl about the gates. Whatever else we need, we need—Arthur."

Seeing that he longed for it, they told him then fully of Arthur the Guledig,—Arthur the Emperor, as men would say. They told what manner of man this was in camp and court and daily converse, who had risen steadily, a star of hope for all the land; his campaigns, how fought, and whither tending; his every hope and plan so far as made known among his following, while yet he stood there by the northern border, watchful. "Stanch men, like you," said Llywarch, "are men after his own heart."

Osburn kept silence a minute. Much of this did not come newly to him; but it was a tale well told again, and they rounded hints and fragments with fuller and surer knowledge. At last he said,—

"I like the wise brain; I like the strong hand—the man who can learn from Rome, live for Britain, and yet value any soldier. That leader is mine who has never yet been beaten. If they choose Constantine, and he chooses me, London is for Arthur."

They looked at him with widened interest, for he spoke assuredly. His men followed with sounds and signs of applause, but their eyes opened as at something new.

"May it indeed be so!" Cian answered. "What force have you here?"

"A legion—which is a half-legion—in fair shape, at the gates and the White Tower. And the citizens turn out—sometimes. And there are always spears—a few—about Caer Collin, our worst border. And the foresters will fight, but as readily against us, for Vortimer of the Andred-wood. The city is full of them now. That is Dynan's danger. What keeps him?"

"You can't go fast through the fog."

"True. But it's too long. By St. John!—too long."

For Osburn was confusedly Christian in his swearing. He clenched his hand as he spoke; when another cry from Dynan brought them all to their feet together. It came from far to the right, and this time there could be no doubt at all of its exceeding urgency. In a breath each man snatched his armor, and then all went tumbling out—one on the heels of another—except the very few that Osburn's hasty word in passing bade remain on guard. He restored some part of order as they ran.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIGHT BEFORE THE SHRINE.

He that was the shelter in battle.
—LLYWARCH.

OSBURN'S precautions, rapid though they were, held him a little behind his anxious guests. Presently these also parted company in the fog; and Cian, being the nimbler, found himself racing on alone, with merely sound for a guide.

There had been enough of it all that evening about London; but it was easy to single one commotion with the din of real combat in it. He made this his aim, shouting ahead to hearten Dynan and the two or three soldiers who were with him.

The moon was up now, though pale and slender, and the veil began slowly thinning away. They were in that forsaken belt left by Roman custom between houses and city wall; in this instance broader than usual by reason of the dying of the outskirts, and also much more desolate. Now they were stumbling over ruinous brickwork; now routing dim sneaking beast forms out of their lairs, and sending them scurrying onward; now splashing through pools and mire which proved that the northern marsh was beginning to spread within the wall.

Suddenly Osburn and Llywarch, now together, were aware of figures dimly flitting backward from them; and at a turning by an old corner of masonry a fury of weapons, curses, limbs, and faces came at them all together, holding them for a moment. Then it vanished as suddenly.

Cian heard the clash and uproar obliquely behind him, but kept on. A light and agile figure leaped in front of him, with the voice of the elf-son Dynan. "So near? I came for aid; come now!" Forthwith he was flying back, while Cian followed as best he could. It was not

their first race into danger, but no wholly mortal man could equal that speed.

For a moment the elf-son was lost to sight, then discovered in violent action, while a form flew from him, moaning. He sprang, his sword fell again, and he sped on. As Cian passed the spot, a form, dead or living, at full length, nearly tripped him. Glancing back, he could see fighting, or fancy that he saw it, where tumult had broken out afresh around the voice of Llywarch. At the crossing of a little rill, two men faced him; but he sprang by, dealing one of them a backward blow. Twenty yards farther he saw Dynan spring on the skirts of a throng with nimble execration, while men scattered right and left. Before they closed again Cian also was cutting vehe- mently among them, while a third figure broke outward to his aid. The three together made such clearance that they won swiftly to a little apse or shrine which had served already as a shelter.

Here some pious legionary had reared, of old, a small temple, it may be to Juno or Proserpine, doubtless a lovely thing in its day. But the pillars had fallen long ago, and very little indeed remained beside that cave-like half-dome and its supporting walls, with two forward running wings of masonry, which left only a narrow entrance with a litter of fragments before it. Inside, three or four men could yet find room, though not with ample motion. A soldier crouched there, unable to dash out with his comrade, but holding his spear forward still.

Cian took a step out of the portal, and his foot slipped on the rounded body of the deity cast down. His hand, coming on it to stay his fall, was wet with blood. A dead man lay half across the marble, face on breast.

There had like to be another; for the enemy, very near, took advantage of his mishap, and one spear at least would surely have gone through him, but that Dynan turned it, and leaped in, thrusting thrice to a breath, until the point found an undefended spot and the man fell. In a moment the elf-son was out and beyond, flitting over obstacles and under blows, bounding, twisting, lunging and striking,

everywhere at once, like a figure driven by some prodigious spring-work.

Cian, busy enough himself, kept an eye on this darting friend, for he felt that the ending of it all must be very near. Twice he dashed out to Dynan's aid, but each time that ally was elsewhere already. At last, with a great bound, the nimble-footed fellow came over one of the masonry wings, landing close behind Cian. Then he gave forth once, brokenly, his peculiar call for aid, and fell exhausted before the entrance and the altar.

Cian stepped back, watching warily the rush that followed, and making the best use of edge and point that he could. The strait was so narrow and cumbered that there was rarely a chance for a full blow; but his enemies were hampered likewise, and they also jostled each other, while not one was nearly a match in fence for the best swordsman, save two, of Arthur's court. Had there been but fair light to see him, the tall dark prince of the northern hills, sword in hand, framed by the rough temple archway, had never appeared more grandly. From each side of him, too, a spear-point darted out, gashing one or another of his assailants in breast or limb, as they were driven over near.

More than once they surged quite up to him, ebbing again after fierce stabbing at close quarters, almost like throbbing of steel. Rather by touch than by sight, he knew that some of them were in armor, some skin-clad, some all but naked, and with weapons as various. "Who are they?" he asked, at a half-minute's breathing spell.

The soldier first wounded was beyond answering. The other replied weakly, "Foresters, rabble, a few of our own men, townspeople who have bought armor, all sorts"—

But again they were on him together, at the closest quarters and with the deadliest intent. One led them whom he had marked before as the most persistent of all, a shorter man than himself, yet of good height and very active, with sinewy arms and a passionately hostile

face. “Tigernach, Tigernach!” he cried, as if his ominous name were a spell.

“And I am Cian Gwenclan,” was the proud answer. At the same time the moon shone out more plainly. However paled in that gleam, there could be no mistaking the golden lustre nor the silver spray.

Now indeed it seemed that a spell was working very strangely. Tigernach drew back bodily, shouldering those behind him. “It is Cian of the Chariots,” he cried, turning. “I will not fight him of the golden mail, the heirloom of the awful dead. I will not fight the mistletoe, nor yet Arthur the Guledig.”

“Why not,” said one, “if he lays open my arm?”

Nevertheless, they swayed about, with signs of melting; then vanished dispersedly, as hurrying calls were heard near at hand. Other forms fleeted by, with Llywarch hotly behind them.

“Praise Mary!” he cried, seeing his friend yet living.

“For letting good men be slain while doing their duty?” inquired Cian, with a glance at the dead soldier. “Or for the wonderfully swift feet of Argoed?”

“Swift enough,” said Dynan, as he rose achingly by sheer will. “See what comes of swiftness. But where’s Osburn?”

For answer, they could hear a new clangor and cursing voices not far away. Hurrying thither,—Dynan for once hobbling desperately in the rear,—they came on the stout centurion, with two or three of his men, holding a clump of the enemy penned in an angle of a broken wall, whence they endeavored to escape, now and then one succeeding. But they did not stir Osburn from his foothold. His blows and anathemas were hammer-like, men rattling down under them. Just as his re-enforcement came up, the last few of these human rats in a trap, with a frantic effort, went scrambling over the ragged masonry behind them, while hip-slashes and a blast of hoarse

words helped them up and on. Osburn turned from them with laughter, and presently had Dynan by the hand. His eyes were eager questioners. Dynan, when breath would serve him, answered as eagerly.

This was his tale: Going in, he had no disquiet beyond a continual hovering in the fog, as of spectres, but there was confusion enough when once among the houses; and the council-house, or basilica rather, seemed a place of frenzy, the party of Constantine claiming power already by election, and their opponents furiously contesting it. Nevertheless, he gave the message, and received instead a summons and an invitation, which was a warning. To Osburn: "Come; bring your men; expect preferment;" and to Arthur's envoys: "Pray rest at my home until to-morrow." Also he was adjured to hasten, and watch keenly.

This he did. But soon after his first call the way was barred, and he was driven to edge away and make détours, until he reached the shrine by the wall. There, being closely pressed, he left his two followers to make good their den, and darted by and through their enemies to bring aid.

"It has a bad look," he conceded ruefully; "but if either of them could have stirred his toes a third as fast as I, he should have gone instead. Now, there's a leader's qualifications for you!"

Osburn pressed his hand reassuringly. They had regained the shrine. It was surprising to find, after all, how little fatal damage had been done. But there was blood enough about certainly.

Cian could feel his own trickling, while a weak indifference gained on him. Presently his head swam and rang; but he held up and said nothing, as they moved back toward the Ermine gate. He heard some stern order from Osburn about leaving the wounded enemy where they lay, and Llywarch's kindly protest. Then there was a startled exclamation; and he felt them supporting him, while some hand presented a flask to his lips.

When he quite came to life again, a surgeon was saying, "He need not be much the worse for it;" while a soldier bathed his limbs, and bandages went around them. He knew that he was in the wall-quarters of the guard again.

Every face showed pleasure that his hurts were no worse; but he was very sore, and felt it all as a satirical absurdity. "A rabble-mauled veteran," he said with deliberate effort. "One Cian, a swordsman, formerly known at Camelot."

"Not all rabble, not all," answered Osburn. "Tigernach was there, a born chief of the forest, good at his weapons. We know him."

"Swift as I nearly; obstinate almost as Osburn; hotter than either or any," added Dynan.

Cian looked from face to face. "Why, Tigernach?" he said. "Ah! bring him in."

"His forty wild followers may wait outside, I trust," suggested Llywarch.

"You may trust him," answered Cian, putting his forefinger significantly on the silver mistletoe.

Tigernach entered, in hastily brightened mail, with brilliant apparel showing through the rifts and joinings. He carried himself so as to give an effect of greater height and shapeliness than in the recent struggle. He had the look of true Celtic fervor and irascible pride, with suggestions of romance also. His black eyes, keen and burning, were fixed on Cian, who was plainly far more to him than all besides.

"We have mingled our blood by a very unfriendly rite," he said; "but you will not blame one who could not know."

He turned the hollow of his shield outward. It also bore the silver mistletoe.

"You know now," answered Cian, "and will stand by me and Arthur the Guledig?"

He used the Celtic title. The forester bowed.

"And by Constantine, King of London," pursued Cian.

The other's lips twisted. "I have no liking for men who lie down to their meals," he said, "and pirate of Rome, Rome, Rome! But I suppose it must be."

Osburn laughed sympathetically. "We may count on him," said he.

"So thoroughly," added Cian, "that I take him and his tribesmen for my guard to-night, setting your men free."

Osburn hesitated. Llywarch looked uneasy.

"That is going far on scant knowledge," he said. "No offence to this spirited gentleman, but we should not be the worse for a dozen drilled soldiers also. Bear in mind, Cian, that there is a lady to be looked after."

"And we savages are unworthy?" commented Tigernach. "As you will. As pleases you!" He forced a laugh.

"Perhaps it is from the lady that he should be guarded," whispered Dynan.

"You are right," answered the woodland chief, his face partly clearing at the jest, also in memory of her, for every man in the little kingdom knew the kind charm of Aurelia.

Osburn decided: "All are right. We trust Tigernach. Prince Cian shall have him—and his men. Prince Llywarch shall have my men, whom he honors by preference. But I can't spare many. Dynan, I commit to you the royal villa and this gate; the princess, who is waiting; the Saxons, who maybe. Now I must go."

Dynan drew a long breath, looking blank. “So much for an enchanted reputation!” he said. “ If it were not for the gnats and the ghosts and poisoned air, I would make my headquarters in the marsh midway. I shall get a fine name as a flying cavalryman.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE RETURN TO THE VILLA.

To view the comely forms of the lovely ones.
—*Black Book of Caermarthen.*

CIAN rode slowly, without speaking; for he still drooped, and every movement hurt him. Tigernach also was silent, but resentfully. Llywarch spoke in kindness.

"You should not mind a soldier's frankness—a fellow woodlander's too. Which way lie your domains?"

"In the heart of the great Andred wood, toward what they call Sussex now, on the old way to Anderida. We hold the ridge, and ever have held it. The Saxons did not come by me. After that town fell, they tried; but we cut up the first party in the thickets, and there never was a second."

He warmed a little in speaking of this achievement.

"You hold of London?" pursued Llywarch, with an interested air.

"Why, so *they* hold. We do our buying here, and some of our fighting. This time Vortimer in- vited us—of the lower woodlands. He has some shadow-claim too, and a borrowed name from olden times that every Briton loves. But he looks the Saxon that he is, on the father's side. We lead our own life, and go our own ways."

"You came lightly attended. Surely you do not usually adjust the affairs of London with half a hundred men."

Tigernach laughed. "Such a kingdom! The only way to adjust a Londoner is to kill him. Then he knows his own mind, and is reasonable. As there was to be a fight, of course I came, with a few

who were nearest, losing no time. Others will follow. Half my young men are on the way before this, if I know them."

"I would send word," suggested Cian.

Tigernach took on a more deferential tone. "That I have done. They will gather for us near the northern gate."

"Re-enforcements for me!" cried Dynan, who had just ridden up, with breath and spirits back again. "We are well rid of the prisoners too. They didn't keep me long."

"Ah!" growled Tigernach. Then he added calmly, "they were not of my people."

"Oh, nothing in the way of slaughter. I turned them loose to bring recruits. One was a neighbor of yours, a tribesman of Caowl, that beetling-browed, slant-eyed, hard-fighting man. My compliments go with him."

"Nimble of wit as of foot! Caowl will come over to us for that. Otherwise I harry him from one end of his land to the other."

Dynan laughed merrily. "Dear neighbors are much the same in the Andred woods as up my way,—do as I bid, and, oh, how I love you!"

"But you were given the prisoners to keep," said Cian.

"There spoke Duty. Know, then, O Conscience! that our well-anchored commander bath endowed me with a huge discretion—which was wise and liberal of him, it being greatly needed. Moreover, I have the countenance of Prince Llywarch of Argoed."

But Llywarch demurred at once, "Oh, no! my countenance was never a thing of red banners and blazes. My countenance is where it ought to be for decency's sake. Yet I did counsel mercy. It is well to err that way, as in over-care of friends."

Tigernach bowed. “That is manful,” said he.

“And heart-warm,” added Cian. “Thence comes all the craftiness of Llywarch.”

The lift of the land had taken them into clear moonshine. Looking back, they could see very little of London, except a low, formless gloom, with veiled glimmerings of light in it, and here and there a lamp on some house-roof or tower, shining like a red star.

There was a diffused gleam about the basilica, and, more doubtfully, along the great bridge.

The noise behind grew louder to them, as they ascended, but rarely made any one sound distinguishable. The howling of the wolves came from the hill-country quite as plainly.

This time they crossed an affluent of the Wallbrook on a bridge a little above the villa. It must have been hidden from them by the fog and the twilight before—a strong bit of olden masonry, in the dip of a branch road, with passage for three horses abreast. New lights came out at this, moving from window to window. The lodge by the gate brightened also.

A group of figures came hastening over the lawn, with sounds of laughter. When the gate swung open, Aurelia and Sylvia were there, breathing fast, but with eyes of welcome. Clad in white, flushed with exercise and expectancy, graceful and stately, with no thought of grace or stateliness, the tall daughter of Constantine had never looked more divine.

“My father?” she inquired.

“King Constantine, Princess,” proclaimed Dynan. “Osburn the Frank is to be his general, at a bound. I have charge of the Ermine gate and this villa.”

While all made obeisance to her, she replied demurely, "Then we will all obey you as king at third hand, Dynan."

But Sylvia was not content. She pulled at her sister, and began to whimper. "Why don't they bow to *me*, if I am a princess too? Why don't they look at *me*? *I* want to be a Princess."

"And if you are," answered Aurelia, with a responsibly improving air, "be sure it will not add one cubit to your stature."

"Heaven forbid, if I know anything of ancient measurement!" protested Llywarch. "Would you have this sweet little maiden shoot up all at once into a mate for the giant of Skiddaw?"

"Prince Llywarch wishes to say that some of us are over-lofty already," expounded Aurelia to the lesser one.

Llywarch looked that way too. "I will do homage to you, and be your champion, my bright little lady," said he.

Sylvia eyed him with grave approval. Then, at a motion of Cian, she shook her ringlets. "This one; he has fought for me already," said she. There was a laugh, but she drew near to her rescuer confidingly. Even her slight touch fell by chance where it made him flinch.

"See," she cried distressfully, "he is hurt. Aurelia, somebody has been hurting him."

"Not much, dear," said Cian, laughing weakly at this new way of viewing his adventure. "That's what we are for, you know."

But Aurelia had heard. "Wounded? and I am keeping you here!" she exclaimed. "Oh, come, come! No, you shall not dismount. At the house, not before."

She walked easily beside him. "We heard there had been fighting," she said gravely, "but not this."

"I shall not grieve," said Cian. "It will keep me your guest a little time."

"Nor shall I grieve for that," she replied frankly.

Turning to those who came behind, she added in a clear, full voice, "All my father's friends are more than welcome."

The soldiery clanked their swords on their shields in response, and the woodland men shouted vociferously. Her beauty, her lavish benignity, the warmth and strength of her nature, were not new to them, but worshipful, as of old.

They were now by the great front portico. Cian, dismounting, began to sway and reach. Aurelia stepped nearer. "It is my turn to help you," said she.

He drew back, fearing to lean such weight on her. "Forgive me," said he, and rested his hand on the shoulder of Tigernach, who was there already.

No greater sense of luxury had ever befallen him than when at last he lay full length in the chamber appointed, sipping a cordial, and disencumbered. With Tigernach watching, he soon slept.

Llywarch brought the good news to their hostess, all the more willingly for the quick turn of her head as he entered, and the inquiry in her kind eyes. He did not love her in the first person, but he was half in love with her for Cian's sake. He made it tenderly plain to her that Cian's wounds were trivial, and that the surgeon had so well treated them, that there was little, beyond common kindness, for anyone else to do. But the beauty of her home, he told her, would be in itself a reviving medicine.

She truly needed comforting, for the strain of that evening had been severe. After her first great peril the wolf-voices had come to her again, hour by hour, as reminders. Her people had told her also of wild human figures that gathered on the hills or went savagely by.

Also, there were both the rumor and the noise of conflict in that tormented city where her father was risking life to win a shadowy crown. But now all had gone fairly well. Her home for the time was in safety, and she, too, might sleep.

CHAPTER V.

A DIP INTO OLD ROME.

Here the baths were
Hot on the breast.
—THE RUIN, *Codex Exoniensis.*

WHEN Cian awoke he was not at first very sure of his awakening. The scenes of the wild evening before melted into the equally strange fancies of the night, and shifted with them interchangeably. As his thought cleared, there was still something astounding and unreal in his memory of the shrouded city, the goddess come to life among the wolves, and that spectral combat of the shrine, where men of frantic and varied aspect, in what quarrel he hardly knew, dealt blows at him unceasingly out of the moonlit haze.

But there was no haze now. The sun, very real and bright, came slanting in through the glassless windows. There were no bird songs. A dry leaf or two drifted by. Summer, after once leaving, had come back again in the lovely air.

He had lifted himself on his elbow, and was inspecting a slit in his forearm, when Llywarch appeared.

What tidings?" Cian inquired.

"Chiefly that the bud of the morning is uncommonly full blown, and that bath and breakfast wait. I am glad to see that the Gwenclan has enough of 'pure blood' left to warrant his title."

"Oh, I shall live. But as to the bath: you know my way."

"Cold water in great severity. It is no doubt a thing of virtue. But when I hinted it a certain royal lady uplifted her brows at me. I think her counsel would be to have you sponged tepidly in bed, and anointed with healing unguents to slow music."

His friend sat upright with a grimace.

"Good!" said Llywarch. "Yet a little warmth in the water would be useful in removing blood-stains. Pray yield thus far to Roman effeminacy, and let me help about the bandages."

Cian was looking at them, "I am less like a man than a disorderly bale of goods," he mused aloud. "How those fellows did get into me! There were enough of them. Is it far?"

"Two rooms;" and Llywarch lent him a hand to rise, then led the way over a bright tessellated floor, flinging the silken door-curtains aside as they came.

Cian entered the anteroom of the bath, and stood gazing.

Before tendering his spear to the great Arthur, Prince Cian had been but a hillside ruler, the lord of a northern valley nook. Later, his had been mainly the soldier life; and he knew the Roman splendor by rumor only, or in mere external view. He could not choose but hear of the surpassing luxury which yet hid itself in a few safe and indolent places, as about the western Waters of the Sun. But he had been content to go on, disapproving, disregarding, in his own simpler ways. What he now saw was a revelation.

The apartment was walled shoulder-high on the right and left with delicate, flower-painted tiles of many varying blossoms. Above these, Corinthian pillars of blue-veined marble, wound with vine-leaves and laurel, rose to the ceiling. The light admitted was nearly as brilliant as in the outer air.

Over the doorway before them, in tints unfading, Apollo, thrilled with inner flame, threw eagerly from him the cloud-veil of the morning. In the mosaic under foot were the foaming waves and the quaint, jubilant Triton-figures of the welcoming sea. Around the ceiling ran a merry rout of fawns and nereids—racing, overtaking, disrobing—about a central figure of airy loveliness, neither wholly

spirit nor winged goddess, but quickening with the life of free air, blue water, sunshine and the bright dew.

"Behold the stoical Briton!" said Llywarch, observing his friend's trance of admiration. "It is a relief, you were such a standing reproach to me. But Tigernach will be the death of you."

Cian scarcely heard the voice, or the steps of withdrawal. Warmth, soothing odors, and the sound of falling water, came to him through the inner doorway, deepening as he entered.

One side of this second apartment was as before, only here the tiles bore fruit instead of flowers,—the peach, the orange, the pomegranate, with many besides,—and the columns had the warm tints of a sensuous life in them.

The fresco of the opposite wall had been given an undulating surface by the broad, hidden tubular tiles which conducted the heated air from the regions below. There the goddess bent, as in the old tale, above the slumbering youth. But the mist waved upward from the lazy stream beside him, the grass billowed in the light wind about her feet, and mortal and deity seemed fluttering together as her lips called him away through vistas of dreamland.

But everywhere the wall-space and flooring were rich in languor—inviting design,—the softly moving damsels of "the hollow lotos land," with the enchanted fruit they bore; Narcissus propped on elbow beside the fountain; a shoal of water nymphs, who floated face upward among white lilies under the leaf shadows that flecked a silent pool. The ceiling afforded a vision of clear sky, white drifting clouds, and, over all, the calm gods at rest.

In one corner stood the great bath of fine porce- lain, blue almost with the blueness and brightness of amethyst. Creamy figures in relief banqueted at ease along the side, reclining to await the cup. A veiled statue of Slumber stood at the head, pouring drowsily from hand to hand the perfumed water of oblivion, which shattered again as it fell, so that the air was heavy with fragrance. Beside this an

ample stream, warmed on its way, flowed into and out of the bath unceasingly.

He lay there long, seeming to take no harm. Regret and aspiration, all bitterness of spirit, and every anxious murmur, had floated quite away. Fancy moved indolently. The pictured scenes about him grew almost as real as the changeful life he had led. The soul of the lotos-bloom was the soul of all.

At length an attendant entered in some anxiety that he staid so long, and the dream was broken. Cian arose with languor, and passed into a third chamber, which lay snow-white and roofless. Marble figures peopled it, of stately mien, ranged about an ample sheet of water that stirred invitingly. Cool airs kept fanning over the surface, awakening early memories of forest and riverside. The plunge seemed very tempting, and it was taken quickly. He rose to the light and air, with life and vigor returning.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HOME OF AURELIA.

> Usual it is for maids to be lovely.
> —TALIESSIN.

OSBURN had found Constantine enthroned in the basilica among his adherents, not very certain of anything outside, but comforting himself with their number and spirit, the insignia of royalty about him, and above all the augury of his own countenance. This trick of outline had much to do with his aspirations. The man who duplicated the world-conqueror stood pledged from birth to mighty deeds. How could fate fail him? He brightened as Osburn entered, but rather with relief than heroism.

There was welcome also in the faces below, though some had looked ill-pleased over the sudden and great uplifting of this mercenary. He knew it well, and knew them also, not wholly with disapproval. For those were days when every trafficker must be something of a fighting man as well; and the mailed London merchants, with their sons and nephews and followers, made a martial array indeed. There was a sprinkling of foreign features; for the commercial houses of Gaul had yet some agents there of their own people, and many adventurers from abroad had taken service. Plainly this was the side of civilization, or what remained of it, militant by necessity.

Osburn was soon aware of some natural disquiet among the Celtic part of the men-at-arms whenever the truculent uproar of their kin outside grew louder than usual. He took his measures promptly, being the one man of either side who knew just what to do and what he dealt with. All the forum space was cleared by trusty legionaries, and securely guarded thereafter. Another gate of the city-wall gave in its adhesion when his men appeared there. The merchants' quarter, already held for Constantine, was more strongly occupied. The governor of the White Tower had been temporizing, but Osburn ended that by a sudden movement in force; and the partisans of

Arthur and Constantine in that garrison threw all open to him directly. Before morning, through management and active skirmishing, three-fifths of the city were in Roman hands.

But the remainder was held in disorderly fashion by fierce men, growing more and more reckless, as they felt the tide running with greater force against them. Few had anything to lose beyond what pillage might repay. Very many were of the woods, half savage, and caring nothing for the city. Out of their exasperation arose the threat of fire; a shrill cry borne to Constantine in many echoes, making him his enemies' ally. For he had much at stake, and his partisans had more,—had their all.

Osburn would have met the issue sternly, but Osburn was disquieting him already. Action was too instant; things went well too quickly; he had felt that it could not last. Now and here he would make a stand. So he interfered suddenly, shutting his ears to all dissuasion, and closed a truce with Vortimer.

Each was to hold his ground, and a new and greater council was to settle or unsettle everything on the evening of that day.

When this had been told by Llywarch in outline, Cian shook his head. "Who would hold a throne by mercy of the torch?" he said. "The head which bows will never keep that crown."

Cian was breakfasting in his room after the bath, with his friend for company.

"The daughter said nothing when it was told us. But—you should have seen her."

"That may yet be done, and ought to be. She will think me a sluggard or a sorely crippled man."

"Also, it may be well to see where you are; for night shows little."

The house lay four-square over a great area, and was built casemate-fashion, one story in height and depth. A great court, which had been turned into a garden, filled the interior. Two lesser wings jutted out from the rear corners. One of these, by the purity of its art, may have been the original home or house-kernel, but was now overflowing with looms and fabrics, in proof that manufacture, no less than more gracious employments, went on in the villa. The other was evidently a granary; though it had been in its day a temple of Minerva, and afterward a Christian chapel, as inscriptions went to show.

The front portico, long and lofty, was very beautiful in an ornate, florid way. Care had been taken to preserve it; with the utmost need, for there was no surviving power to repeat such work, as the sorry patching of the mosaic floor demonstrated all too plainly. The outer wall, enclosing the lawn and shrubbery, was recent also, the stones being uncemented.

There was a stir of population. From the rear came an intermittent jangling, where the repairs of Cian's chariot were going on. Also there was much ado about harvesting, as wains, laden or empty, came and went between the granary wing and the fields.

Entering the garden-court, they found quietness. Hedgerow walls and masses of shrubbery, with purple grape arbors and beds of autumnal flowers between them, broke it up very pleasantly. Every vista ended in rows of ornamented columns, white or veined or tinted, along some one of the inner house fronts, with graceful statuary niched therein, or standing where the alleys crossed.

There were fountains, too, fed by conduits from a hillside rivulet—a very great one in the centre, which made the chief sound of the place.

Beyond this, a little within a ring of evergreen, the only monster lay—a white sphynx with unusual attributes—of doubtful meaning. Below its impassive countenance a living human face looked upward, all else being hidden by the creature's bulk. The brow was

broad; the outlines were manly, kind, and noble, but with intense foreseeing horror in every line. A tender and shapely feminine hand, belonging to the left forearm of that stony, crushing thing, was thrown over against the victim's cheek in a negligent caress.

Just now a little child, Sylvia, who had seen it every day, was idly smoothing the dust from those lady-like fingers, and leaning her bright locks where the heart of the terror should be. Perhaps it had given a turn to her questioning; for her sister made answer with one of the subtly and wildly poetic myth-tales of the British race.

Aurelia was seated in a slanting wicker chair, half under the cedar shadows. A rolled manuscript, lately fallen from her hand, showed that she had been reading. Both arms were uncovered, as also her sandalled feet, but for the light straps across them, and the brown tresses of her hair, in ample undulations. Her scarlet robe, a color held peculiarly noble, was fastened above both shoulders by golden fibulæ, ornamented with blue enamel, the especial pride of Celtic art; for she had the life and love of her own people in her, whatever the fancied claims of Rome. A larger brooch below her neck displayed a Cupid on a dolphin, sporting over the same blue background for their sea.

Her large gray eyes were at rest. She spoke leisurely, as relating what was well known. Her voice was raised a little to be heard above the falling water, wherewith it chimed very well. Cian had found her marvellous in the cloud and the twilight, in the stress of action and peril; but she belonged with even more enchantment to this perfect splendor and peace. He heard Llywarch whisper, "A royal girl indeed! And such kind eyes!" Then they both awaited, unseen, the end of her story.

She continued: "So by reason of this great fault and failure, Cunebelline could not pass into the upper world, but was held here on earth. And the dark goddess of the star-eyes felt pain at heart. In her very great love of him, she came where he was, often, at the ending of the day. But he only felt the night wind breathing, and heard, when she spoke, the faint murmur of the water; for she was of

another and subtler kindred than his, from far away. He was, indeed, doubtfully aware of a presence unseen; but this grew on him as a fear, and she could not be with him any more, unless in sorrow.

Aurelia in the Garden

"Then she besought that she might come before him in such form as he could see and touch without dread, and by choice a beautiful woman; yet, if not that, at least a woman still, however wrinkled and unlovely. But even this might not be granted, except as a goddess, for love of a man, should become far less than he! That was hard measure, and for a long time beyond her; but the yearning grew until the life of the upper world was more a life of torment than any life below.

"One daybreak a strange and lovely thing was found, night-black and lustrous, with silken mane, coat of satin, wistful velvet eyes,—a creature incomparable for power and beauty. And he said, 'Surely some benignity of heaven has sent me this marvel;' for no one could deem her altogether earthly. Therefore he took exceedingly great

care of her, saying, 'Henceforward I will have no other steed to bear me in peace or war.'

"Then came to him great continual gain in dominion and glory. For she whispered wise counsel to him when none were by, which brightened the land, keeping men kind and genial. When he would ride afield, no bird could bear him more swiftly. And the rush of them in battle was like the rush of the lightning. There was panting and fleeing before their aspect more than from the coming thrust or blow.

"Many kings took him willingly for their emperor; his ships went afar, bringing wealth to him from the ends of the world; he was known openly for the equal friend of Rome; and every one in every land had heard of Cunebelline the golden.

"All this he owed to her; for he was but a man, and no very surpassing man, left alone. Moreover, when the end of his life drew near, she did not leave him to die, like all others of our race, but bore him bodily away among the stars."

"Oh, did she?" inquired Sylvia doubtfully.

Aurelia laughed with an awakening air, having grown dreamful in the peace of that nook, with the lulling of the fountain-fall and her own voice, weaving again the fairy web of enchantment.

"Why, so runs the story," she answered; "and I have thought it a pretty one. Don't you?"

Sylvia looked thoughtful. "Yes," she replied hesitatingly. Then she shook her head. "I think the goddess was a fool," said she.

"Hush, dear!" protested Aurelia, though not greatly horrified. "Newer gods have come and gone, and yet newer ones are here; but let us not be disrespectful to the oldest of the old."

"If she were a very pretty horse," conceded Syl- via. "But then," with a sudden freak of judicial wisdom, "suppose she had turned out a donkey! How did she know?"

Aurelia laughed again. "Oh, don't ask me to help the immortals out of that," answered she. "You may find yourself playing the donkey some day, Sylvia."

But a footstep had drawn her attention, and she was rising in pleasure, with a greeting. "I feared we could not see you to-day, she said."

"Oh," answered Llywarch for his friend, "it is of no manner of use to poke spears into this gnarled old campaigner. . Nothing does him any good at all."

"One thing at least—the legend of the starry goddess," declared Cian, bowing.

"Is this magic, or simple eavesdropping?" inquired she. "Now, my father would never listen to that tale, nor to anything against the faith of his first great namesake. As for me, I have a feeling for that excellent legionary from Mesopotamia who built over yonder a temple to 'the gods of all nations."'

Cian made answer dryly, "I see a Christianity with an old British tap-root and a vast hospitality." But she understood his approval.

Sylvia changed the topic by walking up with deliberation, and laying her hand experimentally on his silver mistletoe spray. Then she looked up into his face, considering gravely. "I am not a bit afraid of you," she observed, "if it is magic."

He laughed with the others. "Thank you, my dear child," he answered simply.

"Afraid—after he saved us from the wolves," exclaimed Aurelia.

"I said I wasn't afraid of him," protested Sylvia, frowning defensively, yet half in mind to cry. Then, taking refuge in him, "Where did you get this pretty thing?" she inquired confidentially.

"In a solemn place, very strangely lighted," he replied. "I would scarcely know how to tell any one much more, little Sylvia. But it was after combat with something invisible, whether man or ghost or demon, I do not know."

"Oh, I know, I know!" cried Sylvia. "It must have been a goblin. Why, this is a nice story, like Aurelia's. Is it true?"

"Pretty well for Sylvia!" laughed Llywarch. "But I am afraid you have ended it all at once, my dear." For Cian was looking absurd.

"When did this happen?" inquired Aurelia, controlling her amusement.

"Not very long after the return of the Druids to Mona, in the time of Ambrosius. I was hardly more than a lad. But for this," and Cian touched the golden garment, "I, too, should hold it a dream. After all, the past is dreamland."

"What was it like?" inquired Llywarch, though he had heard before.

"A room below ground, all mirrors and smoothness; a great form lying in state, and multiplied in them all around; a huge lamp on shining ebony, dazzling by reflection from every side; a sword flashing at me like a thousand, so that one could not tell the real blade from the phantasms; a sudden darkness, a form that wrestled with me therein, and fell with no sound; a deep prophetic voice going after me, as I fled with my prize up the narrow way,—and that is all."

Here Tigernach appeared among them, announcing rather sourly, "The king is coming, in the Roman fashion." He added more suavely to Aurelia, "It is indeed a fine display."

Yet hardly Roman so truly as a Rome-imitating medley. The purple robe of Constantine was excessive in amplitude and depth of dye. A great tuft of scarlet feathers went before him, borne aloft. A flaming banner came after him, with a gilded eagle above it. Three hundred horsemen in gay armor rode behind, the sunshine glorifying their bronze, their jewelled weapons, their ruddy, blowing scarfs, tasselled with acorns of gold. More than a score of them had wound about their necks the golden chain of leadership.

At the bridge there was a blare of music from the head of the cavalcade, answered by the population and the garrison of the villa with varied outcry. A faint echo came from the distant concourse about the Ermine gate. Three by three the armored horsemen rode over and on to what was now a royal palace indeed.

Constantine greeted his guests with majesty, tempered by the deference due to those who came from a greater even than he. It suited him presently to put magnificence away, and walk simply with them and his daughter. But none who met them were allowed to forget that it was a monarch with whom they spoke face to face.

Aurelia may have felt this unpleasantly, for there was sobriety in her enjoyment. Otherwise, her demeanor did not vary, no one finding more or less than usual of her cordial frankness and queenly charm.

At the first turning, Sylvia came running to meet them, her little soul full of the wolves and their teeth; also, the fright they had put her in, the valor of Aurelia, the crashing among them of Cian and his chariot. “Oh, how they did scamper!” she cried.

It was a bit of news that she had been saving up for him, after her custom, and telling to herself over and over again, with foreknowledge of its absorbing interest. What had come since was to rule her fancy later. That drama of emotion had the foreground.

Constantine picked up the little thing, and clasped and kissed her, looking vastly more genuine than when playing at Julius Cæsar.

"You won't let the wolves get me, will you?" besought she, for the mere pleasure of reassurance, being very secure in mind just then.

"No, no!" he replied. "Not wolves of any sort. Oh, we have wolves in London too, and some of them put their teeth into your champion last night. But the Saxon wolves are worst of all—those who have driven the poor people of the Stour to our shelter. Princess, there are infants lying cold in the fields where Saxon spears have tossed them. There are homes black as coal and white with ashes. There are altars toppled down where men were used to worship. There are wives, not a few, borne wofully away—lifelong thralls to the men who have slain their husbands. But you should hear Oisin, and doubtless will. We always do hear Oisin. And who can wonder?"

Yet there was an accent of weariness.

Aurelia explained to her guests, "They begin to call him St. Oisin now, a very zealous man. He was priest of a parish below Caer Collin. Eschwine, the East Saxon, came—his own escape was a miracle. They say that many of his people were tortured in his sight."

"In the days of Rome such things could not be," observed Constantine.

"You will find the strength and safety of Rome in our great emperor," said Llywarch, with conviction.

"Of Britain also," added Cian.

"God grant it!" was Constantine's reply. "But—he will want levies and supplies, and they are not in favor with our people. Many put their trust in Vran—you know the story. The head of that wonder—worker, buried in the White Hill, facing seaward, protecting London forever. Why send men to fight in distant quarrels, they say. I but repeat the talk of the town. For my own part, the Saxons have robbed me every way, in ship and caravan, and I am always very willing to have at them."

Still there was a bargain in his eye, and the child had been set down. "A chapman in soul!" thought Cian resentfully.

"It would be insufferable," declared Aurelia, "to wrap ourselves in a magic cloak of safety, and leave all others to their fate."

She spoke with deprecation, if not shame.

"Yes," replied her father; "and nothing is too bad for the Saxons. Why, it was but last year that King Aesc of West Kent, after I had duly bought the monopoly of the wool-trade from him, let three ships of my neighbor go by full laden, so that the price fell to very little. When I complained, he burnished up some old charge against me, and held my next convoy for double tribute. Oh, the Saxon is the ruin of the British exporter!"

"We ought not to submit to any tribute," said Aurelia, darkening.

"The Thames should be as free as the Severn," added Cian.

"True," admitted Constantine; "but we count ourselves fortunate when it is half-way open on any terms. Perhaps the emperor may help, and the council. But I fear you will see a bear-baiting, as usual—with Constantine as the bear," he added ruefully. And now they are coming for us."

CHAPTER VII.

FEAST AND SONG.

Many a mead hall
Fragrant with human joys.
—THE RUIN, *Codex Exoniensis.*

A NOTABLE banquet awaited them in that great dining-hall, which its owner yet persisted in styling the triclinium, while so many of its kind had gone to ruin or been given over to later ways.

The great table and the couches round about occupied nearly one-half the floor; harpers were stationed, in bright apparel, at the other end. The mosaic work of the space between was at its best, a picture of leisurely Olympian enjoyment, from which the great-eyed Juno turned her welcoming face on the mere mortals invited thus into the company of the gods. There were many other decorations, above, below, and all around; but none filled the eye and mind like this.

Both speech and song turned toward what was yet a vivid memory, the war-filled siege and destruction of Anderida. There may have been forethought in this, for nothing could more readily bring together in feeling the different elements assembled. Tigernach's pride was all inwoven with the theme. The father of Caowl had fallen in a furious endeavor to break through the beleaguerment. Constantine's one feat in justification of his aspect—the relief of an ambuscaded provision train—had been wisely and daringly performed not far away. Also he had the chief management of supplies for the forest-entangled army of Ambrosius during all that campaign; and if this effected little, the fault was not his own. Every family of his Roman and mercantile adherents, including nearly all the wealth of London, had contributed both men and needful things, and had lost friends there. It was a retrospect of complacent pride and of pity.

The woodland men had been glooming discontentedly over unfamiliar ways. But now their faces quickened, and their voices came freely, proving them at one with their company. Even their limbs grew more supple in conformity.

Constantine, in high feather, looked toward Llywarch and Cian. "Will one of our guests from the emperor," said he "give us in music the tale of the town which is gone?"

"Willingly," answered Llywarch; "but we need the future, also, to hearten us. Now I never feel sure of my prophecy unless I am hungry, and the Saxons before me, pugnacious. Then I can prophesy heavenly vengeance very confidently. But Cian here, if he is strong enough, will find Tophet ahead almost any time for anybody, and not mind the trouble at all."

Cian's face, perhaps from weakness, had a faraway look. He rose without a word, and took the great harp in hand. In his touch and voice there was something compelling, so that they bore the hearer's heart and mind with them, into what had been, and was no longer, and into what was yet to come:

THE SONG OF CIAN.

Where is the woodland city,
The city beside the sea,
White from her ramparts towering,
Queen of the Andred lea?

Lovely her courts were, and woven
With rainbows her palace walls;
The voice of her many fountains
Was the song of the waterfalls.

But ever a threatful shadow
Grew from the eastward haze,
Out of the bath of burning,
Dawn of the evil days.

And ever a wordless horror
Deepened in heart and eye,
Till the noisome breath was o'er her,
And the coils were winding nigh.

Then broke her trance of anguish
Abroad in a mighty wail;

And the forest arms gave echo,
Smiting the monster's mail:

For round the tightening spoiler
A whirl of fury sped;
And still the spears of Britain
Drove at the giant head.

But foes more grim and ghostly
Hid by the idle gate;
And the life within grew weaker
In all but the force of hate.

There came an eve and a morning,
The blackness of Hell between;
By fire-waves broken, and flashes,
And outcry wild and keen.

The sun came up through smoke-clouds;
Never a soul was near.
The sun went down in glory;
But the walls were riven and drear.

Drear was the riven rampart;
The light of her brow had fled;
The maiden city of Andred
Was a city of the dead.

Nor ever morrow shall see her
Blithe as before and fair;

The life that she found so lovely
Is a life she may not share.

A thing of blackness and ruin,
Of lichen and mould and rime,
Of waste where there has been beauty,
She waits till the end of time.

He paused a moment, with one or two hesitating notes, then swept on,—

But she, the lordlier, grander,
Who proffered the aiding hand;
So long as the Thames runs seaward,
So long her walls shall stand.

The tempest may break upon her,
The billows may whelm and hide;
But there with the life still in her,
She stands in the ebbing tide.

Nor all of the world's old grandeur
Holds aught to hers akin
In the noontime of her glory—
The town by the reedy lynn.

Had Cian, as he went to his couch, a faint memory of that other forecast, "a city nearing its end"? Yet surely both were true. *That* London should die; but London should live on.

For a moment all were silent, looking at each other with widening eyes; for it was a very wonderful promise that he gave to men who felt the overshadowing of Caerleon from afar, and knew themselves outshone by that Caer Segeint which the Romans had called Calleva. Surely there were at least three more towns in Britain already beyond them.

But at once all doubts were swept away in the will- ingness of city pride; for what could be too good and fair to foretell a man of that home which was his birthplace. Acclaim arose, beyond any that the villa of Constantine had ever known. But the look of a dreamer was on Cian still, and the strength and the vision were ebbing away.

CHAPTER VIII.

LONDON AND LONDON'S COUNCIL.

I saw Arthur
Emperor and conductor of the toil.
—LLYWARCH.

CONSTANTINE returned cityward with a greater display, wherein Cian had some part, against his will. His chariot was bright and strong again, being prized highly as a proof of unusual resource and imperial favor. After all, it was the easiest way of going, with a gaudy young charioteer to drive. Moreover, Aurelia rode near him, resplendent, watchful. Admiring murmurs from those around showed that the gorgeousness insisted on by her father met their taste, if not wholly her own. And, indeed, her beauty was of a kind to bear much brilliancy of apparelling. Her chief concern was for her wounded guest.

The basilica, as the Roman faction called it, was a large domed building of brick and marble, the former predominating in the walls, where the white courses were narrow and far between. Inside, the rule was reversed, the very numerous fluted pillars of the main hall being Parian, or as pure. These were in two stories, the gallery resting on the taller series, and bearing the lesser at its front. All were decorated in the extreme. If such art were not the highest, it at any rate made the place bewilderingly beautiful.

There was yet time to explore some part of London before the meeting of the council; so Llywarch and Cian set out on a hasty round. The chariot was discarded by reason of the general narrowness of the streets. Often they had to ride singly, even in the saddle. In the better parts northward, good houses, often of brick, less often of marble, stood, each by itself, in ample grounds; but elsewhere there was chiefly a tangle of alleys and painted or unpainted woodwork. Sometimes a mansion would be found in a pack of shops like booths, attained by hardly passable ways.

Along the river-front the sailor life and artisan life of foreign lands had made some impress, there being even one little colony of Saxons on doubtful tolerance. They were mainly of Kent, and recognized as more human than the lately come barbarians of Eschwine.

There was no real risk; indeed, something of courtesy, by Vortimer's command, everywhere awaited them. He had no wish to break prematurely with Arthur the Emperor.

Cian was growing weary, when Dynan came flitting after them to bring them back. He was full of excitement and significance, talking rapidly of the strangers in the city, their number and importance, the entanglement of intrigues, the possible surprises. Llywarch replied easily that it must all be very bad indeed if it could in any way surpass the complexity of that ill-scented labyrinth.

But Cian went in silence, with a sense of doom. O, London, London! a chaos of disorder, crudeness, and rottenness; of relics half given over, and new, random passions and expedients warring on every hand! What but worse confusion and destruction could possibly come of it all?

The council-hall was full now; eyes were turned every way with uneasy expectancy. At once they were recognized; and a lane was formed for their passage to the raised platform or dais, on which Constantine occupied a kind of throne. At their entrance his face lighted, as though the accession were a boon indeed. But instantly it grew high and stern again, the face of the Rubicon and Pompey's overthrow!

"How little a thing would unsettle him," thought Cian, taking the seat appointed, near Aurelia.

But on either side of the king-elect, Osburn and Tigernach had taken their stand, the one rough-bearded and resolute, the other intent with repressed fierceness, as any one might see. Presently Caowl also was called to this post of honor, where his Hun-like visage, if not a decoration, had very evident value among the mass of Celtic people.

It needed all the towering scorn of Vortimer lo hold them. They looked one at another, and said that he would speak by and by, and they should know.

Who, indeed, of them all, Celt or Roman, had such eloquence of lip and swaying hand, such goodliness and mightiness of limb, such smooth, high-tinted, handsome breadth of countenance as Vortimer the Londoner. He stood in the glare of lamp-light, where a little space had been made for him near the right corner of the dais, his head rising above every other with a profusion of clustering hair turning to waves and ringlets of fine-spun gold. It was the head of a Grecian demi-god.

"Wonderful—here, and with that name!" exclaimed Cian to the son of the Three Shouts, who leaned over him, expounding men and their histories.

But a glance below answered him. Notwithstanding a prevailing likeness, there were hints to be found in face and form of nearly every conquest-wave or importation of soldiery which had ever diversified the island blood.

"Not more than—some of the rest of us," answered Dynan. "Look at Caowl. I credit him to some pretty recruit of Scythia who sought the woods a century ago. As to Vortimer, the facts are known. His mother was a slave to the Saxon, or wife unwilling, carried away from her father's corpse, on that night of "fire-waves and flashes" and "the blackness of hell," by one of the Merscwara serving under Elle. Her people had been noble, her slain father a ruler of towns and men. Her grace and delicate loveliness, well taught in every way, are said to have been surpassing. For all that, she had no choice but to dwell in the marsh-border with robber-folk and fisher-folk, just settling down to a rude husbandry, and do the bidding of her captor in the rough work to which Saxon women were used. There she bore him this manchild, with girls who died—and that no doubt was best.

"But she never found home among them; and always, when occasion served, there came piteous messages from her to London and to the

woodland people and to the fortress towns yet held for us, imploring rescue or ransom. But she was beyond help in arms, and the chief who owned her laughed at every offer while her beauty lasted. When that was gone he made his best bargain, Saxon-wise, throwing in the boy rather than lose the sale, and because there was no love between them.

"So she got into friendly hands again, choosing the Andred shadow, as best suiting her; for in few years she had grown bitter and crone-like, She gave the boy a new name, taking that of him who first made head against the invaders, that her son might not bear himself less hardily, nor give them any peace. And, indeed, he has done them great injury in raids and thicket fighting, for, however it may be elsewhere, there is not often anything but war along the southern border of the great wood. It is a life to breed turbulence; and he brings his turbulence here, along with those great thews that his father left him, and a tongue that is very persuasive and inciting among men of our race."

His attention was wandering to a group of tall men by one of the doors, whom all about them regarded hatefully. Their weapons and costume showed them to be Saxons. One stood in their midst, as if designedly covered by the others, although maintaining a defiant calmness.

"The Sword of Fire," murmured Dynan.

"Eschwine? Ah!" said Llywarch, "a bad place for him! Hence this quietness. When the wolf is in dread of being butted to death, he holds his peace, and maintains his dignity."

"Eschwine never yet kept peace in any sense. He will speak; be sure. No doubt he has some ledge of safety."

"And who are these?"

Another party, wholly mail-clad, were just entering from the opposite side. They passed at once into shadow. One of them wore

steel, from crown to toe. It was bright as any mirror. This alone marked him out from all present.

"If you know not, how should I?" inquired Dynan significantly. Cian nodded.

"But yonder?" said he, quickly casting his eyes toward the gallery, where a hungry intensity of expression, bitter yet exalted, came to a focus.

"They are Oisin's Christians, village people mostly. Yet some are Londoners, and they grow in number. Oisin is the man to make them grow. It's a frightful thing to be a preacher, anyway. Think of having to pour heaven and hell white-hot into men, and work holy magic over them—for without miracle, what sanctity? And to have all his labor swept away in an hour by jeering demons! No wonder he chants to wild music!"

"That seems the sort of thing to expect of everybody," said Llywarch."Denunciation is the one strong point of your Londoner. Do you happen to see anybody, Dynan, who is not eager to denounce?"

The assembly grew impatient. Constantine had delayed, and delayed again, the inevitable moment of collision. There were derisive calls for "his majesty, the purveyor."

"Now, now!" urged Osburn. Constantine arose, incontestably royal in bearing, as though he had chosen his time, and all things were working together excellently. Briefly referring to the choice before them, and the two envoys now in their presence, he called on them first of all to hear the message of "the conqueror of conquerors, the ruin of the Saxon, the salvation of Britain, the immortal and imperial Arthur."

At that there was acclaim from all quarters, even the Saxons joining recklessly. Only the man in steel and a few of Oisin's people kept silence.

"Prince Llywarch of Argoed is the bearer, of whom you know," said Constantine, presenting him.

Vortimer responded for his faction, "We do indeed know of the Prince of Argoed. May his message prove as welcome as his song ever will be."

"If aught have a sound of severity," pursued Constantine, "let us remember that our turmoils and standing alone have not been blameless."

There were murmurs of displeasure.

"At least," he urged, "you will hearken to the great emperor's words, not mine." But he could not keep the deprecating tone from his voice.

Llywarch looked over the concourse of his countrymen with a friendly gaze; calmly smiling. None could fancy any unkindness in his face, nor any weakening, by excuse, of what he was given to convey. His voice reached every corner of the hall. He read:—

"To the present rulers of London.

"Arthur Mabuter, Emperor of the armies of Britain, sends greeting.

"That I know not your true title is enough to show the confusion of your unhappy city, wasting her strength in senseless broils, while Britain suffers. Nor do these matters improve; but even grow worse, insomuch that ye can no longer keep your own borders.

"Now, we have sure knowledge that the Saxons of Deira and many more are gathering about Caer Ebrauc and beyond the northern woods, undoubtedly in such numbers as will task the whole strength of the land to meet them. If this suffice not, every city, even the most distant, the most secure, will be endangered.

"Therefore I, who have heretofore entreated and adjured, do command that you send forthwith a good force of men under capable captains to the camp of our army.

"To assure this, if the succession be still unsettled in your city, I commend to you the house of Constantine, kindred of Ambrosius, well knowing that there can be none with greater natural claim to your devotion."

Uproar was seething before he had ended. The little kingdom had so long ordered, or disordered, its own affairs, that intervention seemed revolutionary, even to those who favored it.

"Constantine!" shouted Vortimer, swollen with derision, his arm brandishing as the words crowded. "And is there none nobler for the Briton to follow, for the Briton of Britons to name? Constantine, the valorous purchaser, the hero of the provision trains, the doubtful branch, half disowned and wholly unworthy, of a foreign tree! Is it Arthur of Celliwig who bids us bow down before this shaking, mimic Cæsar? Verily, the curse of the world-curser is dangling about us still."

Constantine held a stern front, but shifted uneasily. Aurelia frowned and reddened. More than one of their party was on the point of interrupting. Cian rose first, though painfully, with the silver misletoe full in view, a guaranty to many below. His face, dark and spiritually exalted, was as true to the Celtic race tradition as Vortimer's belied it. His voice went clearly abroad with lingering emphasis,—

"I also am a Briton."

Whereat, as more than self-evident, both Tigernach and Caowl, with more, began to laugh mightily.

"Assuredly," began Vortimer. But Cian went on,—

"I have waded with our Emperor waist-deep in the red water and shifting sands of the Glem. When Arthur darted up the Duglas side through the slaughter of the green embankment, I saw the blades and spear-points fly from him like icicles from a winter-sheeted tree when a strong wind shatters them. Let Vortimer lead the men of London, and prove beside the Emperor Arthur what better may be done by British valor unbreathed on of Rome."

"I have led them," retorted Vortimer sullenly and defiantly. "In skirmishes,"and "With our aid," in- terjected Caowl and Tigernach. "So will I lead them again," he continued, unheeding. "Think not, Prince Cian, there is no fighting but in the far northwestern hills and northeastern marshes. There Arthur's victories have been. But who fights for us,—a mere wedge of Britondom left pushing out into the mass of the enemy—the South Saxons, the East Saxons, the men of the populous Caint? Who but ourselves, left lonely? We grapple with them in the fastnesses of the Andred wood, the vales below Caer Collin, the open land between the Thames and the Cray. Wonder not that we must lose a little, when we have held so much so long and so well. Ask not of us to drain away our life-blood, with the Saxon almost at our walls. And since Arthur of Celliwig has done so little to shield or aid us, why should he have more at our hands than we of him?"

"No, surely," called out Dynan, "since that would be transcending salvation. Little good would your bush-wrangling have done, had those `northeastern' and `northwestern' battles gone the wrong way."

Vortimer waved his hand impatiently. "I hold no discussion with triflers, nor with little emissaries of the usurper. Be sure our goodly city will never need aid nor fear enemy while the head of Vran watches from the White Hill of Cynvelyn."

"Woe betide us! Woe betide us!" cried a shrill voice from the gallery, and looking up, they saw the craning, narrow, bird-like visage of Oisin the Christian preacher bent upon them. The power of his eagerness bowed him forward like a strong wind, until he seemed

likely to lose his balance and pillar-hold together. His brow was ridged between the eyes as if by unremitting pain. Those eyes burned. The frivolous decorations beside them, cupids and vine-sprays and bacchanals, deepened that burning by contrast. He gathered himself a little, as attention centred on him, then burst forth in passionate invective: "Woe betide us for that our strongest can but wrangle over the hearth-fire while the slaughterer is in the fold; that our wisest put their trust in the promise of a dead magician, or in a soldier-king seeking his own glory far away! Woe, for that ye tear each other, one and all, like most unworthy hounds, and are given over to believe the lies of the heathen; and open not your ears to the great cry that goes up continually from the places of anguish and desolation, nor know that the one true cause is the cause of God's suffering people, and the one true leader is the everlasting Lord God of Sabaoth!

"What mean ye lurking here or idling otherwhere, when His dread summoning is abroad? What mean ye, when the death-wails have not yet ceased their shrilling from the pleasant villages of the East,—those death-wails which are but the precursors of your own! Ah, that Arthur could but see as I have seen, and loathe his glory! Far away at the north, far away!—yet how near is the murderer in the home-stead, Eschwine, the Sword of Fire, where hamlets roll up their sad witness unto heaven!

"I tell you, men of London, there was a village once. You knew it well, and I knew it to my appalling sorrow. Peace abode there, and comfort and virtue, a little nest of all kindly good that we had made, although so near the heart of all evil that is under the sun. But there came to us a day of rumors, and the going forth to fight, and the quick warnings of those who fled by, all broken, and the growth of clamorous voices, and the crowding, crowding of terror.

"The tale—have ye forgotten it? Yet dare not I again abide the telling. Go search the fields for the split skulls of our old men, whitening like dog-bones where they fell under the swords of merry making pursuers. And this were mildness, were mercy! Oh, the damnable sea-people, the wolfish and impious Saxons, abominable

heathen, God-hating and God-hated, bloody followers of Eschwine, that prince of demons, whom may God speedily overthrow in the fires of hell forever."

A deep angry hum followed this appeal of frenzy. Eyes were turned murderously on the little party of Saxons, who stared back, though doubtless ill at ease. Their leader pushed the others aside, and stepped out, that all might see. He had bony, aquiline features, keen and enterprising, and only less brown than his hair, matching, likewise, his tall, broad-shouldered, very sinewy form; a face hardly capable of indolence or meditation; watchful, unremorseful, daring, dangerous.

"With many thanks," he announced, "I am that Prince of Demons, coming under safeguard of Constantine, your king."

"Who is this that palters with the powers of darkness?" demanded Oisin.

"It was weeks ago," Constantine began, "and for a meeting"—

"No time was named," the Saxon shouted; "to your word I hold you."

But at this a great baying began. "Give him the safeguard of Hengist," cried one. "Have you forgotten the feast of the Long Knives?" jeered another. A third, behind Oisin, called aloud, "It is time for the Sword of Fire to be quenched in blood."

Vortimer, more concerned for his own interest, added his cry, "Behold a Roman cloak thrown over the dripping hands! O men of London, behold the boon and the giver!"

Constantine wavered visibly. "It was for your good; it was in your behalf," he protested, facing about, as the stress of the uproar shifted. "It was for our dear city and her people, God be my witness. Yet if I exceeded—I was surely not king then"—

But his daughter had half risen, with shamed, imploring eyes that held his own. In the pause, came Eschwine's voice clear and fearless,—

"Give me that maid, and I will bring you a crew to lash off this yelping pack, and have done with them. Give me her. She is tenfold the man of any of those who scream and gibber about us."

But the very splendor and excellence of her, standing there, made the demand all the more obviously extravagant. Laughter ran through all the hall, with lessening of Eschwine's danger. "Nothing less than the lady Aurelia?" cried Tigernach. "One would think he would be glad of any chance to save his forfeit life."

"Forfeit or no," said Aurelia, "he cannot fall here by any hand but that of an enemy to me."

Her voice, full and musical, was welcomed by a hush that made every word audible.

"Well said, my Roman princess," cried Eschwine jubilantly. "Between us we will make such a throne as no battering-ram on earth shall topple over."

Amid the beginning again of wrathful murmurs, Aurelia looked at him steadily. "I can have nought but hatred," she said, "for the doer of deeds of hate, and a good longing to see the smiting down of the merciless."

"Amen!" cried Oisin.

"I like you none the less for plain speaking," averred Eschwine. "But when was it ever heard that war went on without bloodshed, or that the fighting man with the fury on him could tell one red from another. If I have been at fault, you will have the more scope in tutoring me."

"Too many British women have left their homes against their will," said Aurelia, "for one more, though the lowliest—and such am not I—to go with any Saxon willingly."

Her face was set and stern. There was no yielding in her voice, but calm scorn and resentment.

Eschwine answered, self-restrained, but chafing. "As for the girls taken, spoil is spoil. So has it ever been. These noisy people may have ours, if they can get them. No doubt many of our slaves might be bought back again at fair value. Bear in mind, maiden, that we riders of the rough sea ways are not given to abide denial from any, be she high or low."

His followers had tried to check this impolitic close, and now gathered again before him in his defence; for an angry rush was beginning. Eschwine half drew his sword, and frowned, yielding not at all.

But Aurelia interposed with a wave of her arm, and the call, "Forbear." Constantine also com-manded, "Hold!" with strenuous endeavor to be resolute.

"Back, every man of you!" shouted Vortimer, not to be outdone. Then, turning toward Aurelia, he added, "There is one member of the house of Constantine whom we are all more than willing to obey." And many shouted at his words.

"To this I hold you," cried a new voice, with a certain genial roll in it, but more of authority. The man in steel was advancing toward the dais. He bore his armor lightly, as if dancing under it would be easy to him; yet there was dignity in his port also. Though lacking the towering bulk of Vortimer, or even the more than usual height of Cian, his advent was as if real kingliness had but just come among mankind. When he turned his face uncovered to the throng, clean-shaven alone of all that presence, with a complexion of surpassing purity, broad of brow under browner waving hair, a face of romance and frankness, yet of forethought and zeal which might become

exaltation, men had no need to be told that the very genius of peace and of war shone on them then out of the strong blue eyes of the great Arthur.

Those were present who had spoken ill of him but lately; yet there went up from nearly all the same enthusiastic cry, as they knew their visitor. Only Oisin watched silently, and Vortimer with chary participation, each having a few imitators near him.

Arthur was kindly smiling, and his speech was easy.

"When a man is vexed, and writes over harshly to his friends," he said, "what is there better for him than to come and see them face to face? You had given some cause, you know. Truly, I come in the best of time; for in my own hearing you have announced with acclamation what I would most desire. Most gladly I make your will my own; seeing that of your own free choice, and with uncommon zeal, you have preferred, from the house whereof I wrote, the very maiden gem in her golden setting. Let Aurelia, chosen of Britain as of London, be hence-forward your queen."

There was a moment's hush; then the hall rang. Aurelia, thoughtful of her father, had half risen to speak in disclaimer; but something in the Emperor's look, between deprecation and command, held her still. She would not harm nor hamper him in any crisis. Moreover, she had perforce taken the measure of her father more clearly that day. It might be very unfilial to keep him in that dangerous seat.

"Vortimer of Andred," resumed Arthur, "you have well said that London needs both men and weapons to regain her losses and hold her lands. Her turn shall come. Together, if we live, we will seek repri- sal, but not now. We have no choice but to meet first, and overthrow, the northern enemy. London must aid me there, and you must lead her men."

Vortimer looked unwilling, yet hesitated, as he had not before Constantine or Cian. The unique fame of the Emperor, the continued fortune which marked him out as strangely favored, the almost

magical element of surprise in his coming, whatever interval or obstacle might lie between, his astuteness, his amplitude of resource, the concentration of purpose that shone out of him,—all these made refusal very difficult.

Before Vortimer had spoken, Arthur turned to Constantine. "Yours shall be a wider charge than I had thought of," said he. "Our armies are larger now than they were, and more scattered. We need a more general and efficient system for supplying them. Constantine, as of old in a lesser undertaking, can do more for us there than any other."

There was but little wavering, for the half-crowned was momentarily losing his desire to rule the unruly. "Whoever exalts my daughter exalts myself," he said. "I will go where I may be useful."

"What for me?" demanded Eschwine mockingly.

Arthur made calm answer, "You have your life. Let that content you. It is safe, till we meet again."

"Perhaps I shall keep it a little longer," scoffed the Saxon; "I have carried it in hand over many British men, living and dead. And, queen or no queen, I will have the maid."

But now his followers urged him, with entreaty, toward the door; while a crowd of their enemies, hardly held in leash, came close behind.

"Llywarch," said Arthur, "see them beyond the city wall."

Then he also departed for the villa of Constantine, his abode that night.

Soon afterward the great council ended, all its members going their ways.

CHAPTER IX.

THE EMPEROR AND THE QUEEN.

> The chair of the sovereign,
> He that keeps it is skilful.
> —-TALIESMIN.

CIAN was glad to be in the open air again, on the way toward rest. Weakened and fevered, he carried thoughts with him which were better away. He had seen Arthur's eyes meeting those of Aurelia's; and already, though he had given no name to his own feeling for her, a breath of fear was astir.

Thus brooding, a dimness came over him, and he swayed to and fro where he sat. But Tigernach sprang in beside him, and Aurelia rode up.

"Oh, pardon me!" she cried. "You have over-tasked yourself in our behalf, and we neglect you."

For indeed she had not felt so drawn to his side, returning, as when they rode in. The knowledge of it hurt her.

Cian raised his head, and sat quite stiffly. "I have no need," he said.

Llywarch, who had rejoined them, looked at him and at her. "Surely, Cian, the new cares of the throne"—he began. "There is enough in London to overwhelm all else."

Aurelia felt ill at ease under his words; for in truth it was not the burden of greatness which had so filled her mind, as the vision of the Emperor, flashing among them suddenly in assurance of power.

"I am not yet queen," she answered gently. "Nor ever will be, I hope, if it is to make me behave unworthily."

Cian did not reply, being wholly occupied in mere endurance. Aurelia watched him with solicitude.

"You saw Eschwine well away?" she inquired of Llywarch.

"Not very far, unhappily. I heard a word at the gate. He is yonder, waiting."

Where he pointed, the Thames and the Lea out-spread together in an estuary-like morass. There was vapor over it now. The light of a half-moon fell slantwise on reedy, glistening expanses, on gleaming, winding, branching inlets, on tufted black islands of forestry, all mapped out as on the face of another world, withdrawn into the dim life of menace and mystery.

It chilled Aurelia, and she turned silently away.

At her home they found her father with the Emperor. Already a general scheme of commissariat had been outlined,—great depots, widely and wisely distributed, with lesser between; interlinking caravan routes like the crossing lines of a spider's web, whereby material in masses could at once be supplied anywhere,—a system worthy of an earlier or a later era.

Constantine was astir with delighted interest as the possibilities grew on him. He was deeply impressed by Arthur also, the soldier-king eager for adventure being hidden in the man of affairs, prompt, full of forethought, quick to learn, shrewd in applying, possessed of every capability.

There was reason why Arthur should strengthen himself with all. Guledig, imperator, emperor, men called him; but this was, first of all, a battle-title, a kingship over armies and kings in armor; beyond that, more or less, according to opportunity and the strain of public need. Never before, in the case of a great city, had he ventured on interference and command. Chance had aided him, but he knew that even friends would recall his action uneasily.

The chiefs of Andred, lately in opposition, could not resist his friendliness. He gave them straightforward words, though, evading nothing, not even religious differences, for he made no secret of his championship of the Cross. When the talk was of worldly and common matters, his attention was calmly given to the speaker, or passed from one to another whom he addressed. When he spoke of man's faith and soul and after life, or of Britain's interminable struggle with the destroyer, his eyes often wandered away and brightened, coming suddenly back with the fire in them of one whose innermost passion and certainty were astir.

There was nothing marble-like about that face; rather a quivering susceptibility, noticeable in the nether lip when not resolutely controlled, as though emotions came too fast and strong for him. In his greatest feats recorded of Arthur Mabuter, it was averred that his whole frame trembled like a harpstring. More than one renowned enemy had felt it with elation, yet broken utterly before the fury of purpose which underlay that vibrating fineness of nerve. In spite of error, it raised him above meanness and grossness, giving him a dedicate fervency, as of one running a great race greatly. At his best, he might well be called the soul of Britain.

After a time he drew away to Aurelia, who was about going within to escape the chill of the autumnal evening. His manner was deferential, with a touch of playfulness.

"I come to you as a bird of warning," he said; "and I would rather warn out here."

Following his words, a wolf-howl came lugubriously from some forest nook, with the usual discord-murmur of the hidden city for its echo.

"With such music?" she replied sadly.

His face grew very grave. "You see your task," he said. "To keep the wolf from the door of a di- vided people. It has been mine also. But we are drawing mightily together now."

"All but London! Poor, rich, great, distracted London!" said she.

"London will not fail such a queen," he answered; for the beauty and easy majesty of her face and form were on him like a spell. Oh, the incredible perversity that could turn away from such as she! He grew stern at thought of it, and added, "Those who will be blind may at least see their own ruin."

She answered gently, "They are my people. Without my destruction, that shall not be."

His face brightened and deepened. "I could not ask a better word from the best fighting man of my Round Table."

"No place for me! I am sufficiently exalted by the charge my Emperor has given;" and she made him archly an obeisance.

"Greater exaltation may"—but he checked himself with remembrance and misgiving.

She did not seem to give his words especial meaning; but his tone awoke a slight perversity, brushing the sense of distance away.

"At least," she said, "I may be better employed than in tilting after rainbow treasures and phantom goblets."

"It is not well to speak lightly of things beyond us," he answered with serious mildness. "Our life, which begins in mystery and ends in mystery, is wrapped in mystery between. But this is my warning. I pray you be very careful in your coming and going after I am gone. Forget not that you rule only a point of doubtful light, jutting into a black sea. Remember that London ever wrangles with the hand that serves and saves it. Above all, bear continually in mind that the Sword of Fire is never far away. Yet I hope he may seek to do no harm. He will get word from me by Llywarch, who goes with Dynan and Caowl into the great marsh to-morrow, demanding his pledge of peace, toward you above all, under penalty which he will hardly

dare. He will keep it, I believe, since it has ever been Eschwine's pride to make good his word. But be more than careful."

Aurelia looked at him, thankful and open-eyed. Then there came a saddening thought. "How shall we drive out the hard Saxons with plans which a woman's mishap may overthrow? You must not bring your men from where they are most needed, for me."

"They will not stir," he answered. "The threat suffices. Trust me."

"Trust me also," she replied, as she passed within. "I shall be on my guard."

But that did not long trouble her. She found pleasanter matter of meditation in the Emperor's thoughtfulness.

CHAPTER X.

A VISIT TO THE SWORD OF FIRE.

Laughing, treacherous,
And of bitter disposition was he.
—*Black Book of Caermarthen.*

LLYWARCH awoke the next morning with a sense that some one was making loud and distressful havoc of his heroic lays. He beheld, on the bed-corner, Dynan, harp in hand, fantastically balancing, with the airiest finger-play and a plain intention of fairy in voice and air. Beside him, the gnome-like features of Caowl were broadly grinning.

"A wild pair for a sane man to be sent with," grumbled LIywarch, not stirring. "There ought to be nightmares enough in that place without you."

Dynan broke off with a final twist and shower of sound. "Oh, we are the people to keep you to the marsh-lights," he cried. "If the hunt should last so long."

"And howl at me in that demon-alluring way for greater cheerfulness! But what must be, must be!" and with a leap he was beside them.

They took the eastern gate, and thence through that unkempt suburb which had been known in Roman days as "the native town" to the open country beyond.

"The first time I rode out like this, three together," said Llywarch, between his comrades, "it was in quest of a monster. The next time we were after a holy maid."

"Two fearsome creatures," quoth Dynan.

"However, Geraint was with me, and Maelgwn."

"Whom they have taken to calling Lancelot, the people's spear. Much he disturbs himself about the people!"

For there was jealousy abroad of this vain, uncertain, ambitious, daring, and skilful Prince of Gwynedd.

"But did you find either of these wild fowl?" Dynan inquired.

"Not precisely, only a bit of some stone which the lady left before her shrine, by chance or in reward. Merlin said it had healing virtue, but I never could get sick enough to try. As to the dragon, I do not know; many tales are brought to Caerleon and to Camelot. It makes one unhappy to see his friends riding furiously after stray moonbeams."

"Yes, a holy maid would be better, if not necessarily more lovely;" and Dynan took on an air of discriminating wisdom.

Near the meeting of the rivers a boat awaited them, containing two marshmen, who settled to work at once with pole or paddle, as the depth of water varied. They wore mud-stained breeches which had once been gaudy; above these, in the one case, a sleeveless tunic badly frayed below the girdle, in the other, a scarf wound obliquely and much faded. They had no other apparel except otter-skin caps, which often lay about their feet, leaving uncovered their masses of dark, coarse hair. They were very gaunt and yellow-brown with wind and sun and the miasma of the marshes.

Curiosity as to the outer world was numb in them; but they had learned to observe without speech, think within narrow limits, and act noiselessly. They made at first one movement of recognition and subserviency which was less surly in intent than in seeming; and now they had eyes only for the banks beside them and the water ahead.

Yet they answered Dynan's questions; and Caowl, who best knew them, added some explanations of his own. It seemed their people

were but scanty in number, with only one village remaining, a stronghold built on piles, in a little lake near the river Lea.

One by one, the others had fallen; for the water-ways tempted Saxon incursions, making the great marsh their nearest approach to London, and a scene of`continual warfare, though in a small way. The marshmen were doing good service very savagely, threading the maze at all hours, with swift knowledge of any hostile coming, retorting surprise for surprise; hardly so intent on their livelihood by trapping and fishing, as on the merciless give and take of their struggle with the invaders. Nothing but the tyrant power of habit could explain their remaining year after year in such a dreadful place.

Their crude stoicism made even a tried soldier like Llywarch uneasy. They did not at all conceal their sense of the risk to that boat-load, nor seem to care about it. "Eschwine," said one, "was more likely, maybe, to spear the whole party, or to toss them, weighted, headforemost into some pool, than to flay them in strips from head to heel, or put them to fire-torture; but there was no telling what whim would take him. He might even entertain them with honor, and let them go." It was grim thinking to one with bright life in him, and no kinship to deeds and beings of darkness.

Through a gap in an old Roman dyke, now long neglected and ruinous, they entered a broad swamp-artery that swayed this way and that in long curves, branching and dwindling. The tide at first drove them in, but later was offset by the drain of the marsh, or in some other way, and gradually ceased to aid.

Civilization was gone now, as though it had never been, except when it came before them out of a dead world in stretches of yet distinguishable road-bed, or some haunted pile, where fort or blockhouse had defended it. In all but these, the mere savagery of nature had regained its own.

Deer-tracks and the footprints of beasts of prey became frequent along the margin; wild fowl hovered and floated numerously, or

flapped heavily away before them, after the manner of their kind when affrighted. Once a lubberly bear broke away, half seen, trampling the reeds. Amid an islanded bit of oak and yew forest, in a glade, a white cow, wild and shapely, turned from drinking, to be presently lost in the shadows.

At last they entered a pool toward the northern border of the swamp, with raised and wooded ground on the farther side. Here they went circumspectly, for there was no sign of any feathered thing which might serve for food; and they looked that Eschwine should not be far away.

While they were near the middle, an arrow came from a reedy point on the left, in a long, low flight, and struck slantwise across their bow, barely missing it. Then they stayed paddle, and cried out their peaceful intention, with only silence for an answer, until a second shaft, and then a third, flew by them, the last between Llywarch's head and that of Dynan, very venomously. So they came to regard that outlying Saxon as not amenable to reason, but merely perverse and dangerous, and went on without delay. Yet there fell two more of his favors, quickly shot, in their wake, whereat Caowl grew angry beyond control, and objurgated the invisible archer, with hand-threatening, in a language that was neither English nor British, but made up of shreds and patches for that border.

Now, ahead, there were boats by the shore, or drawn up into the bushes, and men very ready to fill them, called by the shouting. Yet they desisted at command of Eschwine, who came to them out of the wood, and waited, lounging and curious.

"He does not seem to intend any great harm," said Dynan.

"Our friends are not the easier for that," returned Caowl, indicating the paddlers.

He met them at the landing, with curt recognition of these two, and a very ample civility to the northern prince. But his look at the boatmen should have made them visibly unhappy. He bade all to the

camp, which was in a sloping meadow, between a brook and a wood, Llywarch walking beside him.

Here were men of divers aspect, busy over weapons, game, and apparel, or amusing themselves as best they might, being the picking up of sea-rovers who had welcomed any fighting hands for their crew. Yet an amplitude of muscle prevailed, a ruddiness of face and hair, such as men thought of in naming the English race. By the number of them, it seemed that something graver was projected than waylay- ing the wandering marsh-people, or any such petty prey.

"Is Prince Llywarch here of himself, or from whom?" Eschwine spoke with a twang, as at the council, but in the usual Celtic of the low lands, not unlike the later speech of Brittany. Llywarch noted how well he had caught the idiom, and how justly his words were chosen.

"From Arthur Mabuter, Emperor of Britain," Llywarch made answer.

Eschwine held himself square-shouldered at his full sinewy height. "What does Arthur offer me?" he inquired.

"Offer!" cried Dynan.

Eschwine half turned to him with a look which might easily become a menace.

Llywarch, understanding both, and feeling how much hung that instant on himself, answered calmly, "The Emperor of Britain, victor in many battles, re-conqueror of provinces and of kingdoms, offers to Eschwine—peace."

The Saxon looked the surprise and distrust which were in him. His followers, but half understanding, snorted with amused contempt.

"Will he add," inquired Eschwine, "the very handsome young woman they call queen?"

"'Call!'" echoed Caowl; "be sure we will maintain her so."

"You may not have the chance," Eschwine suggested. "The way out of here is hard to find."

Again Llywarch remained resolutely equable. "You are to promise, King of Essex, to forego all annoyance of her.''

Eschwine stared, frowned, stirred angrily; then smoothed his face again, with a harsh laugh. The other Saxons echoed it more loudly.

"Modest!" he cried. "I am to spare London, then, and its appurtenances; in fact, almost everything and everybody! Is there any more?"

Llywarch bowed. "Nothing more, except that it is for sixty days."

"Now, Prince Llywarch, tell me why, in your good judgment, I should do this."

Llywarch watched intently that hard, keen, bantering face. He discerned uneasiness and growing anger, but kept a "diplomatic cheek and eye."

"Being Arthur's counsellor, when called on," he replied, "I cannot well be Eschwine's also. Yet, consider; the bravest, if wise as brave, will not war needlessly with a power inordinately beyond him."

"What is the meaning of that?" and Eschwine ground his heel among the pebbles.

"I am bidden to say—and say but as I am bidden—that in case of refusal, Arthur will leave all other enemies, and bring the whole force of his armies, with London added, to utterly crush Essex. What, then, have you wherewith to oppose the whole power of Britain? The Sword of Fire will be known no more among men."

Only a part of what he uttered bore meaning to the raiders and loiterers around them. But they caught at the ending with fury. "Carve the blood eagle on him!" yelled one. Others, rising, took up the cry.

Llywarch fronted them with kindly dignity; indeed, he stood as though they were offering some tribute of admiration to his worth, instead of the most frightful death-punishment devised by even their ingeniously cruel race.

Their precipitancy saved him. Eschwine's countenance had been tightening murderously. But this clamor came as a travesty on his own purpose, half-formed. Moreover, some of the later accessions to his camp had troubled him within the hour by unruliness of tongue where they should only hear and obey. With a half-spring, and a snatch at his weapon, he shouted them into silence. Then he turned abruptly, and forced himself to be calm.

"Arthur has brave men," he announced at length.

"Many," said Llywarch. "But as to that, I have seen Eschwine also affront death very lately."

The Saxon laughed a note or two, and took on a more genial aspect. This fearless urbanity, being new, pleased him wonderfully. Llywarch heard be- hind his shoulder Caowl's sigh, as if a burden were lifted. He could not see Dynan. The marshmen were as impassive as ever, but with hopeful eyes.

"I do not know that," said Eschwine. "We Saxons have weighty weapons, and a long reach with them."

Llywarch looked around him. They truly surpassed the average of British massiveness and stature.

He bowed in admission. "But it would have needed the hammer and the arm of Thor to have shattered a way through a city's walls and an army."

"I had Constantine's pledge. You came with nothing."

"Ah, no! With the message of one mighty warrior to another. Would any one deem that so great an honor could end in harm or loss?"

Here even the wilder freebooters, easily shifting in mood, broke out applaudingly. Eschwine looked on with no displeasure. "I don't wonder that you witch men with your singing," he said. "Mere talk suffices. Prince Llywarch, it shall be in every way as you have spoken. And now between us, and with all these, the harp will be sooth and safe, to keep the tongue out of trouble."

"What skill I have," said Llywarch, "is for you."

"Bring then your harp, Wolfnoth;" and Wolfnoth brought it.

"I cannot say how it may misbehave in British hands," he said, tendering it reluctantly. He was more fanciful in apparel and eager of eye than the rest, but more indolent in motion. His manner of holding the instrument showed how he prized it. There were curiosity and interest in his face; for a master of some renown in the craft was before him, being also the prince of a bold people.

Llywarch overcame his hesitation by minstrel free-masonry. He spoke in Saxon, making sad work, for he had studied it little; but the other understood him. "I can do nothing," said Llywarch, "without rhymes. Therefore your hero-songs would be beyond me. It is wise to keep to waters that one knows. I will give you a battle-piece of my people, put together by myself. You may like it or not; I don't know."

Dynan had been edging near, with lively concern. "For the love of God," he protested, "not the lay of Ambrosius!"

Eschwine watched. "What is that?" he demanded sharply.

The little man turned pale, but looked back, eye for eye. "The tale of a death-fight!" he said simply.

His hand was on something in his belt—a dagger, Eschwine thought, but really what had been called the fairy horn, which might never be more urgently needed.

"The death-fight of one who stayed the oncoming of Cerdic," added Caowl bluntly, being more mindful of the jealousies of that coast.

"That will I have, and no other," declared Eschwine, smiting his hand on his thigh, and looking around him with a clearing brow. Alone among the chieftains of the south, great Cerdic of Wessex as yet outshone him, often drawing recruits away, so that rivalry was bitter, and envy bitterer still. "Let us have it all, full tilt; it will do my men good,"he cried gleefully.

Now, Llywarch had a different ballad in mind, and smiled inwardly at the combining of Dynan with Eschwine to take the choice from him. Still, the general aspect was favorable, and he struck into it spiritedly; the rude harp, though poorly worthy of him, doing good service among war-loving ears, in the echoes of the woods. Danger and the strain of self-control gave his voice an unusual reckless resonance, when at length set free.

His theme was the last charge of Aurelius Ambrosius at Netley, in his old age and snow-white armor, defending the way to that Holy House named after him (Amesbury), whence came his title, Prince of the Sanctuary.

And this was the lay sung by Llywarch, Prince of Argoed, to the Saxon marauders in their camp by the marshes of the Lea.

THE SONG OF LLYWARCH.

White was the great steed under him,
White was the gleam of mailéd limb—
Swift as the warrior seraphim!

White was the steed, but dashed with red,
White were the locks that blew outspread,

White was the sword-hilt overhead.

White as the sea-wave's flower of foam!
One shout for Britain, Christ, and Rome!
Horseman and horse went shattering home.

I saw them, as he onward sped,
White horse to white horse of the dead:—
Then the pale banner whirled and fled.

I saw the thousands in his wake,
The wingéd spears that stream and shake,
I heard the crash, as thousands brake.

And, borne upon the wind along,
A faint far swell of chant and song,
A jubilation vast and strong.

Where Ambrose and his thousands fell,
There rises still that holy swell,
Proving their work was done right well.

Where Ambrose and his thousands lie,
The stars of Heaven go sweeping by,
The eyes of Heaven that shall not die.

Where Ambrose and his thousands are
There needs no light of dawn or star,
For the great glory shining far.

Glory to glory, grace on grace!
Hero of Britain's ancient race,
Our crowned one of the holy place!

"It is not for me," said Eschwine, rising gravely, to offer gifts to one not less great every way than myself, and tuneful, as I am mute, in song. But I would change hunting-knives with you, if I may. I cannot spare my sword; there is a fate in it."

"Willingly," said Llywarch; but all his companions looked uncertain. Ever since the death-feast at Wipped's-fleet, the Saxon blade and Saxon friendship had been frightful in British eyes. Yet all was done fairly, and Llywarch found a handsome Frisian haft in his hand.

"Long ago," said Eschwine, "I took it in fight at sea."

His men applauded also, understanding at least the rush of the lines; and that they dealt with battle. Those who had caught the names of a hostile faith cared little, for religion was no passion with them.

Next Wolfnoth took the harp, tossed back his head, and began chanting emulously, in a wild voice, to a wilder accompaniment, one of the staves, unrhymed but alliterative, which delighted his people. The envoys, in their turn, lost many of the words, and found more stress in it than melody; but it somehow brought home to them the sense of death affronted, of shadows overwhelming and feared not, of ear- nest grappling with man and fate, with gods and the hereafter.

When they departed, Eschwine called after them, "Good luck to Arthur with Ossa Cyllalaur!"

Now Cyllalaur was the great Saxon leader of the north.

Llywarch bowed, but later said quietly, "In other words, he would be well content to see an enemy and a rival wear each other out."

"There is comfort in getting off with a whole skin for any reason," observed Caowl.

The marshman in the stern grinned appreciatively. "But we will go back another way," said he.

"I have no fear of waylaying," declared Llywarch. "We were quite in his power."

"It may suit him to play cat and mouse," Dynan suggested. "I vote for all prudence and caution."

"Do you mean that he would be capable of shaking hands for good-by, with an ambuscade awaiting us by his orders?" demanded Llywarch.

"He would. He has done worse than that," Caowl replied, darkening.

"For my part," said Dynan airily, "I put no limits to him; he is a very 'capable' man."

But this time there came no missile at them in crossing the pool. Nor indeed afterward, except once, far away, when a spear was cast viciously into the boat, and a dwarf, nearly naked, went scuttling off where pursuit was not easy. But they judged him to be neither a Saxon nor any settled Briton, but a mere wandering waylayer, of malice toward every one; for there were always a few such about these desolate places.

Most of the time they were in what might be called open land for that region, though the rank growth was neck-high to a standing man, where not fallen in patches with the decrepitude of the year. At last they made firm land at a ring of oak-trees, thick enough to form a screen, enclosing a clear, shallow lakelet, the very centre of which was occupied by the palisaded village of the marshmen. A platform running around the inside of this tall barrier near its top gave the defenders a great advantage. A single narrow causeway led out from shore; but the gate of this was strongly guarded, and the whole structure, down to the water-bed, could be torn away very speedily in case of need.

Here they rested a little time, with much consideration from the villagers, who could find nothing less than magic in the successful outcome of their errand. Thence they easily reached London.

When Arthur heard the tale, he blamed himself, even more than he praised those whom he had sent into such danger. With all his knowledge of Eschwine, he had not felt it fully. Savage demonry, beyond example, was indeed very near the great city.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PERPLEXITY OF ARTHUR AND THE MISSION OF OISIN.

> I have repented of the time that I entreated
> That thou shouldst not have thy choice.
> —LLYWARCH.

THOSE were noisy and busy days around London, preceding the coronation. There was other marshalling, too, for the good will in the air and some touch of policy had brought Vortimer forward with a late display of military zeal; and Arthur, with this aid, and from other elements, began forming a great encampment on the hills. Meantime, counselling with Osburn and Aurelia, he supplied safer men gradually to the gates and strong places which Vortimer had held.

Cian kept his room, lest, as they quoted him, he should glower, and tear somebody. Although his hurts and later efforts might be reason enough, Arthur felt disquieted, and set himself kindly to heal the inner sore that he feared.

Cian half rose as the Emperor entered, but Arthur waved him down, saying,—

"The wound always has precedence. If some one must suffer for my being here, no doubt Tigernach will stand hard enough for two. Yet I see no need, remembering that such as he have made me."

"It is beyond mortal power to make one like our Emperor," declared Tigernach, with pleased and hot directness.

"Why, as to that," began Arthur, laughing. "But it is true I do not owe it all to your people. When before was it ever heard that a man should wave aside the purple to the shoulders of his friend?"

"He knew the gifts of Caradoc and the gifts of Arthur," said Cian. "The event has proved."

"How it might have been, we cannot say. It is as it is. I am glad that he is coming to help me. They are at Caer Segeint now, with Maelgwn and the pick of his mountain men, also a very great following."

"And the Lady Guinevere," suggested Cian, with covert brightening.

"She also," Arthur answered quietly, and the men understood one another; but Cian conjectured even more than Arthur had in mind.

"Lancelot takes a long road, in good company," said he.

That was an ill return, and he felt it so. But the instinct to awaken anxiety for the one whom he did not desire was too strong for him.

"It is true," answered Arthur, and spoke of other things.

When they parted, Cian's eyes were hopeful and thankful, but Arthur bore away more discomfort than should follow a kindly deed. Being only human, whatever the credulous might say, with two women and two men to think of, and no way opening that was free from harm to some one whom he loved, he found himself distressed very sorely. There was that in his heart which told him the wiser choice did not lie with the earlier claim. Yet he had long felt the bright enchantment of Guinevere, and been drawn to her in many ways of late, believing undoubtingly that her sunny love was all for him, though no binding word had been spoken.

He knew that a halt would be made for the night, in her behalf, about midway in the forty-mile ride which was to be that day undertaken. He promised himself to meet her there in the morning.

Meantime, chance threw him again with Aurelia.

The yellow light was fading from the lawn; the brighter stars were just coming into vision. She stood on the lawn hearkening to Oisin, who gesticulated as he spoke. Arthur fancied, resentfully, that the passion of admonition had possessed him. But she turned her face, and he saw that it was not so. "This good man comes to me for aid," she said with grave deference.

Arthur looked into her eyes, a little charged with excitement, then at the anxious ones of the evangelist.

"What aid?" he inquired.

"It has partly to do with Eschwine," she explained.

"By way of conversion?" with a smile.

"No!" broke in Oisin shrilly. Then he recollected himself, hearing their laugh, and added, "If there were any hope—why, surely—even he."

"We must admit that 'even he' has shown some motions of peace and good will," observed Arthur gently.

"Trust him not! trust him not!" cried Oisin. "His heart is the home of hell fire. Not seven devils, I say unto you, but seventy times seven!"

"Then I infer it is not—at present—a mission to the heathen?"

Arthur's glance questioned both of them with puzzled gravity, although he smiled. Aurelia answered.

"As a barrier only. Oisin will make his home with the lake-people of the great marsh. He will teach and preach to them, comforting and uplifting them in every way until death. He will take his own homeless villagers also, with such as may join them, to strengthen these hunted creatures. They will settle on firm ground near the river Lea. I have promised, with the Emperor's good will, such land and arms and other aid as may reasonably be needed. Oisin hopes with

time to build up an outer and living wall for London on that most open side. And the people of the marsh will no longer be crushed into mere brutishness."

Cried Oisin: "The distortion of their belief is unspeakable, unspeakable! And as to ritual, I doubt indeed if they have any whatever." His claw-like hands went up and down as he spoke.

"Is not this better than rainbow-chasing?" asked Aurelia, watching the Emperor's eye.

"Nothing could be braver or grander," answered he. "I will not warn you from slow dying by marsh-poison, Oisin; you have taken counsel of One greater than I. I would ask His blessing of you, for in that name only shall we conquer."

So Arthur Mabuter had the blessing of Oisin; and Oisin had of him whatever might be any aid and stay.

The image of Aurelia, royal, yet not beyond archness, haunted Arthur in the early hours of the night. But he slept at length; and when he woke it was with other fancies, which drove him to the saddle a long time before the brightening of the sky.

CHAPTER XII.

ARTHUR WITH LANCELOT AND GUINEVERE.

I wanted warmth and color.
—TENNYSON.

ALL along the highway between London and that fair city whose ruins underlie the Silchester of later time, villages attested the westward shifting of life and traffic that followed the loss of Kent, Sussex, and the lower Thames. Of these a few were still Roman in part, though the largest had grown up on Celtic lines.

It did not suit the gay court people to abide in any. They chose rather one of the wild spots which lay between, beloved by wandering folk and by citizens willing to take some risk with their outing. Here were you at once in both worlds; the merchant's caravan and the merry riding-party being proper to the glade, while yet the Saxon scout might prowl around its border in the dusk, or the great bear take complacently the measure of its shadow by the light of the moon.

But there was clearly no present danger of human enemy nor of wild beast. Long before Arthur reached them, he could discern the fire-glow in many places among the trees, where each night-long blaze was dying down to embers. The tents grew from ghostliness into brightness as the morning expanded.

Except the sentinels, few forms were yet astir. He recognized one discontentedly. Tall, richly attired, perfect in grace, with a cloven-pomegranate beauty of countenance, that was dreamful now, but marked by spoiled wilfulness, dark pride, and fitful intensity, Maelgwn of Gwynedd, whom we know better as Lancelot, stood watching the tent of the incomparable Guinevere. Was it herself that he awaited by appointment, or the mere sight and sound of her, issuing into the new day?

Arthur felt the stir of such questions as he halted, and therewith the sun and the lady came forth from their hiding together. Guinevere was like the very heart of gladness in those golden rays. There was that about her which, like the sunshine, belonged impersonally to one and all, yet which every man might take unto himself, and deem an especial treasure evermore his own. It came only from her glowing beauty, her love of life and splendor, her ready responsiveness; or, if ever from any deeper fountain, there was yet no such strength of flow but that ambition very easily would turn it and hold it. Still there were few who could believe her otherwise than very loving; as the sun itself appears genial, and we call it so, although in truth it cares nothing whatever for human kind. Already her name everywhere meant the enthralling, the irresistible.

On first passing beyond the tent-flap, she had Maelgwn evidently in her mind, perhaps by reason of preliminary peering, for her smile turned naturally, as by instinct, that way. But in a moment Arthur had that welcome in his stead without change, as he came into her vision; nor could either of these men be sure that it was not thus first intended. Maelgwn received only her passing graciousness and the word-signal, "*He* comes," abounding in loyal fervor, which proclaimed that it could not doubt his own sympathy.

There was hot blackness in the face and heart of the Welsh prince for a moment. Yet, Guinevere aside, he was Arthur's very stanch partisan, and so had been ever since his first entry as a stripling on the life of arms. He felt, admiringly, in another nature the aspirations which were beyond his own. Sometimes it befell that an unreasoning passion of remorse and penance took hold on him in their stead; but it never lasted long, and left him open, as before, to very pitiful sinning. These traits grew with years, but even in that earlier time he was far from a continuously happy man.

His memory held many fond trifles which yet were no trifles at all to his love and pride; though Guin- evere, if driven to it, would have denied all semblance of claim growing from them. He was not wrong in holding himself more congenial to her personally than any other man, though he were twice an Emperor; yet no man could be

so near her heart as the imperial power and dignities. A dim occasional sense of this awoke in him a helplessness and bewildered raging.

Yet now he greeted the Emperor with all, deference and welcome, and, apart from his baffled hope in Guinevere, they bespoke him truly.

"So early!" he cried." It must have taken swift riding or no rest. And all alone! Is that wise, my Emperor?"

"Wisdom would not be worth much penned in a corner or baby-tended," answered Arthur. "There are enough of them behind. This is a good swift fellow," and he patted his steed. "As to rest, I had all that might be had—while awaiting."

His eyes, at the last word, were fondly on Guinevere, who would not meet them, but flushed and checked herself uncertainly in answer. Maelgwn made obeisance and went rigidly away.

Arthur blamed himself momentarily for a tone which fretted him, the tone of one tempted from thorough good-will by a sense of rivalry. But it could not last in that presence.

Guinevere looked up, as in self compulsion, with delight in her eyes. "It is so long," she said, "yet so very kind of our Emperor to meet us thus by the way."

They walked side by side toward the tent of her uncle Caradoc. Her voice went before, and brought him out to them. On his bluff countenance there was a shade of displeasure as he glanced at the receding form of Maelgwn. A small part of it was for her also. The insight which comes to the dullest by kinship and daily proximity made him unsure of her. Since his great renunciation, there had been seasons of regret, and he looked that his niece should bring the purple back to him, in a way, enhanced by Arthur's glory. It was worse than vexation to think of any coquetry with the Welsh prince. But he could not look deep enough, nor do justice to the cool,

unchanging purpose of Guinevere. He would not have loved it, had he known.

A very giant of a man was this Caradoc Vriechvras, careless in his strength, negligently ungraceful, and showing woodland build rather than royal; a man living more in the body than the mind, proud mainly of prowess, as some burly man-at-arms might be, over willing to dare, impulsively generous to resign.

He gave Arthur a grasp that was hard to bear.

"And which Saxon shall we fall on next?" cried he. "I thought it was Ossa Cyllalaur. But I hear strange tales of Eschwine's sauciness. I have men enough to break him up, if ordered."

"He is no dry reed," answered Arthur, with a smile. "When the time comes he will give some trouble. For the present I have his pledge of peace toward the new Queen of London, where the chief danger lies."

"The new queen; her name is"—Guinevere suggested, as one who seeks about in memory.

Caradoc was about to supply it, marvelling at her quick forgetfulness, but Arthur spoke before him.

"Aurelia, daughter of Constantine." He fretted inwardly that he could not make the syllables quite like those of any other. It was the more unreasonable, since the present beauty eclipsed her, to his mind and eye. Guinevere was watching him from covert with oblique demureness.

"A very musical one," she said sweetly. "But have you only this Eschwine's promise? No hostage? Nothing in pledge?"

"A man's pride is the best pledge," answered Arthur. "Eschwine's word is his God. He has never failed in it. He stakes his manhood on it."

Guinevere listened, childlike, as to wisdom in matters beyond her, then answered with maidenly diffidence,—

"Yet—I was thinking of that Gaulish trader, who came and went so many times between our city and the coast, and was always true to the least that he uttered, and would do errands for one beyond the narrow sea, bringing all back faithfully, and showed himself so very honest in little things"—

Caradoc interrupted her, with an impatient sound. "In brief, I trusted him with a treasure caravan," he said. "The Saxons got it; and he does not trade our way, being rich and wise."

There was a veiled keenness of satire in Guinevere's mild young eyes, unnoticed by either of the men. "Are not the Saxons wily?" she queried, in the same submissive way. "A woman knows little of such matters; but they tell me so. May not Eschwine have been upbuilding his fame as a promise-keeper, only to throw it away for a great prize? Or may not the temptation overcome him? London is very rich, and I hear that—Aurelia—is—exceedingly fair."

For she was testing Arthur; not greatly caring for the danger which yet, by inner light, this woman, wilier than the Saxon, well knew.

Caradoc heard her with dissatisfied opening of the eyes. But he caught the drift of her last words. It seemed to him that there would be a better time to consider matters militant.

"It is true that women do not distinguish," he said. "Kings are not chapmen. Wider experience will show. But now I must prepare for departure," and he moved away with a sense of sagacity. There was a smile on his face as he left to her the trial for that "wider experience."

Her scrutiny of Arthur was assuring. He showed no great concernment of any kind, answering only, "It is so; a noble woman too, proud, strong, and trustful."

In that she felt his regret, if not disquiet, for her own suspicious knowingness. That mattered little. She fastened liquid eyes on his, hurt and meekly protesting.

"But the Queen of London has seen so much more," she said; "and no doubt is far wiser. I did wrong to obtrude my foolishness. But one feels—and one counsels from"—

"Her kind heart," he responded, with quick self-blame, taking her hand impulsively. "Don't doubt that I feel that, Guinevere."

Her eyes beamed into his with ineffable admiring devotion. "There is one," she said, "who is too high-souled, too generous, for doubting. May he never suffer for his greatness!"

In part, that was the true voice of her own spirit that day; in part, mere audacity, affronting and trifling with what, as she had even then some glimmering, was in store for them all.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOREBODING AND DANGER.

I have become a predicting bard.
—RED BOOK OF HERGEST.

IN that morning's ride Arthur's fancy busied itself more than once in discomfort with the picture of two royally fair women face to face. But when it became real there was nothing to regret. Guinevere beamed and flowed and sparkled in full wisdom of rivalry, and won her reward; for this urgent speaking loveliness had power over him beyond any more reticent though nobler beauty.

One kind thing he had done in preparing Caradoc to accept as authentic his kinsman of London; and Constantine accordingly was made very happy.

The coronation passed in all magnificence, a breathless, proud, bewildering time; and the army, now swollen to great proportions, went northward, leaving the young queen and the remnant of her people to face whatever might befall.

Never in two generations had money flowed so freely nor in such variety of coinage through all the channels of trade,—Roman gold from Augustus to Honorius; the experimental island mintage of Allectus, the evanishing usurper, and Tetricus, the tyrant of an hour; older British pieces, ranging from the pure fine art of Cunebelline to mere Brigantine savagery; the fair coins of Massilia and their Gaulish wheel-marked copies. Yet the multitudinous bits of brass which alone had often served their needs before were with them still for lesser uses, being mainly the counterfeits or makeshifts of a hundred different hands.

But what all these had brought was of necessity consumed or away. In food, apparel, arms, and men, the draft on the little kingdom had been excessive. Londoners looked about them on empty fields and

barns, on empty shelves and warehouses, on lean garrisons, and streets with women and children only, and there were stirrings of disquiet. Never had their city been so tempting to a money-hungering enemy; never so ill defended.

From the beginning Aurelia was alert to prepare and strengthen, with Osburn for her general in command, and Cian for her counsellor and guest. He was yet at the villa, guarded by Tigernach and a few tribesmen. She saw him often there, although, following Arthur's counsel, her main abode was now within the city wall. At times, with returning strength, he joined her in journeys, undertaken hastily hither and thither.

At first these were indeed royal progresses, that she might feel amply guarded. But there was much to be done, and the cumbersomeness of such doing was against it. Also the cost and the loss of time and labor, when nothing could be spared, made it seem rather an evil than a good. So she took very soon to plainer ways, which yet seemed safe enough.

Once, with Cian and Tigernach, she penetrated the Andred-wood to its inmost hill-chaos of wild thicketry, and was greeted tumultuously on an open plateau about old altars by a skin-clad assemblage, more barbarous than any new-come Saxon, but with Vortimer's mother, and many older memories, to keep them vivid in Saxon-hating. She made great friendship there, for they delighted in her courage; and a band of their sturdiest men went back with her, where men were needed. But most often her wanderings were not so far.

Returning from one of these, a sound of ill omen came to Cian midway between the city wall and the villa, a sound which had not been heard before since the Emperor left them, a wolf-howl out of the forest. At once that first desperate peril of the woman now beloved awoke in memory; and her call for aid seemed verily to shock and thrill him again, as the terrible pack broke around her, a note of far range and compass, appalled, urgently appealing. He had this mainly in his thought as he turned to Tigernach, who rode near him.

"Did you hear?" he queried.

"Could one fail, having ears? After all, a wolf-cry is no very great thing in the woodlands."

"But here it has a meaning. The wolf returns," answered one behind them.

"What then?" demanded Tigernach. "First time or second time, wolf or Saxon or death's-head, the men of the Andred-wood are ready."

"Well said!" exclaimed Cian. But he had a sense of trouble impending, as though in truth her need were calling to him.

He hinted this to Tigernach, who kept silence a moment, then answered: "Prince Cian would have been quite well before this, if he had but eschewed the ways of those who loll in hot waters, and sprawl, gorging sumptuously, and are beaten in arms whenever they take the field."

Cian laughed, saying, "That curse, at least, has not yet reached me." But no doubt his fevered nerves might have their share in so vague a dread.

That night their converse was of secret and eerie things, the poet-mystic and mystic of the woods meeting on such ground with a fearsome comradery. Were they not face to face with knowledge and peril which went by the multitude unregarded, like ghosts in the day?

When all was still except the low wind, Tigernach yet lingered, dozing. For all his disclaimer as they rode, a sense of menace to his leader and the queen hung about him, even at the gate of slumber.

That leader's voice came again startlingly: "Tigernach!" He looked up with a start. Cian was speaking with deliberate gravity. "Either the dregs of fever-poison are yet in me, or I am haunted. I cannot feel

that all is well with Aurelia. I seem to be aware of something like a far cry from her, and a dense cloud—nearing, nearing me."

"It is fever-dreaming," answered Tigernach decisively. But he rose, and took down his cloak and sword-belt.

"What are you about?" Cian demanded. "If it be truly no more than dreaming, what need"—

"There will be sleep-walking or sleep-riding next; and I cannot tell what that might end in. Much better my riding—wide awake." He took a lance from one corner of the room. "Prince Cian, if I bring you word with all speed, will that content you?"

Cian looked at the devoted obstinacy of his face, and laughed. "I would argue the matter if it would do any good," he said.

"Nothing does any good to an ill but the remedy. I am the remedy."

"More exactly, your journey, without sleep, after nothing. But—thank you!"

This was given with a hand-clasp and grateful eyes. There was relief in the tone.

Cian followed his partisan in thought a while. "Now he is crossing the courtyard; now mounted; now over the bridge; along the road with the moon rising behind him now"—until his own consciousness melted in a jumble of fancies. He knew nothing more until Tigernach stood in bright daylight before him.

Cian studied that face, remembering slowly. "I see that all is well," said he.

"Assuredly!" growled Tigernach; and he turned away.

Later he revealed that he had seen the queen, very early astir as was her fashion, but easy in mind, even laughing. She was to ride

somewhere, on some errand, perhaps even his way. “Then our royal lady will have an opportunity of explaining in person to Prince Cian that she did not really call him to her at midnight.”

Cian flushed and frowned. But he set the kind deed against the random words, and forebore. He even smiled inwardly, noting that they had a grievance in common. For wherein shall high and subtle prescience avail, if it lead utterly astray? Yet no doubt it was far better that all the prophecies of the world should fail than that harm should befall Aurelia.

He watched for her through the day; but she did not come, nor did any certain tidings, except—late in the afternoon—that she had ridden eastward toward Oisin, who was always needing more and more for his amphibious mission. This made a ripple among them; but it appeared that she had gone well attended, and there could be no great danger by the way.

They spoke little after sunset, for Cian was weary of himself and of all. He fell asleep quickly, with no soul-warning.

Again a cry assailed him! This time it was real and insistent: “Wake and come! Wake and come!” A glare of lamplight filled his eyes. Moreover, a hand was shaking him. Then Tigernach broke his bewilderment with a great shout, rough and wrathful; and Cian all at once began tumbling into his apparel and armor, thrust at him faster than he could seize them. A few moments more, and they were mounted and speeding away.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CONFLICT AT THE LAKE VILLAGE.

True it is deliverance will come
By the wished for man.
—*Red Book of Hergest.*

TIGERNACH was the fevered one now. "Faster!" cried he to the horsemen hurrying behind them. "Faster! There's not one second to lose. Ride to death; ride to death if need be!"

Cian put forth his hand to bring his follower within bounds. "Tell me," said he; and in fragments Tigernach told him, with some aid from one of Llywarch's two marshmen, who had brought the news, and was their guide.

Eschwine had indeed broken faith, coming secretly against the lake village, in the hope of seizing Aurelia. His force was a great one, according to the measure of marsh-fighting. Oisin, in perfect good faith and zeal, had tempted her to remain over long. There was barely time to send this messenger to the villa, and one other toward London, before they were wrapped all around with enemies. Neither had failed; for while they spoke sounds of contention came to them, as though Osburn, with his mercenaries and citizens, was vigorously attempting the guarded lower ford of the Lea. Their own route lay otherwhere; a détour reaching the northern border of the great marsh at a point where a path went inward—barely practicable and known to few.

It was not until they had crossed the lesser waters of that river that the uproar around Oisin and the queen became audible. At the same time, under thick hanging clouds, a beacon-flare of red and yellow light, waving with the wind, made a silent, powerful appeal for aid. All around it were lesser lights, doubled by reflection in water, and broken by intervening boughs. The marshman, pointing to these, laid his hand on Cian's knee. While he pointed, these divided and

multiplied, as though fire were being borrowed from fire. All at once a flight as of shooting-stars went centring in from them toward the roofs under the beacon light.

Their guide gave a grunt of answered expectation, with no pleasure in it. All behind cried out once, but ceased as suddenly. In that breath came to them the fierce yell that went with the fire-arrows, and the high-keyed, harsh defiance of the villagers answering.

Flight followed flight, with the same company of noises. There was waving of flambeaux, also, about the palisades, and a huddle of dark forms, actively moving, below them, with every discord of onset. Here and there a fresh outburst of flame within, as some bit of woodwork caught fire, showed the defenders with equal plainness. The outlines of the houses, too, were thrown out with fitful vividness; and their walls and slanting thatch danced back and forth between illumination and shadow.

Cian lost nothing of this, but saw as he hurried on, with only a moment's halting. His teeth and eyes were set, his breath came laboringly. Prayers and curses were in his heart together.

Suddenly there were no more meteors. The torches, being inverted, flared higher, and then were dark. Shadows went hurrying back across the half-lighted lake. A loud call of taunting and gladness followed them. One crisis of the little city of refuge had come and passed in Cian's distant vision; and, behold, it was living yet. But dwellings were ablaze already, so there was no more need for the beacon.

Their course was yet wide of that shining mark. Impatience assailed Cian; doubts began to hover; the night air, now clammy with marsh dampness, chilled him thoroughly; but he clenched his countenance, and kept on unquestioning.

The footing grew soft under a thin shell of frozen mire. At every step they sank deeper.

"Where is that secret way you promised us?" Tigernach demanded sharply.

"They Went in Ribbon-like Order."

"Here, turn!" was the marshman's answer, hoarse and savage as though from hostile lips. His gesture directed them toward that lessening riot of flame and the ruddy smoke-masses which overhung it.

They still went heavily, yet at first not increasingly so; having for path a narrow ribbon of moist but solid land, which dangled a good way out from the higher country into that bleak morass. They kept a thread-like and winding order, following the guide with good heed; their best light was the mere intermittent glimmer of a thin paring of moon from behind the now broken and marching clouds.

At last they had to leave their horses under guard at a little eyot of firm sod where some bushes grew, and pushed on afoot from tuft to

tuft very precariously, now leaping, now dragging one another out of some oily hole where a man unaided would have sunk forever.

It was all a desperate task to Cian, the imperfectly convalescent; but he called wit to aid nerve and sinew, measuring the steps, and marking the footholds of the sure-stepping native next before him, and leaving rescue-work to those who were in better case for it. All strength which he could husband would be needed elsewhere, soon and right urgently.

The lights, fading down, appeared ever farther and farther ahead, until their seeming withdrawal grew disheartening. Then revelation came very start- lingly. Once more the earth and air were alive with confusion of sound, with volumes of reddening cloud and dragons of fire—all just before them, with only a thin hedge of forestry between. They hurried on, and paused, as yet unseen amid the lake-encircling trees, with the glare of fire and water in their faces. Their nearest enemies were not a spear's throw away.

Eager-eyed the tall Saxon bowmen stood, sending arrow after arrow in long flight with fiery mane into and over the palisade, or bending to light at the fagot-pyres the tow, tar-painted, until impatience drove them, one after another, out through the ice-crusted shallows to a more immediate share in the assault.

The lake on that side was no real obstacle to these fighting watermen, except as they could not get footing for their strokes and labor at the last. Already in and on the deep water, next the palisade, there was a broad entanglement of boats and rafts and logs and swimming men. Some of the latter were chopping steps in the tall piles before them, others were swarming up with desperate energy at points that looked more nearly practicable than the rest. Many more came to them continually, either straight out from the shore, or around the village, wading knee-deep, waist-deep, neck-deep, and waist-deep again, or swimming overhand through the ice-film with great strokes.

To judge by the excited clamor and signs of effort, the besieged were not less busy. At the moment of Cian's appearance, two or three of the climbing Saxons were flung, from the top of the wall, with stabs or without them, and the air thickened with other missiles, often glowing hot, showered on the heads below. Yet the escalade was gaining, urged on to fury by yells of fight in the marshes toward the Lea, which were heard interruptedly through their own hurly-burly, and seemed approaching, though distant still.

Osburn was coming—resolutely, vehemently, in spite of all resistance, and with the utmost speed which it would allow; but he could never come in time. Well for the village folk, well for Aurelia, that there was no need to await him, with the Sword of Fire in person almost over the palisade!

Cian quickly spread his men to cover that curve of shore from which wading was possible, and then sent them at Eschwine, convergingly and with a dash.

Even while the last lingering archers were staring with half-turned heads at the sudden apparition of lines of armed men behind them, a great shout went up from these, which every Briton knew, and the keen cry of the marshman-guide followed it. As he sent that forth, he sprang on the nearest enemy, spearing him through the throat, and driving weapon and Saxon headlong into the water together. From the village came a glad chorus of many applauding voices. The other Saxon bowmen hurried out to join their comrades, letting fly an arrow or two behind them as they fled.

Nearly the whole Saxon mass was now in such depth of water as allowed neither secure footing nor free arm-play. Before them was the well-manned barrier which had so tried their strength already; behind them a bristling array of new enemies, not very many in number, but with order yet unbroken, pausing where the bottom suddenly fell away, standing knee-deep or thigh-deep without harm since their part was simply to hold their places. Only at the ends of the curving line was there any outlet.

Eschwine stood on the platform of the palisade with a handful who had followed him, fighting bitterly to make good their hold; while Aurelia urged forward her guards, and Oisin called on the wild, lank villagers, to dislodge them.

Such of the Saxons as were yet climbing scrambled desperately up to their king. The others floundered uncertainly for some moments, with cries of discomfiture. Then, back toward the shore went the sea-heathen, swimming and wading as they could, mostly spear in hand, but some with swords, battle-axes, knives, and clubs of war, keeping no order, but fierce as cornered wolves.

There was very grim fighting then, so that the water frothed and spouted with the frenzy of it, and men everywhere fell singly or in writhing and strangling couples. But the Saxons went down seven to one, growing momently less. Very soon there were none withstanding or assailing the Britons, but only a few who had broken through or swam around, and were now hastening to the woods, if so they might escape pursuers, and another few who sought refuge with Eschwine above the palisade.

These last were closely followed, Cian's men cutting into them as they swam, or dragging them down by the feet from the rough wood. Nevertheless, enough of them reached the top to extend very briefly the struggle of the Essex king. He gave those few moments to a charge against Aurelia, most likely in mere fury and bravado, for he could not hope to carry her away.

She did not shrink. The press behind her was such as to preclude any motion. Cian, painfully drawing himself up to the top of the palisade, discerned them both with blurred vision, and tumbled over upon the platform before her in a last violent effort.

Then another form sprang over him, a starved infuriated hovel-dweller of that border, prematurely aged, who had lost all who were dear to him by that Saxon, and had passed bodily under his torture. Like a figure of frenzy this odd assailant came at the Saxon chief, bony and knotted, agile as a dancing dervish of later days, white-hot

with remembered outrage and ravening zeal, a firebrand in one hand, a great knife in the other, striking right at the enemy's eyeballs with the rapidity of cat-clawing, either weapon or both together—a very mountain-devil of a fighter.

Eschwine was bewildered and half blinded by the fantastic onfall. He took one step awry, swaying for the stroke that should end it; lost his balance under a new smiting of the torch, and went headlong down into the water, leaving that human firebrand to chant his pæans of victory alone.

The villagers and London men, with a shout of laughter, flung themselves on the remaining intruders, hewed them down, and cast them over after him, all but one likely youth, whom Cian bade them spare.

There were splashing and fighting where Eschwine made his unwilling dive, and many calls afterward, as that he was here, or here. Those within the wall were in high hope of his capture. But at last no one could find him, and there was little doubt that some chance had aided his escape to the wood.

Not long afterward, Osburn, with his forces, came up, all opposition having suddenly left them. Their loss had been far greater than that of the other Britons, as Osburn had steadily to dislodge an enemy noted for doggedness, who fell back again and again from one strong position to another.

He was ill-pleased with Cian that even one prisoner should be taken after so much slaughter and broken faith, and incensed above all against Oisin—who joined very willingly in his condemnation—for having by his spiritual solicitude brought such trouble on them all. Not even the queen escaped his censure. He would take no rest until he had her within London wall again.

Therein the villagers mightily concurred. She had indeed been the soul of the defence from its beginning; but what need to defend, if

there were no temptation for Eschwine? Better than royalty with fireworks was their safe and wonted obscurity.

Meanwhile Eschwine, safe now beyond the Thames, was blaspheming and grinning together over the grotesqueness of his overthrow, as he made his way to take shelter with that half-ally, half-competitor, Aesc, the Under-king of West Kent. He had hope of aid there, when wrongs and opportunities should have been thrillingly presented. He had no thought of giving up his purpose or his future prize after all that had been staked thereon.

CHAPTER XV.

LONDON BEFORE THE STORM.

I love not him that causes contention.
—TALIESSIN.

IT was but a dismal home-journey to Aurelia, notwithstanding the great joy of rescue, and though they spared her whatever they could. There were no sounds to distress her, for the Saxons had been put beyond moaning, and the wounded Britons borne tenderly away; but along that hard-fought road, which was rarely more than a mere path or cartway, the dead of either side were strewn. Hide-bound forms of the populace, and sons of wealthy houses in glittering mail, encumbered the shallows of the Lea. Roman-trained mercenaries, iron fellows of the Teuton borderland, with teeth yet locked together and blades held forward, lay where Osburn had led them again and again, up the eastward slope, ever stabbing at the face, until at last with those insistent points he bore a way over and through. They were very grim relics to her in the light of that wintry sunrise.

She paused on the London side with a backward look, wistful and faintly shivering. Silence fell on her companions. The face of Osburn darkened with returning blame.

"We have many dead," he reiterated slowly. "We cannot spare so many."

Cian saw her under lip quiver, and it stirred him.

"It is the part of a man to die for his queen," said he.

"Doubtless—where she is queening."

"Ask any one who fought there. How could her bearing have been more queenly?"

Osburn bowed with gravity. "Undoubtedly a hot fight, well fought—which never needed fighting. Is that queen-craft?"

"You presume too far," began Cian angrily; but Aurelia interposed.

"I cannot blame Osburn," she said; "and if I could, I would not, after what he has done for me. Nor will I blame myself unduly. I was on my proper errand, with good intent; and I am well assured that the Sword of Fire would have found occasion before long if I had stayed or gone elsewhere. For what truth was in him had wholly turned to falseness. My danger might have come where Prince Cian could not so fatally have trapped them. But I will not serve again as a marsh-decoy if I can help it."

"Your majesty is very right!" answered Osburn, with slow emphasis. "Yet it was the hardest cuff Eschwine has taken. Mere luck saved him, to sting again—if we let him get ready."

"But Eschwine is in neutral territory."

"No Saxon is neutral," exclaimed Tigernach.

Osburn grunted assent. "We should strike all who harbor him, and talk about neutrality afterward."

Aurelia smiled, shaking her head, and looked at Cian.

"It might be fairer," he admitted, "to ascertain first whether they intend to come with him against us."

"You don't doubt it," answered Osburn. "Fooling is dangerous."

"We might try an embassy to Aesc of West Kent," Aurelia suggested.

"An embassy to the wolf's teeth!" growled Osburn. "I know the cut of them. The two fiends are cousins."

Cian considered. “I feel with you,” said he. “Yet we may be wrong. But if we could keep this down to a fight with Essex! We need risk no man. There is the prisoner.”

Osburn and Tigernach muttered something with black looks.

But when they were again in London and in council, Aurelia sent for the youth.

He came between guards, with a fair show of nimbleness, both in wit and form. Bright colors in stripes bound his legs from foot to knee. His tunic—he had lost his mantle—was of scarlet, broidered with tattered gold. All this gayety of garb had been dimmed by swamp service. His head was bare and sunny. His right arm hung in a sling.

“What is your name?” Aurelia inquired graciously.

“Wulfhelm,” returned the lad, with a bow.

“Wulfhelm, Wulfnoth, Wulfgang, Wulf!” muttered Tigernach distastefully. “Show me a Saxon name without the wolf in it.”

“Better wolves than sheep!” retorted the Saxon.

Aurelia looked at the woodland chief with offended eyes. Then, turning to her prisoner, she said gently, “Wolves would have slain you.”

“True. I owe my life to the boar’s head.” He bowed toward Cian.

“I will leave you to him,” said she, with a smile.

Cian had not thought his cognizance known so far, and the allusion pleased him.

“What I need of you is very simple,” he said. “Ask the King of West Kent for me—’Is it peace or war?’ If you will do this, you are free.”

"To join the Sword of Fire?"

"What you will."

Within the half-hour he was away.

"If they kill him for the inquiry, at least it will not be one of our own people," said Osburn. "Let us make ready to fight—in case the answer should be `Peace.'"

While he busied himself in and about the city, Cian was given charge of all the northern and eastern country to and beyond Caer Collin, where he made his headquarters. Chariots began to grow plentiful, even to be a jest. Not a smith nor wagon-maker but was overdriven with work on them.

His late signal triumph answered all murmuring. Truly it had been won where scythes and wheels could never be of much avail. But there was plenty of firm open land for them. Osburn had already begun to obstruct the river with barriers.

Wulfhelm was back very speedily, with the answer "Peace," and left again hurriedly. But there were more disquieting tales through other channels, and the work of making ready went on. It was too late to do more.

Daily the population of London grew, as the few remaining people of exposed places flocked in at the urgent call of their queen. For she had begun to dread lest she had brought ruin on some of her friends by persistence in untimely scruple.

There was a little stir of trade in the shops again, as provisions came from far corners of the outer country, and mouths which must eat them. There was a stir of labor also, both in strengthening the defences and bringing disused homes into some kind of life and service again. The houses yet intact were mostly crowded. Many tented families occupied in part the belt between these and the walls;

and others lay about near their fires in the open air or under any rude shelter.

The Celtic and pagan element of the cruder sort had been re-enforced beyond any other. Its manifestations of grotesque faith and fervor were disquieting. The dread silent watcher of the White Hill—dead but sleepless—was more than ever a power among men, but the power of a palsy.

The victory in the marsh, that made Oisin's people chant so loudly, did not turn the tide. It was too plainly the rescue of one who had been quite safe while within the wall and the promise. How grievous, too, were the losses that followed her escapade!

This current of feeling disturbed Aurelia. Her amplitude ef vision and contact with many beliefs had not wholly freed her from a fantasy born in the blood. Sometimes, when weary, she seemed to feel eyes on her out of that august burial-place; and though such fancies might be resolutely put by, the legend haunted her memory.

"Sylvia," said she, in a lonely hour, after many trying things, "what am I ever to do with all these people?"

"Send for papa!" was the natural child-answer.

Aurelia petted her, but did not look exhilarated.

"He is busy elsewhere," she replied. "No, my dear, our papa cannot come."

Sylvia gazed at her with the huge responsibility of tender years called on for a decision. Presently it came abruptly: "Aurelia, send for Prince Cian."

At that name the queen sister put her involuntarily away; then, seeing in the little counsellor those lip-quiverings which precede the tears of pain, Aurelia folded the ringlets very close to her, exclaiming: "I did not mean to be unkind."

"But why?" began the pretty wondering mouth and eyes together, uptilted from their nest.

"Oh, never mind, never mind!" and a soft hand pressed the sunny head down again. A low laugh followed, with an echo of self-impatience in it. Presently Aurelia said, with complimentary gravity, "I think so highly of your advice, my dear, that I am going to do just as you have said. And that is more than I always do for our wisest old men. Even our good bishop," she added meditatively.

"He isn't a 'good bishop,"' declared the child, with emphasis.

"Why do you say so?"

"He talks against Prince Cian."

"Ah!" Aurelia found herself admitting this in evidence. But she answered very justly, "They don't agree, you know. And when people don't agree they misjudge."

"I don't like him," persisted Sylvia. "Besides, he hates our Holy One, the sacred Head. He hates Vran!"

"Why child; what do you know of Him?"—smiling at this echoed earnestness.

"Just what so many people say. What you have told me, sister."

"I—oh, I have told you many things. As an old tale, not for certain truth."

Sylvia pondered dubiously. "Anyway," said she, "I think it's very good of him to keep watch for us. And such a long, long time! Just think! And only a head to him! It must be very lonesome, Aurelia."

"Would you like to see it and talk to it, then?" Aurelia blamed herself for the question before she had done asking it.

Sylvia sprang up and off with a gasp, looking about her and trembling. "No!" she cried, with a stamp of her foot, half-petulant, half-terrified.

"There, there," said Aurelia soothingly. "I see the most fervent partisans of the great Vran are even more so at a distance. I must own I think him rather a frightful defender. But you wouldn't be afraid to talk with—Prince Cian?"

"No," demurely; "I love Cian."

"Oh, you do!" said Aurelia. "Why?"

"Because he is good—and kind. And he kills the wolves and the Saxons."

"So does Oisin. Didn't you hear how he made the people knock Eschwine into the lake?"

"Yes," judicially, "I love Oisin too."

"What, that little croaking rook of a man!"

"Yes, I do."

"But he doesn't like Vran."

"I don't care," with another glance around. "Don't *you* love Oisin?"

"I like him, and trust him, and prize him."

"Don't you love Cian, Aurelia?"

"I like him, and trust him, and prize him, too. Sylvia, don't you love Osburn and Vortimer and the great Emperor?"

Sylvia reflected. All items but one were passed by in her slow answer. "The great Emperor Arthur was like the sun, when he rode

in his armor up the northern road," she said. "I was very glad to look at him. But he is too far away."

This lingered in Aurelia's mind with something, perhaps, of that comfort which we find in a spokesman raised up for us unexpectedly. Both of these notably strong and picturesque men had been in her thought and her fancy, and the child had spoken.

Yet, when Cian came hurrying to her presence, he was received only with an elaborate presentation of affairs. For the moment he would gladly have been back at Colchester.

He took himself to task after the manner of the disconcerted. Beyond question, the queen had good right to send for him when needed; nor would he loiter by the way if thus summoned again. Ay, Cian—yet hardly would that coming be with the same stir and thrill of expectancy, a star-gleam going on before.

But soon she passed to matters of more intimate disquiet—those eyes of fire that verily burned through black night out of the blacker hillside; the frenzied processions winding upward in the moonlight, imploring an answer.

"Did they really hear anything?" he inquired.

"A thunder of words in tongues unknown. The sound came to me even here. It makes the votaries more assured, more darkling, more uplifted."

Cian looked grave. He could not feel so sure of the redoubtable obstructive dead, as of wonders which belonged to the common faith of all elder Britain. Yet, true or false, it was a very disturbing feature of local lore and pride.

"I will see and hear to-night," he answered at last.

"Oh!" and she put her hand forward dissuasively; then added, with quiet self-command, "If it seems best to you."

That let the sunshine through. Surely he was, at least, a little more to her than a mere engine of war and pillar of the state. His look, going beyond his will, told her of what he saw and felt, and her face warmed again.

But before either spoke, word was brought of the presence of the Saxon whom they had freed.

"Let him enter," said Aurelia, surmising urgent tidings; but Cian fancied a touch of resigned vexation in her tone.

When Wulfhelm appeared, the marks of wild unresting haste were apparent all over his new and brave attire. He had indeed come fast and far, and sighed with relief, as one who could not hold his course much longer.

"I thought never to be here again," he said. "But since my word was `Peace,' your destruction unarmed would weigh on me more than death."

Cian took his hand and pressed it. "So they are coming," said he.

"From everywhere—the town of the Cantwara, the wet Merscwara country, the walled isles of the sea, and the valleys of the Darent and the Medway. Both Kents and all Essex. They will strike at the heart, hoping to catch you asleep. And that very soon. They look for rain and mire to clog your wheeling scythe-devils."

Cian bowed to the compliment. "So they hope to see my chariots mud-locked at Colchester?"

"That is their hope. I brought word there, found you gone, and followed."

Cian looked him over. "Will not Eschwine carve the blood eagle on you for this?"

A shiver passed through the young man's frame. He made no answer.

"Oh, stay with us! you shall have what you will," cried Aurelia.

He glanced at her haughtily, softening to indulgence, but answered nothing.

"We will neither tempt you nor hold you," said Cian. "But Cerdic is as good a Saxon as Eschwine, with a greater name, and hates him no less than I."

The face of Wulfhelm brightened. "Will you send me to Cerdic?" inquired he.

"Surely. That is over little for all your peril and kindness. My letter to him may aid you. He knows of Cian Gwenclan. Sooner or later, with him, you will be made happy in fighting against us. And now I pray you to await me below, for we must see Osburn."

At the door Wulfhelm turned again, and came back with extended hand.

"It is not only for the life that you have given me," said he. "But you have not asked me to change my soul,—to become a Briton."

"A fine compliment!" quoth Cian; but he seized on the hand with kind eyes.

But what he saw in those of Aurelia drove the Frank and the Saxon together out of his mind.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DEAD.

"An astrologer then he may be . . .
He would make the dead alive."

BOTH elation and trouble were in Cian's heart as he walked towards the White Tower between Wulfhelm and Tigernach, the three together nearly filling the narrow ways. The two enemies by race at first eyed each other across him with looks of reserve, then kept on, saying little.

As they ascended the hill, although not on the haunted side, the face of the Andred man grew reverent, his very feet moving as if in deprecating good will; whereas the Saxon glowered and grinned sardonically at the hostile holy ground, as though very willing to disbelieve, but hating and fearing. This contrasted witness of the two men to the intensified power of the legend impressed Cian very deeply.

They found Osburn disturbed about the matter, and in no amiable mood. He bent devouring eyes on the outwardly indifferent Wulfhelm, until Cian explained how much they owed this young man. Osburn listened gravely, put a question or two, declared himself satisfied, and forthwith issued orders for an escort of honor befitting a noted chieftain. "My best way of thanking," he observed. "It may help you with the King of Wessex."

Wulfhelm grew taller in his delight and pride. "This will pair with Prince Cian's letter," said he—"the best fighter and leader that our great enemy, Arthur, ever had."

There was a deliberation in his praise, evidently intended to enhance its value. It cost effort.

Cian laughed. “Over commending may make a bad ending,” quoted he.

“It wouldn’t do to tell Maelgwn,” suggested Osburn, quizzically and grimly, though kindly.

“If my tongue makes an enemy for Prince Cian, my hand can unmake him,” Wulfhelm replied stoutly.

“No need to defend one who has commonly been able to defend himself,” Cian declared. “Yet I thank you; farewell.”

He turned to Osburn, when the others had gone. “You have made the lad’s fortune, yonder; and I am grateful.”

“I paid my own score,” was the answer. “We’re all in one crazy boat. I’ve been looking for such news. Now’s the last chance to strike, but with what? Half our people crooning about that death’s head of a Vran, who unluckily isn’t where he ought to be.” There was a defiant uplift of the voice in the close of this denunciation, proving that the denouncer was not wholly fearless and at ease with regard to the power upbraided. The northern prince felt this, and therefore disliked the implied blasphemy all the more.

“Whatever else may be said of Vran, he is ours,” Cian replied gravely.

“And we are likely to be his,” retorted Osburn. “Much like an otter with one paw in a trap, and the hounds coming.”

Cian smiled again. “Not so bad, I hope,” said he. “It is something to find such terror-breeding power in a dead Briton. But I mean to try persuasion and argument with him this very night, if you will have me duly awakened.”

Osburn stared and laughed oddly at the means suggested; then, on second thought, looked at him with mingled hope and disquiet. Prince Cian’s repute for occult knowledge hung about him like a

magic robe. Just what might be possible with such a man, it did not become a Frank soldier of fortune to say. But, after all, what need to shrink from a comrade who had done so well? If there were other weapons which he could turn to account, by all means have the good of them.

"Bring 'old Vran' to terms in your own way," quoth he. Late that night Cian was duly awakened. "You may hear them at it now," said the Frank sombrely.

They listened. A hum of voices, low and thrilled, but broken now and then by some sharp cry, came from the southern face of the hill—a murmur charged with dread and anxiously imploring worship. "The Saxon coming is bruited abroad already," said he. Osburn nodded.

The two went out together, taking a half-circuit. It was dark everywhere, yet, as always, a little lighter up the height; so, from the hollow which they had reached, the mob of swaying, gesticulating forms might be discerned like living shadows. The voices of them were chanting an invocation monotonously, all together, except a passionate break or call now and then.

While the two men strained eye and ear, a sudden outleap of light made Osburn throw up his hands, as though he feared blinding. There was a gasping cry among the worshippers, and then all were silent in dread and rapture. For the glare was dual, and came seemingly from within the hill, as though two great fiery eyes were seen, not quite nakedly, but through a film which hardly dimmed them.

Every human figure had moved aside in fear, and was hidden by the great contrast.

"There lies our task," said Cian, with resolute effort.

Osburn forced himself to look. "I—will—go," said he.

"No," answered Cian. "You cannot help here. To say truth, I doubt if any one can."

"'To say truth'—come away!" urged Osburn, with sudden revulsion. "Anything for duty! But I would rather go at the Saxon army with ten men."

Then he seemed to bethink himself. "After all," said he, "there should be nothing within one's command which one doesn't know." He braced himself for the ascent.

Cian answered, "If—or rather since—Vran is in your command, how much greater must you be than the angels of Heaven, or the lords of the darker place!"

Osburn said nothing, and they went upward together. For ten steps or more the glare was on them, with preterhuman life and will in it, long smouldering. Then—suddenly as it began—there was darkness. Not the mere obscurity in which one may discern outlines or shadows, but the smiting of blindness which follows a lightning flash when clouds are heavy, and there is neither moon nor star. They stood still, being helpless. Then they were aware of curses uttered in the black void, and that the curses were for them. That was never a pleas- ant sound to any man, least of all when a very little fancy-play might make the unfriendly sounds unearthly also.

"I gather that they charge us with bringing them into disfavor," said Cian.

By this time they could dimly see a medley of figures, the nearest almost touching them, all swayed by some eager feeling. The voices had changed again, and were swaying, too, in a low singsong of adjuration.

Again, as in response, came the dual outglaring, so that every one before it stood vivid in vision,—marshmen, hill-folk, city rabble, villagers, even a few soldiers, nearly all the forms, it seemed, of London life within or without the city. Into the heart of the light

Osburn could not look; and he felt, rather than saw, that it had two radiant points as before. Sounds came out of it also, addressing Cian, as it seemed to the Frank, in a tongue unknown; but he could only turn his eyes a little aside, and note what he might between darkness and dazzle.

For Cian, that light soon softened into friendliness. He was aware of no cleft in the hillside through which it could come; but he seemed to follow it to a subterranean chamber, with walls like those he had known at the winning of the golden corselet; glassy as by fusion, dense and ponderous, yet illumined, by a dreamy light. He was dreamily aware also of a presence within it, but the form and aspect he could not certainly perceive.

The voice which Osburn heard, and many more as well, came thence to him with meaning; for he well knew that ancient speech of the island, which was now forgotten by all save adepts among the priesthood and wonder-workers. The popular fancy ascribed it unto the squat necromancers of the north who dwelt in hollow terraced hills before ever the Druids came, and who were Celtic in nothing except as being the topic of Celtic song and tale.

“He who cometh,” it said, “bringeth my own.”

It was a mellow sound, though so deep and resonant. Cian understood the allusion to the golden mystery that he wore. After a pause, the voice resumed.

“What he hath won he shall wear, and not yet hath ended the winning. Yet the victory lies not in wheels, nor shod hoofs, nor winged blades, nor the fleetness of men and beasts, nor in any manner of onset. The great waves shatter on the rock while it abides their coming. If it roll to meet them, it shall be lost in the depth of the sea. I, Vran, am the life of London. He who would go forth to battle, leaving his life behind, must needs take death in its stead.”

Cian was awed and shaken; yet he felt that he must make answer and inquiry. He spoke with reverence. “As one who has been

admitted to the light, and has wrestled in the darkness, I would ask why it is your august will to lay a palsy on us."

There was no reply. The light shone on. The crowd listened, recognizing no word.

He inquired again: "Is it the part of men to nestle under the hovering wing while the Saxon hawk is sweeping the field?"

There was stillness again, and he fancied an angry wavering. Those about him shared the fancy; for there were murmurs, blaming presumption. But he hardened himself and raised his voice. "London is without the walls no less than within. What aid had I of Vran when the queen was threatened in the marshes by the Lea? Withdraw, then, your prohibition, I adjure you! Let the life of London willingly go forth with its strength."

At this there was an indescribable stir of light and sound within the crypt. The voice thundered forth amid many echoes. "Woe unto him who heeds not the words I have spoken! Woe unto him who idly breaks my holy peace and vigil!"

Then, as by the shutting of a lid, all was blackness and silence.

There breathed a great sigh among the people, as knowing that the awful communion was ended. A few struck lights, after a brief time, and began to talk, though suppressedly, as they moved away.

Cian knew that their attention was on him, but with little hostility.

"Hardihood wins favor," said Osburn. "The more they think, the stronger you will be with them." He held himself erect and weightily while thus moralizing; but, when they were well around the curve of the hill, he drew a long breath and moved faster. "Better a terrible friend than a terrible enemy,"he said bravely; yet his eyes went back over his shoulder.

"What do you call this Vran?" he demanded a little later, pausing squarely; "Ghost? God? Devil?"

"Pray ask me an easier question,"responded Cian. "A highly patriotic and mysterious Londoner, with a sense of what is due to himself—so much, at least, one may say. What he was, you partly know, and there is not any man who knows wholly. What he is—may be a mere trick of priestcraft and false voices."

For there was a soreness in Cian over that abrupt ending.

Osburn looked at him, and shook his head. "A hard saying that for a brother wonder-worker!" he observed very dryly.

"You do me wrong,"answered Cian, with smiling dignity. "If I have concerned myself about hidden things, it was not for deceiving."

Yet each remained in doubt, with little faith as to the explanation by trickery. Osburn was half-minded to move his headquarters. But there was a sense of shame in flight, even from the unearthly. And by the haunter's own averment, it was a place of peculiar safety.

Cian slept little, what he had seen and heard lingering on in his mind. Moreover, there was the dread that, on next issuing from the walls, he would be at the head of ghost-seeing men foredoomed by their fears to disaster.

When the queen heard the tale the next morning, it was with no great heightening of concern, that being near its highest already. At heart she would have been better pleased than the men with extra human aid; but its limitation stirred her more angrily. What, desertion as the price of protection? Defensive magic bounded by a petty ring! Cruel selfishness made holy! Shameless and shocking niggardliness of the mighty dead! Her own words made her tremulous; but she was set on befriending the weak in their peril at any risk, and on doing her full duty, although every power of the unknown should thunder against it.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIRST SERVICE OF THE CHARIOTS.

The wonderful rush of the gale,
The pervasion of fire, the war of youth.
—CUHELN.

NOT so much for the oracles of the dead as for the tidings of Wulfhelm, such communities as were still outlying were warned and summoned yet again. Colchester, confident in its strength and the weakness of the enemy before it, sent no fugitives, but even aid. Oisin, for the lake-village, responded with a blast of denunciation directed against all truckling to the heathen and the devil. But there were few other exceptions, and in particular every soul southward of the Thames came pouring in with absolute assurance of the enemy close behind.

As always, these first tales brought the danger nearer than the fact; and there was little certainty of any kind until Tigernach, with a party of horsemen, scouted out to a hill overlooking a good reach of the road.

Here he came suddenly on a mounted party of Jutes or Kent-folk, well-blown with the speed of their advance, and sent them back hurriedly, for that was not the arm in which the Saxon excelled. Behind were many footmen, the main body of the army, so the pursuit went no further. The glance that he gave in turning showed Tigernach the three Saxon kings riding together near the van, Eschwine between the others.

He bore the news homeward. Before his party had crossed London bridge, there was a great uprolling of smoke and flame from more than one spot behind. Voids cried, "The Sword of Fire! the Sword of Fire!"with quick recognition.

A great overspreading and sagging of clouds coming up from the sea threatened these Saxon bonfires with a speedy end. “Something from heaven for our side,” said Osburn. “To clog our wheels with mire,” grumbled Cian. “We must make a push while we can.”

Acting on this thought, he set his chariot-procession in motion. Many horsemen and footmen followed, the legionaries and some Christian bodies of the town men pushing forward with alacrity; while the greater mass, who adored Vran or feared him, required all Aurelia’s urging. The most utterly prophecy-ridden were left at the last in the outer defences, being more likely to spread panic than to fight.

Cian found his enemy in the open country south- ward beyond the marshes and the first low hills,—a great spear-point of men, with another close behind. Eschwine strode in the tip of the former; in the space before the latter rode the young king of West Kent.

Cian threw out his few archers in front, with orders to aim at Eschwine only; then spread his chariots in a very open line, so there should be no entangling in the rush. Osburn and Tigernach led the cavalry, next behind, fairly numerous and good. Last of all the infantry, to cover the archers when these should be driven in or withdraw, and at all times to afford a bristling nucleus. At the best the array was pitiably meagre in comparison, excepting those wheeled engines of uncertain prowess.

The first drops of rain were beginning to fall, as these came rolling forward. The archers, well ahead, kept the game to themselves for a time, excepting trivial responses from scattered Saxon bowmen. But when the especial intent became obvious, and Eschwine was nearly smitten off his feet by half a dozen arrows that reached him all together, a wrathful outcry arose, and men broke from the wedge to get at his assailants. Before these were back again, the chariots raced in among them, each with its chosen fighting man and with its armed charioteer on the shaft. Perhaps a third of them bore also revolving scythe-blades on their axles. As they rushed through, mowing and tearing, the horsemen swept around on either side, and dashed against the broader part of the wedge.

Nothing stood before it, not Eschwine, who was all but ridden down by Cian himself, and swept, exchanging blows as best he could, back to the post of his Kentish ally. Not that potentate either; for the very next chariot on the right sheared at one plunge both the legs from his screaming horse, and it and he rolled together. Not the Saxons of either front in either wedge, for the mounted spear-man of that day was the better soldier, and what was not done by the thrust, or the push of the excited beast, the downward sweep of metal was sure to make good. Thus line dragged into line, then broke in fragments, while the battle-axes took them keenly, and the two charging bodies of horsemen met in the midst.

Then was there mere confusion of fighting, where the darting Britons drove at any Saxon cluster which might be found, and the Saxons made head as they could defy them, for few would leave the spot. Meanwhile the British footmen came up, and a far greater number of the Saxons.

Obstinately the heathen clung, like winter fruit, to pole or rein or wheel, avoiding as best they could those ghastly mowers of steel, or clambering up on the chariot from behind. Withal they were so very numerous and determined that it was often hard to make any headway; and here and there a vehicle was overturned with slaughter of the inmates. Although Cian and Tigernach disengaged a few horsemen and chariots to beat back or cut up reenforcements, the great bulk of these last very quickly took part in the battle.

There was now only a great mass of Saxon footmen, thinner in places and thicker in places, through which the chariots were cutting lanes; while into the borders horsemen and footmen were pecking with desultory assaults. But the soil was not over firm, and every rush of the wheels tore it, under the incessant and thickening rainfall, while the hoofs and wrestling feet aided in churning it into mire.

A little more, and that power on which Cian most relied would be quite helpless. At the first outlet, he sought the open ground with such as he could signal, and then, in swift rushes, freed others where best he could; and the remainder, catching his thought, everywhere

essayed the same. So, very briefly, there were again two hostile armaments, each arrayed disorderly, but one vastly the greater, with a narrow interval between.

Then came a great Saxon onset, heavier at the right, where Eschwine led. Osburn struck across his path, with quick interchange of blows, whereby each was slightly wounded, until the wave of men bore the Frank aside, and the Sword of Fire well into the mass of his enemies. But the chariots, even where they could not move freely, at least served as barriers, and a group of three or four that were anchored most firmly checked him like a rock. The British footmen clambered upon them, and smote down, or thrust spears through the wheels and between them, and under the horses' necks and bodies; and there was a very bedlam of struggling and screaming.

Meantime Cian had wheeled about with two or three dozen of his war-vehicles where the ground was firmer, and came plunging in a half-circle to take the Saxons crosswise—the horses gasping and wild with effort, the wheels going deeper and deeper, now and then coming up with great leaps that nearly unsettled charioteer and rider together, or bounding aslant, in clashing over fallen men, who lay singly or in locking couples, and could not shun them. It was the clumsiest and most preposterous of counter-charges, but it served.

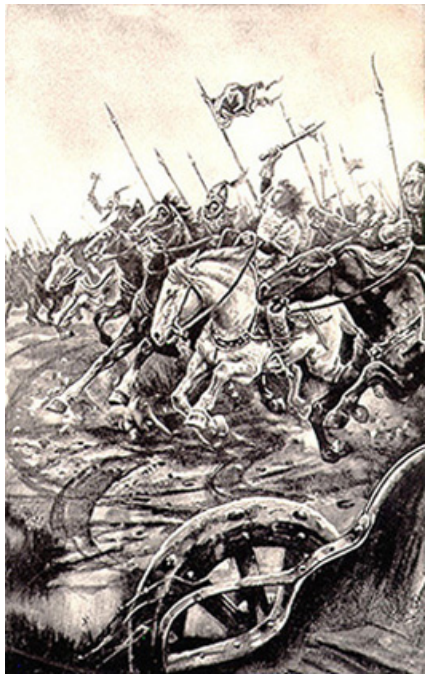
At the same time, those who were a-saddle, minding less the mire, struck in where they could, or galloped along the border of the Saxons, lancing them. So, after a time, the flood was surely ebbing; and Eschwine, finding himself altogether cut off, doggedly fought his way out and back, and was glad enough to be with his men again.

"The work of the chariots is done for this day," said Cian bitterly. "We must not leave them here." It was a hard thought that they might have won him a victory, but for the falling deluge and the softening ground.

So, before the enemy had yet gathered themselves to try another assault, he set his footmen to freeing the sunken wheels, and led his

mounted lances and battle-axes in a spirited dash at Eschwine, to cover the work.

That astute Saxon was not at all deluded, yet had no choice but to meet it. Indeed, Cian's weapon, quivering as it struck his sword-blade aside, very nearly transfixed him. But at that moment Cian reeled, the spear-point veered, the shaft rattled on the ground. An arrow, shot out of the mass of men before him, had seemingly struck him full in the breast over the sprig of misletoe, an inviting mark. Yet, as he came upright again, and turned, now sword in hand, all of either army who were near could well see that no part of the thin gold or silver had sufered any scath, and a great cry of magic went up about them.



"He Led His Mounted Lances and Battle-Axes, in a Spirited Dash at Eschwine."

Eschwine himself, though he doubted, was no longer wholly in love with the encounter. Partly for this, and partly for Cian's greater skill,

it fared badly with the great Saxon, so that he took a sharp gash in the hand, and another in the cheek; and when he leaped up to grapple, the point met him half-way, cutting through the flesh of his left side. The hilt sounded against his ribs, driving him staggering earthward.

Then there was a rally of Saxons over him, and a wrangle of the old Greek and Roman fashion; and at the last Cian broke away with his men to rejoin the chariots, already moving cityward. The golden mail and the mistletoe spray were bright as ever. He had left nothing but his lance behind.

But the Saxons began to feel themselves victors, with the well-won prey escaping them, and ran breathlessly in pursuit. There were times when depth of soil gave them advantage; but in the main, traversing firmer ground, the superiority of four feet over two showed itself. If the Saxons broke ranks in over eagerness, Cian or Tigernach or Osburn, with a cohort, was back at a gallop among them directly. When the whole mass made a vehement push together, it was hampered on every side by light smiting charges that clung a moment, and came again, frittering away all impetus. At last, when a bit of gravelly upland was reached, within sight of the walls, and the rain ceased for a spell, Cian wheeled his chariots about, and struck back with them very surprisingly. The sun shone out on the moving steel with manifold glinting.

Before the forward running Saxons the British footmen had broken partly away, the horsemen also slanting off divergently. Through the gap hurried the gayly-clad stream of warlike men, the young king of West Kent at their head. Then wheels and scythes and horses and fighting men dashed at them in counter-charge all together, with a rumble and a crash; and, while they smote, the horsemen and footmen on either side smote also. There was very wild and reckless turmoil for a while of the blinded among the blinded, in the midst of which that long-tapering tongue of the Saxon army was torn and shredded, and so whirled back to the lower and softer ground.

Before they recovered, Cian was well on his way to the city. But one hope had failed him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MIRTHFULNESS OF GUINEVERE.

Usual is wind from the north,
Usual for maids to be lovely
Usual a handsome man in Gwynedd,
Usual after drinking is derangement of the senses.
—LLYWARCH.

ARTHUR the Emperor and his army, bound northward, made good progress, for all their many appurtenances; having under them an excellent Roman road, beaded with rich and helpful cities. Some of these contributed men also; but there was one at least which levied a draft on those gathered already. Yet, after tasting the good things of Verulam, and witnessing how much of the white glory of Rome was yet kept alive in the moonlit beauty of her shrines and porticos, and above all her great amphitheatre, it was not easy to remind her friendly people that they might as wisely have had care for stout walls and a better armament of their own, to keep these fair things in being all the longer.

Nor would it have served any purpose. Hither the wealth of Londinium, when once out of trade, had drifted for centuries; and though there had been a passing thrill of zeal and persecution, leaving still its memorials in a very few Christians of the Oisin type, the Rome which dreamed on in Verulam was mainly the nerveless and pleasure-loving Rome of the days before her fall.

Guinevere was infatuate with these people, their easy, laughing philosophy, and the indescribable loveliness of all things around. Even after departing northward, on the second day she declared herself aweary, and that she must needs return. A force went back with her for better protection, although the Emperor had been constrained to leave a garrison already.

"Verulam gives us not much in return," said he, "beside the memory of pleasant hours." He looked at her with kindly, wistful eyes, as though he would willingly have heard the wish recanted. She, giving look for look, warming and melting, made answer. "You know—how well you know!—that I shall follow when I am restored but ever so little. Must a woman be an iron campaigner, or there is no love for her?—not any, not any!"

For they had been betrothed since before leaving London. With the words repeated, she offered her lips bewitchingly. He kissed them, laughing, and yet again in his delight. "I would not have you an iron campaigner, Guinevere!" he answered; "it might be painful."

"How could I know?" she replied demurely. "Half the time you spend with Prince Llywarch or my uncle or your Lancelot, weaving plans, till I feel like a poor tangled fly, with you three grim spiders watching."

He laughed again. "Have you the heart, then, to call Llywarch 'grim,' and the daintily stately Maelgwn? Surely I shall tell them. Above all, since one of them must go with you."

She did not show the covert contemning smile that was in her. "You scarce can spare Llywarch's counsel," said she. "And he is anxious incessantly for Argoed. Maelgwn and I have long known each other, boy and girl; and for that little time I can abide his pretty graces."

This, to startle out any disguises of his, that she might see it. One reluctant word from him would have left Maelgwn to Arthur and the army. She had no mind to risk empire in any degree; although—that being safe—there was nothing to hamper her fancy and sportiveness, come of them what might.

But Arthur made no sign, being too trustful and too sure of his supremacy in all things, the grace and the foible which together slew him. "Let it be Maelgwn, then," said he; and embraced her lovingly for farewell. But when her face was safely turned away, her smile

did not resemble his, having a merry derision in it, not hostile, but foresightful and aware.

When Caradoc, her uncle, heard of this return, his brow grew stormy, and he sought her. There was long speech between them that wearied her, but she met him steadily with the uncomprehending openness of a child. "Why not Verulam, then? And why not Maelgwn, her own old playfellow, whom he had first invited?" And Caradoc, the rough and ready, though beginning doughtily, soon found himself at a loss how to speak and not to make more mischief.

Guinevere, to whom nothing could well have been suggested and found new, easily read him, and wondered at the dulness of men who read not her at all. Yet she knew that the veil over his vision was not so dense as that upon the Emperor's, the love being less in degree and in nature different. So she deemed best that their talk should end without more risk of disclosure.

Therefore her under lip quivered, and quivered again; and there were grief and pride in her face as she stiffened herself, sitting upright.

"Since every coming and going of mine is to bear comment," she said, then broke off, adding, after a minute, "will even the Empress—when she *is* Empress—be spared Prince Caradoc's censure?"

Her tone stung him; and he went out forthwith, holding his breath, lest he should say more. Yet soon he laughed aloud in the surprise of finding so much loftiness where other traits had been. "Our kitten will bear rule overwhelmingly," he cried. "Ay, but what man's ruling?"

Meanwhile the "kitten" laughed also, rolling about, after her kind, the silken ball wherewith she had been embroidering. But, however she might seem to the nearly gigantic Caradoc, there was nothing minimized nor pettily outlined about the charms of Guinevere. As

little, also, of over amplitude. If kitten at all, the word must have belonged to some greater and more perilous exemplar of the feline tribe.

As always, she had her will; and Maelgwn rode back with her, flattered, tempted, anticipating, yet uncertainly at ease, finding her the very perfection of uncomprehending, incomprehensible decorum. At him, too, though in her heart she liked him best, Guinevere was covertly smiling. In Verulam there were labyrinths, or what might pass for such, with many things to see.

In these, wholly by his contrivance as he thought, this Lancelot, before three days went by, was for many minutes lost with her and wandering. They paused in a shadowy corner, half below the ground, lit faintly by a narrow stream of yellow motes, which came through some cranny above them. Little else could he see, except bright living eyes fixed on his own, as if they would speak to him thrillingly. With no word or movement of hers—the provocation yet came upon him so strongly—he took Guinevere, all of a sudden, and kissed her face over and over; until—rallying but a little before searchers came—she made him, by word and gesture, set her free, and stood quivering, palpably insulted.

Yet not so that others should see in that dimness. Nor, as they passed out through it, was her cold silence toward him observable, all being full of query and narration as to the losing of their way. In the sunlit outer air she was quite her daily self again; and he wondered at her containment, which allowed not so much as an angry flush or a meaning glance to appear. Yet he knew well that, whether for punishment or reward, the matter would not thus end between them, and that the memory would dwell through life with him, over stirringly, of those few moments in the mazes of Verulam.

As soon as might be he sought—and found with no great effort—opportunity to make his mercy-beseeching plea. She heard him at first severely and with extreme offence, made obvious; but his passion was permitted to move her, above all by memory-awakening allusions to early days. She must grant, judicially, that he had fared

ill with her, and that the fault was not all his own. She hinted of her uncle's pressure, and grave reasons of state and duty, and paused on the very verge of remorsefully hinting her feminine love of brilliancy, and the tempting attributes that begirt the station of the Emperor.

The regret that she would not precisely utter he yet found in her half-sigh, when she announced, with positiveness of words—and almost of tone and mien—that her lot was now settled beyond all rightful disturbance. She displayed to him didactically and with elaboration how very censurable and distressful such disturbance would be; for though their earlier experience might this once excuse—as but brotherly—such tokens of kindly feeling, these were easily to be misunderstood by the world and by one above them.

Moreover, if there were to be continuance thereof during her high betrothal, how could she trust him to leave her in perfect serenity even when uplifted to the Emperor's side? wherein might be a gulf of ruinous disaster beyond all foreseeing! True words, as the event proved very sadly, but with suggestion in them.

When he had gone away, contrite externally, she bethought herself in idleness how long it would be ere such dangerous dallying would come to pass again. She had no regret so far, since nothing was as yet seen or known; and Maelgwn, the daring, fervent, beautiful, and forbidden—was he not tempting also? Yet wisdom might hold with abstinence until all was safe. There were moods when, regarding what she had in the balance, she wished him well away.

Oddly, before long he felt likewise; although his heart had exulted as he left that adorable presence, and the half-admissions extorted seemingly from the grip of will and duty. Defiance ruled him too, of himself and of all others. A power bore him along unresisting, with only some dim inner question as to what should follow. Yet in a little time that questioning grew; and one word which he had heard used of them in the labyrinth abode with him still—the word "lost."

How many other losses there were, and worse—of fidelity and honor and manhood and all that was princely! The soul, most of all her soul, counted for something likewise; and so did the words that she had said as to dark days in store for all the land. Now and again such thoughts leaped out upon him as real things, and he shivered in the saddle under the bright sun. He had never more than a faint hope of resistance, of holding aloof. A grasp was on him, at once loved and hated, until it seemed that interposition of any sort would be welcome. Yet he resented the word of command when it came, though it was almost a summons to battle.

This was from Arthur, most kindly, with no mention of the watchful prompter Caradoc. At the second reading, the wholesomeness of a soldier's effort came home to Maelgwn; with awakening self-scorn for lingering softly and warmly about a woman soft and warm—and untrue. At the third, he was all abashed by the greater strength and manhood of his imperial leader, too great and kind to mistrust on the very brink of treachery.

In the quick revulsion of his wayward soul, he was all passionate devotion to that injured comrade-king, all remorse and bitter eagerness to repair the wrong by fierce service and hot blood. Yet, courteously, he went first to Guinevere with tidings and farewells.

She read them before he spoke, and forthwith perversely wished that he should stay. Also she was pleased to keep him in the wrong, with no mitigation, but rather exacerbation, of shame. Her resolute austerity of aspect, so foreign to her texture and outlines, and broken by quick waves of feeling that seemed to be beyond all government, was a nearly intolerable thing. At the last he broke away blindly, not knowing what would befall if he were to look and listen longer.

When he had gone she was first angered and astounded; then mirthful, with some touch of scorn; but after a little not ill pleased that the risk of unwary demeanor was in any way removed from her. Yet Verulam soon grew a weariness; and the game in which she had so great a stake called her northward by easy stages to that bright border city where she knew the imperial encampment to be.

CHAPTER XIX.

ARTHUR AT LEGIOLUM.

> The first thing to be aimed at
> In every usage and action congenial to the brave
> Is a pure life unto the day of judgment.
> —TYSSILIS.

MAELGWN had been called to withstand those North-folk and South-folk who were pressing through the fens and up along the streams to the assault of Caer Lerion. They menaced also the cities of the Cam, and that great Ermine road which was the main artery of Arthur's northern army.

All along it, where the risk was great, troops had been left in clusters and nuclei; but these needed leadership. Meanwhile the enemy, though in scattered bands, grew daily thicker and more fierce, with concerted movement seemingly in aid of the vaster gathering under Ossa Cyllalaur.

He felt the opportunity tinglingly, being quite in the mood for smiting out self-chastisement on some one else. All the better that this some one should be Saxon! His overflowing zeal and vigor reanimated all his following, who so maltreated their many scrambling assailants, by ambuscade, open rout, relentless chasing down, and whirlwind-like surprise in their own strongholds, that he was soon able to promise the Emperor immunity from further trouble.

It was too brief and confused an experience to be called a campaign; a mere chance-medley in detail, fought out by detached parties in a dozen places at once, but withal co-acting rationally to one end. Arthur's best lieutenant began to feel in some measure rehabilitated in his own eyes.

Arthur, too, was relieved; for he needed all watchfulness toward the front. Elsewhere everything went well. His appointment of Constantine, at once a pleasure and a tactful compromise expedient, had amply justified itself. Many threads of management were weaving through the fingers of the merchant who had been king so nearly. Never had Legiolum been more adequately provided, even in Roman times, with all that could comfort man, or make him formidable. Recruits came also with his provision trains from distant valleys. With the spreading of the news, there were adventurers riding in daily to volunteer.

The brightness of the city was a magnet. The reckless, mirth-loving temper of a frontier garrison was enriched by the still remaining beauties of an elder time wherein lay its pride, and by the influence of that imperial court which blended Celtic picturesqueness with the lingering majesty of Rome.

What more had earth to offer? Men rode into Legiolum to the tossing of light words and lances, high-hearted with the mead-cup and the zeal to display, eager for the beauty and the thrill awaiting them, and for battle in that realm of wild emprise and mystery that lay beyond.

Arthur, knowing deeply his people and in full sympathy with all that lent glamour to their life, wisely gave rein to their romance, enlarging it in every way. Week in and out, there was jousting, with the clash of keen weapons on armor. The Emperor himself often came to look on, thoughtful; also the sunbright Guinevere; the presence of either lifting strife into frenzy.

Only in such things could she comprehend and aid him, but there she was a power. Not queen of the revels only, but queen of all revelry. Furious it grew at times, yet never beyond her pace; and frivolous, yet never too light for her footing.

There were some who shook their heads over this, but their uncertainties could not live on before her gracious tongue and eye. Mindful of what presence was near, and admonished by the near past of Verulam to be wary, Guinevere was a masterpiece now of

giddiness adroitly shown to be in keeping with wise policy, of exuberant kindliness that never became unqueenly, of extravagance in genial merriment, wholly delightful.

Yet at times what was most earnest in Arthur went back to a nobler queenliness beside the Thames, or forward to matters of hope and faith in which his sunbeam-goddess could have no share, or out toward his redoubtable enemy of Caer Ebrauc, with real longing for a trial of skill in something more manly than cajolement. He could only promise, in self-assurance, to be strong for both; and protest that she was the very bloom and sparkle of life to him, which he must not altogether forego.

Yet in duty he must watch London and that stately maid whom his word had lifted into danger. It was a task made easy by the solicitude of Constantine. At first all went well. Disquieting rumors followed, which yet might be set aside. Then, suddenly as a cloud-burst, there fell on them all the tale of Eschwine's treachery, Aurelia's danger at the lake-village, the swift sequence of punishment and rescue, and the Saxon's flight to kinfolk beyond the river, with all that it presaged.

Arthur sprang to his feet, and smote out his anathema. Constantine waited before him, watchful, reticent, and bitter; for he loved his daughter, and harbored unacknowledged hope. Now what dreadful things had nearly befallen her, while a lesser woman filled his Emperor's heart and eyes?

"It was Prince Cian who saved her," he said.

"God bless him!" cried Arthur. "He never de-served better of me; and that is saying much undoubtedly. As to Eschwine, let him wait. Other Saxons claim me now. Yet if there were a myriad, I would get at him yet for this,—and with the hand of death. Meanwhile, pray urge on her to keep within the walls."

"Prince Cian has already done so."

Arthur moved uneasily, but answered, “His are very safe hands. Worthy of any reward.”

After that, little came to them beside matters of preparation, until the sudden march of the Saxon kings on London, and their struggle with the chariots in the mire. Then Constantine and Vortimer, this once together, were for detaching a strong corps to relieve the city. All the northern men protested as strongly, Guinevere siding with her gay companions. Arthur stood in the strain of counsel, wavering beyond his wont, until fate spoke the final word for him by the mouth of Llywarch.

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE VALES OF ARGOED.

> The men of Argoed have ever supported me.
> —LLYWARCH.

THE absorption of the Prince of Argoed in his little realm had grown on him daily, as he went northward from London with Arthur's army. In his genial way he was a man of duty, nor could anything warm or brighten him more than his people's love. On the very eve of the entry into Legiolum he sought and obtained the Emperor's assent to be gone.

"For surely," said Arthur, "no truer man ever went anywhere. Take Dynan, if you will, for company, and bring me word of whatever you may find that will be any aid."

In the spirit of their time, that friendly pair, all alone, rode straight out into the outlaw-haunted and homeless land which lay next beyond them on the northwest, as though adventures were the especial gifts of heaven. Their voices went ringing in song through the hollow woodlands and the morning frost, or echoed among great rocks at the close of the short, still day.

Beside the night-fire on the hill-top they matched well in minstrelsy; although Llywarch touched the harp to his own lays, Dynan, as he said, to those of many others. But they were every way strange to his companion, and some had an elfin revelry to make one stare. Questioning drew only a laughing answer. Whatever the truth might be, such melody suited well the slender lance of fortune, his nimble wayward wit, his flitting unexpectedness, his unvanquishable gayety. Surely he might well be half akin to the wild wee people of the hollowed hills, driven from the sunlight to the moonlight, yet whirling their dances and pealing their elfish laughter in the face of an iron fate.

One day these twain came suddenly upon three hostile men, who would have been called felon-knights in later days; very dirty, stout vagabonds, in armor which was green with verdigris, who lived mainly by robbing lone houses, and picking up what they might between town and town. They showed fight, being the stronger party as it seemed, and also hungry, but did little damage except to the harp-strings which were hanging from Llywarch's saddle-bow. After that there was voice-music only, but it answered; and this was their only adventure on the way to Argoed.

It was a bright morning when they entered the head of one of its lesser branching valleys. From a spring at their feet a rill went downward to a slender waterfall, and a woodman's cabin, where children already were looking up from their play, ready to run or cry. Other such homes were visible every way among bare hillside boughs, or in dimpling hollows and glades. There was nothing squalid about them as far as could be seen. The unseasonable mildness of the melting air made the crude scene gracious after the desert they had left. Dynan uttered a low exclamation of pleasure.

"Yes," said Llywarch, "there has ever been warmth in Argoed." He stooped, and tossed the water with his hand so that the drops fell in a shower. "How bright they are!" he said, "as, indeed, they ought to be. They go to make the Vale Royal. The least of them is on its way to the unconquered fortress-queen beside the Dee. Come, come!"

He strode down the hillside, leading his horse. No boy returning home after weary exile was ever more blithe of heart.

But this proved too much for the wavering covey below. They hurried into hiding with much outcry of terror.

He called after them, in a mellow voice of reassurance, "It is only Llywarch! Your good friend, Prince Llywarch! I shall not hurt you."

But evidently the name had no great nor sure meaning to them after his long absence. Not so with their mother, peering anxiously from the doorway. She stepped forth at once, calling it abroad as joyful

tidings, for the ears of her husband and son at work not far away; then advanced to meet them, with a pleased, if ungraceful, welcome. Yet, almost before she spoke, "Llywarch, Llywarch!" resounded from every side, and hurrying figures were breaking the brittle undergrowth.

"This is a better reception than any monarch could give you!" exclaimed Dynan, doubling the delight of his friend.

"We are of one mind on that," answered Llywarch; and in a moment he was among the throng of them, with heart-greetings and eager inquiries. But presently the two must mount again and hurry on.

As they rode, the valley wound about, and joined with others and widened, until they could see where it ended, as did many like it from every quarter, in a sunken, hill-rimmed space like a bowl. Neat hamlets enlivened many parts of it, with signs of thrift multiplying all about them. A walled circle near the outlet showed where Rome had left her mark through early imperfect imitations. Near the centre of the bowl, in the sunset, over the level land, his little capital, Loidis, lay smiling.

"I don't see that you were distressfully needed here, after all," said Dynan, looking about him.

"With such stewardship, a man might safely go anywhere and stay forever."

"I must tell them that," answered Llywarch; "here come the stewardesses."

"Those ladies?" for a party of distinction, at a distance, were riding towards them.

"My mother and my sister—Freur by name," explained Llywarch, bowing sedately; though, of course, it was well known already to his friend.

In a few moments these were with them; the elder lady of a gracious comeliness, and showing all the vigor of that long-lived race; the daughter brightening out of habitual thoughtfulness, which yet had a gentle and sympathetic charm. She was darker than her brother and slighter, with all allowance for the difference of sex, yet indefinitely like him notwithstanding.

Dynan rightly felt sure that these were very good people, not proud beyond what is well for mortals, but above all meanness, and alive to every call of love and duty. They gave him a very frank and ample welcome to Argoed.

Freur rode back with him, chatting of many things,—her pretty toy-world so much more perfect in itself than she knew!—the outer wonders which had come to her only in reflected vision or echo, but of which none could know better than he.

Then Dynan told her the glory of camp and court and lovely dream-like cities; the shattering of arms on armor in mimic battle; the riding two by two, day by day, on high and mysterious quest over bleak waste-land or through goblin forestry; the putting forth of ships adventurously westward, where any monstrous form or scene divine might yet be hidden; the century-long combat with the ever-raging sea-heathen, wherein spears were bowed like the bowing of thicketry, and came on with the rush of the wind. All this was an awakening to her indeed.

Llywarch heard, with less enthusiasm, from his mother those secrets of statecraft which even princedom in a glove-box could not wholly dispense with. Here the village leader to be conciliated, there the trusty subject who had deserved every rewarding, and again the spirit of mischief that stood cryingly in need to be repressed. There was no disparaging smile on the face of the court-minstrel and widely ranging soldier. He well knew how real and great his mother found these things, and what witness to her methods there was around him.

A few happy days followed, in and around Loidis. Llywarch brought the flutter of new life into the little state. Here and there men were sown over it who had fought for him and Arthur long ago; or households that missed a member now in camp under the walls of Legiolum, or, it may be, garrisoning the far southwest. He was the pride and hero of the land unto all; its future "shelter in battle" should danger turn aside, as well might happen, into the quiet dells of Argoed.

The eyes of Dynan also found enough to fill them. Loidis was charming, though less charming than Freur. Here he came upon no great ruinous villa, no disused military station half made over to suit later needs. Roman civilization had been felt only as a humanizing thrill, a delicate tint and flavor. The best of this lived on, with much that was delightful beside.

There was no noisome quarter, no street where Freur could not accompany him with pleasure. The houses were often very attractive in coloring and design, the streets broad and well-shaded. Down the stream which flowed through it, lazy flat-boats often floated, laden with fleeces and orchard produce for the queen-city of the Dee.

But soon all this must be left behind for an inspection of Cian's patrimony, where already the Saxons were troubling.

CHAPTER XXI.

A RIDE THROUGH THE SAXON-WASTED LAND.

By the common oath,
In the midst of his Cymry
Defending Tren,
That wasted town.—LLYWARCH.

TWENTY men rode with them; this time not through desolation at the first, for some hearth-smoke was always rising. Yet the human thread remained very slender everywhere.

Toward the end they came into a better region than the hill-country of Argoed; but plainly it had fared much worse. The ruins which they passed were significantly humble ones, and of recent date. There was that in the air which made human spirits fail. The faces of men looked haunted and fugitive.

Dynan felt it all with strange intensity. Though dropping his passing word of hope on unpromising soil, he sat often for a long time by the fire with chin on hand. His soul, tired of despondent things, went lightly over the hills in his musing, to find Freur of the pensive eyes in her cloud of hair, amid the calm of eventide.

It passed on also into a future that should not be lived alone. In lovely scenes he saw her; but all faded away as he sank from those welcome visions into the wilder, vaguer, and more shifting ones of sleep.

Then a dread thing came to pass. A woman-like form held his eye. Waveringly apparelled was she in that lightest, filmiest green of the bud-bursting in early spring. Whether of good or evil, he could not say, but a being of the subtler world most surely. He could not fix any lineament and remember it. There were only the essence of a mockery, a living, denying perversity, an inexplicable power to whirl away and inthrall. He was aware of motion, as though that

head of haze and starlight were very slowly shaken. A voice like running water reached his ears—"No, for I claim you." There was a sound as of the blowing of his own elfin horn, a rush upon him of many terrors; and in the dawn he awoke. But thereafter his mirth grew fitful and no longer free. The unearthly chord in him answered to unearthly vibrations.

Not all were overborne in Cian's realm, but industry had been broken. Why sow, for the raiding enemy to reap or destroy utterly? Why build the bonfire of the Furies? Life tended toward the simple ways of hunting and herding. Flocks were gathered within walls of a night, and often by day.

They were made also to grow, in a manner, by wide-ranging, retaliatory forays. Villages had given place to towers with outlying enclosure, even the prince's birthplace being more a fortress than a town.

There they found Cian's father, badger-gray, and badger-like in endurance, with two war-hardened sons, both a little uncouth by reason of harsh conditions and stunting. Proud of his eldest, fighting far away with Arthur, the old man, from first to last, had set his teeth, holding the bones of his princedom with a bitter grip, sending news of each victory as best he could, but stifling every cry for aid. Even now, in trebly welcoming Llywarch, this tough old border-king—who still maintained that title—must needs tempt him aside, and beseech him to be silent. "For we would not draw Cian away from the greater work before him."

Yet the thought crossed the Prince of Argoed that right here, in the midst of these hate-stimulated, half-organized resources, well within stroke of the enemy, there might be for Cian of the Chariots such an opportunity as no one had yet felt or seen.

Even to Llywarch, free as any living man from Druidic ties and mystery, strange allusions were addressed, having to do with the occult power, fore-knowledge, and design of his friend. There was very evident expectancy abroad of great things from him.

In this sequestered and battered bit of the island were more men than elsewhere who had openly taken to the restored rites of Mona with superabundant zeal.

But Llywarch and Dynan were not even yet in the extremest ragged selvage of living Britain. The rush of the northwestern Saxons through the old soldier population—the far-descended offspring of many races in garrison along the great wall—had borne fragments before it which resisted as they could, and for the most part left them stranded at last along the edge of the great woods or in isolated fastnesses.

Thence at intervals masses of people came in, of varying quality, often before unheard of. Still out in that land, now growing strange unto men, abode the sons of the crags and caves, the daughters of myth and rumor. It seemed well every way to seek these lost people of the wild, and also to see with his own eyes what the Saxons were doing. Therefore they took horse again, with Cian's youngest brother for escort and guide; also a few of his men. Their course was partly at random, with frequent changes, but having certain points in mind where people who had taken refuge were reported.

One of these they found, but not its people, nor any hint as to why they had gone, or when they had been borne away.

Another small settlement lay north of the Saxon war-road which ran toward the cities and valleys of the west. There was little to be noted in it beyond a very hideous idol-god in a hollow and doleful place. Even a sea-robber would hardly covet it.

"I thought I knew all about Poverty," said Dynan; "but until now I never saw him bowed down to and worshipped. There's not a doubt of it. As soon as I set eyes on the old fellow, I knew him for the jolly abominable acquaintance of early days."

These demi-savages were but faintly stirred by the name of Arthur or by any news from the south. Yet they fancied themselves, vaguely and crudely, more in the world than were some others,—especially

the cliff-people, of whom, in their uncouth way, they told wonderful things, after the manner of men concerning what is hid by a veil, though near. For across the interval bands of Saxons and lawless renegades were roaming continually.

Not long after setting forth again, the explorers had some taste of these latter people. Riding briskly through open woods, their hoofs rang out such music from the frozen ground that they tempted an ambush. A flight of arrows, coming from everywhere, emptied three saddles together; and then spears were in play.

During the first bewildered moments, there were those who would have fled if they had any fancy whither to go. But Llywarch and Cian's brother held them together by voice and deed; while Dynan, catching sight of horses, made for them with a great clamor, whereby the Saxons lost their main advantage, being driven to hurry from covert in defence of their booty. Yet even this proved unavailing; and in the end they were driven away, leaving most of it.

From one of them, wounded and captured, Llywarch learned that their foray was a most recent one, made on those very people whom he sought.

CHAPTER XXII.

AMONG THE CAVE-DWELLERS OF THE SCAUR.

With a fair maid, a paragon of splendid form,
Have I been wandering in gloom and among sprites.
—MERDDYN.

THE snow was driving, the wind was making uncanny noises, and the night was coming on with benumbing cold in those naked heights where Llywarch and his company had travelled for a day and more, when they rode out suddenly on the brink of a cliff. Below their horses' heads there was nothing but air; a great rough wall, snow-dimmed, opposite; the bottom of the cleft in shadow already.

"It must be the place—the Scaur, as they call it," said Dynan, but not very confidently; for of late nothing had been quite certain to them except losing their way in the storm. "Look!" he exclaimed the next moment, jubilantly pointing across.

The sunset reflection from a cloud that floated high was thrown aslant a ledge of the opposite cliff. There, faintly rose-flushed in it, stood a token, quaint and homely, of man's presence,—a brown goat, motionless as though carved from the rock.

"Not wild," said Cian's brother. "He listens for men without being afraid."

Then, drawing breath, all of them raised a shout together, which the echoes hurled from side to side below, prolonging it down the valley.

At once there rose the barking and baying of many excited dogs of every degree. Human voices awoke also, in tones of concern and warning, then ceased with a sudden hush. A half-grown lad, bow in hand, was where the goat had been, peering keenly upward, but holding himself ready to spring away at need. The arrows which he

carried were held loosely, as though snatched up on the moment. A ragged mantle of some bright stuff dropped from him as he turned, showing a goat-skin tunic below. But the knife-hilt in his girdle had the glitter of jewellery, and he was brow-bound with gold like a chief.

At first sight of them he called out gladly, then paused, shading his eyes for closer scrutiny. Thereupon they announced their names and quality. He seemed to strain in comprehending them amid that reverberation of sound; but he repeated "Argoed" with evident recognition. He indicated a way down quite near them, and shouted delightedly below. Then the hubbub began again, but in a different tone. They saw him hurry down, with a gesture to show that he was coming to guide them.

It was needed. On reaching the shelving ravine of their pathway, they found it so enveloped in murk, so steep and narrow, winding and uncertain, that they slipped willingly one by one from their saddles, and felt their way cautiously, bridle in hand. But before any real trouble had been encountered, sturdy figures were beside them, offering aid, though sometimes in unfamiliar speech. The stripling who had greeted them across the chasm was almost among the first, wofully out of breath, however willing to be voluble. There was a kindness and wildness of pride about him which they found becoming.

For some moments, to the discomfiture of their horses, great movements of light, as from hidden fires, had rolled and shot across the valley. As they turned a corner in reaching the level ground below, there came on them a flood of smoky brightness. Looking up-stream, the cliff swelled outward at a little height over the turf, so as to form a long, low, narrow chamber, now stockaded for the protection of cattle. Horns and ears appeared above the pointed stakes and well behind the gorse-fires, too much accustomed to excitement among their human companions for any grave disquiet. But their own horses and some of the recaptured ones made stout protestation. They had, therefore, to be picketed farther away.

On the flat summit of the arch a good pile of solid wood was blazing. Behind it, a broad patch of blackness, fitfully relieved, indicated the cavern home. All about it were men and women, variously clad, but mainly in some makeshift between civilization and the life of the wild.

One tall and martial figure, though very aged, borne just then on a litter through the entrance, lifted himself at sight of Llywarch and Dynan, and waved his hand with a sonorous call of welcome. A warmer greeting awaited them when they had mounted the path to his side.

"There is not much that Edyrn can bid you to," said he. "This hole in the cliff has been castle and banquet-hall and everything to us for so long that we have come to love it as men will love their home. But more sunshine than I can tell you is in the heart of a long-buried old man like me for the friends who come to him with kind faces and good deeds from the living world of his own people."

"Not surely Edyrn of the Scarlet Coat?" inquired Dynan, with a bewildered air.

The old man's eye brightened, but he smiled and shook his head. "That great hero—my father's father—died while I was young," said he; "before misfortune"—

At the word a spasm of coughing took him, and two of his people bore him out of the smoke and heat. At the same time a very graceful and womanly figure issued from the cave, going anxiously toward him, but with a side-glance at themselves in passing,—kind and grave and gently curious. Llywarch's heart stirred as at a summons. Those eyes of Lebanon and of the desert!

The same Oriental quality was in the countenance and bearing of the venerable man who now addressed them, a Christian priest, undoubtedly, by the surplice he wore. No need to explain that this, kept sacredly, had outlasted all other outer apparel, and so come of necessity into daily use. An odd contrast! for by all hints of aspect

that venerable figure should rather have been practising the grim rites of Astarte, or the thoughtful magic of Zoroaster, under fervid skies far away.

"Pray come in," said he. "The torches are lighting. The evening meal will soon be ready." They followed him into the now brightening and reddening cavern.

It was a great natural hall, with a long table in the middle, of oak slabs hewn to tolerable smoothness, but left uncovered. Seats of various patterns, mostly crude, were along the sides; one at the farther end being throne-like and carved with elaboration, as if brought from elsewhere. Many doorways opened into branching cave-chambers, which served the various needs of the settlement. Some of these were left open, others hung with skins by way of curtains; almost all had been smoothed and rounded from their first rude shape. As Llywarch was marshalled through one, there came to him through another a vision of a domed sparkling chapel, and a whitespread altar aglow with tapers, as at a thank-offering. He bowed without speech. It made his heart swell to think that his coming had been so devoutly welcome.

The priest had seen the motion. "We could not do less," he said. "We have never done less when any one has come to us, by God's will, out of the life of Christian Britain. We esteem them his light-bearers."

"Angels, that is to say," laughed out Dynan. "Oh, now, if you are going to convince us that we are angels!" His face grew respectfully sober, as he added, "But I saw indeed a spirit of the holy twilight pass in before you bade us."

Llywarch looked repression; but the priest accepted his words quite simply. "It was my dear daughter Sanawg," said he. "She has been lighting the tapers. You saw her also with the chief outside. And now I hope you will find here all that is needful. We of the under-world must content ourselves, not with what we would, but what we may."

Truly a very incongruous toilet provision awaited them. The water running freely through clefts in the rock fell, indeed, into a natural basin, half niche, half ledge, and thence into a greater one in the floor itself before passing away. But to supplement these—there being so many guests—a great variety of vessels had been brought and filled. One, richly ornamented, was of silver, heavy and pure, the little arrows, cupids, and snake-heads around its border, and the rounded outlines of the nude, struggling nymphs below, gleaming in the torchlight. Just beside it was another, of uncouth shape and ill-baked clay, almost like some child's plaything moulded of the roadway mire. Then a finely woven piece of tarred wicker ware. And again a shallow thing of fretted coralline pottery, very thin, and resonant even to light tapping.

"There is something of all our history here," said the old man, by way of comment. "If it links us one way with the savage, it links us the other way to kind homes which the Saxons burned for us, and the vanished beauty of Isurium."

"It is a city my father has spoken of," said Llywarch, with a tinge of sadness.

"And it may be of some who dwelt there," suggested the old man, smiling. "If so, you perhaps have heard of me, `Gwydion.'"

"Often!" exclaimed Llywarch.

"Who has not?" echoed Dynan.

In their minds an old song-fragment ran:—

"Gwydion ap Don of the toiling spirits,

By enchantment created a woman from blossoms."

With it came to mind a repute for learning so wide in range and uncommon in quality that the rumor of magic went with it. They saw how well the look of the man and his accessories fitted the

fancy. Dynan shifted his footing. Llywarch seemed half uneasy, then smiled at himself.

Gwydion reassured them pleasantly. “I could not venture to cope with one so much more nearly allied to faery,” said he, pointing to Dynan’s wonder-working heritage. “But in truth I am very far from a magician. Nothing more, I assure you, than a harmless old man, who has learned a little something of a great world, and a much greater one to follow. Meanwhile I aid a hero, still older, who needs it, and strive to keep yet a remnant in the right way. The church of God has taken to the under-world before.”

He bowed, and passed from them. Dynan hummed the song-words to himself again, “a woman from blossoms” coming forth aloud.

Llywarch splashed impatiently, half-drowning his face in the water, then raised it good-humoredly.

“I should not wonder if you have hit the mark,” said he.

When summoned again to the dining-hall, they found a fire burning at the far end, seemingly for the good of old Prince Edyrn, who sat nearest it, now in full vigor and almost impossible youthfulness. As he completed for them that joyous greeting which had been interrupted outside, they could see that their mere presence, and the revival of old patriarchal memories, had left little need for any other cordial. All the cavern people, both men and women, in due succession were made to know them, even to young maidens; for of these last, not uncomely, there were more than a few. The sounds, rather than the sight, of children showed that these, too, were plentiful, though just then in some subterranean hiding-place.

Now, whether of Edyrn’s will or her own, Llywarch was given seat nearest that of Sanawg, daughter of Gwydion. Very gracious and welcoming he found her; subtly strange with that beauty from afar, but more than pleased to please, and eager beyond eagerness to hear; yet self-restraining, and willing to learn by his general answer rather than by closeness of questioning, nor in any regard less than

modest. But, as to that, there were so many anxiously querying or boastful that she had little need.

Edyrn in especial often spoke, exulting openly, as one who deemed the Saxon host would soon be broken, and that the great Emperor with all the embattled powers of Britain would come sweeping by, to do him honor before the setting of his day,—the dream of a lone champion who sees, after years of hidden strife and silent waiting, the gathering of many friends! The hearts of the young men warmed toward him; nor less to the grand old priest, the wisest of his day, yet child-simple, keeping faithfully one little taper of faith aglow in the hollow of the hills, out of all sight but that of God, abiding in patience, manful and holy, the slow wearing from them day by day of whatever was most gracious and lovely. Llywarch knew, moreover, that Sanawg read the admiring compassion of his soul, which made him thankful.

Merry as that gathering was, even before the mead went round, it left ample room for pity. Rich ornaments were among them, for gold and jewels lose nothing by time; but in apparel there was much of savage makeshift, much also of spectral gentility. Sanawg's own robe would have been tattered but for careful mending, which yet showed over plainly, and seemed the more faded in seeming for the brightness of the brooches that fastened it over her shoulders. The men had fared even worse, as her father's expedient indicated. The commoner sort went mainly in sheepskin, as did also a few of better quality, whose words, nevertheless, were well chosen, and their bearing courteous exceedingly. Others, martial figures, wore Saxon garments, no doubt the spoil of some dead raider.

That was an evening which bade fair to have no end. When the table was cleared, and the mountain mead circulated no longer, or only in distant corner eddies, the yet more grateful quaffing of tidings from the outer world went on increasingly. For now nearly all could come thronging about the narrators; and their aged leader, chuckling and brightening, was less than ever extreme to mark what might go amiss.

Then were the campaigns of the great Arthur fought over again, and the reviving glories of the South grew visible to their eyes,—Caerleon, Caer Badus, Caer Gloi, and more, bourgeoning about their white Roman marbles with the fresh current of life that had been turned from the Thames to the Severn; Camelot, queen of the hills and the border, wherein old Rome had little part or none, but all was the fantastic thought of Merlin, or the high hope of Arthur, or the fresh splendor of the young island empire, bodying itself in many diverse forms on high; and beyond all, that gathering of princely men about the Emperor,—the men of glittering joust and wild-wandering emprise, of mystic aspiration and daring beyond all their race, the fame whereof had penetrated already into distant nooks.

Old Edyrn thrilled under it. "I had heard—I had heard a little," said he. "Even in my time, taking some hint from Rome, the great Ambrosius had begun,—even in my time, while I yet held some fragments of the great wall for him. There were games of strength among us then, and tilting, and sallies to find what we might set aright in the de- batable land next the heathen,—all which has since grown into more, and holds the seeds of such promise for a race like ours. Praised be God that these old eyes have been held open until the true break of day." Then Gwydion and all the people responded, "Praised be God!"

Sanawg, only, said not a word where she had sat, bending, all her life in her eyes, while first one guest spoke, and then another. Presently she rose, and stepped away. Coming back with a harp before her, she laid it in Llywarch's hands, saying gently, "We have heard still more of what the princes of Camelot and of Argoed can do, or we know it without hearing." As if his fame for minstrelsy were already abroad among them, voices clamored on every side for his battle-songs, his wild war-music; and Dynan, mischief in his eye, urged them on, suggesting new incentives and more apposite praises.

So Llywarch took the harp, laughing but proud, and played and sang as never before. The eyes of Sanawg had been in his at the giving, and something passed between that lifted him with a great

exultation and bore him on. A world of subtle power possessed him. The old intoxication of battle revived with transcending stir and swell in the thought that for her, and beings rare as her, the great fight above all was raging. He sang of Vortimer, son of Vortigern, and how amid the running of the foam-beads and the curv-ing crash of the breakers, that hero smote the heathen, boats and men together, by the great rock on the shore of the Gallic sea. He sang of Arthur the Emperor, child of mystery and of terror, star of the southwestern ocean haze that rose beside Tintagil, and now, in victory after victory, a portent and a promise, astounding the nations of the heathen, uplifting all his land toward what she yet should be. He closed with a great burst of appeal to every living Christian soul in that last clashing of Armageddon which was now upon them; and it left all trembling.

Then Sanawg, as if moved by some power beyond herself, came forward and laid her hand on his arm. “After that, no more!” said she, in her tone a solemn, half-defiant pride, as of one under glad enchantment.

Gwydion said gravely, “Do not interrupt our guest, my daughter.” He smiled, and added, “We have all been beyond ourselves, under a greater magic than silly folk ever ascribed to me.”

Llywarch shook his head, murmuring, “Gwydion, lord of the toiling spirits, by enchantment created a woman from blossoms.”

Sanawg flushed a little, and smiled a little, feeling many eyes on her, but answered with an awakening look, “I am not dreaming, my father, nor in the shadows of faery. Surely I am thankful to Prince Llywarch for thinking so kindly of me. We will de- lightedly listen again to the harp of Argoed.” For she thought there might be shelter therein. And she drew away a little.

But he answered, The sweeter music ends the ruder;” and they who loved her, having the melody of her voice yet in their ears, were well pleased with his words.

Then Dynan, aware of his friend's longing, took the task of the hour to himself, and told them vividly the strangest and the most stirring things, one after another; while Llywarch, with slight comment, more and more drew from the circle, as by drifting, until, even among so many, under the tossing and rolling of the torchlight and billowy shadow, he and the daughter of Gwydion were together again. The huddle of eager people was a screen of privacy to them, and so were the many voices.

She did not at all withdraw, but willingly made room for him, and speech with him, in very modest gladness, asking and telling of things less general than had been spread before all. He felt, surely, the underflow of personal concern run through it; so that, in bidding good-night, the parting of their eyes was like a lip-pressure. Llyvarch seemed aware of her presence yet with him when she was really there no more.

Then he went out through the thinning men-clusters of the great cavern, where some were casting themselves down to sleep, and took the way to his good horse, in frosty starlight, although he had little fear but that all was well. The stave of Dynan was in his ears at every step. "A woman from blossoms!" Ah, but not of this pale, cold, anxious northern land; flowers of the air they were, flame-golden, yet striking no root in polluted earth; night-bloom of Tyrian purple, distilling a sacred twilight dew. For Sanawg, the cavern maiden, was already a great inciter of hyperboles to the Prince of Argoed; and, in giving her life, Gwydion had wrought more enchantment than he knew.

The light hand of the fairy's child fell on the dreamer's shoulder. A low laugh came after it, as of one who knew. Llywarch, turning face to face in the faint light, laughed also.

"I have seen so many, many women," said he. "I have laughed and sang and feasted with so many. And now "—

"You are bewildered, as I see," answered Dynan, nodding. "But these are sudden times; and a soldier's love, like his fighting, must

come quickly, or it will be little good,—in a world where nothing lasts long."

At the tone of those final words, Llywarch came out of his musing, to look on this true friend with some sense of trouble. Something—a very little—he had surmised between Dynan and Freur, but knew of no cause for disquiet in that, being very willing.

"You are a man of happy fate," quoth Dynan. "There is none to bar your way."

"And who on earth should bar yours?"

"None on earth assuredly;" said Dynan, and turned back, while Llywarch stared after him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RIDE TO ISURIUM AND A WILDER RIDE HOMEWARD.

> Bright were the burgh dwellings,
> Many its princely halls,
> High its steepled splendor,
> Many a mead-hall full of human joys;
> They perished in wide slaughter,
> Therefore these courts are dreary.
> —THE RUIN, *Codex Exoniensis.*

NEITHER a jesting and subtly minded friend's enigma, nor even a sudden seizure of love, will avail very long to keep a man awake when outworn and weather buffeted. Llywarch, with all his people, slept well underground through the remnant of the night. Indeed, much later, for daylight meddled not in that place with either dead slumber or dreamland. No man nor woman molested them, for mercy abode there also.

But when their first awakening was heard a very mirthful echo came from the main cave-hall, where voices grew loud and plentiful, as after restraint withdrawn. Yet few men remained when these laggards entered from that side cavern which had been theirs for the night. There were only invalids, and the aged like Edyrn and Gwydion, with many children, and women of every degree. Sanawg came also, revealing more heart in her face than they all.

Very playfully she chided her warlike oversleepers, wondering aloud whether such were now the leisurely fashion in great Arthur's encampment, and whether Ossa Cyllalaur would be as tender of rousing them as were the wild cave-people. Outside, the sun-jewels were on the thin night-fallen snow.

This was the first of divers restful days; for these hidden people had much to solace their life in good fare and hunters' pleasure, also those gifts of the dairy which mountaineers chiefly love.

It so befell that each of the leaders among the guests found opportunity for some exploit which might be long remembered in tale-telling when they were gone. For Dynan, the swift of foot, in one of their hunting-parties, fairly overran a wild boar among the upland ravines, and cut him behind the ear with a slant deadly stroke before any dog came up, or the beast could turn at bay. And Llywarch, one black night when a bear came sniffing about the beehives,—their main hope for mead-honey and home-like merriment,—sallied out with a torch in one hand and a spear in the other, scattered the uproarious pack from before the niche of the rock where that great robber had sheltered himself, and spitted him fairly through the heart, in so narrow a pass that any slip or failure might have drawn death to him.

Sanawg did not often take part in such rough games, even as a witness. But for a good part of every day she was willingly with Llywarch, sometimes guiding him to wild and secret places, where rivulets came showering out of the cliff-front, making icicles among the lingering fronds of the fern; sometimes into soft, moist, branching valleys, where the cattle and horses found some little pasture even yet. Less often they ascended the cliff, and ranged the open hill-country for miles, watching warily for Saxon raiders or other unfriendly people. As the end of his stay drew near, they planned a wider flight, even to the wreck of Isurium.

All of the quaint cool colony wished them well, holding them near betrothal. But the thought of this journey made her father grave, since rumors were abroad that the Saxon host had begun drifting that way. But Edyrn took Sanawg's hand with a laugh, commending her daring, and the brave sons that should some day be born of her, until her cheek flamed, and she turned away. In mercy he turned his words also.

"Llywarch," said he, "it is like enough this ride will give you all that the Emperor will care to know. Somehow the Saxons find the dead city more to their taste than the city of the living. It will be a marvel if you do not see an army worth looking on when you get to the broad plains beyond the ruins."

"But then," said Llywarch thoughtfully, "I must own that our dear lady would be safer where she is."

"If safety were all," replied Sanawg, "we must admit that it would be safer never to have come into the world. Life is the most perilous of adventures."

"The wisdom of Gwydion! The sins of the fathers visited"—chuckled Edyrn.

"And it is so long since I have seen our old home!" urged Sanawg, not adding, what was in her thought—"I may soon be where I can never see it again."

But this, too, Gwydion understood. A moment he stood by her meditatively, stroking her hair. "Then go, my dear," he said gently; "but, I pray you, be careful."

So they set forth in the early dawn, riding leisurely, for they could not tell whether they should come homeward with hot pursuit behind them or no.

Their road lay at first over high moors, where little life was visible except the great stalking bustard or the sailing eagle. Then the ground began slanting downward, and grew more rugged and woody. At last they came out upon pleasantly rolling openland, with groves and streams that ran in quiet. About noon they drew rein where Isurium had been.

No Saxons were to be seen there, nor any other people, but only a few homeless dogs, very forlorn, and the wild creatures of the wilderness. Nor did it seem that any one would willingly dwell there again, so complete was the desolation. But Llywarch, for greater certainty, had search made in the broken dwellings and all doubtful places near them, and sent forward scouts to find where the Saxons might be. Dynan followed.

Meanwhile they dismounted, to dine beside a brier-entangled spring which had once been a fountain of many jets in one side of the forum space. Not far away a few delicately wreathed columns were yet standing, though not all at the same angle nor to the same height. Others lay broken where great force had flung them.

All about were dwellings in every stage of dilapidation, from mere rooflessness to utterly formless heaping. Here the floor-mosaic showed, and that only; there the wall-frescoes were coming to light again by the peeling of the plaster which had long overlaid them. Fragments of cornice-work and statuary were built into house-walls; themselves, in their turn, abandoned now and ruinous. Confusion of the old and the new, overthrown together, reached its utmost in a barricade-like wall which encircled this more lately inhabited core of the town.

"Here," said Sanawg, "is all the Isurium I have ever known. But it was bright then, and alive with people. What with caravans and travellers and soldiery, many folk went and came."

He answered, "Yet it must always have been sad, with those outer ruins everywhere beyond your gates. Not like that great earlier Isurium which beat back the Saxon for a time, after even imperial Eboracum had fallen."

He was glad to tempt that sweet voice into telling the old tale again. And those eyes,—what centurion of Syria, holding the gate of that royal city, had found his bride there long, long ago, and left whatever was best of him among the people he guarded?

"There was a shadow," said Sanawg dreamily. "I knew it as a child, but I think it did not make me sad. Our people hoped then to roll back the tide,—ah, me, as we are always hoping! Sometimes I rambled through the gates, or was taken pleasuring among thickets and ruins, and wondered how long ago all that destruction befell, and why the heathen must come so far to do us such harm.

"Of course I know now that the former desolation was checked by the coming of aid from Caer Ligion before the rugged heart of the town could be stormed, where the desperate townsmen, heaping everything before them, had made their final stand. Later, Ambrosius guarded it until he weakened near his end. What could be picked and gathered from the outer town aided us, it being our quarry, so that we did not fare altogether the worse for past losses. A man might dwell half his days quietly in that Isurium, which was not the proud Isurium of Rome, nor yet this Isurium of the dead. It was mine: it is mine. And I—am just Sanawg of lost Isurium."

She spoke tenderly, half playfully, with one arm on the broken coping of the fountain. Llywarch found a subtle and touching fitness in this claim to a heritage of oblivion.

"I was very young," she resumed, "when I first heard of the cliffs by the Scaur, where at need we might find shelter. Once—we thought it a long journey—I was taken there to see. Wild and dangerous people held the cave then; and, although the valley was lovely in that summer-time, we were glad to get away.

"Afterward there came tidings that the southern Saxons were hard pressing the Emperor, and all strength was drawn to him from our border. Northward and eastward the enemy were gathering,—the Deirans of Caer Ebrauc, the Bernicians behind them, all Saxons together. Soon the storm burst on us, and on all the country as far as the great wall, where it was not wasted already. Then the hills were full of hiding and flying people, and distress and sorrow were abroad everywhere.

"In the midst of it Prince Edyrn came down to us from the wall-country, breaking his way like a maddened bull, more eager to do hurt than to win safety. For his great knowledge and skill in arms we made him chief captain; and with these, and the fighting men who thronged our town, the Saxons for that time were discomfited, leaving our little Isurium jubilant, though in a very dismal desert.

"But we well knew they would come again; and it was the judgment of cool counsel that we should make all ready to withdraw. So the cave was stocked and guarded; and when news reached us that the great Emperor Ambrose had fallen, we knew it was time to be gone. The enemy were not long behind us, but had little booty; for trade had long been dead, and what we could not take was scarce worth any one's taking. Yet I promise you a slip of a girl was delighted to get away from them, even into a cavern.

"There I have grown to womanhood, faintly conscious of the world outside, not unhappy, but forgotten and wondering; buried to all except our little cavern-tribe—just Sanawg of lost Isurium."

"But why? It was no place for you," he protested, every ruin around them seeming to grant her its echo.

"It is no place for any of us," she admitted quietly. "But Prince Edyrn would go no farther; and since he shielded us we would by no means leave him, nor could a priest forsake the people of his ministration. There are those of them who need it."

She looked up brightly, or with a striving for brightness; but the glow of his face was too much for her again.

"It grieves me," said he. "And above all that you, Sanawg, in the very opening of your years"—

He hesitated, and she made answer. "Oh! I seem to abide it all very well."

"It is not in nature nor in duty," he urged. "What is there that others cannot do? Surely your parents will not wish you to linger among the rocks and caves—now that I am here."

"They have never told me; how can I know?" she answered, half smiling.

"But they know my meaning and the uncommon requirements of the case."

"Uncommon, surely. But a few days ago we were strangers; and now, if I hear you rightly, you are requiring me already."

She smiled without laughter, but he laughed freely. Then he ceased, all at once, and said, "Sanawg, it is this: I cannot go back without you."

"Shall we have another cave-dweller then?" said she, but presently gave her hand kindly. "Remember, it does not all rest with me. I am a good traveller, as you have seen. Also strange and stirring things allure rne. In proof, I am ready now for a look at that great horde of heathendom."

A call from their scouts, far up the road, had prompted this. He did not demur. When they had ridden well beyond the town, they learned that the Saxon encampment could be plainly seen from an eminence a mile or two farther on. With brisk hurrying they soon gained the spot, and mounted through the lower wooded part of the slope to the bare scalp of the hill.

Sanawg put her hands together, with a little sighing cry of admiration, for indeed it was a rare and gallant sight. The Saxon was no less fond of brightness and gay coloring than the Briton; and with him, being cruder, they made a more obvious show at a little distance. Moreover, what remained of wealth about that old Eboracum, where Roman emperors had set up their standards and gone forth to conquer, was all Saxon now. With few exceptions, the ramp was fresh and clean, as if just from some workshop—acres on acres of white tenting, a profusion of scarlet, crimson, and gold. Sparks flew from weapon-points everywhere; the sun glowed on mirror-like armor.

"A pity for so much neatness to be spoiled!" said Llywarch, rather in Cian's vein.

Dynan laughed. “Our own folk can be exquisite at the start, if that were all. But marshes and rocks and thickets are unmerciful.”

But Llywarch had grown thoughtful. “They are more nearly ready than I thought,” said he. “And there are even less horse than usual. They will try to break through Celidon, behind Legiolum, and that soon. I hope it may not be far enough west for them to be drawn to the sacking of Loidis.”

“Amen!” answered Dynan fervently; then he added with conviction, “But they will take a shorter way to a greater quarry. They are many and very vengeful. Think of the glory in shattering Arthur and Legiolum! Think also of the wealth of Caer Lerion, which is yet Ratae the magnificent, and all the temptations of middle Britain.”

“Yes,” said Llywarch. “No doubt that would be their road. Especially,” and he turned to Sanawg, “if I may judge by the dipping together of the hills yonder.”

She answered, “I remember to have heard of a pass through the ridges of the great forest, where once, a long time ago, were some villages, and a track leading southward. I think it must be that. Yet in my time no one ventured into the haunted shadows of Celidon.”

“And that,” said Llywarch, “is another reason why they gather so vastly. The Saxon hates the wood-darkness and the spectres of his own making. I see Ossa Cyllalaur’s great tent yonder, well encircled. He is the strongest and bravest of them, or he would never dare this venture. But if we might catch him half-way, his soldiers would be less before getting out again. Here they come, more and more!”

His hand waved eastward, almost enthusiastically, where were advancing bodies of men and faint murmurs. Dynan pointed nearer.

“They come indeed,” quoth he quickly.

Some outlying horsemen on the nearer side of the camp were unpicketing steeds, with glances toward the party on the hill.

"A woman's curiosity has its limits," replied Sanawg. "I am not curious to know what they will think of us on closer inspection."

She turned as she spoke, and rode downward, her friends about her. Many calls and cries, far behind, informed them that the pursuit had begun.

Llywarch chided himself, as they rode, for bringing that dear girl into such peril. Their horses already had come a long way, and surely some of the enemy must be able to overtake them. Reversing the usual counsel in a trial of speed, he took the utmost pace at the beginning; for it was life to them to get well beyond reach of that great concourse before any such hampering.

At the ruins of Isurium they paused a moment and looked backward. The foremost of the Saxons were just coming into view. A mile beyond they turned again, and saw the road well dotted, even to the dead city. Their own party was straggling now, and they checked a little to unite it. Then they went swiftly again, but with caution.

After a time they had hostile attendants at the sides and in the rear; but these were few, keeping their places with effort, and lacking the desperation to fall on with thrust and blow. Jeers were called back and forth in languages ill understood; but the British leaders, riding, with Sanawg between them, at the head, gave neither word nor sign. These clinging enemies did not greatly increase until the edge of the rough country was reached.

Then Llywarch, placing a guard about Sanawg, turned suddenly with the remainder of his men, and drove back this living war-spray on the first Saxon wave behind. Striking this, as it gathered and made front, he drove it also.

For a time the Saxons held aloof, bringing all their force together, with snow beginning to fall and drive, and the wind in their ears. And Sanawg and her guardians were nimbly in flight again.

The weather alone was enough to urge them on, there being a sudden violence in the air, a spreading thickness overhead, and great access of cold. They did not feel this so painfully when in swift, rough motion, even Sanawg uttering no complaint at all; but the ground was already so chilled that snow would lie, threatening impediment. With every minute there was more of it in the air, and drifts were beginning. But for the sure guides with them they must have lost their way.

Now and then Llywarch must pause a moment to wrap more and more covering about the lady by his side; and the kindness of her eye was reward enough for every endeavor. Her laugh was low; but unchilled, unfearing. "I began to feel disturbed by the Saxons," she said; "but I hope I am too true a daughter of the cliffs to mind the mere storms of nature. Heathen are not nature, but very unnatural, you know."

"It is all heathenish enough," retorted he. "If I get you to the cavern unfrozen, you must seek a milder abiding-place with me."

"A frozen bride would indeed be unusual," admitted Sanawg merrily, "and perhaps not cheering."

But for all her spirit, the biting and the numbness gained on her, so that there was little more speech between them, but only the set will to keep on. This grew the harder continually, there being many places where the tired horses could no more than flounder through; and but for a party from the cavern, who broke the funnel-like way down the cliff, they might never have reached their refuge. Yet it was not long after that they sat in ample warmth and ease, telling their story over good food to many listeners.

That night and the next day the storm kept on; but the air softened notwithstanding, and the snow melted as it blew along or fell. By noon there were only soiled heaps in places of shelter. Yellow brawling streams ran everywhere. Gwydion and Llywarch, standing by the cavern entrance, looked out on this together.

"It will be dry, or nearly so, in twenty-four hours," Llywarch began. "Enough at any rate for travel; and I fear the enemy will be astir."

Gwydion bowed gravely. "You mean that you must go."

"Yes, to warn the Emperor." Llywarch had been gathering confidence. He now spoke roundly and plainly.

"Reverend sir, I must not go alone. We have double need of your aid, as priest and father, to send forth Sanawg with me as my wife, beyond sight and hearing for a season. I know well that it is asking much."

At this admission, converging wrinkles gathered at Gwydion's eye-corners in a rueful half-smile.

"Ah?" said he; "there might indeed be extreme and unreasonable people who would say so, considering the state of the country and of the enemy and the heavens. But I greatly fear Sanawg is not one of them."

Llywarch brightened under the gentle irony. "In this and all else she is with me," said he, "saving only her duty to you."

Gwydion looked blankly out over the sodden land.

Llywarch began again. "Surely you would not have her stay. What certainty have we that the Saxon host, in mere murderous caprice, or following those who affronted them, will not fall on this your refuge? Or, again, they may turn to it in reprisal, coming back worsted from the great wood. At the best, is it to be thought on that she should lose the bloom of her life in these hollows and deserts, with no light in the dismal darkness except what may flow from your ministry and from her own soul?"

Gwydion turned to him. "Believe me," said he, "I, too, have not failed to think thus, and her mother also. We have found it cause of grave concern and night-wakening. And I do not know that I need

disguise from you the relief that came when we guessed your interest in one another. I have said to myself that it is best,—that it is of God. Yet behold, I was this very minute selfishly dreading what you should say, and wishing that, like the storm, it might somehow blow by, leaving my good daughter with me, whom I shall, most likely, not see again."

Then Llywareh was shaken in purpose, but for a moment only. "Do not say so," answered he. "If only you would all go with us!"

Gwydion shook his head with mournful certainty.

"But you are in the right as to Sanawg," said he. "We must part, and she must go. And what is to be done shall be done very quickly."

So the next morning, with all due churchly ceremony, in mingled sorrow and rejoicing, they were wed, and forthwith set out on their journey toward Argoed, the whole fighting strength of her people riding with them until sundown.

This better guidance greatly shortened the way, although the heaviness under hoof counted against them. Yet again, beside the best counsel at parting, they had now a single certain aim, and the impulsion of great need and urgency. Thus a trivial fraction of the time spent in wandering forth brought them to Loidis again.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FROM LOIDIS TO LEGIOLUM.

I was truly in the enchantment.
—TALIESSIN.

THERE was some knowledge of the Saxon invasion at Loidis before them, but nothing worse than they knew. This freed Llywarch of a dread which was troubling his new happiness. With fair speed he need no longer fear any evil thing as a result of his lingering by the Scaur.

Neither his mother nor his sister would have any truce with such self-punishment. Had he not told them, when first he came, that the Emperor was warned and watchful? Moreover, in fact, the Saxons had not yet moved their way, nor any way, so far as the wisest wood-rangers knew.

Sanawg found herself invested with the halo of many welcomes. People came wonderingly from far to look on the daughter of Gwydion, the one who had spoken face to face daily with Edyrn of the olden time, a hero long lost to men, the bride of the hollow cliffs, the bride of mystery, the bride of Argoed. They bore away the memory of a face, lovely indeed, but with a strange loveliness, not elsewhere known, yet marvellously contented already. Tales were told beside the fire-leaping in rough cabins on the woodland fringes, of just such gracious beings, who chose willingly for a time a mortal home, too often vanishing. Nevertheless, they had no fears of her, but loved her from the beginning; and the ladies who so long had ruled them loved her, after the first astonishment of her presence, best of all. To Llywarch's mother, who held her own memories of far years, and had known Isurium, she was as a messenger from an earlier and a brighter world.

Of Edyrn the good dame questioned often—young Edyrn, the hope of the North, most head-strong, most splendid, most indomitable of

princes! Gwydion, too, she bore in mind, whose unpretending wisdom and sanctity might well have won the power to work miracles, as men still uncouthly made claim for him; and this was the very daughter of Gwydion! Was ever a dowager princess of the hills and memories blessed like her in a daughter-in-law? The news of a half-century came to her all at once by her only son's more than lovely bride.

Sanawg was most willing to tell, and tell again, whatsoever she knew, if only the time left to her and to Llywarch before their parting were not so very meagre.

For, little as he dared delay, he dared still less take her with him across the path of the raging heathen. From Argoed, should they turn that way, there was always retreat open down the stream to the river Dee and its goodly Roman-walled city.

Dynan, unlike himself, had made a plea for lingering. Surely, said he, it would be wise to send forth scouts who should ascertain the enemy's purpose, distance, and true course through the wood. Then there would be surer news to carry. Llywarch scarcely made answer, being perturbed and ready for anger with every such echo of his own inner tempting voices; and it was so very evident that haste was the supreme need! But the fact lingered in his mind, as having to do with Dynan's words in the starlight before the cavern, and with a coldness toward Freur at which Sanawg had hinted.

For already the cave-queen had read her sister of the open air,—the pleased expectancy in that pensive face when the fairy's son drew near, the hurt disappointment which followed, the observant, staidly smiling kindness to herself, as from one under government of will and pride, seeking other companionship than that withheld, and doing the offices of friendship justly and fondly, yet troubled, uncomprehending. Nor did any of them comprehend him then; but later came to know him for a truly loving man, strained against his love and against his will, daring not (in mercy) to seek her further favor, yet hardly able to leave her so, and with the shadow of an unknown terror awaiting him.

As the two men rode away together, Llywarch puzzled over him displeasedly. But the stir of motion made his own heart more lenient and hopeful. It was hardly in nature for a genial, comrade-loving man, crowned so supremely with what is best in life, to continue thinking ill of a tried friend whose mirth was failing sadly. Moreover, those remembered words had a spectral sound in after musing; and surely that face beside him was haunted. What could it mean, save matter to be dealt with by masters of mystery? If only he had thought of Gwydion! But there was Cian yet, and at the worst there was Merlin. Yet his pulse thrilled as he espied those eyes again with friendly furtiveness, wondering what they might have seen.

It was at their first night halt, well over the eastern rim of Argoed. Dynan had been jesting excitedly, though pitifully enough to one who thought he knew; then broke off in sullen failure. Llywarch found him alone, out under the racing clouds, in the chill, staring toward a woodland wall whence came unearthly murmurings. His face had something of expectation, desperately defiant. He turned, at the touch of Llywarch's hand on his shoulder, with a wild anger in his eye.

"Not me!" Llywarch protested gently. "For- give me if I have let evil come to you unaided. Tell me about it, Dynan."

Then the slight figure turned again from him, shook, and broke, sobbing, with bowed head. Llywarch stood silent awhile, pitying; then urged again kindly, "Tell me, dear friend."

So Dynan gathered himself, and said, "What more shall I tell? And what must you think of me? Is it not all like—lunacy?"

"Most things in this life seem so at one time or another," answered Llywarch. "I have had little experience in things out of it. But what is there, Dynan, that a man cannot face?"

The fairy's son smiled ruefully. "How should I know?" said he. "But I have `faced,' as you call it, far more than I had any longing to. Oh, I

thought I could bear all—till I came again to Argoed. And you, too, so happy! Ah, Llywarch, you haven't seen!"

"Let me see, then."

"How can you? Can the mountain bird see the forms that come about the dweller in the depths?"

"Am I a vulture, then? And are you a whale?"

Dynan was tempted into smiling, but his face grew sombre gain. "You cannot," he repeated slowly. "I have seen when you were by."

Then Llywarch shuddered; and the thought came to him dismally that eternal parting were most mer- ciful for Freur, at any cost of heartbreak. A bridegroom with the gift of seeing too many about the altar! Scoffers visible to him, guessed by her, mowing and menacing in the bridal chamber. That were a ghastly wedding surely! Even in fancy he found it all too grisly, and would eagerly be back at the camp-fire. But his first thought was for his friend.

"So," said he, "you gave up my sister? Showed her chill indifference, too, rather than horror. Thank you, Dynan."

The sufferer's face warmed at the tone.

"You understand me!" he cried. "Then we are so far of one race still. I will try to tell you. Yet with what hope? You, so human! there is no mist in your kindly blood: I, an echo out of some past that men have willingly let go by, a link to forms of gleam and shadow, coming out of deep places, watchful, sinister, lurking, hovering!"

"Yet," said Llywarch sturdily, "I had thought your token might command them;" and he pointed to the horn by Dynan's side.

"I also trusted it," answered the child of faery. "Until lately I have felt toward the unseen as a most mighty friend. But now—I cannot say. It would be a summoning, a signal,—but for what to follow? Be

sure I shall not blow my horn, except in extreme need to more than me.'

"If indeed I can comprehend, or you can bear to tell, no more," said Llywarch; "let us return."

But Dynan hesitated. "Wait," he said; "it began like this." Then, with many breaks and much doleful grimacing, as of one halfminded to jeer or pretend to jeer at himself, he told a story of strange and growing visitation, indescribable for lack of clear outline and certain utterance, shifting from form to form, from tone to tone, but ever threatful or insistent, ever taunting, darkening, and behind all unfailingly the phantom green of the lady of the hollow hill.

His friend listened solemnly. "It passes my skill," he said. "We will try wiser folk when we may. Let us hope that, in the mean time, the Saxons and your thronging tormentors may have a set-to at each other, and make havoc of both."

"I had thought of that. They shall have a fair field right willingly—to make final havoc of me."

He spoke no more of ghostly beleaguering, and went back to the light with readiness. Not long after he fell quietly asleep.

By night of the next day they were with Arthur.

CHAPTER XXV.

ARTHUR IN COUNCIL.

BEFORE Llywarch had spoken long, the Emperor checked him by a sign, and turned to right and left with a quick succession of commands. A light force of horsemen were to thread the more open parts of the great wood toward the enemy, and send back tidings thereof when found. Vortimer, with the London men, was to guard the southern exit, shielding the heart of the country. Lancelot was to be summoned to his aid, or that of Arthur, as needed. The main army was to prepare forthwith for a march into the forest.

Vortimer heard sullenly. Ever since the first untoward news from the south he had been more than restless. "In all this ado of wildernesses and border towns I find nothing for London," said he. "Is her danger worth no thought at all?"

There was a murmur of strong disapproval. Arthur looked into the speaker's eyes keenly and gravely; but Constantine spoke first.

"I deplore the tone of my fellow-townsman, but is there not some wisdom in his thought? We are assailed in two remote quarters at once. Here it may be long before anything great is in danger; there the enemy confronts and perhaps encompasses our most renowned city. Beside, we can surely crush Eschwine and his confederates; but we are not so certain of Ossa Cyllalaur. Moreover, these northern Saxons are at their strongest now, and will weaken as they go southward."

Arthur listened to him considerately, remembering the stress and motive.

"What say you, Llywarch?" he asked. "Argoed has her share in this, if Loidis is not quite London."

"Because Argoed is so at stake," answered Llywarch, "I do not wholly trust my counsel in what concerns the empire. But it is fair to say that a Saxon defeat in the wilderness might drive fragments of them toward us very hot and vengeful. On the other hand, if they ravage all the lowlands, we shall be given over to that same death in life and blackness of darkness wherein I found Edyrn, the pride of the north, and from which I rescued Sanawg, the daughter of Gwydion."

"Edyrn! Gwydion! have you news of them?" cried Arthur, while all around stared and exclaimed.

Thereupon Llywarch told of the cliff-dwelling colony, isled as he had seen them, but loving still that Britain which left them in oblivion; of their long clinging, quite alone, to a civilization whose outer signs were slipping from them; of the altar which they had set up in their last refuge, the cavern-depths, and kept alive with the tapers of their most holy faith; of the lady love whom he had found there and brought forth as a bride to his home, where light could yet pierce amid the woods and rugged lands. The thrill of all that had befallen him was in his tone, so that men not only heard, but felt and saw.

Then Arthur, the Emperor, smote himself over the heart, and stood quivering. "Llywarch, you shame me," cried he. "This Gwydion, or old Edyrn, should be Emperor, not I." Then, turning to Constaptine and Vortimer, "Behold how God bath saved alive all these years the feeble folk of the rock, whom we had forsaken. Will you not trust the great walls of London to Him a while, O ye of little faith?"

Constantine answered, with a sigh, "You are right, my Emperor."

Vortimer had been touched in some degree by Llywarch's tale, but scarce at all by the appeal of Arthur.

"As many unearthly sureties for the walls as may be," said he. "There are others who find such in the White Hill of Cynvelyn. But neither Christ nor Vran seems to have power over the open country.

The Saxons will burn and kill even to the woodlands where lies my home, unless there are more than promised miracles to stay them."

"Cian and Osburn work miracles that should content you," suggested Llywarch. "And you cannot complain that either is fanatically Christian. Let only your people who arc otherwise fanatical but half do their duty, and I'll answer for my old comrade."

"Let them, indeed!" growled Caowl. "Mark you, Vortimer; I, too, am a man of Andred. My lands border yours. Your risk is mine. *I* say we came here to fight the northern Saxons, or I don't know what we *did* come for. In God's name let us do it, then. If we turn our backs on one army of the sea-folk, we shall get into that bad habit, and keep a-running. Fight here, fight in the wilderness, fight where pleases you; but let it be fighting, and not sneaking home to fight somebody else."

Arthur's face had darkened and tightened during Vortimer's words, and moved not quite approvingly even at Llywarch's, but now it beamed. "Good fruits from rough trees!" cried he, laying his hand on Caowl's shoulder. "I love a man who can speak one's thought for him—and save all trouble. What say you, Dynan?"

"Oh, if I may have my Emperor's other hand," answered Dynan merrily, "I would just say that Central Britain, whence I come, would prefer, so please you, not to be invaded. As for me, being naturally quick, the sooner I get at a Saxon the better. And have it all over," he added, with a sudden overshadowing.

Arthur's hand fell kindly on him, as coveted, while he spoke. "Beware foreboding," said he gently; "we cannot spare you, Dynan."

Folding his arms, the Emperor looked round the company with a bright, firm smile. "Chiefs and princes all," said he, "I have not hands enough to go round. Let my preference be held as for the better counsel, not the better friends. We stand here, inheritors of more than we can restore when ruined, guardians of what the whole world looks to us to preserve. Wherever the savage heathen have broken in, British home-life and Roman beauty and glory have gone

down together. Not one rood more than they must shall they win or ravage through me. I grieve for London assailed, for dear friends endangered. But there shall be no more Edyrns cut off in the northern wild, no more Gwydions praying for us out of the darkness, no more ladies of the cavern forlorn and forsaken. Soldiers of Britain, we make our fight here—here at the north, where is most British land and British life to be shielded, where are most Saxons to be met and overthrown. Pray Heaven there be enough of them to give us peace for many years."

There was a hum and stir of applause. Vortimer did not join therein, but stood undecided. Arthur turned to him, saying, "You have your orders. I look that you should be moving within the hour. And now I will hear further from Llywarch and Dynan alone."

All withdrew except these, Caowl lingering last. "Pardon," he said, stepping near and speaking low, "but—you cannot trust Vortimer."

Arthur smiled gravely, but without surprise. "I am sorry; I should like to," said he. "But I know well whom I can trust," and his eyes gave the kindliest farewell.

Musing over it later, he sent with all speed a second message: to Lancelot, bidding him turn back or seize any one who might essay to pass London-ward without warrant—above all, Vortimer.

It was not too soon. Early abroad the next morning, Arthur found two horsemen awaiting him. One, from the scouting party of lances, bore the news that the Saxon van was already within the woodlands; the other, from Caowl, that Vortimer had indeed taken his appointed post, for a feint, but presently gone southward with a numerous but uncertain following. In the choice of evils, with no Saxons yet near, Caowl had taken his track, and the less resolute of the force ahead were already dropping off to him.

Arthur sent word that this was well and to so continue, aiding Lancelot in every way, and coming back to the neglected border with all strength and swiftness. He felt with disquiet this weakening of an

army, not so strong at the best as the one which came against it; but he moved forward into the forest that day with every man that he had.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE FOREST OF CELIDON.

> The wings of dawn were the flowing of his lances.
> —TALIESSIN.

ARTHUR, the Emperor, after his custom, rode among the foremost, getting early news of what it concerned him to know. This was, that the hurrying Saxons had straggled out in a long line, the foremost, ill provided for the sake of lightness, being already in the heart of that unknown wilderness. He threw Caradoc across their way, lest they should reach the open land and do harm. But most of their stores and some fighting men were yet barely within the verge, or even out beyond. Against these he detached Llywarch and Dynan, with swift riders.

Meanwhile, on the slope of a ridge that made one side of the valley-pass they were following, he awaited the coming up of his cohorts and legions, and the time when best to cut the knotted string of Saxons near the middle.

Caradoc murmured at being enjoined to strengthen his weak numbers by felling trees before them. Stretching forth his huge arm,—

"Is that the kind of engine to poke sticks at people from behind a log?" he inquired, with a good-humored grimace. "The saddle will ache for me, ache for me!"

Arthur smiled. "Oh! you may ride at their horse, if you will. But don't neglect the tree-felling. One footman thus covered will count for three. Remember, they will be coming at you more and more strongly. I can send you half a legion later. But there will be all you will want to do—even you!—to hold them until you have Lancelot at your back."

So Caradoc went, with no more words about it, but only half pleasure in the task, and chose strong ground for his barricade. Then he stood, awaiting all comers.

Llywarch's task suited him well; but there was more chance than skill in it, as happened. For the ground roughened and thickened continually beyond where he left Arthur, and there were no guides who perfectly knew the way, so that this was lost after a time, and he could do no more than blunder on vehemently, with one eye to the sun, and the other for the Saxons. Nevertheless, he came out luckily where he should be, and saw the pack-horses, and the provision wagons, and the groups of laden men coming over the open fields to the entrance of the wilderness.

They saw him likewise, and a shout of warning went up among them; while some drew backward, and took posture of defence together, and others hurried on to join the men and stores in the wood. These last he followed, reaching almost as soon as they a bit of sheltered glade where some before them had found pasture for their horses, and piled packs and bales on the sward. Around these they were most willing to fight, and grew in number every moment, as men, hearing the danger, came rearward. But the ground, being fairly unencumbered, was in favor of a mounted assault.

With a Celtic yell, the men of Llywarch and Dynan went at them, breaking through their loose ranks from side to side by sheer weight and rush, and spearing as they passed. But the Saxons thrust also, yielding little, and threw spears with better skill than the moving men; and sprang up on haunch and saddle, knife in hand, or rooted themselves against the tree-boles, fighting mightily with their battle-axes.

But Dynan, mindful of his luck before, charged the tethered beasts, with such diabolical brandishing and keenness of uproar, that they strained everywhere, and many broke away in great confusion; and for those remaining it needed but a few strokes at men and leather to make them wild runaways in the wilderness. Dynan, as in a whirlwind, vanished after them and with them. A few breaths, and

he was there again, coming headlong, a flaming torch above his head, and many more such flares and blazes behind him, breaking through the still continuing medley, and lighting everything that would burn. Soon the Saxons were right glad to get out of the fire fury of their own food and bales; and finding little left to fight over, drew off from the glade, massing in the road with new re-enforcements.

Llywarch charged them repeatedly, and drove, with increasing labor, foot by foot, to a strong place, where, making feint of assault, he deemed it well to leave them. For there was better service to be done by falling on their ample, ill-defended supplies in the open country. These, in fact, he forthwith raided without mercy, rolling up one party on another, destroying many, and driving the remainder dismayed toward the gates of Caer Ebrauc—the York of our days.

Dynan, heading the other way through the wood as Llywarch left it, rode along the right flank of the Saxon army, looking for a chance to do it a mischief, and yet more that no harm should come to Argoed.

Meanwhile the Saxons of the van were plunging in successive irregular masses on Caradoc, the first easily broken and racing from him, whereby he had more the pleasure of a stag-hunt than of war, but each increasing in volume and tenacity, so that soon all the front of the barricade was thronged with their dogged infantry, thrusting and hewing; and mounted lancers curved round the ends assailing Caradoc's rear. Then up came the first succors promised by Arthur, and with a heave and push the whole weight of the enemy was carried far back again.

Once more in greater numbers they rushed on, and clung so that they could barely be thrust off and held away; each army thereafter glaring at the other, worn and desperate, with deadly intent, across a bare lane of interval, until darkness fell.

In that respite the barricade was made double, with a space between, closed at each end, forming a long, narrow parallelogram across the Saxon advance, wherein most of the surviving Britons awaited their

fate. Caradoc, Prince of Devon, stood by the front wall of it, grimly watchful, thinking no more of especial methods and luxuries in fighting, his great right arm bare and reddened to the elbow. Off in the woods behind and on either side were wet, disorderly places, whence groans came more freely than speech. In front, the broken and tangled bodies of men and horses littered all the ground. Beyond these, were many murmuring voices, and moving figures dimly seen, where a multitude seemed massing with the fury of men who grew hungrier every moment. He could hardly hope to endure another charge.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A PASSAGE AT ARMS BETWEEN LANCELOT AND VORTIMER.

> I will not avenge myself on him who drives me.
> —ANEURIN.

LANCELOT received Arthur's two messages together. For days he had been fevered and worried, anxious at heart to go where he should not be, alternately blessing and cursing the fate which kept him from temptation and Guinevere. The peace that he had made about him was irksome, even while new. At the call for action, he could have sprung from the ground and shouted, all the more since it was to punish treason in another. He sent out every way for all his men, and they came quickly.

Yet not until Vortimer had gone into disorderly encampment before him; and, on the hills beyond, Caowl's pursuing tribesmen were visible. Almost as these came in sight, a fragment broke away from Vortimer's army, amid great contention, and drifted back toward them. Indeed, it seemed that but a small nucleus, if any, could be counted on by that recalcitrant chieftain.

Nevertheless, the first deliverance of Vortimer was proud and swelling. An officer of rank bore it, demanding why so many who should be comrades were drawn up, more like enemies, across his way.

Lancelot made polite obeisance. "This parade is by order of the Emperor," said he. "We are all going northward to fight Ossa Cyllalaur, myself in command. I am very glad of such redoubtable re-enforcements."

The officer smiled understandingly. "We would rather go with you where the fighting now is—about London," said he, being, in peace, a lesser magnate of that city.

Lancelot replied, “It will comfort you and your friends to know that late advices indicate no immediate danger there. Prince Cian has even won some successes. Assaults will not soon be repeated. I am persuaded that the surest way to raise the leaguer of London will be to rout first the Saxons now pouring down from the north. Otherwise they may follow, and be on our backs like wild cats, while we are busy with Eschwine and the rest of them in front. I am further persuaded that we have one paramount duty if we are to hold Britain together, and that is to obey Britain’s head.”

Lancelot had spoken with such upright emphasis that the thought of inconsistency did not then occur to him. The officer bowed and withdrew, not smil- ing again, but with a suggestive face. Lancelot forthwith extended his lines to join Caowl, in effect enclosing the doubtful runaways, who had their choice between a very unpromising reach of uplands, barren and rugged, and a semicircular array of the spears of their own people. Moreover, they were melting momently about the edges, and their opponents grew in number accordingly.

The report of their envoy made this all the greater. Vortimer was nearly alone in urging violence. The mass about him showed in loud complaints or derisive sullenness that they felt they had been brought far on a fool’s errand, and disgraced everyway for nothing.

Vortimer’s love of popularity could not long withstand it. Instinct and habit made him swerve with the tide. He was already half-way advanced in an eloquent address, having that turn in view, when Lancelot, with no more than half a dozen attendants, galloped up before the speaker. This Lancelot was at his lordliest, both in temper and apparel. He had plainly no inkling of Vortimer’s change of purpose, which came too late.

“This will not answer,” he announced with deliberation.

The orator towered a moment, darkling, then essayed to ignore and continue; but, seeing the wavering of his people, turned imperiously.

"Know you," he demanded, "that these would tear you in pieces at a word from me? Back with you to your own!"

The Welsh prince looked with a proud smile over the countenances around.

"They do not seem quite like that," he observed. "I shall return, Vortimer of London, but you will go with me."

As he spoke, his companions moved suddenly around the object of their inroad.

Vortimer swelled and thrilled with the impulse to throw himself on this affronter. There was everything to make the hour bitter. Beside the potent contrast of success and failure, the comparison of person went against him. He was the greater, to some degree, in size, and his ruddy, broad, manlike beauty was plain to see; but about Lancelot there dwelt an air of something finer, subtler, and higher, less needing insistence, an inner assurance of superiority which all around them shared. His celebrity in arms, also, very different from the merely local championship of Vortimer, had a glamour of its own.

The London chieftain looked him over as he sat easily, a smile that was not loving on the dark, handsome face, and stern purpose behind it. It was not fear,—though who but Arthur or Cian could match Lancelot in weapon-skill?—but Vortimer knew what surrounded him, and felt his strength bleeding all away. He swept an eye of reproach and involun- tary appeal around the circle. Those nearest were his own especial following in town or field, the core of the revolt from the beginning, even yet not lacking a certain stubbornness.

"We await your orders," responded one gray centurion grimly, "and will not hold back for fine feathers, be certain."

"We will not desert you in your trouble," added resolutely, though without much alacrity, the officer who had borne the message.

These words had their weight with Lancelot. It was his part to save men for Arthur and the coming battle. Evidently this great-limbed Saxon-Briton was more beloved than he had fancied.

"No one doubts the prowess of the champion of Andred, nor of his followers," he said, looking around upon them. "With such aid he might no doubt overcome me and these few. I should not grudge him the victory, nor mind the trial. But in striking me you strike Britain; and that is a poor thing for any son of hers to do. This once, you have been unwise, and unwisdom should submit manfully to its forfeit. Moreover, your enterprise is hopeless. Even if you could overcome my army, what welcome would Prince Cian, always faithful, give to mutineers before the walls?"

"There are more to be thought of in London than Prince Cian and his assumed ingratitude," broke in Vortimer, with his deepest voice and most swelling port of oratory. "After what I have seen of that in higher place, it would not, indeed, astound me. But since you and he and one higher have become—Britain—I will not contend with Britain, but will be well content to face this overgrown Arthur, my chief accuser."

For even while Lancelot spoke the outcome had grown very plain and inevitable in the sight of Vortimer; and he desired at least the semblance of holding first place in act, speech, and will, as to his own procedure. But he felt below it the scorch of defeat, and saw the derisive curl of Lancelot's lip at his boasting. It drove him on to say more. Quoth he,—

"Also there is more to tell him concerning unfaithfulness—a worse treason, Sir Lancelot, than that of breaking bounds to aid a beleaguered city. Nor should you twist and tangle your face-lines in that fashion; for truly it might be no more than kindness to bring the wrath of the Emperor on your head, if in so doing I might leave free to you" he paused—"a cast-off Guinevere."

The writhing of countenance that he mocked at had been real; and Vortimer, following with bitter delight the passion of shame and

pain which caused it, grew more deadly hateful with every word. The two great men fronted each other, feeding their fury in eye flashes given and taken, until at that fatal name they clashed wildly together, blade on shield, and blow for blow; all thoughts of policy, of clemency, of submission were quite blown away; each made for the other's life, with little heed to his own. Forthwith all their followers near joined the combat, eddying round them as they fought.

The odds were heavy against Lancelot's party, yet not so crushing as might seem, for these were picked of the pick of their kind, better swordsmen nowhere, and they knew the overwhelming aid that was coming; whereas only a very few of Vortimer's men were death-blind in his behalf, and they had nothing else to be their stay. Notwithstanding, every man of the former felt cut and thrust, not once only, through his mail; and their helms were ringing, and their forms reeling about the two infuriated champions, before relief came.

Yet this was speedy. The sight of that straining tangle and vehemence of men and arms, the sound of that smithy-like hammering, were in eyes and ears not over pleased with the venture of their chief; and at once, with a great cry, the whole curve of men swept inward, closing the circle, and crushing into submission that human chaos. The uplifted voice of Lancelot alone saved from trampling even him, their leader. When the storm cleared they found him afoot, between his dead horse and Vortimer, both equally bloody and unlifelike. His own person showed gashes in trunk and limb, and his garments were no longer things of beauty; but he had regained his old jauntily defiant, gracefully complacent air.

"The end would have come sooner," said he, "but that I let the clumsy fellow make me clumsier still with wrath at his nonsense, till I got my skill of hand again, and laid open his crown. Look to him, some of you, and to the rest."

But his eye had in it no great anxiety for Vortimer's revival; and as he glanced around him he was asking inwardly how many who had

heard the first offence were beyond all telling, or certain to forget. Yet at least the combined forces were his own now, a goodly array to bring back northward; and that it might grow rather than lessen, he sent out after all scatterers, even before having his wounds dressed.

While undergoing this he had news of Vortimer, which did not wholly please him. "Mending, is he?" quoth the dark and wilful prince. "It may not mend his comfort or his chances greatly. Bring him in."

When Vortimer entered, Lancelot was smiling; but the contrast between the men and between their conditions made that smile satanic. Vortimer felt it so, scarce able as he was to hold himself erect for weakness, roughly bandaged on head and arm and thigh, blood-dabbled and mire-stained everywhere, tattered as any hedge-side beggar; while before him sat at ease this greater sinner, already seemingly restored in every way, the wine creaming to his hand, a picture of embodied luxury and insolent leisure.

Lancelot nodded indifferently, and waved his attendants from the room. Then his eyes fastened on his huge prey.

"Our little set-to had its inconveniences," he said. "But there were counterbalancing benefits. Of all who heard a lady's name handled indiscreetly,—a very throat-cutting thing,—only two or three are alive, beside you and me. I will answer for the others, and I think we are not likely to speak."

There was an emphasis on the "we," which checked Vortimer's denial. The orator, for once, and very uneasily, hearkened only.

Lancelot went on: "Such speech, but once again, may bring to you the blade that burns. You are going where declamation will not avail; but, even there, let that name pass your lips, and I shall know, and you shall feel. If you say that you have seen too much, you shall see nothing more."

Vortimer had listened helplessly, with growing vehemence of desire to offer some defiance, some reply. At the last he straightened himself, but wilted to the ground before a word was spoken, like some tall reed cut at the root, softening under the hot sun.

At Lancelot's call, men came and bore him away.

When first able to travel, he went westward, where a Welsh castle received him. For long he was not seen. Such report was sent to Arthur as made this unavoidable. Nor, in his life-and-death struggle with the Saxon, could he scan it over closely. But Vortimer was yet dear to many in London. Condoning his faults, they remembered his voice, his bearing, his championship.

Lancelot hardly fared the better. A stir of shame awakened at the sudden weakness of a strong enemy, and at himself, who had not long before been unevenly generous,—a half-startled recognition of some new growth within, for he had never yet been cruel. At times, for a moment, he seemed to look down a distorted vista, futile in its flashes of good, hateful, more and more, in its perverse darkening of evil. In one burst of desperate thought, he dreamed of renouncing all for the cowl and cell. And again, the wish burst from him that the thrust of Vortimer had been more straight and strong. Even the hope of seeing Guinevere was poisoned for him, though he longed feverishly. Only in the thought of combat was there any respite. Therefore he took no heed to his wounds nor any counsel concerning them, but hurried on.

All his men were now with him in heart and will, those foremost in revolt being over eager to atone, lest harm should come of it.

Passing the walls of Legiolum, for there was no time now to tarry, Lancelot had one fair sight of Guinevere, leaning forth sunlike in the sunset. She waved her scarf abroad for a token, and he tossed hand and helmet-plume, riding swiftly on.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NIGHT BATTLE OF THE GREAT WOOD.

A gloomy disaster befell their army.
Thou slayest them with blades without much noise.
Thou powerful pillar of living light causest stillness
—ANEURIN.

ARTHUR in his day had dealt with more formidable enemies; but Ossa Cyllalaur foiled his stroke, so far that it brought no instant ruin. Awakening to the danger of his long thin line, the Saxon king hurried all whom he could to the front, which was then fighting Caradoc.

The night closed on them, growing in mass, a multitude of hardy footmen, as they picked up one body after another by the way. No stragglers, for such could find no safety. The first of the breathless mass were clasping hands with those who confronted the Prince of Devon, when the British Emperor came down on them from the height near their rear, striking crosswise, but with a great body of enemies before him, where he had looked to find them yet loosely strung.

Ossa Cyllalaur was there, too, guessing the danger place, and with him the best of the Saxon spears, quickly bristling before the rush of the British horse, like an ill-formed bayonet square of later days. In splintering charge after charge, Arthur broke into them, once cutting through from side to side, and back again. Thus all their moving line was assailed with brief pauses; and Arthur's infantry, coming up, joined likewise. Therefore there were many kinds of desperate fighting, over much space, through many impediments, in such darkness that a man might hardly know friend from enemy.

Still the Saxon army grew mainly toward the head; and there the worst rush of all came on Caradoc, swarming up against and around his breastwork, and over it in places for all that he could do. The

utmost aid that Arthur could send was too little, making only for a time an islet of fighting-men among numerous and desperate assailants.

Then a great and welcome shout was heard in the night beyond, and when it rose a second time every hard-pressed Briton well knew it for the mountain cry of Lancelot. The sound of battle had reached his men, awakening their eager gladness. The Saxons heard that shout also, and paused for one heartbeat; then fell to more savagely, as knowing their time was brief. Even the champion of the brawny arm was driven hither and thither, reeling while he smote,—his men meanwhile dropping continually all around,—before the onfall of Caowl from one side and Lancelot from the other broke through to him with salvation.

Then the fight here went on confusedly for a time; but the sudden strengthening of the Britons prevailed, and the current turned, setting slantwise; for the Saxons were driven, resisting doggedly, through the westward opening, where was now only Dynan, with a small force, to stay them. These gave way, and the Saxons all drew together on high ground in a strong place; where they fought so sturdily that Arthur, having torn what he could from them as they went, found it wise to form a circle round them, and await the day.

This showed the great havoc of that night, and that it had visited most heavily the Saxons. Caradoc, strongly posted, had given good account of them, even while brought near to destruction; and their flank and rear had been handled mercilessly. Therefore many corpses were in all the undergrowth.

Nevertheless, a great body of Saxons remained, holding well together on a table of open land above the meeting of two streams. Rocks were plentiful here; and many stones had been heaped between them in a rude encircling wall that still grew, the banner of Ossa Cyllalaur being in the centre. There seemed a spring near it, and a few pack animals were standing around. Also there were fires, and men breakfasting, and glittering arms in great plenty.

"A good fort," said Lancelot. "But I do not see that they are making headway into Britain. They are less now than we. And I should suppose, in time, they would grow hungry."

He sat, mounted, with the Emperor and other chiefs, on a second eminence. Looking abroad over their own cordon, Arthur smiled.

"They are indeed delivered over to us," he said. "This time let us make sure work. Cut down trees everywhere, that the wall of oak may surround the wall of stone, Famine will drive them to us."

It was done very swiftly, for battle-axes and other fit tools were abundant. On every side the strokes and heavy crashing echoed through the wilderness.

Hearing such ominous uproar, the busy Saxons were seen to pause with an air of uncertain menace. But their night-slaughter was too recent for any venture. So they turned to their labor again with a cry of derision, and those who had been eating joined them; whereby their wall grew apace, taking the light sparklingly on many crystalline facets. Thus until noon continued the two armies of wall-builders. Then, with shifting of workmen, the Britons kept on still; but the Saxons flauntingly sat down to food and mead,—all they had,—devouring and quaffing, so that this their last meal on earth was in truth a lavish banquet.

Arthur, on the neighboring hill, faring less sumptuously, watched them in silence, his chiefs around him. Their blood, like his own, had cooled in the hours of rest and toil. Looking from eye to eye, he found them faintly astir with fellow-feeling for these roisterers, who showed a temper so like their own. At that he smiled.

"Let us give them another chance," he said; then called for a tablet, and wrote a courteous summons to surrender: "For where you could not pass in the night when all was open," he said, "you surely cannot pass over walls in the day. Nor would it be easier to return, unless by giving us ample pledges and hostages; whereon you may go and

welcome. It were best for all if there might henceforth be amity between us."

He sent this by the chief man among the wounded prisoners; and ten more of those who could walk went with this messenger. No Saxon, unhurt, had been taken arms in hand; but Arthur had caused search to be made for all who lay around, and gentlest care to be given them. This also the men who bore his letter could tell Ossa Cyllalaur, and those who stood with him, for the easing of any doubts and fears.

Both armies watched the little procession pass haltingly from wall to wall, across the belt of open land. Ossa welcomed them, and took their missive, calling one who had the skill to read it. Then there was a stir and hum of admiration, followed by some debate. In the end one of the prisoners came back with the word. "Ossa Cyllalaur, King of Bernicia, Overlord of Deira, bids me say for him that he accepts nothing from an enemy; that a mishap in the dark may be repaired when men can see; that Saxons have little need of food of their own when there are so many Britons with food around them. With thanks to Arthur, who is a wise, brave, and great-hearted soldier, expect Ossa very speedily; for the wolf grows weary of his den."

For now one of Constantine's pack-trains came into plainer sight between the bare trees; and almost before that answer was rendered, the Saxon fighting-men were swarming over their wall on every side at once. Everywhere, too, it was in such fierce fashion that feint could not at first be told from onslaught by any one. But opposite the train a great body, converging in a wedge, made a desperate and long-continued endeavor, wherein most of the others joined them; the foremost hacking at the sharpened branches, or even wrenching their way upward far enough to be speared or cloven, for there was not one who got quite over the wall. Arrows, darts, and stones came grievously among them; and though they did not give way after a single trial and failure, they could render slight return, and in the end went back again very loweringly. There was quick pursuit, and fighting the open ground on even terms; but this venture ended

without the Saxons having won anything. Again their loss in men was the heavier.

At sunset, after one or two passing alarums, there was a great irruption of them toward the point made by the meeting of the waters, suddenly swollen by rain in the upper hills or by melting snow. Here the tree-barrier had made a dam, leaving waterway under it for no more than the common flow. With the sudden rise, the pressure on it grew; and though more trees were felled and braces set, the flood and the enemy came tugging at it together. Presently Ossa Cyllalaur was through, between tumbling and swimming, with two hundred and more of his men. Their blades made havoc for a moment, then sought the depths of the wood, while no others followed. Caradoc, posted near, had hurried, with the men of Devon, crosswise to shield the gap; and though the emptying water still rushed plentifully by, these took care that there should not be any Saxons in it. As the Britons gathered momently, the mass of assailants, leaderless and undecided, went slowly back to their rock-wall again. Meantime Llywarch and a party of horse, overrunning and passing those who had escaped, made search for them in the forest twilight, which was nearly night already, at random, but heading mainly toward Argoed.

Thus the second day of fighting ended.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BLOWING OF THE ELFIN HORN.

The Elfin knight sits on the hill,
Ba, ba, ba, lilli, ba.
He blows his horn both loud and shrill—
The wind has blown my plaid awa.
—*Old Ballad.*

THUS far Dynan's task had been light, though his heart grew hourly heavier. As yet no great effort of the enemy had been directed his way,—the western side. But he had no hope that he should escape what was coming.

At midnight a tongue of fire leaped up tree-top high on the line between him and Argoed. The Saxons of the rock-fort saw it, and cried, "The Torch of Cyllalaur," as they burst out in full strength after this far-summoning leader. Llywarch, remote in the wilderness, also took it for his guide. But no other was stirred to such swiftness as Dynan. Calling his nearest men, he sprang on the horse ready-saddled beside him, and rode madly for the enemy who thus held the path to the lady of his hopeless love. Away behind he heard the sounds of onset, but not now could he turn to them.

Before very long the burning tree died down, but there were sparks and flickers enough to show him the way; and soon the moon came out, spreading a good light in many places before him. Even under the trees he could see dimly. In that half-light of haze and shadow he came suddenly on a massing and stir of figures about the border of a glade, and saw the breath of the wind awaken the last beacon-embers above them. He skirted these men hastily, and kept on.

There was a hubbub of indecision, and one or two spears were thrown; but the way lay open before him, with all his enemies behind. When very sure of this, he drew rein, and his horse nearly sank under him.

It was a barren pass where he halted, with an upward slant between two hills, the one of rounding contour, in a billowy garment of low shrubbery; the other an abrupt, all but overhanging, rocky mass, with distorted, out-thrusting boughs and uncanny roots, twisted and down-reaching. A little above him, where the way widened, a low yew-tree divided it, over-shading the leaden glint of a spring, with yet more uncertain outlines behind. It needed only a breath of air or a shifting of moonbeams to set all astir.

To Dynan's fancy, life was everywhere about him now, though whether friendly or hateful he could not say. There could be no question as to the hurried voices and clanking which he heard far down the glen. They would be too many for him he doubted; and what aid but from one—who would surely come at the magic summons, with her own price for salvation,—the price of the downward way. Over his soul crept the sense of a chill, unhuman tricksomeness and terror—all the uncertain attributes haunting the shadow of a hapless and vanished race.

"Not yet!" he cried aloud. "Not with the sun of Argoed in my veins and the life of the race of man! Not for any need or torment of my own. But Freur!—to save Freur!—if all else fails; it is the path to Freur I am guarding."

Now the sounds were near, and others, greater, arose far behind. He judged that a few of the fleetest were sent after him, while Ossa fell on the rear of the oaken wall where the first Saxons were cutting through it. There his post had been, deserted now, as never before since he first learned duty. He set his face bitterly at the thought.

The moon tipped something that moved a little below him, and he wheeled back under the tree. There were calls, as though he had been seen or heard, and then a quick scrambling up the slope. He could see them now, a panting horse, the rider, and two footmen, well blown, dragging by the thighs of him.

At once he darted on them out of the gloom, spearing the horse in the nostrils, so that he reared and reeled over, dashing two of the

party headlong, while the lance-point, deftly shifting, caught the other runner quite full in front, piercing to the spine. It was plucked out again, but not soon enough to reach the other two, who were tumbling back to their comrades, very much shaken. The horse was there before them. The fairy's son vanished under the yew. The slain Saxon lay all alone in the road.

Dynan heard the muttering of consultation below; and they mounted again, in greater number this time, on foot, two by two. As the foremost pair reached the corpse, the taller of them cursed audibly, but broke his curse midway at sight of the ambushed figure. "A demon!" he cried; and with the word the darted weapon took him, and horse and man leaped out after it together as he fell. The man beside him wounded Dynan's horse, but went down under a sword-cut; and the cry of the dead man, "A demon, a demon!" echoing from lip to lip, far more bore back those who followed than did his charge. Presently they were fleeing down the road, with Dynan right upon them, so that he would have slain another or more than one but that his horse fell. Therefore he went back regretfully and listened.

He could hear now the sound, not far away, of metal stricken together, and angry cries, which in that age alone gave notice of combat. He knew that the Sax- ons must have at last cut an outlet, and that a good part, at least, of Arthur's army, beyond question, had swept round on one or both sides to assail them. Yet in, spite of all, they were coming his way, the way to Argoed.

In no long time the first of this fugitive army overtook those who had attacked him, and halted in perturbation, wild to go on, since Arthur, with Lancelot and Caradoc, were behind them, yet by no means in love with any wood demon either. By the growing sound of their voices he could tell how they gathered, until at last, when some of tougher fibre came up, there was a strong movement toward him. They came rapidly, if not with perfect steadiness, filling the whole pass; a great clamor of fighting, not far behind, urging them on. Then he held the horn very tightly in his left hand, ready for instant use, and with the other flashed out his sword, leaping before

them with a keen, quavering cry, like no human fighting sound that ever was heard. It made them swerve and eddy a little; and before they could settle again, the fairy's son was flitting miraculously before, about, and among them, leaving one blinded by the gash along his brow, another sinking on his knee with severed tendons,—a lithe little fury of attack, exceeding even himself in his own bewildering strategy. Three men had fallen, and more were bleeding, and the line had been kept stationary a minute or more, in spite of the upward crowding, before the Saxons were well aware that the wild cat who thus clawed the front of their array was quite alone and human after all. Then a roar went up of mingled amusement, admiration, anger, and mutual derision; and they closed upon him in a semicircle, wild with the great need to clear the way.

Feeling his doom very near, Dynan sprang about and darted back in a frenzy, keeping his enemies as nearly as he might before him, dodging and dealing blows, and sometimes taking them, until the blood spurted, a human fox in the very jaws of the hounds. He felt, rather than saw, the yew-tree over him. He felt his foot plash and slip in the runnel from the spring. He saw a medley of weapons and faces thronging up almost against his own on every side. With one swing of his blade to keep them off a second, he clapped the elfin horn to his mouth, and blew. So strange was the sound, so ear-splitting and jangling, so cavernous in the echo, that the assailants drew breath and shrank, looking about them. He staggered back against the trunk, murmured weakly, "For Freur!" and blew again.

Then, whether it were echo, or wound-disordered fancy, or the call of human allies thronging to him in his need, or something verily more dread to all, there did certainly seem to come from cliff and hill and hollow fountain-depth and the waste of pallid, moonlit air a multitudinous answer. All nature was full of it and of stormy figures hurrying to the onset. His eyes closed weakly, but he seemed to hear the crash of unearthly havoc and yells of Saxon dismay. As he lifted his eyelids again, he saw, or thought he saw, a figure, as of the haze, waving the assailants on. She turned her face toward him, and he passed into the swoon of one drained of blood. Then, in trance, he felt uplifted bodily, and borne far away. Hope, choice, even wish,

had wholly left him. Yet he seemed to know that he was journeying to the hollow land of his forsaken and haunting race. The arms of the dread lady of his dream were around him.

When Llywarch and his belated horsemen broke in through the upper end of the pass, they saw wild figures in tumultuous movement, and heard the sounds of fight and flight before them, which they could not by any diligence overtake. In after fancy, they seemed to have ridden behind a whirlwind of spectral violence.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DEATH OF AN ARMY.

WHEN Arthur and his men saw that revulsion of panic take their enemies at the blowing of the elfin horn, they too were aware—or later so deemed themselves—of something appalling and unearthly. But they made no stint of fighting, indeed, fought all the harder, for some had raised the cry, "The hosts of heaven are coming to our aid!" Even the Emperor echoed it, this interpretation being most in agreement with his hopes and his will. It seemed that the Saxons were to be reaped from the earth all at once where they hovered, weakened and shaken.

But in a moment there came on them that strength of paroxysm which drives men against anything, with the sense of horrors behind. Against that even the victorious Britons could not stand. They slew many, took and wounded many; but at two points the Saxons broke through them. Ossa Cyllalaur, with a desperate few who clung to him, cut a passage northward, and, in the end, after many hardships and losses, gained his capital. The greater number went back, by the way they lately had taken, through the breach in the British wall. Behind their own rugged stone shelter they turned again, savage in despair. After one unsuccessful assault, their enemies withdrew, and waited. Now and then the environing soldiery jeered, and sent arrow-flights, but nothing more.

As for the Saxons, they mostly kept silence, looking at each other with deep eyes; and many lay down, leaden in their weariness, until slumber took them. Yet keen hunger awoke with them at the dawn.

Whatever in any way might be made to pass for food was eagerly hunted for. Yet there was little to choose between those who ate nothing, and those who wearied their jaws on foul leather, or devoured scraps. The strain of fighting had brought this need swiftly and direly on them. Beside, not a few had lost blood, and needed replenishing. Sore and grim, they looked over the wall, exposing

themselves indifferently, or doubled themselves behind it in the temper and aspect of wild beasts. Only here and there one preserved the nobler air of a brave man under the great shadow.

Of these, a harper, after a time, picked up his instrument where he had thrown it in that last night-sally, and drew his hand, through habit, idly over the strings. Chance, or some soul-movement, wakened hopeful notes, and a faint light came into the dull eyes about him. So—hearers, minstrel, and harp all inciting one another—the sounds grew into a continued strain, which leaped out inspiringly.

"Why have done with hope?" he sang. "Hope hath but fled with Ossa, hath wed Ossa Cyllalaur; and full surely and swiftly will they come again to us together. Why, O men of the North and of the sea, why, O men of the fight and of the storm-wind, have ye grown all at once so child-weak in patience, so unenduring? Was it not said of old that the one food needed by the Saxon is the sight of his enemy's destruction? Is it much to wait a day longer with such a banquet in store? For I tell you that their mighty walls shall be broken, and the weapons of them shall be whirled away like dead leaves through the forest. Then what can save from you their goodly cities, fairer than any dream. Wherefore patience a little while; yet patience."

Listening, they believed with fevered exaltation; a deadly faith for them, since at that moment came one more message of pity and peace, a Briton bearing it. Him these frenzied men seized with mocking answers, and one, wild with famine and many hurts, cut him down. A great cry went up from the British circle, then ceased again as suddenly. There was no further sound, nor any motion. The Saxons looked around, and knew what they had done; and the world drew blank to them.

Their minds went over the long distance between them and York, the city drained of her strength, dead or dying there. Over empty lands it went, from which no new forces might quickly spring, and back into that tangled wilderness where their chief, if yet alive, was

doubtless then striving to force his way. Very desolately it was borne in on them that he would never come.

By noon they were most hopeless, famine-stricken wretches. Through hour after hour following, they said to each other by word and eye, "This must have an end." Toward sundown one cried, "Better now, while we have yet strength to cut our mark on them." At once three or four thousand of the strongest climbed the wall on the northward side, making for their enemy in a leaderless, ravening mass. That charge held, though many fell by the way with arrows in them, and there was hard fighting over the British barricade. But the besiegers were too plentiful, and gathered more and more at the threatened point from every quarter, pushing them farther from the wall in throbs and throes of combat, step by step, quite to their own enclosure. And now all were closely pent there except the dead, while their enemies were up against it on every side.

Seeing their desperate plight, Arthur called aloud one more offer of mercy, to all except him who had slain the message-bearer. But they were beside themselves, and answered only with a jeer.

"End it, then," he commanded; "end it, since they will have no less."

But this was not easily done, even yet. They were still many and well-weaponed, and every way formidable in their famished hate. For a time, fast as men mounted the wall they were hurled back again, or dragged inward, or speared, or cut; or rolled, grappling, with some stabbing enemy. Yet the assault was nearly continuous everywhere, Saxons and Britons being well packed together, with only the slippery and crumbling mass of stones between. Lancelot and Caradoc were the first over it who made good their footing within. Slowly a few more joined them; but they scarce gained ground at all, and had to fight for life as well as victory. Half an hour later a mighty swell of attack lifted Arthur, with Llywarch and Caowl and some hundreds more, a little farther inward from the opposite point of the circle. There was desperate effort to dislodge these; and when it failed, the Saxons threw up some sort of crude barrier before them with whatever came in their way, and fought

over it. Before the sun left the tree-boughs, the doomed men were panting within less than one-fourth of their stone-encircled camp. The glinting yellow rays between the trunks lighted the last knot of haggard, angry faces and whirling arms, driven literally to the wall and to death.

After that there were great shoutings of triumph; but the victors, with their dead and wounded, drew away to a less ghastly place. Then silence and the night fell together; the one suddenly, but not unbroken, the other by slow degrees. And men hushed their breath for ages afterward at thought of the slain Saxon army in that haunted forest of Celidon.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TOKEN OF OISIN AND THE MARCH TO LONDON.

> Arthur bore the image of the holy Virgin, Mother of God.
> —NENNIUS.

ARTHUR, mindful of London's danger, and its people's aid in that great wood-fight, left himself no rest in hastening thither. Guinevere had but one loving hour with him at Legiolum, although using her most enthralling wiles, in jealous fear of that stately queen for whom such prowess was to be expended. She could not even take heart at the thought of Lancelot coming; for he too, though yet sore with wounds, held southward, seeking new battles. Caradoc, who had fared very ill in that slaughter, was to rest there, and to rule. But a halting and growling uncle, though soon to mend, was not the guardian most eagerly to be chosen by the luxuriant Guinevere. She pitied herself many times before it was held quite safe for her to take the southward way.

Arthur's great army was gazed on breathlessly, as it went, for such awful destruction had not been heard of in living memory. The loss was plain, many ranks being thinned wofully, and the marks of battle showed everywhere; but all looked on them as men predestined to conquer. They followed their rapid leader as with wings, Constantine, anxious for Aurelia, doing his best thrice over in smoothing all difficulties away.

London-town still held out, but nearly all other news was ill. Scarcely anything stirred Arthur so bitterly as the storming of the lake-village, the death of Osburn in a futile effort to save it, and the total vanishing of its enthusiastic pastor. Yet none gave him up for lost altogether; for a man with good marsh guidance might lie hidden a long time thereabout, beyond all finding by Saxons.

So in truth it proved; for news of the Emperor's march in some way brought him forth, carried by four men on a litter, with the stain and

rankness of the swamp still on him. Thinner and more bird-like he was than ever, with fingers withered and shrunken to mere talons, fever-flushed in the face and fever-shaken, his breath coming at first in gasps of thankfulness for free air, his eyes deepening intensely.

He bade the bearers put him down at the place of first meeting an officer of that army. "It is for Arthur Mabuter to come hither," said he. "A greater Monarch, by me, his voice among the men of Britain, soon returning to that heavenly sender, summons him, awaits him." His voice was preternaturally calm, and his eyes gazed into the blue above him as if for vision of his home soon to be.

The victor of Celidon heard, and came still more rapidly. This triumph had bred in him an exaltation in unison with that of this martyred enthusiast. Formerly Oisin had seemed to him a pathetic figure, admirable in some ways, yet extravagant, ungovernable, dangerous. Now he was prepared to humble himself, and take the dying man's words as indeed a message from on high. The measured utterance of the sufferer affected him like a shock.

"We are bidden to number our days," began Oisin. "Minutes are days for me now, and I have numbered them; also my words, fitting each to each. Be silent all; there is not one to spare.

"Arthur, Emperor of Britain, this is my burden to you from the Most High: 'Tear thou the head of Vran from the White Hill of his enchantment.'

"And this is the reason thereof: he hath put palsy into British veins. He hath poisoned the cause of Christ with his necromancy. He hath given over London-town to the curse of selfishness, while the ravagers were all abroad in the outer lands.

"They came against us once, twice, three times, and yet a fourth; and while we fought, we called on God and man for aid. At first Cian came against them, and then Osburn, and then both together; but each time those were fewer who would follow; and at the fourth, Osburn went down under many Saxons. Then, for all that we could

do, the people of God were slain, old and young together, in their homes and about their altar, unmercifully; so that only a few escaped with me into the outer noisomeness, where we have dwelt until now like foul spirits of the waste. Yet even there have we heard the cry go up to Vran and the gods of Vran, from the White Hill of Cynvelyn, exulting.

"I adjure you, Arthur Mabuter, as you value salvation, make no compact, no truce, with the works of darkness. For the Christian soldier there is only the cross of his suffering Redeemer and the holy countenance of the Mother of God, not the buried and evil-luminous head of old wickedness."

Arthur bowed his head profoundly, saying, "Even so, Oisin." There was great pity in his eyes, but something hotter and darker behind it.

Oisin lay back easy of mind. He said no more, only once to ask for water; and once he made motion toward his breast. There, moving the mantle, was found a cameo of clear creamy stone, hanging locket-wise, the pure face of Mary, Christ's mother. When Arthur took this reverently, the dying man smiled, and pointed to the shield he bore. Arthur gave promise by word and sign that it should be set there, guarding and guarded. The dying man was still again until the last spasm took him. Thus passed Oisin the evangelist into the light or the shadow.

The token was indeed a marvellous thing, nor could any one tell the land or time wherein it was made. Arthur, all the more for this mystery, held it high above aught else that God or man had given him. So the best of his armorers and cunning workers in precious things were called, and given charge to set it in the central boss of the shield, with a bright encircling wreath, jewelled and golden. Swiftly they wrought, with his more than human eagerness ever beside them, waiting while some part of the army went by. At the last sunset of their march, Arthur the Emperor, with glad, solemn eyes, held it tilted into the wonder and richness of that glory, and said, "It is well."

After all had supped and rested a while, he sent his word abroad and took the lead; and the whole army, wakening limb by limb from its ease, came after him, at first sluggishly, then vehemently, with a great hum, passing quickly into silence. A long night-speeding it was; the footmen striding after the horses, and well nigh keeping pace mile for mile, a dim, multitudinous tossing of spears and javelins and armor-gleams, with a world of doubtful features and forms under the half-clouded starlight.

Silently as they went, some whisper, like the leaves in the night-wind, kept on before, so that all the phantom-like enemies between them and the north wall of the city drew away. When Eschwine, from the banks of the Lea near its mouth, looked northward toward the Hampstead hills, it was not the presence of armed enemies that widened his eyes, but rather their multitude, which was like a miracle, to have appeared so soon. Among them he could see well the spoil of the Cyllalaur and his Saxons,—mail and standards and weapons of cunning ornament. Well before the array, from among the ruins of the villa of Constantine, floated the dragon banner of the great Arthur, imperial token of supremacy throughout Britain.

Then he smiled very grimly, hiding discomfiture, and bade his men to the river and beyond, where were the Kent-folk armaments on the Southwark marshes and fields. There being boats in plenty, all were over before harm came of their severance. Truly when the Saxons were thus together the host of them at second view was not less but even greater (being infantry standing close) than that of their enemy. Notwithstanding, they had no longer any hope of London for a prey.

Some quaint humor moved Eschwine to send that morning an embassy to Arthur, in solemn form, with many titles and compliments, desiring that he would withdraw his goodly display of riders from that useful battlefield between the armies of Kent and Essex and London, it being a contention which in no way concerned the other island peoples.

Arthur heard as one who hears not; then made answer, “Tell your king, Eschwine, and his confederates, that I will have no treaty with

them nor any manner of parley. Tell him that he is forsworn; that he has forfeited both life and soul. Tell him I would I could smite the one, as I verily, and that soon, shall smite out of existence the other."

He bade them be entertained and restored to their own people. His army spread itself over all the land as far as the riverside, while he rode in through the Ermine gate, with his imperial guard of thrice three hundred champions, the best legion of infantry following spear in hand.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BROUGHT TO THE LIGHT.

> Arthur discovered the head, for it was a frivolous thing with him to defend the kingdom by any other power than his own.
> —NOTE TO GUNN's *Nennius*.

THE siege of London, though not very long, had tried the defenders sorely. Even before the storming of the lake village, most of the open country had been swept. Yet there could be no general destruction of life. The invaders trampled empty fields and fired empty houses. But by day the huddled watchers within the walls watched the smoke roll up where their homes had been, and the lights were lighted very distressfully.

Again and again Cian had striven to put heart into his people, and lead them in some effort to stay this ravage. But except the several efforts in behalf of the lake village, and one long sally of foresters to a stronghold up the river, whence they were glad enough to get back again, scarce a man could be brought beyond the limit set by Vran. When the villa of Constantine was fired, Aurelia herself royally forbade the dashing forth of any mere handful, such as Cian could have taken, to fight for her home.

Twice near the wall he made some play with his chariots; but much of that ground was always marshy, and the rains and thaws and sharp frosts were all equally bad for them. On the roads and some smooth places he could indeed yet do service; but these were easily obstructed, and nothing great came of it. All in all, this plain truth remained on the side of Vran, that the walls held, throwing off every assault; and whatever was done without the walls came to no very good ending.

Yet once, at least, there was exceeding danger. While Cian's attention was taken by a determined threatening along the northern wall, a

strong party of the enemy swarmed over an ill-watched point near the eastern abutment on the Thames, and others followed, so that a good many Saxons were fairly within the city. But it so chanced that a great concourse of Druidic devotees had just betaken themselves to the White Hill, and at the first alarm descended right eagerly, their priests now clad in full pagan attire, and wild chants of adoration on every lip. Nothing could withstand them now, for in the very depth of their hearts they deemed they knew. The first Saxon success was a real Saxon undoing. Imbedded in a hostile city, assailed in this preterhuman spirit of shrill hate, not one of them ever left the houses and streets alive. Cian's legions, hurrying across from the northern boundary, found the work already done to their hand.

It was hard for any one not to have some faith in the power that won for them. Aurelia felt it; so, still more, did Cian, growing day by day. In his case were there not also lifelong habit and brooding, the fame that pledged him, the mystery that lured—more than all, the memory of his fight for the golden vest in the luminous hidden crypt, and the living fire that had so lately burned on him, accompanied by that awful voice out of the hollow hill? Thus the defenders were exceedingly ready for that especial work; and when, three days later, a wave-head of Saxons came fairly over the western wall, the intruders were crushed between two masses, each a thousand mailed men closing like jaws, and died there speedily. No other entrances were made, though there were many partial onsets. Even the great battering-ram failed, for slings and arrows and javelins made havoc among those who swung it; and the gate against which it had been trained flew open unexpectedly to let out a throng of destroyers. Therefore it was not used again.

There were many lesser endeavors and stratagems of the enemy, compelling very close watchfulness, but without other result in any case. Toward the last it seemed that they might soon look for an onfall of the whole Saxon host, and how this might have fared none could know. But the people for the most part were high-hearted in their dread reliance; and Arthur found this feeling at the full, confronting his own abhorrence. Nevertheless, they gladly welcomed the bright show he made, and the strength he brought.

They were not famished as yet, but only straitened enough to do double honor to the feast set forth by the imperial largess and the providence of Constantine.

Even at this banquet there was some frowning over the downfall of Vortimer, and other tales that were told. It seemed hard that such ruin should have fallen on mere generous disorder. But they gloried abundantly in the astounding achievement of Celidon. Aloud they cried, "Like death was his spear, killing his enemy." Nevertheless, the sight of the Emperor's shield, and the known charge laid on him by Oisin before death, stirred in them alarm, even the menacing of horror.

Arthur himself was not wholly unchanged. His demeanor, though gracious ever since his entry, held something in reserve. His appalling success in the wilderness battle—so like the descending hand of death, and following many victories—had made his natural self-confidence grow toward a sense of supreme power and undoubted right. A perilous arrogance lurked in this, which yet was not know- ingly self-seeking. All protest of inner sympathy had been barred by the superhuman cogency of the injunction laid on him and the hard uplifting of his mission.

He heard that evening from the queen and Cian the full narrative of the siege, glooming over every allusion to Vran, but saying nothing until all else had been uttered. Then to Aurelia,—

"I have somewhat to tell your people," he said, "which concerns them all. If it please you, let the notables, at least, meet us in council two hours hence. Till then I will rest."

When he had left them, Cian looked at Aurelia, saying, "Our Emperor is the greatest man alive; but I would that Vran had put himself on the side of more generous fighting, or that Arthur were not so stern and fervent in his faith."

Aurelia returned his look, smiling gravely.

"True," she answered, "yet other zeal may not be more wise. I would that faiths might not clash; but let each freely have his own, or so many as may please him."

Cian shook his head. "That will not suffice for Arthur."—

"Let us hope better," replied she, but uncertainly.

Arthur's words to the council were few.

"Men of London," he began. "You have done well in defending your walls. You would have done better but that there was a traitor among you."

One looked at another, distressed and doubtful. Cian, seeing his drift, spoke out,—

"Would it be just, my Emperor, to expect us alone to rout such a host?"

He waved his hand toward the southern windows, where, in detached pictures, were seen, beyond the river, the vast and firmly planted armies of Saxondom.

Arthur gazed on that sight, then turned quietly to Cian. "Will you say that no more could have been done if all had been eager? With the enemy ravaging in scattered parties, what hand was interposed? With the enemy fleeing, who followed beyond the wall, and slew? What ill friend of our race had power to draw a magic circle, and wilt the manhood of British men beyond it to the weakness of a dreaming girl? One—if old tales be true—hidden in some caverned place of the White Hill of Cynvelyn. Whether heathen imposture, I know not; or some evil being justly wiped from the race of men, or existing since the beginning, for man's undoing and destruction. But this I know very surely, that not again from his nether hold shall Vran work treason against Britain. He shall see the daylight, for all the little love he hath of it." At once there were cries, aghast. Aurelia, their queen, arising with modest dignity, spoke for all.

"Beware, great Emperor, not of Vran, nor of any who is or hath been mortal. But beware of affronting that good God who hath set deep feelings in men. These also have made our walls many times the stronger. To disturb the relics of Vran in their burial-place will be a horror in all eyes."

"My Emperor, my loved general!" exclaimed Cian, with shaken voice, "a thing so wrong would surely weaken the homage of every upright follower, and forfeit, soon or late, your dominion, which was founded in righteousness, and rests on righteousness only."

Arthur looked gravely, first at the one speaker, then at the other—sadly, almost fondly, at the woman whom he had made queen, but whose queenliness was beyond his making, that woman who even now made the luxuriant Guinevere seem less to him; then not so sadly, but with a spice of anger, at the trained soldier of his battles.

"I had foreseen all this," he said. "I am sad to grieve you, lady; menaces move me not, Prince Cian. Those who have all wisdom, and who love me not, beyond doubt will leave me. To-morrow we fight the Saxons, when men will be tested. I deal to-night with an enemy long covered, nearer home."

He walked sedately from the hall of audience. At once arose the trample and clang of troops held ready, now steadily moving. It went with him; and all knew that he was for the tomb in the White Hill.

Cian, with face of outrage, cried out, "It is beyond enduring. It shall not be. There are men in London"—

But Aurelia demanded, "Am I queen?"

"Assuredly," he replied.

"Then no hand of London shall be raised against the Emperor."

Cian looked at her with bewilderment, then suspicion. He had seen the softening of memory in Arthur's face. Might not she also remember and hope, towering, as she did, above Guinevere—and Guinevere so far away! The fancy went forth with him resentfully.

His feet bore him to the haunted White Hill. Arthur and his men were there already. The digging had begun.

"It is a work that you will repent," said Cian curtly, halting, as in doubt whether he should say or do more.

Arthur viewed him in displeasure, and half turned, as if about to give some order, then waved his hand in dismissal without speaking; and the work went on. Cian walked away with hot darkness in his heart, feeling himself wholly right and wholly wronged. Forming no definite plan, he yet drew together his chariots and such of his men as were most devoted to him, in the northern part of the city; and when Aurelia sent to know his meaning, he returned a doubtful and sullen answer. But distress and perplexity were so in the air every way that she could not determine to do anything.

A shaking palsy had fallen on the city. For a moment some talked of resistance, and some of fleeing, as not sure what bolt of destruction might fall. But they waited in mere fascination and terror. Only the priests, with a few hundred of the bravest behind them, went in procession before the Emperor, to beseech and warn—if yet by any means they might prevent the dreadful thing. But Arthur merely heard them, and bade them stand by to see that it was done well.

Below the sod and the clay the diggers came to a rough casing of loosely cemented, irregular stones, and within this an apartment, or crypt, very neatly walled with translucent blocks unlike any material near. Therein, on a polished altar, symbolically engraven, rested Vran's hairless and terror-working skull. Yet it wrought no terror now. Arthur inspected it curiously, and averred that he found it too like any other human head to be treated with despite, but would send it honorably away from London for reburial.

Then the great hole was refilled; and all disquieted London was free to go to its repose, with a sense of relief, since no cataclysm had befallen, that was a very odd blankness and disappointment also.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOW ARTHUR AND CIAN RAISED THE SIEGE.

For the terror of death from the base men of Lloegyn
I will not tarnish my honor.
—ANEURIN.

BUT Cian took no rest. Through the night he paced uneasily among his men, or tossed himself down, to rise again, or sat bitterly.

Aurelia's waking moments were also of disquiet and foreboding, so that she half wished the city of London left with the foe still about it, and no rescue. For what had come to pass was portentous, with great upheaval in it of men's faith and human ties. Not the most philosophic mind could face it unshaken.

In the new daylight her mind was clearer. The act of the Emperor was done beyond all undoing. She had no better liking for it than at first; yet destruction had not fallen, and there was no course but to go forward. Toward Cian she was in displeasure, trusting that he would yet do his part, and striving to weigh duly in his behalf the affront which had so stirred him.

Word was brought her of a very great muster by Arthur eastward of the town, presaging some enterprise against the enemy. It slighted her that she should in no way have been called on. After breakfasting, she rode forth duly attended. Arthur was already far beyond the Wallbrook, where the troops of the north and west were gathering to him. But as she went she saw many of her own fighting-men yet at their posts, with eyes that held more than her own unrest. But when Arthur, the Emperor, had sight of her, he rode very decorously thither.

She watched his coming with curious interest. Reliance grew within her on this power among men, who feared not anything, even the most sacred. She found in his poise and air something of the warrior

archangel. At least there was exaltation in his eye. Yet surely even a champion of heaven, while abiding among men, should not ride rough-shod over their hope and adoration.

"I had not thought the Queen of London would be abroad so early," he said. "May we look also for some of her people?"

"Our Emperor knows they are all his to command," replied she.

Arthur reined his steed around beside her, and they rode on together.

"Your Emperor," he responded gravely, "has never acted from his own will only, without regard- ing those between, unless on the highest compulsion, or in the greatest need."

She held an obedient face, bowing gently. He resumed:—

"This time there was no such urgence: My old friend Cian kept aloof. I could not know how you might feel. We had no need of the unwilling, with so many of us already, and *this*." He bent his brow toward the shield.

"Yet the Saxons are many," she said gravely.

It was indeed a spectacle. Their host, great already, had swollen immensely during the night by the increment of many small parties hurriedly called in. By far the greater number were afoot. They did not cover the ground evenly, but in neighboring bodies, larger or smaller—with every chieftain the men who had followed him to the war. A continual hum came from them, as of readiness for the wrestling of spears. .

"There will be less of them when all is over," answered the Emperor; and his men who heard, for they were near now, cried out eagerly, after the manner of the day. That sound of grim rejoicing went along the lines and throughout the great mass of soldiery—greater still in seeming for the number of those who were mounted. Only London

levies who had been with Vortimer at first kept an over-shadowed air; but, as their queen openly smiled on them from beside the Emperor, these responded with a very especial acclaim. It cheered and fortified her. She gazed at Arthur with a certain deep wistfulness, hardly daring. "Does it not show the better way to their zeal and aid?" she said at last.

Arthur bowed courteously, but as yielding nothing.

"Prince Cian is deeply grieved," she added gently.

Now, indeed, there came a touch of resentment in Arthur's pure, strong face.

"Cian defended you well," he said, "and for that and old service much may be passed by. Yet he carries it far. One might fancy him an enemy. Let him stay. The cause of God needs no reluctant aid."

She bowed in deference rather than conviction.

"But at least my father shall lead some of my people to the fight, if you will spare him," she said. "We grudge nothing, if we do not approve all things—even in the highest."

The Emperor knew it was her last rebuke. He bowed low to her womanliness, but offered no defence. When he made answer, it was to her earlier words only.

"They will be welcome. They shall be first over the bridge."

As they rode back before the army, Aurelia could not fail to notice how—for all his rapt loftiness—he bore the new splendor of his shield ever in the sun. Moreover, the gathering, and the movement, and the going and coming again by one road, all seemed part of the vaunting pictorial fancy of his race.

Constantine being already in the forum, and assault resolved on forthwith, a galloping messenger was despatched him, with word to

set men at breaking down the barricades that had long blocked the bridge. Almost, before Aurelia entered the town, a great crashing and splintering had begun.

She had looked for interference from the Saxon outposts by the riverside; but, after one undecided movement, these gave no sign. They even drew off a little, so as to leave open space for some part of Arthur's army, but thickened continually behind the curved front thus acquired. Within the city she discerned a shifting of men, and judged that Arthur was putting forward those who were best able to give and take in hard hand-play against odds, until re-enforcements should reach them. But some of her own were still in the van.

She looked from time to time toward the guardtower of the northern gate, where stood a group watching, with the chariots ranged below. All ready, but for what? The question made her blush in anger and in shame. Should she send again to entreat—another slight? Or command—with possible conflict of wills, and contingencies not to be thought on? Hemmed about and strained, she waited, think- ing, "Surely now he will come, or now, or now." At last, while looking riverward, an exclamation beside her recalled her eyes; and she clasped her hands, with a low, pleased cry, as she saw that the tower-roof was vacant.

At the same time a stir ran through the waiting troops of every arm near that tower. Then the light left her face, and a low moan escaped her. For they were not coming, but going out through the gateway, Cian and the chariots foremost. The bright face of her hope seemed smitten with enduring blackness.

On a tablet she hastily wrote for Arthur: "Prince Clan has fled. His chariots and men are lost to you."

She heard sounds of surprise from both armies; of jeering also from the one, of angered mortification from the other. With set teeth and lips, she watched, now the bridge, gradually clearing of obstruction, now the causeway through the northern marshes, along which the glittering thread of spears and wheels and men in armor crawled

steadily. Surely, she thought, now he will turn, or now; then she chided her silliness, for undoubtedly, if he had meant at all to fight about the bridge, he would have taken the direct course thereto. The last hope left her, as she saw them keep straight on, unwavering, across the marsh and the open land, into the woods. Ah, Cian had robbed her of the best of London, and made it a by-word for all time! She was half in mind to hurry after, with unmistakable commands, and the will, at any cost, to be obeyed.

On the brink of this came Arthur's answer: "Whatever Cian may purpose, be sure it is not to play the coward. This from his Emperor and old-time comrade, who little loves his later moods and ways."

She grew genial under that, with sudden self-blame and thankfulness to the Emperor. How could she have been the first to give way in trust, and to need assurance from another? How far, too, had she failed in comprehending "the magnanimous Arthur!"

Here were two men, the foremost of their time, who had so ordered some part of their conduct that a very friendly woman, meaning to be just and generous, had half despised them. Certainly the Emperor was not at his noblest as a desecrator of the grave. Certainly Prince Cian could not yearn to be depicted as withdrawing through the farthest gate while his comrades marched into danger. For the moment she felt like giving up all comprehension of the sex, but rested in the consoling sense that somehow all was well, though details might be bettered.

But now her father, well pleased at this break in his commonplace duties, and looking all that he ever had thought of himself, rode over the opened bridge at the head of his men. No chance for indecision here, nor conflicting wills, but only those of the enemy, whom he had no thought to shun. His fellow-townsmen, even those who had hated him and contended with him, were all proud of their chief Roman now.

He went slowly, his horsemen spreading like a fan over the low open ground beyond the river, to cover the exit from the bridge. Llywarch

followed with chosen men of the north, a goodly company, turning up the river, where Constantine made room for him. Next Lancelot in like manner, fronted down-stream, with the men of the west. Then Arthur himself, with a greater body, drawn from all quarters, pushed these three forward nearly to the Saxon front, and formed a denser demi-belt behind them. It left indeed but room for one legion of foot, who came swiftly across to guard the bridge-head, making living buttresses on either side, with a narrow lane between for re-enforcements.

The Saxons were swaying now, with the word of onset almost at tongue and ear. It was not Arthur's will that this word should be given. He rose full height in the stirrups, holding his consecrated shield with both hands above his head, and flashed it for a signal to Llywarch, to Constantine, to Lancelot. As it swept round the curve, the Saxons received its scintillation in their dazzled eyes, with some wild ex- pectancy of magic. Before they had quite regained themselves, the outer line of Britons, with loud cries, had spurred in among them everywhere, spearing and slashing. A few moments later Arthur and his main body of horsemen charged, with greater impetus, in the wake of Constantine.

He well knew that the chief endeavor of the enemy would be to cut him off by striking in crosswise near the bridge. But he meant they should gain nothing by this; and before him he saw the father of Aurelia—whom but for Guinevere he might have sought as his bride—in great urgency of peril.

For in this supreme moment Constantine was rushing onward among the enemy as man never went. All disparagement of the past, all baffled self-esteem, rose before him; the inspiration of blood, of lineage, the memory of the white death-charge of Aurelius Ambrosius, hurled him on. At last he was to justify all that he had held himself to be, or die, as Ambrose died, amid the lasting plaudits of the world. So he rode down and smote down, breaking through dense masses on his powerful stallion, taking spear-point after spear-point harmlessly on shield and mail, keeping right on, though

slanting leftward unwittingly, with no eye for anything but the swift work he had to do.

His men, plying desperately to keep the pace, were still left stringing behind one by one, or in little fighting knots among their enemies. They joined Arthur as he swept on, keeping his own ranks well together, and scattering the hostile froth before him. But Constantine was beyond their aid.

Four times Arthur saw the Roman spear-stricken and all but hurled from the saddle; then, since the end was near, he, shouting with might and main, the jewelled Queen of Heaven burning on his arm, and a hundred devoted fighting men hammering close behind, came side by side with the dying Constantine, and the struggle around them was deadly. Packed in the press of friends and enemies, Constantine rode upright in armor manfully out of life. When the inburst of British men scattered the mass, and freed them, it was but a corpse in armor that Arthur caught a moment by the shoulder, as it fell crashing. In his own peril he had no choice but to let it be.

He was now, though with many wounded men, in a great expanse of hostile infantry. But the slanting chase had led him toward the side of Lancelot, though much farther afield; and by the shouting he judged this prince, with his mountain men, to be retarded by great odds, but working in resolutely. Arthur turned thither with weight and fury, his men all striving as if on the one road to life. A tongue of the Saxon army, caught thus between hammer and anvil, was sorely worsted and broken.

Lancelot had been strengthened already by a part of the footmen from the bridge, or he would have been driven back before this in spite of all. Arthur and he together strenuously cleared away their closest assailants at the sides and rear; then swept over the ground which Constantine had held, to the relief of Llywarch.

They did not find him so hard pressed as they had feared. For some reason the weight of Saxondom in front of him had been less than elsewhere; and Caowl, with a mixed body of re-enforcements

flowing thinly over the bridge, had given him nearly all their aid. In his cheery, indomitable way, the Prince of Argoed, as always, had made a fine fight of it, penetrating far, and at the last falling back slowly with no ruinous loss of men. Everywhere around the space left for the Britons, the Saxon attack had been forestalled, the Saxon front badly broken.

Lancelot returned to his place again, Arthur to that of Constantine. All busied themselves in quick dashes to keep a wider space open, that there might be room for new men as they came. On their steady coming success depended; for the Saxons were not really shattered, except the mere face of them, and must press overpoweringly.

Eschwine saw this also. Hitherto he had held slightly aloof, hoping little from the first clashes, and watchful to deal some telling blow. He now pushed his archers along the river's edge from above, toward the bridge, under cover of a moving spearhedge, while simultaneously he made a distracting onset elsewhere.

Only a few minutes earlier some of Aurelia's people had found three chariots left behind by Cian as not perfect and strong. Externally they had the formidable look of their tribe, bright bronzework, seemly woodwork, scythe-like blades of long reach—great rushing engines of war every way to be desired. The queen joined in the welcome which greeted them, and hurried them forward. So, with untrained horses, and hiding fatal weakness under a show of bravery, they rattled and rumbled forward into the line of fire.

So fair a target was not easily to be missed. At the middle of the bridge a flight of flaming arrows took them. Streaks of flaring, smoke-billowing tow struck across the horses' nostrils; keen things, they knew not what, burnt their hides or pierced them. They reared and twisted this way and that; and the faulty vehicles were broken and splintered and locked together, barricading the way with a jagged, hopeless entanglement. The impatient horsemen following, themselves galled and disordered by missiles, pressed vehemently up, with the sound of fighting for a lure, and the impetus of the long column behind to bear them on. Presently there was but a writhing

and dangerous mass, overflowing with great splashes into the water on either side, until the bridge groaned under it; and still the barrier grew.

Arthur saw the peril at hand. From the first he had known this risk, if any risk there could be to one who bore the sure guaranty of Heaven. His open war on Vran had left him no choice but to cross and right himself in all eyes by victory. He saw the whole field now with clear vision and constant mind,—Aurelia hastening down the White Hill toward the bridge; Llywarch and his cohorts dashing at the spearsmen and archers; Eschwine coming straight at himself with a front of horsemen and a great leaping crew of long-haired Saxon foot. Sending word that the men on the bridge and at its nearer end should follow Llywarch, he also charged forward, with all about him.

Midway, as he most desired, Arthur met Eschwine; met him without a word, but a swift-swaying quiver of his long spear that smote aside the lance of the Saxon, caught him at the shoulder, between the plates of bronze, and twisted him backward. One second Eschwine clung, with a face of fury and torment, then fell. Arthur went on vehemently, and many more rode likewise over the fallen man. After the battle Eschwine's body was dragged from a little runnel into which he had crawled for shelter, the dints of shod hoofs in spine and skull showing how he had met with an inglorious end.

His fall and the continued rush of the Britons did not at once turn the Saxon tide. For a time there were two counter torrents of men—one driving on with the plunging of mailed horses, with spears down-thrust and forward, with the smiting of sword-blades and axes; the other bounding like acrobats, upstriking and indriving, thrusting reckless hands throat-ward to drag their enemies down, or, even when wounded and brought to pause, dealing their blows every way until overridden and laid in the dust.

Even Arthur felt the jar of more blades than one behind the sacred shield. His spear was dragged from him by a sea-rover whom it had transfixed. Nearly following it out of the saddle, he was glad enough

to let it go, and snatch his sword for defence against other assailants then around him.

A little way farther, and he found that the movement was British alone. A long wedge of them spread back from him, keeping on and holding together far better than their opponents. Quickening pace with a shout, he found the resistance giving way, and presently the Saxons were fleeing before him, except a few knots of men, who fought on very determinedly, and were shattered or left behind as might happen. At last he drove a reluctant, half-hesitating crew before him into open ground.

Halting here, while his men poured through after him and fell into better trim for charging again, he saw that only a lesser part of the Saxons, after all, had been routed. The great body behind him had nearly closed again, facing about with a good will toward further encounter. Far to the right Lancelot was cutting his way slowly into a forest of opponents; while on the left, as slowly, Llywarch fell back before overpowering forces. He turned anxiously to the bridge, and there was indeed some sign of opening; but would even the first beginning of aid come in time? Up the river there was a stir of dust and moving forms, not yet visible to the Saxons, who, besides, were busy. It made him think of Cian longingly, but that was too good to be true.

He charged back to the bridge-head, fighting hard with greater loss than before in less time. As he faced about again, the Saxons were there still, all together, and beginning to come on with firm feet and faces. Lancelot and Llywarch joined him soon, the enemy pressing close on them from every side.

Then, over a hill beyond them rose a hurrying chariot, then another; and presently a whole line of such were in view. The sun burned on the well-remembered golden vest. “Cian, Cian!” cried the Britons all together, from riverside and bridge and all the roofs of the city. The Saxons gave a cry of consternation, ending in defiance, and a part of them turned about toward the new assailants.

About the same time the tangle of woodwork and ironwork was hurled from the bridge, and men began to come over.

Where Cian struck, the mass of the Saxons was densest, facing both ways formidably, for all their surprise. A few archers, whom Llywarch had driven to the rear, let fly with effect at their new kind of assailants. Cian himself was an especial mark, his charioteer receiving an arrow through the arm, while he heard another vehicle crashing over behind him. But his own kept on, though waveringly, and nearly all that followed struck and cut into the great mass of men before them. The chariot, as an unreasonable means of destruction, was the one thing that shook the Saxon before it touched him. To this bounding, swerving, onward hurling contrivance of steeds and wheels and fighting-men and body-severing blades he could by no means become reconciled. Even before Cian reached his enemies, he had known by their eyes that they would not long bear the onset. And now, as he felt them yielding every way, he heard the cheery cry of Llywarch vehemently coming toward him; while a wider, wilder swell of voices, prolonged over the now thronging bridge to the London shore, told of a great onrush of Arthur and his shield divine.

Yet some of the enemy were packed between these opposite charges, holding the ground perforce, and lessening their momentum. So it was not without hard fighting that the old friends, Cian and Llywarch, met. Even afterward the Saxon infantry, cut off on the side toward the river shore, made terrible efforts to break through, and join their main body. Over, under, and between the chariots, a part of them succeeded. Turning on this great remainder, the comrade princes tore into it with momently increasing numbers, until they had it bodily in motion. But ever the great Emperor, shield on arm, kept his place far before them, with a comet-like trail of mailed riders.

Once he was cut off, and near destruction. A great throng, reeling from the assault of Llywarch farther to the right, broke across behind him, and hardened into a living wall at sight of their great opportunity; then it came furiously upon the few cohorts thus cut

off, knowing they had but little time. Again the chariots came in play, though not too soon, and corners were lapped from the wall, and lanes cut in, until at last Llywarch's horsemen could carve a way through. So Arthur speedily was free again, and hastening on, but with the best of his men in greater mass near him. Their spreading front bore back the Saxons over the open land.

Thus, in wave on wave of dashing onset, he drove them until nightfall; and ever they resisted, seizing new foothold and fighting well; but their resistance grew less. When darknesss fell Arthur turned about to ride through a country filled with scattered and hopeless enemies, knowing that there was, at most, only a small remnant of the once great Saxon army floating on before its vanguard toward the sea.

He had lost many men and some notable chieftains; among others, Caowl, who fell in charging a rough wedge of the West Kent men half-way to the Cray. On Arthur's own body, for all its constant exposure, there was no wound. Good armor might count for much in this; rapidity of motion, skill, and audacity, for more. But he looked on the holy face that brightened his shield, and gave all the glory there. It was Mary, Queen of Heaven, he averred, who had saved him, and won the victory.

Now, this was well-nigh insufferable to Cian; to Tigernach, openly and wholly so. Were there no living men who had come vehemently to his aid when his need was very sore? What would have befallen him, shield or no shield, but for that first rush of the chariots? It was too much that they should be called upon to join in the aggrandizement of a new faith, which frowned on their own.

Arthur had forgiven Cian his first irresolution, in view of the great amends made by later service; and Cian, having rendered this, could not withhold his good will also. But the wound in either nature was thinly healed. The pious vaunting of the Emperor soon made it sore again. Tigernach brought open dissension by some rash utterance that awoke Arthur's horror.

Laying hand to sword, he bade, "Cease blaspheming!"

Tigernach glanced back defiantly. "But for `blasphemers' yon woman-faced shield might have gone to work magic for the Cantwara. Thus much will I dare to say, though it cost me death from an ingrate." He cried it aloud, hotly and defiantly, and, turning aside, made off at good speed toward his native Andred.

Arthur half raised his hand to order pursuit, then lowered it, wrestling with his anger. "There is no need," said he. "Who can harm Our Lady? And I would not return evil for good."

"Somewhat of that," said Cian, "has been done already, when praise is given where it belongs not, and withheld where it is due; when old friends are driven to the hills, angered, with no need."

Arthur's face grew stormy. "Prince Cian is speaking more in wilfulness than in duty," said he. "Moreover, tales are abroad that link him all too nearly to the dealers in darkness."

Cian stiffened in the saddle,—for he had left his chariot broken,—with lowering brow. "I know of no darker dealing than the desecration of the tomb," said he.

The voice of Arthur seemed struggling in his throat for a moment; then abruptly he made a gesture of dismissal. Cian bade adieu gravely, and rode with furious heart toward the bridge. For once there should be no question as to full obedience. "Go"—ay, at a sweep, to his own far northern hills, and as fast as his good horse might carry him. Forthwith he sent a swift rider after Tigernach, who overtook him by dawn at Verulam.

But, as they rode, Cian thought painfully of the queen, Aurelia, and how he had left her in her sorrow without a word, and to whom the welcome task of consoling her would now fall.

Truly, in her bereavement, she had found it hard to miss that strength whereon she had learned to lean through the long leaguer

of the city. With all her gratitude to Arthur, a vacant place remained unfilled. But Cian's prophetic power, whether fancied or real, could not show him this clearly for comfort.

Meanwhile the country of West Kent as far as the Medway had been swept of Saxons, even husbandmen. At first Arthur was minded to push yet farther, bearing the long-settled fighting-men of Kent quite to their ancient stronghold of Thanet. But this was not to be done without sieges and losses and much suffering to those who dwelt quietly. Moreover, the day had been set for his nuptials with Guinevere at Caerleon; and such undertaking might give them long delay.

But the savage Essex folk were driven wholly from the mainland, holding only some walled islets off that coast.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MYSTERIES OF MONA.

I am a Druid.
—TALIESSIN.

THERE was another in Arthur's camp longing to go northward. The withdrawal of Cian awoke uneasiness in his friend of Argoed. A kindly face and voice by the way might avert some schism, or at least cold-heartedness, in the cause of the land. But more, vastly more, he felt Sanawg drawing him from afar, his cliff-bride, his marvel and his love.

With little difficulty he won leave from Arthur on the day after the battle; and by hard hurrying and the favor of accident overtook the two seceders near Caer Lerion. The three kept company thereafter as far as Argoed.

Llywarch found at his home a welcome both of joy and sorrow; for Freur was yet too near her loss, and too piercingly reminded of it by the sight of him, to conceal her grief otherwise than pitifully. The case was indeed far worse than such common assurance of death as would leave the poor body for burial. They could not, indeed, really hope to see Dynan again among the living; yet was there such a faint half-glimmer of hope, as kept searching parties abroad in the wood, and drove her to make unceasing inquiry of all who haunted such wild places, or had so much as seen the tokens of his last fight and taking away. Whatsoever they told her she garnered, if it were only wild-woven fiction, to please the sorrowing ear; yet, all in all, the tales chilled her uncannily. The green-clad phantom lady and her ghostly rout came murmured to her like sounds in sleep, by rumors that she scarce could trace or tell. What evil thing had befallen her lover? What fell enchantment held him beyond all mortal ken?

Thoughts like these had driven her forth to practise rites, piteous if unholy, by those terraced mounds that were held in memory as the

homes of the elder people now gone. For she said to herself, "It may be that they are not demons, nor wholly given over to working the loss of salvation; and if I but beseech humbly the dread beings with ample offering, even yet they may relent, and set him free."

In this work of impiety Sanawg would not and could not aid her, but dissuaded with very strong conviction and great dread of what ill might yet lurk for her friend in the malign everlasting shadow. Her first meeting with Llywarch had in it the added happiness of relief in one to whom she could freely tell all that she feared.

His own kind joy was not a little dashed and darkened by the thought of such fell anguish, so near him in every way. It stirred him, too, as it had stirred his bride, that his sister should be seeking converse in dismal scenes, with beings unholy. Madness might come of it, or some other ill unknown. He said no word to Freur in dissuasion, but offered soon to lead her with a party into that fatal wilderness. But behind her glad, patient eyes, he well knew the stilled suffering.

He sought Cian also, who yet lingered with them, and listened gravely, but as to something in which he might render aid. Very willingly Cian talked with Freur of all such mysteries, and what he had heard and known of wise dealings concerning them. She listened eagerly, well knowing his repute for such knowledge; well commended even by that great warlock, Merlin, who was now quite gone for a season. Then she asked more compelling invocations of him; and these were given her. Also he willingly made appointment to practise them, and all needful ceremonials, that night, in her behalf and presence. Thereon she brightened into more of hope than for many a day, and this pleased Llywarch very well; but Sanawg felt it bitter that what was done, however well meaning, could feed only the thirst for evil enchantment.

What the two wrestlers with the invisible won therefrom in storm and darkness, without star, was left untold to any other ear. But Freur's face for a time shone like that of one brought from the tomb into living hope and sunlight. Cian watched her, less assuredly, but

would say nothing to darken it. After he left them for his own country, this light faded. There were days when expectancy tired her, days, too, when all hope seemed gone; yet again the hope often brightened, even though she herself had searched the place of evanishing; and years went slowly by before she could give Dynan over utterly.

Cian was wearied now, rather than actively wroth with his old leader, the Emperor. But Tigernach had no past that should hold him, and resentment combined with fervor of religion to threaten Arthur's rule. For Tigernach was planning and preparing a great revolt, with the Lord of the Chariots, unknowing, for the centre of his plot.

Cian did indeed suspect the sending of some covert hint or summons, as men of one thought only came gathering about him. But there was urgent need of tillers for the valley soil, and of armed Britons everywhere along that borderland. There was balm also for a heart baffled and misprized in the many faces turning to him for guidance, and the watchful hearkening which would not lose a word. They said little, but from them to him there was the thrill of men awaiting only a sign. Yet, since he need not give that sign, their expectation was harmless. Indeed, why should he not turn their power and faith in him to some end that all would applaud? There was a great reach of land, once British, to be regained, between him and Caer Ebrauc.

The thought, once admitted, grew until ambition was again mightily astir. His father had already withdrawn from leadership, leaving, with pride, all power in his hands. New stirs to the southward again parted Llywarch and his young wife; but Cian would not go thither, for the north held him. No longer passively accepting only such fighting-men as came, he sent messages of alluring hope through all the channels of mystic brotherhood, and to all the old comrades whom he could reach of every faith and degree. But not many Christians responded, even to war on the Saxons; for a doubt of him had already gone abroad. Nevertheless, his gathering soon had grown to a mighty size.

In spite of his plainest utterance, he found the thought well rooted among his soldiery that there was something greater to follow the conquest of Caer Ebrauc. Also, there came, not singly, but in eager troops, the devoted praying-men of Mona, dark of brow and bright of eye, their souls keenly fixed on some great upheaval to come, and the blessings of a new Druidic world. They bore tokens with them, and charms of mighty efficacy, and banners fit to wave forth against any in the world, for very strange and lovely in wildness was the blazoning thereon. These, more than any others, greeted Cian fondly, esteeming him the very right arm of their faith.

"They Bore Tokens with them, and Charms of Mighty Efficiency."

Yet they brought trouble. Not long afterward came a warning from the Emperor that there was grave talk abroad of Prince Cian's gathering. "For himself, he questioned nothing that some worthy enterprise against the heathen was truly in hand, as had been spread abroad. But Cerdic, the West Saxon, was gathering ships and men to descend, no one knew whither, so that already it had been deemed safer to provide for the imperial nuptials at a place more inland than

Caerleon. Hence it would be wise to move southward, with so many brave men ready to give aid. Nor would anything so still evil whisperings as some insignia, borne before them, of the Christian faith." Thus wrote the Emperor.

In this there was no command, but only such urgent counselling as showed that command would follow. Cian brooded over it, then made answer that he was glad indeed his Emperor's trust would not be taken from him by frightened people and maligners; that his forces were not yet ready for movement either way; and, having raised them, he prayed leave rather to use them at the north, where was such opening to retrieve old losses; that the dragon standard of the Emperor should be borne before all others, but that he was loth to put constraint on the soul or conscience of any man.

Therefore he busied himself all the more, meaning to push out on his conquest before any message of forbidding could reach him. Thus he was already well toward Caer Ebrauc when an urgent summons to Caerleon reached his home from Arthur, himself hastening westward. This followed Cian, but could not overtake him until he was in close leaguer of the Saxon capital and stronghold—even on the verge of assault. It was scarce in human nature or in safety then to withdraw; but he hastened the hard work before him, and soon could send word that the ancient imperial Eboracum was British again.

With it came under hand much fertile country, where robbers and the sons of robbers had become husbandmen in long occupancy; also many lesser places, half ruin, half rude Saxon revival, after the fashion of the chief city. All these must be guarded, or what had been sharply won would soon be lost again. In this he had new aid, rough aid, from all along the forest verge and the ridges of Elmet, even also from Argoed. But many of these recruits were more intent on taking than saving, being violent destroyers by nature; so that it was hard to tell whether he had most help or hindrance from his allies. But the few whom old Edyrn could send him rendered good service; and that ancient cavern hero also came forth with the

remnant of Isurium, taking very proudly his old post of garrison behind her strong walls again.

Here Cian halted with them, but not for long, since the delays had been many, and he was needed elsewhere; but it was a more than joyous meeting, above all for Gwydion and his aged wife, who bowed heads of thankfulness to hear again of their daughter, so far away.

The victor brought with him to his rugged home a fine array of men for the southward journey. But now news of victory came from Caerleon, and it left no cause to stir. Yet he kept the men in arms about him, being uncertain what call might follow.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HOW ARTHUR DEALT WITH THE HEATHEN.

Ercwlf said
That he valued not death.
The columns of Ercwlf
Will not dare a threatening.
—TALIESSIN.

CERDIC, the West Saxon, greatest of the invading kings, kept good watch over all that came to pass in the British island from his city of Winchester, which he had held ever since he broke in on Ambrosius, and took the life of that Emperor at the great battle of Netley along the border of the Gwent. Yet it was not so long ago, nor had his losses been so light, that he should forget and assail again without good warrant. Therefore he had lain by, like an orderly neighbor, waiting for the wise time to come.

When the great army of Ossa Cyllalaur gathered above the forest of Celidon, and London was almost in the clutch of Eschwine, Cerdic had indeed very nearly given a bloody hand to their work. But the crash came suddenly, and made him wary, as one who must bear a dangerous burden quite alone. Still, his men remained ever ready, and the broken bands of Kent and Essex drifted to him. Their urgency for revenge upon Arthur was incessant and increasing. In later times there were men who deemed that he had also invitation from Lancelot in his urgency to keep Guinevere from the Emperor, but this need not be. Cerdic's many ships and his murmuring host, the wealth of Caerleon, and the still greater inflow to the wedding of Arthur, were surely argument enough. He put to sea, heading westward. Forthwith Guinevere and all rich things which had been gathered for the marriage were sent beyond sea-reach to Camelot. Her charm was so great, and so heightened by design, that Arthur, almost perforce, went also. But when she was once in safety, he broke suddenly away, and hurried back with all the men he could

gather from his frontier fortresses, bearing more hatred than common in his heart for the interrupting Saxon.

Meanwhile Cerdic had appeared before the Legion city, and found it waiting. In all Britain there was no olden town more splendidly and daringly alive, more endowed with treasures, both inherited and won, with men stern to defend them. Year by year the tide of commerce had been turning westward; and Caerleon, from the pre-eminence given by Arthur's court, received more than an equal share. Under every later drift of population, it held also very plentifully the blood of those Roman legionaries who once made it their stronghold. Lancelot was there in command, with many sons of the hills. No choice now but to fight the Saxon,—vengefully, too, as against himself, in the memory of envious hours that half longed for his coming!

Cerdic's multitude made havoc of all the open land for leagues around, so that the people were driven headlong to places of refuge. Then the forayers gathered in, till every man was close about the walls, waiting the great assault of the morrow. At daybreak they rubbed astonished eyes; for there was a shimmering of armor everywhere on the eastward hills, the dragon standard of Arthur waving above all.

This, at first, they assailed with great fervor and uproar. Afterward, beaten back, they yet withstood, in dense blocks of men, the swift charges made on them. Yet, whether in assault or defence, they fought always under the weight of surprise and his many victories. Little by little the corners were ground surely from the living wedges and squares, and the very heart of them was dinted out under hoof and mail. By midday the very last of the Saxons, however dogged and laggardly, was under sail from that unkindly shore.

For a time they hovered about it with derision and menace, now altogether, now in fragmentary squadrons, doing notable damage here and there, so that the Emperor was kept vigilant in repelling them all up and down the great Severn estuary,—far from Camelot, far from Guinevere. Even when, at last, they were seemingly quite

gone, he waited yet a while, uncertain, and had his reward in sure tidings of their passing northward beyond Wales, along the shore. Then he feared, with reason, for Caer Ligion, the Chester of modern days, and made haste thither, arriving once more in time.

Again the enemy were engaged under the city walls, and beaten off, stroke by stroke, but with heavier loss, having a long and anxious flight overland to their carven prows drawn ashore near the mouth of the Ribble. Now a fall of the tide left these more in sand than in water, and Arthur's foremost horsemen and runners came to them with the later mass of fugitives mingling and fighting confusedly, so that many great war-boats were axe-broken about the keel by chance or design before they could be floated; and, both in the deep mire and on firm ground, there was great slaughter of men who could not get away. Cerdic, with a remnant, was very glad to make all speed homeward, with abiding memories of that chaotic nightmare battle on the strand of Trath Tribuit.

In all this Llywarch did his part well, but Cian had no part at all. For, on the march, word had come to Arthur that Mona, though ill-defended, had been passed without harm by the sea-robbers, and that Cian, with many priests of that isle and a goodly army, was lingering in the hills not far away, purposing to join them as many feared. Thereon the Prince of Argoed had spoken openly and fervently for his friend; but the zealots of the camp and envious men were very eager, and the Emperor's own heart was fevered. Therefore he wrote that even good service, disobediently done, is of ill augury, and breeds little trust; and that the murderous ill-worshippers ought not to be met in battle by hearts or emblems after their own kind. Therefore, he said, Cian and his people should abandon all that savored of heathendom, or keep aloof from the holy fight, as best might please them.

Llywarch and many more shook their heads forebodingly over this; but Cian merely obeyed, remaining there, half-way toward the enemy whom he had meant to assail. But when all was over, and Arthur rested beside the Dee, he came again into the imperial presence, with a mien of amity and dignity, yet shadowed and sore

at heart. As he stood before the Emperor, he heard the chanting of the monks in the great monastery of Bangor, hard by.

Arthur eyed him with stern, awaiting composure. “What may be the desire of Prince Cian?” said he.

Cian bowed lowly and gravely, and returned, “I am more than glad of your great victory, my Emperor, although not permitted to share in it.”

The hurt look and tone touched Arthur. Old battles, and the bearing of Cian therein, came up in memory.

“I named my conditions,” he said.

“I could not become an apostate,” replied the other sadly.

Arthur flushed and frowned. “That is no fit word to your Emperor, nor of his bidding.”

“There are powers above emperors, and mandates from of old.”

“There is none greater than the Lord of Life, who died to save us. There is none greater than the holy mother of God. The apostasy is to turn from these, from Christian Britain, to that evil altar-worship. And how know I what treason this may bring upon you? Beware, Prince Cian. Let what has been show you that the soldiers of Christ need no aid to conquer any enemy. On whomso that stone falls, it shall grind him to powder.”

Cian listened; essayed to speak, with hasty and shaken voice; then checked himself, and said, with quiet repression,—

“It grinds already. Until yesterday there was a shrine by the Ribble-mouth, a home of song and prayer, offshoot of Mona. Holy men dwelt there, leading pure lives, breathing the higher mysteries, doing well by their kind. But their worship was of no new God, nor to the liking of our Emperor.

Now the priests are gone, the walls have tumbled stone over stone, a black cross marks the spot; and monks howl there, not in adoration, but in derision."

Arthur looked him eye for eye as he spoke, intently, with deepening anger, though it was his wont to pardon frankness readily. He said nothing.

Cian resumed: "Is this like the Emperor whom I have loved beyond men, and followed gladly, and served eagerly in every way? Is it not rather like the dealing of Eschwine with the holy places by the Stour, or as Ossa Cyllalaur would do, if he could, by the shrine of St. Alban?"

Arthur half started up. "There are names which you must not name together, Prince Cian, if you value your life."

"I do not value my life. I value truth. I value justice. Our Emperor is giving us neither."

Arthur shook with passion, but the assured fortitude and quiet exaltation of the other compelled him to think as well as feel. Also, these words had ever been the strongest appeal, outside of religion, which any man could make to him; and the part of the persecutor was both ill-suited and new.

"Go, Cian," he said presently, forcing a smile. "Go, before worse comes of it. You are the bravest man in Britain. Yet we cannot both fight heathendom and endure it."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE FIERY TRIAL OF CIAN.

Arthur of anxious contention.
—TALIESSIN.

CIAN drew off with all his men to his own domain. He would willingly have dispersed them over his new northern conquest, for the lessening of suspicion, and to avoid the need of choosing in any dreadful strait. But this they withstood, feeling the drift of things as surely as he, and that their own best hope lay in keeping together, and in the tragedy of his soul.

For into tragedy it deepened continually, while both in numbers and in hostility his gathering grew. All men had learned, with rejoicing or consternation, that they now had verily an Emperor too militantly Christian for any truce with unbelievers. Altar after altar went down where the elder British faith had made its home. Priest after priest, and proselyte after proselyte, fleeing to their one vale of refuge, brought Cian the same distressful tale. Doubtless it grew in their telling; for Arthur was not wilfully cruel, only stern to tyranny in his new growth of enthu- siasm and sacred duty. The sense of invincibility, too, is an evil thing, even for the grand in soul.

The sufferers and also those who had been with Cian from the first began to hold him unduly supine, and wanting in spirit. Was it fear of the tyrant that withheld him? Or weakness of old comradeship unnerving a more holy fealty? And suddenly the murmurs rose all about him into a storm of denunciation, for the despoiling hand had swept over Mona. Not one priest, not one worshipper, remained there, unless hidden in some sea-cavern or woodland refuge.

The priesthood strode in, haggard of face and hot of soul, where Cian stood dismally; and one spoke bitter words to hear, of the sin and shame of it, but he answered nothing. Others would have him feel the great power within his grasp; the victory surely given by the

gods that loved the soil, now wailing abroad like shades of the unburied; the endless glory awaiting the strong savior of his people. He uttered no word. Then the most incensed and vehement of them—he who had led the first troop from the sacred isle, and still bore ever the sword at his side—arose, and upbraided this recreant champion, with shaking forefinger, to his face. He upbraided him as flaunter and braggart, flourishing in the rifled glory of the dead, but daring no single effort in behalf of the living. "Off with the magic vestment," he cried. "Let it pass to worthy hands from hands unworthy."

Then, while the others grew silent, and looked as men look when more has come about than they would plan or wish, Cian, very still of mien, beckoned a lad to lay off his mantle, and take the golden vestment from about his body, then yielded it as an offering before them, bowing lowly. Yet, as he rose erect, his breast heaved and heaved again, for he felt that he could not endure much more.

At last a priest arose who spoke gently,—not their eldest, but one whom all, with reason, revered.

"Prince Cian," said he, "it is a woful thing that I should live to know and feel the bitterness of our people, and that there is no help at all for them in any crying, even from a man like thee. It matters not greatly that I, old and poor, who had thought myself unharmful to any man, should be driven forth from the home where I have dwelt so long. But, Cian, I swear to you, and lie not, that a hand worse than the winged dragons of old is stretched above all Britain, and will spare no grief of heart hereafter unto any, nor leave man, woman, or child in faith and freedom; and that hand is Arthur's. There is one who sees wildly, and would have punishment follow all who have clearer eyes; and that one is Arthur. There is a man whom the gods have made strong, and the dark powers have made malign, and who uses his strength for the undoing of the feeble; and that man is Arthur. Also, there is a protector whom men look to, who might withstand and end all this, if but he would; and that protector is not Arthur."

Then Cian groaned aloud.

"Truly," said he, "I have no blame for any man thinking as ye think, and feeling as ye feel. But I hope yet. A cloud may be black as chaos, yet ever it passes quickly. Not otherwise I deem of the cloud on the soul of Arthur. I look to see him again the godlike hero, comrade of my earlier days, fervent in heart, yet compelling none, the bright imperial champion of our land. Not until in far greater extremity will I sin against that fealty."

They heard him gravely, watching with eyes accustomed to read men, though the inner fires were distracting. But they forebore troubling him further; and one whispered, as they went their way, "Yet a little, more beating of the waves, and the chain will part altogether."

Even the zealot who had demanded the golden corselet lifted it again, with his finger on the mistletoe spray. "We dare not leave the heart without that sacred enlightening," said he. "Take it again, Defender of the Mysteries, and may it so work on you that you may know which fealty is most binding and highest."

None gainsaid the words or the gift. Cian took it again with calm obeisance.

But when they had gone, he was abashed in his own eyes, because this once he had let his words outrun his vision; for the assurance of better things indeed eluded him. He had none of that strange revealing which at times, like the bannered splendors of a winter night, gave illumination and high uplift of soul. His fond wish and the urgency of great need had spoken, but little more. A chill fell on him. He did not know; he could not say.

Then revolt rose against that soul of power which once had been his demigod; not for the wrongs to the weak ones, his brethren only, but his own bitterer wrong of the heart's devotion ill-requited. He clutched his sword-hilt, with a curse on the blind bigotry that could so deform the first of men, and most of all, on the poisonous

instigator, Oisin. Then the dead evangelist rose in fancy before him, as on the lawn of Constantine's now ruined villa, or leaning from the gallery of the great council-hall, or springing kestrel-like at the great Eschwine on the platform of the lake-village palisade,—bitter, dark, narrow, ecstatic, but ever well-willing toward his kind, and faithful unto death. And shame swept him that one so blind should yet be such a brand for burning truth into men, while he, Cian, with all the illumination of an elder day, could only doubt and waver in a passion of torment. Yet thought with thought, and hope with dread, strove in him; and nothing was done.

While in such moods he had a letter from Llywarch, warning, yet reassuring for the time, and threaded with uneasy instinct of pleading for the great leader, as knowing him deeply in blame. Arthur, it said, had been minded to go with force against Cian; but better counsels had prevailed, all the more for the soft urgency of Guinevere, now awaiting her Emperor and the nuptial day at Camelot. Half angry with himself, half mirthful that one so eager could be justly chided for tarrying, the Emperor had flown southward, with all other wrath in abeyance. There could be no sort of danger until his return after a fitting season. Meanwhile, the writer adjured his friend to take peaceably and of free will such steps as would avoid all later harshness and clashing.

Now, this menace of attack had been floating, with no clear outline, in Cian's mind; but to hear it thus from another, although his best friend and in exceeding kindness, awoke him into sudden resentment. What, then! it was no more than a chance, the petulant message of a light-loving woman, that Arthur's blade had not busied itself with his household already. Even now, what safety?—with the sword held suspended until the marriage kiss were given, the cheek of Guinevere the only shield between his heart and his Emperor's deadly blow!

There should be no disbandment. He, Cian, was but in his right as a freeman of the hills; and among them he would make it good, with those who followed him. Facing the fighting life of the land, it might be that the all-conquering one would first learn a limit to his career.

However that might be, those who looked to Cian for shelter must not be turned forth into the blast of tyranny while he could bar the door for them.

Therefore he went about with a settled and resolute face among his people, taking hands with firm clasp which had long been impotently clutching. Also he sent abroad for a yet greater muster and supplies of every kind from every city within call or bidding, and in the forging of arms all artisans were kept busy.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AURELIA AT CAMELOT.

THE shadow of death lay on Aurelia, as on all when the dearly loved ones pass away, with gradual lightening. This did not seem so at first; but the pain recurred in waves or throbs, like all else of outer or inner world-life, each seeming not less than those before it, with blankness between. The work that she drove herself to, and held herself to, irked her greatly; but, excepting at the very first, she did not in any degree fail or shrink. She was aware of kind faces that felt for her, and the bright things in earth and air and heaven which had been her pleasure; but all such touched her now as on the surface only, not deeply stirring.

So, too, she thought not, in the very beginning, on Arthur or Cian, or any grievance or affection, beyond her first yearning to lean and be strengthened, when she knew that the Prince had passed on his northward way. Later, she heard the tale of their doings in broken fragments brought haphazard overland. What went most against her therein was the rumor that men spoke ill of Cian's good faith, holding his cloud of armed men to be a real menace on the northern border, and deeming that the Emperor must needs fall upon him to abate it; though mostly her London people were of more gentle judgment. For they had forgotten neither the stoutness of Cian's shield, nor the weight of Arthur's mailed hand. Aurelia listened to all, wearying her soul, doubting what to do; and in the midst of her doubt came the bidding to the imperial nuptials at Camelot. Eager to render all honor, and hoping also for her opportunity, she departed thither with a great train.

She found before her, and coming in daily, many more of high degree—lords of provinces, and city rulers, commanders of great fortresses like that on the height of Sorbiodunum, left over by Rome or the giants. Kings were some styled, others chiefs, or consuls, or princes, but it mattered little. All manner of wealth and sumptuousness came with them, and a prodigious throng of people,

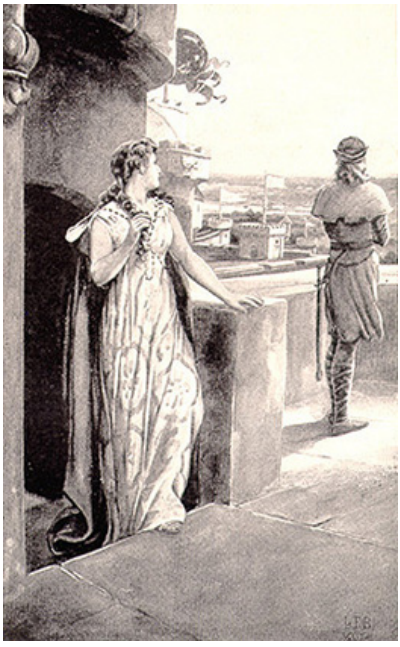
but not so very many fighting-men; for, after Cerdic's mishaps in the west, and the long peace on that southern border, there was no thought of molestation.

Yet, when Aurelia looked abroad in that marvellous and glowing town, an old memory came to her, a tale of the days of Hengist. Never since the great feast of the Long Knives had there been such a banquet-gathering of British leadership as here; and otherwise the lure was far more tempting than in that day of feast and slaughter. Then she blessed the two good legions which Arthur still held about him, and the sufficient store of arms in that hill city; and so took heart again. Yet she felt the burden of warning upon her.

It was not easy to find speech with the Emperor; but one bright noon on a tower of his palace castle, watching him come from Guinevere and seek the battlement, she drew near doubtfully, and uttered what was in mind. He woke from his meditation with gentle greeting, but at first gave seemingly no more heed nor weight than courtesy compelled. She paused a moment. He swept his glance over the pinnacled riot of strange beauty that filled the plateau, and went overflowing down the great cone of the hill beneath them on every side—rainbow walls, and scroll-work carven forms, and faceted jewelry of architecture sparkling in the sun. Standards flaunted here and there, marvellous in device and gorgeous in hue, the bright figures on them moving with the wind as if alive. Away below all wound the triple wall-girdle, earthen, broad and high, with solid front of masonry, sentinels walking their rounds on the level crest of every belt, and many armed men stretched at ease along the slopes and terraces between. All the streets were thrilling and humming with gay, multitudinous human life.

It was a scene such as no other ruler could have looked down upon; such, indeed, as not Britain itself could furnish elsewhere. For here was naught of Rome and her white. ancient majesty, the life of a far time still slowly dreaming away. Its glory was of the young Celtic exuberance, warm, gay, and vital; of baffling conceptions, mystic yet impulsively human and not yet wholly at ease without or within. Power was there, and will and waywardness, earnest zeal and

ecstatic daring; above all, a surpassing and exalted wizardry. For Camelot was the city of Arthur, and the city of Merlin.



"She Drew Near Doubtfully."

"It may well tempt them," said he; "but if the kernel be rare, the shell will endure some hammering.

"The walls of Vortimer the Great," answered she, "are Saxon ground to-day."

He watched her face gravely. "It would be ill for any kind guest of ours to suffer disquiet. Is there new cause for it?

"No. Yet Cerdic has a great force, which may grow quickly. And it is near, while your armies are far away. Would it not be well to summon them? All of my kingdom, at least, are at command."

Arthur smiled. “They would scarce bar Cerdic; and London, too, must be guarded.”

“Then—Lancelot?”

“Suppose that has been tried. Some things are hard to understand.”

“What!—then there have been warnings before?” He bowed.

“And Maelgwn—Lancelot—will not come?”

“He offers reasons. There may be more force in them than one can see.”

“The warning has most force, my Emperor. I pray you send with all speed to the army near Caer Ligion.”

“Unhappily, a great part must be left to watch Prince Cian, whom I trusted more than any other of old.”

Her face flushed. “I am sure that is needless.” Then a spirit, half saucy, half resentful, moved her to cry aloud. “How easily a great commander may be taken in a snare!”

He looked surprise, then laughed. “Your Emperor was not the commander this time,” and she knew he meant the summoning letter of Guinevere.

“But,” he added, “I will call Llywarch to me, with every man that he may safely bring. And to ease you, dear lady, all nearer forces of town and country shall be summoned. Meanwhile, we are not defenceless, and Cerdic has rarely prospered in his dealings with me. I shall hardly resign my bride, or vary either time or ceremonial for any uproar of heathendom.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HOW SANAWG WAS THE SUMMONER OF CIAN.

Like the roaring of the wind against the ashen spears.
—TALIESSIN.

LLYWARCH of Argoed was idling in camp among the Saxon-demolished ruins of a fair town which once had been the capital of the Sistuntii, later to be known as Blackrode. One or two of the chief dwellings, in the Roman style, remained habitable; and the best had been restored and brightened for his use. All manner of pictured gayety was around him, glimpses of a sunny world came through every window; but the Prince of Argoed was dull enough, and more than dull, for Sanawg, his wife, had been left far away in Caerleon, Cian, his friend, was yet an outlaw of the mountains, and he could think of no good thing under heaven for an active, lonely man to do.

Musing thus, he saw two mounted figures come over the open land, very wearily, yet as though in urgent haste; and others behind them, as men will join in the wake of vital news heard by the way. As they stopped at the outer guard, there was a great stir and murmur throughout the whole spread of the camp; and by the same instinct Llywarch also knew at once that he was summoned to life and hardship again. At that his soul leaped up through its shadows; but he held himself with courteous gravity, to hear their say.

One was Arthur's messenger from Camelot. The other, from Caradoc's fortified sanctuary town of Amesbury, with more deadly urgency of need, had overtaken him as he rode and ran. For already the Saxon flood was between these neighboring holds; and out of it, like an island, rose the splendid hill-city of Arthur, which might not long abide that dashing. Yet no breach had been made as yet, nor any grievous loss undergone. The whole great cone of walls and houses bloomed out defiantly in many colored banners; wherefore, and remembering its other gorgeousness, men called this, long after, the battle of the painted hill.

But all knew that no one beside a few men from Silchester could have re-enforced Arthur's garrison; and there was great consternation everywhere for his sake, as well as that of the notable men and women who were with him, and the bright, entrapped lady Guinevere, chosen to empire, whom Cerdic, if he won the town, would certainly take for his own.

Llywarch put questions as to number and armament, then dismissed these messengers to their food and rest, and sent orders forth to make all ready for swift motion. Also he called a council to meet an hour later, and walked abroad, meditating.

Then, more than another time, he felt the need of Sanawg, smiling at himself therefor as a commander of men. Yet he is but poor of spirit who finds no peculiar wisdom in the one woman he has chosen; and here there were problems of the human soul, more than all else, to consider. Had he not Arthur's direct command to leave men enough behind him for guarding against Cian? Yet of what avail to Camelot would be a moiety of his army? If only Cian, instead, were assuredly with him as of old? Must there be, indeed, another and more dreadful Anderida? Then, like glint of hope, came the thought of Sanawg again; and, when he regained his room, another rider had come and gone, leaving a letter from her behind. There was much in it, much that was dear and thoughtful; but two words alone stood out insistently. They were,—"Trust Cian."

With the sense of prevision made good upon him cogently, he wrote and sent this messsage. "Cian, old comrade, your Emperor, Arthur, is surrounded at Camelot. Come with all your men. I take the road to-day with mine." And when the council gathered, although there were some that demurred, the most thought it more than well; for no strength might safely be foregone in that great wrestle, and it was better to risk all at once, with the chance of mending all, than to falter into sure destruction.

He found less pleasing matter in her words of Lancelot. "He looks reckless and fitful, the mien of one tormented until somewhat be ended and over. And, although he has a great array of men here,

largely those who love him first of all, he meets every summoning of the Emperor with some slight plea, and stirs not a foot to his aid." Clearly, she too felt the danger, though she knew not the storm had broken.

Cian was waiting, longing, doubting, sadly foreseeing war with his best friends, and ruin from those who should chiefly prize him, when Llywarch's brief message came. It could not have been more deftly moulded. Its utter unreasoning trust awoke consoling music in his heart. "Come, Cian!" and forthwith Cian came.

His men were ready—for somewhat. Out among them went his word that all should take the road within the hour. In among the priests and leaders he went himself, with a rapt intensity of vehemence that hurried them all away. He made no secret of his aim; and those who had so lately been infuriated with Arthur willingly took it as their own. For they also had latent in them that wayward magnanimity, which is the best heritage of their race, and it awakened suddenly. Nor was there any love for the Saxon in their hearts. Moreover, the dourest of them was quick to see that Arthur saved by them must be Arthur their foe no longer.

All hastened, but away before the first whirled Cian and a hundred chariots; and, though Llywarch went fast also with less distance before him, they were together again amid the gay streets and glittering roofs of Wroxetor by the base of the Dinrle Wrecon. At Gloucester, that rich city of Vortigern, Sanawg met them, with radiance of the Orient, and bantering and kisses for her kindly obedient lord. In less time than ever host fled so far, they were, with more than half their men, about Caer Caradoc.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE LONG BATTLE OF CAMELOT.

A wide multitude of Lloegyr went to sleep with the light in their eyes.
—TALIESSIN.

THE sudden eclipse had come like a miracle of the Evil One upon Aurelia and all others in Camelot. Her anxious forecast had not fancied anything like environment without warning. Even her own hastily summoned Londoners had not been in time. On distant hill-tops she could discern uneasy clusters and masses of men whom those about her discerned for friends, willing, but too feeble. There were signal lights also in the darker hours, but not to rival the havoc fires raised by the Saxon wherever a home had been. Whether by night or day, all the nearer world was Cerdic's, who this once had out-Arthured Arthur in the celerity and amplitude of his onfall.

Rebelling against isolation, the hemmed-in city sent forth its messages to the eye in many ways. Aurelia added a fantasy of her own, working swiftly in bright large embroidery the silver mistletoe on a ground of gold—crude and large-wrought as meant for far seeing, but legible to all eyes that knew. This she held forth in sunshine, yet withal cautiously, not knowing how far the Emperor would pardon even new a bid for Cian's aid.

But it was not in her to keep quite still. When she looked below and around, at the great encompassing of armed strength and hate, when she heard their never-ending shouts of insult and triumph, and the recurring waves of furious uproar about the lower wall,—her heart turned faint; then, wakening, cried out keenly for that other heart which had been by her in beleaguerment before. Then she had not feared, nor shown, even to herself, any weakening. Had the charge and care been hers, she would have risen to the task again. But now she had leisure and freedom to feel all the peril of that one city,

wrongfully left in it alone. It grew monstrous to her that any one should have doubt of Cian. She saw in him salvation.

One morning, at this her task, she filled in person, statuewise, a jutting bit of the castellated rampart, which made a coronal on Arthur's palace-roof. No sentry was there now, the men being all sorely needed. She could see very plainly from her niche what rough handling had been given the great lower earth-wall. More of bristling rubbish was there now—every sort thrown hurriedly in to fill the gaps—than sod or soil or masonry facing. Even dead Saxons, in their armor, hung over it, or dangled down the sides, limp and obstructive; amid the broken pottery and cart-wheels and stones. The night's bloody irruption and expulsion had left also another record in many dark, gleaming spots and streaks between wall and wall. That space glittered vigilantly with British steel; for, though there was brief quiet after such long and savage endeavor, the enemy already began to heave and thrill again, as if to throw a new wave of men on that persistent barrier.

Caradoc, in especial, was watching them, as ever since dawn, from beside what had been the northern gate, his massive arm thrown listlessly about a battered pillar, and obviously swollen yet more by recent effort. From its top, on a short staff, a banner blew abroad which he used on great occasions only,—a ground of imperial purple, the still conquering eagle of Rome, silver-white thereon, as became the scion of the last British-Roman Emperor and the great Aurelius Ambrosius. Body-weighted that heroic soul might be, yet was it almost more than humanly untiring. There was something tenderly admiring in Aurelia's sigh, as she thought, "Even Caradoc is aweary."

At a sound behind her, she turned, and met Arthur's inquiring eye, which had been on the banner of the mistletoe. For a moment the full glare of astonished suspicion was in it, but for one minute only. Then he smiled, and shook his head. "Well meant, undoubtedly," said he, adding, with relief, as he walked away, "I believe women are all alike in some things."

She stared over these last words, half guessing a partnership in fault with Guinevere. Long after, she learned that this was true; the golden-haired empress-to-be, in her terror over barbarian capture, having flaunted all manner of wild signalling toward the watchers of her Lancelot, knowing well by appointment where they should be. Arthur had come suddenly by chance on this discovery, worn with long night combat, and sore from wounds, which he had taken like any common fighter, likewise unnerved and shaken in the revulsion from exceeding effort. He could not read her signs, but he read the look of her face as of something that she would gladly cover; and his words had heat and sternness in them. But Guinevere, rallying, cried indignantly that she was but striving to save herself and everyone from that dreadful Saxon, who, for all Arthur had shown himself able to do, was likely to end Camelot and the marriage his own way. At that heart-thrust, the Emperor held his peace, and strode away, only to find the second woman of his thought doing likewise. And the very first ebb of feeling was toward gratitude that she had thereby answered his latent yearning for some extenuation or defence of Guinevere.

Meanwhile, the sunny-haired goddess of Devon wept over him and her ruined plans and her approaching fate. However versatile and fertile in expedient, however ready to turn from man to man, she could not bear to be taken by a Saxon—the very were-wolf of the human race. For the moment she could wish her ambitions blown away like bubbles, and herself hidden safely in some mountain stronghold of Lancelot. But anger rose against him likewise, as she called to mind that he certainly would not come in time to save these nuptials, caring not at all to save her from Cerdic for Arthur; and, it might be, fancying a prospect of some compact with the former, whereby he might gain her yet. But as to this outcome Guinevere herself could have no hope, well knowing (and for the first time sadly) what power was in her beauty. Cerdic, once the winner, would no more part with her than with his heart-beats.

Arthur descended to join Caradoc on guard, reasoning that he could scarce fare worse at any male hands than he had, aloft, at fairer ones already. But, when he told his tribulations, the laughter of that large

man was very restful. “Let them wave, let them signal,” quoth he. “But these pirates of Wessex will give us more serious work before long. They stick to it, I’ll say that; and there are enough of them. Great heaven, if only some one would come—Llywarch or Lancelot or Cian, St. Michael or the Devil!”

Plainly Caradoc, for all his reckless good humor, was growing thoughtful; an ill portent, as the Emperor felt and knew. He lay down under it, and slept, until the awakening onset called them to fierce toil again.

On that day and other days the two queenly women signalled, Aurelia openly now, and with clear mind, the other fitfully and half secretly, as if forgetting that all were aware. There was no answer to either; and most likely their flashes and tokens reached only half-armed ploughmen or other stolid hoverers, who lacked the wit to decipher the message, if not the will to speed it on its way.

Arthur saw little of them, though sometimes coming in some breathing-space of the fight, for a kiss from Guinevere. Aurelia now and then went to him below, or within sight and hail, rendering womanly aid to the wounded not far from the crossing of spears. There was a frank comradeship between them, in their slight and hurried intercourse, both having seemingly quite forgotten that there might possibly once have been more. It tantalized Guinevere even in danger, and so little before her wedding-day, so that she came distrustfully nearer the blood-spattering than she could otherwise have been drawn, and had even some share also in the blessings of the defenders. Other women of noble station, penned in that hill-city, where savage incessant battle made the chief bride-music, were also steadfastly ministering.

The circuit of defence was lessening; for, in one vast inrush, the Saxons had mastered the lowest wall, and held it long enough to tear the eastern half quite away. So, though at last they were driven off, the labor seemed too great; and it was thought wise to withdraw behind the second line, and throw up a new one close under the eaves of the town.

The wedding, as intended, was then two days away; and all agreed in clinging to the set scheme of things as though no enemy were near,—Aurelia, because there could be no better encouragement of the defenders; Guinevere, because it sealed her triumph if rescue should reach them, and to have been an empress, though but for an hour, could not make her lot the worse with Cerdic; Arthur, by reason of dominant will and real impatient love; Caradoc, to please them all, and show the dogged Saxon a something in British pride more dogged still.

Nevertheless, what had been the second ring of earthwork was torn from them the very night before the marriage-day; and all through the morning the struggle was desperate over the outer one of the two which remained, in the eagerness of the invader to break through before the ceremony, and seize the bride. But at noon it still held, and Caradoc said,—

"Emperor or no, a bridegroom is a bridegroom. Don your fine feathers, my Emperor. I will stand them off yet a while, and let the priests and processionizers work their will on you."

"But we shall need you to give away the bride."

"Oh, anybody will fight for me those few moments. Hammered mail must be my wedding-garment. Hasten!"

Then Arthur, smiling as a commander who finds it arch to obey, went quickly up into the town. More stress and strain of care went with him than ever with a man before on what should be his happiest day.

Yet the whooping uproar for which he listened came not then, nor even later, when festal figures in diverse bravery wound through the streets, gorgeous even in distant view, and every bell in Camelot rang out defiantly the coming of the bride. There were those, women chiefly, who rejoiced aloud that the Saxons were too cowed to venture more that day. Arthur looked grave; then all foreboding was lost in the loveliness trembling beside him. But it was no maiden

tremor of Guinevere, nor any doubt of her matronly future. Even as they passed up the great cathedral aisle, her terror broke in a cry, and she clung to him as with a spasm; for a more hideous din than ever before—shrill, outlandish, multitudinously jangled—had that moment broken forth also. It verily beat at wall and window and door, rising, as they stood before the prelate, with indescribable change and accession and keen metallic resonances.

The Emperor, clutching hard his sword-hilt, half turned from bride and altar, then held himself there perforce with a groan, bidding every man leave them with all speed. He bade also the service go on; for doubtless, when the proper time should come, there would be one to give away the bride. Also from minute to minute he listened, elate that the sound came no nearer, but seemed rather to stay and sway.

With the outpealing of the first chant a message came from Caradoc, by one no longer fit for any fighting, but who stumbled as he came, that the prince might not leave quite yet, but would surely be there soon, despite Saxon and Devil.

Aurelia, not far away, made one step toward the man as he fell; then, leaving that service to others, where women were so plentiful, swept down the aisle and through the door to somewhat that was less easy. Her eye, weapon-seeking, was on the ground, as she sped over the level crest and down the hill. Midway sprawled a dead soldier in a doorway, and, leaning on his great axe beside him, another, yet alive. "Let me lift you to a better prop, and yield me this," she said kindly with quick words. "I will strike good blows for you."

Feeling her health and strength, he said weakly, "I well believe it." Without more, she shifted him gently, and went on very fast, the great axe in her hand, the memory of her old wolf-combat bracing her,—a true battle-goddess.

Into the belt of combat she swept at the first opening. By chance it was the part where was the hottest fighting—and Prince Caradoc. Always furious at hand-to-hand, he was trebly so now, for that these

assailants, numerous as swarming ants and far more full of venom, would by no means leave him one moment for kinder duties. That drove him quite beside himself. Yet still, unconsidering, an ever-renewed surge of spearmen and axemen and swordsmen was thrown up against the wall, to be beaten down again; or quite upon the summit, to be toppled back headlong; or even over it, into the bloody lane behind where he must smite and smite, before driving them to earth or their fellows.

But now there was a great, full, passionate call in a voice of music; and a form such as had never been seen in such a fray swept by him, carrying the breath of victory. All bright with gold and scarlet she was from crown to skirt-rim, glittering keenly with gems, and swaying with bare, perfect arms the gleaming weapon about her head. The men shouted at her coming as they shouted for the coming of Arthur; and their rush upon the Saxons was such as could come only from the strength of a stimulant new in kind. She glanced at Caradoc once only as she went by; and even he, though not apt at any reading, knew what was to be done.

"Who has your place?" demanded Arthur, as the panting giant stood before him.

"Either a she-archangel," gasped Caradoc, "or the London Queen Aurelia."

That passed for his brightest utterance, his only epigram, outwrung by very stress of wind and weather. More he said, also, in due form, as ritual demanded, then sped back to his post.

Later, when the wedded pair had left altar for palace, came word from him that all went well; that his angel of destruction had withdrawn a little, after the greatest beating back of men that ever was seen, without herself quite shedding the blood of any; and that matters would indeed have come to a sad pass if Caradoc, whom men had called good for something, could not secure a little peace and quiet for his niece and her husband on their wedding-day.

Then Arthur laughed openly at the great fighter's ideal of repose, with all that screaming and hooting of demons on every side. He had no mind to profit by the strong-hearted kindliness of his friend. But Guinevere clung to him, and besought him; not greatly in love,—though he thought so,—but chiefly in mere dread and tremor. Fear touched him, too, for her sake, left alone. Lingering, drawn and held, he passed up with her where they could view the lower scene.

There had been a lull; but now the tumult awoke again at its worst, and the setting sun struck across men and spears, swarming and counter-swarming. Red jewels were smitten out where they leaped together. On the house-tops, close to the last wall, women were bringing hastily every kind of missile, for use when that final need should come. All round the circle the battle stormed, but at the north it was still the fiercest; and here he came soon to know a new wave, and very great in the sea of onset, the royal banner of Cerdic tossing on before.

He saw that wave sweep up with a great heaving rush that lifted banner and king and many chosen champions, through friend and enemy, clean over the earthwork. He saw Caradoc rush to the spot, and struggle valiantly, with more thronging to aid him, yet in spite of all, yielding little by little. He saw Aurelia and the few fighting-men whom she had held in reserve hasten into the midst. He tore himself rudely from Guinevere, and dashed recklessly down the stairway, that he might bear his part. Bitter self-blame was in his soul for his dallying, but this had all come about nearly in the twinkling of an eye.

At the palace-door one greeted him to say that Caradoc was sorely wounded; that Aurelia bade him come forthwith, if he would ever be of use.

Hardly a sound reached him from the eastern slope. Hurrying thither, he found that the assault had dwindled, being mainly withdrawn to aid Cerdic. He called back a part of his men to the inner wall, where they would count as more in number, being brought nearer together and re-enforced by missiles from above;

then, with the remainder and all whom he could gather on the way, he sped around the curve to that ever-widening semicircle of combat about the inbulging mass of Saxons, and the tossing of the White Horse standard.

He passed Caradoc, helmetless, and bound with bloody white over the brow, yet unsteadily endeavoring to get forward and join the battle. He heard the glad welcoming call of Aurelia. Then way was made for him, and he came face to face with Cerdic.

A doughty man was the West Saxon king, as many a hot battle, whether lost or won, might tell—red of hair, red and pitted in the face, red in the gnarled long arms, left bare for greater freedom of stroke. No giant in size like Caradoc,—whom yet he had felled with one ringing blow a few minutes before,—but very strongly knitted and sinewy in lean ungainliness. Less than Arthur in mind, as far lower in soul, but formidable in every wise. Perverse, grim, cruel; a man to let nothing bar his way.

He greeted his enemy with a taunt thanking him for the bride that had been won, and thereupon sprang and smote with his great double-handed axe more like some hairy wild man of the woods than a fighting king. But, if his weapon were the heavier and his crude strength the greater, he had not Arthur's alert and surpassing skill; and fell as was his heart that moment, it yet lacked the other's white-hot fire. For a brief time there was a whirling medley of thrust and stroke, the other combatants tossing and jarring against them, destroying all sureness of aim. Then the point of Arthur's sword whipped into Cerdic's right arm below the shoulder; and, as the battle-axe dropped, a slash brought the Saxon to the ground. It was a swift, hard blow, though it could not have full swing in that press; and Cerdic lay on elbow, as, if dazed, with his helmet well dented in. The blood came streaming down into his eyes, and Arthur forbore.

Then the cry of that deed went every way through the mass; and many made desperate pressure to seize or save the fallen king, so that there was very savage fighting over him for a time. But Arthur called off whom he could, feeling well rid of Cerdic and his

following, if only they were in mind to go. As to these, they cared for nothing but the saving of their leader. Thus ended that chiefest onslaught. The outer wall was manned again.

Arthur drew near in the early twilight to where Caradoc was reclining, Aurelia sitting by him. The mighty man, enfeebled now, arose, and took his hand.

"You see how it has fared with me," said Caradoc, "for fancying that the defence could endure, even an hour, without its soul and its captain."

"Its captain bids you go and be properly tended," answered Arthur pleasantly, "and that our strong angel of London supervise the tending."

Aurelia smiled and said, "All must obey our Emperor. But I am not greatly tired, nor hurt at all—they have taken such care of me. And there are so few of us now."

"True," answered he sadly. The dead and the dying were all about them, often richly apparelled as they had come from the bridal, with not a moment to spare. Noble, even royal, blood had been poured out like water in that last rally for the very life of the town, which so nearly failed. "We must withdraw to our last wall, here as elsewhere," he added. "When all else is done, you may come to me again."

Aurelia turned after Caradoc, but hesitated. "With the Empress?" she suggested.

"It will not affront her," answered he. "She is too tender for such as this. I ought never to have brought it about her."

Yet, as Aurelia went up the hill, she could but feel with pity how he thought not of turning to Guinevere his bride for any help in trouble.

CHAPTER XL.

HOW CIAN SAVED ARTHUR FROM CERDIC.

With Arthur of anxious contention
With Arthur a splendid labor.
—TALIESSIN.

IT was black and late when Aurelia groped her way again to the Emperor. A stifling weight of cloud left no crevice for starlight. Even the lamps and tapers of the hill were unseen, being mainly in deep inner recesses, where the work of weapon-hunting or treasure-hiding still went on. The great Saxon encampment was also a wilful darkness. Away here and there, some hill-top, itself unseen, bore its one hazy glimmer, where camp-fire or burning home had died down. The universe had gone into mere blankness and mourning.

There was silence, too, save for sounds of mere menace and pain; sometimes a keen, irrepressible cry as of stabbing, or some tragic mystery; sometimes a brief mocking trill from a night-bird out and below, broken by a nearer groan. Also, with close listening, a blended under-murmur, which might have been of the feeble night-wind only.

Arthur was dozing, utterly outworn, with his back against the palace-wall of a lesser Cornish king, one of many who had built mansions about and below that of their great king of kings, in this new border capital. But he came to life at Aurelia's low call beside him, and answered cheerily. Also he heard by effort, with clear mind, all that she had to tell. She made inquiry in turn, and he answered,

"One whom I sent forth brings word that Cerdic is yet alive, and rallying in strength, and swearing to have his revenge before another day. If he cannot lead, the White Horse will come on with young Cenric. It may be we can snatch that banner—before quite losing life."

He spoke with the calmness that comes of exhaustion and dark, lonely musing.

She held her peace, casting about for words. He spoke again, with little more of thrill or color. “Who would say that I, who have foiled many, should at the last be thus trapped and taken? That I also, who have loved and lifted so many friends, should live to feel all melt from him save only one or two? Ah me! I fear that Arthur has not been the man of his belief and thought, nor so just as he once hoped to be, nor so diffident of his tread where every foot should be unclad.”

Her heart stirred, not unhopefully, though with pity, at these words. She did not need the telling that, in spite of continued triumph and splendor, he had not lately been quite the great Arthur of earlier days. No one had first feared it, and then felt it, more strongly than she. And now the cup of calamity was brimming over in a flood. If only his blindness should not have been washed away too late!

She had no word of excuse to offer, nor any of condemnation.

“You are overworn, my Emperor,” she said very gently. “Sleep, while I watch over you. I trust there may be new hope in the awakening.”

Even yet, behind their last bulwark, on the very eve of ruin and slaughter, her faith clung fitfully to the coming of Cian.

“You are wonderful, Aurelia,” answered the Emperor drowsily. “But this is not the place where you should be.”

Her cheeks burned in the darkness. Was there ever so unheard-of a part to take as hers, the guardian companion of another woman’s bridegroom on his wedding-night? Just how should it be expounded and exemplified to Prince Cian?

The stress of these thoughts both hardened and stung her. “Shall “I bring Guinevere—if she will come?”

Arthur half groaned, impatiently. “Let her remain in safety,” said he.

“Caradoc, then?”

“He has undergone enough and more, considering what may yet await him.”

She spoke again, with a smile in her voice.

“Then surely it must be me. I shall mount the wall, and watch there, first making some of our good fellows clear a little space for me.”

With a sleepy, “God bless you, Aurelia!” he lay back, and passed at once out of consciousness.

Later, men averred that this wedding-time of the great Arthur was such a thing as never had been, nor would ever be again in all the earth.

It seemed but a moment before he started up with the sense of being stirred and shaken. All was black still, though in truth they were near dawn. He could not discern any outline, but he knew Aurelia’s voice.

“They are coming. They are near.”

He was on his feet, hurrying to the wall, his men rousing on every side already.

“Caradoc?” he inquired.

“He was the first sent for.” She whispered on as they peered and listened; “It was but just now. I had watched a long time. I was drowsy. Then something startled me; and I knew it was the noise of stumbling, well down the hill. At once I became sure of men at the other wall, where they may have thought some of ours to be. Hark!”

A forward stir, yet nearer, was distinguishable now. Doubtless there had been a pause of uncer- tainty, but they were coming on all together. With faint scraping, Arthur struck a light, holding it city-ward. At the signal, other lights awoke along the palace-front behind them, and a dozen fire-arrows leaped out from the windows over their heads into the open space between the walls, each with its train of burning tow.

One, chance-guided, lit, for a moment, the fringe of Cerdic's great banner, and stabbed in the face a pikeman who came close behind, bringing him to the ground, all aflame. The other arrows pinned the ground only, but lighted unevenly the whole scene for the archers and slingers. Fast and thick the missiles came. Man after man went down; first, as they shrank from this sudden illumining, then, as they cast all secrecy aside, and came leaping, pitching, butting forward, in every attitude, with every kind of yell. Spears darted from the wall, and some of the foremost fell forward; others caught at the flying missiles, or snatched them from the ground, and paused a moment to hurl them back. Yet the mass made no halt, until an indescribable great rain of all manner of things, weighty and hot and pointed,—even shattering jars of boiling oil, even vessels trailing out pennons of burning tar, viscid and clinging,—descended on them from the housetops.

Then, indeed, there was a little check. Twice the standard-bearer tumbled to earth, and another took his place. Once young Cenric was tripped, and thrown amid the press, barely escaping death from the feet of his own men. And as here, so it was quite round the circuit of Camelot, only in lesser degree. But soon there was spear-thrusting and sword-reaching across the barrier; and the throng momently grew denser against its outer face, being even shielded in a measure by nearness to those within. At intervals one, two, or a dozen would spring or clamber up, or seemingly be hurled from behind or below, and hold some part of the top for a moment.

"The same old game!" cried Caradoc, sweeping his battle-axe into the face of one of these, and guarding, with strokes and thrusts, the place where that enemy had been. The need of the hour had brought

his strength back again for a time. “But I tire of it,” he exclaimed pettishly. “Where, then, is Llywarch—or Lancelot, or Cian?”

The fire-arrows had burned out; but they were not fighting in darkness, for there was a faint glimmer through the cloud-curtains which held back the day. The wind blew higher and higher, and seemed to reach even those upper regions, for they thinned perceptibly. The wounded saw it where they lay, with upward-looking faces; and Aurelia saw it, as, withdrawn a little, she peered and strained in momently weakening hope, and rush of dread. But the men in combat could not see, until the curtain broke away suddenly, and the world was given to all eyes.

It was in the very midst of the most determined attack. Three score Saxons were on the wall in one place, holding together; half a score already inside, fighting forward. Every moment brought others leaping down, and yet others tumbling up into their places. Then came a glad outcry from the roofs and windows, “Look! Cian! Cian of the Chariots!” Aurelia, springing to a higher foothold, called aloud, “It *is* Cian indeed! Thank God!”

The Saxons on the wall saw too; while those within, who could not see, but caught their cries and glances, divined it all, and made frantic efforts to reach them. This, indeed, Cenric, with one more, really did, the rest falling by the way under the reinvigorated swords or spears that struck into them. All pitched out together, and went streaming down the hill, with the half-ordered rout of their comrades, to meet a more formidable onset. Arthur and Caradoc were over and after them, with many followers, unrelenting, shouting abroad in their glee.

For there could no longer be a moment’s doubt of the issue. The Saxons, though so near winning the town, had suffered wofully in thus often assailing a brave enemy strongly posted. The new British force that now came sweeping on them in a crescent was really beyond their remaining strength, and seemed more overwhelming still. The cloud-prolonging of the night had brought Cian and Llywarch very near them unseen; and now that light was needed for

a ruinous stroke, it came swiftly and amply. Llywarch led one wing, Cuneglasse, the stripling grandson of old Edyrn, the other; Cian filled the centre with his chariots, fighting-men in great numbers riding behind. All were below the nearer ridges, making great speed over the open land, for there was not one footman in the whole array. With little noise they came, except an occasional shout of delight as to some festivity; with no menace but the glad up-tossing of spears and javelins, yet in utmost earnestness.

A good part of Cerdic's army was yet on the far side of the hill, and hardly to be brought around in time. But he bestirred himself, with the aid of his best friend and his spear-butt, in driving his men into squares, wedges, and circles on the slope and the lower level ground, the better to resist their enemies of either side.

What a morn for Cian—Cian the deliverer! All through the night, as he swept on before his men, he had watched for the city's lights and feared the city's darkness; until the outsailing fire-arrows told their tale, and the flare and uproar far up the height warned him to make all speed. Now the parting of the curtain had shown him victory surely ahead; the Saxons, appalled, making what hasty shift they could to abide him; the belted cone-hill alive with down-hurrying Britons; the crowning wizardly beauty of palace and temple; and home—many-colored, wildly outlined, multitudinously aflutter, the great dragon-standard from the highest imperial tower surmounting all! Truly never again should man come in quite such fashion, at such an hour, to such a Camelot.

There was racing to see who should first be with the Saxons; but the crescent horns were too far ahead in position, for all that Cian could do. One ill-formed lump of men melted instantly under the charge of Llywarch; yet mainly the rooted spears held, and the horsemen were turned, eddying, until they sprang to earth and joined fight, evenly facing their foes. But before this second locking the plunging chariots had broken in on the whole front as through a shell, making lanes almost as far as Arthur and Caradoc. Some, indeed, were overthrown, where reckless men leaped at bit and shaft, or sent them, by main force of numbers, lurching over; and the riders or

horses of some were speared as they came by. But the greater number kept with Cian, turning and turning again, with varying direction, until the whole resistance was bewildered, and the great Saxon army broken into three.

One part, the least, made in hurrying disorder for some rugged ground on the northeast; another, bearing Cerdic and Cenric in the midst, and holding together as men whose only hope of life lay therein, went doggedly back by the road of their coming; and all the way their teeth showed very plainly to Llywarch, who followed. The third, having less dread of anything human than of Cian's chariots, took the wild resolve to seek their enemy's stronghold, and made, by a dash at a weakly defended point, a part of the second line of earthwork their own.

They numbered a good many yet, very savage and desperate. The men above withstood them fiercely, but still gave way. Cian saw no leader of this minor defence but a woman's form, which made his heart leap with recognition, though he had not thought Aurelia was there.

With little thought, and that figure his only aim, he led the rush of wheels over the nearly obliterated lower wall; and then, on foot, by escalade, the many fighting-men who poured after him, vehemently against the second. There was hard work yet, though brief, on the crest of it and in the space behind; yet he cut through the Saxons wholly, and stood, after so long, again before his London queen.

"I astonish you," she said; "but you have astonished us with better reason. We had all but made up our minds to die. Come, take my place, Cian; I am weary of playing general."

"It reminds me of our first meeting," said he; for the wall gave her height as the pedestal had given, and weapon and garb were nearly the same. A line of dead Saxons below, fallen under the blades of her defenders, proved that wildness and fury had been there, as before, but again without avail. His men were finishing that work, the few

hostile survivors dashing off blindly as they could. The defence and rescue of Camelot were quite ended.

As he stood beside her, Caradoc and Arthur came, the former with a half-defiant promise to be his friend for life, though all the world should deny. But the Emperor denied nothing, his face being solemn and shamed in its gladness. "What more could man do for man than you have done for me, Cian?" he said; and his voice was broken.

"Old times are a strong magnet," answered Cian; "and the need of our friends and our sovereign is a stronger. Even my men of Mona would have been here sooner could we have foreseen. But prophecy failed us."

Arthur winced at the word thrown out to try him. "If it could have forecast something better than—Mona," he suggested. "But—was not the Samaritan some kind of pagan?"

Aurelia and Cian touched eyes and hands, rejoi- cing silently together. It needed no words to assure them that danger had gone by, that good-will would reign again, with no compulsion of faith.

But now a gathering of figures on the far eastern hill-tops drew their notice; and the Saxons, who had taken refuge there, were seen drifting uncertainly back toward Camelot. Presently, as if fearing to be cut off altogether, these broke across the more open country to the southward, and pursuit came instantly hard upon them. Faint cries of fear and exultation reached the watchers on the hill of Camelot. Even the flash of armor and the tossing of scarfs and banners might presently be seen. Arthur uttered a low exclamation, half amused, half scornful—"Lancelot!"

"I think it is he," said Cian. "At least we shall not have to fight him."

"Was there any thought of that?" asked Aurelia.

Then Cian told her the little that was known, and the much by way of surmise, Arthur listening very gravely. When the tale was ended,

the Emperor fixed on this old friend regained a look most kindly, and walked away, pondering. His gaze was on the chase and running fight, now of so little moment to any except the fugitives. But his thought could scarcely be there.

Aurelia followed him with her eyes, then turned in compassion to the distant flying men, overtaken one by one. Mayhap, though, it was in some measure the less for having seen their faces ravening so near, and heard their brutal outcries.

But here was Cian beside her to draw her mind away, and soon also came tidings from her own city. For one outcome of the Saxon rout was to let in the life of the outer world again; and all that it brought was called for greedily, though not all, when heard, was welcome. The Kent-folk, one rumor said, were threatening; and the riotous Celtic party within the town were again shamefully making head against her and the Emperor. For they had thought the calamity beyond repair. And there had been many cries of "Vortimer."

Aurelia's brow knitted, and her soul stung her. She heard Cian's indignant appeal, "Cast them off, and come to me," with answering hand-pressure; but a moment afterward her own words were, "Not yet."

Later she mused aloud, "Vortimer! Then they shall have Vortimer."

CHAPTER XLI.

ALL WELL ENDED.

To bless Arthur
Arthur the blessed.
—TALIESSIN.

AT the opening of that night, Arthur held high state in the great palace-hall of Camelot, the new-made empress by his side. Guinevere was reassured now, and lovelier than ever in their triumph; proud also with the assurance that, through every chance and turmoil, still in her own especial endeavor she had completely won.

Aurelia, too, was there, most like some gracious Olympian figure of Grecian fancy, but with more of human warmth and purity in her gray eyes than ever any goddess owned. Near her, Sanawg, tall in her swaying velvet twilight beauty, overrun with hidden fire, an ambassadress from the Orient and the elder time. Also Cian and Llywarch together, equally merry, for there rested now no cloud at all on the spirit of the poet-seer. Caradoc likewise, that battle-knight of the brawny arm, wound-hampered now, yet towering in his corner. Noble dames, too, in numbers, city rulers and mountain chiefs, lowland kings and notable priestly warriors of the Druid isle, each in his own especial bravery.

Into this presence entered Lancelot, attired even beyond what was usual with him, beautiful immortally—but it was a sinister beauty. At the door, doubt showed itself wistfully in his face. A step farther he felt the chill, and hardened. Yet, as he told his tale before the Emperor, his composure was nearly shaken, and his eyes drifted, with appeal, toward the most contemning ones of Guinevere, who would in no way forgive him that he had not come when called. It was a goodly story, well-sounding to those who did not know. He had been delayed, he had used great effort, and not wholly without

avail. The hostile dead lay on the field where he had left them. He had lost hardly one man.

Arthur heard him through, and made answer,—

"Lancelot, a late gift is better than none, and a little bread than famine. For doing no worse, all thank you. But do not look for grateful ecstasy. Let the future better the past. Return home. Free Vortimer. One wishes it who is brave and fair, and of a house that was his enemy. Moreover, I see no fitness in such custody."

The Prince of Gwynedd flushed and scowled, then looked again toward the throned lady, less in hope than with that soul-compulsion which answers to the magnetic needle's aim. But her eye showed only enjoyment of his distress, recalling how she had signalled and signalled him, with no reply. He faced her; then he faced the Emperor, at full height, under strain. For the moment he dared not trust his voice. All could see what passions tore him,—outraged love, real to infatuation, though selfish and lawless; the helpless writhing under ridicule which no other man could feel so keenly; the strong, upsurging, hateful desire to utterly humiliate and shame those who had brought him low—even her. This passed; but in after years, when the great evil was coming on the land, his soul went back to it in some sort working out the bitterness.

At last he made a mocking obeisance, and said, "It shall be done;" then passed forth with such lack of courtesy that some counselled seizing him before he should do harm. But at that Arthur shook his head.

"No need," said he. "Lancelot is not the dullard that will risk all for nothing, nor Cerdic that sort of Saxon to make compact with one who has failed him, if there were aught between them, that is, concerning which I have no wish to hear further. We shall yet have, as of old, good service from Lancelot."

Another power than prudence was working in the baffled Prince toward the same end. Exiled from the court imperial, how could he

hope to see Guine- vere? And what exile more complete than that of hostility? The binding of her fortune with Arthur's was beyond any undoing now; but equally so was the bond of his own infatuation, when resentment against her paled with time. Yet this did not wholly pass away, but survived, rather, in a deadening of scruple as to what must lessen her gravely in men's eyes.

It was long before any incitement from her had part therein, for the crisis of her danger and bridal came with too hard and close a strain. During all this season of estrangement he was diligent in service to the Emperor, being held in power, and prized there, over all North Wales. Watching this, or seeing it with no watching, it is little wonder if every shadow of distrust left the mind of Arthur. Yet a treachery was latent, biding its opportunity, which had in it, as the world knows, the ruin of them all.

Apart from this soul-warping, Lancelot of Gwynedd had noble graces other than those of form. Hence, loosening his captive, he did not fail to enlarge on Aurelia's share in that boon, and brighten her image and claims with every pleasing color. At first Vortimer, bleached and haggard from confinement, was in disquiet over this unlooked-for blossoming. But, as he found that no harm came, he reconciled himself thereto, and at last went toward Silchester (where she awaited him) with a gallant escort, quite easy in mind and body, and most ready for friendliness with his queen. The old prosperity of person had partly revived, but not the old turbulence as yet; for a subtle change had been wrought by unexpected and ruinous downfall. There could be no doubt of his present willingness to do her service and honor.

This was even as she had dared to hope; for, in truth, it was not only to please her people and restore him to daylight that her good word had been spoken. Cian's own realm was far from London, and that city could not be left uncared for in going to a new life, sorely as it had tried her by unreason and petulance, and by the meanness of wilful desertion in her great need. In the future, if a true viceroy, who had the hearts of London, could be found, it would be easier for her to forget such unloveliness while far away.

This duly came to pass; for already the major part of that city was in fear and adoration of her concerning whom it had reckoned so wrongly, and wild with eagerness to receive its own especial hero back again. Therefore their progress was a thing of flowers and beauty, and every house in every street blazed out with window-tapers at their entry. And their confidence and good-will toward effort were such in every way that it took little bargaining to close a peace with all the neighbor Saxons, which left her people more freedom of the Thames, and more security against inroad and foray than ever before in the memory of men. So there was nothing left but what Vortimer could very well do for the queen, and in her stead. She gave the northern prince her hand, and they went their way.

Would you know more of Cian of the Chariots? In the far North, with the power of Arthur behind him, he held the land, even to the region of lakes far beyond the great wall, securely for Britain. And many poems he wrote and sang, of a strange and mystic beauty known in many countries for centuries, and the fame of which, though every book that held them is lost to men, lasted until our own day. Loving best the hills and woodlands wherein he had been born, he yet went southward at the Emperor's call to that great day of need which brought the great victory and long prosperous peace of Mount Baden; often, too, as a brief visitant of the court at Caerleon with scant approval for the new growth of luxury which foredoomed its own ruin; or to that London which now slumbered on unsafely in a partly reviving dream of greatness toward its final overthrow. Last of all was he drawn to the utter disaster of Camlan, his last days being divided between his battling princedom of the North and Brittany beyond the sea, where one or two of his songs yet linger on peasant tongues and in peasant memories.

APPENDIX.

Cian. Pronounced Kyan.

Llywarch. Pronounced Lu-arch (nearly).

Constans. . The son and lieutenant of Constantine, elected emperor by the Roman troops before their abandonment of Britain. Dr. Guest, Master of Balliol, supposed Aurelius Ambrosius to have been his son, and Caradoc Vreichoras his grandson. The Constantine of our story would then be cousin to "Caradoc of the brawny arm," battle-knight of Arthur.

Duglas and Glem. . See Preface, also the list of Arthur's battles in Tennyson's "Elaine," borrowed from that of Nennius, who composed a history of Britain in perhaps the seventh or eighth century. Mr. Nicholson, Bodley's librarian at Oxford, England, supposes the first four conflicts to have been in Lindsey ("the region Linuis" of Nennius); but the names of the streams themselves, except the Glem, are found in or near the lake country of the northwest. Either supposition accords well with our story, which has nothing directly to do with any battle of Arthur before that in the forest of Celidon.

Caowl. . In the long poem, sometimes called an epic, entitled the "Gododin," Aneurin gives a savage picture of Caowl, but says also "breathless in the presence of a maid would he distribute the mead," a tribute to woodland bashfulness!

Argoed. . This has a general meaning of woodland. More particularly it seems to have been applied to the region which owned Llywarch as its lord. In his "Death-song of Cyndylan" he refers to "the men of Argoed" as his own especial following. There are passages in this poem of epic dignity, martial force, and poignant pathos.

Dynan. Pronounced between Doonan and Dunnan, say Doi-nan.

The White Town. This was the city Uriconium, the emporium of the Welsh mining-districts, near the eminence known as the Wrekon, and on the site occupied by the present Wroxeter. The circuit of its wall about equalled that of London. Its buildings were roofed with a stone which contained many particles of mica, giving a beautiful effect. It is identified by Dr. Guest with the "White Town, the town of flame" of Llywarch. It was taken by storm in the final conquest of the Severn valley, as its ruins yet show.

Calleva Atrebatum, which the Britons called Caer Segeint, is now represented by the small town of Silchester. Its forces marched under the eagle standard after the Romans had withdrawn. According to Geoffrey of Monmouth, Arthur was here elected and crowned by a great assembly of the nobility and clergy of the realm. It was, at all events, hardly inferior to London after the latter waned under the stifling effect of the Saxon blockade, and must always have been more beautiful.

Osburn. . This Frank mercenary is a type of the Teuton free lances who were then serving Rome and Rome's enemies, and every semi-independent power. Naturally the city of London would have some of them in the guard of its wall and gates.

Caer Collin. Colchester. Present county seat of Essex. Ancient capital of "Old King Cole," according to ballad and legend; also of the historic Cunebelline, Shakespeare's Cymbeline, the "friend of Augustus." It was in Roman times one of the great cities of Britain, and the centre of many industries, but had no doubt long been dwindling before the period with which we deal, being often threatened and sometimes quite surrounded by the East Saxons and their allies.

Andred-wood. The greatest wilderness of Britain, which ran east and west parallel with a great part of the southern coast. There was a mining-population in it, besides foresters of every kind. The great fortress town of Anderida, called by the Saxons Andred Ceaster, derived its name from this wood, and was aided by that hardy population in its obstinate resistance to Elle, the conqueror of Sussex.

Long after London fell, the forest of Andred offered an asylum to all sorts of fugitive Britons.

Guledig. Guledig, or Wledig, was the Celtic equivalent of Emperor. Thus the tale known as "The Dream of Maxim Wledig" has to do with the Emperor Maximus. Tigernach, being an extreme reactionary Briton and Celt, would use the native title instead of any foreign equivalent. The mistletoe, sacred to the Druids, had been chosen, we will suppose, as a token among their adherents, and was also the cognizance of Prince Cian.

Waters of the Sun. Aquæ Solis, the modern Bath. It was not destroyed until after Arthur's death. In the Saxon "Codex Exoniensis" appears a very impressive metrical meditation of one of the victors, attesting the extraordinary beauty, luxury, anal attractiveness of the place. "They perished in wide slaughter."

Cian's chariot. It has been thought that some relics indicate the use of chariots in battle as late as the ninth century. They were the distinctive war-engines of ancient Britain. In the Celtic revival from the sixth to the eighth centuries they would naturally reappear after their long disuse during Roman times. But in the earlier part of this period they must have been a rarity, so that Cian, the conservative in opinion though daring in action, would be nearly alone in his fancy.

The legend. It is a very old one, illustrated by some of Cunebelline's coinage.

Vran. This demigod, or half-deified magician, seems to have been a special champion of London at a very early date. The Welsh triads mention him.

Aesc of West Kent. In the confusion and overlapping of the waves of Saxon invaders, there were even for a time two kings within the limits of what is now one county. West Kent was not a kingdom of long duration, yet it existed.

The Song of Cian. Our hero is mentioned by Nennius as one of the four great poets of Arthur's time. So late as the French Revolution a manuscript book of his poems is said to have been extant in Brittany. They may yet possibly be recovered. A single song attributed to him, of a mystical and figurative character, has been taken down from the recitation of peasants in that province. I have endeavored to be faithful to its tone and quality, being without other guide.

Caerleon. Caerleon on Usk, having yet its living representative. This was the main seat of Arthur's court, preserving much of Roman splendor. It affords the scene and personages of the Mabinogion tales in the "Red Book of Hergest." It is "the city Leogis, called Cair Lion" of Nennius. Here also "the neighing of the wild White Horse set every gilded parapet shuddering."

Basilica. In Roman cities this was a combination of court-house, public hall, trade-guild, office-building, and merchants' exchange, but was usually of great beauty.

Eschwine. London was probably taken and destroyed or depopulated by Sleda, the son of Eschwine, soon after Arthur's death. The father, having recently given over sea piracy, and established himself on the land, was not likely to be more clement at the time of our tale. A chief of the Northern Saxons was known by the parallel title of "Flame Bearer."

Maelgwn. Monsieur de Villemarqué was, I believe, the first to identify this Prince of North Wales with the legendary Lancelot. Gildas berates him as a very guilty man, but gives him credit for strength, gallantry, and the possession of high qualities which might have been turned to better account. He appears as a paroxysmal, vain, self-seeking character, extravagant in sinning and repenting, yet foremost in ability after Arthur's fall. By some priestly subterfuge, known as "the affair of Corsfechno," he seems to have acquired supremacy. He was probably the Conmael who fell with two other great chiefs in defending the lower Severn valley and its cluster of commercial cities when the next wave of Saxon invasion rolled that way. Geraint, coupled with him, is mentioned by

Aneurin, and made the hero of a vehement and splendid poem by Llywarch. There is no reason to doubt that Geraint was a real person, very possibly "a tributary prince of Devon, one of the great order of the Table Round," as Tennyson puts it in the "Idylls of the King."

Camelot. . Camelot was probably a newly founded fortress city, which Arthur made his frontier capital, that he might the better watch his most dangerous enemy, Cerdic of Wessex, who had penetrated some distance into the land on this frontier. The site of Camelot was most likely Cadbury Hill, near Queen's Camel, in Somersetshire. Merlin is identified by legend with the building of the place, and dwellers thereabout are said to retain a certain wizardly repute even yet.

A stronghold built on piles. . The lake or great marsh below London probably gave that city its name, "Lyn-dyn," the lake-fort. It must have afforded a refuge and fastness to the Britons, and maintained its race of marsh- men, as did the fens and watery wastes that lay farther to the north. The piles of buildings which were supported in this way above the water have been found within the limits of the metropolis. There is no unlikelihood in a complete lake-village of that time and place.

Arthur Mabuter. . The word Mabuter has been generally translated "the son of Uther." One of the British poets refers to him as "the son of Uther before he was slain." But Dr. Guest insists that it should be rendered "the terrible boy," in allusion to his youth on first assuming command.

The Song of Llywarch. In these verses I have preserved the rhyme, arrangement, and metre of Llywarch's "warrior triplet," which may have indirectly suggested such modern poems as "Hohenlinden" and "Scots wha' hae wi' Wallace bled." The white-horse standard referred to was that of the Saxons under Cerdic. The charge in white armor is from Geoffrey of Monmouth, who puts the number who fell with Ambrosius at five thousand. The Saxon Chronicles mention the death of Natanleod, King of the Britons, at the same time and place. Dr. Guest considers it to be a title, meaning Prince of the Sanctuary,

meaning the "holy house at Amesbury," which had been named after him, and was known as the great Choir of the Dominion. Later it was removed to Glastonbury, known as Avalon, where Arthur himself was laid quietly to rest at the end, being borne in a boat over the flooded land.

Guinevere. According to Geoffrey of Monmouth, her name was Guanhumara. The Scotch peasants make it Wander. Guinevere was a Normanized version. It is likely also that the Normans invented Lancelot as a substitute for Maelgwn.

The Queen of London. . An old Welsh manuscript says, "Wherefore the kings of London were called the sons of Alis." Dr. Freeman says there are indica- tions that London, in its early Saxon history, maintained a kind of local supremacy, having under it the tributary territory of Middlesex.

Verulam. St. Alban's.

Caer Lerion. Ratæ of the Romans. Leicester.

Legiolum. Castleford.

Freur. . Llywarch mentions his sister Freur in one of his poems.

A woman-like form. . The people of the under-world and wonder-world are too important components of early British story to be neglected. We find the lady of the hollow hill in one of the Mabinogion stories; and the experiences of Kilmeny, Childe Roland, and Thomas of Ercildoun show what might befall. Curiously, some of the hills, on excavation, have been shown to be both hollow and once inhabited. There is some element of truth in most superstition. It has been suggested that a primitive aboriginal race, driven to underground shelter and the depths of forestry, and able to keep alive only by secrecy and subtlety, may have made reprisals, including abductions, in a terrifying way, so that the fear of them as mysterious, flitting, and superhuman, would linger on indefinitely.

The Scaur. The Victoria caverns of the King's Scaur were first adequately explored and described by Professor Boyd Dawkins, author of "Cave-Hunting." The relics in them show that refugees from ruined northern cities, like Isurium, atone time took refuge there; this occupancy lasting until civilization was in part worn away, or until they made room for more barbarous successors.

Caer Badus. Caer Gloui. Bath and Gloucester.

The wreck of Isurium. This city, according to Dr. Green, was hardly inferior to Eboracum (York), which exceeded London in importance. The destruction by the Saxons was complete.

Caer Ebrauc. This was now Eboracum, now York.

Prince Edyrn. Edyrn of the Scarlet Coat was a notable British champion of the preceding generation. "Sanawg, or stately maiden," is named in a poem of "The Graves of Britain," author not certain. Gwydion ap Don had a great celebrity for necromantic feats, including the very pretty one commemorated in the fragment of a chant which haunted Llywarch's fancy.

Loidis. Leeds.

Borne far away. If you ask who carried Dynan away, "I cannot tell so mote I thrive." His name is a very old one; he provides a part of the fanciful-mystical element of our romance. Thus in the "Lay of the Last Minstrel" we have a page of preterhuman qualities and abilities, although it is a true picture of its time.

In Lady Guest's Mabinogion, taken from the fourteenth century "Red Book of Hergest," you will find the story of Araun, the Lord of Announ, and Powyll, Prince of Dyfed, in which the mystic lady of the hollow hill appears as "Rhiannon of unspeakable beauty," riding out of the under-world on a white horse, with a garment of shining gold around her. Without effort she distanced all pursuers. Archæologists have found, curiously enough, that some of the mounds popularly called Pechts' houses in North Britain, and

believed to be haunted by fairies, actually had within them chambers fitted up for human occupancy. Mr. MacRitchie argues ingeniously that there was a small aboriginal race which took refuge in them, issuing by night into the outer air, and occasionally abducting the women or children, or even the men, of the conquering race. Dr. Rhys attributes, conjecturally, the liveliness of the Irish, as compared with the Welsh, to the greater amount of fairy blood in them.

The modern concept of the fairies is a very complex one, deriving something, no doubt from the light and shadow of inanimate nature and mere fantastic day-dreaming. Yet back of them troops a more impressive array, the dread lords and ladies of the lower realm, in some part the dethroned deities of divers heathen mythologies, but no doubt even more the memories of dispossessed human beings who lurked on in the shadow, perhaps long after they had ceased to be thought of as flesh and blood by people who were free to come and go as they would in the daylight. Our Dynan is not historic, he is typical, and by no means the only one for whom this dread parentage has been claimed. Let us not be over curious as to whether he were borne into a spectral under-world of magic and faery, or into some dusky refuge of a last lingering fragment of a most archaic but purely human race. In the thrill and twilight of mystery must Romance ever find her home.

White Hill of Cynvelyn. This seems to have been the hill of the Tower of London.

Caer Ligion. . Now Chester. One of the last of the Romano-British cities to be taken by the Saxons. Two hundred years afterward it remained a ruin; but the great walls were used by the Northmen as a defence when hard pressed, as the ruins of Uxmal might be used by a Mexican or Central American expedition now.

Trath Tribuit. This battle of the strand, which has no very direct relation to the main current of our tale, is mentioned in Nennius, and in the poems of the "Black Book of Caermarthen," the oldest of the Welsh manuscripts, a few fragments only excepted. The spelling varies through several intermediate forms, from Trath Tribuit to

Traeth Trywruid. It is located at many widely separated points by different investigators. The mouth of the Ribble is an old suggestion, which, on the whole, has the most to commend it. The word Trath, or Traeth, is translated the sandy shore of an estuary. The Ribble mouth answers to this; the name is more like Tribuit than that of any similar spot which the Saxons had any temptation to reach; and it is not easy to invent any other probable scheme of their semi-naval campaign.

Caer Caradoc. This was Amesbury, the town of Ambrosius, where the Holy House mentioned by Arthur in Tennyson's Guinevere was or had been located; a religious establishment very likely as great as that of Bangor, which is said to have sent a thousand unarmed priests to the final battle before the walls of Chester, where they were slain while praying. At the time of which I write, it is probable that the religious element had withdrawn to safer quarters in Avalon, and that the character of the town was chiefly military. Dr. Guest identifies Amesbury with the provincial capital of Caradoc Vriechvras, Prince of Devon and son of Aurelius Ambrosius.

City of Vortigern. . Old legends make Gloucester the capital of Vortigern, or Vor Tighairn, the British king or emperor who invited Hengist and Horsa into Kent.

Battle of Camelot. This is the Cat Bregion, or battle of the Mount Breguoin of Nennius. The name has been explained by Dr. Skene as meaning the painted hill; and Cadbury, with triple walls of eartwork, and buildings painted after the Celtic fancy, gay-colored banners, and the many richly apparelled chiefs and followers, would answer to that name very well. First or last, the British frontier capital was sure to be assailed. But there can be no such certainty in the identification of the battle of Mount Breguoin as in the case of Mount Badon, which is put by the note of the monks of Glastonbury on their copy of Gildas at a point near Bath and the Avon River; or in the case of Cair Lion, which is still Caerleon on Usk.