

OLD ENGLISH PIRATES.

The British choral boast of "ruling the waves" is a very old one. We can trace it back to sturdy bloodthirsty ancestors among the old vikings who never sought shelter of a roof, who had no other kingdom to rule than the sea. Sea kings who shouted their songs in the midst of the tempest,

The force of the storms helps the arms of the rowers,
The hurricane is carrying us the way we would go.

Almost all the information we possess of our piratical old ancestors, the wave-rulers of a thousand years since (for the lines about "the flag that's braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze," are singularly correct in their chronology) we derive from the Sagas, or songs of the Skalds, a collection of strange wild stories of adventure in verse of measured prose, by the Scandinavian bards. The profession of pirate, or viking, was held highly respectable, and not disdained by men of the highest rank. The qualification for the service was the performance of some exploit of personal prowess, which should entitle a man to the confidence of a band of champions as their commander. The law of bravery laid down for the followers themselves was not unlike that hinted at in the old schoolboy's rhyme:—

Two skinny Frenchmen,
And a Portuguese,
One jolly Englishman
Whacked all three.

It was understood that a man ought to beat a single enemy, that he ought to make a respectable appearance against two enemies, and to show fight against three; but that it would not be disgraceful to run away from four. Each viking governed his champions in his own way, gaining greater fame in proportion as his regulations were more strict and rigorous than those of his peers. For example, Half and Hestrolf, both sons of a Norwegian king, took to the profession. Hestrolf had a number of ships which he manned indiscriminately with serfs and freemen, ruling them mildly. Hestrolf was beaten by almost every opponent. His brother Half had only one ship, but he picked twenty-three king's sons for his companions, requiring each as a test of strength to lift a mighty stone which twelve ordinary men could scarcely stir. He forbade his champions the society of women and children; he made them bare themselves to the fiercest of tempest, and would not allow them to dress their wounds in battle till victorious. For nearly twenty years Half was the terror of the Western Seas, with a reputation of never having been vanquished in fight. So stringent was his discipline that when returning home his vessel overlaid with plunder and nearly foundering in sight of the Norwegian shore, the crew drew lots who should cast themselves into the sea to save their viking his cargo. The losers jumped overboard without a murmur, so that the ship, relieved of their weight, came safe to land.

The viking could govern his vessel as a clever rider controls his horse. It was required of him to be able to run along the oars while they were in motion, and to throw three javelins to the mast-head catching each alternately in his hand without once missing. He was not afraid of going out of sight of land, and never thought of coming to anchor when clouds hid the stars. True, he had no compass, but there was always a cast of hawks or ravens on board, and when in doubt about the direction in which land lay, he had only to loose one of these, satisfied that the bird would instinctively make for the nearest shore. Whether the bird flew he steered. It was all one to the viking what land he reached, so long as it was land and not his own land; for his aim was plunder, and his creed was, where there is habitable land there is sure to be that. The birds seem to have had an unfortunate propensity for leading these gentlemen to Ireland and Britain. Ireland, indeed, appears to have been the first of the British islands favoured with the visits of the northern marauders, and Johnstone mentions a significant fact in connection with their visits. "The fertile Erin," he says, "was long the great resort of Scandinavians, who, from the internal dissensions of the native, gained considerable footing." Poor Ireland! She was suffering from Fenians even in those days. However, by way of compensation, Ireland became a sort of Paris to the vikings; in setting the fashions; for they took to aping Irish manners and talking Celtic, until the celebrated Irish King Brian Boru drove them out of the country early in the eleventh century, and made the Irish unpopular with the vikings.

It cannot be concealed that these rulers of the waves were a terrible set of ruffians. Not content with simple plunder, they but-tered alike those who submitted to their outrages, and those who resented them, showing mercy neither to age nor sex. Believing themselves the avengers of Odin against disciples of all other religions, they were especially severe on the clergy, putting them to death with tortures, and burning their churches, as Scott says, "to light the way to their barks again." Doubly terrible was the viking when "berserker." This was a violent kind of frenzy with which he was liable to be seized, attributed by various writers to intense excitement of the imagination, or to the use of stimulating drugs or drinks. In this state he became dangerous to friends and foes; he would foam at the mouth and vent his fury against trees and rocks; he would swallow red-hot coals and throw himself into the fire. If at sea when the fit came on, he would often slaughter half his crew and destroy his shipping before his companions could land him at some desert island.

there to tear up the tree by the roots and commit all manner of havoc upon inanimate nature until, his strength exhausted, he would lie senseless and prostrate, then wake up recovered. Almost all the great vikings became "berserker" at times. Indeed, when a seaking received any deadly insult from an enemy that he could not avenge, it seems to have been a point of honour that he should become "berserker" on the spot.

Halfdan was a king of Sweden and a viking besides. He had seized the crown from Sivald, and slain Sivald and his five sons, all in a state of "berserk" madness. When Hartben the sea-king came up with twelve champions to attack him, Halfdan offered to fight him and his entire crew single handed. This insolent proposal inflamed Hartben with such awful fury that he immediately became "berserker," and killed six of his own champions in the fit. He then rushed on Halfdan with the remaining six, but he and they all fell dead beneath the terrific blows of Halfdan's mace. The viking's first vessel was nothing better than the trunk of a large tree hollowed out by fire like Robinson Crusoe's boat, and called "holk," a word still surviving in our language as "hulk." The British Museum contains a specimen of one of these ancient holks, found on the Sussex coast. But in process of time the viking became master of a much larger vessel, carved and painted and fashioned into the form of some fantastic monster, usually that of a dragon. Such was Rolf's famous ship called the "Dragon Grimsoth." Often as their vessels were wrecked in the fierce North Sea storms, the hardy pirates who survived would yet defy the tempest, and even the gods themselves, holding on their course, as the Sagas say, "along the track of the swans."

A viking would marry occasionally three or four wives; but would seldom waste time on courtship. He evidently regarded it professionally. When he heard of a lady possessed of beauty and wealth, he would fit out his vessel and demand her of her father. Should the misguided parent refuse the honour of becoming his father-in-law, the viking burnt him out of his house, and returned with his bride, his vessel laden with all the spoil he could conveniently lay hands upon, by way of dowry. An unwilling father had no alternative but consent or fight. Regnald, a Norwegian king, who had refused the peremptory demand of Gunnar the Swedish viking, for his daughter Moalda, not only set himself instantly on the defensive, but hid the princess and all his treasures in a mountain cavern, determined to baffle his enemy, even if beaten. But Gunnar came with a fleet of vessels, and, after a fierce battle, killed the king, and contrived to find out the place of Moalda's retreat. He returned to Sweden with his bride and her treasures, and the Skalds sang his praises in the Kianesinga Saga.

Here is a love story from the Volsunga Saga. Hagbarth and his three brothers, all of them sea-kings and sons of the King of Dronheim, sailing together in the North Sea, met the fleet of the sons of the Danish king Sigar. They fought, of course. The battle lasted all day, and at night was still undecided. A circumstance of frequent occurrence among the vikings then happened: each contending party becoming suddenly impressed with the bravery of his opponent, the weapons fell from their hands in mutual approbation of each other's valour; and, having sworn eternal fidelity—ratifying the treaty by mingling blood drawn from each other's veins in token of indissoluble union—the Danish princes invited their enemies of an hour before to visit the court of their father. Hagbarth and his brothers enjoyed the hospitality of King Sigar for many days; but, during their sojourn in Zealand, Hagbarth gained the heart of the king's daughter, the Princess Signa. The Danish princes, however, refused him her hand, contrary to their father's inclination, on the ground that he was not their equal in birth. Hagbarth and his three brothers, in defiance of their treaty, immediately hewed the Danish princes in pieces before their father's eyes, and fled. But Hagbarth found existence insupportable separated from her to whom he had pledged his troth. Disguised as an old woman, he returned to Zealand, and obtained admission to Signa's chamber. He swore to live or die only by her side. A courtier recognized him as Hagbarth, and, notwithstanding his becoming "berserker" and performing prodigies of valour, he was overpowered by numbers and taken prisoner. Some of the council of nobles who tried him were for sparing his life, and proclaiming him the husband of Signa, on account of his bravery; but by sentence of the majority he was condemned to be hanged, and that by a rope made of "widdie" (twigs), for the greater disgrace. They brought out Hagbarth to be executed before the window of the princess's apartment, in order to add the greater sting to his punishment. But Signa, who had vowed not to survive her lover, set fire to her chamber and perished in the flames. When Hagbarth saw this proof of her devotion, he besought his executioners to hasten his death, that he might the quicker rejoice her faithful spirit in the Halls of Valhalla. The passion for maritime adventure seems to have animated the female breast into rivalry with the opposite sex, for many ladies of high birth exchanged the veil for a heavy coat of linked armour and a brazen helmet.

Placing themselves at the head of a band of pirates, they became Skjold-Meyar, Maidens of the Shield, distinguished as much for bravery in battle as for chastity and gentleness at home.

The wooing of a sea-queen was a hazardous business. Laying siege to her heart or attempting to captivate her affections was completely futile. The only way was to blockade her in some narrow bay, and engage her in single combat. Generally as in the case of Alfhilda, the chaste and beautiful Ortrogoth-princess, there were a couple of notable champions guarding her person, who had first of all to be disposed of. Alfhilda's lover, a young sea-king, slew these two in single combat. But Alfhilda was not so easily won. Clothing herself and her maidens in ring mail, and joining her crew of pirates, she embarked in her swiftest vessel, and gave Alf a year's long chase. One after another Alf conquered every ship of her fleet, and then blockaded his mistress in the Gulf of Finland. She came out to fight. Alf's grappled the maiden's ship, boarded it, and after a terrific hand-to-hand encounter with the queen herself, he clove Alfhilda's helmet with his axe, disclosing her beautiful features and long flowing hair. The sight of her beauty was too much for her adorer. He presented her his weapons; for he could fight no more. Alfhilda, doubly conquered by the valour and generosity of her lover, married him on the spot, while Alf's best champions availed themselves of the opportunity to take the sea-queen's maiden attendants to wife. For the whole of the year, in anticipation of some such result, Alfhilda had carried a priest on board to perform the ceremony.

The legend of Wayland, the smith, who forged the viking's most treasured sword-blades, of such admirable temper that they would cut through rock or iron, without losing the edge, is too familiar for repetition; but it may be mentioned, in connection with a strange legend of the old sea-kings, that Wayland had married one of the Valkyriur, or Choosers of the Slain. This was, however, probably no more than a mythological way of stating how keen were Wayland's sword-blades, and how fatal in use. The Valkyriur of the Sagas correspond to the Fates of the Greeks. These fatal sisters chose and foretold those who should fall in battle. They carried Odin's message of invitation to the warriors he loved best, to meet him in Valhalla and they poured out the ale and mead for the solace of the heroes who sat round Odin's board. They visited the slain at sea in the form of swans, and carried the hero's soul straight to the line where the sea and sky meet, into Odin's presence, and into the halls of Valhalla.

The vikings found plenty of employment for the fatal sisters, for some of their battles were on a tremendously large scale, and resulted in fearful slaughter. At the naval battle of Bravalla, between Farald Golden Teeth, and Sigurd-Ring, the usurper of the Swedish throne, all the sea-kings and the Maidens of the Shield ranged themselves on one side or the other. Sigurd-Ring's fleet alone is said to have consisted of two thousand five hundred ships, and the number is not considered to be exaggerated, taking into account the small capacity of the little barks employed. There were seventy-four champions in the Danish fleet, while the Swedes boasted of ninety-six sea-kings, supported by all the picked archers of Norway. Harald, with fifteen kings and thirty thousand of his Danes, was slain, and the Swede bought his victory at a cost of twelve thousand of his bravest warriors. The tumult which marks the burial place of the slain is said to be still pointed out. "We did not permit the ravens to be in want of food," says the Skald, "those who were slain became the prey of the ravens. We hewed with our swords."

THE ARMY AT THE IRISH ELECTIONS.—We have already noticed the unceremonious way in which the army in Ireland was knocked about during the general election in that country. Any inconvenience which was rendered necessary by the exigencies of the crisis would, of course, be borne cheerfully by both officers and men; but it should be the care of our military administration to make these inconveniences fall as lightly as possible. The knocking-about was, perhaps, inevitable, says the *United Service Gazette*, and it involved quite enough of inconvenience in itself; but we understand that the military miseries have been very much aggravated by the system of extortion which has been carried on by inn and lodging-house keepers in whatever towns the troops happened to be temporarily stationed or even billeted en route. The allowance to officers for travelling expenses was only 5s. a day, with a reduction to half a crown on the days of marching out and returning to barracks. Totally despising such miserable estimates, the keepers of even the poorest public-houses charged 3s. for breakfast and 5s. for dinner, the latter never being anything but the national bacon and chickens. At one very second-rate "hotel" mine host demanded a pound a day for the use of his sitting-room, a demand which, we need hardly add, was indignantly refused. In view of these magnificent tariffs of the Irish innkeepers, we think that a pound a day were quite as little as should be allowed to our officers in Ireland for their election expenses.

—The *London Canadian News* says that it is in a position to state that there is no foundation for the rumour that Lord Monck is to be the new Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, vice Lord Kimberly, resigned.

—The Roman Catholic Bishop of Montreal will leave for Rome on the 20th inst.

TWIN, GREELEY, AND TRAIN.

The N. Y. *World* thus hits off the Anglo-phobia of certain representative Yankees:

Mr. Mark Twain, of California, emulous, and justly emulous, of the diplomatic successes of Mr. Ross Browne, yearns to be sent as American Minister to England. He accordingly appeals to all that is noblest in the nature of Horace Greeley, and entreats that eminent citizen to release General Grant from the promise which ("we have heard and believe") was made by him, over a breakfast-table at Delmonico's, to bestow upon H. G. the honors now enjoyed by Mr. Reverdy Johnson. Mr. Twain may as well understand at once that his cake is all dough, or, if he likes that better, that his "goose is cooked." He is a very amusing and, we dare say, a very good-looking person, but he cannot come in as an envoy to England. If (which is very improbable) H. G. could be induced to abandon his own claims to that exalted post, he would be constrained by all possible considerations of consistency and of policy to exert his whole influence in behalf of Mr. George Francis Train.

The columns of the *Tribune* bear witness to the fact that the first duty of an American Minister to England, in the opinion of Horace Greeley, is to bully the British Government, and his second duty, like unto it, to snub all British Tories, ship-builders, and sympathizers with rebellion. These are his Puffendorf, these his Vattel. And, unless Mr. Twain is a more conceited person than we take him to be, he will hardly deny that in these particulars no man now living in America can be expected to rival the indomitable and incorruptible Train. H. G. himself is a pliant and facile tool in comparison with the Eagle of Omaha. H. G. has been known to consent to sinners when they enticed him. He went to Niagara Falls to hob-nob with George Sanders, and to Richmond to bail out Jefferson Davis. What guarantee can we have that he would not accept a "mount" from the Duke of Beaufort or some other sporting enemy of the Union, and go careering in a red coat, across country after the hounds with a meet of conservative peers and church-and-state squires? He is fond, too, of all sorts of worldly amusements, and we may depend upon it that, before he had been in England a month, Lady Beaconsfield and her wily spouse would have him dancing at Willis's Rooms with wicked little Tory countesses, and fribbling away in the boudoirs of Belgravia the feeling and the force which should be directed to the demolition of the British constitution and the humiliation of a bloated aristocracy.

Now, nothing of this need be feared with George Francis Train. The blandishments of beauty and the fascinations of the flesh would be thrown away upon that most patriotic and most pachydermatous of men. His passive courage has been proved and found not wanting during months of incarceration in a British bastille. What could the cajoleries of a British palace effect upon his just and tenacious nature! He has looked the whole world in the face through the bars of his dungeon, and feared not to call a spade a spade nor a Briton a brute, though the red-cross of St. George waved over his head and the red-coats of Victoria kept watch and ward about him. His last act on leaving the Old World was to hurl defiance at Windsor Castle and demand the independence of Ireland. His last act on reaching the New World was to declare war against Great Britain while yet his foot pressed the deck of a British steamer and the thralls of the tyrant glared in anger and in amazement all about him. Would such a man be likely to call Mr. Roebuck "his friend," or to shake hands with Alabama Laird, or to soothe the feelings of Lord Clarendon, or to placate a venal Parliament? "Not much!"

The *Tribune* will be false to all its professions if it fail to urge the appointment of such a man to the work which it has so elaborately laid out for an American envoy in England to do. Mr. Train must go to the Court of St. James. And Mr. Twain must console himself with the thought that all the "swells" of the British capital, with whom it is an article of faith always to pronounce the letter r like the letter w, will surely turn Train into Twain, and so give him all the glory with none of the trouble of the post which he solicits. The only real difficulty in settling the matter is likely to come from Mr. Train himself. Mr. Train's abhorrence of British tyranny, James McHenry, and the Old Testament is only equalled by his hatred of spirits and of tobacco. It may, therefore, be a little doubtful whether he will consent to accept office from the new administration excepting on the condition that Wendell Phillips shall be appointed Comptroller of the White House, with absolute authority over the domestic life of its inmates. But this should be easy of arrangement. There would be no good reason why Congress should not apply the principles of its recent legislation to families as well as to States; and the Radicals who rule us ought surely to be able to find in the Constitution as clear a warrant for regulating the personal habits of the President as they have found there for over-riding the political prerogatives of another.

—All United States army officers over 62 years of age are to be retired.