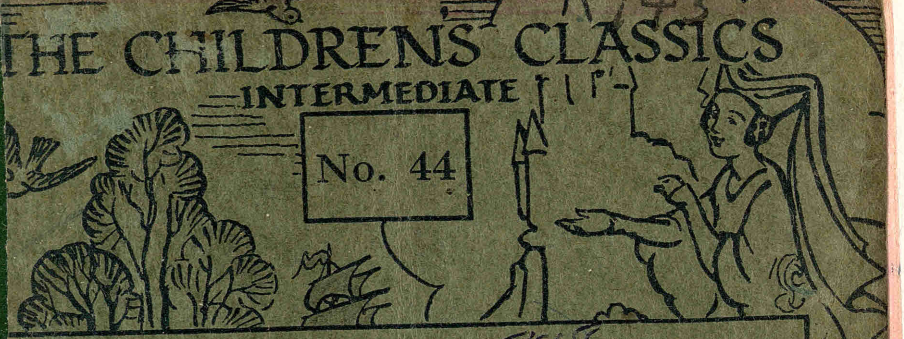


T43

The Little Duke

Richard the Fearless

Abridged

By

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943
1197
HIGH SCHOOL
Duke
ERNAY

THE LITTLE DUKE

CHAPTER I.

On a bright autumn day, as long ago as the year 943, there was a great bustle in the Castle of Bayeux in Normandy.

The hall was large and low, the roof arched, and supported on thick short columns; the walls were thick, and the windows, which had no glass, were very small. There was a fire at each end of this great dark apartment, but there were no chimneys over the ample hearths, and the smoke curled about in thick white folds in the vaulted roof, adding to the wreaths of soot, which made the hall look still darker.

Two young maidens were strewing fresh rushes on the floor; some men were setting up a long table of rough boards, supported on trestles, and then ranging upon it silver cups, drinking horns, and wooden trenchers.

Benches were placed to receive most of the guests, but in the middle, at the place of honour, was a high chair, the arms curiously carved with lions' faces and claws; and the silver drinking-cup on the table was of far more beautiful workmanship than the others, richly chased with vine leaves and grapes, and figures of little boys with goats' legs.

From one of these scenes of activity to the other, there

moved a stately old lady. She directed the servants, and now and then looked rather anxiously from the window, and began to say something about fears that these loitering youths would not bring home the venison in time for Duke William's supper.

Presently, she looked up rejoiced, for a few notes of a bugle-horn were sounded; there was a clattering of feet, and there bounded into the hall, a boy about eight years old, his cheeks and large blue eyes bright with air and exercise, and his long light-brown hair streaming behind him, as he ran forward flourishing a bow in his hand, and crying out, "I hit him, I hit him! Dame Astrida, do you hear? 'Tis a stag of ten branches, and I hit him in the neck."

"You! my Lord Richard! you killed him?"

"Oh, no, I only struck him. It was Osmond's shaft that took him in the eye."

A stout forester was at this instant seen bringing in the venison, and Dame Astrida hastened to meet it, and gave directions, little Richard following her all the way, and talking as eagerly as if she was attending to him.

In the meantime two men entered the hall, one about fifty, the other, one or two-and-twenty, both in hunting dresses of plain leather, crossed by broad belts, supporting a knife, and a bugle-horn. The elder was broad-shouldered, sun-burnt, ruddy, and rather stern-looking; the younger, who was also the taller, was slightly made, and very active, with a bright keen grey eye, and merry smile. These were Dame Astrida's son, Sir Eric de Centeville, and her grand-

son, Osmond; and to their care Duke William of Normandy had committed his only child, Richard.

On this day, Duke William himself was expected at Bayeux to pay a visit to his son.

Even now Richard had caught the sound of horses' hoofs. "Hark! hark!" he cried, and darted to the window. "They come, they come! There is the banner of Normandy." Away ran the happy child, and shouted for joy, as under the arched gateway there came a tall black horse, bearing the stately form of the Duke of Normandy. His purple robe was fastened round him by a rich belt, which held the mighty weapon from which he was called "William of the Long Sword." His brow was grave and thoughtful, and there was something both of dignity and sorrow in his face; but now, how bright a smile beamed upon the little Richard, who, for the first time, paid him the duty of a pupil in chivalry, by holding the stirrup while he sprung from his horse. Next, Richard knelt to receive his blessing, which was always the custom when children met their parents.

It would take too long to tell all the friendly and courteous[1] words that were spoken, the greeting of the Duke and the noble old Lady Astrida, and the reception of the Barons who had come in the train of their Lord. Richard was bidden to greet them, but, though he held out his hand as desired, he shrank a little to his father's side, gazing at them in dread and shyness.

They sat down to Fru Astrida's banquet, the old Lady

[1] Courteous—polite.

at the Duke's right hand, and the Count of Harcourt on his left; Osmond carved for the Duke, and Richard handed his cup and trencher. All through the meal, the Duke and his Lords talked earnestly of the expedition[1] on which they were bound to meet Count Arnulf of Flanders, on a little islet in the river Somme, there to come to some agreement, by which Arnulf might make restitution to Count Herluin of Montreuil, for certain wrongs which he had done him.

Richard was rather tired of their grave talk, and thought the supper very long; but at last it was over, and the Duke had time to attend to his little boy. Richard sat upon his knee and talked, told about all his pleasures, and how his arrow had hit the deer to-day.

Duke William listened, and smiled, and seemed as well pleased to hear as the boy was to tell. "And, Richard," said he at last, "have you nought to tell me of Father Lucas, and his great book? What, not a word? Look up, Richard, and tell me how it goes with the learning."

"Oh, father!" said Richard, in a low voice, playing with the clasp of his father's belt, and looking down, "I don't like those crabbed letters on the old yellow parchment."

"But you try to learn them, I hope!" said the Duke.

"Yes, father, I do, but they are very hard, and the words are so long, and Father Lucas will always come when the sun is so bright, and the wood so green, that I know not how to bear to be kept poring over those black hooks and strokes."

[1] Expedition—undertaking.

"Poor little fellow," said Duke William, smiling. "But, Richard, not only can all Princes here read, but in England, King Ethelstane would have every Noble taught."

"I hate the English," said Richard, raising his head and looking very fierce.

"Hate them? and wherefore?"

"Because they killed the brave Sea King Ragnar! Fru Astrida sings his death-song, which he chanted when the vipers were gnawing him to death, and he gloried to think how his sons would bring the ravens to feast upon the Saxon. Oh! had I been his son, how I would have carried on the feud! How I would have laughed when I cut down the false traitors, and burnt their palaces!"

Duke William looked grave. "Listen to me, my son. Christian as is this nation of ours, this duty of forgiveness is too often neglected, but let it not be so with you. Bear in mind, whenever you see the Cross marked on our banner, that it speaks of forgiveness to us; but of that pardon we shall never taste if we forgive not our enemies. Do you mark me, boy?"

Richard paused a moment, and then said, "Yes, father, but I could never have pardoned, had I been one of Ragnar's sons."

"It may be that you will be in their case, Richard," said the Duke, "and should I fall, as it may well be I shall, in some of the contests that tear to pieces this unhappy Kingdom of France, then, remember what I say now. I charge you, on your duty to God and to your father, that you keep up no feud, no hatred, but rather that you should

deem me best revenged, when you have with heart and hand given the fullest proof of forgiveness to your enemy. Give me your word that you will."

"Yes, father," said Richard, with rather a subdued tone, and resting his head on his father's shoulder.

The next day, after morning service in the Chapel, and breakfast in the hall, the Duke again set forward on his journey, giving Richard hopes he might return in a fortnight's time, and obtaining from him a promise that he would be very attentive to Father Lucas, and very obedient to Sir Eric de Centeville.

CHAPTER II.

One evening Fru Astrida sat in her tall chair in the chimney corner, her distaff in her hand. Opposite to her sat, sleeping in his chair, Sir Eric de Centeville; Osmond was on a low bench within the chimney corner, trimming with his knife some feathers of the wild goose. Two or three large hounds were reposing in front of the hearth, and among them sat little Richard of Normandy, smoothing down their broad silken ears. His eyes were intently fixed on Dame Astrida, as if he would not lose one word of the story she was telling him; how Earl Rollo, his grandfather, had sailed into the mouth of the Seine, and how Archbishop Franco, of Rouen, had come to meet him and brought him the keys of the town, and how not one Neustrian of Rouen had met with harm from the brave Northmen.

"Oh, but tell of the paying homage!" said Richard; "and how Sigurd Bloodaxe threw down simple King Charles! Ah! how would I have laughed to see it!"

"Nay, nay, Lord Richard," said the old lady, "I love not that tale. That was ere the Norman learnt courtesy, and rudeness ought rather to be forgotten than remembered, save for the sake of amending it. No, I will rather tell you of our coming to Centeville, and how dreary I thought these smooth meads, and broad soft gliding streams, compared with mine own father's fiord in Norway." But at this point Dame Astrida paused. A bugle note rang out at the castle gate; the dogs started to their feet, and uttered a sudden deafening bark; Osmond sprung up, exclaiming, "Hark!" and trying to silence the hounds; and Richard, running to Sir Eric, cried, "Wake, wake, Sir Eric, my father is come! Oh, haste to open the gate, and admit him."

"Peace, dogs!" said Sir Eric, slowly rising, as the blast of the horn was repeated. "Go, Osmond, with the porter, and see whether he who comes at such an hour be friend or foe. Stay you here, my Lord," he added, as Richard was running after Osmond; and the little boy obeyed, and stood still, though quivering all over with impatience.

"Tidings from the Duke, I should guess," said Fru Astrida. "It can scarce be himself at such an hour."

"Oh, it must be, dear Fru Astrida!" said Richard. "He said he would come again. Hark, I am sure that is his black charger's tread! And I shall not be there to hold his stirrup! Oh! Sir Eric, let me go."

Sir Eric only shook his head, and at that moment steps were heard on the stone stairs. Again Richard was about to spring forward, when Osmond returned, his face showing, at a glance, that something was amiss; but all that he said was, "Count Bernard of Harcourt, and Sir Rainulf de Ferrières," and he stood aside to let them pass.

Without greeting to Sir Eric, or to any within the hall, the Count of Harcourt came forward to Richard, bent his knee before him, took his hand, and said with a broken voice and heaving breast, "Richard, Duke of Normandy, I am thy liegeman and true vassal"; then rising from his knees while Rainulf de Ferrières went through the same form, the old man covered his face with his hands and wept aloud.

"Is it even so?" said the Baron de Centeville; and being answered by a mournful look and sigh from Ferrières, he too bent before the boy, and repeated the words, "I am thy true vassal, and swear fealty to thee for my castle and barony of Centeville."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Richard, drawing back his hand in a sort of agony, feeling as if he was in a frightful dream from which he could not awake. "What means it? Oh! Fru Astrida, tell me what means it? Where is my father?"

"Alas, my child!" said the old lady, putting her arm round him, and drawing him close to her, whilst her tears flowed fast.

"The Duke dead!" said Sir Eric de Centeville, like one stunned and stupefied.

"Even so," said Rainulf, slowly and sadly, and the silence was only broken by the long-drawn sobs of old Count Bernard.

"But how? when? where?" broke forth Sir Eric, presently. "There was no note of battle when you went forth. Oh, why was not I at his side?"

"He fell not in battle," gloomily replied Sir Rainulf.

"Ha! could sickness cut him down so quickly?"

"It was not sickness," answered Ferrières. "It was treachery. He fell by the hand of the false Fleming!"

"Lives the traitor yet?" cried the Baron de Centeville, grasping his good sword.

"He lives and rejoices in his crime," said Ferrières, "safe in his own merchant towns."

"I can scarce credit you, my Lords!" said Sir Eric. "Our Duke slain, and his enemy safe, and you here to tell the tale!"

"I would I were stark and stiff by my Lord's side!" said Count Bernard, "but for the sake of Normandy, and of that poor child, who is like to need all that ever were friends to his house. I would that mine eyes had been blinded for ever, ere they had seen that sight! And not a sword lifted in his defence! Tell you how it passed, Rainulf! My tongue will not speak it!"

He threw himself on a bench and covered his face with his mantle, while Rainulf de Ferrières proceeded: "You know how in an evil hour our good Duke appointed to meet this caitiff, Count of Flanders, the Duke and Count each bringing twelve men with them, all unarmed. Duke

Alan of Brittany was one on our side, Count Bernard here another, old Count Bothon and myself; we bore no weapon—would that we had—but not so the false Flemings. Ah me! I shall never forget Duke William's lordly presence when he stepped ashore, and doffed his bonnet to the knave Arnulf."

"Yes," interposed Bernard. "And marked you not the words of the traitor, as they met? 'My Lord,' quoth he, 'you are my shield and defence.' Would that I could cleave his treason-hatching skull with my battle-axe."

"So," continued Rainulf, "they spake together, and as words cost nothing to Arnulf, he promised all that was asked of him. They took leave of each other in all courtesy, and we embarked again. It was Duke William's pleasure to go alone in a small boat, while we twelve were together in another. Just as we had nearly reached our own bank, there was a shout from the Flemings that their Count had somewhat further to say to the Duke, and forbidding us to follow him, the Duke turned his boat and went back again. No sooner had he set foot on the isle," proceeded the Norman, clenching his hands, and speaking between his teeth, "than we saw one Fleming strike him on the head with an oar; he fell senseless, the rest threw themselves upon him, and the next moment held up their bloody daggers in scorn at us! You may well think how we shouted and yelled at them, and plied our oars like men distracted, but all in vain; they were already in their boats, and ere we could even reach the isle, they were on the other side of the river, mounted their horses, fled with

coward speed, and were out of reach of a Norman's vengeance."

"But they shall not be so long!" cried Richard. "Oh, that I were a man to chastise them! One day they shall feel——"

He broke off short, for he remembered how his father had bidden him forgive his enemies; but his words were eagerly caught up by the Barons, who thought revenge a duty, and were only glad to see a warlike spirit in their new Prince.

"Ha! say you so, my young Lord?" exclaimed old Count Bernard, rising. "Yes, and I see a sparkle in your eye that tells me you will one day avenge him nobly! How say you, Lord Richard, will you be a valiant leader of the Norman race against our foes?"

"That I will!" said Richard, carried away by the applause excited by those few words of his. "I will ride at your head this very night if you will but go to chastise the false Flemings."

"You shall ride with us to-morrow, my Lord," answered Bernard, "but it must be to Rouen, there to be invested with your ducal sword and mantle, and to receive the homage of your vassals."

When Richard awoke the next morning, he could hardly believe that all that had passed in the evening was true, but soon he found that it was but too real, and all was prepared for him to go to Rouen with the vassals. Fru Astrida was quite unhappy that "the child," as she called him, should go alone with the warriors; but Sir Eric

laughed at her, and said that it would never do for the Duke of Normandy to bring his nurse with him in his first entry into Rouen, and the little Duke rode off between Sir Eric and Count Bernard. Richard was but a little boy, and he did not think so much of his loss, as he rode along in the free morning air, feeling himself a Prince at the head of his vassals, his banner displayed before him, and the people coming out wherever he passed to gaze on him, and call for blessings on his name. Rainulf de Ferrières carried a large heavy purse filled with silver and gold, and whenever they came to these gazing crowds, Richard was well pleased to thrust his hands deep into it, and scatter handfuls of coins among the gazers, especially where he saw little children.

They entered the town just as it was growing dark. Eric de Centeville bade Richard sit upright and not look weary, and then all the Knights held back while the little Duke rode alone a little in advance of them through the gateway. There was a loud shout of "Long live the little Duke!" and crowds of people were standing round to gaze upon his entry, so many that the bag of coins was soon emptied among them. The whole city was like one great castle, shut in by a wall and moat, and with Rollo's Tower rising at one end like the keep of a castle, and it was thither that Richard was turning his horse, when the Count of Harcourt said, "Nay, my Lord, to the Church of our Lady."

It was then thought a duty to be paid to the deceased, that their relatives and friends should visit them as they



The little Duke rode alone a little in advance of them.

lay in state, and sprinkle them with drops of holy water, and Richard was now to pay this token of respect. He trembled a little, and yet it did not seem quite so dreary, since he should once more look on his father's face, and he willingly rode towards the Cathedral.

A whole flood of light poured forth from every window, and when Richard came to the door, he saw not only the two tall thick candles that always burnt on each side of the Altar, but in the Chancel stood a double row ranged in a square, shedding a pure, quiet brilliancy throughout the building. Outside these lights knelt a row of priests in dark garments, their heads bowed over their clasped hands, and their chanted psalms sounding sweet, and full of soothing music. Within that guarded space was a bier, and a form lay on it.

Richard trembled still more with awe, and would have paused, but he was obliged to proceed. He dipped his hand in the water of the font, crossed his brow, and came slowly on, sprinkled the remaining drops on the lifeless figure, and then stood still, for he felt as if he could neither breathe nor move.

There lay William of the Long Sword, like a good and true Christian warrior, arrayed in his shining armour, his sword by his side, his shield on his arm, and a cross between his hands, clasped upon his breast. There was not a single token of violence visible about him, save that one side of his forehead bore a deep purple mark, where he had first been struck by the blow of the oar which had deprived him of sense.

"See you that, my Lord?" said Count Bernard, first breaking the silence, in a low, deep, stern voice.

Richard had heard little for many hours past save counsels against the Flemings, and plans of bitter enmity against them; and the sight of his murdered father, with that look and tone of the old Dane, fired his spirit, and breaking from his trance of silent awe and grief, he exclaimed, "I see it, and dearly shall the traitor Fleming repent it!" He laid his hand on the hilt of his father's sword, and spoke on in words, perhaps suggested by some sage, "Yes, Arnulf of Flanders, know that Duke William of Normandy shall not rest unavenged! On this good sword I vow, that, as soon as my arm shall have strength——"

The rest was left unspoken, for a hand was laid on his arm. A priest, who had hitherto been kneeling near the head of the corpse, had risen, and stood tall and dark over him, and, looking up, he recognized the pale, grave face of Martin the Abbot, his father's chief friend and adviser.

"Richard of Normandy, what sayest thou?" said he, sternly. "Yes, hang thy head, and reply not, rather than repeat those words. Dost thou come here to disturb the peace of the dead with cries for vengeance? Dost thou vow strife and anger on that sword which was never drawn, save in the cause of the poor and distressed?"

Richard made no answer, but he covered his face with his hands, to hide the tears which were fast streaming.

"Lord Abbot, this passes!" exclaimed Bernard the Dane. "Our young Lord is no monk, and we will not see

each spark of noble and knightly spirit quenched as soon as it shows itself."

"Count of Harcourt," said Abbot Martin, "are these the words of a savage Pagan, or of one who has been washed in yonder blessed font? Never, while I have power, shalt thou darken the child's soul with thy foul thirst of revenge; if ye love the child, seek not to injure his soul more deeply than even his bitterest foe, were it Arnulf himself, hath power to hurt him."

The Barons were silenced, and Abbot Martin turned to Richard, whose tears were still dropping fast as the thought of those last words of his father returned more clearly upon him. The Abbot laid his hand on his head, and spoke gently to him. "These are tears of a softened heart, I trust," said he. "I well believe that thou didst scarce know what thou wert saying."

"Forgive me!" said Richard, as well as he could speak.

"See there," said the priest, pointing to the large Cross over the Altar, "thou knowest the meaning of that sacred sign?"

Richard bowed his head in assent.

"It speaks of forgiveness," continued the Abbot. "And knowest thou who gave that pardon? The Son forgave His murderers; the Father them who slew His Son. And shalt thou call for vengeance?"

"But oh!" said Richard, looking up, "must that cruel traitor glory unpunished in his crime, while there lies——" and again his voice was cut off by tears.

"Vengeance shall surely overtake the sinner," said

Martin, "but it must not be of thy seeking. Nay, Richard, thou art of all men the most bound to show love and mercy to Arnulf of Flanders. Yes, when the hand of the Lord hath touched him, and bowed him down in punishment for his crime, it is then, that thou, whom he hath most deeply injured, shouldst receive him with pardon and peace."

Richard wept too bitterly to speak, and Bernard de Harcourt, taking his hand, led him away from the Church.

CHAPTER III.

Duke William of the Long Sword was buried the next morning in high pomp and state, with many a prayer and psalm chanted over his grave.

When this was over, Richard was led into the hall, where there was a great assembly of Barons, some in armour, some in long furred gowns, who had all been attending his father's burial. Richard, as he was desired by Sir Eric de Centeville, took off his cap, and bowed low in reply to the bows with which they all greeted his entrance, and he then slowly crossed the hall, and descended the steps from the door, while they formed into a procession behind him, according to their ranks—the Duke of Brittany first, and then all the rest, down to the poorest knight who held his manor immediately from the Duke of Normandy.

Thus they proceeded, in slow and solemn order, till they came to the Church of Our Lady. As the little Duke entered, there arose from all the voices in the Chancel the

full, loud, clear chant of *Te Deum Laudamus*, echoing among the dark vaults of the roof.

After the beautiful chant of the hymn was ended, the service for the Holy Communion began. When the time came for the offering, each noble gave gold or silver; and, lastly, Rainulf of Ferrières came up to the step of the Altar with a cushion, on which was placed a circlet of gold, the ducal coronet; and another Baron, following him closely, carried a long, heavy sword, with a cross handle. The Archbishop of Rouen received both coronet and sword, and laid them on the Altar. Then the service proceeded. Richard was led forward to the step of the Altar by Count Bernard and Sir Eric, and the Archbishop, laying one hand upon both his, as he held them clasped together, demanded of him, in the name of God, and of the people of Normandy, whether he would be their good and true ruler, guard them from their foes, maintain truth, punish the wicked, and protect the Church.

"I will!" answered Richard's young, trembling voice, "So help me God!" and he knelt, and kissed the book of the Holy Gospels, which the Archbishop offered him.

It was a great and awful oath, and he dreaded to think that he had taken it. He still knelt, put both hands over his face, and whispered, "O God, my Father, help me to keep it."

The Archbishop waited till he rose, and then, turning him with his face to the people, said, "Richard, by the grace of God, I invest thee with the ducal mantle of Normandy!"

Two of the Bishops then hung round his shoulders a crimson velvet mantle, furred with ermine, which, made as it was for a grown man, hung heavily on the poor child's shoulders, and lay in heaps on the ground. The Archbishop then set the golden coronet on his long, flowing hair, where it hung so loosely on the little head, that Sir Eric was obliged to put his hand to it to hold it safe; and, lastly, the long, straight, two-handed sword was brought and placed in his hand, with another solemn bidding to use it ever in maintaining the right. It should have been girded to his side, but the great sword was so much taller than the little Duke, that, as it stood upright by him, he was obliged to raise his arm to put it round the handle.

He then had to return to his throne, which was not done without some difficulty, encumbered as he was, but Osmond held up the train of his mantle, Sir Eric kept the coronet on his head, and he himself held fast and lovingly the sword, though the Count of Harcourt offered to carry it for him. He was lifted up to his throne, and then came the paying him homage; Alan, Duke of Brittany, was the first to kneel before him. Then followed Bernard the Dane, and many another.

The ceremony of receiving homage lasted long, and Richard, though interested and touched at first, grew very weary; the crown and mantle were so heavy, the faces succeeded each other like figures in an endless dream, and the constant repetition of the same words was very tedious. He gave one great yawn, but it brought him such a frown

from the stern face of Bernard, as quite to wake him for a few minutes, and make him sit upright, and receive the next vassal with as much attention as he had shown the first, but he looked imploringly at Sir Eric, as if to ask if it ever would be over. At last, far down among the Barons, came one at whose sight Richard revived a little. It was a boy only a few years older than himself, perhaps about ten, with a pleasant brown face, black hair, and quick black eyes which glanced, with a look between friendliness and respect, up into the little Duke's gazing face. Richard listened eagerly for his name, and was refreshed at the sound of the boyish voice which said, "I, Alberic de Montémar, am thy liegeman and vassal for my castle and barony of Montémar sur Epte."

When Alberic moved away, Richard followed him with his eye as far as he could to his place in the Cathedral, and was taken by surprise when he found the next Baron kneeling before him.

The ceremony of homage came to an end at last, and Richard would fain have run all the way to the palace to shake off his weariness, but he was obliged to head the procession again; and even when he reached the castle hall his toils were not over, for there was a great state banquet spread out, and he had to sit in the high chair where he remembered climbing on his father's knee last Christmas-day, all the time that the Barons feasted round, and held grave converse. At last he grew so very weary, that he fell fast asleep in the corner of his chair, and did not wake till he was startled by the rough voice of Bernard de Harcourt.

calling him to rouse up, and bid the Duke of Brittany farewell.

"Poor child!" said Duke Alan, as Richard rose up, startled, "he is over-wearied with this day's work. Take care of him, Count Bernard; thou art a kindly nurse, but a rough one for such a babe. Ha! my young Lord, your colour mantles at being called a babe! I crave your pardon, for you are a fine spirit."

"Farewell, Sir," said Richard, willingly giving his hand to be shaken by his kind vassal, and watching him as Sir Eric attended him from the hall.

The little Duke was now free to find his way to the room where he had slept last night. He had not made many steps before he heard Osmond's voice say, "Here, my Lord"; he looked up, saw a white cap at a doorway a little above him, he bounded up and flew into Dame Astrida's out-stretched arms.

How glad he was to sit on her lap, and lay his weary head on her bosom, while, with a worn-out voice, he cried, "Oh, Fru Astrida! I am very, very tired of being Duke of Normandy!"

Richard of Normandy was very anxious to know more of the little boy whom he had seen among his vassals, and the next day began to ask Sir Eric about him.

"Ah! the young Baron de Montémar," said Sir Eric. "I knew his father well, and a brave man he was, though not of northern blood."

"But where does he live? Shall I not see him again?"

"Montémar is on the bank of the Epte, in the domain

that the French wrongfully claim from us. He lives there with his mother, and if he be not yet returned, you shall see him presently. Osmond, go you and seek out the lodgings of the young Baron de Montémar, and tell him the Duke would see him."

Richard had never had a playfellow of his own age, and his eagerness to see Alberic de Montémar was great. He watched from the window, and at length beheld Osmond entering the court with a boy of ten years old by his side, and an old grey-headed Squire, with a golden chain to mark him as a Seneschal or Steward of the Castle, walking behind.

Richard ran to the door to meet them, holding out his hand eagerly. Alberic uncovered his bright dark hair, bowed low and gracefully, but stood as if he did not exactly know what to do next. Richard grew shy at the same moment, and the two boys stood looking at each other somewhat awkwardly. It was easy to see that they were of different races, so unlike were the blue eyes, flaxen hair, and fair face of the young Duke, to the black flashing eyes and olive cheek of his French vassal.

For some minutes the little Duke and the young Baron stood surveying each other without a word, and old Sir Eric did not improve matters by saying, "Well, Lord Duke, here he is. Have you no better greeting for him?"

"The children are shame-faced," said Fru Astrida, seeing how they both coloured. "Is your Lady mother in good health, my young sir?"

Alberic blushed more deeply, bowed to the old northern

lady, and answered fast and low in French, "I cannot speak the Norman tongue."

Richard, glad to say something, told him what Fru Astrida had said, and Alberic readily made reply that his mother was well, and he thanked the Dame de Centeville, a French title which sounded new to Fru Astrida's ears. Then came another awkward pause, and Fru Astrida at last said, "Take him out, Lord Richard; take him to see the horses in the stables, or the hounds, or what not."

Richard was not sorry to obey, so out they went into the court of Rollo's Tower, and in the open air the shyness went off. Richard showed his own pony, and Alberic asked if he could leap into the saddle without putting his foot in the stirrup. No, Richard could not; indeed, even Osmond had never seen it done, for the feats of French chivalry had scarcely yet spread into Normandy.

"Can you?" said Richard; "will you show us?"

"I know I can with my own pony," said Alberic, "for Bertrand will not let me mount in any other way; but I will try with yours, if you desire it, my Lord."

So the pony was led out. Alberic laid one hand on its mane and vaulted on its back in a moment. Both Osmond and Richard broke out loudly into admiration. "Oh, this is nothing!" said Alberic. "Bertrand says it is nothing. Before he grew old and stiff he could spring into the saddle in this manner fully armed. I ought to do this much better."

Richard begged to be shown how to perform the exploit, and Alberic repeated it; then Richard wanted to try, but

the pony's patience would not endure any longer, so they wandered about in the court, and then climbed up the spiral stone stairs to the battlements[1] at the top of the tower, where they looked at the house-tops of Rouen close beneath. They threw pebbles down that they might hear them fall, and tried which could stand nearest to the edge of the battlement without being giddy. Richard was pleased to find that he could go the nearest, and began to tell some of Fru Astrida's stories about the steep hills of Norway, among which when she was a young girl she used to climb about and tend the cattle in the long light summer time. When the two boys came down again into the hall to dinner, they felt as if they had known each other all their lives. The dinner was laid out in full state, and Richard had, as before, to sit in the great throne-like chair with the old Count of Harcourt on one side, but, to his comfort, Fru Astrida was on the other.

After the dinner, Alberic de Montémar rose to take his leave, as he was to ride half way to his home that afternoon. Count Bernard, who all dinner time had been watching him intently from under his shaggy eye-brows, at this moment turned to Richard, to whom he hardly ever spoke, and said to him, "Hark ye, my Lord, what should you say to have him yonder for a comrade?"

"To stay with me?" cried Richard, eagerly. "Oh, thanks, Sir Count; and may he stay?"

"You are Lord here."

"Oh, Alberic!" cried Richard, jumping out of his chair

[1] Battlements—the parapet of a building with openings for firing through.

of state, and running up to him, "will you not stay with me, and be my brother and comrade?"

Alberic looked down as if he knew not what to say.

"Oh, say that you will! I will give you horses, and hawks, and hounds, and I will love you—almost as well as Osmond. Oh, stay with me, Alberic."

"I must obey you, my Lord," said Alberic, "but——"

"Come, young Frenchman, out with it," said Bernard,—"no buts! Speak honestly, and at once, like a Norman, if you can."

This rough speech seemed to restore the little Baron, and he looked up bright and bold at the rugged face of the old Dane, while he said, "I had rather not stay here."

"Ha! not do service to your Lord?"

"I would serve him with all my heart, but I do not want to stay here. I love the Castle of Montémar better, and my mother has no one but me."

"Brave and true, Sir Frenchman," said the old Count, laying his great hand on Alberic's head. Then turning to Bertrand, Alberic's Seneschal, he said, "Bear the Count de Harcourt's greetings to the noble Dame de Montémar, and say to her that her son is of a free bold spirit, and if she would have him bred up with my Lord Duke, as his comrade and brother in arms, he will find a ready welcome."

"So, Alberic, you will come back, perhaps?" said Richard.

"That must be as my mother pleases," answered Alberic bluntly, and with all due words of farewell he and his Seneschal departed.

This story was a good



"I would serve him with all my heart, but I do not want to stay here."

CHAPTER IV.

FOUR or five times a day did Richard ask Osmond and Fru Astrida if they thought Alberic would return. Still no Baron de Montémar arrived, and the little Duke was beginning to think less about his hopes, when one evening, as he was returning from a ride with Sir Eric and Osmond, he saw four horsemen coming towards them, and a little boy in front.

"It is Alberic himself, I am sure of it!" he exclaimed, and so it proved; and while the Seneschal gave his Lady's message to Sir Eric, Richard rode up and greeted the welcome guest.

"Oh, I am very glad your mother has sent you!"

"She said she was not fit to bring up a young warrior of the marches," said Alberic.

"Were you very sorry to come?"

"I dare say I shall not mind it soon; and Bertrand is to come and fetch me home to visit her every three months, if you will let me go, my Lord."

Richard was delighted, and thought he could never do enough to make Rouen pleasant to Alberic, who after the first day or two cheered up, missed his mother less, managed to talk something between French and Norman to Sir Eric and Fru Astrida, and became a very good companion and friend. In one respect Alberic was a better playfellow for the Duke than Osmond de Centeville, for Osmond, playing

as a grown-up man, not for his own amusement, but the child's, had left all the advantages of the game to Richard, who was growing not a little inclined to domineer.[1] This Alberic did not like, unless, as he said, "it was to be always Lord and vassal, and then he did not care for the game," and he played with so little animation that Richard grew vexed.

"I can't help it," said Alberic; "if you take all the best chances to yourself, 'tis no sport for me. I will do your bidding, as you are the Duke, but I cannot like it."

"Never mind my being Duke, but play as we used to do."

"Then let us play as I did with Bertrand's sons at Montémar. I was their Baron, as you are my Duke, but my mother said there would be no sport unless we forgot all that at play."

"Then so we will. Come, begin again, Alberic, and you shall have the first turn."

However, Alberic was quite as respectful to the Duke when they were not at play, as the difference of their rank required; indeed, he had learnt much more of grace and courtliness from his mother than was yet to be found among the Normans. The Chaplain of Montémar had begun to teach him to read and write, and he liked learning much better than Richard, who would not have gone on with Father Lucas's lessons at all, if Abbot Martin had not put him in mind that it had been his father's great desire.

[1] Domineer—to rule in an overbearing way.

What Richard most disliked was, however, the being obliged to sit in council. The Count of Harcourt did in truth govern the dukedom, but nothing could be done without the Duke's consent.

Used as Richard was to be petted and made much of by the whole house of Centeville, he resented being called to account for his faults by the old Count, and more than once told Alberic de Montémar, that as soon as he was fourteen, when he would be declared of age, he should send Count Bernard to take care of his own Castle of Harcourt, instead of letting him sit gloomy and grim in the Castle hall in the evening, spoiling all their sport.

Winter had set in, and Osmond used daily to take the little Duke and Alberic to the nearest sheet of ice, for the Normans still prided themselves on excelling in skating, though they had long since left the frost-bound streams and lakes of Norway.

One day, as they were returning from the ice, they were surprised, even before they entered the Castle court, by hearing the trampling of horses' feet and the sound of voices.

"What may this mean?" said Osmond. "There must surely be a great arrival of the vassals. The Duke of Brittany, perhaps."

Just then, Alberic, who had run on a little before, came back exclaiming, "They are French. It is the Frank tongue, not the Norman, that they speak."

"So please you, my Lord," said Osmond, stopping short, "we go not rashly into the midst of them. I would I knew

what were best to do." But before he had come to any conclusion, there came forth from the gate a Norman Squire, and with him were two strangers.

"My Lord Duke," said he to Richard, in French, "Sir Eric has sent me to bring you tidings that the King of France has arrived to receive your homage."

"The King!" exclaimed Osmond.

"Ay!" proceeded the Norman, in his own tongue, "Louis himself, and with a train looking bent on mischief."

"Ha! what?" said Richard, anxiously. "Why is the King come? What must I do?"

"Go on, now, since there is no help for it," said Osmond. "Greet the King as becomes you, bend the knee, and pay him homage."

Richard walked on into the court; the rest falling back as he entered. The court was crowded with horses and men, and it was only by calling out loudly, "The Duke, the Duke," that Osmond could get space enough made for them to pass. In a few moments Richard had mounted the steps and stood in the great hall.

In the chair of state, at the upper end of the room, sat a small spare man, of about nine-and-twenty, pale, and of a light complexion, with a rich dress of blue and gold. He was conversing with the Archbishop, who, as well as Sir Eric, cast several anxious glances at the little Duke as he advanced up the hall. He came up to the King, put his knee to the ground, and was just beginning, "Louis, King of France, I——" when he found himself suddenly lifted from the ground in the King's arms, and kissed on both

cheeks. Then setting him on his knee, the King exclaimed, "And is this the son of my brave and noble friend, Duke William? Ah! I should have known it from his likeness. Let me embrace you again, dear child, for your father's sake."

Richard was rather overcome, but he thought the King very kind, especially when Louis began to admire his height and free bearing, and to lament that his own sons, Lothaire and Carloman, were so much smaller and more backward. He caressed Richard again and again, praised every word he said, and Richard began to say to himself how strange and unkind it was of Bernard de Harcourt to like to find fault with him, when, on the contrary, he deserved all this praise from the King himself.

The King at length turned to the Count de Harcourt.

"I rejoice to see your confidence," he said. "You shall soon hear from me. In the meantime I must return to gather my force together, and summon my great vassals, and I will, with your leave, brave Normans, take with me my dear young ward. His presence will plead better in his cause than the finest words."

"Let the child come to me, so please you, my Lord the King," answered Harcourt, bluntly. "I must hold some converse with him, ere I can reply."

"Go then, Richard," said Louis, "go to your trusty vassal—happy are you to have such a friend; I hope you know his value."

"Here then, young Sir," said the Count, in his native tongue, when Richard had crossed from the King's

side, and stood beside him, "what say you to this proposal?"

"The King is very kind," said Richard. "I am sure he is kind; but I do not like to go from Rouen, or from Dame Astrida."

"Listen, my Lord," said the Dane, stooping down and speaking low. "The King is resolved to have you away; and has so taken us unawares, that though I might yet rescue you, it would not be without a fierce struggle, wherein you might be harmed, and this castle and town certainly burnt, and wrested from us. A few weeks or months, and we shall have time to draw our force together, so that Normandy need fear no man, and for that time you must tarry with him."

"Must I—and all alone?"

"No, not alone, not without the most trusty guardian that can be found for you. Friend Eric, what say you?" and he laid his hand on the old Baron's shoulder. "Yet, I know not; true thou art, as a Norwegian mountain, but I doubt me if thy brains are not too dull to see through the French wiles and disguises, sharp as thou didst show thyself last night."

"That was Osmond, not I," said Sir Eric. "He knows their mincing tongue better than I. He were the best to go with the poor child, if go he must."

"It is well," said Bernard: "young as he is, I had rather trust Osmond with the child than anyone else, for he is ready of counsel, and quick of hand."

"Ay, and a pretty pass it is come to," muttered old

Centeville, "that we, whose business it is to guard the boy, should send him where you scarcely like to trust my son."

Bernard paid no further attention to him, but, coming forward, required another oath from the King, that Richard should be as safe and free at his court as at Rouen, and that on no pretence whatsoever should he be taken from under the care of his Esquire, Osmond Fitz Eric, heir of Centeville.

After this, the King wished to depart, and Bernard called Osmond aside to give full instructions on his conduct. Richard was taking leave of Fru Astrida, who exhorted him not to forget the good and holy learning in which he had been brought up, to rule his temper, and, above all, to say his prayers. As to her grandson, anxiety for him seemed almost lost in her fears for Richard, and the chief things she said to him, when he came to take leave of her, were directions as to the care he was to take of the child.

"I will, grandmother, to the very best of my power," said Osmond; "I may die in his cause, but never will I be faithless!"

"Alberic!" said Richard, "are you glad to be going back to Montémar?"

"Yes, my Lord," answered Alberic, sturdily, "as glad as you will be to come back to Rouen."

"Then I shall send for you directly, Alberic, for I shall never love the Princes Carloman and Lothaire half as well as you!"

"My Lord the King is waiting for the Duke," said a Frenchman, coming forward.

"Farewell then, Fru Astrida. Do not weep. I shall soon come back. Farewell, Alberic; dear, dear Fru Astrida, farewell again."

"Farewell, my own darling. The blessing of Heaven go with you, and bring you safe home! Farewell, Osmond. Heaven guard you and strengthen you to be his shield and his defence!"

CHAPTER V.

Away from the tall, narrow gateway of Rollo's Tower, with the cluster of friendly, sorrowful faces looking forth from it, away from the stout burghers shouting with all the power of their lungs, "Long live Duke Richard! Long live King Louis! Death to the Fleming!"—away from home and friends, rode the young Duke of Normandy, by the side of the palfrey of the King of France.

When they crossed the Epte, the King would have Richard in the same boat with him, and sitting close to Louis, and talking eagerly about falcons and hounds, the little Duke passed the boundary of his own dukedom.

The country beyond was not like Normandy. First they came to a great forest, which seemed to have no path through it. The King ordered that one of the men, who had rowed them across, should be made to serve as guide, and two of the men-at-arms took him between them, and

forced him to lead the way, while others, with their swords and battle-axes, cut down and cleared away the tangled branches and briars that nearly choked the path. On getting beyond the forest a Castle rose before them, and, though it was not yet late in the day, they resolved to rest there, as a marsh lay not far before them, which it would not have been safe to traverse in the evening twilight.

The Baron of the Castle received them with great respect to the King, but without paying much attention to the Duke of Normandy, and Richard did not find the second place left for him at the board. He coloured hotly, and looked first at the King, and then at Osmond, but Osmond held up his finger in warning; he remembered how he had lost his temper before, and what had come of it, and resolved to try to bear it better; and just then the Baron's daughter, a gentle-looking maiden of fifteen or sixteen, came and spoke to him, and amused him so well, that he did not think much more of his offended dignity. When they set off on their journey again, the Baron and several of his followers came with them to show the only safe way across the morass, and a very slippery, treacherous, quaking road it was. The morass passed, they rode with more speed over waste lands, marshes, and through dark forests.

Thus they travelled until they reached the royal Castle of Laon, where the Fleur-de-Lys standard on the battlements announced the presence of Gerberge, Queen of France, and her two sons. The King rode first into the court with his Nobles, and before Richard could follow

him through the narrow arched gateway, he had dismounted, entered the Castle, and was out of sight. Osmond held the Duke's stirrup, and followed him up the steps which led to the Castle Hall. It was full of people, but no one made way, and Richard, holding his Squire's hand, looked up in his face, for he could not make out why he should be thus slighted.

"Sir Seneschal," said Osmond, seeing a broad portly old man, with grey hair and a golden chain, "this is the Duke of Normandy—I pray you conduct him to the King's presence."

Richard had no longer any cause to complain of neglect, for the Seneschal instantly made him a very low bow, and calling, "Place—place for the high and mighty Prince, my Lord Duke of Normandy!" ushered[1] him up to the daïs or raised part of the floor, where the King and Queen stood together talking. The Queen looked round, as Richard was announced, and he saw her face, which did not please him, and he backed and looked reluctant, while Osmond, with a warning hand pressed on his shoulder, was trying to remind him that he ought to go forward, kneel on one knee, and kiss her hand.

"There he is," said the King.

"One thing secure!" said the Queen; "but what makes that northern giant keep close to his heels?"

Louis answered something in a low voice, and, in the meantime, Osmond tried in a whisper to induce his young Lord to go forward as was his duty.

[1] Ushered—led, or, walked before.

"I tell you I will not," said Richard. "She looks cross, and I do not like her."

Luckily he spoke his own language; but his look and air expressed a good deal of what he said, and Gerberge looked still more severe.

"A thorough little Norwegian bear," said the King; "fierce and unruly as the rest. Come, and perform your courtesy—do you forget where you are?" he added, sternly.

Richard bowed, partly because Osmond forced down his shoulder; but he thought of old Rollo and Charles the Simple, and his proud heart resolved that he would never kiss the hand of that sour-looking Queen. He stood on the step of the daïs, swelling with sullen pride, for neither the King nor the Queen took any more notice of him.

Nearly a quarter of an hour had passed in this manner when the servants came to set the table for supper, and Richard, in spite of his indignant looks, was forced to stand aside. Just as the supper had been served up, a side door opened, and the Seneschal called, "Place for the high and mighty Princes, my Lord Lothaire and my Lord Carloman!" and in walked two boys, one about the same age as Richard, the other rather less than a year younger. They were both thin, pale, sharp-featured children, and Richard drew himself up to his full height, with great satisfaction at being so much taller than Lothaire.

They came up to their father and kissed his hand, while he kissed their foreheads, and then said to them, "There is a new playfellow for you."

"Is that the little Northman?" said Carloman, turning to stare at Richard, while Richard in his turn felt deeply offended that a boy so much less than himself should call him little.

"Yes," said the Queen; "your father has brought him home with him."

Carloman stepped forward, shyly holding out his hand to the stranger, but his brother pushed him rudely aside. "I am the eldest; it is my business to be first. So, young Northman, you are come here for us to play with."

Richard was too much amazed at being spoken to in this way to make any answer. He was completely taken by surprise, and only opened his great blue eyes to their utmost extent.

"Ha! why don't you answer? Don't you hear? Can you speak only your own heathen tongue?" continued Lothaire.

"The Norman is no heathen tongue!" said Richard, at once breaking silence in a loud voice. "We are as good Christians as you are—ay, and better too."

"Hush! hush! my Lord!" said Osmond.

"What now, Sir Duke," again broke in the King, in an angry tone, "are you brawling already? Time, indeed, I should take you from your own savage court. Sir Squire, look to it, that you keep your charge in better rule, or I shall send him instantly to bed, supperless."

"My Lord, my Lord," whispered Osmond, "see you not that you are bringing shame on all of us?"

"I would be courteous enough, if they would be courteous

to me," returned Richard, gazing with eyes full of defiance at Lothaire, who returned an angry look, but then shrunk back to his mother. She meanwhile was saying, "So strong, so rough, the young savage is, he will surely harm our poor boys!"

At supper, Richard sat next little Carloman, who peeped at him every now and then from under his eyelashes, as if he was afraid of him; and presently, when there was a good deal of talking going on, so that his voice could not be heard, half whispered, in a very grave tone, "Do you like salt beef or fresh?"

"I like fresh," answered Richard, with equal gravity, "only we eat salt all the winter."

There was another silence, and then Carloman, in the same solemn way, asked, "How old are you?"

"I shall be nine on the eve of St. Boniface. How old are you?"

"Eight. I was eight at Martinmas, and Lothaire was nine three days since."

Another silence; then, as Osmond waited on Richard, Carloman returned to the charge, "Do you make snowballs?"

"To be sure I do! Do not you?"

"Oh, no! the snow is so cold."

"Ah! you are but a little boy," said Richard, in a superior manner. Carloman asked how it was done; and Richard told of the snowballing, a fortnight ago, at Rouen, when Osmond and some of the other young men built a snow fortress, and defended it against Richard, Alberic, and

the other Squires. Carloman listened with delight, and declared that next time it snowed, they would have a snow castle; and thus, by the time supper was over, the two little boys were very good friends.

CHAPTER VI.

OSMOND DE CENTEVILLE was soon convinced that at present no peril threatened his young Duke at the Court of Laon. Louis seemed to intend to fulfil his oaths to the Normans by allowing the child to be the companion of his own sons, and to be treated in every respect as became his rank. Richard had his proper place at table, and all due attendance; he learnt, rode, and played with the Princes, and there was nothing to complain of, excepting the coldness with which the King and Queen treated him.

As to the boys, his constant companions, Richard was on very friendly terms with Carloman, a gentle, timid, weakly child. Richard looked down upon him; but he was kind, as a generous-tempered boy could not fail to be, to one younger and weaker than himself.

It was very different with Lothaire, who had been brought up by an indulgent mother, and by courtiers who never ceased to flatter him, as the heir to the crown. He always had his own way, and nothing had ever been done to check his faults; somewhat weakly, ill-health had made him fretful and timid; and this made him all the more

cruel, sometimes because he was frightened, sometimes because he fancied it manly.

He treated his little brother in a way which in these times boys would call bullying; and, as no one ever dared to oppose the King's eldest son, it was pretty much the same with every one else, except now and then some dumb creature, and then all Lothaire's cruelty was shown. When his dog bit his hand in trying to seize the meat with which he was teasing it, he insisted on having it killed, and it was worse still when a falcon pecked one of his fingers. It really hurt him a good deal, and, in a furious rage, he caused two nails to be heated red hot in the fire, intending to have them thrust into the poor bird's eyes.

"I will not have it done!" exclaimed Richard, expecting to be obeyed as he was at home; but Lothaire only laughed scornfully, saying, "Do you think you are master here, Sir pirate?"

"I will not have it done!" repeated Richard. "Shame on you for thinking of such an unkingly deed."

"Shame on me! Do you know to whom you speak, master savage?" cried Lothaire, red with passion.

"I know who is the savage now!" said Richard. "Hold!" to the servant who was bringing the red-hot irons in a pair of tongs.

"Hold?" exclaimed Lothaire. "No one commands here but I and my father. Go on, Charlot—where is the bird? Keep her fast, Giles."

"Osmond. You I can command——"

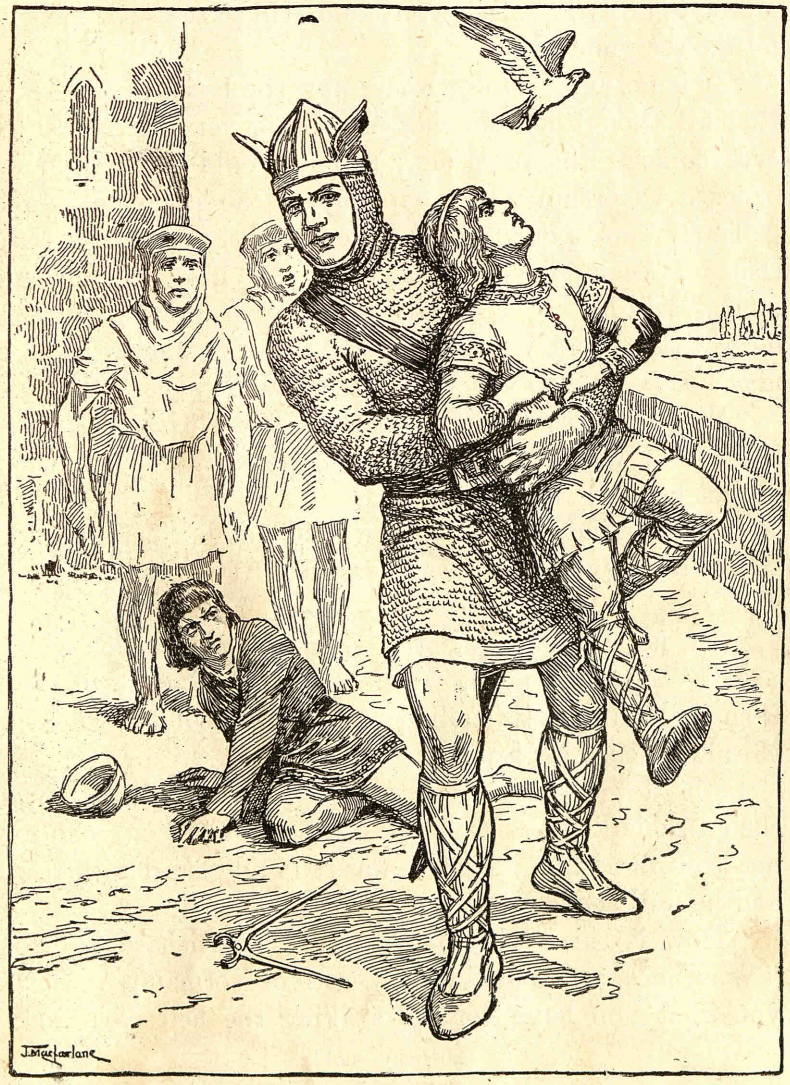
"Come away, my Lord," said Osmond, interrupting

Richard's order, before it was issued. "We have no right to interfere here, and cannot hinder it. Come away from such a foul sight."

"Shame on you too, Osmond, to let such a deed be done without hindering it!" exclaimed Richard, breaking from him, and rushing on the man who carried the hot irons. The French servants were not very willing to exert their strength against the Duke of Normandy, and Richard's onset, taking the man by surprise, made him drop the tongs. Lothaire, both afraid and enraged, caught them up as a weapon of defence, and, hardly knowing what he did, struck full at Richard's face with the hot iron. Happily it missed his eye, and the heat had a little abated; but, as it touched his cheek, it burnt him so much as to cause great pain. With a cry of passion, he flew at Lothaire, shook him with all his might, and ended by throwing him at his length on the pavement. But this was the last of Richard's exploits, for he was at the same moment captured by his Squire, and borne off, struggling and kicking as if Osmond had been his greatest foe; but the young Norman's arms were like iron round him; and he gave over his resistance sooner, because at that moment a whirring, flapping sound was heard, and the poor hawk rose high, higher, over their heads in ever lessening circles, far away from her enemies.

"Safe! safe!" cried Richard, joyfully, ceasing his struggles. "Oh, how glad I am! That young villain should never have hurt her. Put me down, Osmond, what are you doing with me?"

"Saving you from your——no, I cannot call it folly,—



He was at the same moment captured by his Squire, and borne off, struggling and kicking.

I would hardly have had you stand still to see such——but let me see your face."

"It is nothing. I don't care now the hawk is safe," said Richard, though he was obliged to wink very hard with his eyes to keep the tears out; but it would have been far beneath a Northman to complain, and he stood bearing it gallantly,[1] and pinching his fingers tightly together, while Osmond knelt down to examine the hurt. "'Tis not much," said he. "'Tis right bravely you bear it, and it is no bad thing that you should have a scar to show, that they may not be able to say you did *all* the damage."

"Will it always leave a mark?" said Richard. "I am afraid they will call me Richard of the scarred cheek, when we get back to Normandy."

"Never mind, if they do—it will not be a mark to be ashamed of, even if it does last, which I do not believe it will."

"Oh, no, I am so glad the gallant falcon is out of his reach!" began Richard, when a messenger came in haste from the King, commanding the presence of the Duke of Normandy and his Squire.

Lothaire was standing between his father and mother on their throne-like seat, leaning against the Queen, who had her arm round him; his face was red and glazed with tears, and he still shook with sobs.

"How is this?" began the King, as Richard entered. "What means this conduct, my Lord of Normandy? Know you what you have done in striking the heir of France?

[1] Gallantly—nobly.

Ask Prince Lothaire's pardon instantly, or you shall rue it."

"I have done nothing to ask his pardon for. It would have been cruel and cowardly in me to let him put out the poor hawk's eyes," said Richard.

"Hawk's eyes!" repeated the King. "Speak the truth, Sir Duke; do not add slander to your other faults."

"I have spoken the truth—I always speak it," cried Richard. "Whoever says otherwise lies in his throat."

Osmond here broke in, and desired to be allowed to tell the whole story. The hawk was a valuable bird, and Louis's face darkened when he heard what Lothaire had meant to do, for the Prince had, in telling his own story, made it appear only that Richard had insisted on letting the falcon fly. Osmond finished by pointing to the mark on Richard's cheek, so evidently a burn, as to be proof that hot iron had played a part in the matter. The King looked at one of his own Squires and asked his account, and he could not but reply that it was as the young Duke had said. Thereupon Louis angrily reproved his own people for having assisted the Prince in trying to injure the hawk, and went forth to see if it could yet be caught, leaving the two boys neither punished nor pardoned.

"So you have escaped for this once," said Gerberge, coldly, to Richard; "you had better beware another time. Come with me, my poor darling Lothaire." She led her son away to her own apartments, and Osmond, meantime, took Richard to again bathe his face, and presently

Carloman ran out to pity him, wonder at him for not crying, and say he was glad the poor hawk had escaped.

From this time Lothaire left off taunting Richard with his Norman accent, and calling him a young Sea-king. He had felt his strength, and was afraid of him; but he did not like him the better—he never played with him willingly—scowled, and looked dark and jealous, if his father, or any of the great nobles took the least notice of the little Duke.

Since he had been Duke, Richard had been somewhat inclined to grow haughty himself, though always kept under restraint by Fru Astrida's good training, and by Count Bernard, and his whole generous nature would have revolted against treating Alberic, or indeed his meanest vassal, as Lothaire used the children who were his playfellows. He often tried to protect the poor boys, and mostly with success, for the Prince was afraid to provoke such another shake as Richard had once given him, and though he repaid himself on his victim in the end, he yielded for the time.

Carloman, whom Richard often saved from his brother's unkindness, clung closer and closer to him, went with him everywhere, tried to do all he did, grew very fond of Osmond, and liked nothing better than to sit by Richard in some wide window-seat, in the evening after supper, and listen to Richard's version of some of Fru Astrida's favourite tales. He gave small promise of being able to perform great exploits,[1] for he was very small for his age and often ailing; soon tired, and never able to bear much rough

[1] Exploits—deeds.

play. Richard, who had never had any reason to learn to forbear, did not at first understand this, and made Carloman cry several times with his roughness and violence, but this always vexed him so much that he grew careful to avoid such things for the future, and in time learnt to treat his poor little weakly friend with a gentleness and patience at which Osmond used to marvel.

Between Carloman and Osmond he was thus tolerably happy at Laon, but he missed his own dear friends, and the loving greetings of his vassals, and longed earnestly to be at Rouen, asking Osmond almost every night when they should go back, to which Osmond could only answer that he must pray that heaven would be pleased to bring them home safely.

Everything went on in the usual course till the feast of Whitsuntide, when there was always a great display of splendour at the French court. The crown vassals then came to pay their duty and go with the King to Church; and there was a banquet, at which the King and Queen wore their crowns, and every one sat in great state according to their rank.

The grand procession to Church was over. Richard had walked with Carloman, the Prince richly dressed in blue and gold, and Richard in scarlet, with a gold Cross on his breast; the beautiful service was over, they had returned to the Castle, and there the Seneschal was leading the goodly and noble company to the banquet, when horses' feet were heard at the gate announcing some fresh arrival. The Seneschal went to receive the guests, and presently

was heard ushering in the noble Prince, Arnulf, Count of Flanders.

Richard's face became pale—he turned from Carloman by whose side he had been standing, and walked straight out of the hall and up the stairs, closely followed by Osmond. In a few minutes there was a knock at the door of his chamber, and a French knight stood there saying, "Comes not the Duke to the banquet?"

"No," answered Osmond: "he eats not with the slayer of his father."

"The King will take it amiss; for the sake of the child, you had better beware," said the Frenchman.

"He had better beware himself," exclaimed Osmond, "how he brings the murderer of William Longsword into the presence of a free-born Norman, unless he would see him slain where he stands. Were it not for the boy, I would challenge the traitor this instant to single combat."

"Well, I can scarce blame you," said the Knight, "but you had best have a care how you tread. Farewell."

Richard had hardly time to express his anger, and his wishes that he was a man, before another message came through a groom of Lothaire's train, that the Duke must fast, if he would not consent to feast with the rest.

"Tell Prince Lothaire," replied Richard, "that I am not such a glutton as he—I had rather fast than be choked with eating with Arnulf."

All the rest of the day, Richard remained in his own chamber, resolved not to run the risk of meeting with Arnulf. The Squire remained with him, and they spent

the time in cleaning Osmond's armour, and helping each other out in repeating some of the Sagas.[1] They once heard a great uproar in the court, and both were very anxious to learn its cause, but they did not know it till late in the afternoon.

Carloman crept up to them—"Here I am at last!" he exclaimed. "Here, Richard, I have brought you some bread, as you had no dinner: it was all I could bring. I saved it under the table lest Lothaire should see it."

Richard thanked Carloman with all his heart, and being very hungry, was glad to share the bread with Osmond. He asked how long the wicked Count was going to stay, and rejoiced to hear he was going away the next morning, and the King was going with him.

"What was that great noise in the court?" then asked Richard.

"I scarcely like to tell you," returned Carloman.

Richard, however, begged to hear, and Carloman was obliged to tell that the two Norman grooms, Sybald and Henry, had quarrelled with the Flemings of Arnulf's train; there had been a fray, which had ended in the death of three Flemings, a Frank, and of Sybald himself—— And where was Henry? Alas! there was more ill news—the King had sentenced Henry to die, and he had been hanged.

Dark with anger and sorrow grew young Richard's face; he had been fond of his two Norman attendants, and he would have wept for their loss even if it had happened in any other way; but now, when it had been caused by their

[1] Sagas—songs of the country.

enmity to his father's foes, the Flemings,—when one had fallen overwhelmed by numbers, and the other been condemned hastily, cruelly, unjustly, it was too much, and he almost choked with grief and rage. Why had he not been there, to claim Henry as his own vassal, and if he could not save him, at least bid him farewell? Osmond was even more concerned; he valued the two Normans extremely for their courage and faithfulness, and had relied on sending word by their means to Rouen, in case of need.

That danger was fast gathering around them became more evident every day, especially after the King and Arnulf had gone away together. It was very hot weather, and Richard began to weary after the broad cool river at Rouen, where he used to bathe last summer; and one evening he persuaded his Squire to go down with him to the Oise, which flowed along some meadow ground about a quarter of a mile from the Castle; but they had hardly set forth before three or four attendants came running after them, with express orders from the Queen that they should return at once. They obeyed, and found her standing in the Castle hall, looking very angry.

"What means this?" she asked, angrily. "Knew you not that the King has left commands that the Duke quits not the Castle in his absence?"

"I was only going as far as the river——" began Richard, but Gerberge cut him short. "Silence, child—I will hear no excuses. Perhaps you think, Sieur de Centeville, that you may take liberties in the King's absence, but I tell you that if you are found without the walls again, it shall be at

your peril; ay, and his! I'll have those haughty eyes put out, if you disobey!" and she turned away.

"Oh, Osmond! Osmond!" Richard exclaimed, "they shall not hurt you. I will never go out again. I will never speak another hasty word. I will never affront the Prince, if they will but leave you with me!"

CHAPTER VII.

It was a fine summer evening, and Richard and Carloman were playing at ball on the steps of the Castle-gate, when a voice was heard from beneath, begging for alms from the noble Princes in the name of the blessed Virgin, and the two boys saw a pilgrim standing at the gate, wrapt in a long robe of serge, with a staff in his hand, and a broad shady hat, which he had taken off, as he stood, bowing low, and asking charity.

"Come in, holy pilgrim," said Carloman. "It is late, and you shall sup and rest here to-night."

"Blessings from Heaven light on you, noble Prince," replied the pilgrim, and at that moment Richard shouted joyfully, "A Norman, a Norman! 'tis my own dear speech! Oh, are you not from Normandy? Osmond, Osmond! he comes from home!"

"My Lord! my own Lord!" exclaimed the pilgrim, and, kneeling on one knee at the foot of the steps, he kissed the hand which his young Duke held out to him—"This is joy unlooked for!"

"Walter!—Walter, the huntsman!" cried Richard. "Is it you? Oh, how is Fru Astrida, and all at home?"

"Well, my Lord, and wearying to know how it is with you—" began Walter—but a very different tone exclaimed from behind the pilgrim, "What is all this? Who is stopping my way? What! Richard would be King, and more, would he? More insolence!" It was Lothaire, returning with his attendants from the chase, in by no means an amiable mood, for he had been balked of his game.

"He is a Norman—a vassal of Richard's own," said Carloman.

"A Norman, is he? I thought we had got rid of the robbers! We want no robbers here! Scourge him soundly, Perron, and teach him how to stop my way!"

"He is a pilgrim, my Lord," said one of the followers.

"I care not; I'll have no Normans here, coming spying in disguise. Scourge him, I say, dog that he is! Away with him! A spy, a spy!"

"No Norman is scourged in my sight!" said Richard, darting forwards, and throwing himself between Walter and the woodsman just in time to receive on his own bare neck the sharp, cutting leathern thong, which raised a long red streak along its course. Lothaire laughed.

"My Lord Duke! What have you done? Oh, leave me—this befits you not!" cried Walter, deeply distressed; but Richard had caught hold of the whip, and called out, "Away, away! run! haste, haste!" and the Norman, seeing there was no help for it, obeyed: the French made way for

him, and he effected his escape; while Lothaire, after a great deal of storming and raging, went up to his mother to triumph in the cleverness with which he had detected a Norman spy in disguise.

A few days before, Louis had sent notice to Laon that he should return home in a week's time; and Richard rejoiced at the prospect, for the King had always been less unkind to him than the Queen, and he hoped to be released from his captivity within the Castle. Just at this time he became very unwell; it might have been only the effect of the life of confinement which he had lately led that was beginning to tell on his health; but, after being heavy and unwell for a day or two, without knowing what was the matter with him, he was one night attacked with high fever.

Osmond was dreadfully alarmed, knowing nothing at all of the treatment of illness, and, what was worse, he thought that the poor child had been poisoned. He hung over him all night, expecting each moment to see him expire.

Through that night, Richard either tossed about on his narrow bed, or sat, leaning his aching head on Osmond's breast, too ill to speak or think. When the day dawned on them, and he was still too ill to leave the room, the King sent for him, and Osmond could no longer conceal the fact of his sickness, but he tried to keep out every one he could, and refused all offers of help. He would not even admit Carloman, though Richard begged that he might come to him.

All that day and the next Richard was very ill, and Osmond waited on him with every care, never closing his

eyes for a moment, but constantly telling his beads whenever the boy did not require him. At last Richard fell asleep, slept long and soundly for some hours, and waked much better. Osmond was in a transport of joy: "Thanks to Heaven, they shall fail for this time, and they shall never have another chance! May Heaven be with us still!" Richard was too weak and weary to ask what he meant, and for the next few days Osmond watched him with the utmost care. As for food, now that Richard could eat again, Osmond would not hear of his touching what was sent for him from the royal table, but always went down himself to procure food in the kitchen, where he said he had a friend among the cooks.

Thus several days had passed, the King had returned, and Richard was so much better that he had become very anxious to be allowed to go down stairs again, instead of remaining shut up there; but still Osmond would not consent, though Richard had done nothing all day but walk round the room, to show how strong he was.

One day soon after this Osmond was absent nearly half an hour, and, when he returned, brought on his shoulders a huge bundle of straw. "What is this for?" exclaimed Richard. "I wanted my supper, and you have brought straw?"

"Here is your supper," said Osmond, throwing down the straw, and producing a bag with some bread and meat. "What should you say, my Lord, if we should sup in Normandy to-morrow night?"

"In Normandy!" cried Richard, springing up and

clapping his hands. "In Normandy! Oh, Osmond, did you say in Normandy? Shall we, shall we really? Oh, joy! joy! Is Count Bernard come? Will the King let us go?"

"Hush! hush, sir! It must be our own doing; it will all fail if you are not silent and prudent, and we shall be undone."

"I will do anything to get home again!"

"Eat first," said Osmond.

"But what are you going to do? I will not be foolish. but I should like to wish Carloman farewell."

"That must not be," said Osmond; "we should not have time to escape, if they did not still believe you very ill in bed."

"I am sorry not to wish Carloman good-bye," repeated Richard; "but we shall see Fru Astrida again, and Sir Eric; and Alberic must come back! Oh, do let us go! O Normandy, dear Normandy!"

Richard could hardly eat for excitement, while Osmond hastily made his arrangements, girding on his sword, and giving Richard his dagger to put into his belt. He then desired him to lie down on the straw which he had brought in. "I shall hide you in it," he said, "and carry you through the hall, as if I was going to feed my horse."

"Oh, they will never guess!" cried Richard, laughing. "I will be quite still—I will make no noise—I will hold my breath."

"Yes, mind you do not move hand or foot, or rustle the straw. It is no play—it is life or death," said Osmond, as

he disposed the straw round the little boy. "There, can you breathe?"

"Yes," said Richard's voice from the midst. "Am I quite hidden?"

"Entirely. Now, remember, whatever happens, do not move. May Heaven protect us!"

Richard, half stifled with the straw, felt himself carried down the steps, across the court; and then he knew, from the darkness and the changed sound of Osmond's tread, that they were in the stable. Osmond laid him carefully down, and whispered—

"All right so far. Can you breathe?"

"Not well. Can't you let me out?"

"Not yet—not for worlds. Now tell me if I put you face downwards, for I cannot see."

He laid the living heap of straw across the saddle, bound it on, then led out the horse, gazing all round as he did so; but the whole of the people of the Castle were feasting, and there was no one to watch the gates. Richard heard the hollow sound of the hoofs, as the drawbridge was crossed, and knew that he was free; but still Osmond held his arm over him, and would not let him move, for some distance. Then, just as Richard felt as if he could endure not a moment longer, Osmond stopped the horse, took him down, laid him on the grass, and released him. He gazed around; they were in a little wood; evening twilight was just coming on, and the birds sang sweetly.

"Free! free!—this is freedom!" cried Richard, leaping

up in the delicious cool evening breeze; "the Queen and Lothaire, and that grim room, all far behind."

"Not so far yet," said Osmond; "you must not call yourself safe till the Epte is between us and them. Into the saddle, my Lord; we must ride for our lives."

Osmond helped the Duke to mount, and sprang to the saddle behind him, set spurs to the horse, and rode on at a quick rate. The stars grew pale, and the first pink light of dawn showed in the eastern sky; the sun rose, mounted higher and higher, and the day grew hotter; the horse went more slowly, stumbled, and though Osmond halted and loosed the girth, he only mended his pace for a little while.

Osmond knew not what to do, but they had not gone much further before a party of merchants came in sight. They gazed in surprise at the tall young Norman holding the child upon the worn-out war-horse.

"Sir merchant," said Osmond to the first, "see you this steed? Better horse never was ridden; but he is sorely spent, and we must make speed. Let me barter him with you for yonder stout palfrey. He is worth twice as much, but I cannot stop to chaffer—ay or no at once."

The merchant, seeing the value of Osmond's gallant black, accepted the offer; and Osmond removing his saddle, and placing Richard on his new steed, again mounted, and on they went.

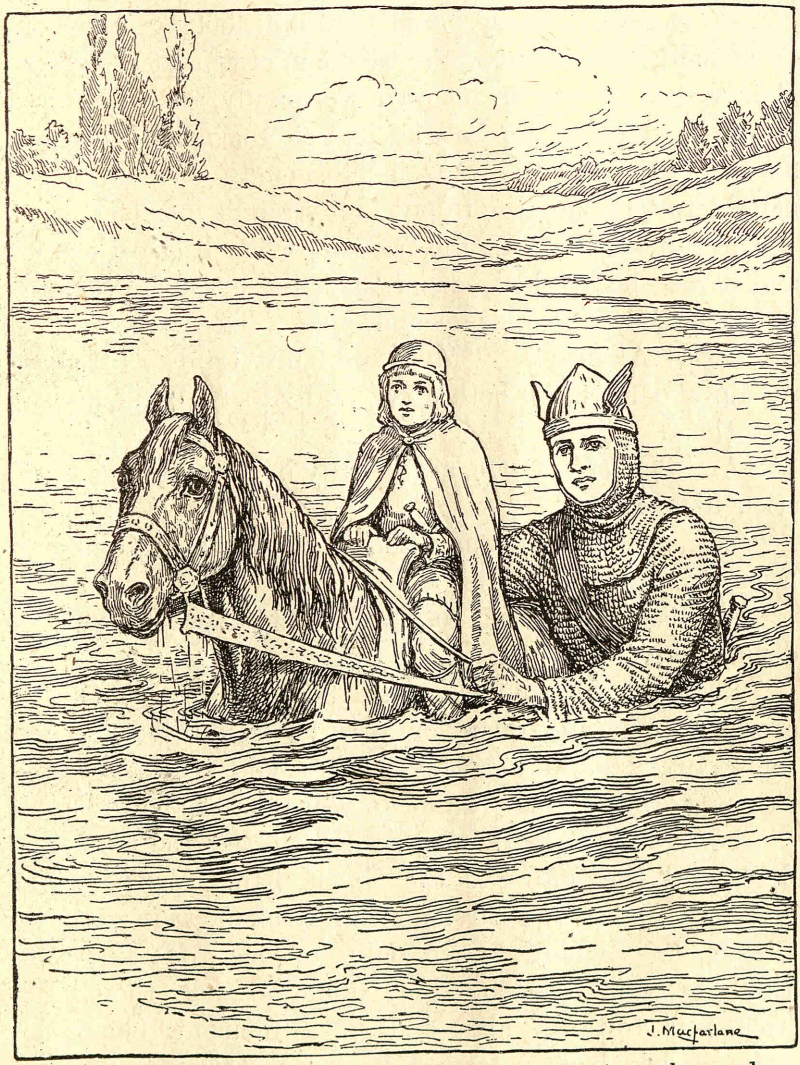
"The Epte! the Epte! There is Normandy, sir! Look up, and see your own dukedom," cried Osmond all at once.

"Normandy!" cried Richard, sitting upright. "Oh, my

own home!" Still the Epte was wide and deep, and the peril was not yet ended. Osmond looked anxiously, and rejoiced to see marks of cattle, as if it had been forded. "We must try it," he said, and dismounting, he waded in, leading the horse, and firmly holding Richard in the saddle. Deep they went; the water rose to Richard's feet, then to the horse's neck; then the horse was swimming, and Osmond too, still keeping his firm hold; then there was ground again, the force of the current was less, and they were gaining the bank. At that instant, however, they perceived two men aiming at them with cross-bows from the castle, and another standing on the bank above them, who called out, "Hold! None pass the ford of Montémar without permission of the noble Dame Yolande." "Ha! Bertrand, the Seneschal, is that you?" returned Osmond. "Who calls me by my name?" replied the Seneschal. "It is I, Osmond de Centeville. Open your gates quickly, Sir Seneschal; for here is the Duke, sorely in need of rest and refreshment."

"The Duke!" exclaimed Bertrand, hurrying down to the landing-place, and throwing off his cap. "The Duke! the Duke!" rang out the shout from the men-at-arms on the battlements above; and in an instant more Osmond had led the horse up from the water, and was exclaiming, "Look up, my Lord, look up! You are in your own dukedom again, and this is Alberic's castle."

"Welcome, indeed, most noble Lord Duke! Blessings on the day!" cried the Seneschal. "What joy for my Lady and my young Lord!"



Then there was ground again, the force of the current was less, and they were gaining the bank.

"He is sorely weary," said Osmond, looking anxiously at Richard, who, even at the welcome cries that showed so plainly that he was in his own Normandy, scarcely raised himself or spoke; for he was, as yet, too much worn out to understand that he was in Normandy, and there was naught to be done save to put him straight into bed.

The sun was high in the heavens when Richard awoke, and it was the bright face and sparkling eyes of Alberic de Montémar, that met his opening eyes. There was a cry—"Alberic! Alberic!" "My Lord! my Lord!" Richard sat up and held out both arms, and Alberic flung himself into them.

"And is it true? Oh, am I really in Normandy again?" cried Richard.

"Yes, yes!—oh, yes, my Lord! You are at Montémar. Everything here is yours."

"O Alberic! Alberic! and is Sir Eric here? I must go down to him!"

"Bertrand sent out notice to them all, as soon as you came, to come and guard our Castle," said Alberic, "lest the Franks should pursue you; but you are safe now—safe as Norman spears can make you—thanks be to God!"

And, holding Alberic's hand, Richard left the room, and descended the stairs to the Castle hall. Many of the Norman knights and barons, in full armour, were gathered there; but Richard looked only for one. He knew Sir Eric's grizzled hair, and blue inlaid armour, though his back was towards him, and in a moment, before his entrance had been perceived, he sprang towards him, and,

with outstretched arms, exclaimed: "Sir Eric—dear Sir Eric, here I am! Osmond is safe! And is Fru Astrida well?"

The old Baron turned. "My child!" he exclaimed, and clasped him in his mailed arms, while the tears flowed down his rugged cheeks. "Blessed be God that you are safe, and that my son has done his duty!"

"And is Fru Astrida well?" he asked again.

"Yes, right well, since she heard of your safety. But look round, my Lord; it befits not a Duke to be clinging thus round an old man's neck. See how many of your true vassals be here, to guard you from the villain Franks."

Richard stood up, and held out his hand, bowing in answer to the greetings of each bold baron, with a grace and readiness he certainly had not when he left Normandy.

Sir Eric led him to the door of the hall, to the top of the steps, that the men-at-arms might see him; and then such a shout rang out of "Long live Duke Richard!"—"Blessings on the little Duke!"—that it echoed and came back again from the hills around.

Before the shout had died away, a bugle-horn was heard winding before the gate; and Sir Eric, saying, "It is the Count of Harcourt's note," sent Bertrand to open the gates in haste, while Alberic followed, as Lord of the Castle, to receive the Count.

The old Count rode into the court, and to the foot of the steps, where he dismounted, Alberic holding his stirrup. He had not taken many steps upwards before Richard came to meet him, held out his hand, and said, "Welcome,

Count Bernard, welcome. Thank you for coming to guard me. I am very glad to see you once more."

"Ah, my young Lord," said Bernard, "I am right glad to see you out of the clutches of the Franks! You know friend from foe now, methinks!"

"Yes, indeed I do, Count Bernard. I know you meant kindly by me, and that I ought to have thanked you, and not been angry, when you reproved me."

CHAPTER VIII.

MONTÉMAR was too near the frontier to be a safe abode for the little Duke, and his uncle, Count Hubert of Senlis, agreed with Bernard the Dane that he would be more secure beyond the limits of his own duchy, which was likely soon to be the scene of war; and, sorely against his will, he was sent in secret, under a strong escort, first to the Castle of Coucy, and afterwards to Senlis.

His consolation was, that he was not again separated from his friends; Alberic, Sir Eric, and even Fru Astrida, went with him, as well as his constant follower, Osmond.

While they were there tidings came that Louis had assembled his army, and marched into Normandy to recover the person of the young Duke, and to seize the country. No summons, however, arrived, but a message came instead, that Rouen had been surrendered into the hands of the King. Richard shed indignant tears. "My

father's Castle! My own city in the hands of the foe! Bernard is a traitor then! None shall hinder me from so calling him. Why did we trust him?"

"Peace, peace, my Lord," said the Baron. "Bernard has more in that wary head of his than your young wits, or my old ones, can unwind. What he is doing I may not guess, but I gage my life his heart is right."

Richard was silent, remembering he had been once unjust, but he grieved heartily when he thought of the French in Rollo's Tower, and it was further reported that the King was about to share Normandy among his French vassals. A fresh outcry broke out in the little garrison of Senlis, but Sir Eric still persisted in his trust in his friend Bernard, even when he heard that Centeville was marked out as the prey of the fat French Count who had served for a hostage at Rouen.

"What say you now, my Lord?" said he, after a conference with a messenger at the gate. "The Black Raven has spread its wings. Fifty keels are in the Seine, and Harald Blue-tooth's Long Serpent at the head of them."

"The King of Denmark! Come to my aid!"

"Ay, that is he! Come at Bernard's secret call, to right you, and put you on your father's seat. Now call honest Harcourt a traitor, because he gave not up your fair dukedom to the flame and sword!"

"No traitor to me," said Richard.

"But the Danes, father, the Danes!" said Osmond. "Blows will be passing now. I may join the host and win my spurs?"

"With all my heart," returned the Baron, "so my Lord here gives you leave: would that I could leave him and go with you. It would do my very spirit good but to set foot in a Northern keel once more."

The next morning, Osmond's steed was led to the door, and such men-at-arms as could be spared from the garrison of Senlis were drawn up in readiness to accompany him. The boys stood on the steps, wishing they were old enough to be warriors, and wondering what had become of him, until at length the sound of an opening door startled them, and there stood Osmond, clad in bright steel, the links of his hauberk [1] reflecting the light, and on his helmet a pair of golden wings, while the same device adorned his long pointed kite-shaped shield.

"Your wings! our wings!" cried Richard, "the bearing of Centeville!"

"May they fly after the foe, not before him," said Sir Eric. "Speed thee well, my son—let not our Danish cousins say we learn Frank graces instead of Northern blows."

With such farewells, Osmond quitted Senlis, while the two boys hastened to the battlements to watch him as long as he remained in view.

One day the loud blast of the warder's horn rang out through the Castle.

With a loud shout, both boys rushed headlong up the turret stairs, and came to the top so breathless, that they could not even ask the warder what he saw. He pointed,

[1] Hauberk—a coat of mail.

and the keen-eyed Alberic exclaimed, "I see! Look, my Lord, a speck there on the heath!"

"I do not see! where, oh where?"

"He is behind the hillock now, but——oh, there again! How fast he comes!"

"He bears somewhat in his hand," said Alberic.

"A banner or pennon," said the warder; "methinks he rides like the young Baron."

"He does! My brave boy! He has done good service," exclaimed Sir Eric, as the figure became more distinct. "The Danes have seen how we train our young men."

"His wings bring good tidings," said Richard. "Let me go, Sir Eric, I must tell Fru Astrida."

The drawbridge was lowered, and as all the dwellers in the Castle stood gathered in the court, in rode the warrior with the winged helm, bearing in his hand a drooping banner; lowering it as he entered, it unfolded, and displayed, trailing on the ground at the feet of the little Duke of Normandy, the golden lilies of France.

A shout of amazement arose, and all gathered round him, asking hurried questions. "A great victory—the King a prisoner—Montreuil slain!"

Richard would not be denied holding his hand, and leading him to the hall, and there, sitting around him, they heard his tidings.

"The Danes were encamped on the Dive," began Osmond, "and so soon as the French came in sight, Blue-tooth sent a messenger to Louis, to summon him to quit Neustria, and leave it to you, its lawful owner. Thereupon Louis,

hoping to win him over with wily words, invited him to hold a personal conference. We all stood without, and the two hosts began to mingle together, then, of a sudden, all was tumult; every one struck without knowing at whom, or for what. I found myself at the foot of this standard, and had a hard combat for it; but I bore it away at last."

"And the Kings?"

"They hurried out of the tent, it seems, to rejoin their men. Louis mounted, but he is not a good horseman, and the beast carried him into the midst of the Danes, where King Harald caught his bridle, and gave him over to four Knights to keep. Whether he dealt secretly with them, or whether they, as they declared, lost sight of him whilst plundering his tent, I cannot say; but when Harald demanded him of them, he was gone."

"Gone! is this what you call having the King prisoner?"

"You shall hear. He rode four leagues, and met one of the baser sort of Rouennais, whom he bribed to hide him in the Isle of Willows; but the King was forced to come out of his hiding-place, and is now fast guarded in Rollo's Tower—a Dane, with a battle-axe on his shoulder, keeping guard at every turn of the stairs."

And so the conflict had ended, and now, after nearly a year's captivity, the King had engaged to pay a ransom, and, until the terms could be arranged, his two sons were to be placed as hostages in the hands of the Normans, whilst he returned to his own domains. The Princes were to be sent to Bayeux; whither Richard had returned.

"I shall rejoice to have Carloman, and make him

happy," said Richard; "but I wish Lothaire were not coming."

"Perhaps," said good Father Lucas, "he comes that you may have a first trial in your father's last lesson, and Abbot Martin's, and return good for evil."

The Duke's cheek flushed, and he made no answer.

Richard met the Princes in the court, his sunny hair uncovered, and bowing with such becoming courtesy, that Fru Astrida pressed her son's arm, and bade him say if their little Duke was not the fairest and noblest child in Christendom.

With black looks, Lothaire stepped from the litter, took no heed of the little Duke, but, roughly calling his attendant, Charlot, to follow him, he marched into the hall, with neither word nor look to any as he passed, threw himself into the highest seat, and ordered Charlot to bring him some wine.

Meanwhile, Richard, looking into the litter, saw Carloman crouching in a corner, sobbing with fright.

"Carloman!—dear Carloman!—do not cry. Come out! It is I—your own Richard! Will you not let me welcome you?"

Carloman looked, caught at the outstretched hand, and clung to his neck.

"Oh, Richard, send us back! Do not let the savage Danes kill us!"

"No one will hurt you. There are no Danes here. You are my guest, my friend, my brother," and Richard coaxed him to eat, consoled him, and, instead of laughing

at his fears, kept between him and the great bloodhound Hardigras, and drove it off when it came too near.

"Take that dog away," said Lothaire, imperiously. No one moved to obey him, and the dog, in seeking for scraps, again came towards him.

"Take it away," he repeated, and struck it with his foot. The dog growled, and Richard started up in indignation.

"Prince Lothaire," he said, "I care not what else you do, but my dogs and my people you shall not maltreat."

Sir Eric, meanwhile, thundered forth in his Norman patois, "I would have you to know, young Sir, Prince though you be, you are our prisoner, and shall taste of a dungeon, and bread and water, unless you behave yourself," and as Lothaire began to answer him back with rude words, he was carried from the hall, roaring and kicking, and locked up alone in an empty room.

Here Richard had to turn, to re-assure Carloman, who had taken refuge in a dark corner, and there shook like an aspen leaf, crying bitterly.

"We would not hurt you for worlds, dear Carloman; Lothaire is not in the dungeon—he is only shut up till he is good," he said, and then Fru Astrida advised him to take his little friend to bed. Carloman would not lie down without still holding Richard's hand, and the little Duke spared no pains to set him at rest, knowing what it was to be a desolate captive far from home. At last little Carloman was asleep, and then the Duke crept softly away to beg to be allowed to go to Lothaire. He entered the

room, already dark, with a pine torch in his hand, that so flickered in the wind, that he could at first see nothing, but presently beheld a dark lump on the floor.

"Prince Lothaire," he said, "here is——"

Lothaire cut him short. "Get away," he said. "If it is your turn now, it will be mine by and by. I wish my mother had kept her word, and put your eyes out."

Richard's temper did not serve for such a reply. "It is a foul shame of you to speak so, when I only came out of kindness to you—so I shall leave you here all night, and not ask Sir Eric to let you out."

And he swung back the heavy door with a resounding clang. But his heart smote him when he told his beads, and remembered what he had said to Carloman. He knew he could not sleep in his warm bed when Lothaire was in that cold gusty room. To be sure, Sir Eric said it would do him good, but Sir Eric little knew how tender the French Princes were.

So Richard crept down in the dark, slid back the bolt, and called, "Prince, Prince, I am sorry I was angry. Come out, and let us try to be friends."

"What do you mean?" said Lothaire.

"Come out of the cold and dark. Here am I. I will show you the way. Where is your hand? Oh, how cold it is. Let me lead you down to the hall fire."

Lothaire was subdued by fright, cold, and darkness, and quietly allowed Richard to lead him down. Round the fire, at the lower end of the hall, snored half-a-dozen men-at-arms; at the upper hearth there was only Hardigras,

who raised his head as the boys came in. Richard's whisper and soft pat quieted him instantly, and the two little Princes sat on the hearth together, Lothaire surprised, but sullen. Richard stirred the embers, so as to bring out more heat, then spoke: "Prince, will you let us be friends?"

"I must, if I am in your power."

"I wish you would be my guest and comrade."

"Well, I will; I can't help it."

Richard thought his advances might have been more graciously met, and, having little encouragement to say more, took Lothaire to bed, as soon as he was warm.

CHAPTER IX.

As the Baron had said, there was more peace now that Lothaire had learnt to know that he must submit. He was very sulky and rude, and severely tried Richard's patience; but there were no fresh outbursts of rage.

Little Carloman, meanwhile, recovered from his fears of all the inmates of the Castle excepting Hardigras, at whose approach he always shrank and trembled.

The old Baron said that hardy, healthy habits would restore the puny children; and Lothaire improved in health, and therewith in temper; but his little brother had not strength enough to bear the seasoning. He pined and drooped more each day: and as the autumn came on, and

the wind was chilly, he grew worse, and was scarcely ever off the lap of the kind Lady Astrida. It was not a settled sickness, but he grew weaker, and wasted away. And then came the time when, at midnight, all were wakened by the slow notes, falling one by one on the ear, of the solemn passing-bell, calling them to waken, that their prayers might speed a soul on its way. Richard and Lothaire were soon at the bedside. Carloman lay still asleep, his hands folded on his breast, but his breath came in long gasps. Father Lucas was praying over him, and candles were placed on each side of the bed. All was still, the boys not daring to speak or move. There came a longer breath —then they heard no more. He was, indeed, gone to a happier home.

For a while the little Duke did nothing but mourn for his friend and play-fellow, then one day he said, "Sir Eric, you told me there was a Parliament to be held at Falaise, between Count Bernard and the King of Denmark. I mean to attend it. Will you come with me, or shall Osmond go, and you remain in charge of the Prince?"

"How now, Lord Richard, you were not wont to love a Parliament?"

"I have something to say," replied Richard.

The Baron made no objection, only telling his mother that the Duke was a marvellous wise child, and that he would soon be fit to take the government himself.

Lothaire lamented the more when he found that Richard was going away; his presence seemed to him a protection, and he fancied, now Carloman was dead, that his former

injuries were about to be revenged. The Duke assured him that he meant him nothing but kindness, adding, "When I return, you will see, Lothaire"; then, commending him to the care and kindness of Fru Astrida, Osmond, and Alberic, Richard set forth upon his pony, attended by Sir Eric and three men-at-arms.

The country was far more broken as they advanced—narrow valleys and sharp hills, each little vale full of wood, and dotted about with rocks. "A choice place for game," Sir Eric said; and Richard, as he saw a herd of deer dash down a forest glade, exclaimed, "that they must come here to stay for some autumn sport."

There seemed to be huntsmen abroad in the woods; for through the frosty air came the baying of dogs, the shouts and calls of men, and, now and then, the echoing, ringing notes of a bugle. Richard's eyes and cheeks glowed with excitement, and he pushed his brisk little pony on faster and faster, unheeding that the heavier men and horses of his suite were not keeping pace with him on the rough ground and through the tangled boughs.

Presently, a strange sound of growling and snarling was heard close at hand: his pony swerved aside, and could not be made to advance; so Richard, dismounting, dashed through some briars, and beheld a huge grey wolf and a large dog in mortal combat. Both were bleeding, and the eyes of both glared like red fiery glass in the dark shadow of the rock. The dog lay undermost, almost overpowered, making but a feeble resistance; and the wolf would, in another moment, be at liberty to spring on the lonely child.

But not a thought of fear passed through his breast; to save the dog was Richard's only idea. In one moment he had drawn the dagger he wore at his girdle, ran to the two struggling animals, and with all his force, plunged it into the throat of the wolf, which, happily, was still held by the teeth of the hound.

The struggle relaxed, the wolf rolled heavily aside, dead; the dog lay panting and bleeding, and Richard feared he was cruelly torn. "Poor fellow! noble dog! what shall I do to help you?" and he gently smoothed the dark brindled head.

A voice was now heard shouting aloud, at which the dog raised and crested his head, as a figure in a hunting dress was coming down a rocky pathway, an extremely tall, well-made man, of noble features. "Ha! holla! Vige! Vige! How now, my brave hound?" he said in the Northern tongue, though not quite with the accent Richard was accustomed[1] to hear. "Art hurt?"

"Much torn, I fear," Richard called out, as the faithful creature wagged his tail, and strove to rise and meet his master.

"Ha, lad! what art thou?" exclaimed the hunter, amazed at seeing the boy between the dead wolf and wounded dog. "By the hammer of Thor! that is a dagger in the wolf's throat!"

"It is mine," said Richard. "I found your dog nearly spent, and I made in to the rescue."

"You did? Well done! I would not have lost Vige

[1] Accustomed—used.



In one moment he had drawn the dagger he wore at his girdle, and ran to the two struggling animals.

for all the plunder of Italy. I am beholden to you, my brave young lad," said the stranger, all the time examining and caressing the hound. "What is your name? You cannot be Southern bred?"

As he spoke, more shouts came near; and the Baron de Centeville rushed through the trees holding Richard's pony by the bridle. "My Lord, my Lord!—oh, thank Heaven, I see you safe!" At the same moment a party of hunters also approached by the path, and at the head of them Bernard the Dane.

"Ha!" exclaimed he, "what do I see? My young Lord! what brought you here?" And with a hasty obeisance, Bernard took Richard's outstretched hand.

"I came hither to attend your council," replied Richard. "I have a boon to ask of the King of Denmark."

"Any boon the King of Denmark has in his power will be yours," said the dog's master, slapping his hand on the little Duke's shoulder, in a rude, hearty way, that took him by surprise; and he looked up with a shade of offence, till, on a sudden flash of perception, he took off his cap, exclaiming, "King Harald himself! Pardon me, Sir King!"

"Pardon, Jarl Richart! What would you have me pardon?—your saving the life of Vige here? No French politeness for me. Tell me your boon, and it is yours."

"My boon is, that you would set free Prince Lothaire."

"What?—the young Frank? Why, they kept you captive, burnt your face, and would have made an end of you but for your clever Bonder."

"That is long past, and Lothaire is so wretched. His brother is dead, and he is sick with grief, and he says he shall die, if he does not go home."

"A good thing too for the treacherous race to die out in him! What should you care for him? he is your foe."

"I am a Christian," was Richard's answer.

"Well, I promised you whatever you might ask. All my share of his ransom,[1] or his person, bond or free, is yours."

Perhaps it was the happiest day in Richard's life when he rode back to Bayeux, to desire Lothaire to prepare to come with him to St. Clair, there to be given back into the hands of his father.

And then they met King Louis, grave and sorrowful for the loss of his little Carloman, and, for the time, repenting of his misdeeds towards the orphan heir of Normandy.

He pressed the Duke in his arms, and his kiss was a genuine one as he said, "Duke Richard, we have not deserved this of you. I did not treat you as you have treated my children. We will be true lord and vassal from henceforth."

Lothaire's last words were, "Farewell, Richard. If I lived with you, I might be good like you. I will never forget what you have done for me."

When Richard once more entered Rouen in state, his subjects shouting round him in transports of joy, better than all his honour and glory was the being able to enter the Church of Our Lady, and kneel by his father's grave,

[1] Ransom—the price paid for the redemption of a prisoner.

with a clear conscience, and the sense that he had tried to keep that last injunction.

Years had passed away. The oaths of Louis and promises of Lothaire had been broken; and Arnulf of Flanders, the murderer of Duke William, had incited them to repeated and treacherous[1] inroads on Normandy; so that Richard's life, from fourteen to six-and-twenty, had been one long war in defence of his country. But it had been a glorious war for him, and his gallant deeds had well earned for him the title of "Richard the Fearless"—a name well deserved; for there was but one thing he feared, and that was, to do wrong.

King Louis was killed by a fall from his horse; Lothaire died in early youth, and in him ended the degenerate line of Charlemagne.

Fru Astrida and Sir Eric had long been in their quiet graves; Osmond and Alberic were among Richard's most trusty councillors and warriors; Abbot Martin, in extreme old age, still ruled the Abbey of Jumièges, where Richard, like his father, loved to visit him, hold converse with him, and refresh himself in the peaceful cloister, after the affairs of state and war.

And Richard himself was a grey-headed man, of lofty stature and majestic bearing. His eldest son was older than he had been himself when he became the little Duke, and he had even begun to remember his father's project, of an old age to be spent in retirement and peace.

It was on a summer eve that Duke Richard sat beside

[1] Treacherous—by false means.

the white-bearded old Abbot, within the porch, looking at the sun shining with soft declining beams on the arches and columns.

As they sat, a man, also very old, and shrivelled and bent, came up to the cloister gate, with the tottering, feeble step of one pursued beyond his strength, coming to take sanctuary.

"What can be the crime of one so aged and feeble?" said the Duke, in surprise.

At the sight of him, a look of terror shot from the old man's eye. He clasped his hands together, and turned as if to flee; then, finding himself incapable of escape, he threw himself on the ground before him.

"Mercy, mercy! noble, most noble Duke!" was all he said.

"Rise up—kneel not to me. I cannot brook this from one who might be my father," said Richard, trying to raise him; but at those words the old man groaned and crouched lower still.

"Who art thou?" said the Duke. "In this holy place thou art secure, be thy deed what it may. Speak!—who art thou?"

"Dost thou not know me?" said the suppliant. "Promise mercy, ere thou dost hear my name."

"I have seen that face under a helmet," said the Duke. "Thou art Arnulf of Flanders!"

There was a deep silence.

"And wherefore art thou here?"

"I delayed to own the French King Hugh. He has taken my towns and ravaged my lands. Each Frenchman

and each Norman vows to slay me, in revenge for your wrongs, Lord Duke. I have been driven hither and thither, in fear of my life, till I thought of the renown of Duke Richard, not merely the most fearless, but the most merciful of Princes. I sought to come hither, trusting that, when the holy Father Abbot beheld my bitter repentance, he would intercede[1] for me with you, most noble Prince, for my safety and forgiveness. Oh, gallant Duke, forgive and spare!"

"Rise up, Arnulf," said Richard. "Where the hand of the Lord hath stricken, it is not for man to exact his own reckoning. My father's death has been long forgiven, and what you have planned against myself has, by the blessing of Heaven, been brought to nought. From Normans at least you are safe; and it shall be my work to ensure your pardon from my brother the King. Come into the refectory: you need refreshment. The Lord Abbot makes you welcome."

Tears of gratitude and true repentance choked Arnulf's speech, and he allowed himself to be raised from the ground, and was forced to accept the support of the Duke's arm.

The venerable Abbot slowly rose, and held up his hand in an attitude of blessing:

"The blessing of a merciful God be upon the sinner who turneth from his evil way; and ten thousand blessings of pardon and peace are already on the head of him who hath stretched out his hand to forgive and aid him who was once his most grievous foe!"

[1] Intercede—to plead.

NOTES

The Banner of Normandy was a cross till William the Conqueror adopted the lion.

In a battle fought with Lothaire at Charmenil, Richard saved the life of Walter the huntsman, who had been with him from his youth.

Bernard was founder of the family of Harcourt of Nuneham, Ferrières, the ancestor of that of Ferrars.

"Gules, two wings conjoined in lure, or," is the original coat of St. Maur, or Seymour, said to be derived from Osmond de Centeville, who assumed them in honour of his flight with Duke Richard. His direct descendants in Normandy were the Marquises of Osmond, whose arms were gules, two wings ermine. In 1789 there were two survivors of the line of Centeville, one a Canon of Notre Dame, the other a Chevalier de St. Louis, who died childless.

Richard obtained for Arnulf the restitution of Arras, and several other Flemish towns. He died eight years afterwards, in 996, leaving several children, among whom his daughter Emma is connected with English history, by her marriage, first, with Æthelred the Unready, and secondly, with Knute, the grandson of his firm friend and ally, Harald Blue-tooth. His son was Richard, called the Good; his grandson, Robert the Magnificent; his great-grandson, William the Conqueror, who brought the Norman race to England. Few names in history shine with so consistent a lustre as that of Richard; at first the little Duke, afterwards Richard *aux longues jambes*, but always Richard *sans peur*.

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QUESTIONS

1. Turn again to the picture on page 43 of *The Little Duke*. Say what incident it represents, and give the names of three of the persons there shown.

2. What did Father Lucas mean when he said, " Perhaps, he (Lothaire) comes that you may have a first trial in your father's last lesson "?

3. When children meet as strangers they are often shy. Twice in the story this happened : how did the children become better acquainted?

4. What lesson did Richard learn from playing with Alberic?

5. Describe Richard's arrival at the royal castle of Laon.

6. Arnulf of Flanders comes three times into the story. Richard saw him twice and spoke to him once. Tell the story of Arnulf, " in three chapters."

7. Why did Harald say to Richard, " Any boon the King of Denmark has in his power will be yours "? For what boon did Richard ask?

8. Of what incidents do the following sentences remind you?

(*a*) " it will not be a mark to be ashamed of."

(*b*) " There can you breathe? "

(*c*) " a Dane, with a battle-axe on his shoulder, keeping guard at every turn of the stairs."

(*d*) " I am very, very tired of being Duke of Normandy."

(*e*) " He is a Norman—a vassal of Richard's own."

9. What ideas has the story given you of the characters of Osmond Carloman, Lothaire, Dame Astrida, and Count Bernard?

10. What has the story taught you about the history of the Normans?