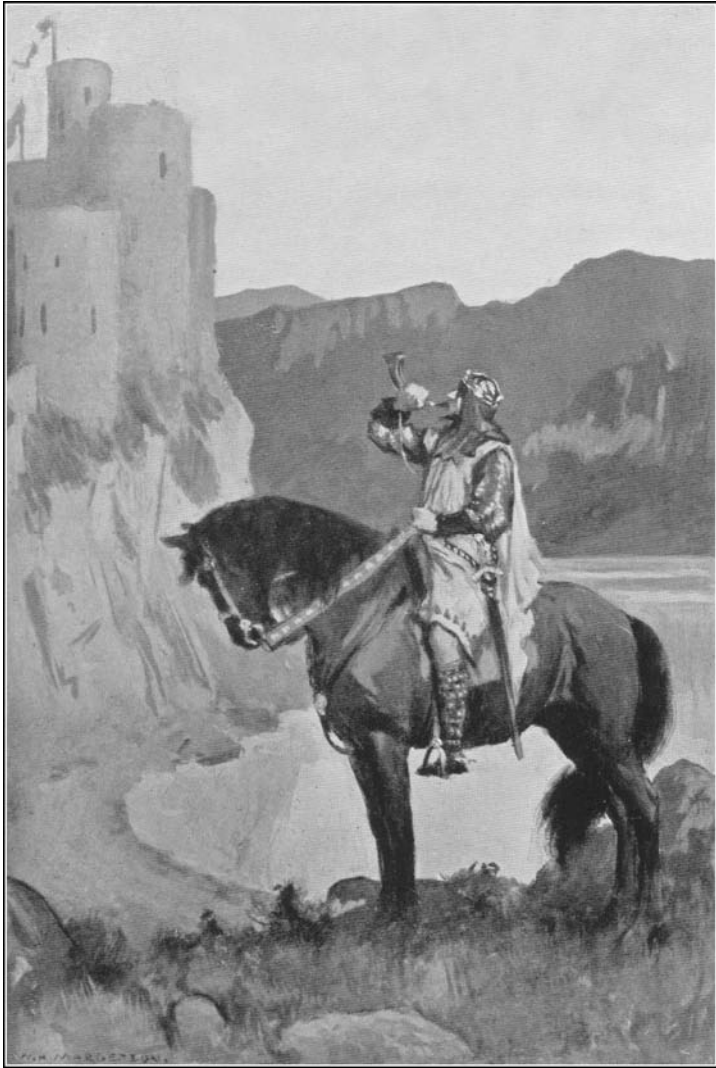


HEROES OF THE MIDDLE AGES



KING ARTHUR

HEROES OF THE MIDDLE AGES

(ALARIC TO JOAN OF ARC)

BY

EVA MARCH TAPPAN

YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS

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PREFACE

I HAVE sometimes wondered if every one realizes how startlingly independent and isolated a historical fact is to the young reader. It has happened before his remembrance, and that alone is enough to put it into another world. It is outside of his own experience. It has appeared to him by no familiar road, but from unknown regions of space.

The object of this book is to bring together stories of the most important movements in the history of Europe during the Middle Ages, and to make familiar the names of the most important figures in those scenes. I have endeavoured to weave a tapestry in which, with due colour, may be traced the history of the rise and fall of the various nationalities and the circumstances and mode of life of each—in short, to give the young reader an approximation to the background for the study of his country's history which a wide reading gives to a man.

EVA MARCH TAPPAN

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CHAPTER I

ALARIC THE VISIGOTH

But thou, imperial City! thou hast stood
In greatness once, in sackcloth now and tears,
A mighty name, for evil or for good,
Even in the liveness of thy widowed years:
Thou that hast gazed, as the world hurried by,
Upon its headlong course with sad prophetic eye.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

IF an Italian country boy had been taken to visit Rome fifteen hundred years ago, he would have found much to see. There were temples and theatres and baths. There were aqueducts, sometimes with arches one hundred feet high, stretching far out into the country to bring pure water to the city. There was an open space known as the Forum, where the people came together for public meetings, and in this space were beautiful pillars and arches and statues of famous Romans. Around the Forum were palaces and temples and the Senate House; and directly in front of the Senate House was a platform on which speakers stood when they wished to address the people. The platform was called the rostrum, which is a Latin word, meaning the beak of a

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warship, because it was adorned with the beaks of ships which the Romans had captured. Another open space was the great race-course, the Circus Maximus, in which 250,000 people could sit and watch leaping, wrestling, boxing, foot-races, and especially the famous four-horse chariot races. There was the Coliseum, too, where gladiators, generally captives or slaves, fought with one another or with wild beasts.

The Roman streets were narrow, and they seemed still narrower because many houses were built with their upper stories projecting over the lower; but in those narrow streets there was always something of interest. Sometimes it was a wedding procession with torches and songs and the music of the flute. Sometimes it was a funeral train with not only the friends of the dead man, but also trumpeters and pipers. In the long line walked hired actors wearing waxen masks made to imitate the faces of the dead person's ancestors. Early in the morning, one could see crowds of clients, each one hastening to the home of his patron, some wealthy man who was expected to give him either food or money.

Rome was built upon seven hills, and most of these men of wealth lived either on the Palatine or the Esquiline Hill. After a patron had received his clients, he ate a light meal and then attended to his business, if he had any. About noon he ate another meal and had a nap. When he awoke, he played ball or took some other exercise. Then came his bath; and this was quite a lengthy affair, for there was not only hot and cold bathing, but there was rubbing and

ALARIC THE VISIGOTH

scraping and anointing. At the public baths were hot rooms and cold rooms and rooms where friends might sit and talk together, or lie on couches and rest. Dinner, the principal meal of the day, came at two or three o'clock. Oysters were often served first, together with radishes, lettuce, sorrel, and pickled cabbage. These were to increase the keenness of the appetite. Then came fish, flesh, and fowl, course after course. Next came cakes and fruits, and last, wine followed, mixed with water and spices. The formal banquets were much more elaborate than this, for a good host must load his table with as many kinds of expensive food as possible; and a guest who wished to show his appreciation must eat as much as he could. The whole business of a feast was eating, and there was seldom any witty conversation. No one sung any songs or told any merry stories.

Such was the life of the wealthy Romans. Moreover, they kept hosts of slaves to save themselves from every exertion. Their ancestors had been brave, patriotic folk who loved their country and thought it was an honour to fight for it; but these idle, luxurious people were not willing to give up their comfort and leisure and to enter the army. Hired soldiers could defend their fatherland, they thought.

The time had come when Rome needed to be defended. In the early days, it had been only a tiny settlement, but it had grown in power till the Romans ruled all Europe south of the Rhine and the Danube, also Asia Minor, Northern Africa, and Brit-

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ain. Nearly all the people of Europe are thought to have come from Central Asia. One tribe after another moved to the westward from their early home into Europe, and when the hunting and fishing became poor in their new settlements, they went on still farther west. The Celts came first, pushing their way through Central Europe, and finally into France, Spain, and the British Isles. Later, the Latins and Greeks took possession of Southern Europe. Meanwhile the Celts had to move faster than they wished into France, Spain, and Britain, because another race, the Teutons, had followed close behind them, and taken possession of Central Europe. These Teutons, who lived a wild, restless, half-savage life, roamed back and forth between the Danube and the shores of the Baltic Sea. They consisted of many different tribes, but the Romans called them all Germans. For many years the Germans had tried to cross the Danube and the Rhine, and break into the Roman Empire, but the Roman armies had driven them back, and had destroyed their rude villages again and again. Sometimes, however, the Germans were so stubborn in their efforts to get into the empire that the Roman emperors found it convenient to admit certain tribes as allies.

As time went on, a tribe of Teutons called Goths became the most troublesome of all to the Romans. Part of them lived on the shores of the Black Sea, and were called Ostrogoths, or Eastern Goths; while those who lived near the shores of the Danube were called Visigoths, or Western Goths. Toward the end of the fourth century, the Visigoths

ALARIC THE VISIGOTH

found themselves between two fires, for another people, the Huns, were driving them into the Roman Empire, and the Romans were driving them back. The Visigoths could not fight both nations, and in despair they sent ambassadors to the Romans. "Let us live on your side of the river," they pleaded. "Give us food, and we will defend the frontier for you." The bargain was made, but it was broken by both parties. It had been agreed that the Goths should give up their arms, but they bribed the Roman officers and kept them. The Romans had promised to furnish food, but they did not keep their word. Hungry warriors with weapons in their hands make fierce enemies. The Goths revolted, and the Roman Emperor was slain.



ALARIC AT ATHENS

HEROES OF THE MIDDLE AGES

As the years passed, the Goths grew stronger and the Romans weaker. By and by, a man named Alaric became leader of the Visigoths. He and his followers had fought under Roman commanders. He had been in Italy twice, and he began to wonder whether it would not be possible for him and his brave warriors to fight their way into the heart of the Roman Empire. One night, he dreamed that he was driving a golden chariot through the streets of Rome and that the Roman citizens were thronging about him and shouting, "Hail, O Emperor, hail!" Another time when he was passing by a sacred grove, he heard, or thought he heard, a voice cry, "You will make your way to the city." "The city" meant Rome, of course; and now Alaric called his chief men together and laid his plans before them. First, they would go to Greece, he said. The warlike Goths shouted for joy, for in the cities of Greece were treasures of gold and silver, and these would fall into the hands of the victors. They went on boldly, and before long Alaric and his followers were feasting in Athens, while great masses of treasure were waiting to be distributed among the soldiers. The Greeks had forgotten how brave their ancestors had been, and Alaric had no trouble in sweeping over the country. At last, however, the general Stilicho was sent with troops from Rome; and now Alaric would have been captured or slain if he had not succeeded in slipping away. Before this, the Roman Empire had been divided into two parts, the western and the eastern. The capital of the western part was Rome; that of the eastern was Constantinople.

ALARIC THE VISIGOTH

The young man of eighteen who was emperor in the eastern part of the empire became jealous of Stilicho. "If he wins more victories, he will surely try to make himself emperor," thought the foolish boy; and he concluded that it would be an exceedingly wise move to make Alaric governor of Eastern Illyricum. This was like setting a hungry cat to watch a particularly tempting little mouse; for Illyricum stretched along the Adriatic Sea, and just across the narrow water lay Italy. Of course, after a few years, Alaric set out for Italy. The boy emperor in the western part of the empire ran away as fast as he could go. He would have been captured had not Stilicho appeared. Then Alaric and his warriors held a council. "Shall we withdraw and make sure of the treasure that we have taken, or shall we push on to Rome?" questioned the warriors. "I will find in Italy either a kingdom or a grave," declared the chief; but Stilicho was upon them, and they were obliged to retreat. Then the boy emperor returned to Rome to celebrate the victory and declare that he had never thought of such a thing as being afraid. Nevertheless, he hurried away to a safe fortress again, and left Rome to take care of itself.

Alaric waited for six years, but meanwhile he watched everything that went on in Italy. The boy emperor had become a man of twenty-five, but he was as foolish as ever; and now, like the Emperor in the East, he concluded that Stilicho meant to become ruler of the empire, and he murdered the only man who could have protected it.

HEROES OF THE MIDDLE AGES



A BARBARIAN INVASION

ALARIC THE VISIGOTH

This was Alaric's opportunity, and he marched straight up to the walls of Rome, shut off food from the city, and commanded it to surrender. The luxurious Romans were indignant that a mere barbarian should think of conquering their city. Even after they were weakened by famine and pestilence, they told Alaric that if he would give them generous terms of surrender, they might yield; "but if not," they said, "sound your trumpets and make ready to meet a countless multitude." Alaric laughed and retorted, "The thicker the hay, the easier it is mowed." He would leave Rome, he declared, if they would bring him all the gold and silver of the city. Finally, however, he agreed to accept 5000 pounds of gold, 30,000 pounds of silver, 4000 robes of silk, 3000 pieces of scarlet cloth, and 3000 pounds of pepper.

Only two years later, Alaric came again, and the proud Romans were ready to do whatever he commanded. This time he put the prefect of the city upon the throne; but a little later he came a third time and encamped before the walls of Rome. The trumpets blew blast after blast, and the invaders poured into the city. Alaric bade his men spare both churches and people; but the Goths killed all who opposed them, or whom they suspected of concealing their wealth. Then they went away loaded with gold and silver and silk and jewels. They were in no haste to leave Italy with its wine and oil and cattle and corn; and, moreover, Alaric was not satisfied with sacking Rome; he meant to get possession of Sicily and then make an expedition to Africa. Sud-

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denly all these plans came to an end, for he was taken ill and died. His followers turned aside a little river from its channel, wrapped the body of their dead leader in the richest of the Roman robes, and made his grave in the river bed. They heaped around it the most splendid of their treasures, and then turned back the waters of the stream to flow over it for ever. Finally, lest the grave should become known and be robbed or treated with dishonour, they put to death the multitude of captives whom they had forced to do this work.

CHAPTER II

ATTILA THE HUN

WHILE Alaric was winning his victories, the Huns had built on the banks of the Danube what they looked upon as their capital. The homes of the poorer folk were huts of mud or straw; but the king Attila, and his chief men lived in houses of wood with columns finely carved and polished. There was plenty of some kinds of luxury in this strange capital, for the tables of the chiefs were loaded with golden dishes; and swords, shoes, and even the trappings of the horses gleamed with gold and sparkled with jewels. King Attila, however, would have no such elegance. "I live as did my ancestors," he declared; and in his wooden palace he wore only the plainest of clothes. He ate nothing but flesh, and he was served from rough wooden bowls and plates. Nevertheless, he was proud of his wealth because it had been taken from enemies, and so was a proof of the bravery and daring of his people.

This king of a barbarous tribe meant to become the greatest of conquerors. Even in the early years of his reign he had hoped to do this. It is said

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that one of his shepherds noticed one day that the foot of an ox was wet with blood. He searched for the cause, and discovered a sharp point of steel sticking up from the ground. He began to dig around it, and soon saw that it was a sword. "That must go to the king," he said to himself, and he set out for the palace. King Attila examined the weapon closely and declared, "This is the sword of Tyr. I will wear it as long as I live, for no one who wears the sword of the war-god can ever know defeat."

When Attila had made his preparations, he set out with his followers to conquer the world. Before long, Constantinople was in his power. The Emperor in the East called himself the Invincible Augustus, but he could not meet Attila, and to save his city and his life he had to give the barbarians 6000 pounds of gold and a large tract of land on the Roman side of the Danube.

Wherever Attila went, he was successful. His ferocious warriors rode like the wind. They would dash down upon some village, kill the inhabitants, snatch up whatever there was of booty, and level the homes of the people so completely that it was said a horse could gallop over the ruins without danger of stumbling. In the far East, he was thought to be a magician. "The Huns have a wonder-stone," declared the folk of that region, "and whenever they choose they can raise storms of wind or rain." It is no wonder that men trembled at the sound of Attila's name and shuddered at the thought of the Scourge of God, as he called himself, when they heard any strange sound in the night. "Attila and his

ATTILA THE HUN

Huns are the children of demons," they whispered; and those who had seen them were ready to believe that this was true. They were of a different family from the Goths and Celts and Romans. They were short and thick-set, with big heads and dark, swarthy complexions. Their eyes were small and bright, and so deep-set that they seemed to be far back in their skulls. Their turned-up noses were so short and broad that it was commonly said they had no noses, but only two holes in their faces.

Although Attila had made peace with the Emperor in the East, before long he found an excuse for invading his empire. With the sword of Tyr in his hand, he swept across what is now Germany and France, killing and burning wherever he went. When he came to Orleans, he expected that city to yield as the others had done; but the people had just made their fortifications stronger, and they had no idea of surrendering even to the terrible Huns. But before long, Attila had got possession of the suburbs, he had weakened the walls with his battering-rams, and the people of Orleans began to tremble with fear. Those who could not bear arms were at the altars praying, and their bishop was trying to encourage them by declaring that God would never abandon those who put their trust in Him. "Go to the rampart," he bade a faithful attendant, "and tell me if aid is not at hand." "What did you see?" he asked when the messenger returned. "Nothing," was the reply. A little later the man was sent again, but he had nothing of comfort to report. A third time he climbed the rampart, and now he ran

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back to the bishop, crying, "A cloud! there is a cloud on the horizon as if made by an army marching!" "It is the aid of God," the bishop exclaimed. "It is the aid of God," repeated the people, and they fought with fresh courage. The cloud grew larger and larger. Now and then there was a flash of steel or the gleam of a war banner. The bishop was right; it was the brave Roman general Aëtius with his army, and Orleans was saved.



AËTIUS
(Relief on
ivory tablet
found at
Monza, in
Northern
Italy)

Attila withdrew to the plain of Châlons. The Romans and their former foes, the Goths, had united against him, and on this plain was fought one of the most bloody battles ever known. It raged from the middle of the afternoon until night, and some of the people of the country believed that in the darkness the spirits of those who had fallen arose and kept up the fight in mid-air. Attila retreated across the Rhine. If he had won the day the heathen Huns instead of the Christian Germans would have become the most powerful people of Europe. That is why this conflict at Châlons is counted as one of the decisive battles of the world.

After a winter's rest, Attila started to invade Italy. He meant to go straight to Rome, but the strong city of Aquileia was in his way. After a long siege, however, it yielded. Some of the inhabitants of that and other conquered cities fled to a group of marshy islands, where Venice now stands. City after

ATTILA THE HUN

city he captured and burned. But this wild Hun was not without a sense of humour. While he was strolling through the royal palace in Milan, he came across a picture showing Roman emperors on their thrones with Scythian chiefs kneeling before them and paying them tribute of bags of gold. Attila did not draw the sword of Tyr and cut the picture to fragments; he simply sent for painter and said, "Put those kneeling men upon the thrones, and paint the emperors kneeling to pay tribute."

The Romans were thoroughly frightened, for now Attila was near their city. Aëtius was calm and brave, but he was without troops. Then Pope Leo I., courageous as the Bishop of Orleans, went forth to meet the Huns, and begged Attila to spare the city. Attila yielded, but no one knows why. A legend arose, that the apostles Peter and Paul appeared to him and declared that he should die at once if he did not grant the prayers of Leo. It is certain that before he started for Rome his friends had said to him, "Beware! Remember that Alaric conquered Rome and died." He had no fear of a sword, but he may have been afraid of such warnings as this. Whatever was the reason, he agreed to spare Rome if the Romans would pay him a large ransom.

The gold was paid, and Attila returned to his wooden palace on the Danube. Soon after this he suddenly died. His followers cut off their hair and gashed their faces, so that blood rather than tears might flow for him. His body was enclosed in three coffins, one of gold, one of silver, and one of iron. It was buried at night with a vast amount of treasure.

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Then, as in the case of Alaric, the captives who had dug the grave were put to death. His followers belonged to different races. Several chieftains tried to become king, but no one of them was strong enough to hold the tribes together, and they were soon scattered, and the power of the Huns declined forever.

CHAPTER III

GENSERIC THE VANDAL

A FEW years after the death of Attila, Rome was once more in the hands of an invader, Genseric the Vandal. The Vandals were great wanderers. They slowly made their way from the shores of the Baltic Sea to the Danube, passed through what is now France, and went south into Spain. Only eight or nine miles from Spain, just across what is now the Strait of Gibraltar, lay Africa.

Northern Africa belonged to Rome. It was one of her most valued provinces because, while Italy could not raise enough grain to feed her people, Africa could supply all that was needed. Genseric longed to add Africa to his domain, and he was more fortunate than most men who wish to invade a country, for after a little while he received a cordial invitation to come to Africa and bring his soldiers with him. The invitation was given by no less a man than the brave general Boniface, who had been appointed governor of the province. This is the way it came about. Aëtius was jealous of the success of Boniface, and he persuaded the mother of the child emperor to send the governor a letter recalling him.

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Then he himself wrote a letter to his "friend" Boniface with the warning that the empress was angry with him, and he would lose his head if he risked it in Rome. Boniface was in a hard position. He concluded that the safest thing for him to do was to remain where he was, and ask Genseric to help him to hold Africa.

Genseric did not wait to be urged. He hurried across the Strait of Gibraltar and began his career of violence. A Vandal conquest was more severe than that of any other tribe, for the Vandals seemed to delight in ruining everything that came into their power. They killed men, women, and children; they burned houses and churches; and they destroyed whatever treasures they could not carry away with them. Some said that whenever they conquered a country, they cut down every fruit tree within its limits. This is why people who seem to enjoy spoiling things are sometimes called *vandals*.

After a while Boniface discovered how he had been tricked by Aëtius, and he begged Genseric to leave the country; but the barbarian refused, and Boniface could not drive him away. Genseric and his followers settled in Africa, making the city of Carthage the capital of their kingdom, and they became a nation of pirates. They built light swift vessels and ravaged the shore of any country where they expected to find plunder.

All this time Genseric had his eyes fixed upon Italy, and again he was fortunate enough to be invited to a land which he was longing to invade.

GENSERIC THE VANDAL

This time the widow of a murdered emperor begged him to come and avenge her wrongs. He wasted no time but crossed the narrow sea and marched up to the walls of Rome. Behold, the gates were flung open, and once more Leo, now a hoary-headed man, came forth with his clergy, all in their priestly robes, to beg the Vandals to have mercy. Genseric made some promises, but they were soon broken. For fourteen days the Vandals did what they would. They were in no hurry; they had plenty of ships to carry away whatever they chose; and after they had chosen, there was little but the walls remaining. They snatched at gold and silver and jewels, of course, but they took also brass, copper, and bronze, silken robes, and even furniture. Works of art were nothing to them unless they were of precious metal and could be melted; and what they did not care to take with them, they broke or burned. The widowed empress had expected to be treated with the greatest honour, but the Vandals stripped off her jewels and threw her and her two daughters on board their ships to be carried to Africa as prisoners.

Genseric kept his nation together as long as he lived; and indeed, though the Romans made many expeditions against the Vandals, it was nearly eighty years before the pirates were conquered.

CHAPTER IV

THE TEUTONS AND THEIR MYTHS

FOR a long while, as we have seen, the Roman Empire had been growing weaker and the Teutons, or Germans, had been growing stronger. These Teutons were a most interesting people. They were tall and strong, with blue eyes and light hair. They were splendid fighters, and nothing made them so happy as the sound of a battle-cry. They cared nothing for wounds, and they felt it a disgrace for any one to meet death quietly at home. A man should die on the field of battle, thought the Teutons; and then one of the Valkyrs, the beautiful war-maidens of Odin, would come and carry him on her swift horse straight to Valhalla, her armour gleaming as she rode through the air, with the flashing glow which men call the northern lights. Valhalla, they believed, was a great hall with shields and spears hanging on its walls. The bravest warriors who had ever fought on the earth were to be found there. Every morning they went out to some glorious battle. At night they came back, their wounds were healed, they drank great cups of mead and

THE TEUTONS AND THEIR MYTHS



THE RIDE OF THE VALKYRS
H. Hendrich

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listened to songs of deeds of valour. Odin, or Woden, king of the gods, ruled in this hall. He had a son Thor, who was sometimes called the



WODEN

thunder-god. Thor rode about in a chariot drawn by goats. He carried with him a mighty hammer, and this he threw at any one who displeased him. Tyr, another son of Odin, whose sword Attila thought he had found, was the god of war.

Not all the gods were thunderers and fighters. There was Odin's wife, Freya, who ruled the sunshine and the rain, and who loved fairies and flowers and all things dainty and pretty. Then there was

Freya's son, Baldur, whom every one loved, and Loki, whom everyone feared and hated. Loki was always getting the gods into trouble, and it was he who brought about the death of Baldur. Freya had once made beasts and birds and trees and everything on the earth that had life promise never to hurt her son; but the mistletoe was so small and harmless that she forgot it. There was a chance for wicked Loki. It was a favourite game of the gods to shoot arrows at Baldur, for they knew that nothing would harm him. One of the gods was blind, and Loki offered to

THE TEUTONS AND THEIR MYTHS

guide his hand, saying that all ought to do honour to so good a god as Baldur. In all innocence, the blind one threw the twig of mistletoe that Loki gave him. Baldur fell down dead, and had to go forever to the land of gloom and darkness.



THOR

The Teutonic story of the creation of the earth was this:—Long ago there was far to the northward a gulf of mist. In the mist was a fountain, and from the fountain there flowed twelve rivers. By and by, the waters of the rivers froze, and then in the north there was nothing but a great mass of ice. Far to the southward was a world of warmth and light. From this a warm wind blew upon the ice and melted it. Clouds were formed, and from them came forth the giant Ymir and his children and his cow. The cow was one day licking the hoar frost and salt from the ice, when she saw the hair of a man. The next day she licked still deeper, and then she saw a

HEROES OF THE MIDDLE AGES

man's head. On the third day a living being, strong and beautiful, had taken his place in this strange world. He was a god, and one of his children was



FREYA

Odin. Together the children slew Ymir. Of his body they made the earth, of his blood the seas, of his bones the mountains, of his eyebrows they made Midgard, the mid earth. Odin arranged the seasons, and when the world was covered with green things growing, the gods made man of an ash tree and woman of an alder. An immense ash tree, which grew from the body of Ymir, supported the whole universe. One of its roots extended to Asgard, the home

of the gods; one to Jötunheim, the abode of the giants; and one to Niflheim, the region of cold and darkness beneath the earth. It was believed that some day all created things would be destroyed. After this a new heaven and a new earth would be formed in which there would be no wickedness or trouble, and gods and men would live together in peace and happiness. All these fancies had some meaning; for instance, Baldur the beautiful, at sight of whose face all things rejoiced, represented the sunshine.

Poetical as the Germans were in some of their fancies, they were by no means poetical when any fighting was to be done. They had a custom of

THE TEUTONS AND THEIR MYTHS

choosing some man as leader and following him wherever he led; but the moment that he showed himself a poor commander or failed to give them a fair share of whatever spoils they had captured, they left him and sought another chief. When the time had come that the Romans were no longer willing to defend themselves, it seemed to them a most comfortable arrangement to send a messenger to some of the Teuton chiefs to say, "If you will help us in this war, we will give you so much gold." Unluckily for themselves, the Romans looked upon barbarians as nothing more than convenient weapons, and did not stop to think that they were men who kept their eyes open, and who sooner or later would be sure to feel that there was no reason why they, as well as the Romans, should not take what they wanted if they could get it.



A BARBARIAN
ALLY OF THE
ROMANS

(From the Column
of Trajan, at Rome.
His weapons are a
club and a sword.)

The Goths, especially, were always ready to give up their old ways if they found something better; and by the time Alaric invaded Italy, those who lived nearest the Roman territories had learned something of Christianity, and Ulfilas, a Greek whom they had captured in war, had translated nearly all of the Bible into their language. They had learned to enjoy some of the comforts and conveniences of the Romans. They had discovered that

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there were better ways of governing a nation than their haphazard fashion of following any one who had won a victory; and they had begun to see that it was a good thing to have established cities. But if they gave up their roving life and made their home in one place, they could no longer live by fishing and hunting, for the rivers and forests would soon be exhausted; they must cultivate the ground. We have seen how the Goths had become the most powerful of all the Teutonic tribes. To so warlike a people, it seemed much easier to take the cultivated ground of the Romans than to make the wild forest land into fields and gardens. These were reasons why the Goths, among all the Germans, were so persistent in their invasions of the Roman Empire. There was one more reason, however, quite as strong as these. It was that other tribes even more barbarous than they were coming from Asia, and pressing upon them in order to get their land. The Romans might have found some way to save their country; but they were too busy enjoying themselves to be troubled about such matters. Their only care seemed to be to find the easiest way out of a difficulty, and when a nation is faced by powerful and determined enemies whose hearts are not set upon a life of ease and luxury, they are sure, sooner or later, to be destroyed.

CHAPTER V

THE STORY OF THE NIBELUNGS

MANY of the Goths had learned about Christianity, as has been said before; but for a long while most of the Teutons believed, or half believed, in the old fables of gods and heroes. One of these, the story of the Nibelungs, was a special favourite. It was told by father to son for centuries; then some unknown poet put it into poetry. This poem was called the Nibelungen-Lied, or song of the Nibelungs. It began with one of the evil pranks of Loki by which the gallant knight Siegfried became owner of a vast hoard of gold once belonging to a nation of dwarfs called Nibelungs. Siegfried was rich and handsome and brave, and he rode forth into the world, not knowing that the gold was accursed and would bring trouble to whoever might own it.

His first adventure was in Isenland, or Iceland, where he broke through a magic ring of fire that for many years had burned around a lofty castle on the summit of a mountain. In this castle lay Brunhild, a disobedient Valkyr whom Odin had pun-

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ished by putting her and the king and court who had received her into a sleep. This was to last till some hero should pass the ring of fire. Siegfried broke through, found the beautiful maiden, and became betrothed to her. But after a brief period of happiness Odin bade the hero leave Isenland and go elsewhere in search of adventures.

Siegfried went next to the land of Burgundy, and there he found a new exploit awaiting him. King Günther had heard of the beautiful Brunhild, and was eager to marry her. Many a man had lost his life because of this same wish; for whoever would win her must outdo her in the games, and if he failed, both he and his attendant knights were put to death. The king and Siegfried set off for Isenland, and the games began. First, Brunhild threw her heavy javelin against the king's shield; but Günther cast it back at her so powerfully that she fell to the ground. When she rose, she caught up a stone, so heavy that twelve knights could hardly lift it, and hurled it an amazing distance. Then at one leap she sprang to where the stone had fallen; but Günther threw the stone farther and leaped farther. Then the Valkyr yielded and became his wife. She did not guess that it was not Günther who had beaten her, but Siegfried. Siegfried had a magic cap of darkness, and when he put it on, he became invisible; so while Günther went through the motions, it was really Siegfried who threw the javelin and hurled the stone and even carried Günther in his arms far beyond the leap of the Valkyr. So it was that Brunhild became the wife of Günther. As for Siegfried, an enchantment had been thrown

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about him, and he had entirely forgotten that he had ever ridden through the ring of fire or seen Brunhild before. The hand of the king's sister, the gentle, lovely Kriemhild, was to be his reward for his service to King Günther; and now both weddings were celebrated. Günther and Brunhild remained in Burgundy, and Siegfried carried Kriemhild to his kingdom in the Jutland.



SIEGFRIED FIGHTING THE DRAGON

Even if Siegfried had forgotten Brunhild, she had not forgotten him, and she meant to have her revenge. She persuaded Günther to invite Siegfried and Kriemhild to Burgundy. It was easy for a quarrel to arise between the two queens, and Hagen, uncle of Kriemhild, took the part of Brunhild. He pretended that war had arisen against Günther, and Siegfried agreed to fight for his host. Kriemhild begged her uncle to help Siegfried whenever he was in peril; and the treacherous Hagen replied, "Surely; but first tell me where his chief peril lies. Is there

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some one way by which he may most easily lose his life?" "Yes," answered Kriemhild, "he once slew a dragon and bathed himself in its blood. Therefore no weapon can harm him save in one tiny place between his shoulders which was not touched by the blood because it was covered by a linden leaf." "Then do you sew a mark upon his garment directly over that place," said the false Hagen, "that I may guard it well." One day Siegfried went out hunting with Günther and Hagen, and it was not long before his body was brought back to the sorrowing Kriemhild. The treachery of Hagen, however, was not to be hidden, for during the funeral rites Siegfried's wounds began to bleed afresh as Hagen passed the bier; and from this Kriemhild knew that he was the murderer of her husband.

Siegfried's father lovingly begged Kriemhild to return to the Jutland with him; but she would not leave Burgundy, for she hoped some day to avenge her murdered husband. She sent for the Nibelung treasure and gave generously to all around her. Then wicked Hagen began to fear that the hearts of the people would turn towards her. Therefore he stole the treasure and sank it deep in the river Rhine; but he meant to recover it some day for himself.

It came about that King Etzel of Hungary sent a noble envoy to beg for the hand of the widowed queen. She answered him kindly, for she said to herself, "Etzel is brave and powerful, and if I wed him, I may be able some day to avenge my Siegfried." So it was that Kriemhild became the wife of Etzel, and was true and faithful to him for thirteen

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years. At the end of that time she asked him to invite the king and court of Burgundy to visit them. The Burgundians accepted the invitation, though the murderer Hagen urged them to remain at home. In



BRINGING BACK THE BODY OF SIEGFRIED

H. Hendrich

Hungary they were treated with all courtesy; but Kriemhild had told her wrongs to her Hungarian friends, and as the guests sat at a magnificent feast given in their honour, the Hungarian knights dashed into the hall of feasting, and slew almost every one. Günther and Hagen yet lived, and Kriemhild bade Hagen reveal where he had hidden her stolen treasure. "Never, so long as Günther lives," was his reply.

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Kriemhild ordered Günther to be put to death and his head taken to Hagen, but Hagen still refused to tell what had become of the treasure. In her anger



HAGEN THROWS THE NIBELUNGEN TREASURE INTO THE RHINE

(From a fresco in the Royal Palace, Munich)

Kriemhild caught up the magic sword of Siegfried and struck off Hagen's head at a blow. Then one of the Burgundians cried, "Whatever may become of me, she shall gain nothing by this murderous deed"; and in a moment he had run her through with his sword. So ended the story of the treasure of the Nibelungs, which brought ill to every one who possessed it.

CHAPTER VI

CLOVIS

OF all the Teutons who came to live on Roman territory, the most important were the Franks, or free men. They had no wish to wander over the world when they had once found a country that pleased them, and so, since they liked the land about the mouth of the Rhine, they settled there and held on to it, adding more and more wherever a little fighting would win it for them. Each tribe had its chief; but Clovis, one of these chiefs, came at last to rule them all. The country west of the Rhine, then called Gaul, was still partly held by the Romans, but Clovis meant to drive them away and keep the land for the Franks. When he was only twenty-one, he led his men against the Roman governor at Soissons and took the place. From here he sent out expeditions to conquer one bit of land after another and to bring back rich booty. The most valuable treasures were usually kept in the churches, and the heathen Franks took great



BRONZE HELMET
OF A FRANKISH
WARRIOR

(Found near the river
Seine in France. Now in
the Louvre, Paris)

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delight in seizing these. Among the church treasures captured at Rheims was a marvellously beautiful vase. Now the bishop of Rheims was on good terms with Clovis, and he sent a messenger to the young chief to beg that, even if the soldiers would not return all the holy vessels of the church, this one at least might be given back. Clovis bade the messenger follow on to Soissons, where the booty would be divided.

At Soissons, when all the warriors were assembled, the king pointed to the vase and said, "I ask you, O most valiant warriors, not to refuse to me the vase in addition to my rightful part." Most of the



FRANKISH
COSTUME
OF THE
TIME OF
CLOVIS
(From an illustration in an old Bible at Rome)

soldiers were wise enough not to object to the wishes of so powerful a chief; but one foolish, envious man swung his battle-axe and crushed the vase, crying, "Thou shalt receive nothing of this unless a just lot gives it to thee." It is no wonder that the whole army were amazed at such audacity. Clovis said nothing, but quietly handed the crushed vase to the bishop's messenger. He did not forget the insult, however, and a year later, when he was reviewing his troops, he declared that this man's weapons were not in fit condition, and with one blow of his axe he struck the soldier dead, saying, "Thus thou didst to the vase at Soissons."

Clovis showed himself so much stronger than the other chiefs of the Franks that at

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length they all accepted him as their king. Soon after this, he began to think about taking a wife. The story of his wooing is almost like a fairy tale. In the land of Burgundy lived a fair young girl named Clotilda, whose wicked uncle had slain her father, mother, and brothers that he might get the kingdom. Clovis had heard how beautiful and good she was, and he sent an envoy to ask for her hand in marriage. The wicked uncle was afraid to have her marry so powerful a ruler, lest she should avenge the slaughter of her family; but he did not dare to refuse Clovis or to murder the girl after Clovis had asked that she might become his queen. There was nothing to do but to send her to the king of the Franks. Clovis was delighted with her, and they were married with all festivities.

Clotilda was a Christian, and she was much grieved that her husband should remain a heathen. She told him many times about her God, but nothing moved him. When their first child was born, Clotilda had the baby baptized. Not long afterwards, the little boy grew ill and died. "That is because he was baptized in the name of your God," declared Clovis bitterly. "If he had been consecrated in the name of my gods, he would be alive still." Nevertheless, when a second son was born, Clotilda had him baptized. He, too, fell ill, and the king said, "He was baptized in the name of Christ, and he will soon die." But the mother prayed to God, and by God's will the boy recovered. Still Clovis would not give up the gods of his fathers. It came to pass, however, that he was engaged in a fierce battle near where

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Cologne now stands. His enemies were fast getting the better of him, and he was almost in despair, when suddenly he thought of the God of his queen, and he cried, "Jesus Christ, whom Clotilda declares to be the Son of the living God, if Thou wilt grant me victory over these enemies, I will believe in Thee and be baptized in Thy name." Soon the enemy fled, and Clovis did not doubt that his prayer had been answered.

When he told Clotilda of this, she was delighted. She sent for the bishop and asked him to teach her husband the true religion. After a little, Clovis said to him, "I am glad to listen to you, but my people will not leave their gods." He thought a while and then he declared, "I will go forth and tell them what you have told me." He went out among his people, and, as the legend says, even before he had spoken a word, the people cried out all together, "We are ready to follow the immortal God." Then the bishop ordered the font to be prepared for the baptism of the king. The procession set out from the palace and passed through streets made gorgeous with embroidered hangings. First came the clergy, chanting hymns as they marched, and bearing the Gospels and a golden cross. After them walked the bishop, leading the king by the hand. Behind them came the queen, and after her the people. They passed through the door and into the church. The candles gleamed, the house was hung with tapestries of the purest white and was fragrant with incense; and there the king of the Franks, his sisters, and more than three thousand of his warriors, besides a

CLOVIS



BAPTISM OF CLOVIS

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throng of women and children, were baptized and marked with the sign of the cross.

The times were harsh and rude, and even a king who was looked upon as a Christian ruler never dreamed of hesitating to do many cruel deeds. Clovis wished to enlarge his kingdom, and he could always find some excuse for attacking any tribe living on land next his own. He cared nothing for his word, and to get what he wanted, he was ready to lie or steal or murder.

Clovis died in 511, but before that time all the lands between the lower Rhine and the Pyrenees had been obliged to acknowledge his rule. He made Paris his capital, and went there to live. This was the beginning of France. The descendants of Clovis held the throne for nearly two centuries and a half. They were called Merovingians from Merovæus, the grandfather of Clovis.