

**THE
STORY OF ROLAND**

**THE
STORY OF ROLAND**

**BY
JAMES BALDWIN**

Illustrated by R. B. Birch

**YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS
CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA**

Cover and arrangement © 2006 Yesterday's Classics.

This edition, first published in 2006 by Yesterday's Classics, is an unabridged republication of the work originally published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1888. For a listing of the books published by Yesterday's Classics, visit www.yesterdaysclassics.com. Yesterday's Classics is the publishing arm of the Baldwin Project which presents the complete text of dozens of classic books for children at www.mainlesson.com under the editorship of Lisa M. Ripperton and T. A. Roth.

ISBN-10: 1-59915-040-9

ISBN-13: 978-1-59915-040-6

Yesterday's Classics
PO Box 3418
Chapel Hill, NC 27515

THE FORE WORD

THE fairyland of romance is not far removed from the more sober domains of history. Indeed, the territory of the one sometimes overlaps that of the other; and the boundary line between them is often dim and ill-defined. This truth is illustrated in the legends which have come down to us from the middle ages. In those rude, uncultured times, men did not care greatly to sift fact from fiction, nor to pry into the likelihood of things. No matter how improbable a story might be, if it were pleasing to them, they never thought of questioning its truth. Most of the earlier legends began in song: they were sung or recited by wandering bards or minstrels long before they were written down. They have in them usually some slender thread of real history, so covered over with traditions, and mixed up with mysteries and marvels, that it is impossible to know how much is fact, and how much is fable. We read them chiefly to learn how the men of those far-off cloudy days thought and felt, what they believed and with what kind of literature they were entertained. Yet if we remove the dress and impurities which obscure the fairer and nobler part of these legends, and adapt them to our own modes of thinking and expression, we shall not fail to find some things that will instruct, and many that will please.

Jean Bodel a minstrel of the thirteenth century, wrote, "There are but three subjects which interest men,—the tales of France, of Britain, and of Rome the great; and to these subjects there is nothing like. The tales of Britain¹ are so light and pleasant, those of Rome² are wise and of teachful sense; those of France³ truly every day of greater appearance."

In this story of Roland as I propose telling it, I shall introduce you to some of the most pleasing of those "tales of France." The poems and legends which embody them were written in various languages, and at widely different times; but in them two names, Charlemagne and Roland are of very frequent occurrence. Charlemagne, as you know, was a real historical personage, the greatest monarch of medieval times. His empire included France, the greater part of Germany and Italy; and his power and influence were felt all over the Christian world. The fame of his achievements in war was heralded and sung in every country of Europe; his name was in the mouth of every story-teller and wandering bard; and it finally became customary to ascribe all the heroic deeds and wonderful events of three centuries to the time of Charlemagne. The songs and stories in which these events were related were dressed up with every kind of embellishment to suit the circumstances of their recital. Wild myths of the Pagan ages, legends and traditions of the Christian Church, superstitious notions of magic and witchcraft, fantastic stories derived from the Arabs of Spain and the East,—all these were

¹ The romances of King Arthur.

² The *Gesta Romanorum*.

³ The legends of Charlemagne.

blended in one strange mass, and grafted upon a slender core of historical truth. The result was a curious mixture of fact and fiction, of the real and the marvellous, of the beautiful and the impure, of Christian devotion and heathen superstition. And it was thus that "the tales of France," which we may term the legendary history of Charlemagne, came into being.

The Charlemagne of romance is a very different personage from the Charlemagne of history; and the tales which cluster around the name of that monarch must not be regarded as true pictures of life and manners during his reign, but rather as illustrations of the state of society at the various times of their composition. In the romances, Charlemagne is represented as the patron of chivalry, and his warriors as possessing all the knightly virtues. But we know, that, in his time, the institution of chivalry did not exist, and that there were no knights. In the tenth century, however, when men first began to write down the tales of France, chivalry was in its prime; and it was but natural that the poet who wrote and sang for feudal chiefs and lords should invest his heroes with knighthood, and represent Charlemagne as the founder of the order.

Roland, the nephew of the Charlemagne of romance, and his companion in all great enterprises, is unknown to history. Yet he is the typical knight, the greatest hero of the middle ages. His story, as I shall tell it you, is not a mere transcript of the old romances. The main incidents have been derived from a great variety of sources, while the arrangement and the connecting parts are of my own invention. I have culled the story from the song-writers and poets of five centuries and of as

many languages. Sometimes I have adhered closely to the matter and spirit, and even the words, of the originals; sometimes I have given free rein to my own imagination; and throughout I have endeavored so to arrange and retouch the individual parts of the story as to lend interest to its recital, and adapt it to our own ways of thinking, and our modern notions of propriety. The oldest story of Roland was doubtless that which was sung by the minstrel of William the Conqueror, in 1066. Wace, in his account of the battle of Hastings, says, "Taillefer, who sang very well, rode before the duke, singing of Charlemagne and of Roland and Oliver, and of the vassals who died at Roncevaux." The song which Taillefer sang must have been the "Chanson de Roland," written by one Tuold, perhaps as early as the tenth century. It is by far the finest of all the "tales of France." More than twenty years after the battle of Hastings, there appeared a Latin work, entitled, "The Life of Charles the Great and of Roland," which, it was claimed, had been written by Archbishop Turpin, the father-confessor of Charlemagne. The falsity of this claim is too apparent to need any proof; and yet the work, having been sanctioned by Pope Calixtus, and placed by him upon the roll of canonical books, exerted no small influence over the poetical literature which followed it, and supplied materials and suggestions to many later romancists. In England, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, there appeared several rhyming romances relating to our hero. Among these were "Sir Ferumbras," an adaptation of a French poem, entitled "Fierabras," "Otuel," and "Roland and Ferragus." One of the first books printed in our language was a legendary history of Charlemagne, entitled "The Lyf of

Charles the Great, fynysshed in the reducing of it into Englysshe in the xvii day of Juin MCCCCLXXXV. Explicit per William Caxton.” In our own time, Mr. John Malcolm Ludlow, in his “Popular Epics of the Middle Ages,” has given us a valuable critical analysis of some of the most noticeable legends of Roland and Charlemagne. In Germany, we find an adaptation of the “Chanson de Roland” in an old poem, entitled, “Ruolandes Liet,” which appeared, probably, as early as 1177, and has recently been edited by William Grimm. Karl Simrock’s “Kerlingisches Heldenbuch” contains some of the most delightful traditions of Roland and Charlemagne; and the “Kaiserchronik,” published in 1849, gives a complete legendary history of Charlemagne and his peers from a German point of view. In Italy the story of Roland was long a most fertile and attractive theme, and gave rise to more than one great poem. The legends relating to his parentage and boyhood are contained in the “Innamoramento di Milone d’Anglante,” printed in the sixteenth century, and in several other poems much older; the “Orlando Innamorato” of Boiardo tells us of the marvellous adventures of our hero in Fairyland and in the Far East; the “Orlando Furioso” of Ariosto tells of his prowess as a knight, his disappointment in love, his madness and ultimate recovery; the “Morgante Maggiore” of Pulci relates the story of his later adventures and his death. In the mediæval romances of Spain the name of Roland is of frequent occurrence; and the story, modified to suit the prejudices of Spanish readers, is found in numerous old songs and poems, some of them as early as the twelfth century. There is, in short, no country in Europe, and no language, in which the exploits of Charlemagne and

of Roland have not at some time been recounted and sung.

In relating the story of Roland it would, of course, be impossible to avoid some mention of Oliver and Reinold, and Ogier the Dane,—heroes who were his companions in arms, and who rivalled him in the number and greatness of their exploits. I have therefore been at some pains to give, from the same ancient sources, the most popular and pleasing legends concerning the valorous knights, one of whom, at least, can lay claim to an historical existence. The old bards and storytellers who invented, embellished, and sang these famous “tales of France” were accustomed to modify, recast, and remodel their stories so as to adapt them to the tastes and demands of their audiences. In presenting the story of Roland for the first time in a connected form and to a popular audience, I shall certainly be pardoned if I endeavor to follow their example.

CONTENTS

I.	ROLAND AND OLIVER	1
II.	THE KING'S GUEST	18
III.	THE WAR WITH THE SAXONS	33
IV.	THE KNIGHT OF THE SWAN	40
V.	OGIER THE DANE	45
VI.	HOW THE ARMY CROSSED THE ALPS	55
VII.	KNIGHTED ON THE BATTLEFIELD	68
VIII.	HOW OGIER WON SWORD AND HORSE	78
IX.	ROLAND'S ARMS	93
X.	A ROLAND FOR AN OLIVER	109
XI.	REINOLD OF MONTALBAN	128
XII.	MALAGIS THE WIZARD	143
XIII.	THE PRINCESS OF CATHAY	167
XIV.	IN THE WOOD OF ARDENNES	183
XV.	ROLAND'S QUEST IN THE FAR EAST	190
XVI.	HOW REINOLD FARED TO CATHAY	203
XVII.	IN THE GARDENS OF FALERINA	211
XVIII.	MORGAN THE FAY	224
XIX.	HOW OGIER REFUSED A KINGDOM	231
XX.	HOW ROLAND SLEW A SEA MONSTER	236
XXI.	HOW ROLAND FELL INTO PRISON	246
XXII.	BRADAMANT THE WARRIOR MAIDEN	256

XXIII.	THE WINGED HORSE OF THE PYRENEES	275
XXIV.	HOW ROLAND LOST HIS HELMET	283
XXV.	THE BATTLE	288
XXVI.	MEDORO THE MOOR	295
XXVII.	A CONTEST FOR DURANDAL	306
XXVIII.	HOW ROLAND BECAME HIS OWN SHADOW	317
XXIX.	A FLIGHT TO THE LAND OF PRESTER JOHN	332
XXX.	HOW THE PEERS RETURNED TO FRANCE	349
XXXI.	HOW CHARLEMAGNE FOUGHT AGAINST OGIER	353
XXXII.	THE VALE OF THORNS	371
	THE AFTER WORD	389
	NOTES	395

ROLAND

ADVENTURE I

ROLAND AND OLIVER

ONE summer afternoon rather more than eleven hundred years ago, the boy Roland was sitting in the cleft of a broken rock that forms the crest of one of the hills in the neighborhood of Sutri. Above him was the deep blue sky of Italy, unflecked by any cloud: on either side of him stretched a dull, uneven plain broken here and there by wet marshes, and long lines of low hills. A mile or more to the south, and partly hidden behind the brow of the hill, could be seen the old town, with its strong castle, and its half-ruined amphitheatre and its white-walled monastery. Directly beneath him was the dusty highroad which, after winding among the straggling vineyards and little farms that dotted the plain, was lost to sight in a strip of dusky woodland a league and more to the northward. Along that road King Charlemagne, with the flower of his great army, was hourly expected to pass, marching on his way to the castle of Sutri, where he was to be entertained for a time as a guest; and it was for this reason that the lad sat so still,

THE STORY OF ROLAND

and watched so long, in his half-hidden perch on the hilltop.

Every thing, as if awed by the near coming of the hero king, seemed strangely still that afternoon. Scarcely a sign of life was to be seen; and the places which at other times had been noisy with busy workers were now silent and deserted. The reapers, who yesterday had made the wheat-fields ring with their gay jests and their rude songs, had left their sickles in the fields, and stolen silently away. The young girls who had been gleaning the fallen grain, and whose laughter had awakened the echoes among the hills, were nowhere to be seen to-day, although the eagle eyes of Roland sought them on every hand. Along the highroad, which at other times seemed alive with the busy folk coming and going between Sutri and Viterbo, neither man, woman, nor beast was stirring. But off toward Sutri the boy could see that things were quite different. The town seemed to be decked in holiday attire: the governor's castle was draped with gay bunting, and flags and banners floated from the turret-tops. Companies of knights dressed in rich livery rode hither and thither, impatiently waiting the word from the watchman above the gates to go out and meet the kingly guest. The streets were crowded with hurrying, eager folk, who knew not whether to hail the coming of Charlemagne and his host as a blessing, or look upon it as a calamity.

Now and then the sound of voices from the town or the cries of the soldiers in the garrison, came to Roland's ears; and anon he heard the monks in the monastery drowsily chanting their prayers. And there he sat, waiting and wondering, and anxiously watching for

ROLAND AND OLIVER

any sign of the coming host. The fair face of the lad, and the long flaxen hair which fell in glistening waves upon his bare shoulders, showed his kinship to the hardy races of the North. And there was something in the piercing look of his eye in the proud curl of his lip, in the haughty turn of his head, which made him seem like a young king among men, and which often had caused those who met him to doff the hat in humble courtesy. He was very poorly clad; his head and limbs were bare; and the thin, scant clothing which covered his body was naught but rags and shreds. Yet he bore himself proudly, as one who knew his own worth, and who, having a blameless heart, had nothing of which to feel ashamed.

And now the sun began to slope towards the west; and, with each moment that passed, the lad's eagerness seemed to grow greater. By and by another boy came over the crest of the hill, and stood in the cleft of the rock by the side of Roland and with him gazed down the deserted road. He seemed to be of about the same age as Roland, and, like him, was tall and sparely built. His dark hair and overhanging brows, his ruddy face and flashing eyes, betokened an equal kinship with the danger-daring North-folk and the leisure-loving people of the South. He wore the rich dress of a court page and carried himself with a lofty grace such as only those who bear brave hearts can ever show.

"I feared you were not coming, Oliver," said Roland, offering his hand, but not once turning his head, or taking his eyes from the distant woodland.

THE STORY OF ROLAND



Roland and Oliver on the hillside

ROLAND AND OLIVER

“It was indeed hard for me to get leave,” answered the other. “But the ladies at the castle are very kind, and here I am, and I mean to be, with you, the first to see the great king and his valiant knights. Yet he is late.”

“I think I see them coming now,” said Roland. “There is a glimmering of light among the trees which I think must be the flashing of the sun upon their armor. And it grows brighter and seems to come nearer.”

He had scarcely finished speaking, when the clear notes of a bugle were heard, borne faintly to them on the breeze. And soon they heard a sound like the distant dashing of waves against the seashore, the rustling of myriads of dry leaves in the autumn woods, the faint rumbling of a far-away storm cloud. They knew that it was naught but the noise made by the trampling of many feet, the heavy tread of war-horses, the rattling of arms and armor. Then a great cloud of dust was seen rising like a mist above the treetops, and the rainbow-hued banners of the coming host hove in sight.

Presently the edge of the wood seemed ablaze with flashing shields and glittering war coats. The boy Roland leaped to his feet. He stood on tiptoe, and strained himself eagerly forward; his face beamed with delight; and his eyes sparkled with that strange wild fire which in after-days, in the midst of the battle’s din, was wont to strike his foes with terror. Oliver climbed to the highest point of the rock, and gazed with an eagerness half mixed with fear, at the wonderful array of steel-clad warriors, who now could be plainly seen issuing from the woodland. Like a torrent of rolling, flashing waters,

THE STORY OF ROLAND

the host of Charlemagne came moving along the line of the highway, and spreading across the plain. They came not, however, in all the array of battle, nor with their terrible engines of war, nor, indeed, as enemies bent on pillage, or seeking revenge; but they came, rather, as an army of peace, with music sounding, and banners flying, and words of good-will and friendship to all. For Charlemagne, having left off fighting with the Lombards, was on his way to Rome, with the best and bravest of his warriors, to receive the homage and the blessing of the Pope.

The vanguard of the procession drew rapidly nearer. In front rode four and twenty knights, the heralds of the king, bearing along the silken banner of France and the golden eagle of Rome. They were clad in rich armor, which glittered like gold in the sunlight; their shields were inlaid with many priceless gems, and polished as bright as mirrors; and the sharp points of their long lances flashed around them like the restless gleams of lightning in the van of a summer storm-cloud. They were mounted on milk-white horses trapped with white cloth-of-gold, with gold-red saddles, and housings of bluest silk.

The boy Roland had never seen any thing so beautiful or so grand, and he thought that one of these knights must surely be Charlemagne. And as they drew very near to the foot of the hill, and he could look down almost upon the heads of the brilliant company, he called to Oliver, and asked—

“Which of these knights is the great Charles? Is it not he who rides nearest the standard-bearer? He,

ROLAND AND OLIVER

surely, is the noblest warrior of them all; and he rides with a grace which well becomes a king.”

But this scene, which filled the mind of Roland with such astonishment, was not altogether new to Oliver. Not many months before, his father, the governor of Sutri, had taken him on a visit to the court of Charlemagne; and there he had witnessed the splendor of the king’s surroundings, and had heard of the fearful might of his warriors.

“No,” he answered. “The great king is not one of these. They are but heralds and messengers, who ride before to my father’s castle to see that every thing is in readiness for their master. They are right courtly fellows, I ween, fair of speech, and comely of form, but I doubt if any of them would be ranked among his bravest knights.”

Following the heralds came a body of guards,—a thousand men of giant stature, and muscles of iron,—incased from head to foot in strongest armor, and riding heavy war-steeds trapped with steel. After these came a long line of bishops and abbots and monks and priests, most of them dressed in the garb of their office or profession, and riding on the backs of palfreys or of mules.

“See you the tall bishop, dressed partly in armor, and carrying a crucifix in one hand, while with the other he toys with his sword-hilt?” asked Oliver. “That is the brave Turpin, one of the peers of Charlemagne. He is at home in the battlefield as well as before the altar, and many an unbelieving Pagan has felt the thrust of his lance. But see! here comes the king himself!”

THE STORY OF ROLAND

The whole highway and the fields before them now seemed filled with steel-coated men, and horses clothed in steel trappings; and the long lances in the hands of the knights seemed as thick-set as the blades of grass in an autumn meadow. Everywhere were seen the gleam of polished steel and the waving of gay plumes and many-colored pennons; and here and there were banners, of varied shapes and every hue, on which were emblazoned mottoes, and the strange devices of the warriors who bore them. First and foremost in this company was Charlemagne himself, clad in steel from head to foot, and riding a horse of the color of steel and the strength of steel. Roland, as soon as he saw him, knew that this must be the king; for there was no other man who seemed so kingly, or who bore himself with so lordly a grace. The noblest knight among his followers seemed but a weak stripling when seen by the side of the matchless Charlemagne. In his left hand he carried a lance of steel of wondrous length, while his right hand held the reins of his fiery steed. His head was bare, for he had laid aside his helmet; and his long hair fell in waves upon his steel-covered shoulders. His broad shield, which was carried by an attendant knight, was of plated steel of three thicknesses bound together with iron bolts. His thighs were encircled with plates of steel, and his hands were garnished with steel gauntlets. On his kingly face a smile lingered; and from his gleaming gray eyes sparks of fire seemed to shoot; and under a weight of armor which would have borne down a common man he carried himself erect and proud, like one who was every inch a king.¹

¹ See Note 1 at the end of this volume.

ROLAND AND OLIVER

With wonder, rather than with awe, Roland kept his eyes fixed upon the noble figure of Charlemagne; and he did not withdraw his gaze until a sudden turn of the road around the hill toward Sutri hid the steel-clad company from his sight. He did not care to see that part of the host which followed. He had no thought for the throng of squires and pages, and the crowd of common soldiers and grooms, who brought up the rear with the baggage and the camp equipage and the led horses of the knights. He had seen the great Charles, and that was all he wished. He beckoned to Oliver; and the two boys climbed down from their well-hidden lookout, and started homeward.

To keep out of the way of the soldiery, and to shun other hindrances, they followed a narrow pathway which led them over the hill, and down the slope on the other side from that where the highway ran. Not a word did either speak until they reached the level fields; but here they paused, for here they must needs part. The path which Oliver was to take led southward to the lordly castle of Sutri, where, that night and the following day, Charlemagne and his warriors were to rest and be entertained. But Roland's way lay across the lonely fields to a far different dwelling among the barren hills. Before they parted, each took the other's hand; and both stood for some time in silence, their hearts full of thoughts too big to find utterance in speech. Roland spoke first.

"Some day, Oliver," said he, "we, too, shall be knights, and we shall ride with Charlemagne and his peers as proud as the proudest warriors we have seen to-day."

THE STORY OF ROLAND

“Yes, “ answered Oliver, his face beaming with delight. “And boldly will we fare over land and sea, fighting the Pagan folk, and doing worthy deeds for the honor of God, the king, and the ladies.”

“My mother has often told me,” said Roland, “that the day when I should first see Charlemagne would be to me the beginning of a new life. I know not why she said it; but I have seen the great king, and I feel that a wonderful change has come to me, and that I shall no longer be a mere beggar boy. I must soon be up and away, doing my part in this busy world. Let us now, like real knights, pledge ourselves as brothers-in-arms. Next to my mother, you are my dearest friend. Let me call you my brother.”

“You are indeed my brother, Roland,” answered Oliver earnestly. “You are my brother. Don’t you remember, that, since the day when you gave me such a well-deserved drubbing for laughing at your ragged clothing, we have been sworn brothers-in-arms? Did any one ever apologize for a fault more heartily than I did then? And did any one ever forgive with freer grace than you forgave me? And have any two persons ever loved with a truer love than that which binds us together?”

“But we are only boys,” said Roland. “You are a page and a prince. I am a beggar and a prince: at least so I have been told in my dreams. The next time we meet, we may both be knights. Let us pledge ourselves, that, let that meeting be when it may, it shall be a meeting between brothers-in-arms.”

ROLAND AND OLIVER

Without more words, the two boys, still holding each other's hands, knelt together by the roadside. And they vowed to be true to each other so long as life should last; to share together whatever fortune might betide, whether it should be good or ill; to meet all dangers together, and to undertake all great enterprises in company; to rejoice together in success, and grieve together when sorrow should come; to devote their lives to the succor of the helpless and to the defence of the right; and, if need be, to die for each other.

“And now,” said Oliver, as they rose to their feet, “let us, like true knights, seal our vow of brotherhood by exchanging tokens.”

And with the word he took from his girdle a little dagger with long gleaming blade and a handle of ivory richly carved, and inlaid with gold. It was a gift from his grandfather, Gerard of Viana, and had once belonged to the Pagan king of Morocco. It was the dearest of Oliver's possessions, and hence the fittest token to present to his brother-in-arms. As Roland took it from his hand, and gazed with pleased eyes upon its razor edges, gleaming like lines of silver light, tears stood in his eyes, for he knew how highly its owner prized it. Then from the folds of his ragged garment he drew the short, broken fragment of an old sword-blade, dimmed with age and much rust, and dull with many notches.

“My token,” said he, “is but a poor return for the beautiful keepsake you have given me. But it is very dear to me, and I know that it will also be dear to you. It is all that was left of my father's sword, when, hemmed in

THE STORY OF ROLAND

by Pagan foes, he sold his life dearly in fight, and died for the honor of the king and the church.”

Oliver took the proffered token reverently, for he already knew its story. He gazed a moment at the curious letters carved on its sides, and at its hacked and battered edge; and then he placed it carefully in his girdle. And the two boys, after many earnest words and many kind good-bys, turned away, and each hastened toward his own home.

By this time the sun had gone down, and the short twilight was fast giving place to darkness. With hasty steps Roland made his way across the fields toward the low line of yellow hills, which now could be scarcely seen, lying more than a league away, dimly outlined against the western horizon. It was quite dark long before he reached them. But he knew the way well, and a light shining in the door of his mother's dwelling helped to guide his steps across the uneven ground. And what kind of a dwelling was it that Roland called his home? It was nothing more than a little cave hollowed out of the rocky hillside, where, long before, a holy hermit had made himself a quiet cell in which to live, and worship God. The narrow entrance to the cave was in great part hidden by flowering vines, which Roland's mother had with daily care coaxed to grow in the barren soil, and had trained to cling to the rough rocks and twine among the crevices overhead. Inside every thing betokened poverty. A single stool, a broken table, a few earthen dishes, the simple articles which the hermit had left,—these were the only pieces of furniture. In one corner of the room hung an old set of armor, dented with many a lance-thrust, and hacked in

ROLAND AND OLIVER

many a battle, but still kept bright against the day when Roland should become a knight. Near it leaned a long, broken lance which had done duty in more than one tourney; and beneath it was a battered shield, on which were emblazoned the arms of Charlemagne. The stone floor was bare, and the rough stone walls were grimed with smoke, and the low ceilings were damp with moisture. Few were the comforts of home in that humble dwelling; and but for the kind welcome of his queen-like mother, the Lady Bertha, small would have been the cheer that Roland would have found there.

“I have seen him, mother!” he cried, rushing into her arms. “I have seen the great Charles and his glorious army and his gallant peers. Would that I were a man, that I, too, might ride forth with the king, the bravest of the brave!”

Then the gentle Bertha took the lad’s hand in her own, and the two sat down together in their lowly dwelling, and Roland told her of all that he had seen that memorable afternoon; but he talked most of the noble Charlemagne, and of his kingly grace and bearing. Then he spoke again of his own hopes and of his high ambition, and of the time when he should be a knight, and, mayhap, one of the peers of the king.

“And now, dear mother,” said he, “the time has come for me to learn the great secret of my life. To-day I am twelve years old,—old enough to be a page; to-day I have seen Charlemagne; and to-day you have promised to tell me all about my kinsfolk and myself, and the great destiny which lies before me.”

THE STORY OF ROLAND

Then the Lady Bertha drew the lad close to her, and told him the story of her own life and his,—a story so full of strange surprises to Roland, that, when he heard it, he wept for joy and for the big thoughts that came welling up from his heart. She told him that the great king whom he had seen that day, and whose fame was known in every land, was his uncle and her own brother. She told him how she, the spoiled and petted daughter of Pepin, had been brought up at the French court; and how, after her father's death, she had lived in her brother's kingly palace at Aix, loved and honored next to Charlemagne himself. Then she told, how, on a time, there came to Charlemagne's court a worthy knight named Milon,—a warrior poor and needy, but brave, and without reproach. "Milon boasted that his kin had been the noblest heroes of all time. Through his father, he traced his descent from the Greeks; and he wore the arms of Trojan Hector engraved on his shield; and he numbered among his ancestors the godlike hero Hercules. On his mother's side he claimed kingship with the fair-haired heroes of the North, with the fearless Vikings, with Siegfried the dragon-slayer, with the mighty Thor, and the matchless Odin.

"And when your mother, then the Princess Bertha, saw the gallant Count Milon, and heard of his nobleness and learned his true worth, she loved him. And your uncle Charlemagne hated him, and banished him from France, and sought even to take his life; for he wished to wed his sister to Duke Ganelon of Mayence, one of his peers. But, when Milon fled from the king's court at Aix, he went not alone; he took me, the Princess Bertha, with him as his wife: for the good

ROLAND AND OLIVER

Archbishop Turpin had secretly married us, and given us his blessing, and promised to help us on our way to Italy. When Charlemagne heard how he had been outwitted, he was very angry, and he swore that he would do his uttermost to ruin Count Milon, and to bring me back to France, and make me the wife of the hated Ganelon. And so, to escape his anger, we dressed ourselves in the guise of beggars, and wandered on foot from town to town and through many countries, begging our bread. And wherever we went we met the spies of Charlemagne seeking for Milon, and offering a price for his head. At last we came to Sutri, tired and footsore, and unable to go any farther. And, when none would take us into their houses, we found shelter in this wretched cave, which we fitted up the best that we could, to serve as a home until we could soften the anger of Charlemagne, and obtain his forgiveness. But soon after you were born, Roland, the Pagan folk crossed the sea, and came into Italy, and threatened Rome itself. Then your father, the gallant Milon, remembering his knightly vows, once more donned his armor; and, taking his lance and shield, he went out to do battle for the king and for the holy church. You know the rest. You know how bravely he fought, and how he died, as heroes die, with his face toward the foe. All this I have told you often. And you know how we have lived these long, weary years in this wretched hermit cell, dependent on our kind neighbors for food, and hoping always for brighter and better days.

“And now you have learned the story of your birth and your kinship, and you know the destiny that is yours if you but do your part. The blood that flows in

THE STORY OF ROLAND

your veins is the blood of heroes, and it will not belie itself. You have seen Charlemagne, and to-day is the turning point in your life. Before the king leaves Sutri, he must acknowledge you as his nephew, and take you as a page into his court.”

Then mother and son sat long together in the quiet cell, talking of the past, so fraught with distress and poverty and wretchedness, and of the unknown future with its vague promises and uncertain hopes. But so great was the lad's trust in his own strength, and so firm was the mother's faith in her son, that not once did clouds of doubt darken the bright pictures which their fancy painted of the good fortune yet in store for them. And the little candle which lighted the humble room burned down and left them in darkness; and the moon rose over the hills, and peeped in through the doorway, and sloped downwards toward the west; and the stars, one by one, looked in between the vines, and then went onward in their endless journey around the world; and at length the eastern sky began to brighten, and then to blush at the coming of the sun; and still the Lady Bertha and the boy Roland sat, unmindful of the passing hours, and talked of the new life which they felt must soon be theirs. But when the morning had fairly come, and the first rays of the sun shot in upon them, Roland, as if suddenly awakened, sprang to his feet, and cried,—

“Mother, the night is past, and the day has dawned!—the first day in the great new life which is mine. I will go at once to my uncle, the king, and demand my rights and yours.”

ROLAND AND OLIVER

And with his mother's blessing and many a word of advice well fixed in his memory, the lad hurried away, walking rapidly across the fields towards Sutri.

ADVENTURE II

THE KING'S GUEST

IT was a great day in Sutri. Never since the old Roman days had so brilliant a company of warriors and noble men been seen in that quiet town. In the governor's castle the king and the peers of the realm were being entertained and feasted. The chambers and halls and courts were full of knights and squires; and every one talked of the noble order of chivalry, and of war, and of arms and armor, and of the king's progress on the morrow to Rome. In the broad feast hall, Charlemagne and his peers were dining. On the dais, by the side of the king, sat Count Rainier, the governor of Sutri. Around them stood many of the noblest knights, attentive to their slightest wishes. Next below the king sat Turpin, the warrior bishop, clad to-day, not in his war coat of steel, but in his rich official robes, and looking much more the priest than the knight. Next to him sat Duke Namon of Bavaria, the king's counselor, gray-bearded and sage, strong in fight, and wise in statesmanship,—the oldest and the most trusted of all the peers. On the other side was Malagis, the cunning dwarf, who,

THE KING'S GUEST

it was said, had power over the unseen creatures of the air, and by means of witchery could sometimes foretell the things that were about to befall. Next to him was old Ganelon of Mayence, at heart a vile traitor, the smile of a hypocrite resting on his thin lips, and his serpent-eyes twinkling with an evil light. On either side of the long table below sat many worthy knights, the most trusted warriors of Charlemagne, and the doughtiest heroes in Christendom. I doubt if ever more valor was seen in castle hall.

Mirth and revelry ruled the hour; and the long, low hall rang with the sound of the harp and the flute and the glad voices of the singers. The great oaken table groaned beneath its weight of good cheer. The lordly Count Rainier had provided for this feast every thing that was pleasant to the taste, or that could add zest to the appetite. The richest meats and the rarest fruits, sparkling wine and foaming ale, the whitest bread and the most tempting sweetmeats—all were offered in generous profusion as if on purpose to make the knights forgetful of their vows of temperance. In the courtyard, around the open door, stood numbers of the poor people of the town, listening to the music, and waiting for the morsels that would be left after the feast. Suddenly a young boy, ragged and barefooted, appeared among them. All stood aside for him, as, with proud step and flashing eyes, he entered the great hall. With the air of a lord he pushed his way through the crowd of attendant knights and squires, and walked boldly up to the table. Then, without saying a word, he seized upon a basket of rare fruit and a loaf of bread that had been placed before the king.

THE STORY OF ROLAND

“Indeed,” said Charlemagne, “that is a bold boy. He will make a brave knight.”

But those who stood around were so awed by the lad’s proud bearing and by the strange flash of his eyes, that they dared not touch him; nor did they think of placing any hinderance in his way until he had seized the golden wine-cup which Charlemagne was on the point of lifting to his lips.

“Stop!” cried the king. “How dare you be so rude?”

But Roland held fast to his prize; and, fearless as a young eagle, he gazed into the face of the king. Charlemagne tried hard to appear angry; but, in spite of himself, a pleasant smile played upon his face, and his eyes twinkled merrily.

“My boy,” said he, “the forest is a fitter place than this banquet hall for such as you. You would do better picking nuts from the trees than snatching dishes from the king’s table; and the wine which you have taken from my hand is not nearly so good for you as the water in the flowing brook.”

“The peasant drinks from the brook,” answered Roland proudly; “the slave gathers nuts in the forest. But to my mother belong the best things that your table affords. The choicest game, the rarest fish, the reddest wine, are hers.”

“Ha!” cried the king. “Your mother must indeed be a noble lady! And I suppose you will tell me that she lives in a lordly castle, with scores of brave knights and gentle dames about her, and that she sits daily in her

THE KING'S GUEST

great feast hall at a table loaded with every delicacy. How many servants has she? Who is her carver? and who is her cup-bearer? Come, tell us all about it."

"My right hand is her carver," answered Roland; "and my left hand is her cup-bearer."

"And has she soldiers and watchmen and minstrels, this wonderful mother of yours?"

"Indeed she has. These two arms are her soldiers; these eyes are her watchmen; these lips are her minstrels."

"That is a numerous household and a worthy one," answered the king, now very much amused. "But your good mother has strange taste in the matter of livery for her servants. I see they are all bareheaded and barefooted; and their clothing, what there is of it, is made of all the colors of the rainbow. How came she to furnish you with a robe so rich and rare?"

"My robe is of my own furnishing," answered Roland. "Eight boys in the town do me homage; and they pay me tribute in cloth, each a different color. And now, my lord, since you have learned all about my mother and her household, will you not visit her in her castle?"

Before the king could answer, the boy had turned on his heel, and, with the basket of food and the cup of wine in his hands, he fearlessly walked out of the hall. Charlemagne was surprised at the boldness of the lad, and delighted with his witty answers.

THE STORY OF ROLAND

“Let him go,” said he. “A braver lad I have never seen; and he well deserves his prize. He will yet become the noblest knight in Christendom.”

Then, turning to Duke Namon, he whispered, “Saw you that strange flash in his eye? Was there ever a fairer countenance, or a more king-like form? Tell me truly, did he not remind you of some one you have seen elsewhere?”

“He did, my lord,” answered Namon. “He reminded me of your worthy father, the great Pepin. He has the same noble features, the same broad brow, the same clear gray eyes flashing with a strange light. He reminded me, too, of yourself. Had he been clothed in garb befitting a prince, I should have imagined that I saw you again as you appeared when a boy. But he reminded me most of your lost sister, the fair Princess Bertha. The same gentleness of manner, the same proud carriage of the head, the same curl of lip,—qualities that we once admired so much in the Lady Bertha,—may all be seen in this wonderful boy.”

“I dreamed last night,” said the king, “that my darling sister came to me, leading just such a boy as this. And I thought that he grew tall and strong, and that the whole world looked up to him as a pattern of knightly valor and courtesy, and that he carried my whole kingdom upon his shoulders. Now this boy is no common lad; and the mother of whom he speaks can be no common beggar. My heart tells me that she is the long-lost, long-forgiven Bertha.”

“Your heart speaks rightly,” answered Namon. “The son of no other lady could bear so perfect a like-

THE KING'S GUEST

ness to the Pepins. I am sure that we have found her at last.”

Then Charlemagne turned to the dwarf Malagis. “What say you, sir wizard?” he asked. “You have the gift of foresight, and you can read that which lies hidden to the eyes of others. What think you of a boy who comes thus boldly to our table, and levies mail from us as if it were his right?”

The dwarf twisted and writhed about in his seat: he smiled, as only wizards can smile, and then he humbly but wisely answered,—

“My lord, the lad is no beggar. The blood of heroes flows in his veins. Kings are his kinsmen. Great deeds await his coming into manhood. Harm him not, but have him sought out, and brought again before you. I have read in the stars that somehow the woof of your life is strangely interwoven with that of a lad like this.”

Charlemagne at once ordered a dozen squires to follow the boy secretly to find where he dwelt, and then, without harming him, to bring both him and his mother to the castle. And then the feasting, which had been so strangely broken off, was begun again. And the wassail bowl went round, and many a weak-souled knight forgot his solemn vows of temperance; and the old hall again resounded with music and with uproarious mirth; and the boy Roland was for a time forgotten.

Very anxiously did the fair Bertha in the lonely hermit cell await the return of her son that day. He had left her in the morning, determined to make himself known to Charlemagne, and to demand the forgiveness of his mother, and her re-instatement in the king's pal-

THE STORY OF ROLAND

ace. He had promised to be back very soon, with a palfrey for his mother to ride upon, and a company of knights and squires to escort her to the castle. But hour after hour had passed by; and it was now high noon, and still the boy did not come. Could it be possible that he had been too rash, and had been imprisoned, or otherwise severely punished, for his boldness? Another hour went by; and Bertha was about to despair of his return, when Roland suddenly appeared around the foot of the hill, carrying on his left arm a basket of food and in his right hand a golden goblet of wine.

“Mother,” he cried, as he set his burden down in the doorway of the grotto,—“mother, I have brought you some share of the feast. You shall not starve while your brother, who is no better than you, eats and drinks and has such plenty of other luxuries that he knows not what to do with them.”

Then he placed before her the bread and the wine, and a delicately baked fowl, and the rare fruits; and, while she ate, he told her all that had happened to him since he had left her in the morning. He had waited a long time about the palace doors, trying in vain to be allowed to see the king. The guards said that he was sleeping, and would not be disturbed. If he could only have found his friend Oliver, all would have been well. But the page was nowhere to be seen; and a squire whom he asked said that he had gone that morning, with a company of knights and dames, to Rome, and that it would be long ere he returned again to Sutri. At length, by the merest chance, he had peeped in through the open door of the banquet hall, and had seen the king himself seated at the table.

THE KING'S GUEST

"I could not bear," he said, "to see so great plenty of all that was good, and to hear the mirth of the greedy revellers, and know that you were here in this wretched cave without a morsel of food. I walked right in and took the best, nor did I regard that I was robbing the king. He talked to me, and seemed not a bit angry; and I feel sure that he will send for me to come again before him, and then I will tell him all."

"Ah, Roland," said the Lady Bertha doubtfully, "you do not know your kingly uncle. He is hot-tempered and violent; and he may yet punish you for your rashness, and listen to no word of explanation or excuse. Many an innocent man has suffered from his unreasoning anger."

"I am not afraid," answered the boy. "He was altogether too jolly to be angry. And I expect, ere this time to-morrow, to be installed as a page to the king or to one of his peers."

He had scarcely spoken these words, when the squires who had been sent in search of him came around the foot of the hill, and halted only a few yards from the entrance to the grotto. Some were on foot, some on horseback; and all were armed with sticks, and more or less under the influence of the strong ale which they had drunk at the banquet. As soon as they saw Roland, they called out loudly to him, ordering him to surrender himself as their prisoner.

"Come along at once, my little one," cried the leader. "The king wants you for robbing his table."

THE STORY OF ROLAND

Had the squires approached Roland in a respectful manner, he would have gone with them gladly. But their insolence maddened him.

“Tell the king,” he answered, “that I am holding high court at home to-day, and that, if he wants me, he must come after me himself.”

“But you must come with us,” cried the squires. “You, and your mother the beggar woman, must come with us to Sutri, and lose no time.”

“Beggar woman, indeed!” cried Roland, overflowing with rage. “How dare you speak thus of the sister of Charlemagne! Go back to the king, and tell him that his nephew is not wont to do the bidding of squires and churls. Tell him that only by the worthiest of his peers will my mother and I be taken into his presence.”

At this boastful speech of one whom they looked upon as only a beggar, the squires laughed heartily; and one or two of them shook their sticks in a threatening manner, and made as if they would seize upon the boy. Roland ran quickly into the grotto, and soon came out again, bearing the long, broken lance in his hands. But it was a heavy weapon, and, as he found it, an unwieldy one. The squires closed in upon him from every side; and, as the great length of the lance prevented him from turning it quickly enough to guard himself at all points, he was obliged to drop it to the ground. In its stead, he seized a stout light club that lay in his way, and then, taking his stand in the doorway, he dared his assailants to come within his reach.

“You shall see,” said he, “whether I cannot defend my mother’s castle.”

THE KING'S GUEST

The squires, astonished at the quickness and the pluck of the boy, fell back, and began trying to persuade him to go with them peaceably. But Roland stood warily in the doorway of his castle, and answered them only by swinging his club in the faces of the nearest, and by withering glances of defiance. It is uncertain how long this strange scene would have lasted, or how it would have ended, had it not been unexpectedly interrupted. A knight, unarmed, and mounted on a coal-black steed, rode suddenly around the hill, and reined up in the midst of the excited crowd. His long hair and flowing beard were white with age, and his pleasant face beamed with kindness, and was lighted up with lines of far-seeing wisdom.

“Ha, my brave men!” he cried in tones of merriment. “What have we here? Twelve gallant squires in combat with a single boy! And the boy holds his castle against them all. Surely this is chivalry! What does it all mean?”

“It means,” answered Roland, “that these fellows want to take me by force to the king at Sutri, and they have insulted me and my mother. Were they knights, or even gentlemen, I would go with them; but they are neither. They are mere churls and hangers-on about the governor’s court, and they know nought of honor and knightly courtesy. It will be long ere they are worthy to wear the golden spurs.”

The knight was amused at the boy’s earnestness; and he said, “I cannot blame you for refusing to be taken by them. Yet I know that the king wishes very much to see you and your good mother, and he has sent

THE STORY OF ROLAND

me to hasten your coming. I am Namon, Duke of Bavaria, and I am sometimes known as one of Charlemagne's peers. Perhaps you will be willing to go with me if I send these squires away."

Roland, without a word of dissent, dropped his club to the ground, and promised to go with the good knight at once if he would only find some means by which his mother might be helped to reach Sutri castle without the fatigue of walking so far. Duke Namon dismounted from his steed, and, having sent the squires away, went with Roland into the little cavern. There he was welcomed heartily by the Lady Bertha, who remembered him as a firm, kind friend in former days, when both were inmates of Charlemagne's palace at Aix. And the fair lady and the noble knight talked long together of things that had happened since then in France,—of the gallant deeds of her brother the king, and of his many triumphs at home and abroad; of the death of the gallant Milon, and of the long years of wretchedness and want that had since dragged by. And the knight told her how Charlemagne had sought in every land for her, and had sent messengers beyond the sea to inquire for her, in order that he might grant her his forgiveness, and make some amends for his former harshness. But all in vain. The messengers had brought back word that Milon was dead, but they could find no traces of his noble wife; and Charlemagne mourned her as lost. And then Namon told her of Roland's strange, daring deed in the feast hall at Sutri castle that day, and of the thoughts that he and the king had had about the boy; and lastly he spoke of the king's desire that she should appear at once before him, and, if she were

THE KING'S GUEST

indeed the lost Princess Bertha, she should be restored to her old place in his court and in his affections.

And towards evening the noble duke, with the Lady Bertha mounted behind him on a pillion, rode gayly over the fields to Sutri; while Roland, proud and happy, and carrying his father's broken lance on his shoulder, followed them on foot. Glad, indeed, was the greeting with which the king welcomed his sister; but not a word could the fair Bertha speak, so overwhelmed was she with gratitude. Roland, still wearing his livery of many-colored rags, but holding himself erect and haughty as a prince, raised his wondrous gray eyes until they met Charlemagne's gaze.

"Sister," said the king, "for this boy's sake, if for nought else, all shall be forgiven. Let the past be forgotten in the joy of the present hour."

"Dear brother," said fair Bertha, "your kindness shall not go unrewarded. Roland will not disappoint you. He will grow up to be, next to you, the pattern of all heroes and the type of all manly virtues."¹

And the next day a great feast was held in the banquet hall of Count Rainier's castle, in honor of the fair princess and her gallant little son. And not only the bravest warriors in Charlmagne's service, but also many noble ladies and many knights from Rome and the country round about, sat down with the king at the festal board. And this time Roland was not an uninvited guest; but he sat in the place of honor at the king's right hand, while squires and servitors waited his call, and

¹ See Note 2 at the end of this volume.

THE STORY OF ROLAND

hastened to do his bidding. And Charlemagne rested two days longer at Sutri before proceeding on his march; and then he sent his sister, the princess, with a guard of trustworthy knights, back to France and to the pleasant palace and halls of Aix. But Roland was made a page in the service of good Duke Namon; and, when the grand army moved on again towards Rome, he bade good-by to his humble friends in Sutri, and made ready to go too. No happier, prouder heart beat in Italy that day than Roland's. Dressed in a rich gown of green velvet bordered with crimson and gold, and mounted on a white palfrey most handsomely harnessed, he seemed not like the barefooted beggar to whom the boys of Sutri had been wont to do homage. But it needed not that one should look closely to recognize that same noble form, those wonderful gray eyes, that proud but kind-like face. And he rode not with the rout of squires and soldiers and hangers-on who brought up the rear of the army, but by the side of Duke Namon, and in company with the bravest knights and the peers of the realm.

All along the road the people of the towns, the castles, and the countryside, crowded to see the conquering hero; and they welcomed him with shouts and glad songs as the guardian of Italy and the champion of all Christendom. Three miles this side of Rome all the noblest men of the city came out, with music playing and banners waving, to escort the grand army through the gates. At a mile from the walls the children of the schools met them, bearing palm leaves and olive branches in their hands, and strewing flowers in the way, and singing hymns in honor of the hero king.

THE KING'S GUEST

Charlemagne had laid aside his arms and his armor; and, dressed in his kingly robes, he rode by the side of the good Archbishop Turpin. His mantle was wrought of the finest purple, bordered with gold and ermine; upon his feet were sandals sparkling with priceless gems; upon his head was a coronet of pearls and flashing jewels. His horse was harnessed in the most goodly fashion, with trappings of purple damask bordered with ermine and white cloth-of-gold.

At the gate of the city the procession was met by a company of priests and monks bearing the standard of the cross, which was never taken out save on the most solemn and magnificent occasions. When Charlemagne saw the cross, he and his peers alighted from their horses, and went humbly on foot to the steps of St. Peter's Church. There he was met by the Pope, the bishops, and a great retinue of priests and monks, dressed in their richest vestments, who welcomed him to Rome, and blessed him. And on every side, in the streets and in the church, loud shouts rent the air, and the people joined in singing the chant, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

The boy Roland, having never seen such grandeur, was filled with wonder and astonishment. "Surely," said he, "this is the happy vale of paradise, of which my mother has so often told me, where every Christian knight hopes one day to find a home."

"It is not that vale," answered good Duke Namon; "but it is the beginning of the road which leads thither."¹

¹ See Note 3 at the end of this volume.

THE STORY OF ROLAND

Not many days did Charlemagne remain at Rome. Messengers came to him from France, who said that the Saxons and other Pagan folk had crossed the Rhine, and were carrying fire and sword into the fairest portions of the land; and they begged him to hasten his return to his own country, that he might protect his people from the ravages of their barbarous foes. So, having received the homage and the blessing of the Pope, and having been crowned with the iron crown of the Lombards, he marshalled all his forces, and set out on his journey back to France. And late that same autumn, Roland saw for the first time the noble city of Aix, and was formally installed as page in Duke Namon's household.

ADVENTURE III

THE WAR WITH THE SAXONS

A STORMY winter had set in. It was unlike any thing that Roland had ever seen in his sunny southern home; and he was scarcely more astonished by the grandeur of Charlemagne's court than by this wonderful war of the elements. The bleak north winds, like so many giants let loose, came roaring through the forests, and shrieking among the house-tops and the castle towers, carrying blinding tempests of sleet and snow in their arms, and hurling them angrily to the ground. The rivers were frozen over; the roads were blockaded; there was little communication between Aix and other parts of Charlemagne's dominions. The main part of the army was still in southern France, and there it was ordered to stay until the opening of spring should make it possible to advance against the Saxons.

Very pleasant to Roland was his first winter at Charlemagne's court. Within the palace halls, there were comfort and good cheer; the fires blazed high and warm in the great chimney-places; there was much music and merry-making; and for Roland there were many agree-

THE STORY OF ROLAND

able duties. Much of his time was spent in the service of the ladies at court, and especially of the Duchess Blanchefleur, the wife of good Duke Namon. And he was instructed in the first duties of the true knight,—to reverence God, and honor the king; to speak the truth at all times; to deal justly with both friend and foe; to be courteous and obliging to his equals; to be large-hearted and kind to those beneath him in rank; and, above all, to help the needy, to protect the weak, and to respect and venerate the ladies. Some time, too, he spent in the company of his lord, Duke Namon. He waited on him at table, he poured out his wine, he carried his messages; and much wisdom did he learn, listening to the words that fell from the lips of the sage counselor. He became acquainted, too, with the officers of the court, and with the squires and grooms about the palace. And he learned how to manage horses, and how to mount and ride a high-mettled steed. He was taught how to hold a lance with ease, how to handle the broadsword dexterously, and how to draw the longbow, and shoot with sharp-sighted skill. When the weather was fine, and the snow not too deep on the ground, he often rode out with his master and other knights to hunt the deer and wild boars in the forest. And he learned all about the training and care of falcons and merlins and hunting-hounds, and how to follow the game in the wildwood, and how to meet the charge of a wounded buck or a maddened boar. Sometimes, during the long winter evenings, he sat in the school of the palace with Charlemagne and the members of the family, and listened to the wise instructions of Alcuin, the English schoolmaster. And he learned to read in the few Latin books that were treasured with great care in the *scriptorium*, or writ-

THE WAR WITH THE SAXONS

ing-room, of the palace; and sometimes, under the direction of the schoolmaster, he tried to copy the beautiful letters of some old-time manuscript. At other times he sat with the knights and the squires in the low-raftered feast-hall, and listened to the music and the song-stories of some wandering harper.

And thus the winter months sped swiftly by; and as the days began to grow longer and warmer, and the snow melted from the ground, and the ice thawed in the rivers, Charlemagne thought it time to make ready for the long-deferred campaign against the Saxons. Messengers were sent out in every direction to summon every true knight and every loyal fighting man to join the king's standard at Aix; and it was expected, that, by the time of the Easter festival, a hundred thousand warriors would be there, ready to march against the Pagan folk of the North. About the king's castle many busy preparations were going on. Some were furbishing up their arms, or mending their old armor; others were providing new weapons for themselves, or new harness for their steeds; knights, squires, pages, and grooms, all found enough to do, and all looked forward with eager impatience to the day that was set for the march. In the smithies the bellows roared and the fires glowed; and smiths and armorers worked day and night, forging swords and spear points, and riveting armor plates and rings of mail. And even in the kitchens there was an unwonted hurrying to and fro, and the sound of busy voices and busier hands; while in the halls and the castle-chambers many a brave-hearted lady sat stitching and embroidering rich garments for her lord.

THE STORY OF ROLAND

The time of the Easter festival came at last. Grass was springing fresh and green in the meadows. The trees were putting forth their leaves. In the wildwood the voice of the cuckoo and the song of the warbler were heard. The ice had disappeared from the river, and the snow had melted in the valleys: the roads were once more passable. It seemed a fitting time for the beginning of new schemes and of bold undertakings. And early one April morning the great army, with Charlemagne and his peers at its head, filed out of the city, and began its march toward the Rhine. And Roland, proud and happy as a knight with spurs, was allowed to ride in the train of Duke Namon.

When the Saxons heard of the coming of the Franks, they hastily crossed again into their own country, and shut themselves up in their towns and strongholds. But Charlemagne followed them without delay; nor did the wide, deep Rhine hinder him long. Through all their land he carried fire and sword; nor did he spare any one through pity. For he was a Christian: while the Saxons were Pagans, and worshipped Thor and Odin; and many of them had never heard of the true God. It is said, that, a little while before this time, an English priest named St. Liebwin had gone alone into the very heart of Saxony for the purpose of carrying the gospel of Christ to that benighted folk. Boldly he stood up before them when they came to worship in their false temples, and, holding the cross in his hands, he upbraided them.

“What do ye?” he said. “The gods that ye worship live not, they understand not, they see not. They are the works of your hands. They can help neither you

THE WAR WITH THE SAXONS

nor themselves. Wherefore, the only true and good God, having pity on you, has sent me unto you to warn you of the trouble which shall come upon you unless ye put away your false gods. A prince, wise, strong, and unsleeping, shall come among you, and he shall fall upon you like a torrent. At one rush he shall invade your country; and he shall lay it waste with fire and sword, and spare none.”

Great was the anger of the Pagan folk when they heard this bold speech of St. Liebwin. Some threatened to tear him to pieces in front of their temples: others ran in haste to the woods, and began to cut sharpened stakes with which to slay him. But one, more wise than the rest, a chief named Buto, stood up before them, and cried out, “Do not act rashly in this matter! It is against our laws, and contrary to our custom, to mistreat or abuse ambassadors. We have always received them kindly, hearkened to their messages, and sent them away with presents. Here is an ambassador from a great God; and should we slay him?”

The words of the chief softened the anger of the Saxons, and they allowed St. Liebwin to return unharmed across the Rhine. But they still clung to their false gods, and thought no more of his warning until after Charlemagne had overrun their country, and carried dire distress among them.

Among the places which fell into the hands of the French was the stronghold of Ehresburg, near which was a temple of the Saxons,—a spacious building, wide and high, and ornamented with thousands of trophies taken in battle. In the midst of this temple

THE STORY OF ROLAND

stood a marble column on which was the figure of an armed warrior holding in one hand a banner, and in the other a balance. On the breastplate of the figure was engraven a bear; and on the shield which hung from his shoulders was painted a lion in a field full of flowers. This figure was the idol known in history as Irmin, and was the image of the war-god of the Saxons. Charlemagne caused the temple of Irmin to be torn down and destroyed, and he buried the idol and its column deep in the earth. But so great was the building, and so large was the image, that the whole army was employed three days in their destruction.

By this time midsummer had come. The sun shone hot and fierce in a cloudless sky. There had been no rain since the early spring, and the ground was parched and dry. There was no water in the brooks; the springs ceased flowing; and ere long the river itself became dry. The leaves of the trees withered for want of moisture; the grain would not ripen in the fields; the meadows and pastures were burned up with the heat and the long drought. Warriors who had never turned their backs upon a foe trembled now at the thought of death from thirst and starvation. Horrible indeed was the fate which threatened the French army, and Charlemagne ordered a quick retreat towards the river Rhine. Yet both men and horses were weak with fasting, and exhausted by the oppressive heat; and the march was slow and painful. They reached the dry bed of an unknown stream, and could go no farther. The soldiers groped among the rocks, and tried in vain to find some trace of moisture in the sand. Every mind was burdened

THE WAR WITH THE SAXONS

with despair. Not one among the knights but that would have given his richest fief for a drink of cold water.

All at once, a storm cloud was seen in the south. Rapidly it rose higher and higher above the horizon. The lightnings flashed; the roar of distant falling rain was heard. A great hoarse shout went up from the parched throats of ten thousand warriors. They were saved. Soon the bed of the river was filled with a torrent of rushing, foaming water; and men and beasts hastened to quench their thirst. And good Archbishop Turpin, taking the crucifix in his hand, stood up before the host, and thanked Heaven for this timely deliverance. And all joined in solemnly singing praises to God; and all devoutly believed that they had been thus blessed because they had overthrown the idol of Irmin, and destroyed his temple. The very same day, the Saxons sent to Charlemagne begging for peace, and offering to do him homage, and pay him tribute. And the king took hostages from them from among the noblest families in the land, and then recrossed the Rhine into his own country.¹

¹ See Note 4 at the end of this volume.