Ririro
READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Havelok Hid From The Traitor

F. J. H. Darton

In former days there was a King of England called Athelwold; the very flower of England was he, and he ruled justly and well. All things in his realm he ordered strictly, and maintained truth and right throughout the land. Under his rule robbers and traitors were put down; men bought and sold freely, without fear, and wrongdoers were so hard pressed that they could but lurk and creep in secret corners. Athelwold set up justice in his kingdom. There was mercy for the fatherless in his day; his judgments could not be turned aside by bribes of silver and gold. If any man did evil, the king's arm reached him to punish him, were he never so wary and strong.

This Athelwold had no heir, save only one daughter, very fair to look upon, named Goldborough. But ere she grew up, the king fell ill of a dire sickness. He knew well that his time was come, and that death was nigh him. "What shall I do now?" he said in his heart. "How shall my daughter fare when I am dead? My heart is troubled for her: I think nought of myself. She cannot yet speak or walk: if she were of age to ride, she could rule England, and I would care nothing about dying."

But it was idle to lament. The king was sure in his mind that he must die, and he sent messengers to all his vassals, to his earls, and his barons, rich and poor, from Roxburgh to Dover, bidding them come to him speedily where he lay sick.

All those who heard his message were sad at the tidings, and prayed that he might be delivered from death. They came with all speed to the king at Winchester.

"Welcome," said he, when they entered the hall of his dwelling. "Full glad am I that you are come. You see in what sorry case I lie. I have bidden you here that you may know that my daughter shall be your lady when I, your lord, am dead. But she is yet a child, and I am fain to make some true man her guardian till she be a woman grown: I will that Godrich, Earl of Cornwall, do guard her and bring her up. He is a true man, wise in counsel and wise in deed, and men have him in awe."

They brought a holy book to the king. On it he made Earl Godrich swear a solemn oath to keep Goldborough well and truly, till she was of age to rule and to order the realm of England wisely. Then the little maid was given to the earl,

her new guardian. Athelwold thanked the earl, and bade him to be true to his charge; and in a little while death took the good king.

When King Athelwold was dead, Godrich ruled England. In every castle he set some knight of his own, whom he could trust: all the English folk he caused to take an oath to be faithful to him; and in a little while Athelwold's realm was altogether in his power.

In the meantime Goldborough was kept at Winchester, and brought up as befitted a king's daughter. Every day she seemed to grow in wisdom and fairness, till when she was twenty years old there was none like her in the land. But Godrich, when he saw how good and how fair she was, grew jealous of her. "Shall she be queen over me?" he thought. "Must I give up my kingdom and my power to her? She has waxed all too proud; I have treated her with too great gentleness. She shall not be queen. I will rule, and after me my son shall be king."

As that treason crept into his mind, he forgot his oath to Athelwold, caring not a straw for it. Without more ado he sent for Goldborough from Winchester and took her to Dover. There he set her in a strong castle, and clad her meanly, and guarded her so strictly that no man could see her or come at her without his leave.

Now it chanced that about this time the same thing came to pass in Denmark as in England. Birkabeyn, King of Denmark, died, and at his death gave to one Earl Godard the charge of his kingdom and of his son Havelok and his two daughters, Swanborough and Elfled. Godard stood by his oath no better than Godrich, but cast all three children into prison, and well-nigh starved them to death. But when they had lain in prison for a little time, and were nearly dead of hunger, he went to see them.

"How do you fare?" he asked, for Havelok ran to him, and crept upon his knees when he sat down, and looked up joyfully into his face. "I hear that you moan and cry: why is this?"

"We hunger sore," answered Havelok. "We have nought to eat, and no man has brought us meat or drink. We are nigh dead of hunger."

Godard heard his words, but felt no pity; he cared not a straw for their misery. He took Swanborough and Elfled by the hand, and slew them then and there. Then he turned to Havelok and would have slain him also. But the boy in terror cried for mercy. "Have pity," he said. "Spare me and I will give you all Denmark, and will vow never to take up arms against you. Let me live, and I will flee from Denmark this very day, and never more come back; I will take oath that Birkabeyn was not my father."

At that some touch of doubt came into Godard's mind. He put up his knife, and looked at Havelok. "If I let him go alive," he thought, "he might work me much woe. He shall die, but not now; I will cast him in the sea and drown him."

He went thence, and sent for a fisherman named Grim. "Grim," he said, "you are my thrall; do my will and to-morrow I will give you your freedom. Take the boy Havelok at night to the sea and cast him therein."

Grim took the boy, and bound him with strong cords, and bore him on his back to his cottage, and showed him to his wife Leve. "You see this boy, wife," said he. "I am to drown him in the sea; when I have done it, I shall be made a free man, and much gold will be ours; so has our Lord Godard promised."

When Dame Leve heard that, she started up, and threw Havelok down so roughly that he hurt his head on a great stone that lay on the ground. "Alas that ever I was a king's son!" he moaned in his pain; and he lay there where he fell till night-time.

When night fell Grim made ready for his task. "Rise up, wife, blow the fire," said he. "Light a candle. I must keep my word to my lord."

Leve rose to tend the fire. Her eyes fell on Havelok, who still lay on the ground. Round him, she marvelled to see, shone a bright light, and out of his mouth proceeded light as it were a sunbeam.

"What is that light?" quoth Dame Leve. "Grim, look what it means; what is this light?"

Grim went to Havelok, and unbound him. He rolled back the shirt from the boy's shoulder. There he saw, bright and clear, a king's birthmark.



"Heaven help us," said Grim, "this is the heir to Denmark, who should be king and lord of us all. He will work Godard great harm." Then he fell on his knees before Havelok. "Lord king," he said, "have mercy on me and on Leve here. We are both yours, lord, both your servants. We will keep you and nurture you till you can ride and bear shield and spear; Godard shall know nought of it. Some day I will take my freedom at your hands, not at his."

Then was Havelok blithe and glad. He sat up and asked for bread. "I am well-nigh dead," he said, "with hunger and hardship."

They fed him and cared for him, and lastly put him to bed; and he slept soundly. On the morrow Grim went to the traitor Godard. "I have done your will on the

boy, lord," he said. "He is drowned in the sea. Now I pray you give me gold for a reward, and grant me my freedom, as you vowed."

Godard looked at him, fierce and cruel of mien. "Will you not rather be made an earl, proud knave?" he asked. "Go home, fool; go, and be evermore a thrall and churl, [Footnote: An Ignorant laborer of the lowest rank.] as you have ever been; no other reward shall be yours. For very little I would lead you to the gallows for your wicked deed."

Grim went away. "What shall I do?" he thought as he hurried home. "He will assuredly hang me on the gallows-tree. It were better to flee out of the land altogether."

He came home and told Leve all; and they took counsel together. Soon Grim sold all his possessions. Only his boat he kept; and that he made ready for a voyage, till there was not so much as a nail wanting to make it better. Then he took on board his wife and his three sons, Robert the Red, William Wendat, and Hugh Raven, and his two fair daughters, Gunnild and Levive, and Havelok; and they set sail.

The wind blew fair behind them, and drove them out to sea. Long did they sail, and came at last to England, to Lindsey at the mouth of the Humber. They landed safely; and before long Grim began to make a little house of clay and turf for them to dwell in. He named the place after himself, Grimsby; and so men call it now, and shall call it forever, from now even to doomsday.

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