Ririro
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Ogier The Dane

Thomas Bulfinch

Ogier the Dane was the son of Geoffroy, who wrested Denmark from the Pagans, and reigned the first Christian king of that country. In his education nothing was neglected to elevate him to the standard of a perfect knight, and render him accomplished in all the arts necessary to make him a hero.

He had hardly reached the age of sixteen years, when Charlemagne, whose power was established over all the sovereigns of his time, recollected that Geoffroy, Ogier's father, had omitted to render the homage due to him as emperor, and sovereign lord of Denmark. He accordingly sent an embassy to demand of the King of Denmark this homage, and on receiving a refusal, sent an army to enforce the demand. Geoffroy, after an unsuccessful resistance, was forced to comply, and as a pledge of his sincerity, delivered Ogier, his eldest son, a hostage to Charles, to be brought up at his court.

Ogier grew up more and more handsome and amiable every day. He surpassed in form, strength, and address all the noble youths his companions; he failed not to be present at all tourneys; he was attentive to the elder knights, and burned with impatience to imitate them.

Yet his heart rose sometimes in secret against his condition as a hostage, and as one apparently forgotten by his father.

Ogier's mother having died, the king had married a second wife, and had a son named Guyon. The new queen had absolute power over her husband, and fearing that, if he should see Ogier again, he would give him the preference over Guyon, she had adroitly persuaded him to delay rendering his homage to Charlemagne, till now four years had passed away since the last renewal of that ceremony. Charlemagne, irritated at this delinquency, drew closer the bonds of Ogier's captivity until he should receive a response from the King of Denmark to a fresh summons which he caused to be sent to him.

The answer of Geoffroy was insulting and defiant, and the rage of Charlemagne was roused in the highest degree. He was at first disposed to wreak his vengeance upon Ogier, his hostage; but consented to spare his life, if Ogier would swear fidelity to him as his liege-lord, and promise not to quit his court without his permission. Ogier accepted these terms, and was allowed to retain all the freedom he had before enjoyed.

The emperor would have immediately taken arms to reduce his disobedient vassal, if he had not been called off in another direction by a message from Pope Leo, imploring his assistance. The Saracens had landed in the neighborhood of Rome, and prepared to carry fire and sword to the capital of the Christian world. Charlemagne speedily assembled an army, crossed the Alps, traversed Italy, and arrived at Spoleto, a strong place to which the Pope had retired. He stopped but two days at Spoleto, and learning that the Infidels were besieging the Capitol, marched promptly to attack them.

The advanced posts of the army were commanded by Duke Namo, on whom Ogier waited as his squire. He did not yet bear arms, not having received the order of knighthood. The Oriflamme, the royal standard, was borne by a knight named Alory, who showed himself unworthy of the honor.

Duke Namo, seeing a strong body of the Infidels advancing to attack him, gave the word to charge them. Ogier remained in the rear, with the other youths, grieving much that he was not permitted to fight. Very soon he saw Alory lower the Oriflamme, and turn his horse in flight. Ogier pointed him out to the young men, and, seizing a club, rushed upon Alory and struck him from his horse. Then, with his companions, he disarmed him, clothed himself in his armor, raised the Oriflamme, and, mounting the horse of the unworthy knight, flew to the front rank, where he joined Duke Namo, drove back the Infidels, and carried the Oriflamme quite through their broken ranks. The duke, thinking it was Alory, whom he had not held in high esteem, was astonished at his strength and valor. Ogier's young companions imitated him, supplying themselves with armor from the bodies of the slain; they followed Ogier and carried death into the ranks of the Saracens, who fell back in confusion upon their main body.



Duke Namo now ordered a retreat, and Ogier obeyed with reluctance, when they perceived Charlemagne advancing to their assistance. The combat now became general, and was more terrible than ever. Charlemagne had overthrown

Corsuble, the commander of the Saracens, and had drawn his famous sword, Joyeuse, to cut off his head, when two Saracen knights set upon him at once, one of whom slew his horse, and the other overthrew the emperor on the sand. Perceiving by the eagle on his casque who he was, they dismounted in haste to give him his death-blow. Never was the life of the emperor in such peril. But Ogier, who saw him fall, flew to his rescue. Though embarrassed with the Oriflamme, he pushed his horse against one of the Saracens and knocked him down; and with his sword dealt the other so vigorous a blow that he fell stunned to the earth. Then helping the emperor to rise, he remounted him on the horse of one of the fallen knights. "Brave and generous Alory!" Charles exclaimed, "I owe to you my honor and my life!" Ogier made no answer; but, leaving Charlemagne surrounded by a great many of the knights who had flown to his succor, he plunged into the thickest ranks of the enemy, and carried the Oriflamme, followed by a gallant train of youthful warriors, till the standard of Mahomet turned in retreat and the Infidels sought safety in their intrenchments.

As the good Archbishop Turpin took his mitre and his crosier, and intoned Te Deum, Ogier, covered with blood and dust, came to lay the Oriflamme at the feet of the emperor. He knelt at the feet of Charlemagne, who embraced him, calling him Alory, while Turpin, from the height of the altar, blessed him with all his might. Then young Orlando, son of the Count Milone and nephew of Charlemagne, no longer able to endure this misapprehension, threw down his helmet, and ran to unlace Ogier's, while the other young men laid aside theirs. It would be difficult to express the surprise, the admiration, and the tenderness of the emperor and his peers. Charlemagne folded Ogier in his arms, and the happy fathers of those brave youths embraced them with tears of joy. "My dear Ogier! I owe you my life! My sword leaps to touch your shoulder, and those of your brave young friends." At these words he drew that famous sword, Joyeuse, and, while Ogier and the rest knelt before him, conferred on them the order of knighthood. The young Orlando and his cousin Oliver could not refrain from falling upon Ogier's neck and pledging with him that brotherhood in arms, so dear and so sacred to the knights of old times; but Charlot, the emperor's son, at the sight of the glory with which Ogier had covered himself, conceived the blackest jealousy and hate.

The rest of the day and the next were spent in the rejoicings of the army. Duke Namo presented them with golden spurs, Charlemagne himself girded on their swords. But what was his astonishment when he examined that intended for Ogier! The loving fairy, Morgana, had had the art to change it, and to substitute one of her own procuring, and when Charlemagne drew it out of the scabbard, these words appeared written on the steel: "My name is Cortana, of the same steel and temper as Joyeuse and Durindana." The emperor saw that a superior power watched over the destiny of Ogier; he vowed to love him as a father

would, and Ogier promised him the devotion of a son.

The Saracen army had hardly recovered from its dismay when Carahue, King of Mauritania, who was one of the knights overthrown by Ogier, determined to challenge him to single combat. With that view, he assumed the dress of a herald, resolved to carry his own message. He began by passing the warmest eulogium upon the knight who bore the Oriflamme on the day of the battle, and concluded by saying that Carahue, King of Mauritania, respected that knight so much that he challenged him to the combat.

Ogier had risen to reply, when he was interrupted by Charlot, who said that the gage of the King of Mauritania could not fitly be received by a vassal, living in captivity; by which he meant Ogier, who was at that time serving as hostage for his father. Fire flashed from the eyes of Ogier, but the presence of the emperor restrained his speech, and he was calmed by the kind looks of Charlemagne, who said, with an angry voice, "Silence, Charlot! By the life of Bertha, my queen, he who has saved my life is as dear to me as yourself. Ogier," he continued, "you are no longer a hostage. Herald! report my answer to your master, that never does knight of my court refuse a challenge on equal terms. Ogier the Dane accepts of his, and I myself am his security."

Carahue, profoundly bowing, replied, "My lord, I was sure that the sentiments of so great a sovereign as yourself would be worthy of your high and brilliant fame; I shall report your answer to my master, who I know admires you, and unwillingly takes arms against you." Then, turning to Charlot, whom he did not know as the son of the emperor, he continued, "As for you, sir knight, if the desire of battle inflames you, I have it in charge from Sadon, cousin of the King of Mauritania, to give the like defiance to any French knights who will grant him the honor of the combat."

Chariot, inflamed with rage and vexation at the public reproof which he had just received, hesitated not to deliver his gage. Carahue received it with Ogier's, and it was agreed that the combat should be on the next day, in a meadow environed by woods and equally distant from both armies.

During the night Charlot collected some knights unworthy of the name; he made them swear to avenge his injuries, armed them in black armor, and sent them to lie in ambush in the wood, with orders to make a pretended attack upon the whole party, but in fact to lay heavy hands upon Ogier and the two Saracens.

At the dawn of day Sadon and Carahue, attended only by two pages to carry their spears, took their way to the appointed meadow; and Charlot and Ogier repaired thither also, but by different paths. Ogier advanced with a calm air, saluted courteously the two Saracen knights, and joined them in arranging the terms of combat.

While this was going on, the perfidious Charlot remained behind and gave his men the signal to advance. That cowardly troop issued from the wood and encompassed the three knights. All three were equally surprised at the attack, but neither of them suspected the other to have any hand in the treason. Seeing the attack made equally upon them all, they united their efforts to resist it, and made the most forward of the assailants bite the dust. Cortana fell on no one without inflicting a mortal wound, but the sword of Carahue was not of equal temper and broke in his hands. At the same instant his horse was slain, and Carahue fell, without a weapon and entangled with his prostrate horse. Ogier, who saw it, ran to his defence, and, leaping to the ground, covered the prince with his shield, supplied him with the sword of one of the fallen ruffians, and would have had him mount his own horse. At that moment Charlot, inflamed with rage, pushed his horse upon Ogier, knocked him down, and would have run him through with his lance if Sadon, who saw the treason, had not sprung upon him and thrust him back. Carahue leapt lightly upon the horse which Ogier presented him, and had time only to exclaim, "Brave Ogier, I am no longer your enemy, I pledge to you an eternal friendship," when numerous Saracen knights were seen approaching, having discovered the treachery, and Charlot with his followers took refuge in the wood.

The troop which advanced was commanded by Dannemont, the exiled King of Denmark, whom Geoffroy, Ogier's father, had driven from his throne and compelled to take refuge with the Saracens. Learning who Ogier was he instantly declared him his prisoner, in spite of the urgent remonstrances and even threats of Carahue and Sadon, and carried him, under a strong guard, to the Saracen camp. Here he was at first subjected to the most rigorous captivity, but Carahue and Sadon insisted so vehemently on his release, threatening to turn their arms against their own party if it was not granted, while Dannemont as eagerly opposed the measure, that Corsuble, the Saracen commander, consented to a middle course, and allowed Ogier the freedom of his camp, upon his promise not to leave it without permission.

Carahue was not satisfied with this partial concession. He left the city next morning, proceeded to the camp of Charlemagne, and demanded to be led to the emperor. When he reached his presence he dismounted from his horse, took off his helmet, drew his sword, and, holding it by the blade, presented it to Charlemagne as he knelt before him.

"Illustrious prince," he said, "behold before you the herald who brought the challenge to your knights from the King of Mauritania. The cowardly old King Dannemont has made the brave Ogier prisoner, and has prevailed on our general to refuse to give him up. I come to make amends for this ungenerous conduct by yielding myself, Carahue, King of Mauritania, your prisoner."

Charlemagne, with all his peers, admired the magnanimity of Carahue; he raised him, embraced him, and restored to him his sword. "Prince," said he, "your presence and the bright example you afford my knights consoles me for the loss of Ogier. Would to God you might receive our holy faith, and be wholly united with us." All the lords of the court, led by Duke Namo, paid their respects to the King of Mauritania. Charlot only failed to appear, fearing to be recognized as a traitor; but the heart of Carahue was too noble to pierce that of Charlemagne by telling him the treachery of his son.

Meanwhile the Saracen army was rent by discord. The troops of Carahue clamored against the commander-in-chief because their king was left in captivity. They even threatened to desert the cause, and turn their arms against their allies. Charlemagne pressed the siege vigorously, till at length the Saracen leaders found themselves compelled to abandon the city and betake themselves to their ships. A truce was made; Ogier was exchanged for Carahue, and the two friends embraced one another with vows of perpetual brotherhood. The Pope was reestablished in his dominions, and Italy being tranquil, Charlemagne returned, with his peers and their followers, to France.

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