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THE FASHION OF THE WOLFING ROOF.

roof were three hearths for the fires, and above each hearth a luffer or smoke-bearer to draw the smoke up when the fires were lighted. For sooth on a bright winter afternoon it was strange to see the three columns of smoke going waving up to the dimness of the mighty roof, and one maybe smitten athwart by the sunbeams. As for the timber of the roof itself and its framing, so exceeding great and high it was, that the tale tells how that none might see the fashion of it from the hall-floor unless he were to raise aloft a blazing faggot on a long pole: since no lack of timber was there among the men of the Mark.

At the end of the hall anigh the Man's-door was the daïs, and a table thereon set thwartwise of the hall; and in front of the daïs was the noblest and greatest of the hearths: (but of the others one was in the very midstest, and another in the Woman's-Chamber) and round about the daïs, along the gable-wall, and hung from pillar to pillar were woven cloths pictured with images of ancient tales and the deeds of the Wolfings, and the deeds of the Gods from whence they came. And this was the fairest place of all the house and the best-beloved of the Folk, and especially of the older and the mightier men: and there were tales told, and songs sung, especially if they were new: and thereto also were messengers brought if any tidings were abroad: there also would the elders talk together about matters concerning the House or the Mid-mark or the whole Folk of the Markmen.

Yet you must not think that their solemn councils were held there, the folk-motes whereat it must be determined what to do and what to forbear doing; for according as such councils, (which they called Things) were of the House or of the Mid-mark or of the whole Folk, were they held each at the due Thing-steads in the Wood aloof from either acre or meadow, (as was the custom of our forefathers for long after) and at such Things would all the men of the House or the Mid-mark or the Folk be present man by man. And in each of these steads was there a Doomring wherein Doom was given by the neighbours chosen, (whom now we call the Jury) in matters between man and man; and no such doom of neighbours was given, and no such voice of the Folk proclaimed in any house or under any roof, nor even as aforesaid on the tilled acres or the depastured meadows. This was the custom of our forefathers, in memory, belike, of the days when as yet there was neither house nor tillage, nor flocks and herds, but the Earth's face only and what freely grew thereon.
THE EVENING REST OF THE HOUSE.

one by one through the lanes between the wheat and the rye towards the meadow. Round the cots of the thralls were gathered knots of men and women both thralls and freemen, some talking together, some hearkening to song or to tale, some singing and some dancing together; and the children gambolling about from group to group with their shrill and tuneful voices, like young thralls who have not yet learned the song of their race. With these were mingled dogs, sons of colour, long of limb, sharp-eared, gaunt and great; they took little heed of the children as they pulled them about in their play, but lay down, or halted about, as though they had forgotten the chase and the wild-wood.

Merry was the folk with that fair tide, and the promise of the harvest, and the joy of life, and there was no weapon among them so close to the house, save here and there the boar-spear of some herdsman or herdswoman late come from the meadow.

Tall and for the most part comely were both men and women; the most of them light-haired and grey-eyed, with cheek-bones somewhat high; white of skin but for the sun's burning, and the wind's parching, and whereas they were tanned of a very ruddy and cheerful hue. But the thralls were some of them of a shorter and darker breed, black-haired also and dark-eyed, lighter of limb; sometimes better built, but sometimes crooked of leg and knotted of arm. But some also were of build and hue not much unlike to the freemen; and these doubtless came of some other Folks of the Gods which had given way in battle before the Men of the Mark, either they or their fathers.

Moreover some of the freemen were unlike their fellows and kindred, being slenderer and closer-knit, and black-haired, but grey-eyed withal; and amongst these were one or two who exceeded in beauty all others of the House.

Now the sun was set and the gloominess was at point to begin and the shadowless twilight lay upon the earth. The singing-songs on the borders of the wood sang uneasily from the scattered hazel-trees above the greenward where the grass was cropped down close by the nibbling of the rabbits; but in spite of their song and the divers voices of the men-folk about the house, it was an evening on which sounds from aloof can be well heard, since noise carry far at such times.

Suddenly they who were on the edges of those things and were the less noisy, held themselves as if to listen; and a group that had gathered
about a minstrel to bear his story fell hearkening also round about the
alloted and hearkening tale-teller: some of the dancers and singers
acted them and in their turn stayed the dance and kept silence to hearken;
and so from group to group spread the change, till all were straining
t heir ears to hearken the tidings. Already the men of the night-shield
had heard it, and the shepherds of them had turned about, and were
rooting smartly back through the lanes of the tall wheat: but the horse
herds were now nearer seen on the darkening meadow, as they galloped
on foot toward their herds to drive home the stallions. For what
they had heard was the tidings of war.

There was a sound in the air as of a humble-bee close to the ear of
one lying on a grassy bank: or whiles as of a cow afar in the meadow
howling in the afternoon when milking-time draws nigh: but it was ever
shillier than the one, and feller than the other: for it changed at will,
though after the first sound of it, it did not rise or fall, because the eye
was windless. You might hear at once that for all it was afar, it was a
great and mighty sound: nor did any that hearkened doubt what it was,
but all knew it for the blast of the great war-horn of the Eldings, whose
Roof lay up Minwater-water next to the Roof of the Weplings.
So those little throngs broke up at once; and all the freemen, and of
the thralls a good many, flocked, both men and women, to the Man's-
door of the hall, and streamed in quietly and with little talk, as men
knowing that they should hear all in due season.

Within the Hall-Sun, amidst the waven stories of time past, sat
the elders and chief warriors on the dais, and amidst all a big strong
man of forty winters, his dark beard a little glittered, his eyes big and
grey. Before him on the board lay the great War-horn of the Weplings
carved out of the tusk of a sea-whale of the North and with many dyes
on it and the Wolf amidst them all; its golden mouth-piece and rim
wrought finely with flowers. There it shone the blazoning, until the
spoken word of some messenger should set forth the tidings borne on
the air by the horn of the Eldings.

But the name of the dark-haired chief was Thiodolf (to wit Folk-
wolf) and he was deemed the wisest man of the Weplings, and the best
man of his hands, and of heart most staunch. Beside him sat the fair
woman called the Hall-Sun: for she was his foster-daughter before men's
eyes: and she was black-haired and grey-eyed like her fosterer,

and never was woman fashioned fairer: she was young of years, scarce
twenty winters old.

There sat the chiefs and elders on the dais, and sound about stood the
kindled intermingled with the thralls, and no man spake, for they were
awaiting sure and certain tidings: and when all were come in who had a
mind to, there was so great a silence in the hall, that the song of the
nightingales on the wood-edge sounded clear and loud therein, and even
the click of the buzz about the upper windows could be heard. Then
amidst the bash of men-folk, and the sounds of the life of the earth came
another sound that made all turn their eyes toward the door; and this
was the pad-pad of one running on the tredden and summer-dried
ground round the hall: it stopped for a moment at the Man's-door, and
the door opened, and the throng parted, making way for the man that
entered and came hastily up to the midst of the table that stood on the
dais athwart the hall, and stood there panting, holding forth in his out-
stretched hand something which not all could see in the dimness of the
hall-twilight, but which all knew nevertheless. The man was young,
lithe and slendour, and had no raiment but linen breeches round his
middle, and skin shoes on his feet. As he stood there gathering his
breath for speech, Thiodolf stood up, and poured mead into a drinking
horn and held it out towards the new-comer, and spoke, but in rhymed
and measure:

"Welcome, thou evening-farer, and holly be thine head,
Since thou hast sought unto us in the heart of the Weplings' stand;
Drink now of the horn of the mighty, and call a health if thou wilt
O'er the eddies of the meal-born to the washing out of guilt.
For thou com'st to the peace of the Weplings, and our very guest thou art,
And mearest as I beheld thee, that I look on a child of the Hartz."

But the man put the horn from him with a hasty hand, and none said
another word to him until he had gotten his breath again; and then he
said:

"All hail ye Wood-Wolf's children! nought may I drink the wiser,
For the mouth and the maw that I carry this eve are nought of mine;
And my feet are the feet of the people, since the word went forth that tide,

"O Eilvere of the Hartzings, no longer shall thou ride..."
In any house of the Markmen than to speak the word and wend, 
Till all men know the tidings and thine errand hath an end.'
Behold, O Wolves, the token and say if it be true!
I bear the shaft of battle that is four-wise cloven through,
And its each end dipped in the blood-stream, both the iron and the horn,
And its midmost scathed with the fire; and the word that I have borne
Along with this war-token is, 'Wolfsings of the Mark
Whenso ye see the war-shaft, by the daylight or the dark,
Beak ye to battle faring, and leave all work undone
Save the gathering for the handplay at the rising of the sun.
Three days hence is the hosting, and thither bear along
Your wains and your kine for the slaughter lest the journey should be long.
For great is the Folk, saith the tidings, that against the Markmen come;
In a far off land is their dwelling, whence they sit at home,
And Welsh is their tongue, and we wot not of the word that is in their
As they march a many together from the cities of the South.'" [mouth,

Therewith he held up yet for a minute the token of the war-arrow
ragged and burnt and bloody; and turning about with it in his hand
went his ways through the open door, none hindering; and when he was
gone, it was as if the token were still in the air there against the heads
of the living men, and the heads of the woven warriors, so lucently had
all gazed at it; and none doubted the tidings or the token. Then said
Thiodolf:

"Forth will we Wolfsing children, and cast a sound abroad:
The mouth of the sea-beast’s weapon shall speak the battle-word;
And ye warriors hearken and hasten, and dig the weed of war,
And then to acre and meadow wend ye adown no more,
For this work shall be for the women to drive our neat from the mead,
And to yoke the wains, and to load them as the men of war have need."

Out then they streamed from the hall, and no man was left therein
to save the fair Half-Sun sitting under the lamp whose name she bore.
But to the highest of the slope they went, where was a mound made

Welsh with these men means Foreign, and is used for all people of Europe who
are not of Gothic or Teutonic blood.