



## SANT EFFLAMM AND KING ARTHUR.<sup>1</sup>

**O**N a far-off day, a day in the shadow of forgotten time, a great king reigned in Inisfail, the Isle of Destiny, whence, later, the holy Columba sailed towards Iona in his frail coracle. This king had a daughter whose hand he was fain to give in high marriage. Her name was Enora, and she was more fair to see than the fairest princesses of her time. When men looked upon her, it was as though they beheld the woman of their dream. Many young lords there were who paid homage to Enora, but of these one only found favour in the sight of the king; and this was Efflamm, the son of a mighty monarch who ruled a distant land. This Lord Efflamm was young and fair. So it came to pass that Efflamm and Enora took the marriage-troth before God and man. Now the brave knight, ere he had quitted his father's kingdom, had vowed a vow. Therefore it was that on the marriage-night, when all slept, he did a strange thing: for a strange thing it was to leave the bridal chamber and the sleeping Enora, and stealthily to quit the palace, followed only by his faithful hound.

Straight to where the waves lapped the shore he went, but when he reached the rocks he gazed in vain for the galley which was to carry him thence: no boat could he discern, because of the darkness which lay upon the moaning sea. As he peered into the night the moon rose, and it was borne

<sup>1</sup> This rendering of the Breton legend 'Sant Efflamm hag ar Roue Arzur' is based upon the ballad of that name given by the late Vicomte Hersart de la Villemarqué in the Barzaz-Breiz.

in upon Eflamm that he must follow her track across the waters. While still he pondered, his gaze chanced upon a little chest tossing forlornly from wave to wave. Drawing it shoreward, he made ready to commit himself to this frail and perilous craft, but first a prayer sped from his lips along the moonway: 'God of the sea, of the moon, and of the human clan! guard me, for henceforth my life is Thine: guard me, for my boat is small, Thy sea is vast.' Thereat the tiny craft began to move, and soon was a dim shadow swallowed up in the drowning darkness. Before the yellow track paled with the coming of day, Eflamm neared the coast of Brittany.

At this time many wild animals roamed through the forests and over the waste lands of Armorica; and there were dreaded haunts whence fierce and terrible dragons devastated the land, and wrought ruin and terror among the poor folk. Nowhere did the curse lie more heavily than on Lannuon: Lannuon of the Islands, which has been called the Venice of Brittany; Lannuon the Fair, where the lads dance the daintiest steps in all the country of Landreger, where the damsels are so beautiful that an unloved maiden is as rare as a star shining in full daylight, or a blossoming rose when winter has come. Of the dragons, whose victims were to be counted by tens of hundreds in Armorica, the great King Arthur had killed many; but even the sword of this mighty hero had been powerless against the Terror of Landreger, the fiercest of a fierce band.

Landreger is sheltered from the blasts of the Atlantic by the chain of the Black Mountains. Far as the gaze can reach green valleys stretch westward, in spring starred white and yellow with violets and primroses—milk-flowers, the children call them. The winding lanes are bordered by hedges of hawthorn and privet, over and amid which interlace the branches of the wild rose and the honeysuckle. Here, as seldom in Kerne or Leon, the air is clear and wind-swept, the sky blue. Hamlets nestle on the slopes, half hidden among rich foliage, and rolling purple heathlands meet the blue of the sky. Smoke rises from the steadings, and the lowing of kine,

the bellowing of bulls, and the barking of dogs break the silence.

But it was not springtime when Efflamm the Holy first saw this fair country. Then, over hill-slope and valley, over moorland and plain lay the white peace of winter. The chain of Black Mountains might well have been a bank of cloud against the horizon, so shining white were they. Yet beneath the peace Efflamm discerned the green sleeping life, he heard the breathing of Nature our mother, with the unborn spring like a child wrapped close to her brown breast beneath its soft garment of snow. He knew that fair would be the land whereon he stood when once the south-west wind blew its bugle over forest and lea.

Soon all other thoughts were merged in one; for he beheld stains of blood on the snow. These Efflamm traced to their source; and thus it was that he found King Arthur stretched prostrate on the ground. By the king's side lay his charger, wounded to death; and over the hero himself stood a furious monster, with one blood-red eye glaring from the centre of his forehead, and green scales, so thick that spear had never pierced them, protecting his shoulders. Gigantic and savage he was, fiercer than a bull with the red rage upon him. His huge scaly tail writhed like a serpent, and in the mouth that stretched from ear to ear were sown broadcast great tusks more terrible than those of a boar.

From sunrise to sunset, and all through one night, king and dragon had fought; throughout the following day and night the conflict continued, the monster as fierce, the knight as courageous, as at the onset. It was now the end of the third day, and the strength of King Arthur was spent.

'For the love of Mary a cup of water, good pilgrim, to cool my parched lips!' cried the stricken champion as he saw the stranger approach.

'By the grace of God I will help thee, and gladly,' answered Efflamm. As he spoke he struck thrice with his staff the mound whereon he stood. Over the white country passed a tremor:

the face of the snow was tinged with faint green ; and in the heart of King Arthur hope was reborn. For a moment there was silence, while the gaze of Efflamm rested on that of the warrior, and over the eyes of the beast a film slowly spread.

Then water sprang from the rock—cool, clear water. As King Arthur drank eagerly, his strength came back to him. Throwing himself on his adversary, he plunged his sword into the monster's throat ; to the very hilt it sank, and with one cry the Terror of Landreger fell dead, and the body rolled over the rocks into the sea. The blood from the wound left gory pools on the snow, and down the white cliff was a blood-red track where the beast had fallen.

King Arthur and Efflamm now stood alone upon the height. Each looked at the other wonderingly. At last the king spoke : 'Follow me, I pray thee, to my palace. I would make thy future prosperous and happy.'

But Efflamm answered : 'Red as the gore at thy feet is my past ; white as the snow on yonder cliff I have vowed my life shall be. Henceforth my days shall be spent on this hill. It may be that as the sun melts the snow, and springtime succeeds to winter, the good God will smile upon me, and my heart shall be green once more.'

At that King Arthur bowed his head, and silently went towards his palace, leaving Efflamm alone upon the hill.

In the stillness of the marriage-night Enora awoke from a dream. 'Efflamm, my hero,' she murmured, ere her eyes opened to the darkness, 'Efflamm, my hero, my king !' But a moment thereafter the silence was broken by the weeping of the lonely bride. She knew that none save herself breathed in that silent chamber, and a strange fear crept over her. It was long before the first whisper of sunlight ran across the frontiers of the morning ; long, at least, it seemed to Enora, who, in bewildered grief, sat at her window gazing towards the east. Her hands were locked, and ever and again her lips moved in prayer.

'Whither has my lord Efflamm fared?' was the question that she put to all, when once the new day was come. And as each made the same answer, 'The good God only can tell that thing,' Enora turned away, and the pain at her heart became yet fiercer. All that day she sat on the seashore. 'Perchance he has gone a-fishing, and his boat has been caught in a storm,' her lips said; but in her heart was a dread silence. 'Or mayhap he is on the hills tracking the deer,' she muttered; yet the pulse gave no answering leap. Thus the hours of light passed; and throughout the darkness Enora watched and wept.

For many weeks thereafter she was alone in her gloom. The roar of the sea, the sougning of the wind, the drip of the rain which fell unceasingly, were all the sounds that pierced to the silence of her soul.

At last one night, when for the third time the moon was at the full, weary with sorrow, she fell asleep and dreamed a dream.

Efflamm stood by her side, radiant as the sun at noon; a glory was about him: 'Follow me, Enora, my bride.' Each word healed an open wound; sweet was the sound of his voice as the cooing of the doves at dawn. 'Follow me into the solitude, that thy white soul may become yet whiter. White it shall be as the snow ere it descends from heaven.'

Is it not a hearthside tale how angels came to carry Enora over the wide stretch of sea between Ireland and Brittany; and how they laid her on the threshold of the hermit's cell?

When she awoke she knocked thrice on the door—

'Efflamm, Efflamm! I am Enora, thy wife. God has borne me hither. In my heart there is joy.'

Efflamm had spent his days in prayer. Each morning the first words on his lips had been, 'May Thy peace fall as morning dew upon Enora'; every nightfall he prayed, 'May Thy cool hand rest on Enora in the gloom.' Every hour of the day it was for her soul he travailed with prayer and fasting.

When he heard the voice at his door, Efflamm knew that God had answered his prayers.

Winter had passed, and springtime had come in the country of Landreger; fresh and green was the grass of the hillside; but of the meeting on that lone spot no man knows aught, though folk say that thereafter it was as if the wind and the sun were comrades.

By the side of his cell Efflamm built a hut for Enora; and thus the two saints lived for many a year. The wonder of the miracles that they wrought was passed from lip to lip, and each day the sick were healed at the touch of Efflamm, and young mothers sought the blessing of Enora.

There came a night when the fishermen, idly at rest where their boats lay becalmed, saw the heavens open, and heard a strange, wild music. On the morrow a poor woman, unable to suckle her child, toiled up the hill. She knocked at the door of Enora's cell many times, but no voice bade her enter. When she looked through a hole in the wall, a glory filled the hut. It came from the fair body of the saint, who lay dead on the earthen floor. Near her knelt a little lad robed in white.

Startled with awe, the good woman ran to the cell of Efflamm; but he, too, lay in the white sleep which comes to all when the pulse in the heart is weary.

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