OLD MEN AT PEVENSEY

‘It has nought to do with apes or devils,’ Sir Richard went on, in an undertone. ‘It concerns De Aquila, than whom there was never bolder nor craftier, nor more hardy knight born. And, remember, he was an old, old man at that time.’

‘When?’ said Dan.

‘When we came back from sailing with Witta.’

‘What did you do with your gold?’ said Dan.

‘Have patience. Link by link is chain-mail made. I will tell all in its place. We bore the gold to Pevensey on horseback—three loads of it—and then up to the north chamber, above the Great Hall of Pevensey Castle, where De Aquila lay in winter. He sat on his bed like a little white falcon, turning his head swiftly from one to the other as we told our tale. Jehan the Crab, an old sour man-at-arms, guarded the stairway, but De Aquila bade him wait at the stair-foot, and let down both leather

curtains over the door. It was Jehan whom De Aquila had sent to us with the horses, and only Jehan had loaded the gold. When our story was told, De Aquila gave us the news of England, for we were as men waked from a year-long sleep. The Red King was dead—slain (ye remember?) the day we set

sail—and Henry, his younger brother, had made himself King of England over

the head of Robert of Normandy. This was the very thing that the Red King had done to Robert when our Great William died. Then Robert of Normandy, mad, as De Aquila said, at twice missing of this kingdom, had sent an army against England, which army had been well beaten back to their ships at Portsmouth. A little earlier, and Witta's ship would have rowed through them.

"'And now," said De Aquila, "half the great Barons of the north and west are out against the King between Salisbury and Shrewsbury; and half the other half wait to see which way the game shall go. They say Henry is overly English for their stomachs, because he hath married an English wife and she hath coaxed him to give back their old laws to our Saxons. (Better ride a horse on the bit he knows, I say.) But that is only a cloak to their falsehood." He cracked his finger on the table where the wine was spilt, and thus he spoke:—

"'William crammed us Norman barons full of good English acres after Santlache. I had my share too," he said, and clapped Hugh on the shoulder; "but I warned him—I warned him before Odo rebelled—that he should have bidden the Barons give up their lands and lordships in

Normandy if they would be English lords. Now they are all but princes both in England and Normandy—trencher-fed hounds, with a foot in one trough and both eyes on the other! Robert of Normandy has sent them word that if they do not fight for him in England he will sack and harry out their lands in Normandy. Therefore Clare has risen, Fitz Osborn has risen, Montgomery has risen—whom our First William made an English earl. Even D'Arcy is out with his men, whose father I remember a little hedge-sparrow knight nearby Caen. If Henry wins, the Barons can still flee to Normandy, where Robert will welcome them. If Henry loses, Robert, he says, will give them more lands in England. Oh, a pest—a pest on Normandy, for she will be our England's curse this many a long year!"

"'Amen," said Hugh. "But will the war come our ways, think you?"

"'Not from the North," said De Aquila. "But the sea is always open. If the Barons gain the upper hand Robert will send another army into England for sure; and this time I think he will land here—where his father, the Conqueror, landed. Ye have brought your pigs to a pretty market! Half England alight, and gold enough on the ground"—he stamped on the bars beneath the table—"to set every sword in Christendom fighting."

"'What is to do?" said Hugh. "I have no keep at Dallington; and if we buried it, whom could we trust?"

“‘Me,” said De Aquila. “Pevensey walls are strong. No man but Jehan, who is my dog, knows what is between them.” He drew a curtain by the shot-window and showed us the shaft of a well in the thickness of the wall.

“‘I made it for a drinking-well,” he said, “but we found salt water, and it rises and falls with the tide. Hark!” We heard the water whistle and blow at the bottom. “Will it serve?” said he.

“‘Needs must,” said Hugh. “Our lives are in thy hands.” So we lowered all the gold down except one small chest of it by De Aquila’s bed, which we kept as much for his delight in its weight and colour as for any our needs.

‘In the morning, ere we rode to our Manors, he said: “I do not say farewell; because ye will return and bide here. Not for love nor for sorrow, but to be with the gold. Have a care,” he said, laughing, “lest I use it to make myself Pope. Trust me not, but return!”’

Sir Richard paused and smiled sadly.

‘In seven days, then, we returned from our Manors—from the Manors which had been ours.’

‘And were the children quite well?’ said Una.

‘My sons were young. Land and governance belong by right to young men.’ Sir Richard was talking to himself. ‘It would have broken their hearts if we had taken back our Manors. They made us great welcome, but we could see—Hugh and I could see—that our day was done. I was a cripple and he a one-armed man. No!’ He shook his head. ‘And therefore’—he raised his voice—‘we rode back to Pevensey.’

‘I’m sorry,’ said Una, for the knight seemed very sorrowful.

‘Little maid, it all passed long ago. They were young; we were old. We let them rule the Manors. “Aha!” cried De Aquila from his shot-window, when we
dismounted. “Back again to earth, old foxes?” but when we were in his chamber above the hall he puts his arms about us and says, “Welcome, ghosts! Welcome, poor ghosts!”... Thus it fell out that we were rich beyond belief, and lonely. And lonely!’

‘What did you do?’ said Dan.

‘We watched for Robert of Normandy,’ said the knight. ‘De Aquila was like Witta. He suffered no idleness. In fair weather we would ride along between Bexlei on the one side, to Cuckmere on the other—sometimes with hawk, sometimes with hound (there are stout hares both on the Marsh and the Downland), but always with an eye to the sea, for fear of fleets from Normandy. In foul weather he would walk on the top of his tower, frowning against the rain—peering here and pointing there. It always vexed him to

think how Witta's ship had come and gone without his knowledge. When the wind ceased and ships anchored, to the wharf's edge he would go and, leaning on his sword among the stinking fish, would call to the mariners for their news from France. His other eye he kept landward for word of Henry's war against the Barons.

'Many brought him news—jongleurs, harpers, pedlars, sutlers, priests, and the like; and, though he was secret enough in small things, yet, if their news misliked him, then, regarding neither time nor place nor people, would he curse our King Henry for a fool or a babe. I have heard him cry aloud by the fishing-boats: "If I were King of England I would do thus and thus"; and when I rode out to see that the warning-beacons were laid and dry, he hath often called to me from the shot-window: "Look to it, Richard! Do not copy our blind King, but see with thine own eyes and feel with thine own hands." I do not think he knew any sort of fear. And so we lived at Pevensey, in the little chamber above the Hall.

'One foul night came word that a messenger of the King waited below. We were chilled after a long riding in the fog towards Bexlei, which is an easy place for ships to land. De Aquila sent word the man might either eat with us or wait till we had fed. Anon Jehan, at the stair-head, cried that he had called for horse, and was gone. "Pest on him!" said De Aquila. "I have more to do than to shiver in the Great Hall for every gadling the King sends. Left he no word?"

'"None," said Jehan, "except"—he had been with De Aquila at

Santlache—"except he said that if an old dog could not learn new tricks it was time to sweep out the kennel."

"'Oho!" said De Aquila, rubbing his nose, "to whom did he say that?"

"'To his beard, chiefly, but some to his horse's flank as he was girthing up. I followed him out," said Jehan the Crab.

"'What was his shield-mark?"

"'Gold horseshoes on black," said the Crab.

"'That is one of Fulke's men," said De Aquila.'

Puck broke in very gently, 'Gold horseshoes on black is not the Fulkes' shield. The Fulkes' arms are——'

The knight waved one hand statelily.

'Thou knowest that evil man's true name,' he replied, 'but I have chosen to call him Fulke because I promised him I would not tell the story of his wickedness so that any man might guess it. I have changed all the names in my tale. His children's children may be still alive.'

'True—true,' said Puck, smiling softly. 'It is knightly to keep faith—even after a thousand years.'

Sir Richard bowed a little and went on:—

"'Gold horseshoes on black?" said De Aquila. "I had heard Fulke had joined the Barons, but if this is true our King must be of the upper hand. No matter, all Fulkes are faithful. Still, I would not have sent the man away empty."

"'He fed," said Jehan. "Gilbert the Clerk fetched him meat and wine from the kitchens. He ate at Gilbert's table."

'This Gilbert was a clerk from Battle Abbey, who kept the accounts of the Manor of Pevensey. He was tall and pale-coloured, and carried those new-fashioned beads for counting of prayers. They were large brown nuts or seeds, and hanging from his girdle with his penner and inkhorn they clashed when he walked. His place was in the great fireplace. There was his table of accounts, and there he lay o' nights. He feared the hounds in the Hall that came nosing after bones or to sleep on the warm ashes, and would slash at them with his beads—like a woman. When De Aquila sat in Hall to do justice, take fines, or grant lands, Gilbert would so write it in the Manor-roll. But it was none of his work to feed our guests, or to let them depart without his lord's knowledge.

'Said De Aquila, after Jehan was gone down the stair: "Hugh, hast thou ever told my Gilbert thou canst read Latin hand-of-write?"

"'No," said Hugh. "He is no friend to me, or to Odo my hound either." "No matter," said De Aquila. "Let him never know thou canst tell one letter from its fellow, and"—here he jerked us in the ribs with his scabbard—"watch him both of ye. There be devils in Africa, as I have heard, but by the Saints there be greater devils in Pevensey!" And that was all he would say.

'It chanced, some small while afterwards, a Norman man-at-arms would wed a

Saxon wench of the Manor, and Gilbert (we had watched him well since De Aquila spoke) doubted whether her folk were free or slave. Since De Aquila would give them a field of good land, if she were free, the matter came up at the justice in Great Hall before De Aquila. First the wench's father spoke; then her mother; then all together, till the hall rang and the hounds bayed. De Aquila held up his hands. "Write her free," he called to Gilbert by the fireplace. "A' God's Name write her free, before she deafens me! Yes, yes," he said to the wench that was on her knees at him; "thou art Cerdic's sister, and own cousin to the Lady of Mercia, if thou wilt be silent. In fifty years there will be neither Norman nor Saxon, but all English," said he, "and these are the men that do our work!" He clapped the man-at-arms, that was Jehan's nephew, on the shoulder, and kissed the wench, and fretted with his feet among the rushes to show it was finished. (The Great Hall is always bitter cold.) I stood at his side; Hugh was behind Gilbert in the fireplace making to play with wise rough Odo. He signed to De Aquila, who bade Gilbert measure the new field for the new couple. Out then runs our Gilbert between man and maid, his beads

clashing at his waist, and the Hall being empty, we three sit by the fire.

'Said Hugh, leaning down to the hearthstones, "I saw this stone move under Gilbert's foot when Odo snuffed at it. Look!" De Aquila digged in the ashes with his sword; the stone tilted; beneath it lay a parchment folden, and the writing atop was: "Words spoken against the King by our Lord of Pevensey—the second part."

'Here was set out (Hugh read it us whispering) every jest De Aquila had made to us touching the King; every time he had called out to me from the shot-window, and every time he had said what he would do if he were King of England. Yes, day by day had his daily speech, which he never stinted, been set down by Gilbert, tricked out and twisted from its true meaning, yet withal so cunningly that none could deny who knew him that De Aquila had in some sort spoken those words. Ye see?'

Dan and Una nodded.

'Yes,' said Una, gravely. 'It isn't what you say so much. It's what you mean when you say it. Like calling Dan a beast in fun. Only grown-ups don't always understand.'

"'He hath done this day by day before our very face?" said De Aquila.

"Nay, hour by hour," said Hugh. "When De Aquila spoke even now, in the hall, of Saxons and Normans, I saw Gilbert write on a parchment, which he

kept beside the Manor-roll, that De Aquila said soon there would be no Normans left in England if his men-at-arms did their work aright."

"'Bones of the Saints!" said De Aquila. "What avail is honour or a sword against a pen? Where did Gilbert hide that writing? He shall eat it."

"'In his breast when he ran out," said Hugh. "Which made me look to see where he kept his finished stuff. When Odo scratched at this stone here, I saw his face change. So I was sure."

"'He is bold," said De Aquila. "Do him justice. In his own fashion, my Gilbert is bold."

"'Overbold," said Hugh. "Hearken here," and he read: "Upon the feast of St. Agatha, our Lord of Pevensey, lying in his upper chamber, being clothed in his second fur gown reversed with rabbit——"

"'Pest on him! He is not my tire-woman!" said De Aquila, and Hugh and I laughed.

"'Reversed with rabbit, seeing a fog over the marshes, did wake Sir Richard Dalyngridge, his drunken cup-mate" (here they laughed at me) "and said, 'Peer out, old fox, for God is on the Duke of Normandy's side.'"

"'So did I. It was a black fog. Robert could have landed ten thousand men, and we none the wiser. Does he tell how we were out all day riding the

marsh, and how I near perished in a quicksand, and coughed like a sick ewe for ten days after?" cried De Aquila.

"'No," said Hugh. "But here is the prayer of Gilbert himself to his master Fulke."

"'Ah," said De Aquila. "Well I knew it was Fulke. What is the price of my blood?"

"'Gilbert prayeth that when our Lord of Pevensey is stripped of his lands on this evidence which Gilbert hath, with fear and pains, collected——"

"'Fear and pains is a true word," said De Aquila, and sucked in his cheeks. "But how excellent a weapon is a pen! I must learn it."

"'He prays that Fulke will advance him from his present service to that honour in the Church which Fulke promised him. And lest Fulke should forget, he has written below, 'To be Sacristan of Battle.'"

'At this De Aquila whistled. "A man who can plot against one lord can plot against another. When I am stripped of my lands Fulke will whip off my Gilbert's foolish head. None the less Battle needs a new Sacristan. They tell me the Abbot Henry keeps no sort of rule there."

"'Let the Abbot wait," said Hugh. "It is our heads and our lands that are in danger. This parchment is the second part of the tale. The first has

gone to Fulke, and so to the King, who will hold us traitors."

"'Assuredly," said De Aquila. "Fulke's man took the first part that evening when Gilbert fed him, and our King is so beset by his brother and his Barons (small blame, too!) that he is mad with mistrust. Fulke has his ear, and pours poison into it. Presently the King gives him my land and yours. This is old," and he leaned back and yawned.

"'And thou wilt surrender Pevensey without word or blow?" said Hugh. "We Saxons will fight your King then. I will go warn my nephew at Dallington. Give me a horse!"

"'Give thee a toy and a rattle." said De Aquila. "Put back the parchment, and rake over the ashes. If Fulke is given my Pevensey which is England's gate, what will he do with it? He is Norman at heart, and his heart is in Normandy, where he can kill peasants at his pleasure. He will open England's gate to our sleepy Robert, as Odo and Mortain tried to do, and then there will be another landing and another Santlache. Therefore I cannot give up Pevensey."

"'Good," said we two.

"'Ah, but wait! If my King be made, on Gilbert's evidence, to mistrust me, he will send his men against me here, and, while we fight, England's gate is left unguarded. Who will be the first to come through thereby? Even Robert of Normandy. Therefore I cannot fight my King." He nursed his

sword—thus.

"'This is saying and unsaying like a Norman," said Hugh. "What of our Manors?"

"'I do not think for myself," said De Aquila, "nor for our King, nor for your lands. I think for England, for whom neither King nor Baron thinks. I am not Norman, Sir Richard, nor Saxon, Sir Hugh. English am I."

"'Saxon, Norman, or English," said Hugh, "our lives are thine, however the game goes. When do we hang Gilbert?"

"'Never," said De Aquila. "Who knows he may yet be Sacristan of Battle, for, to do him justice, he is a good writer. Dead men make dumb witnesses. Wait."

"'But the King may give Pevensey to Fulke. And our Manors go with it," said I. "Shall we tell our sons?"

"'No. The King will not wake up a hornet's nest in the South till he has smoked out the bees in the North. He may hold me a traitor; but at least he sees I am not fighting against him, and every day that I lie still is so much gain to him while he fights the barons. If he were wise he would wait till that war were over before he made new enemies. But I think Fulke will play upon him to send for me, and if I do not obey the summons that will, to Henry's mind, be proof of my treason. But mere talk, such as

Gilbert sends, is no proof nowadays. We Barons follow the Church, and, like Anselm, we speak what we please. Let us go about our day's dealings, and say naught to Gilbert."

"'Then we do nothing?" said Hugh.

"'We wait," said De Aquila. "I am old, but still I find that the most grievous work I know."

'And so we found it, but in the end De Aquila was right.

'A little later in the year, armed men rode over the hill, the Golden Horseshoes flying behind the King's banner. Said De Aquila, at the window of our chamber: "How did I tell you? Here comes Fulke himself to spy out his new lands which our King hath promised him if he can bring proof of my treason."

"'How dost thou know?" said Hugh.

"'Because that is what I would do if I were Fulke, but I should have brought more men. My roan horse to your old shoes," said he, "Fulke brings me the King's Summons to leave Pevensey and join the war." He sucked in his cheeks and drummed on the edge of the shaft, where the water sounded all hollow.

"'Shall we go?" said I.

“‘Go! At this time of year? Stark madness,” said he. “Take me from Pevensey to fisk and flyte through fern and forest, and in three days Robert’s keels would be lying on Pevensey mud with ten thousand men! Who would stop them—Fulke?”

‘The horns blew without, and anon Fulke cried the King’s Summons at the great door that De Aquila with all men and horse should join the King’s camp at Salisbury.

“‘How did I tell you?” said De Aquila. “There are twenty Barons ’twixt here and Salisbury could give King Henry good land-service, but he has been worked upon by Fulke to send south and call me—me!—off the Gate of England, when his enemies stand about to batter it in. See that Fulke’s men lie in the big south barn,” said he. “Give them drink, and when Fulke has eaten we will drink in my chamber. The Great Hall is too cold for old bones.”

‘As soon as he was off-horse Fulke went to the chapel with Gilbert to give thanks for his safe coming, and when he had eaten—he was a fat man, and rolled his eyes greedily at our good roast Sussex wheatears—we led him to the little upper chamber, whither Gilbert had already gone with the Manor-roll. I remember when Fulke heard the tide blow and whistle in the shaft he leaped back, and his long down-turned stirrup-shoes caught in the rushes and he stumbled, so that Jehan behind him found it easy to knock his head against the wall.’

‘Did you know it was going to happen?’ said Dan.

‘Assuredly,’ said Sir Richard, with a sweet smile. ‘I put my foot on his sword and plucked away his dagger, but he knew not whether it was day or night for a while. He lay rolling his eyes and bubbling with his mouth, and Jehan roped him like a calf. He was cased all in that new-fangled armour which we call lizard-mail. Not rings like my hauberk here’—Sir Richard tapped his chest—‘but little pieces of dagger-proof steel overlapping on stout leather. We stripped it off (no need to spoil good harness by wetting it), and in the neck-piece De Aquila found the same folden piece of parchment which we had put back under the hearthstone.

‘At this Gilbert would have run out. I laid my hand on his shoulder. It sufficed. He fell to trembling and praying on his beads.

“‘Gilbert,” said De Aquila, “here be more notable sayings and doings of our Lord of Pevensey for thee to write down. Take penner and inkhorn, Gilbert. We cannot all be Sacristans of Battle.”

‘Said Fulke from the floor, “Ye have bound a King’s messenger. Pevensey shall burn for this!”

“‘Maybe. I have seen it besieged once,” said De Aquila, “but heart up, Fulke. I promise thee that thou shalt be hanged in the middle of the flames at the end of that siege, if I have to share my last loaf with

thee; and that is more than Odo would have done when we starved out him and Mortain."

'Then Fulke sat up and looked long and cunningly at De Aquila.

"'By the Saints," said he, "why didst thou not say thou wast on the Duke's side at the first?"

"'Am I?" said De Aquila.

'Fulke laughed and said, "No man who serves King Henry dare do this much to his messenger. When didst thou come over to the Duke? Let me up and we
can smooth it out together." And he smiled and becked and winked.

"'Yes, we will smooth it out," said De Aquila. He nodded to me, and Jehan and I heaved up Fulke—he was a heavy man—and lowered him into the shaft by
a rope, not so as to stand on our gold, but dangling by his shoulders a little above. It was turn of ebb, and the water came to his knees. He said nothing, but shivered somewhat.

'Then Jehan of a sudden beat down Gilbert's wrist with his sheathed dagger, "Stop!" he said. "He swallows his beads."

"'Poison, belike," said De Aquila. "It is good for men who know too much. I have carried it these thirty years. Give me!"

‘Then Gilbert wept and howled. De Aquila ran the beads through his fingers. The last one—I have said they were large nuts—opened in two halves on a pin, and there was a small folded parchment within. On it was written: “The Old Dog goes to Salisbury to be beaten. I have his Kennel. Come quickly.”

“‘This is worse than poison,” said De Aquila, very softly, and sucked in his cheeks. Then Gilbert grovelled in the rushes, and told us all he knew. The letter, as we guessed, was from Fulke to the Duke (and not the first that had passed between them); Fulke had given it to Gilbert in the chapel, and Gilbert thought to have taken it by morning to a certain fishing-boat at the wharf, which trafficked between Pevensey and the French shore. Gilbert was a false fellow, but he found time between his quakings and shakings to swear that the master of the boat knew nothing of the matter.

“‘He hath called me shaved head,” said Gilbert, “and he hath thrown haddock-guts at me; but for all that, he is no traitor.”

“‘I will have no clerk of mine mishandled or miscalled,” said De Aquila. “That seaman shall be whipped at his own mast. Write me first a letter, and thou shalt bear it, with the order for the whipping, to-morrow to the boat.”

‘At this Gilbert would have kissed De Aquila’s hand—he had not hoped to

live until the morning—and when he trembled less he wrote a letter as from Fulke to the Duke saying that the Kennel, which signified Pevensey, was shut, and that the old Dog (which was De Aquila) sat outside it, and, moreover, that all had been betrayed.

"'Write to any man that all is betrayed," said De Aquila, "and even the Pope himself would sleep uneasily. Eh, Jehan? If one told thee all was betrayed, what wouldst thou do?"

"'I would run away," said Jehan. "It might be true."

"'Well said," quoth De Aquila. "Write, Gilbert, that Montgomery, the great Earl, hath made his peace with the King, and that little D'Arcy, whom I hate, hath been hanged by the heels. We will give Robert full measure to chew upon. Write also that Fulke himself is sick to death of a dropsy."

"'Nay?" cried Fulke, hanging in the well-shaft. "Drown me out of hand, but do not make a jest of me."

"'Jest? I?" said De Aquila. "I am but fighting for life and lands with a pen, as thou hast shown me, Fulke."

'Then Fulke groaned, for he was cold, and, "Let me confess," said he.

"'Now, this is right neighbourly," said De Aquila, leaning over the shaft. "Thou hast read my sayings and doings—or at least the first part of

them—and thou art minded to repay me with thy own doings and sayings. Take

penner and inkhorn, Gilbert. Here is work that will not irk thee."

"'Let my men go without hurt, and I will confess my treason against the King," said Fulke.

"'Now, why has he grown so tender of his men of a sudden?" said Hugh to me; for Fulke had no name for mercy to his men. Plunder he gave them, but pity, none.

"'Té! Té!" said De Aquila. "Thy treason was all confessed long ago by Gilbert. It would be enough to hang Montgomery himself."

"'Nay; but spare my men," said Fulke; and we heard him splash like a fish in a pond, for the tide was rising.

"'All in good time," said De Aquila. "The night is young; the wine is old; and we need only the merry tale. Begin the story of thy life since when thou wast a lad at Tours. Tell it nimbly!"

"'Ye shame me to my soul," said Fulke.

"'Then I have done what neither King nor Duke could do," said De Aquila. "But begin, and forget nothing."

"'Send thy man away," said Fulke.

"'That much I can," said De Aquila. "But, remember, I am like the Danes' King; I cannot turn the tide."

"'How long will it rise?" said Fulke, and splashed anew.

"'For three hours," said De Aquila. "Time to tell all thy good deeds. Begin, and Gilbert—I have heard thou art somewhat careless—do not twist his words from their true meaning."

'So—fear of death in the dark being upon him—Fulke began; and Gilbert, not knowing what his fate might be, wrote it word by word. I have heard many tales, but never heard I aught to match the tale of Fulke, his black life, as Fulke told it hollowly, hanging in the shaft.'

'Was it bad?' said Dan, awestruck.

'Beyond belief,' Sir Richard answered. 'None the less, there was that in it which forced even Gilbert to laugh. We three laughed till we ached. At one place his teeth so chattered that we could not well hear, and we reached him down a cup of wine. Then he warmed to it, and smoothly set out all his shifts, malices, and treacheries, his extreme boldnesses (he was desperate bold); his retreats, shufflings, and counterfeitings (he was also inconceivably a coward); his lack of gear and honour; his despair at

their loss; his remedies, and well-coloured contrivances. Yes, he waved the filthy rags of his life before us, as though they had been some proud banner. When he ceased, we saw by torches that the tide stood at the corners of his mouth, and he breathed strongly through his nose.

'We had him out, and rubbed him; we wrapped him in a cloak, and gave him wine, and we leaned and looked upon him the while he drank. He was shivering, but shameless.

'Of a sudden we heard Jehan at the stairway wake, but a boy pushed past him, and stood before us, the hall rushes in his hair, all slubbered with sleep. "My father! My father! I dreamed of treachery," he cried, and babbled thickly.

"'There is no treachery here," said Fulke. "Go," and the boy turned, even then not fully awake, and Jehan led him by the hand to the Great Hall.

"'Thy only son!" said De Aquila, "Why didst thou bring the child here?"

"'He is my heir. I dared not trust him to my brother," said Fulke, and now he was ashamed. De Aquila said nothing, but sat weighing a wine cup in his two hands—thus. Anon, Fulke touched him on the knee.

"'Let the boy escape to Normandy," said he, "and do with me at thy pleasure. Yea, hang me to-morrow, with my letter to Robert round my neck, but let the boy go."

“‘Be still,” said De Aquila. “I think for England.”

‘So we waited what our Lord of Pevensey should devise; and the sweat ran down Fulke’s forehead.

‘At last said De Aquila: “I am too old to judge, or to trust any man. I do not covet thy lands, as thou hast coveted mine; and whether thou art any better or any worse than any other black Angevin thief, it is for thy King to find out. Therefore, go back to thy King, Fulke.”

“‘And thou wilt say nothing of what has passed?” said Fulke.

“‘Why should I? Thy son will stay with me. If the King calls me again to leave Pevensey, which I must guard against England’s enemies; if the King sends his men against me for a traitor; or if I hear that the King in his bed thinks any evil of me or my two knights, thy son will be hanged from out this window, Fulke.”’

‘But it hadn’t anything to do with his son,’ cried Una, startled.

‘How could we have hanged Fulke?’ said Sir Richard. ‘We needed him to make
our peace with the King. He would have betrayed half England for the boy’s sake. Of that we were sure.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Una. ‘But I think it was simply awful.’

‘So did not Fulke. He was well pleased.’

‘What? Because his son was going to be killed?’

‘Nay. Because De Aquila had shown him how he might save the boy’s life and

his own lands and honours. “I will do it,” he said. “I swear I will do it.

I will tell the King thou art no traitor, but the most excellent, valiant,

and perfect of us all. Yes, I will save thee.”

‘De Aquila looked still into the bottom of the cup, rolling the wine-dregs

to and fro.

‘“Ay,” he said. “If I had a son, I would, I think, save him. But do not by

any means tell me how thou wilt go about it.”

‘“Nay, nay,” said Fulke, nodding his bald head wisely. “That is my secret.

But rest at ease, De Aquila, no hair of thy head nor rood of thy land

shall be forfeited,” and he smiled like one planning great good deeds.

‘“And henceforward,” said De Aquila, “I counsel thee to serve one

master—not two.”

‘“What?” said Fulke. “Can I work no more honest trading between the two

sides these troublous times?"

"'Serve Robert or the King—England or Normandy," said De Aquila. "I care not which it is, but make thy choice here and now."

"'The King, then," said Fulke, "for I see he is better served than Robert. Shall I swear it?"

"'No need," said De Aquila, and he laid his hand on the parchments which Gilbert had written. "It shall be some part of my Gilbert's penance to copy out the savoury tale of thy life, till we have made ten, twenty, an hundred, maybe, copies. How many cattle, think you, would the Bishop of Tours give for that tale? Or thy brother? Or the Monks of Blois? Minstrels will turn it into songs which thy own Saxon serfs shall sing behind their plough-stilts, and men-at-arms riding through thy Norman towns. From here
to Rome, Fulke, men will make very merry over that tale, and how Fulke told it, hanging in a well, like a drowned puppy. This shall be thy punishment, if ever I find thee double-dealing with thy King any more. Meantime, the parchments stay here with thy son. Him I will return to thee when thou hast made my peace with the King. The parchments never."

'Fulke hid his face and groaned.

"'Bones of the Saints!" said De Aquila, laughing. "The pen cuts deep. I could never have fetched that grunt out of thee with any sword."

‘“But so long as I do not anger thee, my tale will be secret?” said Fulke.

‘“Just so long. Does that comfort thee, Fulke?” said De Aquila.

‘“What other comfort have ye left me?” he said, and of a sudden he wept hopelessly like a child, dropping his face on his knees.’

‘Poor Fulke,’ said Una.

‘I pitied him also,’ said Sir Richard.

‘“After the spur, corn,” said De Aquila, and he threw Fulke three wedges of gold that he had taken from our little chest by the bed-place.

‘“If I had known this,” said Fulke, catching his breath, “I would never have lifted hand against Pevensey. Only lack of this yellow stuff has made me so unlucky in my dealings.”

‘It was dawn then, and they stirred in the Great Hall below. We sent down Fulke’s mail to be scoured, and when he rode away at noon under his own and the King’s banner very splendid and stately did he show. He smoothed his long beard, and called his son to his stirrup and kissed him. De Aquila rode with him as far as the New Mill landward. We thought the night had been all a dream.’

‘But did he make it right with the King?’ Dan asked. ‘About your not being traitors, I mean?’

Sir Richard smiled. ‘The King sent no second summons to Pevensey, nor did he ask why De Aquila had not obeyed the first. Yes, that was Fulke’s work. I know not how he did it, but it was well and swiftly done.’

‘Then you didn’t do anything to his son?’ said Una.

‘The boy? Oh, he was an imp. He turned the keep doors out of dortoirs while we had him. He sang foul songs, learned in the Barons’ camps—poor fool; he set the hounds fighting in hall; he lit the rushes to drive out, as he said, the fleas; he drew his dagger on Jehan, who threw him down the stairway for it; and he rode his horse through crops and among sheep. But when we had beaten him, and showed him wolf and deer, he followed us old men like a young, eager hound, and called us “uncle.” His father came the summer’s end to take him away, but the boy had no lust to go, because of the otter-hunting, and he stayed on till the fox-hunting. I gave him a bittern’s claw to bring him good luck at shooting. An imp, if ever there was!’

‘And what happened to Gilbert?’ said Dan.

‘Not even a whipping. De Aquila said he would sooner a clerk, however false, that knew the Manor-roll than a fool, however true, that must be taught his work afresh. Moreover, after that night I think Gilbert loved

as much as he feared De Aquila. At least he would not leave us—not even when Vivian, the King's Clerk, would have made him Sacristan of Battle Abbey. A false fellow, but, in his fashion, bold.'

'Did Robert ever land in Pevensey after all?' Dan went on.

'We guarded the coast too well while Henry was fighting his Barons; and three or four years later, when England had peace, Henry crossed to Normandy and showed his brother some work at Tenchebrai that cured Robert
of fighting. Many of Henry's men sailed from Pevensey to that war. Fulke came, I remember, and we all four lay in the little chamber once again, and drank together. De Aquila was right. One should not judge men. Fulke was merry. Yes, always merry—with a catch in his breath.'

'And what did you do afterwards?' said Una.

'We talked together of times past. That is all men can do when they grow old, little maid.'

The bell for tea rang faintly across the meadows. Dan lay in the bows of the Golden Hind; Una in the stern, the book of verses open in her lap, was reading from 'The Slave's Dream':—

'Again in the mist and shadow of sleep
He saw his native land.'

‘I don’t know when you began that,’ said Dan, sleepily.

On the middle thwart of the boat, beside Una’s sun-bonnet, lay an Oak leaf, an Ash leaf, and a Thorn leaf, that must have dropped down from the trees above; and the brook giggled as though it had just seen some joke.

THE RUNES ON WELAND’S SWORD

A Smith makes me
To betray my Man
In my first fight.

To gather Gold
At the world’s end
I am sent.

The Gold I gather
Comes into England
Out of deep Water.

Like a shining Fish