

ART. XV.—*The Battle of Stainmoor in Legend and History.*  
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WHEN our Society visited Stainmoor in 1880 the late Canon Simpson mentioned a tradition of a great battle there, and showed evidence that such had taken place. The late Rev. Thomas Lees also pointed out that the battle of Stainmoor was described under a romantic disguise in the fourteenth-century poem of "Horn Child" (a variant of the romance of "King Horn"), of which the plot is as follows:—\*

An Angle prince named Hatheolf lived in the North Riding of Yorkshire. After repelling, at Alerton Moor, a Danish invasion, Hatheolf held a feast at Pickering; and there, on a Whitsunday, news was brought to him that three kings—Ferwell, Winwald, and Malkan—had landed from Ireland and ravaged Westmorland. Hatheolf marched to meet the invaders and a great battle took place on Stainmoor, in which Ferwell and Winwald perished with 60,000 men of both armies, and Hatheolf, after slaying 5,000 men with his own hand, was beaten down with stones by the Irish and stabbed by King Malkan. Malkan himself returned to Ireland with only thirteen of his men, and was afterwards slain at the battle of Yolkil by Horn, the son of Hatheolf.

The date given to these events is "about the middle of the fifth century," and Mr. Lees thought that in Melkintorpe, near Lowther, we had a place-name commemorating King Malkan.

Now the middle of the fifth century is a very dark time. It was the epoch when, as far as we can gather, the Angles were just beginning to settle in Northumbria,

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\* These *Transactions*, vol. v., p. 69; and vol. ix., p. 448. The visit of the Society to Stainmoor on August 18th, 1880, is mentioned in vol. ix., p. 452.

and to fight the Britons. It was the age in which the legends of King Arthur have made confusion worse confounded. It was a hundred years before Ida began to reign in Bamborough, and the real history of the north of England glimmered into dawn. Even if we date the story sixth century, we can find no corroboration in any notice of an invasion of Anglian territory from Ireland; nothing of the sort appears possible until the Viking age in the ninth and tenth centuries.

But by that time the plot had become possible, and the incidents, topography, manners, and names are all such as suit that period.

The suggestion finds support from the fact that there is a series of similar mediæval romances which evidently refer to the Viking age. These romances, both in date of production and in the date of the events to which they refer, are not unlike the Icelandic sagas, properly so-called—the mediæval prose stories of the Viking settlers. The treatment of their subjects, also, is not entirely different. Both the Icelandic and the English sagas are historical romances, fantasias upon themes of a stirring age two or three centuries earlier, and quite passed away by the time when the stories were written. There was some history in the tale, but any traditions that would ornament the plot were worked in, and, no doubt, some imaginary incidents. The manners and customs, when part of the real legend, were preserved; but in general the colouring was that of the writer's day. Only the most careful criticism can disentangle the real waifs of history from the web of fiction; but the motive is fairly plain.

In this case the motive is obvious. It is a raid into Anglo-Saxon England by three kings from Ireland, two with Gaelic names and one apparently Teutonic. It does not describe the ravaging of post-Roman Britain by the Picts and Scots, but the circumstances of the Viking age and the raids of the Gallgael, or mixed Scandinavian and Irish freebooters who, we know, did repeatedly invade the

north of England from Dublin and the coasts of the Irish Sea, landing in Cumberland and marching up the old Roman road to York across Stainmoor.

This tale of "Horn" therefore relates to some obscure bit of ninth or tenth century history. What can we find about a battle of Stainmoor in that age?

The historian Roger of Wendover, who died in 1237, and collected information from many sources to fill up the meagre outlines of the Saxon chronicle, says under the year 950—"King Eilric, by the treachery of Earl Osulf, was slain by the Consul Maco (or Macon—a *Macone Consule*), together with his son Henry and brother Reginald, in a lonely place named *Steinmor*."

Now this King Eilric is known to other chroniclers as Eric of York.

The Saxon chronicle says that after Edred came to the throne in 946 he was received by the Northumbrians and Scots; but soon after the people of York took "Yric" to be their king. So in 948 Edred brought a punitive expedition against them, burned Ripon Minster, and marched homewards. They cut off his rearguard with great slaughter and then he returned in force, vowing to lay the whole land waste; but when the Northumbrian *witan* understood that, then forsook they "Hyryc" and made compensation for their misdeeds. Next year, however, Olaf Cuaran came into the country and reigned (for the second time) until 952, when he was expelled, and "Yric Haroldson" returned to power. Nothing farther is said until 954, when the Northumbrians expelled "Yric," and Edred got the kingdom.

To several of the writers who tried to edit the Anglo-Saxon chronicle these events appeared confusing. There were critical historians even in those days, and they thought they could improve upon the text. Florence of Worcester, who died in 1118, calls the king "Ircus, a Dane," and simplifies the story by giving him only one tenure instead of two. William of Malmesbury, a little

later, adds to the glory of Edred by making him nearly exterminate the Northumbrians and the Scots because they chose "Iricius" for their king. Henry of Huntingdon, writing about 1135, omits Eric's first tenure and inserts Olaf Cuaran, "who reigned four years; then with their usual fickleness the Northumbrians expelled him and elected Eric, son of Harold, who, reigning three years, was expelled, and the people of their own free will invited Edred to reign."

A better authority is Symeon of Durham, who was born only a century after the events, and must have known local traditions. He gives the name more correctly as Eiricus; the Icelandic and old Norse spelling is *Eiríkr*; but he calls him a Dane. He adds that the Northumbrian kingdom was abolished in 952, though it was not until 954 that Osulf (Earl Oswulf of Bamborough) was made earl of all Northumbria; that is to say, Eric was expelled in 952, but the country was not settled under the new government until two years later. In the *Historiæ Continuatio*, he says that Eiric was the last king, and that after he was expelled he was slain by Maccus, son of Anlaf (Olaf Cuaran).

Another north-countryman, Roger of Hoveden, writing at the end of the twelfth century, says under 953:—"The last king was Eiric, whom the Northumbrians expelled. They also slew Amancus, son of Anlaf, and with oaths and gifts appeased Edred, who made Earl Osulf governor of the province."

Finally we have the statement, already quoted, by Roger of Wendover, that King Eilric, certainly the Eiric or Eric of the others, was slain in 950 at Steinmor, a "lonely place," somewhere in Northumbria, which we can hardly hesitate to identify with the Stainmoor we know.

Who, then, was this King Eric slain at Stainmoor between 950 and 954? All our old chroniclers tell us that the last King of York was Eric Haroldson, and the

ancient Icelanders and Norse writers add that he was Eric Bloodaxe, son of the famous Harold Fairhair and Queen Ragnhild the Mighty.

He was a typical Viking. At twelve, his father gave him five long-ships, with which he went sea-roving up the Baltic. In a succession of years he played havoc on all the coasts of northern Europe and the British Isles, and when he was twenty he doubled the North Cape to fight a nation then famous and powerful in Bjarmaland or Permian on the Gulf of Archangel. Homeward bound he landed near the North Cape, and met with a most beautiful girl in a cottage up some wild fjord. It appeared that she was a daughter of a Norse nobleman, sent there to be fostered (as the custom was), and that the two Finns or Lapps of the place, terrible wizards both, were at daggers drawn through jealousy for her sake. The saga tells with old-world frankness how she tricked the pair and escaped; and so Eric won his witch-wife Gunnhild. In describing them, it says:—"Eric was tall and handsome, strong and very bold, a mighty warrior and conqueror, fierce and fell, stern and silent; Gunnhild was exceedingly beautiful, clever and cunning in witchcraft, gay in speech but guileful at heart, and the most dangerous of all people to deal with."

Eric was his father's favourite, and succeeded to the chief power in Norway—a position which he tried to improve by killing off his brothers. But the youngest of them, Hakon the Good, had been brought up in England in safety, and with an education much superior to the rough training of the far North. When he went out to claim his throne, he was welcomed by a powerful faction who were tired of the rule of violence; so that before long Eric Bloodaxe was defeated and expelled, finding a new home in the Orkneys. This was, according to the Icelandic *Annales Regii*, in the year 937—that is to say, the year of the battle of Brunanburg, when Athelstan defeated the great combination of Vikings from Ireland and Scot-

land. The *Heimskringla* tells us that Eric soon after came to the mouth of the Humber intending to raid the country, but Athelstan met him and offered him the sub-kingdom of York, on condition of his becoming a Christian and guarding Northumbria from invasion.

Now this would be nearly ten years before any Eric is mentioned in our English annals. There are also various misstatements about English history and politics mixed with the Norse tale, so that critical modern historians, thinking the whole account untrustworthy, have looked about for another person to fill the place which used to be held by Eric Bloodaxe as King of York. Lappenberg, the German historian of England under the Anglo-Saxons, claimed the honour for another Eric, son of another Harold. He quoted from Adam of Bremen's *medieval History of the Bishops of Hamburg* a statement that Harold Bluetooth (King of Denmark from about 940 to 985) "sent his son Hiring to England with an army, who after conquering an island—*insula subacta*—was betrayed and slain by the Northumbrians." "This Hiring," he said, "must be the Eric Haroldson of the old English chronicles." Some of our more recent writers have followed Lappenberg, and some have followed the old story; but there is a curious coincidence between Roger of Wendover's account and that of the death of Eric Bloodaxe as told by Snorri Sturluson in the *Heimskringla*, which shows that both are derived from the same original tradition, though that tradition in its original form is lost. And if that be so, then the Eric of York in English chronicles is Eric Bloodaxe; and the battle of Stainmoor, and the invasion of Cumberland and Westmorland which preceded it, can be brought out of the region of romance into history.

After saying that Edmund threatened to depose Eric, who therefore retired from York and buccaneered in the Irish Sea, the saga continues:—"Thereafter he fared to Wales; thence he sailed south under England." (This

may be an error on Snorri's part, or a merely general expression for south of the district he had been ravaging earlier; it cannot mean that he attacked what we call the South of England, as there was no King Olaf there as in Northumbria.) "Now, whereas Eric was a most daring man, and had a great host, he trusted so well to his folk that he went a long way up into the land, and harried and followed up the fleers; but there was a king called Olaf whom King Edmund had set there for the warding of the land, and he drew together an army not to be withstood, and fell on King Eric, and there was a great battle. Many of the English folk fell, but ever whereas one fell came three in his place down from the land, and by the latter end of the day the fall of men turned toward the side of the Northmen, and there died full many folk; and ere this day was ended fell King Eric and five kings with him, which are named, Guthorm and his two sons, Ivar and Harek (Henry). There fell also Sigurd and Rognvald (Reginald), and there fell withal Arnkel and Erland, the sons of Turf-Einar. Yea, and there was an exceeding great fall of the Northmen, but they who escaped fared back to Northumberland and told Gunnhild and her son of these tidings . . . so they straightway got them gone from Northumberland, and had all the ships that King Eric had, and such folk as would follow them, and plenteous wealth." (Morris and Magnússon's translation.)

In comparing this account with Roger of Wendover's it is impossible not to see that both refer to the same person, and relate what had come down to each writer as fragments of an identical tale.

"A long way up the land," says Snorri, who did not know English topography: "In a lonely place named Steinmor," says Wendover, aware of the famous wild pass, still named Stainmoor, on the great north road by which anyone from the Irish Sea would approach York. "A king called Olaf" (Cuaran) was Eric's rival for the

throne, and he had been sub-king to Edmund. Wendover seems to differ in saying that Eric was slain by the Consul (Prince) Maco; but this story was perhaps better known a century earlier to Symeon of Durham, who says that he was slain by *Maccus, son of Olaf*.

“With his son Henry and brother Reginald” in Wendover echoes the story of Snorri almost verbally; but it is not copied from the Icelandic account, which was written about the same time, quite independently. It is a mutilated recollection of some earlier story, now lost; and Wendover has misread “Guthorm’s son Henry” as “Eric’s son Henry,” and forgotten that Eric had already killed his brother Rognvald or Reginald. But it is obvious that Wendover is talking about Eric Bloodaxe, and no other person. So, a century earlier, was Symeon of Durham. So, therefore, are all the English chroniclers. They are all telling scraps of the same story as that told more fully, though not more trustworthily, by Snorri; and that story says that Eric Bloodaxe was the last King of York.

There is still another ray of light to be thrown on this famous battle. The Annals of Ulster, which mention battles in England only when they were of great importance, give under the date 951, corresponding with a little later in English chronology:—“A battle against the men of Alban and Britain and Saxony by the Galls”—*i.e.*, an attack by Vikings on a combined force of Scots, Cumbrians, and Anglo-Saxons; and this is exactly what must have taken place. Eric, expelled, went buccaneering in the Irish Sea, and at last feeling himself strong enough to attempt the recovery of York, landed at the port “in Northumbria” where Gunnhild was left with the ships. Any place in the north of England was in Northumbria, and the description would apply to a port such as Ravensglass or Ellenborough on the Cumberland coast. He went up the Roman road towards Stainmoor, ravaging the country. The Cumbrians fled before him, and the

news reached Earl Oswulf, head of the Anglian people of Bernicia. In Deira (Yorkshire) there were still Scandinavians, the party of Olaf Cuaran, who was allied with the family of King Constantine of Scotland, and must have been able to engage a Scottish contingent, beside the Scots in his own service. Oswulf seems to have effected a coalition of Olaf's party with the Cumbrians and his own men to oppose the common enemy. The natural place to intercept him was Stainmoor; the natural tactics at such a spot would be some form of trap, the "treachery of Oswulf" of which Wendover writes, and the ambushed reserves of which Snorri hints. Eric was overwhelmed, and the honour of slaying him rested with Maccus or Macon, son of Olaf. But some while after, Oswulf managed to get rid of Maccus too, and as Olaf was in Ireland, the field was cleared; the representatives of both Viking dynasties were put out of the way, and Oswulf, from being Earl of Bamborough, was promoted by Edred to govern the whole of Northumbria as one great earldom.

Now we know that the traditions of the tenth century were used by thirteenth and fourteenth century writers of romance, in England just as in Iceland, and that a cycle of wild mediæval stories were "founded on fact." The names were altered, and the events were turned upside down, but the stories are not pure inventions. For instance, Olaf Cuaran became "Havelock the Dane" with many extraordinary adventures, and a date suggested much earlier than his real period. This tale of Hatheolf has been referred to the fifth century, which is impossible; it is a travesty of tenth century events, and, I suggest, of this invasion by Eric and his fall at Stainmoor. The persons do not actually correspond, but Hatheolf (Eadulf or Adolph) was a near ancestor of Oswulf, and the name is pressed into service. Malkan, though fighting on the invader's side, seems to be a rendering of Maelchon—*i.e.*, Macon, as Maelchael became Machel; the name after-

wards passing through Maccus and A-mancus into Magnus. Winwald, the leader of Irish invaders, though himself bearing an English or Scandinavian name, may possibly stand for Eric, leading the mixed Celtic-Norse vikings, the Gallgael; the name Winwald might mean the "Ruler of his Friends," or something of the sort. But these guesses matter little; the point is that we have a modern tradition and evidence of a great battle at Stainmoor, a mediæval romance about it, a statement by Wendover that Eric was slain at Steinmor, a circumstantial account by Snorri of the great battle in which Eric was slain, and a brief note by Symeon of Durham, little over a century after the event, that Eric was slain by Maccus, son of Olaf—all these mutually supporting one another.

At Stainmoor stands the famous Reycross, now a broken shaft with hardly any traceable sculpture. But in the seventeenth century it bore figures and carving, mistaken by Speed for the figures and arms of the Kings of England and Scotland. Even fifty years ago there was a fragment lying near it, curiously sculptured; and, I think, the spring of a wheel-cross can be traced on the upper end of the pillar. It has been thought that it was erected as a boundary-cross, and it was certainly regarded as such very early in the Middle Ages. The name "Rey" or "Rere" is used of boundary-marks in our northern dialect, and perhaps comes from the ancient Scandinavian *Rá*—a land-mark. But comparing this with other such monuments of the district, I think it must be one of a series of late pre-Norman grave-crosses. Usually they were set up in churchyards, but if the dead were buried far from a church, there was no reason why the cross should not be set up at the grave, wherever it was. If, as we have seen there was a battle here, in or about 954, it is quite possible that such a cross was erected over one of the great men who fell and were buried on the spot. It would commemorate a Christian, not a pagan, and most

of the invaders were pagans. Eric Bloodaxe, indeed, was baptized, and nominally Christian ; and a romancer might be justified in fancying that the Reycross was carved and set up by Northumbrian admirers of the once mighty and long famous last King of York. But far from Christian was the song which the witch-wife Gunnhild "let make," so they said, of his ride to Valhalla, where Odin and Sigmund greeted him :—

“ Hail to thee, Eric, now !  
Heartily welcome thou !  
Enter, thou mighty king, enter the hall.  
I ask but this only,  
What princes from far  
Come with thee ? Not lonely  
Thou surely hast hastened,  
Leaving the battle where foemen fell chastened,  
Hither to Heaven from tumult of war.

“ Kings five, Eric said,—  
Their names I will tell ;  
I, the sixth, at their head  
In the gory fight fell.”