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Illustrations of northern antiquities, from the earlier Teutonic and Scandinavian romances

Weber, Henry William

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Appendix II

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APPENDIX II.

THE SONG OF OLD HILDEBRAND.

THIS poem has not been translated for its intrinsic merit, which is very inconsiderable, but for the reasons specified in the Introduction, (p. 21 and 26,) and also because it seems to have formed a portion of the original Book of Heroes, to which it forms no unapt supplement. In the translation, both the German and Danish copies have been consulted, and though the difference between them is but trifling, any variations in the latter, which were deemed improvements, have been adopted. In the original, the son of the old knight bears his father's name. The Danish ballad, which in this point has been followed, calls him, in conformity with the Wilkina-Saga, (see the Introd. p. 37,) Alebrand. The German copy occurs in Eschenburg's Denkmæler, (p. 437,) and in the Knaben Wunderhorn, Berlin, 1806, (p. 128,) but the former copy is far better. The Danish ballad is preserved in the Kampe Viser, 1695, (p. 67.)

Ich will zu Land ausreiten
Sprach sich Meister Hildebrand;
Der mir die weg will weisen
Gen Bern wol in die Land? &c.

"It's I will speed me far away," cried Master Hildebrand;
"Who will be my trusty guide to Bern, in the Lombard land?
I have not passed the weary road since many a day, I ween;
For more than two-and-thirty years Dame Utta have I not seen."

Up and spake Duke Amelung,— "If thou wilt ride to Bern,
Who will meet thee on the heath? A youth right brave and stern,
Who will meet thee on the march? Alebrand the young;
Though with twelve of the boldest knights thou pass, thou must fight that hero strong."

¹ March, borders, frontier. At present the word is only used in the plural.

" And if he break a lance with me in his high and fiery mood,
I will hew asunder his buckler green, that fast shall stream his blood :
Asunder his hauberk will I hew with a slanting blow of might ;
I ween for a year to his mother he will plain him of the fight."—

" Nay," cried Dietrich, lord of Bern, " battle shalt thou not wage
Against the youthful Alébrand, for in sooth I love the page.
I rede thee, knight, to do my will, and ask him courteously
To let thee pass along in peace, for the love of me."—

When he rode through the garden of roses, right on the march of Bern,
He came in pain and heavy woe with a hero young and stern :
Against him rushed, with couchant lance, a hero brave and bold :
" What seek'st thou in my father's land? say on, thou champion old.

" A bruny clear and bright thou bear'st, like sons of mighty kings ;
I ween thou deem'st to strike me blind with thy hauberk's glittering rings.
Bide at home in quiet, I rede thee, man of age ;
Sit thee down by thy good fire-side!"— Loud laughed the hero sage.

" And why should I in quiet be, and sit by the chimney-side ?
I have pledged me, night and day, to wander far and wide ;
To wander o'er the world, and fight until my latest day :
I tell thee, young and boasting knight, for that my beard grows grey."

" It's I will pull thy beard of grey, I tell thee, ancient man,
That all adown thy furrowed cheeks the purple blood shall run :
Thy hauberk and thy buckler green yield without further strife ;
My willing captive must thou be, if thou wilt keep thy life."—

" My hauberk and my buckler green, renown and bread have gain'd,
And well I trust in Christ on high, in the stour my life to defend."—
They left their speech, and rapidly drew out their falchions bright,
And what the heroes bold desired, they had in the bloody fight.

I know not how Sir Alébrand dealt a heavy slanting blow,
That the ancient knight astounded at his heart with pain and woe,
And hastily he started back seven fathoms far, I ween,—
" Say, did not a woman teach thee, young knight, that dint so keen?"—

" Foul shame it were if women taught me to wield the brand :
Many a gallant knight and squire dwell in my father's land ;

¹ This lady, as Eschenburg conjectures, is perhaps Chrimhilt. See the third book of the Book of Heroes, and the Song of the Nibelungen.

Many earls and knights of high renown in the court of my father dwell,
And what I have not learnt as yet, they can teach me right and well."—

"He who will scour old kettles, black and foul his hands will be:
Even so, young kemp, from the champion old, will soon betide to thee;
And quickly shalt thou shrive thee upon the blooming heath,
Or else, thou youthful hero, thou must graithe thee for thy death."—¹

He caught him by the middle, where the young man weakest was,
And heavily he cast him behind him, on the grass.
"Now say to me, thou champion young, thy confessor will I be;
If thou art of the Wolfing race, thou shalt gain thy life from me."—

"Thou speak'st to me of savage wolves, that roam the woods about;
Of noble Grecian blood I came, of high-born champions stout:
My mother is Lady Utta, a duchess of main and might;
And Hildébrand, the ancient kemp, my dearest father hight."—

"If Utta be thy mother, who rules o'er many a land,
I am thy dearest father, the ancient Hildébrand."
Soon has he doffed his helmet green; on his cheek he kissed the swain:
"Praised be God we are sound and safe, nor ever will battle again."—

"Father, dearest father mine, the wounds I dealt to thee,
Gladly would I bear them thrice on my head, right joyfully."—
"Oh, bide in quiet, my gentle son; my wounds will soon be well;
But thank'd be God in Heaven! we now together will dwell."—

The fight began at the hour of none, they fought till the vesper-tide:²
Up rose the youthful Alébrand, and into Bern they ride:
What bears he on helmet? A little cross of gold;
And what on his right hand bears he? His dearest father old.

He led him into his mother's hall, set him highest at the board,
When he gave him meat and drink, his mother cried aloud, with angry word,
"Oh, son, my son, so dear to me, 'tis too much honour to place
So high a captive champion, the highest at the deas."—

¹ This and the following stanza are improperly reversed in the German ballad. They are regulated as in the text in the *Kæmpe Viser*.

² The hour of none is three o'clock in the afternoon; vesper-tide at six.

"Rest in quiet, my mother dear; let him sit at the table head:
Upon the blooming heath so green he had well nigh struck me dead.
Oh, hearken, lady mother mine! captive shall he not be;
It is my father, Old Hildëbrand, that kemp so dear to thee."—

It was the Lady Utta, her heart was blythe and glad;
Out she poured the purple wine, and drank to the ancient blade.
What bore in his mouth Sir Hildëbrand? A ring of the gold it was,
And for his lady, Dame Utta, he has dropped it in the glass.