

The
Princess
of Selgovæ
and the
High King

B O O K O N E

ALSO BY BRYCE GIBBY

The Princess of Selgovae and the High King

His Majesty and the Prince of Lothian

The Captain and the Dark Queen

The Red Dragon and the Crown of Saxnôt

Knights of the Argoat

The Young Knight of Selgovae

Cwen

The Beldam

The
Princess
of Selgovæ
and the
High King

A N O V E L

BRYCE GIBBY

Copyright © 2015, 2020, 2022, 2023 by Bryce D. Gibby. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by an information storage and retrieval system—except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages to be printed in a book, magazine, newspaper, or on the Web—without permission in writing from the publisher.

All graphic art by Wendy Dayley. Photographs by the author.

Hardback ISBN: 9798817195040

The Princess of Selgovae and the High King



PERLYCROSS
PUBLISHERS

Wilmington, Delaware

“The Perle, as it flows on the north of the Churchyard, the bridge two or three hundred yards below, the vale, and the hills which shape it, are comprised in the parish of Perlycross.” R.D. Blackmore

CONTENTS

Preface	ix
1. The Fall of Selgovae	1
2. The Immortal Hawk and the Two Dragons	24
3. The Journey to the Mountain beyond the Woods of Brocéliande	35
4. The Rise of Artorius—Lord of Battles	56
5. The Palace of Annwn	70
6. The Rock and the Two-Edged Sword	95
7. The Two Lakes	116
8. Realm of Darkness	133
9. Lord of Self	168
10. The Love of Annwn	189
11. Battle of Champions	199
12. Ailbric the Giant and The Witch of Tees	229
Afterword	259
Notes	261

PREFACE

Vivien lay down at the water's edge and with cupped hand drew pure water to her mouth—delicious draughts for one so thirsty and weak. Walking for many days, with little food to sustain strength, sleeping in fields exposed to frequent rains, witnessing the pillaging of her people and knowing nothing of her father's fate—all this was too great for the young maiden. She succumbed to overpowering fatigue and fell into a deep sleep in the sun-lit meadow.

The daystar was well past its zenith when Vivien was awakened by the sound of neighing horses, as five Saxon cavalymen circled their horses around her. From jeers and raucous laughter there was no mistake as to their intended sport.

Her mind raced, trying to find some means of salvation. Hidden beneath Vivien's bodice was a signet ring, proof of royalty. It was doubtful that common soldiers would molest a maiden of blue blood, especially the very princess sought by their Saxon generals. However, to acknowledge identity must surely lead to her torture and the extortion of the vital secret of The Mountain.

Vivien sank to her knees with clasped hands and pled aloud for

PREFACE

heaven's mercy. Amused by what they thought were frightened babblings and excited by her beauty, the soldiers congratulated themselves for having found such a maiden.

Their leader, an ugly Saxon with rotten teeth, barked, "Keep to your mounts, for I will make of this pretty damsel a wife!"

Another chortled, "T'would be fine if we'd found a bevy of maids, but 'tis one and she must do for us all."

As the man swung down from his saddle, the commander bunted his horse against him and yelled, "NAY! I'll not have her passed about 'till I tire of her British ways!" Then he smiled, backing his steed and said, "Surely we'll find others, perhaps this very day—then let each have his own wench." His men laughed heartily, and the dissension subsided. Throughout this banter, Vivien remained upon her knees, her mind in a place far removed.

So engaged were the Saxons in base deliberations that they failed to notice a lone, tall man emerge on foot from the woodlands . . .



North of Edinburgh is the ancient wall of Antonine, running from the North Sea to the Irish Sea. Near Carlisle runs a parallel barrier of antiquity known as Hadrian's Wall. Between these two walls was the Land of Gododdin,¹ a country of four kingdoms, the greatest of which was Selgovae. The Age of the Princess of Selgovae is not known by her name but by the name of the High King who loved her. Yet Vivien's influence spread far beyond her realm, for the greatest knights of Britannia were taught chivalry at her feet.

For half a millennium the provinces of the Celtic Britons were protected by the Roman VI Legion, until its legionnaires were recalled to the mainland to defend a disintegrating Empire. Without a united defense, the Britons suffered unimaginable carnage as wave after wave of Picts, Angles, Saxons, and Frisians pillaged and conquered their land,

PREFACE

ushering in an era of paganism. However, in the midst of this darkness there was one season of light and security, a time of great happiness—a foretoken of a future age when a child should play safely over the viper’s den. This interlude of peace came to the Isles when, called by a holy seer, a great High King was crowned.

The Arthurian legends are the supreme sagas of all time, surviving the maze of centuries—inspiring nobility and hope for a future utopia of like grandeur. In them are found examples of exceptional goodness and abysmal wickedness. Chivalry and love abound, as do the contrasts of barbarism and seduction. There are tales of courageous faith, rousing us to gallantry—and stories of the occult, fearfully warning of depths to which men and angels fall. There is distinctive style to the symbols and types of this era—kings and queens, immortals and demigods, wizards and witches, dragons and lions, castles and dungeons, swords and chalices.

Outside of Holy Writ, ancient histories are sparse and interwoven with myth. However, by carefully examining the worn cloth of ages one may discover fine golden strands hidden in legends—heroism, truth, beauty and the magnificence of visionary kingdoms!

For many years the author researched the ancient traditions of the British Isles and followed threads of veracity entwined with romantic and imaginary chronicles. The nature of available sources precluded composing an historical narrative. Writing *The Princess of Selgovae and the High King* as a fictional work afforded the author the freedom to select core truths and receive unabashedly the assistance of the Muses of Avalon.





Great Britain and the Kingdoms of Caledonia,
Irish Scotia, Gaul, Francia and Brittany



The Gododdin - Northland of the Britains,
between Hadrian's and Antonine's Walls



Sheeplands
Archipelago



Zetland
Islands



Orkneys
Archipelago



Fair Isle



Caledonia



Caledonia, the Orkneys, the Zetlands,
the Sheeplands and Fair Isle



Britain, Zetlands, Scandinavia, Sheeplands,
Thule, Ultima Thule, Francia, Scotia, Brittany

Caledonia
Picts

Meigle

Arthur's
Seat

Esk

Woods of
Broceliande

Losk'n

The Gododdin

Carlisle

Camlann

Yarm

Lothian

York

Midlands

Bedegraine

Leicester

Dinas Emrys

Snowdonia

Southern Kingdom
of Britain

Northwic

Tremadog
Bay

Wealas

Virconium

Linnuis

Colchester

Bravonium

Londinium

Chalk
Caves

Kent

Mount Badon

Glastonbury

Exeter

Hayle



Great Britain and the
Kingdoms of Caledonia



Isle of
Inishmurray

Niall

Drumurcher

Sligeach

Dundalk
Bay

Ui Mall

Irish Scotia

Plains of
Connachata

Eoganacht

Saltee
Islands



Irish Scotia



Francia

Lenur
Islands

Catalaunian Plain

Brittany

Argoat

Gaul



Kingdoms of Gaul, Francia
and Brittany

CHAPTER I

THE FALL OF SELGOVAE

*Too late! Forgive the crime;
Unheeded flew the hours;
How noiseless falls the foot of Time
That only treads on flowers.
William Robert Spencer*

The Castle of Selgovae was not a fortress; no battles had been fought from its bastions, its curtain walls too low for defense. The Castle of Selgovae was also not a palace, for the venerable edifice was not elegant or richly styled. Nonetheless, it was a grand house made of white stone and gray slate, adorned with long racemes of purple wisteria, climbing roses, and dark green ivy. The courtyard was more orchard and garden than cobble. Adjacent to the Great Hall was a magnificent flowering arbor, a gallery of nature's wonders.

BRYCE GIBBY



The Castle of Selgovae

THE PRINCESS OF SELGOVAE AND THE HIGH KING

In its shade the commander of the Roman garrison and four centurions supped upon oaken tables with King Cedric. Extraordinarily, they were not attended by servants but by the heir to the throne, a maiden princess who graciously set before her father and guests a delicious repast of roast fowl, leek soup, rye bread, goat's cheese and Valerian Ale.

Tribunus Aetius raised his chalice, "To Selgovae, the strength and beauty of the Gododdin. May the matchless steel forged in its mountains protect always its incomparable treasure."

Princess Vivien, who had just filled the legionnaire's goblet asked, "Is not there greater wealth found in the Kingdoms of Damnonii, Novantae and Votadini than in our pleasant land?"

"Nay," said Aetius. "There is no jeweled coronet in all the provinces north of Hadrian's Wall of such luster and worth as the solitary gem for which this realm is renowned!"

Puzzled, the guileless princess wrinkled her brow. The king laughed as he answered the toast with his own calix, and to Vivien's embarrassment solved the matter. "Aetius speaks not of emeralds, but of you, my dear."

The princess blushed, smiled uneasily and withdrew. The Roman had entirely disarmed the damsel who, on all other fronts, possessed unmatched wit, for she had not a mother alive to teach her how to receive and turn a compliment. With her leaving, the tribunus thought again of his purpose in coming and cheer left his countenance. "King Cedric," he said, "I bring ill tidings. Would that I had known far sooner of the plight of Italia and the subsequent perils that undoubtedly will come to Britannia in consequence—then might I have been of true service to my friend!"

BRYCE GIBBY



Princess Vivien of Selgovae

For half a millennium Rome not only ruled the provinces of Great Britain but had been their protectorate. The power of the VI Legion had kept back the savage invaders, who envious of the goodly isles had long sought to steal its dominions. King Cedric asked, "Surely the Visigoths will not wage war on both sides of the channel! As for Selgovae, your garrison is more than five hundred strong, and has always proved more than capable in our defense!"

Felix, one of the centurions, pushed aside his plate, saying "It is a hard thing, Your Highness. I have lived more years in the Gododdin than in Italia and have married a Briton and have sons and daughters. Your people are mine!"

"Well of course they are," Cedric replied, troubled at the legionnaire's meaning. "Aetius, what is this all about?"

The tribune answered, "The Empire is besieged on all sides. The Visigoths overwhelm the north and on the south, Africa is in rebellion. Flavius Honorius Augustus has recalled the VI Legion. The Emperor has decreed that Britannia must see to its own defenses. My orders are to amass our forces in the Gododdin and march for Colchester within a fortnight,¹ where we shall sail for Italia. So many of our commanders have been slain in battle that soon I will be commissioned a general, young as I am. Sadly it shall not be in the service of this land I've come to love. I am sorry, for we must abandon you. There are no finer swords in all the world than those fashioned of Selgovae Steel, yet you've no army trained in their use. I have appealed to Honorius to stay the summer and prepare the provinces but have been denied."



TIME PASSED. Far from the Gododdin, a weary commander slept in his tent upon the Catalaunian Plains of Gaul. By lamplight Captain Felix lifted back the canvas flap and spoke quietly, "General Aetius, I would

not disturb your rest, but a courier has arrived from Britannia bearing a sealed parchment. He says the matter is urgent.”

“And what is not pressing in war?” Aetius asked, rubbing his eyes.

“Forgive my imposition,” Felix answered and was about to withdraw.

“No, do not leave my friend,” said Aetius. “From which province comes the messenger?”

“He is sent of Selgovae by King Cedric’s brother.”

Aetius quickly arose. “Bring your lamp closer,” he said, taking the parchment from Felix’s hand. He examined the wax seal and recognized at once the familiar insignia. Silently the general read the few words of the parchment.

“To Aetius, thrice consul, hear the groans of the Britons. The barbarians drive us to the sea, the sea drives us to the barbarians, between these two means of death we are either killed or drowned.”² He sighed aloud.

Felix asked, “What is it?”

“A plea,” Aetius answered.

“What are your orders?”

“The courier was fortunate to make our camp alive,” said Aetius. “He knows our straits. Tell him we can do nothing. He may stay in our protection or leave, as he desires. Then return that we may talk, for sleep is gone from me.”

A short while later the general and captain sat upon rough wood-hewn stools, drinking wine from a leathern bottle.

“Ah,” said Felix, “would that this was Valerian Ale and we were again in the enchanted arbor! Though my eyes saw her once, tell me again of your princess.”

“Oh, that she was mine—but it shall never be. Life is cast in iron, forged in wars that will outlast our breath. Yet thoughts of the night are as real to me as actions of the day. Just thinking of Vivien is a mighty solace and is all of her I shall ever possess.”

“Then,” admonished Felix, “speak of her beauty to keep alive our hearts, which daily petrify by duties of war.”

Aetius closed his eyes. “Have you ever seen another maiden such as the Princess of Selgovae? I have not, nor ever shall! I remember her hair, the color of golden flax, which fell in folds about her slender neck and upon soft shoulders. Her countenance was as the eastern sun, dispersing night’s shadows and radiating hope of a new day’s creation. Her skin so white, so translucent, that it seemed a conduit of her soul. Always her dress was austere and chaste; nonetheless, her slender form was more artistic than could be sculpted in marble. And her voice—Felix, did you hear her speak?”

“Yes,” he answered, “once.”

“Vivien’s voice was melody, possessing many qualities—like the gentle sounds of nature—the song of the lark, wind’s whisper, the sigh of willows after a storm.”

“Truly,” said Felix, “she was a delicate and considerate damsel.”

“It is understandable you should think so for my words are faulted. As Tribunus, I met with Cedric frequently and was, at the first, surprised, for the daughter was the king’s foremost advisor. The Princess of Selgovae possessed the strength of polished steel. Quick to perceive, extremely intelligent and unlike most counselors, she despised cunning and deceit. Because of Vivien’s refined and graceful manner she was often misjudged. Once, when the aristocrats of the Gododdin were gathered in Novantae, she rooted out a treacherous intrigue and proved a formidable antagonist to the king of that realm.”

“What happened to the man?” asked Felix.

“He lost his vassalage in dishonor to Rome—brought down,” he laughed, “by a delicate maiden!”

Felix was the only man the general ever spoke to in such a manner, for they had long served together. Aetius said nothing for a time, lost in thought. At length the captain asked, “Do you think she is alive?”

“Only in my mind,” Aetius answered. “Vivien was the Crown

Princess. The parchment was sent not by King Cedric, or his heiress, but by his brother.”



WHEN TRIBUNUS AETIUS and his centurions left the castle’s verdant arbor, it was the last time King Cedric saw the Romans. It would have been well for the Selgovaeans if Aetius had been permitted to stay the season and build an army of Britons. This was not to be and King Cedric was not a man of battles. He’d reigned in the very heart of the Gododdin where war was unknown for generations. Nor had the monarch raised his sword against the seditious of his land, for there were none. Cedric was the least regal of the sovereigns of the Gododdin. He kept no stately court or obsequious courtiers. Twice each month King Cedric officiated upon his wooden throne—which served as a judgment seat and more often as a counselor’s chair, for whenever possible he advised rather than commanded. Cedric trusted his people to live in accordance with the Christian principles taught by Joseph, the Missionary of Glastonbury. The Selgovaeans revered King Cedric as a beloved father and seldom were disobedient. Except to attain funds for levies due Rome, he exacted no taxes. Yet, his wealth was abundant, derived from flocks, farms and from his most profitable enterprise—his forge. Cedric was an incomparable metallurgist. The swords crafted by his artisans were the most valued in the Empire.

THE PRINCESS OF SELGOVAE AND THE HIGH KING



Ruins of the Glastonbury Monasterium

Deep in the mountains of Selgovae, in a network of hidden, well-guarded caves, King Cedric employed fiercely loyal alchemists and smiths. So secretive were Cedric's guildsmen that many outsiders regarded these powerful metalworkers as wizards, fashioning mystical swords of superior strength and sharpness. In truth they created steel according to Cedric's formula of iron, manganese, and a secret combination of metallic minerals, rust-resistant and carbon stabilized, molted in furnaces of intense heat and tempered in the consistent cold waters of an underground lagoon. No other metallurgists possessed an alloy comparable to Cedician Steel.

The wife of Cedric died giving birth to Vivien, their only child. Cedric never loved another woman and never remarried. Rather, he devoted himself wholly to his princess. In Vivien, even as a little girl, Cedric saw

the exquisite features of her mother. It was not only loveliness that bound the father's heart to the child's, but also Vivien's inherent goodness and gentleness. The king did not raise a pampered princess. Rather he asked the dames of the castle to teach his growing maiden their every skill, from the needle, to the harp, to the kitchen, to the spade. Vivien learned to work and enjoyed even the most mundane task. She thought it magical to grow a garden, or to transform grain into delicious bread, or to take the gauze of worms and spin the fibers into silken thread. The princess was also the beneficiary of centuries of Christian, Roman and Greek scholarship and was tutored in literature, art, languages and mathematics.

Although Selgovae's priests were Catholic, Vivien learned from her father of Britain's religious heritage, which predated the Council of Nicaea, and the establishment of the Universal Church.³ In the late hours, Cedric taught his child vital truths. Time and again Vivien asked her sire to tell her the story of the first Christian missionary to set foot on British soil.

"The legend," Cedric explained, "began after the ascension of Christ. Joseph of Arimathea was ordained to the priesthood by one of the original twelve disciples and was a great help to members of the early church. Sadly, Christ's family and loved ones were severely persecuted, their lives in peril. Dedicating his wealth to their well-being, Joseph took Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Martha and Lazarus to the same safe haven where, forty years earlier, the infant Messiah was saved from the sword of Herod. However, Egypt was not to be a permanent sanctuary, for again they were dangerously maligned, and the refugees sailed to the southern shore of Gaul."⁴

Cedric continued, "Here the little assemblage was kindly received. After hearing of their plight and being taught the true faith, many were converted."⁵ Among these people, the two Marys made their home, the younger woman caring for the elder mother. Joseph of Arimathea, however, stayed only so long as to ensure the welfare of those most

beloved by the Savior. He then began his missionary trek northward. At last he arrived in Britain where he founded the earliest Christian Church at Glastonbury,⁶ a beautiful island, one of many in the marshlands of southwestern Britannia.⁷

“One day, Vivien,” the father said, I’d like to take you to Summer Land.⁸ The climate is mild and the sky a brilliant blue; the rays of the sun caress the hillocks in continual warmth and cause the wetlands to sparkle as if a thousand jewels were cast upon the glittering surface of reed-hedged lakes.

“Joseph grew old and desired to live his final days in that glorious country. Rising above Glastonbury there stands a hill which bears the name given it by the wayfarer from far-away Arimathaea—for his pilgrimage had been a long and difficult journey. When Joseph rested on ‘Weary-all Hill,’ he plunged his staff into the rich soil near the crest and there left it, for no more would he travel from kingdom to kingdom. The staff, a slender hardwood stalk from Palestine, amazingly took root and became the Winter Thorn, which, in honor of our Lord, blooms only in the season of Christmas.”⁹

When Vivien was very young, she questioned how a staff could be transformed into a living bush. Cedric explained that legends are like the parables of the Lord, only not as perfectly true. “In them are things literal and things symbolic,” he said. “Learn to read the images. Discern hidden truths and learn to distinguish these from the corruptions woven into the fabric of legend by false hands.” Later, Vivien learned of miracles far more wondrous than the Glastonbury Thorn.



The Winter or Christmas Thorn, atop Weary-all Hill in Glastonbury

Selgovae and the other provinces of Britannia materially prospered under Roman protection. When the VI Legion began to withdraw, the Picts, Frisians, Saxons and others looked upon the vulnerable wealth of the Britons with envious eyes. It was the age-old motif: what a people cannot create can be obtained by theft in conquest. As soon as her enemies sensed a power void, Britannia was subjected to the sword and torch of merciless invaders.

The horde that descended upon Selgovae came as a sudden pestilent storm, as a devouring cloud of locusts. King Cedric, although expert in the craft of making swords was not a swordsman. Nor had he an army—as he had depended upon his former allies. As the battles fought by the Romans were always been beyond his borders, Cedric had never witnessed the carnage of war. The chief fault of the Monarch of Selgovae

was his unfamiliarity with horrific evil. As a just *ruler* Cedric was supreme—as a *defender* he was woefully inexperienced.

Yet, he was a king of great courage. For the first time Cedric commanded a council of war. When he arose from his throne, he placed in his jeweled scabbard a magnificent sword that bore the name of Caliburn, forged by his own hand in the Mountain of Selgovae. As he mounted his stallion, Cedric kissed his daughter upon her forehead and left her with his blessing and commands. He said, “Next to your mother, you, my innocent child, are the best person I have ever known. Vivien, you have been my life’s joy and consolation. To your people you are a goddess of never-failing beauty and goodness.

“As you have always looked upon me not only as your father, but your spiritual tutor, hold fast to that which I have taught you. Allow no bitterness to canker your heart as you witness the blight that falls upon Selgovae. Remember you cannot weigh justice upon the scales of this world, but only upon the balances of Heaven. If the righteous never suffered how then could Christ be our atoning Savior?

“We must part and each fulfill our separate missions. I must unsheathe Caliburn in defense of my people. Would that I might not shed blood, though my fellowman makes himself my enemy! Vivien you will soon be Queen of Selgovae. Therefore, my only child, flee to The Mountain. Preserve your life for futurity. I know you would rather die by my side—but then what purpose would your death serve? As you are of noble birth, your life is not your own. As long as I live, you must obey my word. How you shall act when I am gone will be shown you hereafter. For the time now upon you, take refuge in the secret caves among my loyal artisans. The Mountain is a sure sanctuary.”

Vivien clung to her sire and wept. “You speak as if your death is certain. This cannot be!”

King Cedric answered, “A father is also a prophet to his family and people. I promise you, we shall embrace again in the Day of The Morning Star.”

Leading his few men, King Cedric rode beyond the castle walls and held back the Saxons only for a single day—but that day was life to his daughter. Princess Vivien kept not a single guard, but obedient to her father left immediately for The Mountain. For her defense, she wore a disguise and traveled alone—as she determined her foes would believe an escaping princess would travel only in the comfort of a carriage and with the protection of an entourage. This stratagem was only partially effective. Prince Hegnist of the Saxons knew of the Crown Princess and desired her death, but not before he obtained a vital secret she possessed. His soldiers searched every road and trail which led from the castle for the sole heir to the throne of Selgovae—and when they happened to come upon Vivien, clothed in rags and worn sandals, she was thought to be a peasant. However, no amount of disguise could completely cloak her beauty, and therein was unspeakable danger.

As Vivien traveled through the countryside she was nearly incapacitated by the carnage. At every turn she wanted to abandon her journey and render what aid could be given, but remembering the command of her father she pressed on for The Mountain. All seemed unreal, as if she walked in a hellish dream through a blighted foreign land of strangely familiar landscapes. The arcadian Selgovae she had known throughout her young life, with its peaceful hamlets, was disappearing before her eyes. The sweet air scented by mown hay and fragrant flowers was obliterated by foul odor. Stale smoky sky and the stench of death marked the path of the invading army and constantly forced the wayfaring maiden to flee anew.

THE PRINCESS OF SELGOVAE AND THE HIGH KING



Young Princess Vivien fleeing from the invading army

Realizing she could not hope to get past the infestation of barbarians until the first torrent of rapine ebbed, Princess Vivien sought temporary sanctuary in a centuries old township she loved. The secluded village, set in a deep valley, was bounded on three sides by a great river of extraordinary splendor and, on the last periphery, by a steep forested mountain. Its fine cottages of stone, graced by twining ivy and roses, could not be seen from afar. The rugged trail that led to this isolated asylum was not well traveled and had the appearance of winding insignificantly into a sparsely inhabited wilderness. Therefore, Vivien considered it was likely the enemy would overlook its existence.

The maiden was extremely weary as she made her way down the last craggy slope. Every few moments she stopped to listen for contented sounds of village life. She thought of the quaint home where she stayed on her last visit—where she would soon be cleansed, fed and given rest upon a bed made of fresh down—safe with friends who loved their king's daughter. The villagers had always greeted Vivien with utmost delight, especially the children, whose cheeks were as deeply colored and tender as the rouge velvet of a rose petal. She always heard their laughter before rounding the final bend of the road that led into this haven at the very heart of Selgovae. The children always ran excitedly to her carriage, without fear of impropriety, for Vivien was a princess of gentle condescension.

However, as she neared the township, Vivien heard no sounds of mirth. All was remarkably quiet; even the voices of the forest were silent. Unexpectedly, an acrid veil rose to meet her as she descended the last hill and soon a thick obscuring haze enveloped her. With trepidation, the princess made her way carefully round the final familiar curve of the path and stopped in horror. Blackened skeletons of stone were the only remnants of once lovely cottages, the great ceiling beams reduced to smoldering charcoal.

With halting steps, the damsel forced herself to go on. The destruction was recent, yet she could hear no war shouts. She believed the

soldiers were gone and there might be aid to give. The first corpse Vivien came upon was that of a girl of seven, who likely had greeted the enemy horsemen eagerly. The trusting maid would not have suspected danger, for the village had never been accosted. What must have been her horror as she was trampled mercilessly? Vivien knelt by the crumpled body and lifted her small, bloodied arm. The lifeless limb still wore a bracelet, put upon the wrist by the princess herself only a few months before. Vivien sank to the ground and, drawing the innocent victim to her breast, cradled her tightly, weeping uncontrollably. So that she might look for others, she carried the little maid to a spot of undisturbed grass and laid her gently upon it.

As the Princess of Selgovae made her way through the dismal ruins, the vile smoke stinging her eyes, she could not fathom the cruelty of the invaders. Some villagers had died in the flames, others tortured to death. Why, she thought, had this township been so totally subjected and tormented? Still she hoped to find survivors, for the inhabitants were more numerous than the slain she'd found.

However, her hope was in vain, for as Vivien made her way beyond the last burnt-out home, she came to open fields flanked by the U of the great river and found the remaining bodies of the townspeople. Here they had fled as a last resort, but recent heavy rains made for raging waters. Those in the strength of life had not abandoned the old or young who could not have survived the torrent. Upon the rocky banks were slain over five score¹⁰ Selgovaeans. Some were pierced by arrows, meeting a quick death. Others had been horribly cut by knives and had died slowly in agony.

It was more than the young woman could bear. She cried aloud, "Oh God, how could so great an evil befall my people? What was their guilt? Is not your hand omnipotent? Did not they cry unto you for protection? Could not your omniscient eye see their suffering? This village was not sacked, no plunder was taken here! What mercenary gain is there in total destruction? Oh Father, these were not my people only; were they

not also your children? How, Oh Lord, in this beautiful creation of your making, can there be such unspeakable calamity?"

Regardless of her misfortunes, Vivien had never before questioned or accused the Almighty. In answer the words of her father came back to her mind, "Hold fast to that which you have been taught . . . allow no bitterness . . . you cannot weigh justice upon the scales of this world, but only upon the balances of Heaven." She pled again with God and tried to understand but felt only horrible despair and abject isolation. Her father's admonitions seemed null and insignificant. Vivien fell to the ground. The crashing tumult of the river's whitewater seemed to be crushing her heart. Convulsively Vivien sobbed until her strength was entirely spent and she fell into nightmarish sleep upon the damp earth.

The dreadful night at last awakened the princess. Cold penetrated her body and she shivered painfully. She had to find shelter, even if it was in the lee of a gutted wall. Still, the air had cleared somewhat allowing her to breathe more easily. As Vivien made her way through the ruins, she espied the reflection of a small fire. This surprised her, for the heavy evening dew had extinguished the smoldering beams. The fire, she reasoned, could yet be a vestige of the inferno or perhaps the camp of a lone marauder. Moving stealthily, from shadow to shadow, she crept ever closer, clamping her mouth forcefully to prevent her teeth from chattering.

As she drew near, the crackling fire suggested inexpressible warmth and comfort. Vivien lifted her head quietly above the last barrier of a broken wall. A campfire blazed against the stone and next to it laid an old man whom Vivien instantly recognized as the blacksmith of the township. Even in the dim light she could see he was badly injured and rested fitfully. He did not become cognizant until her hand gently stroked his head. Even then he lacked sufficient strength to be startled, but simply opened his eyes. The blacksmith studied her face and said, "My Princess, you have come at last. I beg you to forgive me that I do not rise. Please warm yourself by the fire I was blessed to

kindle in my weakness. I have made fires all my life—this one I cherish most.”

The fire soon returned feeling to her cold extremities and her clothes began to dry. As quickly as she revived, Vivien attempted to give relief to the old man and tend his many wounds. As he'd lost a great deal of blood, it was miracle he was alive and lucid. Over and over again the sufferer thanked Vivien for her solace. When she had done all that could be done and had re-stoked the fire, he laid his hand in hers and told the princess what had befallen his village.

“Our parish is so remote we know little of the happenings of Selgovae. Still, ours was the grandest village hereabouts and honored above the rest—for King Cedric, and you, our princess, graced us often with your presence. When we heard riders, we at first thought it might be the king and his company—for by the sound we knew the horsemen were many.

“Beasts they were with no regard for the innocent or aged! I grabbed an iron, its tip red from the forge and got me two of the Saxon devils before a swordsman opened my left side and I fell unconscious at the shock of the blow. But I am a man of great strength, for I have labored hard all my days. When the monsters brought me awake, our Eden was all aflame and the air was filled with the din of crackl'n and scream'n. Soon it was that I learnt the reason for the butchery. A gruesome foreigner pressed a blade upon my face and demanded of me to tell 'em where we had *you* hidden! Said he, 'We know the Princess of Selgovae is here. Tell me now the secret of her hid'n place and your death will be quick—otherwise you shall die in hasteless agony!'"

“I would have spit in his face, but for the others. For their sakes I tried to reason with the brute. I told him you were not here and asked how he could believe a thing that was not? He laughed and said, 'torture begets truth.' The Saxons, Your Highness, had got hold of a servant back at the castle. In agony the poor man betrayed that only you knew where Cedician steel was forged and also said our village was your most cher-

ished retreat—and to here you would certainly flee. Now indeed here you are, and I am unfit to offer a proper hid'n place."

Vivien stroked his head again and kissed his forehead. It was increasingly difficult for him to speak for he was dying. The princess answered, saying, "Your fire this night has saved my life; I soon would have been cold as the earth. My dear friend, I am so sorry—this tragedy has come upon you because of me! Oh, the pain you have endured!"

"Nay, Princess Vivien. Firstly, the Saxons knew not the power of a British smith—for when they finished with me and thought me dead—I ag'n outdid 'em and roused myself. See how God made a fire for you by my hand! As for the other, well, to eyes as young as yours this is tragedy. But remember, 'tis the Saxons that are in hell; my friends are beyond their misery, as soon I shall be. The *great affliction* none of us bore, for the LORD has already bled away our pain. Is it not so?"

At that moment the words of King Cedric came again to her heart. As Vivien looked upon the old blacksmith, she thought: What are my sufferings compared to his, and what are his compared to the torments Christ endured? She pressed his hand a little tighter and whispered in reverence, "Thank you for all you've done for me. If you cannot be bitter, then I cannot. You are right—now rest. Tomorrow I will find you food."

When the sun rose the blacksmith's eyes were already open and did not close until Vivien's hand passed over them.

The skeleton of the village still smoldered, diffusing morning light in a sorrowful pallor. The ruins seemed grossly disfigured in horrible likeness of the dead. Of necessity, the princess searched the smoking rubble, foraging for food and found a few charred biscuits. Although she had no appetite for sustenance, Vivien knew she must eat and renew her strength, for the journey was yet long before her. The summits she had climbed were lowly hills compared to the mountain range of the great forge, her final hope for refuge! After she had eaten Vivien looked about mournfully. How, she thought, could she bury her friends? There were so many! As she had no spade to dig, she determined to send the bodies of

the deceased to the eternal sea using the swift flowing river as their final carriage.

Before beginning this sad undertaking the princess paused to consider her indebtedness to heaven and, kneeling, offered a prayer of thanksgiving. Thus far she had survived the fall of Selgovae—perhaps the fall of all the kingdoms of Britain. Her enemies desired her life so desperately as to kill wantonly in an effort to find her and learn the secrets of the metal smiths of Selgovae; yet she had eluded capture. How? What if she had arrived at the village before the Saxons instead of after the raid? It could only have been the difference of a few hours. She asked herself if she could have withstood the torture her friends had endured? They knew nothing—so they could tell nothing. It was not so with her. A shudder ran down her spine. As she rose from prayer her heart was impressed with one thought: her life was not her own. For a purpose much greater than self, God had saved her.



NOT FAR FROM the burnt-out hamlet, a Saxon commander woke to the sun's rays and the aroma of his cook's steaming oats and butter. As he sat down to eat with his men, the captain said gruffly, "He was a servant of the royal household, an attendant to King Cedric himself! Though he lied at the first, the truth finally gushed out of his mouth like vomit he could n'er constrain. Before he breathed his last, he swore she would be found in that village. How could she have escaped us!" he yelled in frustration.

His legate answered, "Are there not dens in the forest? We assume we took the village by complete surprise. Perhaps not all were caught unawares; might not some provision 'ave been made to hide her in a nearby cave or copse of woods? We searched only the town, is it not so?"

The commander thought on this and replied, "Aye—and if so," he assayed, "she will likely emerge in the light of day. If Princess Vivien is

there she will not be caught unless taken by stealth. Already she has eluded us entirely—a no small feat for a woman!” The captain ordered a four-man patrol to go back to the town they’d destroyed and furtively travel the last league on foot.



ALL MORNING long Vivien dragged the lifeless victims to the raging river where one after the other was sent hurdling ocean bound. She prayed that by this means God would convey the dead to a place of lasting rest. Regardless of the indomitable will of the princess, the task would have been too great, had not most of the townspeople died near the banks. When the sun was at its zenith her death-labors were finished and she sat upon an outcropping of rock gazing downstream. She could not see even the last corpse she had entombed in the rolling and tumbling grave. The sun felt hot upon her. By then she was truly hungry and ate a solitary biscuit. At that moment, more than anything else, Vivien wanted to sleep. Although half of the day was yet ahead, she thought it best to rest a while. Later she would search again for food, and then recommence her travels with greater vigor. Sitting with her back to a rock Vivien nodded off to sleep, only to open her somnolent eyes a few minutes later, disturbed by the appalling sights haunting her mind. Lethargically she gazed at the rhythmic white water.

Suddenly, and amazingly considering the din of the rapids, Vivien heard the snap of a branch and was instantly alert. Not ten rods away four Saxon soldiers approached her cautiously so as not to excite their prey—until escape was impossible. She quickly stood upon the rock instinctively evaluating her position. To reach the doubtful protection of the forest she would have to run through the midst of her enemies. Her situation was exactly as that of the villagers the morning before. She was caught unawares with no plausible retreat.

The Saxons looked upon the maiden smiling maliciously. Their

leader said loudly, his hand outstretched, "Come down off the rock now. Ye've nowhere to go." By her dirty appearance, sooty and otherwise disguised, not one of the four believed they had cornered the princess. Rather, she appeared to be a survivor of the previous day's carnage—another victim to torture in hopes of finding the one they sought.

Two of the men flanked her left and right side. The third hung back while the foremost advanced confidently to take her. When he almost had the princess in hand, to his astonishment, Vivien abruptly turned on her heels and dove headlong into the torrents, and in the foaming mists was immediately gone from sight.

From where the Saxons stood, staring in disbelief, the river descended downstream over a series of cascades entering a canyon of many rods in depth, making pursuit unfeasible. The leader of the patrol surmised, "A strong man could scarcely out-swim or outwit that current and to meet your head with any of those frightful rocks would split it as surely as a battle axe. She is gone men, and we're the no better for it. Say naught to our captain, but that no one here survived, and the princess was not found!"