

# PREHISTORIC TALES.

By CHARLES GLEIG.

## I.—THE CAVE OF DISCORD.

**A**BOUT the year 10,000 B.C. (these prehistoric legends can seldom be dated precisely), a great whale feast was in progress on the southern shore of the Bristol Channel. In those times the Channel was much narrower than now, and whales quite frequently tantalised by their inaccessible gambols the cave-dwellers on its rocky shores. The coracle was not yet invented—though even in coracles one cannot greatly enjoy the pursuit of whales. The sea-monster upon which the Sux tribe was feasting had been washed ashore, some days previously, during a severe gale. The carcass was still moderately fresh when a bountiful Providence thus favoured the tribe with free meals and a supply of oil that promised cheap lubrication for a month. The tribe had no large vessels in which the oil could be stored, but every man could rub himself from head to heel with lumps of the odoriferous blubber, whilst the married men

"A great whale feast was in progress."

also anointed their favourite wives and carried away fragments of meat for their children.

The sun was setting over what we now call the Welsh hills, as a young man and a maiden clambered out of the stinking carcass, laden with meat and blubber. The season being warm, the man had left his reindeer skin at home. The girl, with a prudery somewhat in advance of the age, wore a narrow girdle of hide, and was further bedecked for the feast with a necklet of shells, strung upon reindeer sinew. The man was named Ug, the maiden Zug. As the girl's head rose above the surface of the torn carcass, she slipped, and would have slid back into the interior but for the swift aid of her companion, who caught her beneath her glistening arms. Regaining a foothold in a crevice of the carcass, she tossed back her dark, oily hair and laughed merrily. Still supporting her with his free arm, Ug bent his head and rubbed his nose tenderly against hers. The girl faintly resisted, but presently returned the caress.



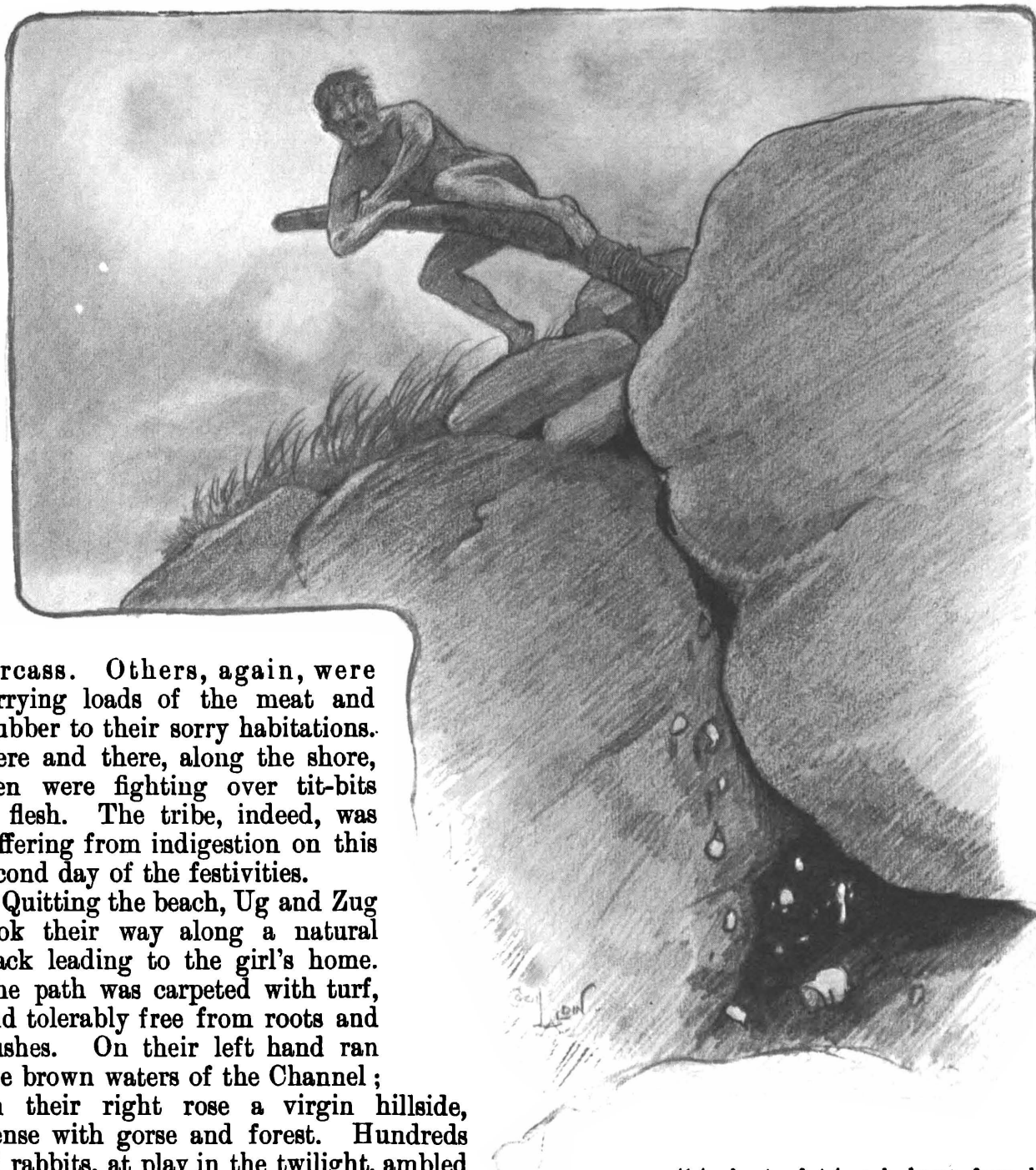
"Ug rubbed his nose tenderly against hers."

"See, you have made me drop a piece of the meat," she said reproachfully.

"I will give you all of mine," said Ug. "All that I carry is for your father, and to-morrow I will bring more to his cave."

Zug sighed, but did not reply. Together they slid off the carcass on to the soft mud that fringed the shore. The tide was low ; indeed, the prize was submerged at high water, although secured by the skill of the tribe against drifting away. The men had driven many stakes into the mud, forming a rude scaffolding round the carcass.

Gaining the stony beach, the lovers paused to glance back at the festive scene. Scores of men, women, and children were still revelling upon the raw meat beneath the surface of blubber. By strenuous labour the blubber had been torn away, for the tribe owned no better implements than flints. Cooked meat they preferred, but, in the rude fashion of the age, they were well content to eat their fill of a raw dainty liable to be washed away by the next gale. Many of the savages were sleeping, full-gorged, upon the beach. Others still lingered within the



carcass. Others, again, were carrying loads of the meat and blubber to their sorry habitations. Here and there, along the shore, men were fighting over tit-bits of flesh. The tribe, indeed, was suffering from indigestion on this second day of the festivities.

Quitting the beach, Ug and Zug took their way along a natural track leading to the girl's home. The path was carpeted with turf, and tolerably free from roots and bushes. On their left hand ran the brown waters of the Channel; on their right rose a virgin hillside, dense with gorse and forest. Hundreds of rabbits, at play in the twilight, ambled across the track to their holes as the lovers advanced.

Ug was a finer specimen of manhood than you will commonly meet in modern Somersetshire. He was accounted one of the swiftest hunters of the tribe. He was of medium height, very muscular, and swarthy of skin. He had another claim to distinction, being the proprietor of one of the largest and driest caves inhabited by the tribe.

Unfortunately, he had let his cave to Fug, a fellow-tribesman, who had since become a rival for the hand of the fascinating Zug. It is probable that Ug was the first landlord; by the Sux tribe, at any rate, the compact was regarded as entirely original. The rent fixed was six reindeer per annum, and Ug made no charge for water-rate, although there was

"A shout of triumph burst from his brawny chest. The slab had yielded."

a slight fissure in the roof. The cave was salubriously situated, some five feet above high-water mark, commanded a fine view of the Channel, and was agreeably sheltered from the westerly gales of winter by a projecting bluff. A curious feature of the cave merits notice: the great flat slab forming the roof was so delicately poised upon an internal boulder that during exceptionally violent storms it slightly oscillated. The motion was almost imperceptible, but Ug had observed the peculiarity. Indeed, this had been his reason for accepting a tenant, for it seemed to him possible that the slab might some day lose its delicate balance and seal



the mouth of the cave. Being a prudent young man, he kept this apprehension to himself and became Fug's landlord.

The agreement, made in the presence of old Sux and other chiefs of the tribe, had been somewhat loosely worded. Six reindeer yearly was the stipulated rent, but Ug had carelessly assumed that Fug would pay by instalments. Subject to the payment of his rent, Fug was entitled to occupy the cave indefinitely. For this clause he had contended with a persistence that had rather amused Ug, until he ascertained Fug's reason for making the condition.

Fug had barely been in residence a couple of moons when a large herd of reindeer chanced to visit the neighbourhood, and scores of them were "bagged" by the tribe. Hitherto, reindeer had been scarce, and Ug had not reckoned upon a glut of the dainty. In the course of ten days, Fug killed and delivered the whole of his first year's rent. Ug objected, and, pending the decision of the chiefs, four out of the six reindeer went bad at the entrance of Ug's temporary abode. Fug was an eloquent speaker and won his case. In those days, you will perceive, the law of landlord and tenant had not been evolved, and the rights of property were but dimly understood. The chiefs held that the rent had been lawfully tendered; so Ug lost his suit, and had, moreover, to bury the bad venison himself.

The case led to strained relations between Ug and his tenant. Several sharp flints grazed Fug's head after nightfall, and the leak in the roof perceptibly increased.

Not long after the memorable glut of reindeer, Ug fell in love, in his primitive fashion, with Zug, a daughter of old Sux, and offered to buy her. He bid three superb flint hatchets, two scrapers, and a small annual tribute of reindeer, being spurred to this liberality by a suspicion that Fug also fancied the smiling maid.

"Oh! it is too much," said the thrifty and modest girl, when Ug told her of his magnificent offer.

"No, it is not enough," said Ug simply.

"Am I, then, so fair in your eyes?" she asked bashfully.

"Your eyes," said Ug, "are as bright to me as the stars" (the simile was relatively fresh ten or twelve thousand years ago), "your breath is as sweet as the flesh of the reindeer, your laugh drives away sadness as the sun melts the mists of morning."

"Yet there are no hatchets or scrapers so sharp as thine, O Ug, my beloved,"

replied the maiden; "and after marriage, perhaps, you will wish for your weapons back, and be sad."

"I would pay six hatchets," said Ug recklessly (and, perhaps, not quite truthfully). "Yet your father denies me."

"What! He refused?" she exclaimed.

"The old chief has refused," said Ug mournfully.

"It is very strange," said Zug, and, mindful of the proprieties, she withdrew herself from his ardent embrace.

Some weeks had elapsed since this conversation, and, meanwhile, Ug had fruitlessly raised the bidding. Hitherto, the greed of Zug's father had remained inexplicable to the lovers, but on the night of the whale feast the girl's laughter cloaked a heavy heart. Ug, on the other hand, being full of meat, was in hopeful mood.

"See," he said, as they neared the Chief's cave—"see, this gift of meat will gladden your father, and to-night I will offer him one half of all that I kill for twelve moons."

"And yet he will deny you, O mighty hunter," sighed Zug. "Ah! why did you let you cave to Fug?"

Her voice rose to a pitch of passionate regret that smote his ear like a reproach.

"What do you mean?" he asked sternly, gripping her by the arm.

"My father greatly desires to live in the cave," she faltered. "Oh! why did you let it to Fug? He says that I must wed Fug, and you know that I do not love him. I would rather dwell on the bare hillside with you, than find warmth with such as he."

"Fug must die, then," said Ug quietly.

"No, no!" cried Zug. "Remember the laws of the tribe. If you slay him, except for sufficient reason, they will stone you."

"Then let us escape together," said Ug. "We will renounce the tribe and raise up a new and mightier race from our children."

The girl shuddered as she clung to him. "I dare not," she said. "You are swift and brave, but what is one chief against a tribe? Soon, too, some strange tribe would seize us. You they would slay, and I should become a slave."

"It is true," sighed Ug.

Her news so depressed him that he had no heart to bid again that evening. Old Sux, it was evident, was bent upon ending his days in the coveted cave, and meant to live there with Fug and Zug. The lovers parted in sorrow, Ug retracing his steps towards a hollow tree in which he had found bachelor quarters.

That night Ug could not sleep, but lay



"Ug and Zug often picknicked outside the cave."

tossing and twisting on his circular couch, consumed by a natural craving to assassinate Fug. But the tribal laws were strict, and his rival had given him no provocation that the chiefs would consider adequate. Old Sux had the clearest right to dispose of a daughter to the best advantage, yet Ug, as a landlord, glowed with resentment at his inability to evict Fug. The cave was his own property, and he anticipated, by thousands of years, the natural privileges of the landlord. The expedient of warning old Sux against the

roof danger he weighed and rejected. The Chief would not believe that the roof oscillated—nobody would credit his unsupported statement.

Marriage was not taken very seriously in those days, but the announcement of Fug's approaching nuptials with the twentieth daughter of the Chief excited a mild interest in the tribe, mainly because there would be a feast. Ug's disappointment was much discussed among the maidens, for his renown as a hunter made him an eligible *parti*.

Ug, meanwhile, prayed earnestly to his gods for stormy weather, and propitiated them with blubber sacrifices. During several days there was no response, but he kept the fire going and fairly beggared himself in vows of future liberality. And his faith was rewarded, for on the night preceding the nuptials a heavy gale sprang up from the right quarter, and then Ug knew that the gods smiled upon his project. To mark his gratitude he burnt his last ounce of blubber, and two of his best reindeer skins. This done, he shouldered a young pine tree, which he had laboriously shaped to his purpose, and took his way along the wind-swept hillside.

An hour later, and hard upon midnight, Ug reached the back of the cave. The gale had increased in violence. The wind howled and sobbed among the trees; the dark waters of the Channel were crested with the foam of breaking waves; the shore was lashed with flying spray; the moon was hidden by a lowering sky. Ug crouched down upon his belly and laid his hands upon the great slab roof. The movement of the stone was distinctly perceptible, and never before had he felt it oscillate so frequently. And yet, so perfect was the balance, so ponderous the slab, that Ug began to doubt whether his lever and one pair of strong arms would suffice to displace it. Then he remembered how his gods had already favoured the enterprise, and took heart. The gale, he piously recognised, was no accidental event. So, with a final prayer, Ug thrust his fir tree into a certain crevice and awaited the upward movement of his side of the slab. Once, twice, thrice, he strained every muscle of his body. At the third attempt, his lever broke like a carrot, about a foot from its lower end. The snap was drowned by the gale, but Ug fell heavily upon the uneven surface of the slab and barked the front of his body, from the nose downwards. On the verge of saying something rude about his gods, Ug checked the imprudent complaint and promised more blubber instead. Fug still slept, which seemed another proof of miraculous favour. Profiting by the accident, Ug now made more intelligent use of the lever. He thrust his pole further into the crevice, muttered a final prayer (which threatened to leave Zug skinless for several winters), and awaited the upward movement.

A shout of triumph burst from his brawny chest. The slab had yielded. For a moment it hung motionless, as though reluctant to glide from its ancient pivot, but Ug re-

doubled his efforts, and slowly the near end rose. Higher, higher it rose, majestic in its silence, awful in its bulk. Then, with a rending crash, the great slab obeyed the law of gravity. The ground shook, the neighbouring rocks trembled, as the monster came to rest, sealing the mouth of the cave.

During some minutes Ug was so deeply awed by his work (not through any sentimentality on behalf of Fug) that he lacked resolution to move. Then anxiety overcame his awe. He scrambled to the front of the cave to see if his hopes were realised. They were realised; Fug was securely entombed. Not till daylight, however, was Ug's peace of mind assured. Kindly dawn showed him that only one little crevice, just wide enough to admit a man's hand, connected his rival with the outer world. Through this narrow aperture he could just distinguish the gloomy face of Fug.

"Good morning," said Ug courteously. "What time is the wedding?"

"Help me out," groaned Fug, "and you shall marry her yourself. Oh! my friend, I did wrong to pay the rent in a lump."

"No," said Ug, "the Chief sided with you. Let us say no more about it."

"Help me out!" screamed Fug.

Then Ug, being a primitive person, dropped irony and exulted openly in his triumph. He told Fug all about his sacrifices, and how his gods had approved his revenge. He also gave Fug his views on the ideal relations between landlords and tenants. Reverting to banter, he waived all further claim in the matter of rent, and pointed out to Fug that he might live rent free to quite a ripe old age, if his family thought it worth while to feed him through the crevice. He expressed the hope that Fug was on good terms with his relatives. Lastly, he assured Fug that he would himself be a kind husband to Zug, whom he meant to marry that evening.

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Legend records that old Sux raised no further obstacles to the union of his daughter with Ug. He seems to have recognised that a slab of rock, two feet thick, constituted a valid impediment to the marriage which he had previously sanctioned.

Fug, so tradition states, lived rent free to an advanced age, and set up in later life as a kind of prophet. Ug and Zug often picnicked outside the cave on summer afternoons, and occasionally Zug would throw the recluse a piece of meat.