

X.

You would never think her unhappy. Everything about her speaks of happiness. She wears necklaces of gold, and purple robes. When she goes out, a throng of vassals lie prostrate in her path, and obedient pages spread carpets before her feet. But none see her in the solitude that she loves; for then she weeps, and her husband does not see her tears.—I am that miserable being, the spouse of an honorable man, of a noble count, the mother of a child whose smiles stab me to the heart.—Maturin: *Bertram*.

THE Countess d'Ahlefeld rose after a sleepless night to face a restless day. Half-reclining on a sofa, she pondered the bitter after-taste of corrupt pleasures, and the crime which wastes life in ecstasy without enjoyment and grief without alleviation. She thought of Musdæmon, whom guilty illusions had once painted in such seductive colors, so frightful now that she had penetrated his mask and seen his soul through his body. The wretched woman wept, not because she had been deceived, but because her eyes were no longer blinded,—tears of regret, but not of repentance; therefore her tears afforded her no relief. At this moment her door was opened. She dried her eyes quickly, and turned away, annoyed at being surprised, for she had given orders that she was not to be disturbed. On seeing Musdæmon her vexation changed to fright, which was dispelled when she found that her son Frederic was with him.

“Mother,” cried the lieutenant, “how does it happen that you are here? I thought you were at Bergen. Have our fine ladies taken to running about the country?”

The countess received Frederic with kisses, to which, like all spoiled children, he responded very coldly. This was possibly the worst of punishments to the unhappy woman. Frederic was her beloved son, the only creature in the world for whom she felt an unselfish affection; for a degraded woman often, even when all sense of wifely duty has vanished, retains some trace of the mother.

“I see, my son, that when you heard I was in Thronhjem you hastened to me at once.”

“Oh, no; not I. I was bored to death at the fort; so I came to town, where I met Musdæmon, who brought me here.”

The poor mother sighed heavily.

“By the way, mother,” continued Frederic, “I am very glad to see you, for you can tell me whether knots of pink ribbon on the hem of the doublet are still worn in Copenhagen. Did you think to bring me a flask of that Oil of Youth to whiten the skin? You did not forget, I hope, the last French novel, or the pure gold lace which I

asked{116} you to get for my scarlet cloak, or those little combs which are so much used just now to hold the curls in place, or—”

The poor woman had brought nothing to her son, the only love she had on earth.

“My dear boy, I have been ill, and my sufferings prevented my thinking of your pleasures.”

“Have you been ill, mother? Well, are you better now? By the bye, how is my pack of Norman hounds? I’ll wager that they have neglected to bathe my monkey in rose-water every night. You’ll see that I shall find my parrot Bilboa dead on my return. When I am away no one thinks of my pets.”

“At least your mother thinks of you, my son,” said his mother in a faltering voice.

Had this been the inexorable hour when the destroying angel hurls sinful souls into everlasting torments, he would have felt pity for the torture which at this instant wrung the heart of the unfortunate countess. Musdæmon laughed in his sleeve.

“Sir Frederic,” said he, “I see that the steel sword has no desire to rust in its iron scabbard. You do not care to lose the wholesome traditions of Copenhagen drawingrooms within the walls of Munkholm. But yet, allow me to ask you, what is the use of all this Oil of Youth, these pink ribbons, and little combs? What is the use of all these preparations for a siege, if the only feminine fortress within the walls of Munkholm is impregnable?”

“Upon my honor, she is,” laughingly responded Frederic. “Certainly, if I have failed, General Schack himself would fail. But how can you surprise a fortress where{117} nothing is exposed,—where every post is unremittingly guarded? How can you contend against chemisettes which cover all but the neck, against sleeves that hide the whole arm, so that only the face and hands remain to prove that the young woman is not as black as the Emperor of Mauritania? My dear tutor, you yourself would have to go to school again. Believe me, that fort is not to be taken where Modesty is garrisoned.”

“Indeed!” said Musdæmon. “But may not Modesty be forced to surrender, if Love lay siege to it, instead of confining himself to a blockade of delicate attentions?”

“Labor in vain, my dear friend. Love is already in possession of the place, but he serves to reinforce Modesty.”

“Ah, Sir Frederic, this is news indeed,—with Love on your side—”

“And who tells you, Musdæmon, that he is on my side?”

“On whose, then?” exclaimed Musdæmon and the countess, who had listened in silence until now, but who was reminded of Ordener by the lieutenant’s last words.

Frederic was about to answer, and was already preparing a spicy account of the scene of the previous night, when he remembered the silence prescribed by the etiquette of duelling, which changed his gayety to confusion.

“I’ faith,” said he, “I don’t know,—that of some clown perhaps, some retainer.”

“Some soldier of the garrison?” said Musdæmon, laughing heartily.{118}

“What, my son!” exclaimed the countess in her turn. “Are you sure that she loves a rustic, a serf? What luck, if you are sure of it!”

“Oh, of course I am sure. But it’s not one of the soldiers of the garrison,” added the lieutenant, with an offended air. “I am sure enough of what I say, however, to beg you, mother, to cut short my very unnecessary exile at that confounded castle.”

The countess’s face brightened on hearing of the young girl’s fall. Ordener Guldenlew’s eagerness to visit Munkholm now appeared to her in very different colors. She gave her son the benefit of them.

“You must give us an account, Frederic, of Ethel Schumacker’s loves. I am not surprised; the daughter of a boor can only love a boor. Meantime, do not curse that castle which yesterday afforded you the honor of the first advances towards an acquaintance, from a certain distinguished personage.”

“What, mother!” said the lieutenant, staring at her,—“what distinguished personage?”

“A truce to jests, my son. Did no one visit you yesterday? You see that I know all about it.”

“I’ faith, more than I do, Mother. Deuce take me if I saw a face yesterday, except those of the masks carved beneath the cornices of those old towers.”

“What, Frederic! You saw nobody?”

“No one, mother!”

In omitting to mention his antagonist of the donjon, Frederic obeyed the law which bound him to silence; besides, could that clodhopper be counted as any one?{119}

“What!” said his mother. “Did not the viceroy’s son visit Munkholm last night?”

The lieutenant laughed.

“The viceroy’s son! Indeed, mother, you must be dreaming, or else you are joking.”

“Neither, my son. Who was on guard yesterday?”

“I myself, mother.”

“And you did not see Baron Ordener?”

“Not a bit of it,” repeated the lieutenant.

“But consider, my boy, he may have entered in disguise. You never saw him, having been brought up at Copenhagen, while he was educated at Thronhjelm. Remember all the stories about his caprices and whims, and his eccentric ideas. Are you sure, my son, that you did not see any one?”

Frederic hesitated an instant.

“No,” he cried, “no one. I can say no more.”

“Then,” replied the countess, “I suppose the baron did not go to Munkholm.”

Musdæmon, at first surprised like Frederic, had listened attentively. He interrupted the countess.

“Allow me, noble lady. Master Frederic, pray tell me the name of the dependent loved by Schumacker’s daughter.”

He repeated his question; for Frederic, who for some moments had been lost in thought, did not hear him.

“I do not know; or rather—no, I do not know.”

“And how, sir, do you know that she loves a dependent?”

“Did I say so? A dependent?—well, yes; he is a dependent.{120}”

The awkwardness of the lieutenant’s position increased momentarily. This series of questions, the ideas to which they gave rise, his enforced silence, threw him into a confusion which he feared he could not much longer control.

“Upon my word, Mr. Musdæmon, and you, my lady mother, if a mania for asking questions be the latest fashion, you may amuse yourselves by questioning each other. For my part, I’ll have nothing more to say to you.”

And flinging open the door, he disappeared, leaving them plunged in an abyss of doubt. He hastened down into the courtyard, for he heard Musdæmon’s voice calling him back.

He mounted his horse and rode toward the harbor, where he intended to take a boat for Munkholm, thinking that there he might find the stranger who had given rise to such serious thoughts in the greatest feather-brain of a feather-brained capital.

“If that was Ordener Guldenlew,” he reflected, “then my poor Ulrica—But no; it is impossible that he could be such a fool as to prefer the penniless daughter of a prisoner of State to the wealthy daughter of an all-powerful minister. At any rate, Schumacker’s daughter can be no more than a caprice; and there is nothing to hinder a man who has a wife from having a mistress too; in fact, it is quite the stylish thing. But no, it was not Ordener. The viceroy’s son would never wear such a shabby jacket. And that old black plume without a buckle, beaten by the wind and rain! And that great{121} cloak, big enough for a tent! And that disordered hair, with no combs and no frizzes! And those boots with iron spurs, covered with mud and dust! Indeed, it could never be he. Baron Thorwick is a knight of the Dannebrog. That fellow wore no decoration. If I were a knight of the Dannebrog, I believe I should wear the collar of the order to bed. Oh, no! He had never even read ‘Clelia.’ No, it was not the viceroy’s son.{122}”

XI.

If man could still retain his warmth of soul when experience has taught him, if he could inherit the legacies of time without bending beneath the weight, he would never attack those exalted virtues whose first lesson is ever self-sacrifice.—Madame de Staël: *Germany*.

“WELL, what is it? You, Poël! what brings you here?”

“Your Excellency forgets that you yourself summoned me.”

“Did I?” said the general. “Oh, I wanted you to hand me that portfolio.”

Poël handed the governor the portfolio, which he could have reached himself by stretching out his arm.

His Excellency mechanically replaced it without opening it; then he turned over some papers in an absentminded way.{123}

“Poël, I was going to ask you—What time is it?”

“Six o’clock in the morning,” replied the general’s servant, who was facing the clock.

“I was going to tell you, Poël—What is the news to-day at the palace?”

The general went on shuffling his papers, writing a few words on each with a preoccupied air.

“Nothing, your Excellency, except that we are still expecting my noble master, about whom I see the general is anxious.”

The general rose from his big writing-table, and looked at Poël somewhat angrily.

“Your eyes are very poor, Poël. I, anxious about Ordener, indeed! I know the reason for his absence; I do not expect him yet.”

General Levin de Knud was so jealous of his authority that he would have considered it compromised had a subaltern been able to guess his secret thoughts, and learn that Ordener had acted without his orders.

“Poël,” he added, “you may go.”

The servant left the room.

“Really,” exclaimed the general when he was left alone, “Ordener uses and abuses his privileges. A blade too often bent will break. To make me spend a night in sleepless impatience! To expose General Levin to the sarcasms of a chancellor’s wife and the conjectures of a servant! And all this that an aged enemy may have those first greetings which are due to an old friend! Ordener! Ordener! whims are destructive of liberty! Let him come, only let him come now, deuce take me if I do{n’t} receive him as gunpowder does fire,—I’ll blow him up! To expose the governor of Throndhjem to a servant’s conjectures and a she-chancellor’s sarcasms! Let him come!”

The general went on making marginal notes on his papers without reading them, so all-absorbing was his ill-temper.

“General! my noble father!” cried a familiar voice; and Ordener clasped in his arms the old man, who did not even try to repress a cry of joy.

“Ordener, my good Ordener! Zounds! how glad I am!” He collected his thoughts in the middle of his phrase. “I am glad, Baron, that you have learned to control your feelings. You seem pleased to see me again. It was probably to mortify your flesh, that you deprived yourself of that pleasure for a whole day and night.”

“Father, you have often told me that an unfortunate enemy should be put before a fortunate friend. I come from Munkholm.”

“Of course,” said the general, “when the enemy’s misfortune is imminent. But Schumacker’s future—”

“Looks more threatening than ever. Noble General, there is an odious plot on foot against that unlucky man. Men born his friends, would ruin him; a man born his foe, must serve him.”

The general, whose face had gradually cleared, interrupted Ordener.

“Very good, my dear Ordener. But what are you talking about? Schumacker is under my protection. What men? What plots?”

Ordener could scarcely have replied plainly to this question. He had but very vague gleams of light, very uncertain suspicions as to the position of the man for whom he was about to expose his life. Many will think that he acted foolishly; but young hearts do what they think right by instinct, and not from calculation; and besides, in this world, where prudence is so barren and wisdom so caustic, who denies that generosity is folly? All is relative on earth, where all is limited; and virtue would be the greatest madness if there were no God behind man. Ordener was at the age to believe and to be believed. He risked his life trustingly. Even the general accepted reasons which would not have borne calm discussion.

“What plots? What men? Good father, in a few days I shall have solved the mystery; then you shall know all that I know. I must start off again to-night.”

“What!” cried the old man, “can you spare me but a few hours? Where are you going? Why are you going, my dear son?”

“You have sometimes allowed me, my noble father, to perform a praiseworthy act in secret.”

“Yes, my brave boy; but you are going without knowing why, and you know what an important affair requires your presence here.”

“My father has given me a month to consider the matter, and I shall devote that time to the interests of another. A good deed is often fruitful in good advice. Besides, we will see about it on my return.”

“How!” anxiously asked the general; “don’t you like this match? They say that Ulrica d’Ahlefeld is very beautiful. Tell me, have you seen her?”

“I believe I have,” said Ordener. “Yes, I believe that she is handsome.”

“Well?” rejoined the governor.

“Well,” said Ordener, “she will never be my wife.”

These cold, decisive words startled the general as if he had received a violent blow. He recalled the suspicions of the haughty countess.

“Ordener,” said he, shaking his head, “I ought to be wise, for I have sinned. Well, I am nothing but an old fool! Ordener, the prisoner has a daughter—”

“Oh,” cried the young man, “General, I wanted to speak to you of her. I ask your protection, father, for that helpless and oppressed young girl.”

“Indeed,” said the governor, gravely, “your request is urgent.”

Ordener recovered himself.

“And why should it not be urgent for a poor captive whose life, and, what is far more precious, her honor, is in danger?”

“Life! honor! Why, I still govern here, and I know nothing of all these horrors! Explain yourself.”

“Noble father, the lives of the prisoner and his defenceless daughter are threatened by an infernal plot.”

“What you say is serious. What proofs have you?”

“The oldest son of a powerful family is even now at Munkholm. He is there to seduce Countess Ethel; he told me so himself.”

The general started back.{127}

“Good God! Poor, forlorn creature! Ordener, Ordener, Ethel and Schumacker are under my protection. Who is this wretch? What is the name of the family?”

Ordener approached the general and wrung his hand.

“It is the D’Ahlefeld family.”

“D’Ahlefeld!” said the governor. “Yes, it is all clear. Lieutenant Frederic is at Munkholm now. My noble Ordener, would they marry you to such a brood! I understand your aversion, Ordener.”

The old man, folding his arms, thought for some moments, then clasped Ordener in his embrace.

“Ordener, you may go. Your friends shall not lack protection; I will guard them. Yes, go; you are perfectly right. That infernal Countess d’Ahlefeld is here; did you know it?”

“The noble lady, Countess d’Ahlefeld,” said the usher, opening the door.

At that name, Ordener mechanically withdrew to the back of the room; and the countess, entering without seeing him, exclaimed,—

“General, your pupil is deceiving you. He never went to Munkholm.”

“Indeed?” said the general.

“Good gracious, no! My son Frederic, who has just left the palace, was on duty yesterday in the donjon, and he saw no one.”

“Really, noble lady?” repeated the general.

“So,” added the countess, with a triumphant smile, “you need not wait for your Ordener any longer, General.”

The governor was cold and calm.

“I am no longer expecting him, Countess, it is true.”

“General,” said the countess, turning, “I thought we were alone. Who is this?”

The countess looked searchingly at Ordener, who bowed.

“Really,” she continued, “I never saw him but once; still, if it were not for that dress, I should say—General, is this the viceroy’s son?”

“Himself, noble lady,” said Ordener, with another bow.

The countess smiled.

“In that case, permit a lady who will soon be more closely allied to you, to ask where you were yesterday, Count?”

“Count! I do not think that I am so unfortunate as to have lost my noble father yet, my lady countess.”

“Certainly not; that was not my meaning. It is better to become a count by taking a wife than by losing a father.”

“One is no better than the other, noble lady.”

The countess, although slightly confused, made up her mind to laugh heartily.

“Come, the stories that I have heard are true. Your manners are somewhat boorish; but you will grow more used to accepting gifts from fair hands when Ulrica d’Ahlefeld has put the chain of the Order of the Elephant about your neck.”

“A chain indeed!” said Ordener.

“You will see, General Levin,” resumed the countess,{129} whose laugh was somewhat forced, “that your intractable pupil will not consent to receive his colonel’s brevet from a lady’s hand either.”

“You are right, Countess,” replied Ordener; “a man who wears a sword ought not to owe his epaulettes to a petticoat.”

The great lady’s face darkened.

“Ho! ho! whence comes the baron? Is it really true that your Highness was not at Munkholm yesterday?”

“Noble lady, I do not always satisfy all questions. But, General, you and I will meet again.”

Then, pressing the old man’s hand and bowing to the countess, he quitted the room, leaving the lady, amazed at the extent of her own ignorance, alone with the governor, who was furious at the amount of his knowledge.{130}

XII.

The fellow that sits next him now, parts bread with him, and pledges the breath of him in a divided draught, is the readiest man to kill him.—Shakespeare: *Timon of Athens*.

IF the reader will transport himself to the highway leading from Throndhjem to Skongen, a narrow, stony road which skirts Throndhjem Fjord until it reaches the village of Vygla, he will not fail to hear the footsteps of two travellers, who left the city by what is known as Skongen Gate, at nightfall, and are rapidly climbing the range of hills up which the path to Vygla winds. Both are wrapped in cloaks. One walks with a firm, youthful step, his body erect and his head well up; the point of his sword hangs below the hem of his cloak, and in spite of the darkness, we see the plume in his cap waving in the breeze. The other is rather taller than his companion, but{131} slightly bent; upon his back is a hump, doubtless formed by a wallet which is hidden by his large black mantle, whose ragged edges bear witness to its long and faithful service. His only weapon is a stick, with which he supports his rapid and uneven steps.

If darkness prevent our reader from distinguishing the features of the two travellers, he may perhaps recognize them by the conversation which one of them opens after an hour of silent, consequently tedious travel.

“Master, my young master! we have reached the point from which Vygla tower and Throndhjem spires may both be seen at the same time. Before us, on the horizon, that

black mass is the tower; behind us lies the cathedral; its flying buttresses, darker still against the sky, stand out like the skeleton ribs of a mammoth.”

“Is Vygla far from Skongen?” asked the other wayfarer.

“We have to cross the Ordals, sir; we shall not reach Skongen before three o’clock in the morning.”

“What hour is that striking now?”

“Good heavens, master! you make me shiver. Yes, that is Thronhjelm clock; the wind brings the sound to us. That’s a sign of storm. The northwest wind brings clouds.”

“In truth, the stars have all disappeared behind us.”

“Pray let us make haste, my noble lord, the storm is close at hand, and Gill’s corpse and my escape may already have been discovered in the city. Let us make haste!”

“Willingly. Old man, your load seems heavy; give it to me, I am younger and stronger than you.{132}”

“No, indeed, noble master; it is not for the eagle to carry the shell of the tortoise. I am too far beneath you for you to burden yourself with my wallet.”

“But, old man, if it tires you? It seems heavy. What have you in it? Just now you stumbled, and it clinked as if there were iron in it.”

The old man sprang away from the young man.

“It clinked, master? Oh, no! you are mistaken. It contains nothing—but food, clothes. No, it does not tire me, sir.”

The young man’s friendly offer seemed to give his old comrade a fright which he tried to disguise.

“Well,” replied the young man, without noticing it, “if your bundle does not tire you, keep it.”

The old man, although his fears were set at rest, made haste to change the conversation.

“It is hard to travel by night as fugitives, over a road which it would be so agreeable, sir, to take by day as observers of Nature. On the shores of the fjord, to our left, are a quantity of Runic stones, upon which may be studied inscriptions traced, they say, by gods and giants. On our right, behind the rocks at the edge of the road, lies the salt-marsh of Sciold, which undoubtedly communicates with the sea by some

subterranean passage; for the sea lobworm is caught there, that strange fish, which, as your servant and guide discovered, eats sand. It was in the Vygla tower, which we are now approaching, that the pagan king Vermond roasted the breasts of Saint Etheldreda, that glorious martyr, with wood from the true cross, brought to Copenhagen by Olaf III., and conquered from{133} him by the Norwegian king. They say that since then repeated attempts have been made to turn that cursed tower into a chapel; every cross placed there, is consumed in its turn by fire from heaven.”

At this instant a tremendous flash of lightning covered the fjord, the hill, the rocks, the tower, and faded before the two travellers could distinguish any of these objects. They instinctively paused, and the lightning was almost immediately followed by a violent peal of thunder, which echoed from cloud to cloud across the sky, and from rock to rock along the earth.

They raised their eyes. All the stars were hidden, huge clouds rolled rapidly over one another, and the tempest hung like an avalanche above their heads. The tremendous blast, before which all these masses fled, had not yet descended to the trees, which no breath stirred, and upon which no drop of rain had as yet fallen. The roar of the storm was heard aloft, and this, with the noise of the fjord, was the only sound to be heard in the darkness of the night, made doubly dark by the blackness of the tempest.

This tumultuous silence was suddenly interrupted, close beside the travellers, by a growl which made the old man tremble.

“Omnipotent God!” he cried, grasping the young man’s arm, “that is either the laugh of the Devil in the storm, or the voice of—”

A fresh flash, a fresh peal, cut short his words. The tempest then burst with fury, as if it had only waited this signal. The travellers drew their cloaks closer, to{134} protect themselves alike from the rain falling in torrents from the clouds, and from the thick dust swept in whirlwinds from the dry earth by a howling blast.

“Old man,” said the youth, “a flash of lightning just now showed me Vygla tower on our right; let us leave the path and seek shelter there.”

“Shelter in the Cursed Tower!” exclaimed the old man; “may Saint Hospitius protect us! Think, young master; that tower is deserted.”

“So much the better, old man! We shall not be kept waiting at the door.”

“Think of the abominable act which polluted it!”

“Well, let it purify itself by sheltering us. Come, old man, follow me. I tell you that on such a night I would test the hospitality of a den of thieves.”

Then, in spite of the old man’s remonstrances, he grasped his arm and hastened toward the building, which, as the frequent flashes showed him, was close at hand. As they approached, they saw a light in one of the loopholes of the tower.

“You see,” said the young man, “that this tower is not deserted. You feel easier now, no doubt.”

“Oh, my God! my God!” cried the old man, “where are you taking me, master? Saint Hospitius forbid that I should enter that oratory of the Devil!”

They had now reached the foot of the tower. The young traveller knocked loudly at the new door of this much dreaded ruin.

“Calm yourself, old man. Some pious hermit has come hither to sanctify this profane abode by dwelling in it.{135}”

“No,” said his comrade, “I will not enter. I’ll answer for it that no monk can live here, unless he has one of Beelzebub’s seven chains for a chaplet.”

However, a light had descended from one narrow window to another, and now shone through the key-hole.

“You are very late, Nychol!” cried a sharp voice; “the gallows was erected at noon, and it takes but six hours to come from Skongen to Vygla. Did you have an extra job?”

These questions were asked just as the door was opened. The woman who opened it, seeing two strange faces instead of the one which she expected, uttered a frightened, threatening shriek, and started back.

Her appearance was by no means reassuring. She was tall; she held above her head an iron lamp, which threw a bright light upon her face. Her livid features, her bony, angular figure, were corpse-like, and her hollow eyes emitted ominous flashes like those of a funeral torch. She wore a red serge petticoat, reaching to her bare feet, and apparently stained in spots with deeper red. Her fleshless breast was half covered by a man’s jacket of the same color, the sleeves of which were cut off at the elbow. The wind, coming in at the open door, blew about her head her long gray hair, which was insecurely fastened with a strip of bark, and lent an added ferocity to her savage face.

“Good lady,” said the younger of the new-comers, “the rain falls in floods; you have a roof, and we have gold.”

His aged comrade plucked him by the cloak, whispering, "Oh, master, what are you saying? If this be not the abode of the Devil, it is the habitation of some robber. Our money, instead of protecting us, will be our ruin."

"Hush!" said the young man; and drawing a purse from his bosom, he displayed it to his hostess, repeating his request as he did so.

The woman, recovering from her surprise, studied them in turn with fixed and haggard eyes.

"Strangers," she cried at last, as if she had not heard their voices, "have your guardian angels forsaken you? What would you with the cursed inhabitants of the Cursed Tower? Strangers, they were no mortals who sent you here for shelter, or they would have told you: Better are the lightning and the storm than the hearth within Vygla tower. The only living man who may enter here, enters the abode of no other human being; he only leaves solitude for a crowd; he lives only by death; he has no place save in the curses of men; he serves their vengeance only; he exists by their crimes alone; and the vilest criminal, in the hour of his doom, vents on him the universal scorn, and feels that he has a right to add to it his own contempt. Strangers! You must indeed be strangers, for your foot does not yet shrink with horror from the threshold of this tower. Disturb no longer the she-wolf and her cubs; return to the road travelled by the rest of mankind, and if you would not be shunned by your fellows, do not tell them that your face ever caught the rays of the lamp of the dwellers in Vygla tower." With these words, pointing to the door, she advanced toward the two travellers. The old man trembled in every limb, and looked imploringly at the young man, who, understanding nothing of the tall woman's words because of the great rapidity of her speech, thought her crazy, and was in no wise disposed to go out again into the rain, which still fell heavily.

"Faith, good hostess, you describe a strange character, whose acquaintance I would not lose this chance of making."

"His acquaintance, young man, is soon made, sooner ended. If your evil spirit urge you to seek it, go kill some living man, or profane the dead."

"Profane the dead!" repeated the old man, in a faltering voice, hiding himself in his companion's shadow.

"I scarcely comprehend," the latter said, "your suggestions, which seem somewhat indirect; it is shorter to stay here. No one but a madman would continue his journey in such weather."

“Unhappy man!” exclaimed the woman, “do not knock at the door of one who can open no door save that of the tomb.”

“And if the door of the tomb should indeed open for me with that of your abode, woman, it shall not be said that I shrank from an ill-omened word. My sword is my safeguard. Come, close the door, for the wind is cold, and take this money.”

“Bah! what is your money to me!” rejoined their hostess; “precious in your hands, in mine it would become more vile than pewter. Well, stay if you will, and give me the gold. It may protect you from the storms of Heaven; it cannot save me from the scorn of men. Nay; you pay a higher price for hospitality than others pay for{138} murder. Wait here an instant, and give me your gold. Yes, it is the first time that a man’s hands have entered here filled with gold, without being stained with blood.”

So saying, after putting down her lamp and barricading the door, she disappeared beneath the arch of a dark staircase built at the back of the room.

While the old man shuddered, and, invoking the glorious Saint Hospitius under every name, cordially, but in an undertone, cursed his young companion’s imprudence, the latter took the light and surveyed the large circular apartment in which they had been left. What he saw as he approached the wall, startled him; and the old man, who had watched him closely, exclaimed,—

“Good God, master! a gallows?”

A tall gallows, in fact, rested against the wall, reaching to the keystone of the damp, high, arched roof.

“Yes,” said the young man, “and here are saws of wood and iron, chains and iron collars; here is a rack, and huge pincers hanging over it.”

“Holy saints of Paradise!” cried the old man; “where are we?”

The young man calmly went on with his inspection.

“This is a roll of hempen cord; here are furnaces and caldrons; this part of the wall is covered with tongs and scalpels; here are leathern whips with steel tips, an axe and a mace.”

“This must be the wardrobe of hell!” interrupted the old man, terrified by this dreadful catalogue.

“Here,” continued the other, “are copper screws, wheels with teeth of bronze, a box of huge nails, and a lever. In{139} truth, these are sorry furnishings. It may seem to you hard that my impatience should have brought you hither with me.”

“Really, you agree to that!”

The old man was more dead than alive.

“Do not be frightened. What matters it where you are? I am with you.”

“A fine protection!” muttered the old man, whose increasing terror modified his fear and respect for his young companion; “a sword three feet long against a gibbet nine feet high!”

The big, red woman returned, and again taking up the iron lamp, beckoned to the travellers to follow her. They cautiously climbed a narrow, rickety flight of stairs built in the thickness of the tower wall. At each loop-hole a blast of wind and rain threatened to extinguish the quivering flame of the lamp, which their hostess shielded with her long, transparent hands. After stumbling more than once upon a rolling stone, in which the old man’s alarmed fancy saw human bones scattered over the stairs, they reached the next floor, and found themselves in a circular hall like the one below. In the centre, according to Gothic custom, burned a huge fire, the smoke of which escaped through a hole in the roof, but not without perceptibly obscuring the atmosphere of the hall. It was the light from this fire, combined with that of the iron lamp, which had caught the notice of the two wayfarers. A spit, loaded with fresh-killed meat, revolved before the flames. The old man turned from it in disgust.

“It was upon that execrable hearth,” said he to his{140} comrade, “that the embers of the true cross consumed the limbs of a saint.” A rude table stood some distance away from the fire. The woman invited the travellers to be seated at it.

“Strangers,” said she, placing the lamp before them, “supper will soon be ready, and my husband will probably make haste to get here, for fear the midnight ghost should carry him off as it passes the Cursed Tower.”

Ordener—for the reader has doubtless already guessed that he and his guide, Benignus Spiagudry, were the two travellers—could now examine at his leisure the strange disguise, in the concoction of which Benignus had exhausted all the resources of his fertile fancy, spurred on by a dread of recognition and capture. The poor fugitive had exchanged his reindeer-skin garments for a full suit of black, left at the Spladgest by a famous Throndhjem grammarian, who drowned himself in despair because he could not find out why “Jupiter” changed to “Jovis” in the genitive. His wooden shoes

gave place to a stout pair of postilion boots, whose owner had been killed by his horses, in which his slender shanks had so much spare room that he could not have walked without the aid of half a truss of hay. The huge wig of an elegant young Frenchman, slain by thieves just outside the city gates, concealed his bald pate and floated over his sharp, crooked shoulders. One of his eyes was covered with a plaster, and, thanks to a pot of paint which he had found in the pocket of an old maid who died of disappointed love, his pale, hollow cheeks were tinged with an unwonted crimson, an ornament which the rain had now divided{141} with his chin. Before seating himself, he carefully placed beneath him the pack which he carried on his back, first wrapping it in his old mantle, and while he absorbed his comrade's entire attention, all his thoughts seemed centred in the roast which his hostess was watching, toward which he cast ever and anon a glance of anxiety and alarm. Broken ejaculations fell from his lips at intervals:

“Human flesh! *Horridas epulas!* Cannibals! A feast for Moloch! *Ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet!* Where are we?—Atreus—Druidess—Irmensul—The Devil struck Lycaon with lightning—” Finally he exclaimed: “Good Heavens! God be thanked! I see a tail!”

Ordener, who, having watched and listened attentively, had closely followed the train of his thoughts, could not help smiling.

“That tail need not comfort you. It may be the Devil's hind quarter.”

Spiagudry did not hear this pleasantry. His eyes were riveted on the back of the room. He trembled, and whispered in Ordener's ear,—

“Master, look yonder, on that heap of straw, in the shadow!”

“Well, what is it?” said Ordener.

“Three naked bodies,—the corpses of three children!”

“Some one is knocking at the door,” cried the red woman, who was squatting by the fire.

In fact, a knock, followed by two louder raps, was heard above the ever-increasing din of the storm.

“It is he at last! It is Nychol!{142}”

And seizing the lamp, their hostess hurried downstairs.

The two travellers had not had time to resume their conversation, when they heard a confused murmur of voices below, in the midst of which they caught these words, uttered in a voice which made Spiagudry start and shiver:

“Be quiet, woman; we shall stay. The thunderbolt enters without waiting for the door to be opened.”

Spiagudry pressed closer to Ordener.

“Master, master,” he quavered, “we are lost!”

The sound of footsteps was heard on the stairs, and two men in ecclesiastic dress entered the room, followed by the startled hostess.

One of these men was tall, and wore the black gown and close-clipped hair of a Lutheran minister; the other was shorter, and wore a hermit’s robe tied with a girdle of rope. The hood drawn over his face concealed all but his long black beard, and his hands were entirely hidden by his flowing sleeves.

When he saw these two peaceful strangers, Spiagudry recovered from the terror which the peculiar voice of one of them had caused.

“Don’t be alarmed, my good lady,” said the minister. “Christian ministers do good even to those who injure them; why should they harm those who help them? We humbly beg for shelter. If the reverend gentleman with me spoke harshly to you just now, he was wrong to forget the gentle voice recommended to us in our ordination vows. Alas! the most saintly may err. I lost my way on the road from Skongen to Throndhjem, and could find no guide through the darkness, no shelter from the storm. This reverend brother, whom I encountered, being like myself far from home, deigned to allow me to accompany him hither. He praised your kind hospitality, dear lady; doubtless he was not mistaken. Do not say to us, like the wicked shepherd, ‘*Advene, cur intras?*’ Take us in, worthy hostess, and God will save your crops from the storm, God will protect your flocks from the tempest, as you give a refuge to travellers who have gone astray!”

“Old man,” broke in the woman in a fierce voice, “I have neither crops nor flocks.”

“Well, if you are poor, God blesses the poor more than the rich. You and your husband shall live to a good old age, respected, not for your wealth, but for your virtues; your children shall grow up blessed in the esteem of all men, and be what their father was before them.”

“Silence!” cried the hostess. “If they continue to be what we are, our children must grow old as we have, scorned by all,—a scorn handed down from generation to generation. Silence, old man! Your blessing turns to curses on our heads.”

“Heavens!” returned the minister, “who then are you? Amid what crimes do you pass your life?”

“What do you call crime? What do you call virtue? We enjoy one privilege,—we can possess no virtue and commit no crime.”

“The woman’s reason wanders,” said the minister, turning to the little hermit, who was drying his coarse robe before the fire.

“No, priest!” replied the woman. “Learn where you{144} are. I would rather inspire horror than pity. I am not mad, but the wife of—”

A prolonged and violent knocking at the door drowned her words, to the great disappointment of Spiagudry and Ordener, who had silently listened to the dialogue.

“Cursed,” muttered the red woman, “be the mayor and council of Skongen, who gave us this tower so near the high-road for our dwelling! Perhaps that is not Nychol, now.”

Still, she took up the lamp.

“After all, if it be another traveller, what matters it? The brook can flow where the torrent has passed.”

The four travellers, left alone, examined each other by the firelight. Spiagudry, terrified at first by the hermit’s voice, and then reassured by his black beard, might have trembled afresh if he had seen the piercing eye with which the monk observed him from beneath his cowl.

In the general silence the minister ventured a question: “Brother monk, I presume that you are one of the Catholic priests who escaped from the last persecution, and that you were returning to your retreat when I was fortunate enough to meet you. Can you tell me where we are?”

The broken door of the ruined staircase opened before the hermit could answer.

“Woman, let a storm but burst, and there is always a crowd to sit at our hated board and take shelter beneath our accursed roof.”

“Nychol,” replied the wife, “I could not help it!”

“What do I care how many guests you have, provided{145} they pay? Money is as well earned by lodging a traveller as by strangling a thief.”

The speaker paused at the door, and the four strangers had ample opportunity to examine him. He was a man of colossal size, dressed, like their hostess, in red serge. His enormous head seemed to rest directly upon his broad shoulders, in strong contrast with his gracious lady’s long, bony neck. He had a low forehead, flat nose, and thick eyebrows; his eyes, rimmed with red, shone like burning coals in a pool of blood. The lower part of his face was shaved smooth, exposing his big mouth, whose black lips were parted in a hideous grin, like the gaping edges of a never-healing wound. Two wisps of frizzled beard, extending from his cheeks to his chin, made his face seem square when seen from the front. He wore a gray felt hat, which dripped with rain, and which he did not deign to remove in the presence of the four travellers.

As he looked at him, Benignus Spiagudry uttered a cry of fright, and the Lutheran minister turned away, struck with horror and surprise; while the master of the house, recognizing, addressed him thus: “What, are you here, minister! Indeed, I did not expect to have the pleasure of seeing your scared and woebegone face again to-day.”

The priest mastered his first feeling of repulsion. His face became serious and serene.

“And I, my son, rejoice at the chance which has brought together the shepherd and the lost sheep, to the end, no doubt, that the sheep may return to the fold.”

“Ah, by Haman’s gibbet,” rejoined the other with a{146} loud laugh, “this is the first time that ever I was compared to a sheep! Believe me, Father, if you would flatter the vulture, you must not call him a dove.”

“He who can change the vulture to a dove, consoles, my son, and does not flatter. You think that I fear you, and I only pity you!”

“You must indeed have a goodly store of pity. I should have fancied that you had exhausted it all on that poor devil to whom you displayed your cross this morning in the hope of hiding my gallows from his eyes.”

“That unfortunate man,” replied the priest, “was less to be pitied than you; for he wept, and you laugh. Happy is he who learns in the moment of atonement how much less powerful is man’s arm than the word of God!”

“Well said, Father!” replied the host, with a horrid and ironical mirth. “Happy is he who weeps! That fellow to-day, moreover, had no other fault than that of loving the king so much that he could not live without making his Majesty’s picture upon little copper medals, which he then gilded artistically to render them more worthy of the royal

effigy. Our gracious sovereign was not ungrateful, and rewarded him for such a display of affection with a fine hempen decoration, which, let me inform my worthy guests, was conferred upon him this very day, in Skongen market-place, by me, lord chancellor of the Order of the Gibbet, assisted by this gentleman here present, grand chaplain of the said order.”

“Stop, wretched man!” broke in the priest. “How can he who punishes forget that punishment awaits us all? Listen to the thunder{147}—”

“Well, what is thunder? Satan’s laughter.”

“Good God, he has just looked on death, and he blasphemes!”

“A truce to your sermons, old fool!” cried the host, in a loud, angry tone, “unless you would curse the angel of darkness who has brought us together twice in one day, in the same carriage and under the same roof. Imitate your friend the hermit, who is silent, for he longs to be back again in his cave at Lynrass. I thank you, brother monk, for the blessing which I see you bestow upon the Cursed Tower every morning as you cross the hill; but the fact is that you always seemed tall to me until now, and that black beard of yours looked white. Are you sure that you are the hermit of Lynrass,—the only hermit in the province of Thronhjem?”

“I am the only one,” said the hermit in a hollow voice.

“We are, then,” rejoined his host, “the two recluses of the district—Hollo, Becky, make haste with that roast lamb, for I am hungry. I was detained at Burlock village by that confounded Dr. Manryll, who would only give me twelve escalins for the corpse. That miserable fellow who keeps the Thronhjem Spladgest gets forty. Ha, Master Periwig, what’s the matter with you? Are you going to tumble over? By the way, Becky, have you finished the skeleton of that famous magician, Orgivius the poisoner? It is high time it was delivered to the Bergen Museum. Did you send one of your little pigs to the mayor of Loevig to get what he owes me,—four double crowns for boiling a witch and two alchemists, and{148} for removing several chains from the cross-beams of his tribunal, which they disfigured; twenty escalins for hanging Ishmael Typhaine, a Jew against whom the good bishop entered a complaint; and a crown for putting a new wooden arm to the stone gallows of the tower.”

“Your wages,” replied his wife in sour tones, “remain in the mayor’s hands, because your son forgot to take a wooden spoon to receive the money, and none of the judge’s servants were willing to put it into his hand.”

The husband frowned.

“Only let their necks fall into my hands, and they shall see whether I need a wooden spoon to touch them. But we must manage the mayor carefully, for it is to him that robber Ivar complained that he was put to the rack by me, and not by a regular executioner, alleging that, as he had not yet been tried, he was not upon my level. By the way, wife, do keep the children from playing with my nippers and pincers; they have spoiled all my tools, so that I really could not use them to-day. Where are they, the little monsters?” added the man, going up to the heap of straw where Spiagudry had fancied that he saw three dead bodies. “Here they are in bed; they sleep through all our noise as soundly as if they had been hanged.”

From these words, whose grim horror was in strong contrast with the speaker’s mirth and fierce, frightful composure, the reader will have guessed who was the inhabitant of the Vygla tower. Spiagudry, who upon his first appearance recognized him from having often seen him act in his official capacity in the Throndhjem market-place, felt ready to faint, particularly when he considered his own powerful personal motive for dreading this awful personage. He leaned over to Ordener, and said in scarcely articulate tones, “It is Nychol Orugix, the hangman of the province of Throndhjem!”

Ordener, at first struck with horror, shuddered, and regretted both his journey and the storm. But soon a peculiar feeling of curiosity took possession of him, and although he pitied his old guide’s distress and terror, he devoted his entire attention to observing the speech and manners of the singular being before him,—just as a man might listen eagerly to the growl of a hyena or the roar of a tiger, brought from the desert to one of our great cities. Poor Benignus was far from being sufficiently easy in his mind to make psychological observations. Hidden behind Ordener, he drew his mantle closely about him, raised a restless hand to his plaster, pulled the back of his loose periwig over his face, and sighed heavily.

Meantime the hostess had dished up the joint of roast lamb, with its reassuring tail, on a large earthen platter. The hangman seated himself opposite Ordener and Spiagudry, between the two clergymen; and his wife, after putting upon the table a jug of sweetened beer, a piece of *rindebrod*,^[8] and five wooden plates, sat down by the fire and busied herself in sharpening her husband’s dull tools.

“There, reverend sir,” said Orugix, laughing; “the sheep offers you a piece of lamb. And you, Sir Periwig, was it the wind that blew your hair over your face?^{150}”

“The wind, sir,—the storm—” stammered the trembling Spiagudry.

“Come, pluck up a spirit, old boy! You see that these reverend gentlemen and I are good fellows. Tell us who you are, and who your silent young friend is, and talk a bit. If your conversation is as amusing as your person, it must be funny indeed.”

“Your worship jests,” said the keeper, pursing his lips, showing his teeth and winking, to make himself look merry. “I am but a poor old man.”

“Yes,” interrupted the jovial hangman, “some old scientist, some old sorcerer.”

“Oh, my lord and master, a scientist, but no sorcerer!”

“So much the worse; a sorcerer would complete our joyful Sanhedrim. Gentlemen and guests, let us drink to restore this old sage’s speech, so that he may enliven us at supper; the health of the man we hanged to-day, brother preacher! Well, father monk, do you refuse my beer?”

The hermit had, indeed, drawn from under his gown a large gourd of clear water, from which he filled his glass.

“Zounds, hermit of Lynrass!” cried the hangman, “if you will not taste my beer, I will taste the water which you prefer to it.”

“So be it,” answered the hermit.

“First take off your glove, worthy brother,” answered the hangman. “Water should always be poured with the bare hand.”

The hermit shook his head, saying, “It is a vow.”

“Well, then, pour,” said the hangman.{151}

Hardly had Orugix raised the glass to his lips when he set it down hastily, while the hermit drained his at a draught.

“By the Holy Grail! good hermit, what is that infernal stuff? I have not drank its like since the day that I came near drowning in my voyage from Copenhagen to Thronhjem. Truly, hermit, that is no water from Lynrass spring; it is salt water.”

“Salt water,” repeated Spiagudry, his terror increasing as he looked at the hermit’s glove.

“Well, well!” said the hangman, turning toward him with a loud laugh; “so everything alarms you, old Absalom,—even to the drink of a holy monk who chooses to mortify his flesh!”

“Alas, no, master! But salt water—There is but one man—”

“Come, come, you don’t know what you are talking about, sir doctor; your distress must be caused by your bad conscience, or else you despise our company.”

These words, uttered in a humorous tone, reminded Spiagudry that he must needs hide his fears. To mollify his much-dreaded host, he called his vast memory to his aid, and summoned up all the presence of mind which was left to him.

“I despise you,—you, my lord and master! You, whose presence in a province gives that province the *merum imperium!*^[9] You, mighty hangman, the executioner of secular vengeance, the sword of justice, the shield of innocence! You, whom Aristotle in the sixth book and^{152} last chapter of his ‘Politics’ ranks with magistrates, and whose salary Paris de Puteo, in his treatise ‘De Syndico,’ fixes at five gold crowns, as this passage proves: *Quinque aureos manivolto!* You, sir, whose Cronstadt colleagues were ennobled when they had cut off three hundred heads,—you, whose terrible but most honorable functions are performed with pride in Franconia by the most recent bridegroom, in Reutlingen by the youngest of the city councillors, in Stedien by the last-made citizen! And do I not also know, good master, that your colleagues in France have the right of *havadium* upon every leper, upon pigs, and upon cake on Epiphany eve? How could I fail to feel the deepest respect for you when the abbot of Saint Germain des Prés gives you a boar’s head every year, on Saint Vincent’s Day, and puts you at the head of his procession!”

Here the keeper’s erudite flow of fancy was abruptly cut short by the hangman.

“Upon my word, this is the first that I have heard of it. The learned abbot of whom you speak, my worthy friend, has hitherto defrauded me of all these fine privileges which you describe in such attractive fashion.—Strangers,” continued Orugix, “aside from all this old fool’s extravagant nonsense, it is quite true that I have missed my career. I am only the poor hangman of a poor province. Well, I certainly ought to have done better than Stillison Dickoy, the famous hangman of Moscow. Would you believe that I am the same man who was chosen twenty-four years ago to behead Schumacker?”

“Schumacker, Count of Griffenfeld!” exclaimed Ordener.^{153}

“Does that surprise you, Sir Silent? Yes, that selfsame Schumacker who, strange to say, would again fall into my hands should it please the king to recall his reprieve. Let us empty this jug, gentlemen, and I will tell you how it happens that after so brilliant a beginning I end my career so miserably.

“In 1676, I was assistant to Rhum Stuald, the royal hangman at Copenhagen. At the time of Count Griffenfeld’s sentence, my master falling ill, I was, thanks to my powerful patrons, selected to act in his place. On June 5,—I shall never forget that

day,—at five o'clock in the morning, assisted by the carpenter, I erected in the public square a huge gallows, which we hung with black, out of respect for the prisoner. At eight, the king's guards surrounded the scaffold, and the Schleswig Uhlans kept back the crowd that thronged the square. Who would not have been dazzled in my place? Erect, and sword in hand, I stood waiting on the platform. All eyes were upon me; at that moment I was the most important personage in the two kingdoms. My fortune, thought I, is made; for what could all these great lords, who have sworn the chancellor's ruin, do without me? I already regarded myself as the royal hangman of the town, by letters-patent; I had servants and privileges of every sort. Just listen! The clock on the fortress struck ten. The prisoner left his cell, crossed the square, and ascended the scaffold with a firm step and calm face. I wanted to tie his hair; he refused, and himself performed this last office. 'It's a long time,' he said smilingly to the prior of St. Andrew's, since I dressed my own hair.' I offered him the black bandage; he declined it scornfully, but without showing any contempt for me. 'My friend,' said he, 'this is perhaps the first time on record, that the space of a few feet ever held the two officers representing the extremes of the law,—the chancellor and the executioner!' Those words have remained graven on my memory. He also refused the black cushion which I would have given him for his knees, embraced the priest, and knelt, after declaring his innocence in a loud voice. Then I broke his escutcheon with a single blow of my mace, crying aloud, as is the custom, 'This is not done without just cause!' This affront shook the count's firm bearing; he turned pale, but soon mastered himself and said, 'The king gave me my arms; the king can take them from me!' He placed his head on the block, turned his eyes toward the east, and I raised my sword in both hands. Now listen! At that instant a shout fell upon my ears,—'Pardon, in the king's name! Pardon for Schumacker!' I turned; I saw a royal aide-de-camp galloping toward the gallows waving a parchment. The count rose, with a look not of pleasure, but of satisfaction. The parchment was handed to him. 'Good God!' cried he, 'imprisonment for life! Their mercy is more cruel than death.' He stepped, looking like a thief, from the scaffold which he had mounted so serenely. It was nothing to me. I had no idea that this man's salvation meant my ruin. After removing the scaffold, I returned to my master still full of hope, although slightly disappointed at losing the golden crown, my fee for removing a head. That was not all. Next day I received an order to leave the city, and an appointment as executioner for the province of Thronhjem. A provincial hangman, and that in the most miserable province of Norway! Now you shall see, gentlemen, how small causes sometimes bring about great results. The count's enemies, by way of displaying their generosity, had done all in their power to keep back the pardon until the execution was over. It lacked but one minute; they blamed me for being so slow, as if it would have been

decent to prevent an illustrious man from amusing himself for a few moments, before he breathed his last! As if a royal executioner beheading a lord high chancellor could act with no more dignity and sense of proportion than a country hangman turning off a Jew! Ill-will was added to this. I had a brother; indeed, I think I have one still. He had changed his name, and succeeded in finding employment in the house of the new chancellor, Count d'Ahlefeld. My presence in Copenhagen disturbed the scoundrel. My brother despised me, because it might some time fall to my lot to hang him."

Here the fluent narrator stopped to give vent to his mirth; then he went on:—

"You see, my dear guests, that I made the best of it. The deuce take ambition! I ply my calling honestly. I sell my dead bodies, or Becky turns them into skeletons, which the Bergen anatomical museum buys. I laugh at everything, even at that poor woman who was a gypsy, and whom solitude has driven mad. My three heirs are growing up in the fear of the Devil and the gallows. My name is the terror of all the children in Thronhjøm. The city council furnish me with a cart{156} and red clothes. The Cursed Tower protects me from rain as well as the bishop's palace could do. Old priests, driven hither by a storm, preach to me; learned men fawn upon me. In fine, I am as happy as most people; I drink, eat, hang, and sleep."

The hangman did not close this long speech without frequent interludes of beer and noisy bursts of laughter.

"He kills, and he sleeps!" murmured the minister; "poor wretch!"

"What a lucky fellow the rascal is!" exclaimed the hermit.

"Yes, brother monk," said the hangman; "just as much of a rascal as you are, but assuredly much luckier. You see, the business would be a capital one if people did not seem to take pleasure in cutting down my profits. Would you believe it, some great wedding has just afforded the chaplain newly appointed to Thronhjøm a pretext for asking the pardon of twelve criminals who really belonged to me?"

"Belonged to you!" cried the minister.

"Yes, to be sure, Father. Seven of them were sentenced to be whipped, two to be branded on the left cheek, and three to be hanged, which makes twelve in all. Yes, I shall lose twelve crowns and thirteen escalins if the pardon is granted. What do you think, strangers, of such a chaplain, who disposes so easily of my property? That confounded priest's name is Athanasius Munder. Oh, if I could only get hold of him!"

The minister rose, and said in a quiet voice, with a calm manner, "My son, I am Athanasius Munder.{157}"

At these words Orugix's face became inflamed with fury; he started from his seat. Then his angry eye met the friendly gaze of the chaplain, and he sat down again slowly, in mute confusion.

There was a momentary silence. Ordener, who had risen from the table ready to defend the priest, was first to break it.

"Nychol Orugix," said he, "here are thirteen crowns to pay for the pardon of those prisoners."

"Alas!" interrupted the minister, "who knows whether I can obtain their pardon? I must first manage to get a word with the viceroy's son, for it all depends upon his marrying the chancellor's daughter."

"Sir chaplain," answered the young man in a firm voice, "your wish shall be granted. Even if Ordener Guldenlew never wears the marriage ring, the chains of your *protégés* shall be loosed."

"Young stranger, you can do nothing in the matter; but God hears, and will reward you!"

Meantime, Ordener's thirteen crowns had finished the work which the priest's mild gaze began. Nychol's anger being allayed, he recovered his good-humor.

"Come, reverend sir, you are a good man, worthy to serve in St. Hilary's chapel; I spoke more harshly than I intended. You do but follow your own path; it is not your fault if it crosses mine. But there is one man to whom I do bear a grudge, and that's the guardian of the dead at Throndhjem,—that old sorcerer, the keeper of the Spladgest. What's his name now,—Splugry? Spadugry? Tell me, you old philosopher, who seem to be a perfect{158} Babel of learning,—you who know everything, can't you help me to remember the name of that magician, your brother? You must have met him sometimes of a Sabbath, riding through the air on a broomstick, eh?"

Certainly, if poor Benignus could have escaped at that moment upon some such aerial steed, the narrator of this story doubts not that he would most gladly have trusted his frail and terrified body to its tender mercies. Never before was his love of life so strong as now that he clearly perceived the extreme imminence of his danger. Everything that he saw frightened him,—the legends of the Cursed Tower, the wild eyes of the red woman, the voice, gloves, and beverage of the mysterious monk, the rash courage of his young companion, and especially the hangman,—the hangman, into whose abode he had fallen in his effort to escape from the charge of crime. He trembled so violently that he could scarcely move, particularly when the conversation

turned upon himself, and he heard the dreadful Orugix's question. As he had no desire to imitate the heroism of the priest, his faltering tongue found great difficulty in framing a reply.

"Well!" repeated the hangman, "don't you know the name of the keeper of the Spladgest? Does your wig make you deaf?"

"Somewhat, sir; but," he finally stammered out, "I don't know his name, I swear I don't."

"He don't know?" said the hermit's terrible voice. "He does wrong to take oath to it. That man's name is Benignus Spiagudry.{159}"

"My name! my name! Great heavens!" exclaimed the affrighted old man.

The hangman burst out laughing.

"And who said that it was your name? We are talking of that dog of a keeper. In good sooth, this learned fellow is scared at nothing. How would it be if his ridiculous grimaces had a genuine cause? It would be fun to hang the old fool. So then, venerable doctor," added the hangman, whom Spiagudry's fears entertained, "you do not know this Benignus Spiagudry?"

"No, master," said the keeper, somewhat reassured by his disguise; "I assure you I don't know him. And since he is so unfortunate as to displease you, I should be very sorry, master, indeed I should, if I did know the fellow."

"And you, hermit," said Orugix,— "you seem to know him?"

"Yes, truly," replied the hermit; "he is a tall, dried-up, bald old fellow—"

Spiagudry, justly alarmed at this minute description, hastily adjusted his wig.

"He has," added the hermit, "long hands like those of a thief who has not seen a traveller for a week, a bent back—"

Spiagudry sat up as straight as he could.

"Moreover, he might easily be taken for one of the corpses in his charge if he had not such sharp eyes."

Spiagudry clapped his hand to his plaster.

"Many thanks, Father," said the hangman; "I shall know the old Jew now, wherever I may run across him.{160}"

Spiagudry, who was an excellent Christian, indignant at this intolerable insult, could not help exclaiming, "Jew, master!"

Then he stopped short, trembling lest he had said too much.

"Well, Jew or Pagan, what does it matter which, if he have dealings with the Devil, as they say he has?"

"I should readily believe it," rejoined the hermit, with a sarcastic smile, not quite hidden by his cowl, "if he were not such a coward. But how could he covenant with Satan? He is as cowardly as he is wicked. When fear takes possession of him, he actually forgets his own identity."

The hermit spoke slowly, as if with intention, the very deliberation of his words lending them peculiar force.

"He forgets his own identity!" mentally repeated Spiagudry.

"It's a pity for a bad man to be a coward," said the hangman; "for he's not worth hating. We fight a serpent, but we can only crush a lizard."

Spiagudry ventured a few words in his own defence.

"But, gentlemen, are you sure that the official of whom you speak is really what you say? Is his reputation so bad?"

"His reputation!" repeated the hermit; "he has the worst reputation of any man in the district!"

Benignus, in his disappointment, turned to the hangman.

"Master, what fault have you to find with him? For I do not doubt that your dislike is just."

"You are right, old man, not to doubt it. As his trade^{161} resembles mine, Spiagudry does all he can to injure me."

"Oh, master, never believe it! Or, if it be so, it is because he never saw you, as I have, surrounded by your good wife and lovely children, admitting strangers to the delights of your domestic circle. Had he enjoyed your kind hospitality as I have, sir, the unfortunate man could never be your enemy."

Spiagudry had scarcely ended this wily speech, when the tall woman, who had been silent until then, rose, and said in a sharp, stern voice, "The viper's tongue is never more venomous than when it is smeared with honey." Then she sat down again, and

went on polishing her pincers,—a task whose hoarse, grating sound, filling up the spaces in the conversation, performed the office of the chorus in a Greek tragedy, at the expense of the ears of the four travellers.

“That woman is crazy indeed!” thought the keeper, unable otherwise to explain the ill effect of his flattery.

“Becky is right, my fair-haired sage,” exclaimed the hangman. “I shall think you have a viper’s tongue, if you defend that Spiagudry much longer.”

“God forbid, master!” exclaimed the latter; “I would not defend him for the world.”

“Very good. You do not know how far he carries his insolence. Would you believe that the impudent scamp is bold enough to dispute my right to the possession of Hans of Iceland?”

“Hans of Iceland!” exclaimed the hermit.

“Yes, to be sure. Do you know that famous knave?^{162}”

“Yes,” said the hermit.

“Well, every thief belongs to the hangman, doesn’t he? What does that infernal Spiagudry do? He asks to have a price set upon the head of Hans.”

“He asks to have a price set upon the head of Hans?” interrupted the hermit.

“He had the audacity to do so, and that, simply that the body might fall to his share, and I might be defrauded of my property.”

“What an outrage, Master Orugix, to dare to dispute your right to a thing which so plainly belongs to you!”

These words were accompanied by a malicious smile, which alarmed Spiagudry.

“The trick is all the worse, hermit, because I only need one good hanging, such as that of Hans would be, to remove me from my obscurity, and to make the fortune which I failed to make by beheading Schumacker.”

“Indeed, Master Nychol?”

“Yes, brother monk, on the day that Hans is arrested, come and see me, and we will sacrifice a fat pig to my future greatness.”

“Gladly; but who knows whether I shall be at liberty upon that day? Besides, you just now sent ambition to the Devil.”

“Oh, why not, Father, when I see that to destroy my best founded hopes it only needs a Spiagudry, and a request to set a price upon a man’s head?”

“Ah!” repeated the hermit, in a peculiar tone; “so Spiagudry asked that a price be set!{163}”

That voice was to the wretched keeper what the toad’s eye is to a bird.

“Gentlemen,” he urged, “why judge rashly? It is not at all sure; it may be a false report.”

“A false report!” cried Orugix; “the thing is but too certain. The petition of the city council, supported by the signature of the keeper of the Spladgest, is in Throndhjem at this very moment. It only waits the decision of his excellency the governor-general.”

The hangman was so well informed, that Spiagudry dared not continue his defence; he contented himself with swearing inwardly, for the hundredth time, at his youthful companion. But what was his horror when he heard the hermit, who for some moments had seemed lost in thought, suddenly exclaim in bantering tones: “Master Nychol, what is the penalty for sacrilege?”

These words produced the same effect on Spiagudry as if his periwig and plaster had been torn off. He anxiously awaited the reply of Orugix, who stopped to empty his glass.

“That depends on the nature of the sacrilege,” said the hangman.

“Suppose it was profaning the dead?”

Upon this the shivering Spiagudry expected every instant to hear his name issue from the lips of the unaccountable monk.

“Formerly,” coolly remarked Orugix, “they buried the offender alive, with the body he had outraged.”

“And now?”

“Now the punishment is milder.{164}”

“Is milder!” said Spiagudry, scarcely daring to breathe.

“Yes,” rejoined the hangman, with the satisfied and indifferent air of an artist talking of his own art; “they brand him first, with a hot iron, with the letter S, on the calf of the leg.”

“And then?” broke in the old keeper, upon whom it would have been difficult to inflict this part of the sentence.

“Then,” said the executioner, “they merely hang him.”

“Mercy!” said Spiagudry; “hang him!”

“Well, what’s the matter with you? You look at me as the victim looks at the gallows.”

“I am glad,” said the hermit, “to see that people are growing more humane.”

At this moment, the storm having ceased, the clear, intermittent sound of a horn was distinctly heard outside.

“Nychol,” said his wife, “they are in search of some malefactor; that’s the horn of the bowmen.”

“The horn of the bowmen!” repeated each of the company, in different accents, but Spiagudry in tones of unmistakable terror.

They had scarcely uttered the words when there was a knock at the door.{165}

XIII.

Only a man, a sign, is needed; the elements of revolution are ready. Who will be the first? So soon as there is a fulcrum, everything will move.—Bonaparte.

LOEVIG is a large town, situated on the north side of Thronhjem fjord, and sheltered by a low chain of bare hills, singularly diversified by various sorts of crops, like broad bits of mosaic resting upon the horizon. The appearance of the town is gloomy; the fishermen’s cabins, made of twigs and reeds, the conical hut, constructed of earth and stones, in which the invalid miner spends the few days which his scanty savings allow him to devote to sunshine and rest, and the frail ruin which the chamois-hunter in his turn decks with a straw roof and walls hung with skins, line streets longer than the town itself, because they are narrow and crooked. In a square where now{166} exist only the remains of a great tower, once stood the ancient fortress built by Horda the Fine Archer, lord of Loevig, and brother-in-arms of the pagan king Halfdan, occupied in 1698 by the mayor of the town, who would have been the best-dodged citizen in the city, if it had not been for the silvery stork who every summer perched on the tip of the sharp spire of the church, like the white pearl on the top of a mandarin’s pointed cap.

On the morning of the same day that Ordener reached Thronhjem, another personage, also incognito, landed at Loevig. His gilded litter, although without armorial bearings, his four tall lackeys, armed to the teeth, instantly became the topic of every conversation, and roused the curiosity of all. The landlord of the Golden Gull, a small tavern at which the great man alighted, himself assumed an air of mystery,

and answered every question with an "I don't know," which seemed to imply, "I know all, but you shall know nothing." The tall lackeys were as mute as fishes, and more obscure than the mouth of a mine.

The mayor shut himself up in his tower, waiting with great dignity for the stranger to make the first visit; but the inhabitants were soon surprised to see him call twice at the Golden Gull in vain, and at evening lie in wait for a bow from the stranger, as he sat at the half-open window. From this the gossips inferred that the great man had made his high rank known to the lord mayor. They were mistaken. A messenger sent by the stranger presented himself at the mayor's office to get his passport signed, and the mayor noticed upon the green seal{167} two crossed hands supporting an ermine mantle, surmounted by a count's coronet upon a shield, from which depended the collars of the Orders of the Elephant and the Dannebrog. This was enough for the mayor, who was most desirous of obtaining from the chancellor the lord mayoralty of Thronhjem. But his advances were useless, for the great man would see no one.

The second day of the traveller's stay in Loevig was drawing to its close, when the landlord entered his room, saying with a low bow that the messenger expected by his Grace had arrived.

"Very well," said his Grace; "let him come up."

A moment later the messenger entered, carefully closed the door, then bowing to the ground before the stranger, who had half turned toward him, waited in respectful silence until he should be addressed.

"I expected you this morning," said the stranger; "what detained you?"

"The interests of your Grace, Count; have I another thought?"

"How is Elphega? How is Frederic?"

"They are well."

"Good! good!" broke in the master; "have you nothing more interesting to tell me? What is the news at Thronhjem?"

"Nothing, except that Baron Thorwick arrived there yesterday."

"Yes, I know that he wanted to consult that old Mecklenburger, Levin, about his marriage. Do you know the result of his interview with the governor?{168}"

"To-day at noon, when I left, he had not yet seen the general."

“What! and he arrived last night! You surprise me, Musdæmon. And had he seen the countess?”

“Still less, sir.”

“Then you saw him?”

“No, noble master; besides, I do not know him.”

“And how, if no one has seen him, do you know that he is in Thronhjæm?”

“Through his servant, who was at the governor’s palace yesterday.”

“But he,—did he go elsewhere?”

“His servant declares that as soon as he arrived, he set off for Munkholm, after first visiting the Spladgest.”

The count’s eye flashed fire.

“For Munkholm! For Schumacker’s prison! Are you positive? I always suspected that honest Levin of being a traitor. For Munkholm! What can be the attraction there? Did he want to ask Schumacker’s advice also? Did he—”

“Noble lord,” interrupted Musdæmon, “it is by no means certain that he went there.”

“What! Then why did you say so? Are you trifling with me?”

“Pardon me, your Grace! I merely repeated what the baron’s servant said. But Mr. Frederic, who was on duty yesterday at Munkholm, saw nothing of Baron Ordener.”

“That’s no proof! My son does not know the viceroy’s son. Ordener may have entered the fortress in disguise.{169}”

“Yes, sir; but Mr. Frederic asserts that he saw no one.”

The count grew calmer.

“That’s a different matter. Did my son really say so?”

“He assured me of the fact three separate times; and Mr. Frederic’s interests in this case are identical with your own.”

This suggestion quite relieved the count.

“Ah!” said he, “I understand. The baron, on his arrival, must have wished to take a short sail on the fjord, and his servant fancied that he went to Munkholm. After all, why should he go there? I was foolish to take alarm. My son-in-law’s lack of eagerness

to see old Levin proves, on the contrary, that his affection for him is not so strong as I feared. You will hardly believe it, my dear Musdæmon," added the count, "but I actually imagined that Ordener was in love with Ethel Schumacker, and I constructed a romance and an intrigue out of this journey to Munkholm. But, thank God, Ordener is not such a fool as I am. By the way, my friend, how fares it with that young Danaë in Frederic's hands?"

Musdæmon had shared his master's fears regarding Ethel Schumacker, and had struggled against them without overcoming them quite so readily. However, charmed to see his master smile, he took care not to disturb his peace of mind, but rather sought to add to it, that he might increase that serene temper so necessary in the great for the well-being of their favorites.

"Noble Count, your son has failed with Schumacker's daughter; but it seems that another has been more fortunate."

The count interrupted him eagerly.

"Another! What other?"

"Oh, I don't know,—some peasant, serf, or vassal."

"Do you speak the truth?" cried the count, his stern, dark face beaming.

"Mr. Frederic declares that it is so, and he told the countess the same story."

The count rose and paced the room, rubbing his hands.

"Mugdæmon, dear Musdæmon, but one more effort, and our end is gained. The young shoot is blasted. We have only to uproot the parent tree. Have you any other good news?"

"Dispolsen has been murdered."

The count's features brightened.

"Ah, you see that we advance from victory to victory. Have we his papers? Above all, have we that iron casket?"

"I regret to inform your Grace that the murder was not committed by our people. He was killed and robbed upon Urchtal Sands, and the deed is attributed to Hans of Iceland."

"Hans of Iceland!" repeated his master, his brow again clouding. "What! that famous brigand whom we meant to put in charge of our rebellion?"

“The same, noble Count; and I fear, from what I can gather, that it will be no easy task to find him. At any rate, I have secured a leader who will take his name, and can replace him if necessary,—a wild mountaineer, tall{171} and strong as an oak, fierce and bold as a wolf in a wilderness of snow, this terrible giant must surely look much like the real Hans of Iceland.”

“Then Hans of Iceland is tall?” inquired the count.

“That is the general opinion, your Grace.”

“I cannot but admire, my dear Musdæmon, the art with which you lay your plans. When is the insurrection to break out?”

“Oh, very soon, your Grace; perhaps it is on foot even now. The royal protectorate has long been odious to the miners; they all grasped with joy at the idea of revolt. The movement will begin at Guldbrandsdal, extend to Sund-Moer, and reach Kongsberg. Two thousand miners can be raised in three days. The rebellion will be kindled in Schumacker’s name; our emissaries use no other. The reserve forces in the South and the garrisons at Thronhjem and Skongen can be called out, and you will be here on the spot most opportunely to put down the rebellion,—a fresh and significant service in the eyes of the king,—and to rid him of this Schumacker, the source of such anxiety to the throne. Upon these firm foundations will rise the structure to be crowned by the marriage of our noble lady Ulrica and Baron Thorwick.”

A private interview between two scoundrels is never long, because all that is human in their souls quickly takes alarm at the infernal qualities revealed. When two depraved spirits mutually display their naked vices, each is disgusted by the other’s iniquity. Crime itself revolts at crime; and two evil-doers conversing, with all the cyni{172}cism of intimacy, of their pleasures and their interests, are like a fearful mirror, each reflecting the other’s monstrous features. Their own degradation mortifies them when seen in another, their own pride confounds them, their own nothingness alarms them; and they cannot fly from themselves or disavow their own portrait in their fellowman; for each odious harmony, each frightful coincidence, each hideous parallel finds within them an untiring voice to denounce them in their ever-wearied ear. However secret may be their intercourse, it has always two intolerable witnesses,—God, whom they cannot see, and conscience, which they feel.

His confidential talks with Musdæmon distressed the count the more because the latter always unhesitatingly imputed to his master a good share of the crimes committed or about to be committed. Many courtiers think it wise to save great men from the appearance of wrong-doing; they assume the responsibility of evil, and often

spare their patron's blushes by allowing him to feign resistance to advantageous crime. Musdæmon, by a refinement of skill, pursued the contrary course. He wished it to seem that he seldom advised, and always obeyed. He knew his master's soul as familiarly as that master knew his heart; therefore he never compromised himself without compromising the count. There was no head, save that of Schumacker, that the count would have been so glad to see fall; Musdæmon knew this as well as if his master had told him, and his master knew that he knew it.

The count had learned all that he wished to learn; he was satisfied; he was now eager to dismiss Musdæmon.{173}

"Mugdæmon," said he, with a gracious smile, "you are the most faithful and most zealous of all my servants. All goes well, and I owe it to your devotion. I make you private secretary to the chancellor's office."

Mugdæmon bowed low.

"Nor is that all," added the count; "I will ask for you, for the third time, the Order of the Dannebrog. But I still fear that your birth, your humble relations—"

Mugdæmon blushed, turned pale, and hid his change of color by another bow.

"Come," said the count, offering him his hand to kiss, "come, Mr. Private Secretary, draw up your *placeat*! It may chance to find the king in gracious mood."

"Whether his Majesty grant my petition or not, your Grace's kindness overwhelms me."

"Make haste, my dear fellow, for I am anxious to be off. We must try to get some exact information about this Hans."

Mugdæmon, with a third bow, opened the door.

"Ah!" said the count, "I forgot. In your new position as private secretary, you may write to the chancellor's office and order them to dismiss this mayor of Loevig, who compromises the dignity of his position in the eyes of the villagers by his servility to strangers whom he does not know.{174}"

XIV.

The monk at midnight visiting the cross,
The knight taming his fiery steed,
The man who with dread sound of trumpet dies,
And he who dies with peaceful voice of prayer,

Are all the objects of Thy care, lavished alike
On every pious soul, whether he tonsure wear or helm.

Hymn to Saint Anselm.

“YES, master, we really owe a pilgrimage to Lynrass grotto. Who would have thought that the hermit, whom I cursed as if he had been the Devil, would prove to be our guardian angel, and that the sword which seemed to threaten our very lives would serve for a bridge to take us over the abyss?”

It was in these somewhat grotesquely figurative terms that Benignus Spiagudry poured into Ordener’s ears his joy, his admiration, and his gratitude for the mysterious{175} monk. As will readily be supposed, our two travellers had left the Cursed Tower; nay, when we again encounter them, they have even left the village of Vygla far behind them, and are painfully pursuing a steep path, interrupted by frequent pools or blocked by huge stones, which transient torrents caused by storms had washed down from the wet, sticky soil. Day had not yet dawned; but the bushes growing above the rocks on either side of the road stood out against the clear sky like dark silhouettes, and various objects, although still colorless, gradually assumed form in the dim, dull light which daybreak in the North filters through the chill fogs of early morning.

Ordener was silent, for he had yielded to that somnolent state sometimes permitted by the mechanical motion of walking. He had not slept since the night before, when he allowed himself to rest in a fishing-boat moored in Throndhjem harbor for the few hours intervening between his departure from the Spladgest and his arrival at Munkholm. Accordingly, while his body moved toward Skongen his spirit had flown back to Throndhjem Fjord,—to that gloomy prison and those melancholy towers which contained the only being on earth to whom he attached any idea of hope and happiness.

Awake, thoughts of his Ethel filled his mind; asleep, her memory became a fanciful image which irradiated all his dreams. In this second life of sleep, where for a time the soul alone exists, and the physical being with all its material ills seems to disappear, he saw the beloved maiden, no more beautiful, no purer, than in reality, but happier, freer, more wholly his own. Only, upon the road{176} to Skongen, the oblivion of his body, the torpor of his senses, could not be complete; for from time to time a bog, a stone, the branch of a tree, impeding his progress, recalled him suddenly from the ideal to the real. He would then raise his head, half open his drowsy eyes, and regret the fall from bright celestial wanderings to his painful earthly journey, where nothing could compensate for his lost illusions, save that he felt close to his heart the ringlet

which was his until Ethel herself should be his own. Then this memory revived the charming dream-image, and he gently relapsed, not into slumber, but into a vague, persistent reverie.

“Master,” repeated Spiagudry, in a louder tone, which, combined with a blow from the trunk of a tree, aroused Ordener, “fear nothing. The bowmen turned to the right with the hermit when they left the tower, and we are far enough away from them to venture to speak. It is true that silence was most prudent until now.”

“Indeed,” said Ordener, yawning, “you push your prudence to extremes. It is at least three hours since we left the tower and the bowmen behind us.”

“That is true, sir; but prudence never does any harm. Only think, if I had declared myself when the chief of that infernal troop asked for Benignus Spiagudry in a voice like that of Saturn calling for his new-born son that he might devour him! Suppose, even, I had not taken refuge in a prudent silence at that awful moment, where should I be now, noble master?”

“Faith, old man, I fancy that at that moment nothing, not even pincers, could have drawn your name from you.{177}”

“Was I wrong, master? If I had spoken, the monk,—may Saint Hospitius, and Saint Usbald the Solitary, bless him!—the monk would have had no opportunity to ask the captain of the archers whether his men did not belong to the Munkholm regiment; a trifling question, merely asked in order to gain time. Did you notice, sir, after that stupid archer answered ‘Yes,’ with what a peculiar smile the monk requested him to follow him, saying that he knew the hiding-place of the fugitive, Benignus Spiagudry?”

Here the keeper paused for a moment, as if to make a fresh start; for he suddenly resumed, in a voice quivering with emotion: “A good priest, a worthy and upright anchorite, practising the principles of Christian virtue and evangelic charity; and I was alarmed at his mere outward appearance, forbidding enough, truly; but what a beautiful soul lies beneath! Did you notice too, noble master, that there was something peculiar in the tone with which he said to me, ‘We shall meet again!’ as he led away the archers? At any other time that tone would have alarmed me; but it is not the pious and excellent hermit’s fault. Solitude undoubtedly gives that strange intonation; for I know, sir,”—here the voice of Benignus sank lower,—“I know another hermit, that dreadful fellow who—But no; out of respect for the venerable hermit of Lynrass I will not make so odious a comparison. Neither was there anything peculiar about his gloves; it is quite cold enough to wear them; and his salty beverage does not surprise me either. Catholic anchorites often follow singular examples; the very same

thing, master, is alluded to{178} in this line by the famous Urensius, the monk of Mount Caucasus:—

‘Rivos despiciens, maris undam potat amaram.’

Why didn't I think of that verse while I was in that confounded ruin at Vyglá? A little better memory would have spared me much needless alarm. To be sure, it is not easy, is it, sir, to collect your thoughts in such a den, seated at the table of a hangman,—a hangman, a creature given over to universal scorn and execration, who only differs from an assassin in the frequency and impunity of his murders; whose heart to all the atrocity of the most awful brigands unites the cowardice of which at least their daring crimes do not admit; a being who offers food and drink with the same hand that wields the instruments of torture, and crushes the bones of his miserable victims between the planks of the rack! Think of breathing the same air with a hangman! And the vilest beggar, if polluted by his loathsome touch, would cast aside with horror the last rags which protected his nakedness and his disease from the wintry blast! And the chancellor, after sealing his commission, flings the paper under the table in token of his malediction and his disgust! And in France, when the hangman dies in his turn, the provost's assistants would rather pay a fine of forty pounds than succeed him! And at Pesth, when Churchill was condemned to die, and they offered to pardon him if he would turn executioner, he preferred death to such a trade. Is it not still notorious, noble sir, that Turmeryn, bishop of Mäestricht, ordered a church to be{179} purified because the hangman had entered it; and that Czarina Petrowna washed her face whenever she witnessed an execution? You know also that the kings of France, to honor warriors, permit them to be punished by their comrades, so that these brave men, even if they be criminals, may not be made infamous by contact with the hangman. And finally, which is decisive, in the ‘Descent of Saint George into Hell,’ by the learned Melasius Iturham, does not Charon give the robber, Robin Hood, precedence over the hangman, Philip Crass? Truly, master, if ever I attain to power, which God alone can foresee, I shall put down hangmen, and restore the ancient custom and the ancient tariff. For the murder of a prince a man shall pay, as in 1150, fourteen hundred and forty double-crown pieces; for the murder of a count, fourteen hundred and forty plain crowns; for that of a baron, fourteen hundred and forty half-crowns; the killing of a mere noble shall be rated at fourteen hundred and forty escalins; and that of a citizen—”

“Don't I hear the tread of a horse coming toward us?” interrupted Ordener.

They looked back, and, as day had dawned during Spiagudry's long soliloquy, they could distinguish, a hundred paces behind them, a man dressed in black waving one

hand to them, and with the other urging on one of those small dingy white ponies so often seen, either wild or domesticated, in the lower mountain ranges of Norway.

“For mercy’s sake, master,” said the timid keeper, “let us hasten; that black fellow looks to me just like an archer!{180}”

“What, old man; we are two, and we should fly before a single man!”

“Alas! twenty sparrows fly before an owl. What glory is there in waiting for an officer of the law?”

“And who tells you that this is one?” rejoined Ordener, whose eyes were not blinded by fear. “Keep up your courage, my valiant guide; I recognize this traveller. Let us wait for him.”

The keeper was forced to submit. A moment later the horseman came up with them, and Spiagudry ceased to tremble when he saw the grave, calm face of the chaplain, Athanasius Munder.

The latter greeted them with a smile, and reined in his steed, saying in an almost breathless voice, “My dear children, it is for your sake that I retrace my steps; and the Lord will surely not permit my absence, prolonged with a charitable intent, to injure those who sorely need my presence.”

“Sir minister,” answered Ordener, “we shall be happy to aid you in any way we can.”

“On the contrary, it is I, noble young man, who desire to serve you. Will you deign to tell me the object of your journey?”

“Reverend sir, I cannot.”

“All I ask, my son, is that your refusal may proceed from inability, and not from distrust. If not, I am indeed unhappy! Unhappy is he whom the good man distrusts, even if he have seen him but once!”

The priest’s modesty and unction touched Ordener deeply.{181}

“All that I can tell you, Father, is that we are bound to the mountains of the North.”

“So I thought, my son, and that is why I followed you. There are bands of roving hunters and miners in those mountains who might injure travellers.”

“What then?”

“Well, I know that it is useless to dissuade a noble young man in search of adventure; but the esteem I feel for you inspires me with another plan for helping you. The

unfortunate counterfeiter to whom I bore the last consolations of religion yesterday was a miner. Just before he died he gave me a paper inscribed with his name, saying that this passport would protect me from all danger if I ever had to travel among those mountains. Alas! what can it avail a poor priest who must live and die among prisoners, and who, moreover, *inter castra latronum*, should seek no other defence than patience and prayer, the only weapons of God! I did not decline the pass, because we should never distress by refusal the heart of one who in a few minutes more will have nothing to receive or to give on earth. The good God deigned to inspire me, for now I can offer you this parchment, that it may go with you in all the perils of your journey, and that the gift of the dying man may benefit the traveller.”

Ordener accepted the old priest’s gift with emotion.

“Sir Chaplain,” said he, “God grant that your prayer may be heard! Thank you. But,” he added, laying his hand on his sword, “I already carry my passport at my side.”

“Young man,” said the priest, “that poor parchment{182} may perhaps protect you better than your steel blade. The gaze of a penitent man is more potent than the archangel’s sword. Farewell! My prisoners await me. Pray sometimes for them and me.”

“Holy priest,” rejoined Ordener, with a smile, “I told you that your prisoners should be pardoned, and they shall be.”

“Oh, do not speak with such assurance, my son! Do not tempt the Lord! No man can know what passes in the mind of another, and you cannot tell what the viceroy’s son may decide to do. Perhaps, alas! he will never condescend to admit a humble chaplain to his presence. Farewell, my son; may your journey be blessed, and may you sometimes remember the poor priest and pray for his unhappy prisoners.{183}”

XV.

Welcome, Hugo; tell me, did you ever see so terrible a storm!—Maturin: *Bertram*.

IN a room communicating with the apartments of the Governor of Throndhjem, three of his Excellency’s secretaries sat at a table loaded with parchments, papers, inkstands, and seals, a fourth chair, left vacant, showing that one of the scribes was late. They had been silently writing and thinking for some time, when one of them exclaimed: “Did you know, Wapherney, that the poor librarian, Foxtipp, is to be dismissed by the bishop, owing to the letter which you wrote recommending Dr. Anglyvius’s petition to his favorable notice?”

“What nonsense are you talking, Richard?” hastily inquired the secretary to whom Richard had not spoken. “Wapherney could not have written in favor of Anglyvius,{184} for the fellow’s petition disgusted the general when I read it to him.”

“So you told me,” answered Wapherney; “but I found the word *tribuatur*[\[10\]](#) written on the petition in his Excellency’s own hand.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed the other.

“Yes, my dear fellow; and several other of his Excellency’s decisions of which you told me, were also altered in marginal notes. For instance, on the petition of the miners, the general wrote, *negetur*.”

“What! I can’t understand that; the general dreaded the turbulent spirit of those miners.”

“Perhaps he wanted to frighten them into submission by his severity. What makes me think so is that Chaplain Munder’s request for the pardon of twelve condemned prisoners is also refused.”

The secretary whom Wapherney addressed, rose abruptly, saying, “Oh, come now, I can’t believe that; the governor is too kind, and expressed too much compassion for those prisoners to—”

“Very well, Arthur,” answered Wapherney; “read it for yourself.”

Arthur took the petition and saw the fatal words.

“Really,” said he, “I can scarcely credit my own eyes. I must present this to the governor again. What day did his Excellency mark these papers?”

“I believe it was some three days ago,” replied Wapherney.

“That was,” said Richard in a low voice, “the morning{185} before Baron Ordener’s brief appearance and mysteriously sudden disappearance.”

“Stay!” quickly exclaimed Wapherney, before Arthur had time to answer; “if here is not another *tribuatur* on Benignus Spiagudry’s ridiculous petition!”

Richard burst out laughing.

“Didn’t that old keeper of corpses disappear in a strange way, too?”

“Yes,” replied Arthur; “a body was found in his charnel-house so mutilated that the officers of the law are in pursuit of him on a charge of sacrilege. But a little Lapp, who

acted as his servant, and who was left alone at the Spladgest, thinks, as do most people, that the Devil carried him off for a sorcerer.”

“Here,” said Wapherney, laughing, “is a fellow who leaves a good reputation behind him!”

He had hardly had his laugh out when the fourth secretary came in.

“Upon my honor, Gustavus, you are very late this morning. Did you happen to get married yesterday?”

“Oh, no!” answered Wapherney; “he only took the longest way round, so that he might pass under the fair Rosalie’s windows in his new cloak.”

“Wapherney,” said the new-comer, “I only wish that you were right. But the cause of my delay is not half so agreeable; and I doubt if my new cloak produced the slightest effect upon the persons whom I visited.”

“Where have you been, then?” asked Arthur.

“To the Spladgest.”

“Heaven is my witness,” cried Wapherney, dropping^{186} his pen, “that we were just now speaking of that place! But though it may be talked of to pass away the time, I cannot conceive how anybody can enter it.”

“And still less,” said Richard, “how anybody can linger there. But what did you see, my dear Gustavus?”

“Yes,” said Gustavus, “you are curious to hear about it, if not to see it; and it would serve you right if I refused to describe those horrors which you would shudder to behold.”

The three secretaries crowded about Gustavus, who waited to be urged, although his desire to tell what he had seen was secretly no less lively than their curiosity to hear.

“Well, Wapherney, you can repeat my story to your little sister, who is so fond of frightful tales. I was pushed into the Spladgest by the crowd which thronged about it. The bodies of three soldiers and two bowmen from the Munkholm regiment had just been brought in, having been found yesterday some four miles away, in the ravine at the foot of Cascadthymore cliff. Some of the spectators declared that the poor fellows were the very ones sent out three days ago in the direction of Skongen to catch the runaway keeper of the Spladgest. If this be true, it is impossible to imagine how so many well-armed men could be murdered. The mutilation of the bodies seems to

prove that they were flung from the top of the rocks. It made my hair stand on end to look at them.”

“What, Gustavus! did you see them?” eagerly inquired Wapherney.

“They are still before my eyes.{187}”

“And has any one an idea as to the authors of the crime?”

“Some think that it may have been a band of miners, and assert that they heard the sound of the horn with which the soldiers call to one another, only yesterday among the mountains.”

“Really!” said Arthur.

“Yes; but an old peasant demolished this supposition by remarking that there were neither mines nor miners in the neighborhood of Cascadthymore.”

“Then who could it have been?”

“No one knows. If the bodies were not intact, it might be supposed the work of wild beasts, for their limbs are covered with long, deep scratches. The same is the case with the corpse of a white-bearded old man brought into the Spladgest day before yesterday, after that fearful storm which prevented you, my dear Leander Wapherney, from visiting your Hero across the fjord, on the Larsynn shore.”

“All right, Gustavus,” said Wapherney, laughing. “But who was this old man?”

“From his height, his long white beard, and a rosary still clasped tightly in his hands, although he had been stripped of everything else, he was recognized as a hermit of the neighborhood; I believe they called him the Monk of Lynrass. It is evident that this poor man was murdered also; but for what purpose? People are not slaughtered now for their religious opinions, and the old hermit possessed nothing in the world but his serge gown and the good-will of all who knew him.{188}”

“And you say,” observed Richard, “that his body was mangled, like those of the soldiers, as if by the claws of some savage animal?”

“Yes, my dear boy; and a fisherman declares that he noticed the same marks upon the body of an officer found murdered a few days since upon Urchtal Sands.”

“That is strange,” said Arthur.

“It is frightful,” said Richard.

“Come,” said Wapherney, “silence, and to work, for I think the general will be here soon. My dear Gustavus, I am curious to see those corpses. If you like, we will stop a moment at the Spladgest when we leave here this evening.”{189}”

XVI.

She with young unawakened senses,
Within her cabin on the Alpine field
Her simple homely life commences,
Her little world therein concealed.
And I, God’s hate flung o’er me,
Had not enough, to thrust
The stubborn rocks before me
And strike them into dust!
She and her peace I yet must undermine:
Thou, Hell, hast claimed this sacrifice as thine!
Goethe: *Faust*, Bayard Taylor’s *Translation*.

IN 1675, twenty-four years previous to the date of this story, sooth to say, the whole village of Thoctree rejoiced and made merry over the marriage of sweet Lucy Pelryhn and that tall, handsome, upright youth, Carroll Stadt. They had long been lovers, and every one felt a warm interest in the happy pair upon the day which was to change so many restless hopes and eager longings into assured and quiet bliss. Born in the same village, reared in the same fields, Carroll had often in their childhood slept in Lucy’s lap when tired of play; Lucy had often, as a young girl, leaned on Carroll’s arm as she returned from work. Lucy was the loveliest and most modest maiden in the land; Carroll the bravest and noblest lad in the village. They loved each other, and they could no more{190} remember the day when their love began than they could recall the day when they were born.

But their marriage did not come, like their love, easily and as a matter of course. There were domestic interests to be consulted,—family feuds, relations, obstacles. They were parted for a whole year; and Carroll suffered sadly far from Lucy, and Lucy wept bitter tears far from Carroll, before the dawn of that happy day which united them, thereafter never to suffer or to weep apart.

It was by saving her from great danger that Carroll finally won his Lucy. He heard cries from the woods one day; they were uttered by his Lucy, surprised by a brigand dreaded by all the mountain folk, and on the point of carrying her off to his den. Carroll boldly attacked this monster in human shape, who gave vent to strange growls like those of a wild beast. Yes, he attacked the wretch, whom none before had ventured to

resist. Love lent him a lion's strength. He rescued his beloved Lucy, restored her to her father, and her father gave her to her deliverer.

Now, the whole village made merry upon the day which united these two lovers. Lucy alone seemed depressed; and yet never had she gazed more tenderly at her dear Carroll. But her gaze was as sad as it was loving, and amid the universal rejoicing this was a subject for surprise. Every moment, as her husband's happiness seemed to increase, her eyes expressed more and more love and despair.

"Oh, my Lucy," said Carroll, when the sacred rites were over, "the coming of that robber, a curse to the entire country, was the greatest blessing for me!{191}"

She shook her head, and made no answer.

Night came; they were left alone in their new abode, and the sports and dancing on the village green went on more merrily than before, to celebrate the happiness of the bridal pair.

Next morning Carroll Stadt had vanished. A few words in his handwriting were brought to Lucy's father by a hunter from the mountains of Kiölen, who met him before daylight wandering along the shore of the fjord.

Old Will Pelryhn showed the paper to his pastor and the mayor, and nothing was left of last night's festival but Lucy's gloom and dull despair.

This mysterious catastrophe dismayed the entire village, and vain efforts were made to explain it. Prayers for Carroll's soul were said in the same church where but a few days before he himself sang hymns of thanksgiving for his happiness.

No one knew what kept Widow Stadt alive. At the end of nine months of solitary grief she brought into the world a son, and on the same day the village of Golyn was destroyed by the fall of the hanging cliff above it.

The birth of this son did not dissipate his mother's deep depression. Gill Stadt showed no signs of resemblance to Carroll. His fierce, angry infancy seemed to prophecy a still more ferocious manhood. Sometimes a little wild man—whom those mountaineers who saw him from a distance asserted to be the famous Hans of Iceland—entered the lonely hut of Carroll's widow, and the passers-by would then hear a woman's shrieks and what seemed the roar of a tiger. The man would carry off young{192} Gill, and months would elapse; then he would restore him to his mother, more sombre and more terrible than before.

Widow Stadt felt a mixture of horror and affection for the child. Sometimes she would clasp him in her maternal arms, as the only tie which still bound her to earth; again she would repulse him with terror, calling upon Carroll, her dear Carroll. No one in the world knew what agitated her soul.

Gill reached his twenty-third year; he saw Guth Stersen, and loved her madly.

Guth Stersen was rich, and he was poor; therefore he set off for Roeraas and turned miner, in order to make money. His mother never heard from him again.

One night she sat at the wheel, by which she earned her daily bread; the lamp burned low as she worked and waited in her cabin, beneath those walls which had grown old like herself, in solitude and grief, the silent witnesses of her mysterious wedding-night. She thought anxiously of her son, whose presence, ardently desired as it was, would recall much sorrow, perhaps bring more in its train. The poor mother loved her son, ungrateful as he was. And how could she help loving him, she had suffered so much for him?

She rose and took from an antique wardrobe a crucifix thickly coated with dust. For an instant she looked at it imploringly; then suddenly casting it from her in horror, she cried: "I pray! How can I pray? Your prayers can only be addressed to hell, poor woman! You belong to hell, and to hell alone.{193}"

She had relapsed into her mournful revery, when there was a knock at the door.

This was a rare event with Widow Stadt. For many long years, in consequence of the strange incidents connected with her history, the whole village of Thoctree believed that she had dealings with evil spirits; no one therefore ever ventured near her hut,—strange superstitions of that age and ignorant region! She owed to her misfortunes the same reputation for witchcraft that the keeper of the Spladgest owed to his learning.

"What if it were my son, if it were Gill!" she exclaimed; and she rushed to the door.

Alas! it was not her son. It was a little monk clad in serge, his cowl covering all of his face but a black beard.

"Holy man," said the widow, "what would you have? You do not know the house to which you come."

"Yes, truly!" replied the hermit in a hoarse and all too familiar voice.

And tearing off his gloves, his black beard, and his cowl, he revealed a fierce countenance, a red beard, and a pair of hands armed with tremendous claws.

“Oh!” cried the widow, burying her head in her hands.

“Well,” said the little man, “have you not in four-and-twenty years grown used to seeing the husband upon whom you must gaze through all eternity?”

“Through all eternity!” she repeated in a terrified whisper.

“Hark ye, Lucy Pelryhn, I bring you news of your son.”

“My son! Where is he? Why does he not come?{194}”

“He cannot.”

“But you have news of him. I thank you. Alas! and can you bring me pleasure?”

“They are pleasant tidings indeed that I bring you,” said the man in hollow tones; “for you are a weak woman, and I wonder that you could bring forth such a son. Rejoice and be glad. You feared that your son would follow in my footsteps; fear no longer.”

“What!” cried the enraptured mother, “has my son, my beloved Gill, changed?”

The hermit watched her raptures with an ominous sneer.

“Oh, greatly changed!” said he.

“And why did he not fly to my arms? Where did you see him? What was he doing?”

“He was asleep.”

In the excess of her joy, the widow did not notice the little man’s ominous look, nor his horrible and scoffing manner.

“Why did you not wake him? Why did not you say to him, ‘Gill, come to your mother?’”

“His sleep was too sound.”

“Oh, when will he come? Tell me, I implore, if I shall see him soon.”

The mock monk drew from beneath his gown a sort of cup of singular shape.

“There, widow,” said he, “drink to your son’s speedy return!”

The widow uttered a shriek of horror. It was a human skull. She waved it away in terror, and could not utter a word.{195}

“No, no!” abruptly exclaimed the man, in an awful voice, “do not turn away your eyes, woman; look. You asked to see your son. Look, I say! for this is all that is left of him.”

And by the red light of the lamp, he offered the dry and fleshless skull of her son to the mother's pale lips.

Too many waves of misfortune had passed over her soul for one misery the more to crush her. She gazed at the cruel monk with a fixed and meaningless stare.

"Dead!" she whispered; "dead! Then let me die."

"Die, if you choose! But remember, Lucy Pelryhn, Thoctree woods; remember the day when the demon, taking possession of your body, gave your soul to hell! I am that demon, Lucy, and you are my wife forever! Now, die if you will."

It is the belief in those superstitious regions that infernal spirits sometimes appear among men to lead lives of crime and calamity. In common with other noted criminals, Hans of Iceland enjoyed this fearful renown. It was also believed that a woman, who by seduction or by violence, became the prey of one of these monsters in human form, by that misfortune was doomed to be his companion in hell.

The events of which the hermit reminded the widow seemed to revive in her these thoughts.

"Alas!" she sobbed, "then I cannot escape from this wretched existence! And what have I done? for you know, my beloved Carroll, I am innocent. A young girl's arm is without strength to resist the arm of a demon."

She rambled on; her eyes were wild with delirium, and her incoherent words seemed born of the convulsive quiver of her lips.

"Yes, Carroll, since that day, though polluted, I am innocent; and the demon asks me if I remember that horrible day! Carroll, I never deceived you; you came too late. I was his before I was yours, alas! Alas! and I must be forever punished. No, I can never rejoin you,—you for whom I weep. What would it avail me to die? I should follow this monster into a world as fearful as himself,—the world of the damned! And what have I done? Must my misfortunes in this life become my crimes in the next?"

The little monk bent a look of triumph and command upon her face.

"Ah!" she suddenly exclaimed, turning toward him; "ah, tell me, is not this some fearful dream induced by your presence? For you know but too well, alas! that since the day of my ruin, every night that I am visited by your fatal spirit is marked by foul apparitions, awful dreams, and frightful visions."

"Woman, woman, cease your raving; it is as true that you are wide awake as it is true that Gill is dead."

The memory of her past misfortunes had, as it were, blotted out all thought of her fresh grief; these words revived it.

“Oh, my son! my son!” she moaned; and the tones of her voice would have moved any but the wicked being who heard it. “No, he will return; he is not dead; I cannot believe that he is dead.”

“Well, go ask him of Roeraas rocks, which crushed out{197} his life; of Throndhjem Fjord, which swallowed up his body.”

The widow fell upon her knees, crying convulsively, “God! great God!”

“Be silent, servant of hell!”

The wretched woman was silent. He added: “Do not doubt your son’s death; he was punished for the sins of his father. He let his granite heart melt in the sunlight of a woman’s eyes. I possessed you, but I never loved you. Your Carroll’s misfortune was also his. My son and yours was deceived by his betrothed, by her for whom he died.”

“Died!” she repeated, “died! Then it is really true? Oh, Gill, you were born of my misery; you were conceived in terror and born in sorrow; your lips lacerated my breast; as a child, you never returned my caresses or embraces; you always shunned and repulsed your mother, your lonely and forsaken mother! You never tried to make me forget my past distress, save by causing me fresh injury. You deserted me for the demon author of your existence and of my widowhood. Never, in long years, Gill, never did you procure me one thrill of pleasure; and yet to-day your death, my son, seems to me the most insupportable of all my afflictions. Your memory to-day seems to me to be twined with comfort and rapture. Alas! alas!”

She could not go on; she covered her head with her coarse black woollen veil, and sobbed bitterly.

“Weak woman!” muttered the hermit; then he continued in a firm voice: “Control your grief; I laugh at{198} mine. Listen, Lucy Pelryhn. While you still weep for your son, I have already begun to avenge him. It was for a soldier in the Munkholm regiment that his sweetheart betrayed him. The whole regiment shall perish by my hands. Look, Lucy Pelryhn!”

He had rolled up the sleeves of his gown, and showed the widow his misshapen arms stained with blood.

“Yes,” he said with a fierce roar, “Gill’s spirit shall delight to haunt Urchtal Sands and Cascadthymore ravine. Come, woman, do you not see this blood? Be comforted!”

Then all at once, as if struck by a sudden thought, he interrupted himself: "Widow, did you not receive an iron casket from me? What! I sent you gold and I bring you blood, and you still weep. Are you not human?"

The widow, absorbed in her despair, was silent.

"What!" said he, with a fierce laugh, "motionless and mute. You are no woman, then, Lucy Pelryhn!" and he shook her by the arm to rouse her. "Did not a messenger bring you an iron casket?"

The widow, lending him a brief attention, shook her head, and relapsed into her gloomy revery.

"Ah, the wretch!" cried the little man, "the miserable traitor! Spiagudry, that gold shall cost you dear!"

And stripping off his gown, he rushed from the hut with the growl of a hyena that scents a corpse.{199}

XVII.

My lord, I braid my hair; I braid it with salt tears because you leave me alone, and because you go hence into the hills.—*The Count's Lady (Old Romance)*.

ETHEL, meantime, had already reckoned four long and weary days since she was left to wander alone in the dark garden of Schleswig tower; alone in the oratory, the witness of so many tears, the confidant of so many longings; alone in the long gallery, where once upon a time she had failed to hear the midnight bell. Her aged father sometimes accompanied her, but she was none the less alone, for the true companion of her life was absent.

Unfortunate young girl! What had that pure young soul done that it should be thus early given over to so much sorrow? Taken from the world, from honors, riches, youthful delights, and from the triumphs of beauty, she was still in the cradle when she was already in a prison cell; a captive with her captive father, she had grown up watching his decay; and to complete her misery, that she might not be ignorant of any form of bondage, love had sought her out in prison.

Even then, could she but have kept her Ordener at her side, would liberty have tempted her? Would she ever have known that a world existed from which she was cut off? Moreover, would not her world, her heaven, have{200} been with her in that narrow keep, within those gloomy towers bristling with soldiers, toward which the passer-by would still have cast a pitying glance?

But, alas! for the second time her Ordener was absent; and instead of spending all too brief but ever recurring hours with him in holy caresses and chaste embraces, she passed days and nights in bewailing his absence, and praying that he might be shielded from danger. For a maiden has only her prayers and her tears.

Sometimes she longed for the wings of the free swallow which came to her to be fed through her prison bars. Sometimes her thought escaped upon the cloud which a swift breeze drove northward through the sky; then suddenly she would turn away her head and cover her eyes, as if she dreaded to see a gigantic brigand appear and begin the unequal contest upon one of the distant mountains whose blue peaks hung on the horizon like a stationary cloud.

Oh, it is cruel to live when we are parted from the object of our love! Few hearts have known this pang in all its extent, because few hearts have known love in all its depth. Then, in some sort a stranger to our ordinary existence, we create for ourselves a melancholy waste, a vast solitude, and for the absent one some terrible world of peril, of monsters, and of deceit; the various faculties which make up our being are changed into and lost in an infinite longing for the missing one; everything about us seems utterly indifferent to us. And yet we still breathe, and move, and act, but without our own volition. Like a wandering planet which has lost its sun, the body moves at random; the soul is elsewhere.{201}

XVIII.

On a vast buckler those relentless men
Terrified hell with fearful oaths;
And beside a black bull which they had slain,
All, bathing their hands in blood, swore to be revenged.
The Seven Chiefs before Thebes.

THE coast of Norway abounds in narrow bays, in creeks, coves, reefs, lagoons, and little headlands so numerous as to weary the traveller's memory and the topographer's patience. Formerly, if we are to credit popular tradition, every isthmus was haunted by some demon, each bay inhabited by some fairy, each promontory protected by some saint; superstition mingles all beliefs to create for itself imaginary terrors. Upon Kelvel strand, some miles to the north of Walderhog cave, there was but a single spot, they said, which was free from all jurisdiction either of infernal, intermediary, or celestial{202} spirits. It was the glade lying along the shore, overhung by a cliff, on the top of which could still be seen vestiges of the manor of Ralph, or Rudolf, the Giant. This little wild meadow, bordered on the west by the sea, and closely shut in by rocks clad with heather, owed its exemption solely to the name of

that ancient Norwegian lord, its first possessor. For what fairy, what devil, or what angel would venture to become master or guest of a domain once occupied and guarded by Ralph the Giant?

It is true that the mere name of the much dreaded Ralph sufficed to give an alarming character to a region wild in itself. But after all, a memory is not so much to be feared as a spirit; and no fisher, belated in rough weather, and mooring his bark in Ralph's creek, had ever seen the will-o'-the-wisp sport and dance upon the summit of a rock, or a fairy ride through the heather in her phosphorescent car drawn by glow-worms, or a saint ascend toward the moon, after his prayers were said.

And yet, if the angry waves and wind had allowed a wandering mariner to land in that hospitable harbor upon the night after the great storm, he might have been struck with superstitious fear at the sight of three men, who upon that same night sat around a huge fire, blazing in the middle of the meadow. Two of them wore the broad felt hat and loose trousers of royal miners. Their arms were bare to the shoulder, their feet were cased in fawn-colored leather boots; a red sash held their crooked swords and heavy pistols; each had a hunter's horn slung about his neck. One was old, the other was young; the old man's thick beard and the young man's long hair lent a wild and barbarous look to their faces, which were naturally hard and stern.

By his bearskin cap, his tanned leather jacket, the musket slung across his back, his short, tight-fitting drawers, his bare knees, his bark shoes, and the glittering axe in his hand, it was easy to guess that the companion of the two miners was a mountaineer from the north of Norway.

Certainly, any one who saw from afar these three weird figures, upon which the flames, fanned by the salt breeze, cast a red, flickering light, might well have been frightened, even had he no faith in spectres and demons; it would have been enough that he believed in thieves and was somewhat richer than the ordinary poet.

The three men constantly turned their heads toward the winding path through the wood which fringes Ralph's meadow, and judging by such of their words as were not carried off by the wind, they were expecting a fourth person.

"I say, Kennybol, do you know that we should not be allowed to wait so peacefully for this envoy from Count Griffenfeld, if we were in the neighboring meadow, Goblin Tulbytilbet's meadow, or yonder in St. Cuthbert's bay?"

"Don't talk so loud, Jonas," replied the mountaineer; "blessed be Ralph the Giant, who protects us! Heaven save me from setting foot in Tulbytilbet's meadow! The other day I

thought I was picking hawthorn there, and I gathered mandrake instead, which began to bleed and shriek, and nearly drove me mad.{204}”

The young miner laughed.

“Nearly, Kennybol? For my part, I think that the mandrake’s shriek produced its full effect upon your feeble brains.”

“Feeble brains yourself!” said the vexed mountaineer; “just see, Jonas, he jests at mandrake. He laughs like a lunatic playing with a death’s-head.”

“Hum!” answered Jonas. “Let him go to Walderhog cave, where the heads of those whom Hans, the foul fiend of Iceland, has murdered, come back every night to dance about his bed of withered leaves, and gnash their teeth to lull him to sleep.”

“That’s so,” said the mountaineer.

“But,” rejoined the young man, “did not Mr. Hacket, for whom we are waiting, promise us that Hans of Iceland would take the lead in our rebellion?”

“He did,” replied Kennybol; “and with the help of that demon we are sure to conquer the green jackets of Thronhjem and Copenhagen.”

“So much the better!” cried the old miner. “But I’m not the man to stand guard beside him at night.”

At this moment the rustle of dead leaves beneath the tread of a man drew the attention of the speakers; they turned, and the firelight gleamed on the new-comer’s face.

“It is he! it is Mr. Hacket! Welcome, Mr. Hacket; you have kept us waiting. We have been here this three quarters of an hour.”

“Mr. Hacket” was a short, fat man, dressed in black, and his jovial countenance wore a forbidding expression.

“Well, friends,” said he, “I was delayed by my igno{205}rance of the road and the necessary precautions. I left Count Schumacker this morning; here are three purses of gold which he bade me give you.”

The two old men flung themselves upon the gold with the eagerness common among the peasants of barren Norway. The young miner declined the purse which Hacket offered him.

“Keep your gold, Sir Envoy; I should lie if I said that I had joined the revolt for your Count Schumacker’s sake. I rebel to free the miners from the guardianship of the crown; I rebel that my mother’s bed may have a blanket less ragged than the coast of our good country, Norway.”

Far from seeming disconcerted, Mr. Hacket answered smilingly, “Then I will send this money to your poor mother, my dear Norbith, so that she may have two new blankets to shield her from the cold wind this winter.”

The young man assented with a nod, and the envoy, like a skilful orator, made haste to add:—

“But be careful not to repeat what you just now inconsiderately said, that you are not taking up arms in behalf of Schumacker, Count Griffenfeld.”

“But—but,” muttered the two old men, “we know very well that the miners are oppressed, but we know nothing about this count, this prisoner of state.”

“What!” sharply rejoined the envoy; “are you so ungrateful? You groan in your subterranean caves, deprived of light and air, robbed of all your property, slaves to the most onerous tutelage! Who came to your rescue? Who revived your failing courage? Who gave you gold and arms? Was it not my illustrious master, noble Count Griffenfeld, more of a slave and more unfortunate even than you? And now, loaded with his favors, would you refuse to use them to acquire his liberty with your own?”

“You are right,” interrupted the young miner; “that would be an ill deed.”

“Yes, Mr. Hacket,” said the two old men, “we will fight for Count Schumacker.”

“Courage, my friends! Rise in his name; bear your benefactor’s name from one end of Norway to the other. Only listen; everything seconds your righteous enterprise; you are about to be freed from a formidable enemy, General Levin de Knud, governor of the province. The secret power of my noble master, Count Griffenfeld, will soon procure his recall to Bergen. Come, tell me, Kennybol, Jonas, and you, my dear Norbith, are all your comrades ready?”

“My brethren of GuldbRANDSDAL,” said Norbith, “only await my signal. To-morrow, if you wish—”

“To-morrow; so be it. The young miners under your leadership must be the first to raise the standard. And you, my brave Jonas?”

“Six hundred heroes from the Färöe Islands, who for three days have lived on chamois flesh and bear’s fat in Bennallag forest, only ask a blast from the horn of their old captain, Jonas of Loevig town.”

“Good! And you, Kennybol?”

“All those who carry an axe in the gorges of Kiölen, and climb the rocks with bare knees, are ready to join their brothers, the miners, when they need them.{207}”

“Enough. Tell your comrades that they need not doubt their victory,” added the envoy, raising his voice; “for Hans of Iceland will be their captain.”

“Is that certain?” asked all three at once, in a voice of mingled hope and fear.

The envoy answered: “I will meet you four days hence, at the same hour, with your united forces, in Apsyl-Corh mine, near Lake Miösen, on Blue Star plain. Hans of Iceland will be with me.”

“We will be there,” said the three leaders. “And may God not desert those whom the Devil aids!”

“Fear nothing from God,” said Hacket, with a sneer. “Stay; you will find flags for your troops among the ruins of Crag. Do not forget the war-cry, ‘Long live Schumacker! We will rescue Schumacker!’ Now we must part; day will shortly break. But first, swear the most profound secrecy as to what has passed between us.”

Without a word each of the three chiefs opened a vein in his left arm with the point of his sword; then, seizing the envoy’s hand, each let a few drops of blood trickle into it.

“You have our blood,” they said.

Then the young man exclaimed: “May all my blood flow forth like that which I now shed; may a malicious spirit destroy my plans, as the hurricane does a straw; may my arm be of lead to avenge an insult; may bats dwell in my tomb; may I, still living, be haunted by the dead, and dead, be profaned by the living; may my eyes melt with tears like those of a woman, if ever I speak of what has occurred at this time in Ralph the Gian{208}t’s meadow. And may the blessed saints deign to hear this, my prayer!”

“Amen!” repeated the two old men.

Then they parted, and nothing was left in the meadow but the smouldering fire, whose expiring embers burned up at intervals, and gleamed upon the summit of Ralph the Giant’s ruined and deserted towers.{209}

XIX.

Theodore. Tristam, let us be gone.

Tristam. This is a strange disgrace.

Theodore. Did any one see us?

Tristam. I know not, but I fear they did.

Lope da Vega: *The Gardener's Dog*.

BENIGNUS SPIAGUDRY found it hard to guess the motives which led a youth of fine appearance, and apparently likely to live for many long years, to become the voluntary antagonist of the much-dreaded Hans of Iceland. He had frequently and with much ingenuity broached the question since they started on their travels; but the young adventurer preserved a stubborn silence as to the cause of his journey. Nor was the poor fellow any more successful in satisfying his curiosity concerning various other details as to his strange comrade. Once he ventured to ask a question about his young master's family and his name. "Call me Ordener," was the reply; and this very unsatisfactory answer was given in a tone which forbade further question. He was forced to submit; every one has his secrets, and good Spiagudry himself carefully concealed in his wallet, under his cloak, a certain mysterious casket, any inquiry as to which he would certainly have considered very disagreeable and greatly out of place.

Four days had passed since they left Throndhjem, but they had made little progress, owing to the bad state of the roads after the storm, and the multiplicity of crosscuts and roundabout routes which the runaway keeper thought it prudent to take in order to avoid too thickly settled regions. Leaving Skongen on their right, toward evening of the fourth day they reached the shores of Lake Sparbo.

The vast stretch of water reflecting the last gleams of daylight and the first stars of coming night set in a frame of tall cliffs, black firs, and lofty oaks, presented a gloomy but magnificent picture. The sight of a lake at evening sometimes produces, at a certain distance, a peculiar optical illusion; it seems as if a vast abyss, cleaving the earth from side to side, revealed the heavens beneath our feet.

Ordener paused to contemplate the old Druidical forests, which cover the steep shores of the lake as with a garment, and the chalky huts of Sparbo, scattered over the slope like a stray flock of white goats. He listened to the distant clink of the forges,^[11] mingled with the dull roar of the weird forests, the intermittent cry of wild birds,^{211} and the solemn music of the waves. To the north a huge granite boulder, still gilded by the rays of the sun, rose majestically above the little village of Oëlmœ, its summit bending beneath a mass of ruined towers, as if the giant were weary of his load.

When the soul is sad, it delights in melancholy scenes; it adds to them its own gloom. Let an unhappy man be thrown among wild, high mountains beside some black lake in the heart of a dark forest, at the close of day, and he will see this solemn scene through a funereal veil; he will not feel that the sun is setting, but that it is dying.

Ordener lingered, motionless and mute, until his companion exclaimed: "Capital, sir! You do well to ponder thus beside the most miasma-laden lake in Norway."

This remark and the gesture which accompanied it, would have brought a smile to the lips of any but a lover parted from his mistress perhaps never again to meet her. The learned keeper added:—

"And yet I must rouse you from your meditations to remind you that day is drawing to a close, and we must make haste if we would reach Oëlmœ village before twilight overtakes us."

The observation was correct. Ordener resumed his journey, and Spiagudry followed him, continuing his unheeded reflections upon the botanic and physiologic phenomena which Lake Sparbo affords the naturalist.

"Mr. Ordener," said he, "if you will listen to your devoted guide, you will give up your fatal enterprise; yes, sir, and you will take up your abode upon the shores of this most curious lake, where we can devote ourselves to{212} all sorts of learned research; for instance, to the study of the *stella canora palustris*,—a singular plant, which many scholars consider to be fabulous, but which Bishop Arngrimsson asserts that he both saw and heard on the shores of Lake Sparbo. Added to this, we shall have the satisfaction of feeling that we dwell upon soil which contains more gypsum than any other in Europe, and where the hired assassins of Throndhjem are least likely to find their way. Doesn't it attract you, young master? Come, renounce your senseless journey; for, not to offend you, your scheme is dangerous, without being profitable,—*periculum sine pecunia*; that is to say, senseless, and conceived at a moment when you might better have been thinking of other things."

Ordener, who paid no attention to the poor man's words, merely kept up the conversation by those occasional meaningless monosyllables which great talkers are ready to accept in lieu of answers. Thus they reached Oëlmœ village, where they found an unusual bustle and stir.

The inhabitants—hunters, fishers, and blacksmiths—had left their houses, and hastily collected about a central mound occupied by a group of men, one of whom blew a horn and waved a small black-and-white banner over his head.

“Probably some quack doctor,” said Spiagudry,—“*ambubaiarum collegia, pharmacopolæ*; some scamp who turns gold into lead and wounds into sores. Let us see. What invention of the Evil One will he sell these poor rustics? It would be bad enough if these impostors confined themselves to kings, if they all imitated Borch{213} the Dane and Borri of Milan, those alchemists who so completely duped our Frederic III.;[12] but they are just as greedy for the peasant’s mite as for the prince’s million.”

Spiagudry was mistaken. As they approached the mound they recognized by his black gown and round, pointed cap, the mayor, surrounded by a number of bowmen. The man blowing the horn was the town crier.

The fugitive keeper, somewhat disturbed, muttered: “Truly, Mr. Ordener, I did not expect to stumble upon the mayor when I came into this hamlet. Great Saint Hospitius, protect us! What does he say?”

His uncertainty was of brief duration, for the crier’s shrill voice was quickly raised, and religiously heeded by the little group of villagers.

“In the name of his Majesty and by order of his Excellency, General Levin de Knud, governor, the lord mayor of Throndhjem notifies the inhabitants of all cities, towns, and villages in the province, that a reward of one thousand crowns is offered for the head of Hans, a native of Klipstadur, in Iceland, a murderer and incendiary.”

A vague murmur ran through the crowd. The crier continued:—

“A reward of four crowns is offered for the head of Benignus Spiagudry, ex-keeper of the Spladgest at{214} Throndhjem, accused of necromancy and sacrilege. This proclamation shall be published throughout the province by the mayors of all cities, towns, and villages, who will see that it is carried out.”

The mayor took the proclamation from the crier’s hands, and added in a lugubrious and solemn voice:—

“The life of these men is offered to whosoever will take it.”

The reader will readily believe that this reading was not heard unmoved by our poor, unfortunate Spiagudry. No doubt, the unusual signs of terror which he showed would have roused the attention of the bystanders, had it not just then been wholly absorbed by the first clause of the proclamation.

“A reward for the head of Hans!” cried an old fisherman, who had hastened to the spot, trailing his wet nets behind him. “They might as well, by Saint Usuph, set a price upon the head of Beelzebub!”

“To keep up a proper balance between Hans and Beelzebub,” said a hunter, recognizable by his chamois-skin jerkin, “they should only offer fifteen hundred crowns for the head and horns of the latter fiend.”

“Glory be to the holy mother of God!” cried an old woman, her bald head shaking as she twirled her distaff. “I only wish I might see the head of that Hans, so that I might make sure if his eyes are really live coals, as they say.”

“Yes, to be sure,” replied another old woman; “it was just by looking at it that he set Throndhjem cathedral on fire. Now I should like to see the monster whole, with his serpent’s tail, cloven foot, and broad wings like a bat.”

“Who told you such nonsense, good mother?” broke in the hunter, with a self-satisfied air. “I’ve seen this Hans of Iceland with my own eyes in the gorges of Medsyhath; he is a man like ourselves, only he is as tall as a forty-year-old poplar.”

“Indeed!” said a voice from the crowd, with singular emphasis.

This voice, which made Spiagudry shudder, proceeded from a short man whose face was hidden by the broad felt hat of a miner, his body wrapped in rush matting and sealskin.

“Faith!” cried, with a coarse laugh, a smith who wore his heavy hammer slung across his shoulder, “they may offer one thousand or ten thousand crowns for his head, and he may be four or forty feet tall, but I’ll not offer to go in search of him.”

“Nor I,” said the fisherman.

“Nor I; nor I,” repeated every voice.

“And yet any one who may feel tempted,” rejoined the little man, “will find Hans of Iceland to-morrow at the ruins of Arbar, near Lake Miösen; the day after that at Walderhog cave.”

“Are you sure, my good man?”

This question was asked at one and the same time by Ordener, who listened to this scene with an interest easily understood by any one but Spiagudry, and by another short and tolerably stout man, dressed in black, with a merry countenance, who had

issued from the only inn^{216} which the village contained, at the first sound of the crier's horn.

The little man with the broad-brimmed hat seemed to be studying them both for a moment, and then answered in hollow tones: "Yes."

"And how can you be so certain?" asked Ordener.

"I know where Hans of Iceland is, just as well as I know where Benignus Spiagudry is; neither of them is far off at this instant."

All the poor keeper's terrors were revived, and he scarcely dared look at the mysterious little man. Fancying that his French periwig had failed to disguise him, he began to pluck at Ordener's cloak and to whisper: "Master, sir, in Heaven's name, have mercy! have pity let us be off! let us leave this accursed suburb of hell!"

Ordener, although equally surprised, carefully examined the little man, who, turning his back to the light, seemed anxious to conceal his face.

"I've seen that Benignus Spiagudry," cried the fisherman, "at Throndhjem Spladgest. He's a tall fellow. They offer four crowns for him."

The hunter burst out laughing.

"Four crowns! I shan't go a-hunting for him. I can get more for the skin of a blue fox."

This comparison, which at any other time would have greatly offended the learned keeper, now comforted him. Still, he was about to address another prayer to Ordener to persuade him to continue his journey, when the latter, having learned all that he wished to know forestalled him^{217} by making his way out of the crowd, which was beginning to disperse.

Although when they entered Oëlmœ village they had intended passing the night there, they quitted it, as if by common consent, without even alluding to the motive for their abrupt departure. Ordener was moved by the hope of a more speedy meeting with the brigand, Spiagudry by a desire to get away from the archers as speedily as might be.

Ordener was in too serious a mood to laugh at his comrade's misadventures. He broke the silence in kindly tones.

"Old man, what is the name of the ruin where Hans is to be found to-morrow, according to that little man who seemed to know everything?"

"I don't know; I didn't quite catch the name, noble master," replied Spiagudry, who uttered no falsehood in so saying.

“Then,” continued the young man, “I must make up my mind not to meet him until the day after to-morrow at Walderhog cave.”

“Walderhog cave, sir! Indeed, that is Hans of Iceland’s favorite haunt.”

“Let us take that road,” said Ordener.

“We must turn to the left, behind Oëlmœ cliff. It will take us at least two days to get to Walderhog cave.”

“Do you know, old man,” cautiously observed Ordener, “who that odd fellow was, who seemed to be so well acquainted with you?”

This question again awakened Spiagudry’s fears, which had been lulled to sleep as the village of Oëlmœ faded in the distance.

“No, truly, sir,” he answered, in trembling accents. “But he had a very strange voice.”

Ordener tried to encourage him.

“Fear nothing, old man; serve me well, and I will protect you. If I return victorious over Hans, I promise you not only a pardon, but I will also give you the thousand crowns reward offered by the officers of the law.”

Honest Benignus dearly loved his life, but he also loved gold. Ordener’s promises sounded like magic in his ears; they not only banished all his terrors, but they excited in him a kind of garrulous mirth, which found vent in lengthy discourses, queer gestures, and learned quotations.

“Mr. Ordener,” said he, “if I should ever have occasion to discuss the subject with Over-Bilseuth, otherwise called ‘the Babblers,’ nothing shall prevent me from maintaining that you are a wise and honorable young man. What more worthy and more glorious, in fact, *quid cithara, tuba, vel campana dignius*, than nobly to risk your life to free your country from a monster, a brigand, a demon, in whom all demons, brigands, and monsters seem to be combined? Nobody need tell me that you are moved by mercenary motives. Noble Lord Ordener yields the price of his conflict to the companion of his journey, to the old man who only guided him within a mile of Walderhog cave; for I am sure, young master, that you will allow me to await the result of your illustrious enterprise at the village of Surb, situated in the forest within a mile of Walderhog, will you not? And when your glorious victory is made known, sir, all Norway will thrill with joy like that of Vermund the Refugee, when from the summit of this same Oëlmœ cliff, which we just now passed, he saw the great fire kindled by his brother Halfdan on Munkholm tower in token of his deliverance.”

At these words Ordener interrupted him eagerly.

“What! is Munkholm tower visible from the top of this rock?”

“Yes, sir; twelve miles to the south, between the mountains which our fathers called Frigga’s Footstools. At this hour you should be able to see the light in the tower distinctly.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Ordener, fired by the idea of another glimpse of the seat of all his happiness. “Old man, of course there is a path leading to the top of the rock, is there not?”

“Yes, to be sure; a path which begins in the wood that lies just before us, and rises by a gentle slope to the bare crown of the cliff, whence it is continued by steps cut in the rock by Vermund’s companions, as far as the castle, where it ends. Those are the ruins which you see in the moonlight.”

“Well, old man, you shall show me the path; we will spend the night in those ruins,—in those ruins from which Munkholm tower is visible.”

“Can you really mean it, sir?” asked Benignus. “The fatigues of the day—”

“Old man, I will support your steps; my footing was never more secure.{220}”

“Sir, the brambles that block the path, which has long been deserted, the fallen stones, the darkness—”

“I will take the lead.”

“There may be some savage beast, some unclean animal, some hideous monster—”

“I did not undertake this journey to avoid monsters.”

The idea of halting so near Oëlmœ was very unpleasant to Spiagudry; the thought of seeing Munkholm light, and possibly the light in Ethel’s window, enraptured and transported Ordener.

“Young master,” urged Spiagudry, “give up this scheme; take my advice. I have a presentiment that it will bring us bad luck.”

This plea was as nothing in the face of Ordener’s longing.

“Come,” said he, impatiently, “you must remember that you agreed to serve me faithfully. I insist upon your showing me the path; where is it?”

“We shall come across it directly,” said the keeper, forced to obey.

In fact, they soon saw the path. They entered it; but Spiagudry observed, with surprise mixed with fright, that the tall grass was broken and trampled, and that Vermund the Refugee's old footpath seemed to have been recently trodden.{221}