

XX.

*Leonardo.* The king requires your presence.

*Henrique.* How so?

Lope da Vega: *La Fuerza Lastinosa.*

GENERAL LEVIN DE KNUD sat at his desk, which was covered with papers and open letters, apparently lost in thought. A secretary stood before him awaiting his orders. The general now struck the rich carpet beneath his feet with his spurs, and now absently toyed with the decoration of the Elephant, hanging about his neck from the collar of the order. Occasionally he opened his lips as if to speak, then stopped, rubbed his head, and cast another glance at the unsealed despatches littering the table.

“How the devil!” he cried at last.

This conclusive exclamation was followed by a brief silence.

“Who would ever have imagined,” he resumed, “that those devilish miners would have gone so far? Of course they were secretly egged on to this revolt; but do you know, Wapherney, the thing looks serious? Do you know that five or six hundred scoundrels from the Färöe Islands, headed by a certain old thief named Jonas, have already quitted the mines; that a young fanatic called Norbith has also taken command of the Gulbrandsdal malcon{222}tents; that all the hot-heads in Sund-Moer, Hubfallo, and Kongsberg, who were only waiting the signal, may have risen already? Do you know that the mountaineers have joined the movement, and that they are headed by one of the boldest foxes of Kiölen, old Kennybol? And finally, do you know that according to popular report in northern Thronhjem, if we are to believe the lord mayor, who has written me, that notorious criminal, upon whose head we have set a price, the much-dreaded Hans, has taken chief command of the insurrection? What do you say to all this, my dear Wapherney? Ahem!”

“Your Excellency,” said Wapherney, “knows what measures—”

“There is still another circumstance connected with this lamentable affair which I cannot explain; that is, how our prisoner Schumacker can be the author of the revolt, as they claim. This seems to surprise no one, but it surprises me more than anything else. It is hard to believe that a man whose company my faithful Ordener loves can be a traitor; and yet it is asserted that the miners have risen in his name,—his name is their watchword. They even give him the titles of which the king deprived him. All this seems certain; but how does it happen that Countess d’Ahlefeld knew all these details a week ago, at a time when the first real symptoms of trouble had scarcely

begun to appear in the mines? It is strange! No matter, I must provide for every emergency. Give me my seal, Wapherney.”

The general wrote three letters, sealed them, and handed them to his secretary.{223}

“See that this message is sent to Baron Vøethaün, colonel of musketeers, now garrisoned at Munkholm, so that his regiment may march at once to the seat of the revolt; this to the officer in command at Munkholm, an order to guard the ex-chancellor more closely than ever. I must see and question this Schumacker myself. Then despatch this letter to Skongen, to Major Wolhm, who is in command there, directing him to send forward a portion of the garrison to the centre of rebellion. Go, Wapherney, and see that these orders are executed at once.”

The secretary went out, leaving the governor plunged in meditation.

“All this is very alarming,” thought he. “These miners rebelling in one place, this chancellor intriguing in another, that crazy Ordener—nobody knows where! He may be travelling in the very midst of all these rioters, leaving Schumacker here under my protection to conspire against the State, and his daughter, for whose safety I have been kind enough to remove the company of soldiers to which that Frederic d’Ahlefeld belongs, whom Ordener accuses of—Why, it seems to me that this very company might easily stop the advance columns of the insurgents; it is very well situated for that. Wahlstrom, where it is stationed, is near Lake Miösen and Arbar ruin. That is one of the places of which the rebels will be sure to take possession.”

At this point in his reverie, the general was interrupted by the sound of the opening door.

“Well, what do you want, Gustavus?{224}”

“General, a messenger asks to speak for a moment with your Excellency.”

“Well, what is it now? What fresh disaster! Let the messenger come in.”

The messenger entered, and handed a packet to the governor, saying, “From his highness the viceroy, your Excellency.”

The general hurriedly tore open the despatch.

“By Saint George!” he cried, with a start of surprise, “I believe that they have all gone mad! If here is not the viceroy requesting me to proceed to Bergen. He says it is on urgent business, by order of the king. A fine time this to transact urgent business! ‘The lord chancellor, now travelling in the province of Thronhjem, will take your place during your absence.’ Here’s a substitute in whom I have no confidence! ‘The bishop

will assist him—’ Really, these are excellent governors that Frederic chooses for a country in a state of revolt,—two gentlemen of the cloth, a chancellor, and a bishop! Well, no matter, the invitation is express; it is the order of the king. Needs must obey; but before I go I must see Schumacker and question him. I am sure that there is a plot to involve me in a network of intrigue; but I have one unerring compass,—my conscience.{225}”

XXI.

The voice of thy slain brother’s blood cries out,  
Even from the ground, unto the Lord!

*Cain: A Mystery.*

“YES, Count; it was this very day, in Arbar ruin, that we were told he might be found. Countless circumstances lead me to believe in the truth of this valuable information which I accidentally picked up yesterday, as I told you, at Oëlmœ village.”

“Are we far from this Arbar ruin?”

“It is close by Lake Miösen. The guide assures me that we shall be there before noon.”

These words were spoken by two horsemen muffled in brown cloaks, who early one morning were pursuing one of the many narrow, winding paths which run in every direction through the forest lying between Lakes Miösen and Sparbo. A mountain guide, provided with a {226}huntinghorn and an axe, led the way upon his little gray pony, and behind the travellers rode four men armed to the teeth, toward whom these two persons occasionally turned, as if afraid of being overheard.

“If that Iceland thief is really lurking in Arbar ruin,” said one rider, whose steed kept a respectful distance behind the other, “it is a great point gained; for the difficulty hitherto has been to find this mysterious being.”

“Do you think so, Musdæmon? And suppose he declines our offers?”

“Impossible, your Grace! What brigand could resist gold and a free pardon?”

“But you know that this is no common scoundrel. Do not judge him by yourself. If he should refuse, how can you keep your promise of night before last to the three leaders of the insurrection?”

“Well, noble Count, in that case, which I regard as impossible if we are lucky enough to find our man, has your Grace forgotten that a false Hans of Iceland awaits me two days hence at the hour and place appointed for meeting the three chiefs, at Blue Star, a place, moreover, conveniently near Arbar ruin?”

“You are right, my dear Musdæmon, as usual,” said the count; and each resumed his own particular line of thought.

Musdæmon, whose interest it was to keep his master in good humor, for the purpose of diverting him, asked the guide a question.

“My good man, what is that ruined stone cross yonder, behind those young oaks?”

The guide, a man with fixed stare and stupid mien, turned his head and shook it several times, as he said: “Oh, master, that is the oldest gallows in Norway; holy king Olaf had it built for a judge who made a compact with a robber.”

Musdæmon saw by his patron’s face that the guide’s artless words had produced an effect quite contrary to that which he hoped.

“It is a curious story,” the guide added; “good Mother Osia told it to me. The robber was ordered to hang the judge.”

The poor guide, in his simplicity, did not suppose that the incident with which he meant to entertain his employers was almost an insult to them. Musdæmon stopped him.

“That will do,” said he; “we have heard the story before.”

“Insolent fellow!” muttered the count, “he has heard the story before. Ah, Musdæmon, you shall pay for your impudence yet.”

“Did your Grace speak to me?” obsequiously asked Musdæmon.

“I was thinking how I could obtain the Order of the Dannebrog for you. The marriage of my daughter Ulrica and Baron Ordener would be an excellent opportunity.”

Musdæmon was profuse in protestations and thanks.

“By the way,” added his Grace, “let us talk business. Do you suppose that the temporary recall which we sent him has reached the Mecklenburger?”

The reader may remember that the count was in the habit of thus designating General Levin de Knud, who was indeed a native of Mecklenburg.

“Let us talk business!” thought the injured Musdæmon; “it seems that my affairs are not ‘business.’ Count,” he replied aloud, “I think that the viceroy’s messenger must be in Thronhjelm by this time, and therefore General Levin must be getting ready to start.”

The count assumed a kindly tone.

“That recall, my dear fellow, was one of your masterstrokes,—one of your best planned and most skilfully executed intrigues.”

“The credit belongs as much to your Grace as to me,” replied Musdœmon, careful, as we have already remarked, to mix the count in all his machinations.

The master understood this secret desire of his confidant, but chose to seem unconscious of it.

He smiled.

“My dear private secretary, you are always modest; but nothing can make me depreciate your most eminent services. Elphega’s presence and the Mecklenburger’s absence assure my triumph in Throndhjem. I am now at the head of the province; and if Hans of Iceland accepts the command of the rebels, which I intend to offer him in person, to me will fall, in the eyes of the king, the glory of putting down this distressing insurrection and capturing this terrible brigand.”

They were chatting thus in low voices when the guide rode back to them.

“Masters,” said he, “here on our left is the hillock upon which Biorn the Just had the double-tongued{229} Vellon beheaded in the presence of his entire army, the traitor having driven off the king’s allies and summoned the enemy to the camp, that he might have the appearance of saving Biorn’s life.”

All these reminiscences of old Norway did not seem to be to Musdœmon’s taste, for he hurriedly interrupted the guide.

“Come, come, good man, be silent and go your way, without turning back so often. What do we care about the foolish stories of which these ruins and dead trees remind you? You annoy my master with your old wives’ tales.{230}”

XXII.

Now the hungry lion roars,  
And the wolf howls the moon;  
While the heavy ploughman snores,  
All with weary task foredone.  
Now the wasted brands do glow,  
Whilst the screech-owl, screeching loud,  
Puts the wretch that lies in woe  
In remembrance of a shroud.

Now it is the time of night,  
That the graves, all gaping wide,  
Every one lets forth his sprite,  
In the church-way paths to glide.  
Shakespeare: *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

LET us now retrace our steps. We left Ordener and Spiagudry struggling laboriously up the brow of Oëlmœ cliff by the light of the rising moon. This rock, bare of vegetation at the point where it begins to curve, is, from this peculiarity, called by the Norwegian peasants{231} the Vulture's Neck,—a name which gives an excellent idea of the aspect of this huge granite boulder as seen from a distance.

As our travellers approached this part of the rock, the forest changed to heather. Grass gave place to moss; wild brier-roses, broom, and holly were substituted for oaks and beeches,—a scantier growth, which in mountainous regions always shows that the summit is near, as it indicates the gradual diminution of the stratum of earth covering what may be termed the skeleton of the mountain.

“Mr. Ordener,” said Spiagudry, whose lively mind seemed ever a prey to a varying world of ideas, “this is a very tiresome climb, and it takes all my devotion to follow you. But it seems to me that I see a superb *convolvulus* yonder to the right; how I should like to examine it. Why is it not broad daylight? Don't you think it was a great piece of impertinence to value a learned man like me at no more than four paltry crowns? 'Tis true, the famous Phædrus was a slave, and Æsop, if we are to believe the learned Planudes, was sold at a fair like a beast of burden or household chattel. And who would not be proud to bear any sort of resemblance to the great Æsop?”

“Or to the celebrated Hans?” added Ordener, with a smile.

“By Saint Hospitius,” replied the keeper, “do not utter that name so lightly; I swear I could readily forego the latter comparison. But wouldn't it be strange if Benignus Spiagudry, his companion in misfortune, should win the{232} reward for his head? Mr. Ordener, you are more generous than Jason, for he did not give the golden fleece to the Argonaut pilot; and I am sure that your mission, although I do not clearly understand its object, is no less perilous than that of Jason.”

“Well,” said Ordener, “since you know Hans of Iceland, tell me something about him. You say that he is by no means a giant, as is generally supposed.”

Spiagudry interrupted him: “Stop, master! Don't you hear footsteps behind us?”

“Yes,” quietly answered the young man; “don’t be alarmed; it is some animal frightened at our coming, and brushing against the bushes in its flight.”

“You are right, my young Cæsar; it is so long since these woods have seen the face of man! If we may judge by its heavy tread, it must be a good-sized animal. It may be an elk or a reindeer; this part of Norway abounds in these beasts. Wildcats are also found here; I saw one myself, which was brought to Copenhagen; he was monstrous big. I must give you a description of this ferocious animal.”

“My dear guide,” said Ordener, “I would rather that you would give me a description of another and no less ferocious monster, the horrible Hans.”

“Speak lower, sir! How calmly you utter that name! You do not know—Good Heavens, sir! just hear that!”

As Spiagudry said this, he drew closer to Ordener, who did indeed distinctly hear a cry similar to the growl which, as the reader may remember, had so alarmed the timid keeper on the stormy night of their departure from Throndhjem.

“Did you hear that?” he whispered, breathless with fright.

“To be sure I did,” said Ordener; “but I don’t see why you tremble so violently. It is the howl of some wild beast, possibly the cry of one of those very wildcats of which you were just talking. Did you expect to pass through such a place at this time of night without disturbing any of its inhabitants? I’ll warrant you, old man, they are far more frightened than you are.”

Spiagudry, seeing his young companion’s composure, was somewhat reassured.

“Well, it may be, sir, that you are right. But that yell sounded terribly like a voice that I—It was a very poor idea, let me tell you, sir, to insist upon climbing up to this Vermund’s castle. I fear we shall meet with some accident on the Vulture’s Neck.”

“Fear nothing while you are with me,” answered Ordener.

“Oh, nothing disturbs you; but, sir, nobody but the blessed Saint Paul can handle vipers without getting bitten. You did not even notice, when we struck into this confounded footpath, that it seemed to have been recently trodden, and that the grass had not had time to lift its head since it was trampled.”

“I confess that I did not pay much heed to it, and that my peace of mind is not dependent upon the state of a few blades of grass. See, we are now out of the thicket; we shall hear no more from the wild beasts; I need not therefore tell you, my

brave guide, to summon all your courage, but rather bid you muster all your strength, for this path, cut in the rock, will doubtless be even steeper than the one we have left.”

“It is not that it is steeper, sir, but the learned traveller, Suckson, says that it is often impeded by rocks or heavy stones too big to be handled, over which it is not easy to clamber. Among others, there is, just beyond the Maläer postern, which must be close at hand, a huge triangular granite boulder, which I have always had the greatest desire to see. Schoenning asserts that he discovered the three primitive Runic characters on it.”

The travellers had for some time been climbing the face of the rock; they now reached a small, ruined tower, through which their path led, and to which Spiagudry drew Ordener’s attention.

“This is the Maläer postern, sir. This path hewn in the living rock contains several curious structures, which show the ancient style of fortification used in our Norwegian manor-houses. This postern, which was always guarded by four men-at-arms, was the first outwork of Vermund’s fort. Speaking of posterns, the monk Urensus makes an odd remark; he asks whether the word *janua*, derived from Janus, whose temple doors were so widely celebrated, has any connection with ‘Janissary,’ a name applied to the troops who guard the sultan’s gate. It would be strange enough if the name of the mildest prince known to history should have passed to the most ferocious soldiers upon earth.”

In the midst of all the keeper’s scientific twaddle, they<sup>{235}</sup> journeyed laboriously along, over loose stones and sharp pebbles, mingled with the short, slippery grass which sometimes grows upon rocks. Ordener beguiled his weariness by thinking how delightful it would be to gaze once more upon distant Munkholm; all at once Spiagudry exclaimed: “Oh, I see it! This sight alone repays me for all my trouble. I see it, sir, I see it!”

“See what?” said Ordener, who was just then thinking of Ethel.

“Why, sir, the three-sided pyramid described by Schoenning. I shall be the third scientific man, with Professor Schoenning and Bishop Isleif, to have the pleasure of studying it. Only it is a great pity that there is no moon.”

As they approached the famous boulder, Spiagudry uttered an exclamation of horror and distress. Ordener, in surprise, asked with some interest the cause of this new emotion; but the archæologist was for a time unable to reply.

“You thought,” said Ordener, “that this rock blocked the path; on the contrary, you should be grateful to find that it leaves it entirely open.”

“And that is the very thing which provokes me,” said Benignus, in piteous accents.

“What do you mean?”

“Why, sir,” replied the keeper, “do you not see that the position of the pyramid has been changed; that the base, which rested on the path, is now uppermost; and that the boulder stands upside down, upon the very side on which Schoenning discovered the primordial Runic letters? I am indeed unfortunate!{236}”

“It is a pity,” said the young man.

“And besides,” hastily added Spiagudry, “the overturning of this mass of stone proves the presence of some superhuman being. Unless it be the work of the Devil, there is but one man in Norway whose arm could—”

“My poor guide, there you are, giving way again to your foolish fears. Who knows but this stone has lain thus for more than a hundred years?”

“It is a hundred and fifty years, it is true,” said Spiagudry, more quietly, “since the last scientific man observed it. But it seems to me to have been moved recently; the place which it formerly occupied is still damp. Look, sir.”

Ordener, impatient to reach the ruins, dragged his guide away from the marvellous pyramid, and succeeded, by gentle words, in removing the fresh fears with which this strange displacement inspired the aged scholar.

“See here, old man, you can take up your abode on the borders of this lake, and devote yourself to your important studies, when you get the thousand crowns reward for Hans’s head.”

“You are right, noble sir; but do not speak so lightly of so dubious a victory. I must give you one piece of advice which may help you to overcome the monster.”

Ordener drew eagerly toward Spiagudry. “Advice! what is it?”

“The robber,” said the latter, in a low voice, casting uneasy glances around him,—“the robber wears at his belt a skull, from which he usually drinks. It is the skull of his son, of the mutilation of whose corpse I am accused.{237}”

“Speak a little louder, and don’t be frightened; I can hardly hear you. Well, this skull?”

“This skull,” said Spiagudry, bending to whisper in the young man’s ear, “you must try to obtain. The monster attaches a certain superstitious importance to its possession. His son’s skull once yours, you can do what you will with him.”

“That is all very well, my good fellow; but how am I to get this skull?”

“By some stratagem, sir. While the monster sleeps, perhaps.”

Ordener interrupted him: “Enough. Your good advice is useless. I cannot be supposed to know when my enemy is asleep. My sword is the only weapon which I recognize.”

“Sir, sir! it has never been proved that the archangel Michael did not resort to stratagem to vanquish Satan.”

Here Spiagudry stopped short, and stretching out his hands, exclaimed in scarcely audible tones, “Oh, heavens! Oh, heavens! What do I see? Look, master; is not that a short man walking before us in the path?”

“Faith,” said Ordener, raising his eyes, “I see nothing.”

“Nothing, sir? To be sure, the path bends, and he has disappeared behind that rock. Go no farther, sir, I entreat you.”

“Surely, if the person whom you imagine that you saw disappeared so quickly, it shows that he has no idea of waiting for us; and if he chooses to run away, that is no reason why we should do the same.”

“Watch over us, holy Hospitius!” ejaculated Spiagudry,<sup>{238}</sup> who in all moments of danger remembered his favorite saint.

“You must,” added Ordener, “have taken the flickering shadow of some startled owl for a man.”

“And yet I really thought I saw a little man; to be sure, the moonlight often produces strange delusions. It was in the moonlight that Baldan, lord of Merneugh, took a white bed-curtain for his mother’s ghost; which led him to go next day and confess himself guilty of parricide before the judges of Christiania, who were about to condemn the dead woman’s innocent page. So we may say that the moonlight saved that page’s life.”

No one was ever more ready than Spiagudry to forget the present in the past. One anecdote from the vast storehouse of his memory was enough to banish all thought of the present. Thus the story of Baldan diverted his fears, and he added in a tranquil voice, “It is quite possible that the moonlight deceived me too.”

Meantime, they gained the top of the Vulture's Neck, and began to get another glimpse of the ruins, which the steep slope of the rock had hidden from them as they ascended.

The reader need not be surprised if we frequently encounter ruins on the topmost peak of Norwegian mountains. No one who has travelled among the mountains of Europe can have failed to notice the remains of fortresses and castles clinging to the top of the loftiest peaks, like the deserted nest of a vulture or the eyrie of some dead eagle. In Norway especially, at the period of which we write, the variety of these aerial structures was{239} as amazing as their number. Sometimes they consisted of long dismantled walls, enclosing a rock, sometimes of slender pointed turrets, surmounting a sharp peak, like a crown; or upon the snowy summit of a lofty mountain might be seen great towers grouped about a massive donjon, looking in the distance like an antique diadem. Here were the graceful pointed arches of a Gothic cloister, side by side with the heavy Egyptian columns of a Saxon church; there, close by some pagan chieftain's citadel with its square towers, stood the crenellated fortress of a Christian lord; or, again, a stronghold crumbling with age, neighbored by a monastery ravaged by war. Of all these edifices—a strange medley of architectural styles, now almost forgotten, daringly constructed in apparently inaccessible spots—but a few ruins remained to bear witness alike to the power and the impotence of man. Within their walls deeds were perhaps done far worthier of repetition than all the stories which are written now; but time passed; the eyes which witnessed them are closed; the tradition of them died with the lapse of years, like a fire which is not fed; and when that is lost, who can read the secret of the ages?

The manor-house of Vermund the Refugee, which our two travellers had now reached, was one of those places about which popular superstition has woven endless amazing histories and marvellous legends. By its walls—composed of pebbles bedded in cement, now harder than stone—it was easy to determine that it was built about the fifth or sixth century. But one of its five towers remained standing; the other four, more or less dilapidated,{240} and strewing the top of the rock with broken fragments, were connected by a line of ruins, which also showed the ancient limits of the inner courts of the castle. It was very difficult to penetrate this enclosure, littered as it was with stones and shattered blocks of granite, and overgrown with weeds and brambles which, clambering from ruin to ruin, crowned the broken walls with verdure, or overhung the precipice with long, flexible branches. On these drooping tendrils, it was said, dim ghosts often swung in the moonlight,—the guilty spirits of those who had wilfully drowned themselves in Lake Sparbo; and to these twigs, too, the water-sprite fastened the cloud which was to bear him home again at sunrise. Fearful

mysteries were these, more than once witnessed by hardy fishermen, when, to take advantage of the time when dogfish sleep, [13] they ventured to row as far as Oëlmœ cliff, which loomed up in the darkness over their heads like the broken arch of some huge bridge.

Our two adventurers climbed the manor wall, though not without some difficulty, and crept through a crevice, for the door was filled with fragments. The only tower which, as we have said, remained standing, was at the extreme edge of the rock. It was, Spiagudry told Ordener, from the top of this tower that Munkholm lighthouse could be seen. They went towards it, although the darkness was at that moment complete, the moon being hidden by a great black cloud. They were about to cross a breach in another wall, in order to enter what was{241} once the second courtyard of the castle, when Benignus stopped short, and suddenly seized Ordener's arm with such a trembling hand that the young man himself almost fell.

"What now?" asked Ordener in surprise.

Benignus, without answering, pressed his arm more firmly, as if begging him to be silent.

"Well—" said the young man.

Another pressure, accompanied by an ill-suppressed sigh, decided him to wait patiently until this fresh fright should cease.

At last Spiagudry asked, in a stifled voice: "Well, master, what do you say now?"

"To what?" said Ordener.

"Yes, sir," added the other, in the same tone; "I suppose you are sorry now that you came here?"

"No, indeed, my worthy guide; on the contrary, I hope to climb higher still. Why should you think that I am sorry?"

"What, sir, did you not see?"

"See! What?"

"You saw nothing?" repeated the honest keeper, with ever-increasing terror.

"Truly I did not," impatiently answered Ordener; "I saw nothing, and I heard nothing but the sound of your teeth chattering with fright."

“What! not behind that wall, in the shadow, those two flaming eyes, like comets, fixed directly upon us,—did you not see them?”

“Upon my honor, I did not.{242}”

“You did not see them move up and down, and then disappear among the ruins?”

“I don’t know what you are talking about. Besides, what if I did see them?”

“What! Mr. Ordener, don’t you know that there is but one man in Norway whose eyes gleam in that way in the dark?”

“Well, and what then? Who is this man with the eyes of a cat? Is it Hans, your much-dreaded Icelander? So much the better if he be here! It will spare us a journey to Walderhog.”

This “so much the better” was not to the taste of Spiagudry, who could not help betraying his secret thought by the involuntary ejaculation: “Oh, sir, you promised to leave me at the village of Surb, a mile away from the battle.”

The generous and kindly Ordener understood, and smiled.

“You are right, old man; it would be unfair to make you share my danger; therefore fear nothing. You see this Hans of Iceland everywhere. May there not be some wildcat lurking among these ruins, whose eyes shine quite as fiercely as his do?”

Once more Spiagudry’s fears were set at rest, either because Ordener’s suggestion struck him as very plausible, or because his young companion’s composure proved contagious.

“Ah, sir,” said he, “if it had not been for you I should have died a dozen deaths from fright as I climbed these rocks. To be sure, I should never have attempted such a task if it had not been for you.{243}”

The moon, which now broke through the clouds, showed them the gateway to the highest tower, the foot of which they had already reached. They entered, after raising a thick curtain of vines, which showered them with drowsy lizards and old decayed bird’s-nests. The keeper picked up a couple of pebbles, and striking them together, produced a few sparks, by means of which he soon set fire to a heap of dead leaves and dry branches collected by Ordener. In a few moments a bright column of flame rose into the air, and banishing the darkness about them, permitted them to examine the interior of the tower.

Nothing was left but a circular wall, which was very thick, and was overgrown with moss and vines. The ceiling and floors of its four stories had crumbled away one after the other, and now formed a vast heap of rubbish upon the ground. A narrow spiral staircase, entirely without a railing, and broken in various places, was built in the wall, to the top of which it led. As the fire began to crackle cheerily, a swarm of owls and ospreys flew up heavily, with strange, weird cries, and huge bats now and then hovered above the flames, poised upon their ashen wings.

“Our hosts do not receive us very merrily,” said Ordener; “but do not take fright again.”

“I, sir,” replied Spiagudry, seating himself close to the fire; “I fear an owl or a bat! I have dwelt with corpses, and I do not fear vampires. Ah, I only dread the living! I am not brave, I admit; but at least I am not superstitious. Come, sir, take my advice; let us laugh at these{244} ladies in black petticoats and with such hoarse voices, and let us be thinking of supper.”

Ordener thought of nothing but Munkholm.

“I have here a few provisions,” said Spiagudry, drawing his knapsack from under his cloak; “but if your appetite be as good as mine, this black bread and mouldy cheese will not go far. I see that we shall have to observe the limits of the law laid down by the French king, Philip the Fair,—*Nemo audeat comedere præter duo fercula cum potagio*. There must be nests of gulls or pheasants on the top of this tower; but how are we to get there by that dilapidated staircase, which does not look as if it would bear the weight of anything but a sylph?”

“Still,” answered Ordener, “it must needs bear mine, for I shall certainly climb to the top of this tower.”

“What, master! to get a few gull’s-nests? Do not, for mercy’s sake, be so rash! It is not worth while to kill yourself for the sake of a better supper. Besides, suppose you should make a mistake and take the nests of these owls?”

“Much I care for your nests! Didn’t you tell me that I could see Munkholm light from the top of this tower?”

“So you can, young master; it lies to the south. I see that your desire to establish this point, so important to the science of geography, was your motive for taking this fatiguing journey to Vermund castle. But do consider, good Mr. Ordener, that it may sometimes be the duty of a zealous student to brave toil and hardship, but{245} never to run into danger. I implore you, do not attempt that poor broken-down staircase, upon which even a crow would not venture to perch.”

Benignus was by no means anxious to be left alone in the tower. As he rose to take Ordener's hand, his knapsack, which was lying across his knees, fell upon some stones, and gave forth a clear metallic ring.

"What have you in your wallet that rings so loudly?" asked Ordener.

This was such a delicate question that Spiagudry lost all desire to restrain his young companion.

"Well," said he, without answering the question, "if, in spite of all my prayers, you persist in climbing to the top of this tower, at least beware of the broken places in the stairs."

"But," repeated Ordener, "you have not told me what you have in your knapsack to make it sound so metallic."

This indiscreet persistence was extremely unpleasant to the old keeper, who cursed the questioner from the bottom of his soul.

"Oh, noble master," he replied, "how can you show such curiosity about a paltry iron barber's-basin, which clinked against a stone? If I cannot persuade you to change your mind," he made haste to add, "come back as soon as you can, and be careful to hold fast to the vines which cover the wall. You will see Munkholm lighthouse to the south, between Frigga's Footstools."

Spiagudry could not have said anything better calculated to drive every other idea out of the young man's head. Ordener, throwing aside his mantle, sprang toward the staircase, up which the keeper followed him with his eyes until he could only see him move like a faint shadow upward to the top of the wall, dimly lighted by the flickering flames and the cold rays of the moon.

Then reseating himself and picking up his knapsack, he said: "Now, my dear Benignus Spiagudry, while that young lynx cannot see you, and you are alone, make haste and break the cumbrous iron envelope which prevents you from taking possession, *oculis et manu*, of the treasure undoubtedly contained in this casket. When it is delivered from its prison, it will be lighter to carry and easier to conceal."

Arming himself with a huge stone, he was about to break the lid of the box, when the firelight, falling on the iron lock, suddenly arrested the antiquarian.

"By Saint Willibrod the Numismatologist, I am not mistaken," he exclaimed, eagerly rubbing the rusty lid; "those are indeed the arms of Griffenfeld. I came near doing a very foolish thing in breaking this lock. This may be the only perfect copy in existence

of those famous armorial bearings destroyed in 1676 by the hangman's hand. The devil! I will not touch this box. Whatever may be the value of its contents, unless, as seems scarcely probable, it should be coin of Palmyra or Carthaginian money, this is certainly still more precious. So here I am the sole owner of the now obsolete arms of Griffenfeld! Let me hide this treasure carefully, and I may some time discover the secret of opening the casket without committing an act of vandalism. The Griffenfeld arms! Oh, {247} yes! here are the hand of Justice and the scales upon a gules ground. What luck!"

At each fresh heraldic discovery that he made as he polished the ancient coffer, he uttered a cry of admiration or an exclamation of content.

"By means of a solvent, I can open the box without breaking the lock. It probably contains the ex-chancellor's treasure. If any one, tempted by the bait of the four crowns offered by the council for my head, should recognize me now and stop me, I can readily buy my freedom. So this blessed casket will save me."

As he spoke, he looked up mechanically. All at once his grotesque features changed with lightning speed from an expression of intense delight to that of stupefied dismay; his limbs trembled convulsively, his eyes became fixed, his brow furrowed, his mouth gaped wide, and his voice stuck in his throat.

Before him, on the other side of the fire, stood a little man with folded arms. By his dress of blood-stained skins, his stone axe, his red beard, and the ravenous stare fastened on his face, the wretched keeper at once recognized the frightful character whose last visit he had received in the Spladgest at Throndhjem.

"It is I!" said the little man, with terrible calmness. "That casket will save you," he added with a bitterly sarcastic smile. "Spiagudry, is this the way to Thoctree?"

The unfortunate man tried to stammer a word of excuse.

"Thoctree! Sir—My lord and master,—I was going {248}—"

"You were going to Walderhog," replied the other, in a voice of thunder.

The terrified Spiagudry mustered all his forces to deny the charge.

"You were guiding an enemy to my retreat. I thank you! 'Twill be one living man the less. Fear nothing, faithful guide; he shall follow you."

The luckless keeper strove to shriek, but could with difficulty utter a feeble moan.

“Why are you so frightened at my presence? You were seeking me. Hark ye! Do not speak, or you are a dead man.”

The little man swung his stone axe above the keeper’s head. He added, in a voice which sounded like the roar of a mountain torrent as it bursts from some subterranean cave: “You have betrayed me.”

“No, your Grace! No, your Excellency!” gasped Benignus, scarcely able to articulate these words of apology and entreaty.

The other gave vent to a low growl.

“Ah! you would deceive me again! Hope not to succeed. Listen! I was on the roof of the Spladgest when you sealed your compact with that mad fool; twice you have heard my voice. It was my voice you heard amid the storm upon your road; it was I whom you met in Vyglá tower; it was I who said, ‘We shall meet again!’”

The terrified keeper looked about him in despair, as if to summon help. The little man went on: “I could not let those soldiers who pursued you, escape my wrath; they belonged to the Munkholm regiment. I knew that{249} I should not lose you. Spiagudry, it was I whom you saw again in Oëlmœ village beneath the miner’s hat; it was my footstep and my voice that you heard, and my eyes that you saw as you climbed to these ruins. It was I!”

Alas! the unfortunate man was but too well convinced of these dreadful truths. He rolled upon the ground at the feet of his fearful judge, crying in faint and agonizing accents, “Mercy!”

The little man, his arms still folded, fixed upon him a murderous look, more scorching even than the flames upon the hearth.

“Ask that casket to save you, as you said it would do,” he said sarcastically.

“Mercy, sir, mercy!” repeated the expiring victim.

“I warned you to be faithful and to be dumb. You have not been faithful; but in future I protest that you shall be dumb.”

The keeper, grasping the horrible meaning of these words, uttered a deep groan.

“Fear nothing,” said the man; “I will not part you from your treasure.”

At these words, unfastening his leather belt, he passed it through a ring on the cover of the casket, and by this means hung it about Spiagudry’s neck, the poor fellow bending beneath its weight.

“Come!” rejoined the monster, “to what devil will you confide your soul? Make haste and summon him, lest another demon whom you do not care about, take possession of it before him.{250}”

The desperate old man, past all power of speech, fell at the little man’s knees, making countless gestures of terror and entreaty.

“No, no!” said his tormentor; “my faithful Spiagudry, you need not be distressed at leaving your young companion without a guide. I promise you that he shall go where you go. Follow me; you do but show him the way. Come!”

With these words, seizing the wretched man in his powerful arms, he bore him from the tower as a tiger might carry off a writhing serpent, and a moment later a fearful shriek rang through the ruins, mingled with a horrible burst of laughter.{251}

XXIII.

Yes, we may reveal to the faithful lover’s tear-wet eye the distant object of his adoration. But alas! the moments of expectation, the farewells, the thoughts, the sweet and bitter memories, the enchanting dreams of two beings that love! Who can restore these?—Maturin: *Bertram*.

MEANTIME the venturesome Ordener, after a score or more of narrow escapes from a fall during his perilous ascent, reached the top of the thick, round tower wall. At his unexpected visit, dusky old owls abruptly aroused from their nests, flew up, staring at him as they sailed away, and loose stones, displaced by his tread, rolled into the abyss, rebounding from projections in the masonry with a remote, hollow roar.

At any other time, Ordener’s gaze would have roamed far and wide, and his mind would have dwelt upon the depth of the gulf yawning beneath him, which seemed even greater from the thick darkness of the night. His{252} eye, taking in all the great masses of shadow on the horizon, their sombre outlines but half revealed by a nebulous moon, would have striven to distinguish between mist and rocks, between mountains and clouds; his imagination would have lent life to all the gigantic forms, the fantastic shapes with which moonlight clothes hills and vapors. He would have listened to the indistinct murmur of lake and woods blended with the shrill sough of the wind through the crevices in the stones and through the dried grass at his feet, and his fancy would have lent words to all those low voices through which material Nature speaks while man sleeps, in the silence of the night. But although the scene unconsciously acted upon his whole being, other thoughts filled his mind. Hardly had his foot touched the top of the wall, when his eye turned to the southern sky, and he thrilled with unspeakable rapture as he saw beyond and between two small

mountains a point of light gleaming upon the horizon like a red star. It was Munkholm beacon.

None but those who have tasted the truest joys which life can give can understand the young man's happiness. His soul was filled with delight; his heart beat violently. Motionless, his eye fixed, he gazed at the star of hope and consolation. It seemed as if that beam of light traversing the darkness, and coming from the spot which held all that made life worth living, bore with it something of his Ethel. Ah! do not doubt it; one soul may sometimes hold mysterious communion with another, though widely parted by time and space. In vain the world of{253} reality rears its barriers between two beings who love; inhabitants of an ideal world, they are present to each other in absence, they are united in death. What can mere bodily separation or physical distance avail if two hearts be indissolubly bound by a single thought and a common desire? True love may suffer, but it cannot die.

Who has not repeatedly lingered on a rainy night beneath some dimly lighted window? Who has not passed and repassed a certain door, rapturously wandered up and down before a certain house? Who has not abruptly retraced his steps, to follow, at evening, along some deserted, winding street, a floating skirt or a white veil suddenly recognized in the twilight? He who has never experienced these feelings may safely say that he has never loved.

As he gazed at the distant lighthouse, Ordener pondered. A sad and ironical contentment took the place of his first transports; a thousand varying thoughts and ideas crowded upon his agitated spirit. "Yes," said he, "a man must labor long and painfully to win at last a ray of happiness in the vast night of existence. So she is there! She sleeps, she dreams, perhaps she thinks of me! But who will tell her that her Ordener even now hangs above an abyss, sad and lonely, surrounded by darkness,— her Ordener, who retains nothing of her but a single ringlet pressed to his heart and a faint light upon the horizon!" Then, looking at the ruddy glow of the huge fire burning in the tower beneath, and escaping through the crevices in the wall, he murmured: "Perhaps{254} from one of her prison windows she casts an indifferent glance at the far-off flame upon this hearth."

All at once, a loud shriek and a prolonged burst of laughter rose from the brink of the precipice below; he turned abruptly, and saw that the interior of the tower was vacant. Alarmed for the safety of the old man, he hurriedly descended; but he had taken but a few steps when he heard a dull splash, as if a heavy body had been thrown into the deep waters of the lake.{255}

XXIV.

Count Don Sancho Diaz, lord of Saldana, shed bitter tears in his prison cell. Full of despair, he sighed forth in solitude his complaints against King Alfonso: "Oh, sad moments, when my white locks remind me how many years I have already passed in this horrible prison!"—*Old Spanish Romance*.

THE sun was setting, and its horizontal beams threw the dark shadow of the prison-bars upon Schumacker's woollen gown and Ethel's crape dress, as they sat by the high-arched casement, the old man in a great Gothic chair, the young girl upon a stool at his feet. The prisoner seemed to be brooding, in his favorite melancholy attitude. His bald, wrinkled brow rested on his hand, and his face was hidden save for the long white beard which hung down his breast in sad disorder.

"Father," said Ethel, trying by every means to rouse him, "my lord and father, I dreamed last night of a happy{256} future. Look, dear father; raise your eyes, and see that bright, cloudless sky."

"I can only see the sky," the old man replied, "through my prison-bars, as I can only see your future, Ethel, through my misfortunes."

Then his head, for an instant lifted, fell back upon his hands, and both were silent.

"Father," rejoined the young girl, a moment later, in a timid voice, "are you thinking of Lord Ordener?"

"Ordener?" said the old man, as if striving to recall the name. "Ah, I know whom you mean! What of him?"

"Do you think that he will soon return, father? He has been gone so long!—this is the fourth day."

The old man shook his head sadly.

"I think that when four years have passed, his return will be as close at hand as it is today."

Ethel turned pale.

"Heavens! Then you think that he will not come back?"

Schumacker made no answer. The young girl repeated her question in an anxious and beseeching tone.

"Did he not promise to return?" said the old man, curtly.

"Yes, to be sure!" eagerly answered Ethel.

“Well, how can you reckon upon his coming, then? Is he not a man? I believe that the vulture will return to a dead body, but I have no faith in the return of spring when the year is on the wane.”

Ethel, seeing that her father had relapsed into his{257} wonted melancholy, took courage; the voice of her young and virginal soul proudly denied the old man’s morbid philosophy.

“Father,” she said firmly, “Lord Ordener will return; he is not like other men.”

“What do you know about it, girl?”

“What you know yourself, my lord and father.”

“I know nothing,” said the old man. “I heard words from a man, and they promised the actions of a god.” Then he added, with a bitter smile: “I have weighed them well, and I see that they are too beautiful to be true.”

“And I, sir, believe them because they are so beautiful.”

“Oh, girl, if you were what you should be, Countess of Tönsberg and Princess of Wollin, surrounded, as you would be, by a swarm of handsome traitors and selfish adorers, such credulity would be most dangerous.”

“It is not credulity, my lord and father, but confidence.”

“It is easy to see, Ethel, that there is French blood in your veins.”

This idea led the old man, by an imperceptible transition, to a different train of thought, and he added, with a certain complacency:—

“For those who degraded your father to a point lower yet than that from which he had raised himself, cannot deny that you are the daughter of Charlotte, Princess of Tarentum, or that one of your ancestresses was Adela (or Edila), Countess of Flanders, whose name you bear.{258}”

Ethel’s mind was running on quite other things.

“Father, you misjudge the noble Ordener.”

“Noble, my daughter! What do you mean by that? I have made men noble who proved themselves very vile.”

“I do not mean, sir, that his nobility is of the kind conferred by man.”

“Do you know that he is descended from some ‘jarl’ or ‘hersa’?”[\[14\]](#)

“I know as little of his descent as you do, father. He may be,” she added, with downcast eyes, “the son of a vassal or a serf. Alas! crowns and lyres may be painted upon the velvet covering of a footstool. I only mean that, judged by your own standard, my revered sire, he has a noble heart.”

Of all the men whom she had seen, Ordener was the one whom Ethel knew at once best and least. He had dawned upon her destiny, like one of those angels who visited the first men, wrapped alike in mystery and in radiant light. Their mere presence revealed their nature, and they were at once adored. Thus Ordener had shown Ethel what men usually conceal, his heart; he had been silent concerning that of which they usually make boast, his country and his family. His look was enough for Ethel, and she had faith in his words. She loved him, she had given him her life, she was intimate with his soul, and she did not know his name.{259}

“A noble heart!” repeated the old man; “a noble heart! Such nobility is higher than any in the gift of kings; it is the gift of God. He is less lavish with it than are they.”

The prisoner raised his eyes to his shattered escutcheon as he added: “And he never withdraws it.”

“Then, father,” said the girl, “he who retains the one should be easily consoled for the loss of the other.”

These words startled her father and restored his courage. He replied in a firm voice:—

“You are right, girl. But you do not know that the disgrace held by the world to be unjust is sometimes confirmed by our secret conscience. Such is our poor nature; once unhappy, countless voices which slumbered in the time of our prosperity wake within us and accuse us of faults and errors before unnoted.”

“Say not so, illustrious father,” said Ethel, deeply moved; for by the old man’s altered voice, she felt that he had allowed the secret source of one of his greatest sorrows to escape him.

She raised her eyes to his face, and kissing his pallid, withered hand, she added gently: “You are severe in your judgment of two noble men, Lord Ordener and yourself, my revered father.”

“You decide lightly, Ethel. One would say that you did not know that life is a serious matter.”

“Am I wrong then, sir, to do justice to the generous Ordener?”

Schumacker frowned, with a dissatisfied air.{260}

“I cannot approve, my daughter, of such admiration for a stranger whom you may never see again.”

“Oh,” said the young girl, upon whose soul these cold words fell like a heavy weight, “do not believe it. We shall see him again. Was it not for your sake that he went forth to brave such danger?”

“Like yourself, I confess that I was at first deceived by his promises. But no; he will never go upon his mission, and therefore he will never return to us.”

“He did go, sir; he did go.”

The tone in which the young girl pronounced these words was almost that of one offended and insulted. She felt herself outraged in her Ordener’s person. Alas! she was only too sure in her own soul of the truth which she asserted.

The prisoner replied, seemingly unmoved: “Very well. If he has really gone to fight that brigand, if he has rushed into such danger, it comes to the same thing,—he will never return.”

Poor Ethel! how often a word indifferently uttered, painfully galls the hidden wound in an anxious and tortured heart! She bent her pale face to hide from her father’s stern gaze the tears which, in spite of all her efforts, fell from her burning eyes.

“Oh, father,” she sighed, “while you speak thus, this noble and unfortunate youth may be dying for your sake!”

The aged minister shook his head doubtfully.

“That I can neither believe nor wish. And even so, how am I to blame? I should merely show myself ungrateful to the young man, as so many others have shown themselves to me.”

A deep sigh was Ethel’s only answer; and Schumacker, turning to his table, tore up with an absent air a few leaves of “Plutarch’s Lives,” which volume lay before him, already tattered in countless places, and covered with marginal notes. A moment later the door opened, and Schumacker, without looking up, cried out as usual: “Do not enter! do not disturb me! I will see no one!”

“It is his Excellency the governor,” was the answer.

An elderly man dressed in the uniform of a general, with the collars of the Elephant, the Dannebrog, and the Golden Fleece about his neck, advanced toward Schumacker, who half rose, muttering, “The governor! the governor!” The general

bowed respectfully to Ethel, as she stood at her father's side, timidly and anxiously watching him.

Perhaps before proceeding further, it will be well briefly to recall the motives of General Levin's visit to Munkholm. The reader will remember the unpleasant news which disturbed the old governor, in the twentieth chapter of this truthful narrative. On receiving it, he at once saw the importance of questioning Schumacker; but he was extremely reluctant to do so. The idea of tormenting a poor prisoner, already a prey to so much that was painful, and whom he had known in his days of power, of severely scanning the secrets of an unfortunate man, even if guilty, was most unpleasant to his kind and generous soul. Still, his duty to the king required it. He ought not to leave Thronhjem without such fresh light as might be gained by questioning the apparent author of the rebellion among the miners. Accordingly, the night before his departure, after a long and confidential talk with Countess d'Ahlefeld, the governor made up his mind to visit the prisoner. As he approached the fortress, thoughts of the interests of the State, of the advantage to which his many personal enemies might turn what they would style his negligence, and perhaps too the crafty words of the chancellor's wife, worked within him, and confirmed him in his purpose. He therefore climbed to the Lion of Schleswig tower with every intention to be severe; he resolved to bear himself toward Schumacker the conspirator as if he had never known Griffenfeld the chancellor,—to cast aside all his memories, and even his natural disposition, and to speak as a firm judge to this former fellow-sharer in the royal favor.

So soon, however, as he entered the ex-chancellor's apartment, the old man's venerable though sombre face made a strong impression upon him; Ethel's sweet though dignified expression touched him; and with his first glance at the two prisoners, his stern intentions died within him.

He advanced toward the fallen minister, and involuntarily offered him his hand, saying, without remarking that his politeness met with no response:—

“How are you, Count Griffenf—” His old habit overcame him for the moment; then he corrected himself quickly—“Mr. Schumacker?” With this he paused, satisfied and exhausted by such an effort.<sup>{263}</sup>

Silence ensued. The general racked his brain to find words harsh enough to correspond with this brutal beginning.

“Well,” Schumacker said at last, “are you the governor of the province of Thronhjem?”

The governor, somewhat surprised to find himself questioned by the man he had meant to question, bowed his head.

“Then,” added the prisoner, “I have a complaint to lay before you.”

“A complaint! What is it? what is it?” And the kind-hearted Levin’s countenance assumed a look of interest.

Schumacker went on, in a tone of considerable annoyance: “By order of the viceroy I am to be left free and undisturbed in this donjon.”

“I am aware of the order.”

“And yet, Governor, I am importuned and annoyed by visits.”

“Visits! and from whom?” cried the general; “tell me who dares—”

“You, Governor.”

These words, uttered in a haughty tone, offended the general. He answered, in a somewhat irritated voice: “You forget that my power knows no limits when it is a question of serving the king.”

“Unless,” said Schumacker, “it were those of the respect due to misfortune. But men know nothing of that.”

The ex-chancellor said this as if speaking to himself. The governor heard him. {264}

“Yes, indeed! yes, indeed! I was wrong, Count Griff—Mr. Schumacker, I should say; I should leave the privilege of anger to you, since the power is mine.”

Schumacker was silent for a moment. “There is,” he resumed thoughtfully, “something about your face and voice, Governor, which reminds me of a man I once knew. It was very long ago. No one but myself can remember those days. It was in the time of my prosperity. He was one Levin de Knud, of Mecklenburg. Did you ever know the foolish fellow?”

“I knew him,” quietly replied the general.

“Oh, you remember him! I thought it was only in adversity that we remembered.”

“Was he not a captain in the Royal Guards?” added the governor.

“Yes, a mere captain, although the king loved him dearly. But he thought of nothing but pleasure, and seemed to have no ambition. He was a strange, mad fellow. Can you conceive that a favorite could be so moderate in his desires?”

“I can understand it.”

“I was fond of this Levin de Knud, because he never gave me any alarm. He was the king’s friend as he might have been the friend of any other man. It seemed as if he loved him for his own sake, and not for his position.”

The general would have interrupted Schumacker; but the latter persisted, either from a spirit of contradiction, or because the train of thought into which he had drifted really pleased him.{265}

“Since you knew this Captain Levin, Governor, you probably know that he had a son who died young. But do you remember what happened at the birth of this son?”

“I can better recall what occurred at the time of his death,” said the general, covering his eyes with his hand, and in a faltering voice.

“But,” continued the heedless Schumacker, “this fact was known to very few persons, and it will show you just how peculiar this Levin was. The king wished to be the child’s godfather; would you believe that Levin refused? He did more; he chose an old beggar who hung about the palace gates, to hold his son at the baptismal font. I never could understand the reason for such an act of lunacy.”

“I will tell you,” replied the general. “In choosing a guardian for his son’s soul, this Captain Levin doubtless thought that a poor man had more influence with God than a king.”

Schumacker considered for a moment, then said: “You are right.”

The governor again attempted to turn the conversation to the object of his visit. But Schumacker cut him short.

“Excuse me; if it be true that you know this Levin of Mecklenburg, let me talk of him. Of all the men whom I knew in the days of my grandeur, he is the only one whose memory does not inspire me with disgust or horror. Although he carried his peculiarity to the verge of folly, his noble qualities, none the less, made him one man in a thousand.”

“I do not agree with you. This Levin was no better than other men. In fact, there are many who are better.{266}”

Schumacker folded his arms, and raised his eyes to heaven. “Yes, that is the way with them all. You cannot praise a worthy man in their presence, that they do not instantly seek to disparage him. They poison everything, even the pleasure of just praise, rare as it is.”

“If you knew me, you would not accuse me of disparaging Gener—I mean, Captain Levin.”

“Nonsense! nonsense,” said the prisoner; “for loyalty and generosity, there were never two men like this Levin de Knud, and to say a word to the contrary is both an outrageous slander and a flattery of this miserable human race.”

“I assure you,” returned the general, trying to assuage Schumacker’s wrath, “that I have not the slightest intention of wronging Levin de Knud.”

“Do not say that. Although he was so foolish, the rest of mankind is anything but like him. They are a false, ungrateful, envious set of slanderers. Do you know that Levin de Knud gave more than half his income to the Copenhagen hospitals?”

“I did not know that you knew it.”

“There it is!” triumphantly exclaimed the old man. “You thought that you could safely brand him, trusting to my ignorance of the poor fellow’s good deeds!”

“Not at all, not at all!”

“Do you suppose, too, that I don’t know that he persuaded the king to give the regiment which he intended for him, to an officer who had wounded him in a duel, because, he said, the other outranked him?”

“I thought that transaction was a secret.{267}”

“Well, tell me, Governor of Thronhjelm, does that make it any less beautiful? If Levin concealed his virtues, is that a reason for denying them? Oh, how much alike men are! How dare you compare the noble Levin with them,—he who, when he could not save a soldier convicted of an attempt to murder him, settled a pension upon his murderer’s widow?”

“Pooh! who would not do as much?”

Here Schumacker exploded. “Who? You! !! Any other man, Sir Governor! Because you wear the showy uniform of a general, and stars and crosses on your breast, do you think yourself a very meritorious person? You are a general, and poor Levin, I dare say, died a captain. True, he was a foolish fellow, and never thought of promotion.”

“If he did not think of it himself, the king in his goodness thought of it for him.”

“Goodness? Say, rather, justice, if there be such a thing as the justice of a king! Well, what signal reward did he receive?”

“His Majesty paid Levin de Knud far beyond his deserts.”

“Capital!” cried the aged minister, clapping his hands. “A faithful captain is perhaps, after thirty years’ service, made a major; and this distinguished mark of favor offends you, noble general? The Persian proverb is true which says that the setting sun is jealous of the rising moon.”

Schumacker’s fury was so great that the general could scarcely get in the words: “If you persist in interrupting me—You will not let me explain{268}—”

“No, no!” continued the other; “I thought at first sight, General, that I caught a certain likeness between you and my good Levin; but no! there is none.”

“Do but listen to me—”

“Listen to you! and hear you say that Levin de Knud is unworthy of some trifling reward?”

“I swear it is not—”

“You will presently—I know you men—try to persuade me that he is a knave, a hypocrite, and a villain, like the rest of you.”

“No, indeed!”

“How do I know? Or perhaps that he betrayed a friend, persecuted a benefactor, as you all do; or poisoned his father, or murdered his mother?”

“You are mistaken. I have not the slightest desire—”

“Do you know that it was he who compelled Vice-chancellor Wind, as well as Scheele, Vinding, and Justice Lasson, three of my judges, not to sentence me to death? And you would have me hear him calumniated, and not defend him! Yes, that is what he did for me, and yet I had always done him more harm than good; for I am like you, vile and wicked.”

The noble Levin was strangely moved by this singular interview. The object alike of the most direct insults and the sincerest praise, he knew not how to take such rough compliments and such flattering abuse. He was shocked and touched. Now he wanted to get into a passion, and now to thank Schumacker. Present and yet unknown, he loved to hear the fierce Schumacker defend in him, and against him, a friend and an absent man; only he would{269} have preferred that his advocate should put a trifle less bitterness and acrimony into his panegyric. But in his innermost heart the exaggerated praise bestowed on Captain Levin pleased him even more than the

insults addressed to the governor of Throndhjem wounded him. Fixing his kindly gaze upon the favorite in disgrace, he allowed him to vent his gratitude and his wrath; until at last, after a prolonged invective against human ingratitude, he sank exhausted upon an arm-chair, into the trembling Ethel's arms, saying in a melancholy voice: "Oh, men! what have I done that I should be forced to know you?"

The general had not yet been able to broach the important topic of his visit to Munkholm. All his reluctance to torment the captive by a series of questions, revived; to his pity and emotion were added two powerful motives: Schumacker's present state of agitation made it improbable that he could answer satisfactorily; and, moreover, on considering the affair more closely, it did not seem to the trusting Levin that such a man could be a conspirator. Still, how could he leave Throndhjem without examining Schumacker? This disagreeable necessity of his position as governor once more overcame all his scruples, and he began as follows, softening his voice as much as possible: "Pray, calm your excitement, Count Schumacker."

This compromise struck the good governor as a happy inspiration, well fitted to reconcile the respect due to the sentence pronounced against him, with a proper regard for the prisoner's misfortune, as it combined his noble title and his humble cognomen. He added: "It is my painful duty{270}—"

"First," interrupted the prisoner, "allow me, Governor, to return to a subject which interests me far more than anything that your Excellency can have to say to me. You assured me just now that that madcap Levin had been rewarded for his services. I am most anxious to know in what way."

"His Majesty, my lord Griffenfeld, raised Levin to the rank of general, and for more than twenty years the foolish fellow has grown old in peace, honored with this military dignity and the favor of his king."

Schumacker's head drooped.

"Yes; that foolish Levin, who cared so little whether he ever lived to be more than a captain, will die a general; and the wise Schumacker, who expected to die Lord Chancellor, grows old a prisoner of State."

As he uttered these words, he hid his face in his hands and heaved a deep sigh. Ethel, who understood nothing of the conversation, save that it distressed her father, instantly strove to divert him.

"Look yonder, father, to the north; I see a gleam of light which I never noticed before."

In fact, the night, which had now closed in, revealed a faint and distant light upon the horizon, apparently coming from some far-off mountain. But Schumacker's mind and eye were not, like those of Ethel, ever bent on the north; therefore he made no reply. The general alone was struck by the young girl's remark.

"It may be," thought he, "a fire kindled by the rebels;" and this idea forcibly reminding him of the purpose of his visit, he thus addressed the prisoner: "Mr. {271} Griffenfeld, I am sorry to distress you, but you must allow me—"

"I understand you, Governor; it is not enough to spend my days in this dungeon, to lead a lonely, disgraced existence, to have nothing left but bitter memories of past grandeur and power, you must also intrude upon my solitude, gaze upon my sorrow, and enjoy my misfortune. Since that noble Levin de Knud, whom some of your outward features recall to me, is a general like yourself, why was not he permitted to fill your post; for he would never, I swear, Sir Governor, have come to torture a miserable prisoner."

During the course of this strange interview the general had more than once been on the point of revealing himself, that he might bring it to a close. This indirect reproach made it impossible; it accorded so well with his secret feelings that it almost made him feel ashamed of himself. Still, he tried to answer Schumacker's injurious charge. Strange to say, from their mere difference of character, the two men had mutually changed their position; the judge was in some sort obliged to justify himself to the prisoner.

"But," said the general, "if his duty compelled him, do not doubt that Levin de Knud—"

"I do doubt it, noble Governor," exclaimed Schumacker; "do not doubt in your turn that he would have rejected, with all the generous indignation of his soul, the office of spy, or of increasing the agony of a wretched prisoner! No, I know him better than you; he would never have accepted the duties of an executioner. Now, General, {272} I am at your service; do what you consider your duty. What does your Excellency require of me?"

And the old minister fixed his haughty gaze upon the governor, all whose resolution was gone. His first reluctance had returned, and was not to be overcome.

"He is right," thought he; "why should I torture an unfortunate man upon mere suspicion? Let some one else undertake the task!"

The effect of these reflections was prompt; he walked up to the astonished Schumacker and pressed his hand. Then he hurriedly left the room, saying: "Count Schumacker, always preserve the same esteem for Levin de Knud.{273}"

XXV.

*Lion* (roaring). Oh—

*Demetrius*. Well roared, lion!

Shakespeare: *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

THE traveller of the present day who visits the snow-clad mountains which surround Lake Miösen like a white girdle, will scarcely find a vestige of what Norwegians of the seventeenth century knew as Arbar ruin. No one was ever able to decide the architectural period or the purpose for which this ruin, if we may give it the name, was built. As you left the forest which covered the southern shore of the lake, after climbing a slope crowned with here and there a fragment of wall or a bit of masonry once a tower, you reached an arched opening leading into the side of the mountain. This entrance, now completely closed by landslips, led into a{274} species of gallery cut in the living rock, and piercing the mountain from side to side.

This tunnel, dimly lighted by conical air-holes made in the arched roof at regular intervals, ended in an oval hall in part excavated from the rock, and terminating in a cyclopean stone wall. Around this hall, in deep niches, were rude images carved from granite. Some of these mysterious figures, which had fallen from their pedestals, lay heaped in confusion on the ground with other shapeless rubbish, covered with grass and weeds, among which crawled lizards, spiders, and all the hideous vermin born of damp earth and ruins.

Daylight penetrated to this place only through a door opposite the mouth of the gallery. This door, viewed in a certain light, was seen to be of pointed construction, of no especial date, and evidently the work of the architect's whim.

This door might as well have been styled a window, although it was on a level with the ground, for it opened upon a fearful precipice; and it was impossible to imagine whither a short flight of stairs which overhung the abyss could possibly lead.

The hall formed the interior of a huge turret which from a distance, seen from the other side of the precipice, looked like any high mountain peak. It stood alone, and, as has already been said, no one knew to what sort of structure it had belonged. Above it, however, upon a plateau inaccessible even to the boldest hunter, was a mass of masonry which might be taken, being so remote, either for a rounded rock or for the remains of a colossal arch. This{275} turret and crumbling arch were known to the

peasants as Arbar ruin, the origin of the name being fully as obscure as that of the buildings themselves.

On a stone in the centre of this oval hall sat a little man dressed in the skins of wild beasts, whom we have already had occasion to mention several times in the course of our story.

His back was turned to the light, or rather to the faint twilight which filtered into the gloomy turret when the sun reached high noon. This light, the strongest natural light which ever entered the tower, was not sufficient to reveal the nature of the object over which the little man was stooping. An occasional muffled groan was heard, and it seemed to proceed from this object, judging by the feeble movement which it now and then made. Sometimes the little man straightened himself, and raised to his lips a cup, by its form apparently a human skull, filled with steaming liquid of some indistinguishable hue, and drank deep draughts.

All at once he started up.

“I hear steps in the gallery, I believe; can it be the chancellor of the two kingdoms already?”

These words were followed by a horrible burst of laughter ending in a savage roar, which met with an instant response in a howl from the gallery.

“Oh, ho!” rejoined the lord of Arbar ruin; “it is not a man. But it is an enemy all the same; it is a wolf.”

In fact, a huge wolf suddenly emerged from the vaulted gallery, paused a moment, then advanced stealthily toward the man, crouching to the ground and fixing upon him<sup>{276}</sup> burning eyes which gleamed through the darkness. The man stood with folded arms, and watched him.

“Ah! ’tis the old gray wolf,—the oldest wolf in Miösen woods! Good-morning, wolf; your eyes glitter; you are hungry, and the smell of dead bodies attracts you. You too shall soon attract other hungry wolves. Welcome, wolf of Miösen; I have always longed to make your acquaintance. You are so old that they say you cannot die; they will not say so to-morrow.”

The animal answered with a frightful yell, sprang back, and then bounded upon the little man.

He did not budge an inch. As quick as a flash, with his right arm he grasped the body of the wolf, which, standing on two legs before him, had thrown his fore-paws upon

his shoulders; with his left hand he guarded his face from the gaping jaws of his enemy, seizing it by the throat with such force that the creature, compelled to raise his head, could scarcely utter a sound.

“Wolf of Miösen,” said the triumphant man, “you tear my jerkin, but your skin shall replace it.”

As he mingled with these words of victory a few words in a strange jargon, a convulsive movement made by the dying wolf caused him to stumble upon the stones which were thickly strewn over the floor. The two fell together, and the roars of the man were blended with the howls of the beast.

Obliged in his fall to relax his grasp of the wolf's throat, the man felt the sharp teeth buried in his shoulder, when, as they rolled over one another, the two combatants struck against an enormous shaggy white body lying in the darkest corner of the room. It was a bear, who waked from his heavy sleep with a growl.

No sooner were the drowsy eyes of this new-comer opened wide enough to see the fight, than he rushed furiously, not upon the man, but upon the wolf, just then victorious in his turn, seized him violently by the back, and thus freed the human combatant.

This latter, far from showing any gratitude for so great a service, rose, covered with blood, and springing upon the bear, gave him a vigorous kick, such as a master might bestow on a dog guilty of some misdemeanor.

“Friend, who called you? Why do you meddle?”

These words were interspersed with furious ejaculations and gnashing of teeth.

“Begone!” he added with a roar.

The bear, who had received at one and the same time a kick from the man and a bite from the wolf, uttered a plaintive remonstrance; then, hanging his great head, he released the famished beast, who hurled himself upon the man with fresh fury.

While the struggle was renewed, the rebuffed bear went back to his couch, sat gravely down, and gazed indifferently at the two raging adversaries, preserving the utmost silence, and rubbing first one fore-paw and then the other across the tip of his white nose.

But the small man, as the leader of the Miösen wolves returned to the charge, seized his bloody snout; then, by an unparalleled exertion requiring both strength and skill, he managed to clasp his entire jaw in one hand. The wolf struggled frantically with

rage and pain; foam{278} dropped from his compressed lips, and his eyes, distended with rage, seemed starting from their sockets. Of the two foes, the one whose bones were shattered by sharp teeth, whose flesh was rent by cruel claws, was not the man but the wild beast; the one whose howl was most savage, whose expression was most fierce, was not the animal but the man.

Finally, the latter, collecting all his strength, exhausted by the aged wolf's prolonged resistance, squeezed his muzzle in both hands with such force that blood gushed from the creature's nose and mouth; his flaming eyes grew dim, and half closed; he tottered, and fell lifeless at his victor's feet. The feeble twitching of his tail and the convulsive and occasional shudder which shook his entire frame, alone showed that he was not yet quite dead.

All at once a final quiver ran through the expiring frame, and all signs of life ceased.

"There you lie, dead, old wolf," said the little man, kicking him contemptuously. "Did you think that you could live on after you had encountered me? You will hasten no more with muffled step across the snow, following the scent and the track of your prey; you are food for wolves or vultures now yourself; you have devoured many a lost traveller on the shores of Miösen during your long life of murder and carnage; now you yourself are dead, you will eat no more men. 'Tis a pity!"

He took up a sharp stone, crouched beside the wolf's warm, palpitating body, broke the limbs at their joints, severed the head from the shoulders, slit the skin from head to heel, stripped it off, as he might remove his own{279} waistcoat, and in the twinkling of an eye nothing was left of the much-dreaded wolf of Miösen but a bare and bleeding carcass. He flung his trophy over his shoulders, bruised with bites, turning inside out the skin, still reeking and stained with long streaks of blood.

"Needs must," he muttered, "dress in the skins of beasts; that of a man is too thin to keep out the cold."

As he thus talked to himself, more hideous than ever beneath his loathsome burden, the bear, tired no doubt of inaction, furtively approached the other object lying in the shadow, to which we referred in the beginning of this chapter, and a crunching of bones, mingled with faint, agonized moans, soon rose from this gloomy quarter of the hall. The small man turned.

"Friend!" cried he in threatening tones; "ah, you good-for-nothing Friend! Here, come here!"

And picking up a huge stone, he hurled it at the monster's head. The creature, stunned by the blow, reluctantly tore himself from his prey, and crawled, licking his bloody chaps, to fall panting at the little man's feet, lifting his huge head and wriggling, as if to ask pardon for his rash act.

Then ensued between the two monsters—for we may well apply that name to the dweller in Arbar ruin—an exchange of significant growls. Those of the man expressed anger and authority; those of the bear, entreaty and submission.

“There,” said the man at last, pointing with his crooked finger to the flayed body of the wolf, “there is your victim; leave mine to me.{280}”

The bear, after smelling at the wolf's carcass, shook his head discontentedly, and turned his eye toward the man who seemed to be his master.

“I understand,” said the latter; “that is too dead for you, while there is still life in the other. You are refined in your pleasures, Friend,—quite as much so as a man; you like to have your food retain its life until the instant when you tear it limb from limb; you love to feel the flesh expire beneath your teeth; you enjoy nothing unless it suffers. We are alike; for I am not a man, Friend; I am superior to that wretched race; I am a wild beast like you. How I wish that you could speak to me, comrade Friend, to tell me whether my joy equals that which thrills your bearish soul when you devour a man's heart. But no; I should be loath to hear you speak, lest your voice should recall to me the human voice. Yes, growl at my feet with that growl which makes the stray goatherd tremble among the mountains; it pleases me as the voice of a friend, because it proclaims you his enemy. Look up, Friend, look up at me; lick my hands with that tongue which has drunk so often of human blood. Your teeth are white like mine: it is no fault of ours if they be not red as a new-made wound; but blood washes away blood. More than once from the depths of some dark cave I have seen the maidens of Kiölen or Oëlmœ bathe their bare feet in some mountain torrent, singing the while in sweet tones; but I prefer your hairy snout and your hoarse cries to those melodious voices and satin-smooth faces; for they terrify mankind.”

As he said this, he sat down and yielded his hand to{281} the caresses of the monster, who, rolling on his back at his master's feet, lavished all sorts of endearments upon him, like a spaniel displaying his pretty tricks before the sofa of his mistress.

Stranger yet was the intelligent attention with which he seemed to follow his master's words. The singular monosyllables with which the latter interspersed them seemed particularly intelligible to his understanding; and he showed his comprehension by rearing his head suddenly, or by a vague rumbling noise in the back of his throat.

“Men say that I shun them,” resumed the little man; “but it is they that shun me; they do through fear what I should do through hate. Still, you know, Friend, that I am always glad to come across a man when I am hungry or thirsty.”

All at once he saw a red glow start into life in the depths of the gallery, growing brighter by degrees and faintly tinting the damp old walls.

“Here comes one now. Talk of the Devil and you see his horns. Hullo, Friend!” he added, turning to the bear; “hullo! get up!”

The animal instantly rose.

“Come, I must reward your obedience by gratifying your appetite.”

With these words, the man stooped toward the object lying on the ground.

The cracking of bones broken by a hatchet was heard; but no sigh or groan was now blended with it.

“It seems,” muttered the small man, “that there are{282} but two of us left alive in Arbar hall. There, good Friend, finish the feast which you began.”

He flung toward the aforementioned outer door what he had detached from the object stretched at his feet. The bear threw himself upon his prey so rapidly that the swiftest eye could not have been sure that the fragment was indeed a human arm, clad in a bit of green stuff of the same shade as the uniform worn by the Munkholm musketeers.

“Some one is coming,” said the little man, keeping his eye on the light, which was steadily advancing. “Comrade Friend, leave me alone for a moment. Ho there! Away with you!”

The obedient beast rushed to the door, backed down the steps outside, and disappeared, bearing off his disgusting booty with a satisfied howl.

At the same instant a tall man appeared at the mouth of the tunnel, whose sinuous depths still reflected a dim light. He was wrapped in a long brown cloak, and carried a dark-lantern, which he turned full on the small man’s face.

The latter, still seated on his stone with folded arms, exclaimed: “Ill befall you, you who come hither guided by an idea, and not by instinct!”

But the stranger, making no reply, seemed studying him carefully.

“Look at me,” he continued, raising his head; “an hour hence you may have no voice left with which to boast that you have seen me.”

The new-comer, moving his light up and down the{283} little man's person, seemed even more surprised than frightened.

"Well, what astonishes you so much?" rejoined the little man, with a laugh like the breaking of bones. "I have legs and arms like your own; only my limbs will not like yours serve to feed wildcats and crows!"

The stranger at length replied, in a low but confident voice, as if he only feared being heard from without: "Hear me; I come, not as an enemy, but as a friend."

The other interrupted, "Then why did you not strip off your human form?"

"It is my purpose to do you a service, if you be he whom I seek."

"You mean, to ask a service. Man, you waste your breath. I can do no service to any save those who are weary of life."

"By your words," replied the stranger, "I am sure that you are the man I want; but your stature—Hans of Iceland is a giant. You cannot be he."

"You are the first who ever doubted it to my face."

"What! can it be?" And the stranger approached the little man. "But I always heard that Hans of Iceland was of colossal height."

"Add my renown to my height, and you will see that I am taller than Mount Hecla."

"Indeed! Tell me, I pray, are you really Hans, a native of Klipstadur in Iceland?"

"It is not in words that I should answer that question," said the little man, rising; and the look which he cast at the rash stranger made him start back several paces.{284}

"Confine yourself, I beg, to answering it by that glance," he replied in a voice of entreaty, casting a look toward the exit, which showed his regret that he had ever entered; "I came here in your interests alone."

Upon entering the hall, the new-comer, having but a glimpse of the person whom he accosted, had retained his self-possession; but when the master of Arbar rose, with his tigerish visage, his thick-set limbs, his bloody shoulders, but half concealed by a skin still green, his huge hands armed with claws, and his fiery eyes, the bold stranger shuddered, like an ignorant traveller who thinks he is handling an eel and feels the sting of a viper.

“My interests?” repeated the monster. “Have you come to tell me of some spring which I may poison, some village I may burn, or some Munkholm musketeer I may slaughter?”

“Perhaps. Listen: The miners of Norway are in a state of revolt. You know what disaster follows in the train of revolt.”

“Yes,—murder, rape, sacrilege, fire, and pillage.”

“All these I offer you.”

The little man laughed.

“I should not wait for you to offer them.”

The brutal sneer accompanying these words made the stranger again shudder. He went on, however:—

“In the name of the miners, I offer you the command of the insurrection.”

The small man was silent for an instant. All at once his dark countenance assumed an expression of infernal malice.<sup>{285}</sup>

“Does the offer really come from them?” said he.

This question seemed to embarrass the new-comer; but as he was sure that he was unknown to his terrible interlocutor, he readily recovered himself.

“Why have the miners rebelled?”

“To throw off the burden of the royal protectorate.”

“Only for that?” replied the other in the same mocking tone.

“They also wish to free the prisoner of Munkholm.”

“Is this the sole purpose of the movement?” repeated the small man in a voice which confused the stranger.

“I know of no other,” he stammered.

“Oh, you know of no other!”

These words were pronounced in the same sarcastic tone. The stranger, to hide the embarrassment which they caused him, hastily drew from beneath his cloak a heavy purse which he flung at the monster’s feet.

“Here is your pay as commander-in-chief.”

The small man spurned the purse with his foot.

“I will not have it. Do you imagine that if I wanted your gold or your blood I should wait for your permission to gratify my desire?”

The stranger made a gesture of surprise, almost of terror.

“It is a present from the royal miners.”

“I will not have it, I tell you. Gold is useless to me. Men will sell their soul, but they do not sell their life. That must be taken by force.”

“Then I may tell the miners that the terrible Hans of Iceland accepts their leadership, but not their gold?”

“I do not accept it.{286}”

These words, uttered in curt tones, seemed to strike the pretended envoy from the rebellious miners very unpleasantly.

“What?” he asked.

“No!” repeated the other.

“You refuse to take part in an expedition which presents so many advantages?”

“I am quite able to pillage farms, lay waste villages, and massacre peasants or soldiers, single-handed.”

“But consider that by accepting the offer of the miners you are assured of a free pardon.”

“Does this offer also come from the miners?” asked the other, with a laugh.

“I will not disguise from you the fact,” replied the stranger, with an air of mystery, “that it comes from an important personage who is deeply interested in the insurrection.”

“And is this important personage so sure that he will himself escape hanging?”

“If you knew who he is, you would not shake your head so significantly.”

“Indeed! Well, who is he?”

“I may not tell you.”

The small man stepped forward and clapped the stranger on the shoulder, still with the same sardonic sneer.

“Shall I tell *you*?”

The man wrapped in the cloak gave a start; it was a start of both fright and wounded pride. He was prepared for neither the monster's abrupt proposal, nor for his savage familiarity.{287}

"I am only laughing at you," added the brigand. "You little guess that I know all. This important personage is the Lord High Chancellor of Norway and Denmark; and you yourself are the Lord High Chancellor of Norway and Denmark."

It was indeed he. On reaching Arbar ruin, toward which we left him journeying with Musdæmon, he had been unwilling to intrust to any one else the task of securing the brigand, by whom he was far from supposing himself known and expected. Never, even after years had elapsed, did Count d'Ahlefeld, with all his power and all his diplomacy, discover how Hans of Iceland acquired his information. Was it through Musdæmon's treachery? True, it was Musdæmon who suggested to the noble count that it would be well to see the brigand in person; but what profit could he derive from his perfidy? Had the bandit captured upon some one of his numerous victims, papers relating to the chancellor's schemes? But Frederic d'Ahlefeld was, with the sole exception of Musdæmon, the only living being acquainted with his father's plans, and frivolous as he was, he was not quite so senseless as to expose such a secret. Moreover, he was in garrison at Munkholm, at least so the chancellor supposed. Those who read the close of this scene, without being any better able to solve the problem than was Count d'Ahlefeld, will see how much truth there was in this latter hypothesis.

One of Count d'Ahlefeld's most marked characteristics was his great presence of mind. When he heard himself so abruptly named, he could not repress an exclamation{288} of surprise; but in the twinkling of an eye, his pale, proud features lost their expression of fear and astonishment, and recovered their usual calm composure.

"Well, yes," said he, "I will be frank with you; I am indeed the chancellor. But I hope you will be equally frank with me."

A burst of laughter interrupted him.

"Have I waited to be urged to tell you my name, or to tell you your own?"

"Tell me with the same sincerity how you found me out?"

"Have you never heard that Hans of Iceland can see through mountains?"

The count tried to insist.

“Consider me as a friend.”

“Your hand, Count d’Ahlefeld,” said the little man, with brutal familiarity. Then he stared the minister in the face, exclaiming: “Could our two souls escape from our bodies at this moment, I fancy that Satan would hesitate to decide which of the two belonged to the monster.”

The haughty noble bit his lip; but between his fear of the robber and his desire to secure him as his tool, he managed to disguise his resentment.

“Do not imperil your own interests; accept the command of the rebellion, and trust to my gratitude.”

“Chancellor of Norway, you count on the success of your schemes, like an old woman who dreams of the gown which she will spin from stolen hemp, while the cat’s claws tangle her spindle.{289}”

“Reflect once more, before you reject my offers.”

“Once more, I, the brigand, say to you, Lord Chancellor of both kingdoms, No!”

“I expected a different answer, after the eminent service which you have already rendered me.”

“What service?” asked the robber.

“Was it not you who murdered Captain Dispolsen?” replied the chancellor.

“That may be, Count d’Ahlefeld; I do not know him. Who is he?”

“What! did not the iron casket which he had in charge fall to your share?”

This question seemed to sharpen the robber’s memory.

“Stay!” said he; “I do remember that man and his iron casket. It was on Urchtal Sands.”

“At least,” rejoined the chancellor, “if you could restore that casket to me, my gratitude would be unbounded. Tell me what has become of that casket, for I am sure it is in your possession.”

The noble minister laid such stress upon this request that the brigand was struck by it.

“So, then, that iron casket is of the utmost importance to your Grace, my Lord Chancellor?”

“Yes.”

“What shall my reward be if I tell you where it is?”

“Anything that you may desire, my dear Hans.”

“Well, I will not tell you.”

“Pooh! you are joking! Think what a service you can do me.”

“That is exactly what I am thinking.{290}”

“I will insure you a vast fortune; I will ask your pardon from the king.”

“You had better beg your own from me,” said the bandit. “Look you, Lord Chancellor of Norway and Denmark, the tiger does not devour the hyena. I will permit you to leave my presence with your life, because you are a scoundrel, and every instant that you live, every thought of your heart, causes fresh misery for mankind and fresh crime for yourself. But return not, or I may teach you that my hatred spares no one, not even a villain. As for your captain, do not flatter yourself that it was on your account I slaughtered him; it was his uniform which doomed him, as it did this other wretch, whom I did not murder to gratify you either, I assure you.”

With these words, he seized the noble count by the arm and dragged him toward the body lying in the shadow. As he finished his protestations, the light from the lantern fell upon this object. It was a mutilated corpse, and was indeed dressed in the uniform of an officer of the Munkholm Musketeers. The chancellor approached it with a sense of horror. All at once his eye rested on the pallid, blood-stained face of the dead. The livid, half-parted lips, the bristling hair, the discolored cheeks, and lustreless eyes could not disguise that countenance from him. He uttered a fearful shriek: “My God! Frederic! My son!”

Doubt not that hearts seemingly the most hardened still conceal in their innermost recesses some trace of affection unknown even to themselves, apparently hidden by vice and passion, like a mysterious witness and a future avenger. It may be said to exist, that it may some day make{291} crime acquainted with grief. It silently bides its time. The wicked man bears it in his bosom and is unconscious of it, because no ordinary affection is sufficient to pierce the thick crust of selfishness and iniquity which covers it; but let one of the rare and genuine sorrows of life appear unawares, and it plunges a sharp-edged sword into the dark regions of that soul and probes its lowest depths. Then the unknown sentiment of love is revealed to the wretched criminal, all the more violent for its long repression, all the more painful from his lack of sensibility, because the sting of misfortune was forced to stab the heart more deeply in order to reach it. Nature wakes and casts aside her chains; she delivers the

miscreant to unwonted despair, to unheard-of torments; he feels, compressed into a single instant, all the sufferings which he has defied for years. The most various pangs rend him simultaneously. His heart, burdened by dull amazement, revolts to find itself a prey to convulsive agony. He seems to experience the pains of hell while still in this life, and something beyond despair is made clear to him.

Count d'Ahlefeld loved his son without knowing it. We say his son, because, being unaware of his wife's guilt, as such he regarded Frederic, the direct heir to his name. Supposing him still at Munkholm, he was far from prepared to meet him in Arbar tower, and to find him dead! But there he lay, bruised and bleeding; it was he, impossible to doubt it. His emotions may be imagined when a realizing sense of his love for his son unexpectedly pierced his soul, together with the assurance that he was{292} lost to him forever. All the sensations so inadequately described in these pages burst upon his heart at once like so many claps of thunder. Stunned, as it were, by surprise, terror, and despair, he cast himself upon the ground, and wrung his hands, repeating in woful accents: "My son! my son!"

The brigand laughed. It was horrible to hear such laughter mingled with the groans of a father looking upon the dead body of his son.

"By my ancestor Ingulf! you may call, Count d'Ahlefeld, but you cannot wake him."

All at once his cruel face darkened, and he said in a melancholy voice: "Weep for your son, if you will; I avenge mine."

The sound of footsteps hurrying along the gallery interrupted the words upon his lips; and as he turned in surprise, four tall men, with drawn swords, rushed into the room; a fifth, short and stout, followed, bearing a torch in one hand and a sword in the other. He was wrapped in a brown cloak, like that worn by the chancellor.

"My lord," he exclaimed, "we heard your voice, and hastened to your assistance."

The reader has doubtless recognized Musdœmon and the four armed retainers who formed the count's escort.

As the torchlight filled the room with its ruddy glow, the five new-comers paused in horror-stricken dismay; and it was indeed an awful sight. On the one hand, the bloody remains of the wolf, the disfigured body of the young officer; on the other, the father, with his wild eyes and frantic shrieks; and beside him the fearful monster,{293} turning on his assailants a hideous front, indicative of dauntless surprise.

At the sight of this unlooked-for reinforcement the idea of vengeance took possession of the count, and roused him from his despair.

“Death to that brigand!” he cried, drawing his sword; “he has murdered my son! Kill him! kill him!”

“Has he murdered Mr. Frederic?” said Musdœmon; and the torch in his hand did not reveal the slightest change in his countenance.

“Kill him! kill him!” repeated the frantic count.

And the whole six rushed upon the robber. He, surprised by this sudden attack, retreated toward the opening which overhung the precipice, with a fierce roar, expressive rather of rage than fear.

Six swords were directed against him, and his eyes flamed forth greater fury, while his features wore a more menacing expression than those of any of his aggressors. He had grasped his stone axe, and, forced by the number of his assailants to confine himself to defensive action, whirled it round and round in his hand so rapidly that the circle described, covered him like a shield. A myriad sparks flashed from the point of his assailants’ swords as they clashed against the edge of the hatchet; but not a single blade touched him. And yet, exhausted by his recent battle with the wolf, he lost ground imperceptibly, and soon found himself driven close against the door opening upon the abyss.

“Courage, friends!” shouted the count; “let us hurl the monster over this precipice.{294}”

“Before I fall, the stars themselves shall fall,” replied the brigand.

But the aggressors redoubled their ardor and their assurance as they saw that the small man was compelled to descend one step of the flight which overhung the abyss.

“Good! one effort more!” cried the lord chancellor; “he needs must fall; push your advantage! Wretch, you have committed your last crime. Courage, men!”

While with his right hand he continued his fearful evolutions with the axe, the brigand, without deigning a reply, with his left hand grasped a horn which hung at his belt, and raising it to his lips, again and again blew a long, hoarse blast, which was answered suddenly by a roar from the gulf beneath.

A few instants later, as the count and his followers, still pressing the little man hard, rejoiced that they had driven him down a second step, the huge head of a white bear appeared at the broken end of the staircase. Struck dumb with amazement and fright, they shrank back. The bear climbed the stairs with a lumbering gait, showing his bloody jaws and sharp teeth as he did so.

“Thanks, good Friend!” cried the brigand. And taking advantage of his enemy’s surprise, he sprang upon the back of his bear, who slowly descended the stairs backwards, still keeping his threatening front turned upon his master’s foes.

Soon, recovering from their first astonishment, they beheld the bear, carrying the brigand beyond their reach, descend into the abyss, probably in the same way that he<sup>{295}</sup> ascended, by clinging to the trunks of trees and to projecting rocks. They tried to roll great bowlders down upon him; but before they could detach a single one of those ancient granite fragments which had slumbered there so long, the brigand and his strange steed had vanished in a cave.<sup>{296}</sup>

XXVI.

No, no, laugh no more. Look you, that which I thought so humorous has its serious side as well, a very serious side, like everything in this world! Believe me, that word, chance, is blasphemy; nothing beneath the sun is the work of chance; and do you not see herein the purpose marked out by Providence!—Lessing: *Emilia Galotti*.

YES, a deep design often lies at the root of what men call chance. There seems to be a mysterious hand which marks the cause and purpose of events. We inveigh against fickle fortune, against the strange accidents of our lot, and lo! chaos is made clear by a fearful flash of lightning or a marvellous beam of light, and human wisdom is humbled by the great lessons of fate.

If, for instance, when Frederic d’Ahlefeld displayed his magnificent attire, his foolish complacency, and his presumptuous pride, in some sumptuous apartment, to the ladies of Copenhagen; if some man, endowed with the gift of second sight, had troubled his frivolous thoughts by gloomy revelations; if he had told him that one day the brilliant uniform of which he boasted should cause his death; that a monster in human shape should drink his blood as greedily as he, careless epicure that he was, drank the wines of France and Bohemia; that the locks upon which he could not lavish too many essences and perfumes should sweep the dust of a cave haunted by wild<sup>{297}</sup> beasts; that the arm which he so gracefully offered to the fair ladies of Charlottenburg should be flung to a bear like a half-gnawed chicken-bone,—how would Frederic have answered these dismal prophecies? With a laugh and a pirouette; and, more frightful still, most sensible men would have applauded his reckless conduct.

Let us consider his destiny more closely. Is it not strange to find that the crime of Count and Countess d’Ahlefeld met with such fitting punishment? They wove an infamous plot against the daughter of a prisoner; this unfortunate girl by a mere

chance found a protector, who saw fit to remove their son, charged by them to carry out their abominable scheme. This son, their only hope, was sent far from the scene of his purposed villany; and hardly had he reached his destination, when another avenging chance caused his death. Thus in their attempt to bring dishonor upon an innocent yet detested young girl, they plunged their own guilty yet adored son into the oblivion of the grave. The wretched pair were made miserable by their own hands.{298}

XXVII.

Ah, here comes our lovely countess! Forgive me, Madam, if I may not have the honor of a visit from you to-day. I am busy. Another time, dear Countess, another time; but to-day I will not detain you longer.—*The Prince and Orsina*.

THE day after his visit to Munkholm, the governor of Throndhjem ordered his travelling carriage to be made ready very early in the morning, hoping to start off before Countess d'Ahlefeld was awake; but we have already observed that her slumbers were light.

The general had just signed his final instructions to the bishop, into whose hands the government was to be committed during his absence. He rose, put on his fur-lined coat, and was about to leave the room, when the usher announced the chancellor's wife.

This piece of ill luck confused the old soldier, who could laugh at the fiery rain of a hundred guns, but not at the artifices of a woman. However, he took leave of the wicked creature with a tolerably good grace, and disguised his annoyance until she whispered in his ear with that crafty look which would fain seem confidential, "Well, noble General, what did he say?"

"Who,—Poël? He said that the carriage was ready."

"I mean the prisoner of Munkholm, General."

"Oh!{299}"

"Did he answer your questions satisfactorily?"

"Why—Yes, to be sure, Countess," said the much embarrassed governor.

"Did you find proofs that he was concerned in the conspiracy among the miners?"

The general involuntarily exclaimed, "Noble lady, he is innocent."

He stopped short, for he knew that he had uttered the conviction of his heart, not of his head.

“He is innocent!” repeated the countess, with a look of consternation and incredulity; for she trembled lest Schumacker had really proved to the governor the innocence which it was so much to the chancellor’s interest to deny.

The governor had had time to reflect; he answered the persistent gentlewoman in a tone which quieted her fears, for it revealed his doubt and anxiety.

“Innocent—Yes, if you choose—”

“If I choose, General!” And the wicked woman laughed aloud.

Her laughter offended the governor, who said, “By your leave, Countess, I will report my interview with the ex-chancellor to the viceroy.” Then he bowed low, and went down to the courtyard, where his carriage awaited him.

“Yes,” said Countess d’Ahlefeld, as she returned to her rooms; “go, my knight-errant, for your absence rids us of the protector of our enemies. Go; for your departure is the signal for my Frederic’s return. I wonder how you dared to send the handsomest young man in Copenhagen to those horrid mountains! Luckily, it will be easy enough now for me to have him recalled.{300}”

At this thought she turned to her favorite attendant.

“Lisbeth, my dear, send to Bergen for two dozen of those little combs which our elegant young men are wearing in their hair, inquire for the famous Scudéry’s last novel, and see that my dear Frederic’s monkey is washed in rose-water every morning, without fail.”

“What! my gracious mistress,” asked Lisbeth, “is there a chance that Mr. Frederic will come back?”

“Yes, indeed; and we must do everything that he wishes, so that he may be glad to see me again. I must arrange a surprise for him.”

Poor mother!{301}

XXVIII.

Bernard hurries along the shores of the Arlanza. He is like a lion rushing from his den, seeking the hunters, and resolved to conquer them or die. The brave and resolute Spaniard sets forth. With a quick step, in his hand a heavy spear, in which he puts his trust, Bernard traverses the ruins of Arlanza.—*Old Spanish Romance*.

ON descending from the tower from whose summit he had seen Munkholm light, Ordener looked in every direction, until he was exhausted, for his poor guide, Benignus Spiagudry. He called him repeatedly, but only echo answered. Surprised but not alarmed by this inexplicable disappearance, he attributed it to some panic which had seized upon the timid keeper, and after generously blaming himself for having left him, even for a few moments, he decided to spend the night upon the cliff, in order to give him time to return. Then he ate something, and wrapping himself in his mantle, laid down by the dying embers, kissed Ethel's ringlet, and soon fell asleep; for an anxious heart cannot keep awake a man whose conscience is clear.

At sunrise he rose, but found no trace of Spiagudry except his wallet and cloak, which had been left in the tower, showing that his flight had been very hasty. Then, despairing of his return, at least to Oëlmœ Cliff, Ordener resolved to set off without him, for it was on the next day that he hoped to meet Hans of Iceland at Walderhog.

It has been stated in the earlier chapters of this story that Ordener had accustomed himself to the hardships incident to a roving and adventurous life. Having already travelled through northern Norway several times, he did not need a guide, now that he knew where to find the robber. He accordingly turned his lonely steps toward the northwest, no longer having Benignus Spiagudry at his side to tell him just how much quartz or spar each hill contained, what traditions were connected with every ruin, and whether this or that gaping chasm was caused by an ancient flood or by some volcanic action. He walked a whole day through those mountains which, proceeding at intervals like foot-hills from the principal chain traversing the length of Norway, slope gradually down to the sea; so that the coast of that country is a mere succession of promontories and fjords, while inland it is nothing but a series of mountains and valleys, a strange conformation, which has caused Norway to be compared to the skeleton of a great fish.

It was no easy matter to travel in such a region. Sometimes he was forced to follow the stony bed of a dry stream, sometimes to cross, by an unsteady bridge made of a tree-trunk, over a road which torrents born but the day before had chosen for their bed.

Sometimes, too, Ordener would journey for hours without seeing any sign of the presence of man in these wild places, save an occasional glimpse of the sails of a windmill upon the top of a hill, or the sound of a distant forge, whose smoke blew hither and thither like a black plume, as the wind shifted this way and that.

Now and again he met a peasant mounted on a little gray pony, its head down, and scarcely more untamed than its master; or a dealer in furs and skins, seated in his

sledge, drawn by reindeer, a long rope fastened behind, the end covered with knots, meant to frighten away wolves, as it rebounded from the pebbles in the road.

If Ordener asked this trader the way to Walderhog cave, the travelling merchant, familiar only with the names and positions of the places to which his business took him, would answer indifferently: "Keep to the northwest till you come to Hervalyn village, then cross Dodlysax ravine, and by night you will reach Surb, which is only two miles from Walderhog."

If Ordener put the same question to the peasant, the latter, deeply imbued with the traditions of the country and the fireside tales, would shake his head again and again, and stop his gray horse, as he said: "Walderhog! Walderhog cave! There the stones sing, the dry bones dance, and the demon of Iceland dwells; it cannot be to Walderhog cave that your worship wishes to go?"

"Yes, indeed," Ordener would reply.{304}

"Has your worship lost your mother, or has fire destroyed your farm, or has one of your neighbors stolen your fat pig?"

"No, truly," the young man would answer.

"Then some magician must have cast a spell over your worship's senses."

"My friend, I asked you to tell me the way to Walderhog."

"I am trying to answer your question, sir. Farewell. Keep to the north! I can tell you how to go there, but I do not know how you will get back."

And the peasant would ride off, crossing himself as he went.

To the gloomy monotony of the road was added the inconvenience of a fine, penetrating rain, which took possession of the sky toward noonday, and increased the difficulties of the way. No song-bird dared venture forth; and Ordener, chilled to the bone beneath his cloak, saw only the goshawk and the falcon hover above his head, or the kingfisher fly up from the reeds of a pond with a fish in its claws, startled by his tread.

It was after dark when the young traveller, after making his way through the forest of aspens and beeches which lies close to Dodlysax ravine, reached the village of Surb, where (as the reader may remember) Spiagudry had asked leave to establish his headquarters. The smell of tar and the charcoal smoke told Ordener that he was approaching a seafaring population. He advanced to the first hut which he could see through the darkness. According to Norwegian custom, the low, narrow

entrance{305} was closed by a large, transparent fish-skin, tinged at this moment by the flickering red light of the fire. He knocked on the wooden doorpost, saying,—

“It is a traveller!”

“Come in, come in,” answered a voice from within.

At the same instant an eager hand raised the fish-skin, and Ordener was admitted to the cone-shaped home of a Norwegian 'longshore fisherman. It was a sort of circular tent made of wood and earth, in the centre of which blazed a fire, where the purple glow of turf was mixed with the white light of the pine. Beside this fire the fisherman, his wife, and two children dressed in rags were seated at a table set with wooden plates and earthen cups. On the opposite side of the fire was a pile of nets and oars; a couple of reindeer were asleep on a bed of dried leaves and skins, which by its ample size seemed intended also as a resting-place for the family and any guests whom it might please Heaven to send them. It took more than one glance to make out the arrangement of the hut; for a thick, pungent smoke, which found but scanty outlet through a hole in the pointed roof, wrapped everything in a misty but almost impenetrable veil.

As soon as Ordener crossed the threshold, the fisherman and his wife rose, and returned his greeting in a frank and friendly manner. Norwegian peasants welcome travellers perhaps as much from a lively feeling of curiosity inherent in their nature as from their native inclination to hospitality.

“Sir,” said the fisherman, “you must be cold and hungry; here are fire to dry your cloak and excellent{306} bark bread to satisfy your appetite. Afterward your worship may be willing to tell us who you are, where you come from, where you are going, and what stories the gossips relate in your native place.”

“Yes, sir,” added his wife; “and you might add to that bark bread—which, as my husband says, is excellent—a delicious bit of salt fish, seasoned with whale oil. Sit down, stranger.”

“And if your worship does not like Saint Usuph's[15] fare,” added the man, “and will have patience for a few moments, I can promise you a splendid piece of venison, or at least a pheasant's wing. We are expecting a visit from the best hunter in the three provinces. Isn't that so, good Maase?”

“Maase,” the name which the fisherman gave his wife, is a Norwegian word meaning “sea-gull.” The wife did not seem in the least offended, either because it was really her name, or because she took it as a term of endearment.

“The best hunter! I should say so,” she answered with great emphasis. “He means my brother, the famous Kennybol. God bless all his undertakings! He has come to spend a few days with us, and you shall drink a mug of good beer with him. He is a traveller like you.”

“Many thanks, my kind hostess,” said Ordener, with a smile; “but I must be content with your tempting salt fish and a bit of this bark bread. I have not time to wait for your brother, the mighty hunter. I must set off again immediately.{307}”

Good Maase, flattered by the stranger’s praises of her fish and her brother, and vexed at his hasty departure, exclaimed: “You are very kind, sir. But why should you leave us so soon?”

“I must.”

“Must you venture among these mountains at this hour and in such weather?”

“My business is important.”

These answers roused the native curiosity of the young man’s entertainers as much as they excited their surprise.

The fisherman rose, and said: “You are in the house of Christopher Buldus Braal, fisherman, of the village of Surb.”

The woman added: “Maase Kennybol is his wife and servant.”

When Norwegian peasants wish to ask a stranger’s name in polite style, it is their custom to tell him their own.

Ordener answered: “And I am a traveller, who is neither sure of the name he bears nor of the road he travels.”

This strange reply did not seem to satisfy fisher Braal.

“By the crown of Gorman the Old,” said he, “I did not suppose there was more than one man in Norway just now who was not sure of his name. I mean the noble Baron Thorwick, who is to change his name, they say, to Count Danneskiold, on account of his famous marriage to the chancellor’s daughter. At least, dear Maase, tha{308}t’s the latest news from Throndhjem. I congratulate you, stranger, upon this likeness between you and the son of the viceroy, the great Count Guldenlew.”

“As your worship,” added the wife, her face beaming with curiosity, “does not seem able to tell us anything about yourself, can you not tell us something about what is

going on just now, for instance, something about this wonderful marriage of which my husband speaks?”

“Yes,” rejoined her husband, with a self-important air, “that’s the very latest news. Within a month the viceroy’s son will marry the chancellor’s daughter.”

“I doubt it,” said Ordener.

“You doubt it, sir! I assure you that the thing is certain. I have it on the best authority. The fellow who told me had it from Mr. Poël, the favorite servant of the noble Baron Thorwick,—that is, the noble Count Danneskiold. Can any storm have troubled the waters within the week? Has this grand match been broken off?”

“I think so,” replied the young man, smiling.

“If that is so, sir, I am wrong. Never light the fire to fry the fish before it is in the net. But have they really quarrelled? Who told you so?”

“Nobody,” said Ordener. “I merely imagined so.”

At this frank confession the fisherman could not help transgressing the laws of Norwegian courtesy by a loud burst of laughter.

“A thousand pardons, sir. But it is easy to see that you are indeed a traveller, and probably a stranger. Do you fancy that things will turn out as you happen to wish, and that the sky will be clear or cloudy at your caprice?”

Here the fisherman, well versed in the affairs of the nation, as all Norse peasants are, began to explain to Ordener why this marriage could not fail to take place: it was essential to the interests of the d’Ahlefeld family; the viceroy could not refuse the king, who desired it; besides, it was said that the future husband and wife were very much in love. In a word, fisher Braal could not doubt that the match would come off; he only wished he was as sure of killing next day that confounded dogfish which infested Master-Bick pond.

Ordener was little inclined to carry on a political discussion with so uncouth a statesman, and was delighted when the arrival of another guest relieved him of all embarrassment.

“It is he; it is my brother!” cried old Maase.

And no less event than the arrival of her brother could have diverted her from the rapt admiration with which she listened to her husband’s lengthy discourse.

The latter, while the two children threw themselves noisily upon their uncle's neck, quietly offered him his hand, saying,—

“Welcome, brother.”

Then, turning to Ordener: “Sir, this is our brother, the famous hunter Kennybol, from the mountains of Kiölen.”

“A hearty greeting to you all,” said the mountaineer, taking off his bearskin cap.

“Brother, I've had as bad luck in hunting upon your coast as you would probably{310} have had if you had gone fishing in our mountains. I think I could sooner fill my game-bag if I chased elves and goblins in the misty forests of Queen Mab. Sister Maase, you are the first sea-mew whom I have caught sight of to-day. Here, friends, God keep you! but this wretched grouse is all that the best hunter in the province of Throndhjem has got in a whole day's tramp through the heather in this weather.”

With these words he drew from his pouch and laid on the table a white ptarmigan, declaring that it was not worth a shot.

“But,” he muttered between his teeth, “my faithful arquebuse, you shall soon hunt far bigger game. If you can bring down no more chamois or elk skins, you shall make holes in green jackets and red jerkins.”

These words, but half heard, struck the curious Maase.

“Eh!” asked she; “what did you say, brother?”

“I said that there was always a goblin dancing under a woman's tongue.”

“You are right, brother Kennybol,” cried the fisherman. “Eve's daughters are all curious, like their mother. Weren't you talking of green jackets?”

“Brother Braal,” replied the hunter, with some spirit, “I trust my secrets to no one but my musket, because I am sure that then they will never be repeated.”

“There's talk in the village,” boldly continued the fisherman, “of a revolt among the miners. Do you know anything about it, brother?”

The mountaineer picked up his cap and pulled it over his eyes, with a sidelong look at the stranger; then he{311} bent toward the fisherman and said in a low, stern tone: “Silence!”

The fisherman shook his head several times.

“Brother Kennybol, the fish may be silent, but it falls into the net all the same.”

There was a short pause. The two brothers exchanged meaning glances; the children picked the feathers from the ptarmigan as it lay on the table; the good wife listened, and hoped to guess more than was actually said; and Ordener studied them all.

“If you have but meagre fare to-day,” suddenly observed the hunter, evidently anxious to change the subject, “it shall not be so to-morrow. Brother Braal, catch the king of fish, if you can, for I promise you plenty of bear’s grease to dress it.”

“Bear’s grease!” cried Maase. “Has any one seen a bear in the neighborhood? Patrick, Regner, my boys, I forbid you to leave the house. A bear!”

“Make yourself easy, sister; you will have nothing to fear from him after to-morrow. Yes, it was really a bear that I saw about two miles away from Surb,—a white bear. He seemed to be carrying off a man, or rather an animal. But no, it may have been a goatherd, for goatherds dress in the skins of animals; however, I was not near enough to tell. What amazed me, was that he carried his prey on his back, and not in his teeth.”

“Really, brother?”

“Yes; and the creature must have been dead, for it made no attempt to defend itself.{312}”

“But,” sagely inquired the fisherman, “if it were dead, how did it stay on the bear’s back?”

“That’s more than I can say. Never mind; it shall be the bear’s last meal. As I entered the village I engaged six strong companions, and to-morrow, sister Maase, I will bring you the handsomest white fur that ever ran over mountain snow.”

“Take care, brother,” said the woman; “you have seen strange things, truly. That bear may be the Devil.”

“Are you mad?” interrupted the mountaineer, with a laugh; “the Devil change himself into a bear, indeed! Into a cat or a monkey, I grant you; but to a bear! Oh, by Saint Eldon the exorciser, you’re worse than any child or old woman, with your superstition!”

The poor woman hung her head.

“Brother, you were my lord and master before my revered husband cast his eyes upon me; do as your guardian angel bids you.”

“But,” the fisherman asked the mountaineer, “where did you meet with this bear?”

“Between Lake Miösen and Walderhog.”

“Walderhog!” said the woman, crossing herself.

“Walderhog!” repeated Ordener.

“But, brother,” rejoined the fisherman; “I hope you were not travelling toward Walderhog.”

“! Heaven forbid; it was the bear.”

“Shall you go there to-morrow in search of him?” broke in the terrified Maase.

“No, truly; how can you suppose, friends, that even a bear would venture to take refuge in a cave where{313}—”

He stopped short, and all three made the sign of the cross.

“You are right,” replied the fisherman; “wild beasts would be warned away by their instinct.”

“My good friends,” said Ordener, “what is there so frightful about this Walderhog cave?”

They looked at one another in stupid surprise, as if they could not understand such a question.

“Is that where King Walder’s tomb is?” added the young man.

“Yes,” replied the woman; “a stone tomb which sings.”

“And that’s not all,” said the fisherman.

“No,” she added; “the bones of the dead dance there by night.”

“And that’s not all,” said the mountaineer.

All were silent, as if they dared not go on.

“Well,” asked Ordener, “what else is there that is supernatural?”

“Young man,” said the mountaineer, gravely, “you should not speak so lightly; when you see an old gray wolf like me, shudder.”

The young man answered, with a gentle smile: “Still, I should like to know all the marvels which occur in this Walderhog cave; for that is exactly where I am going.”

These words seemed to turn his three hearers into stone.

“To Walderhog! Heavens! are you going to Walderhog?<sup>{314}</sup>”

“And he says that,” rejoined the fisherman, “just as I might say I’m going to Loevig to sell my codfish, or to Ralph’s meadow for herring. To Walderhog! Great Heavens!”

“Poor young man!” cried the wife; “were you born without a guardian angel? Have you no patron saint? Alas! it must be so; for you do not even seem to know your own name.”

“And what motive,” broke in the mountaineer, “can lead your worship to that fearful spot?”

“I have a question to ask,” answered Ordener.

The astonishment of his hosts grew with their curiosity.

“See here, stranger; you do not seem to be familiar with this part of the country. Your worship is doubtless mistaken; it cannot be to Walderhog that you wish to go.”

“Besides,” added the mountaineer, “if you want to speak with any human being, you will find none there.”

“None but the demon,” rejoined the woman.

“The demon! What demon?”

“Yes,” she added; “the one for whom the tomb sings and the dead dance.”

“Then you do not know, sir,” said the fisherman, dropping his voice and approaching Ordener,—“you do not know that Walderhog cave is the favorite abode of—”

The woman stopped him.

“Husband, do not speak that name; it brings ill luck.”

“Whose abode?” asked Ordener.

“That of Beelzebub incarnate,” said Kennybol.

“Really, my kind hosts, I know not what you mean.<sup>{315}</sup> I was surely told that Walderhog was the haunt of Hans of Iceland.”

A triple cry of terror arose.

“Well!—Then you do know!—He is the demon we mean!”

The woman drew her woollen kerchief over her face, and called on all the saints to witness that it was not she who uttered that name.

When the fisherman had somewhat recovered from his surprise, he looked steadily at Ordener, as if there were something about that young man which he could not comprehend.

“I did not expect, stranger, that even if I lived still longer than my father, who died at the age of one hundred and twenty, I should ever have to show the road to Walderhog to any human being possessed of his senses and believing in God.”

“Surely not,” cried Maase; “your worship will not go to that accursed cave; for if one only step foot inside, he must make a compact with the Devil!”

“I must go, my kind hosts, and the greatest service that you can do me is to show me the shortest road there.”

“The shortest way to reach the place where you wish to go,” said the fisherman, “is to throw yourself from the top of the nearest rock into the next torrent.”

“Should I reach the same end,” quietly asked Ordener, “by preferring a useless death to a profitable danger?”

Braal shook his head, while his brother looked scrutinizingly at the young adventurer.<sup>{316}</sup>

“I understand,” suddenly exclaimed the fisherman; “you want to earn the thousand crowns reward which the lord mayor offers for the head of this Iceland demon.”

Ordener smiled.

“Young sir,” added the fisherman, with deep emotion, “take my advice; give up your scheme. I am old and poor, and I would not sell the remnant of my life for a thousand crowns if I had but one day left.”

The woman, with a beseeching, compassionate look, watched the effect of her husband’s entreaties. Ordener made haste to reply: “It is a much higher motive which leads me to seek this robber whom you call a demon; it is for the sake of others, not my own—”

The mountaineer, who had not taken his eyes from Ordener, interrupted him.

“I understand you now. I know why you seek the demon of Iceland.”

“I wish to force him to fight,” said the young man.

“That’s it,” said Kennybol; “you are intrusted with important interests, are you not?”

“So I just said.”

The mountaineer approached the young man with an air of great intelligence, and to his utter amazement whispered in his ear: "You come from Count Schumacker, from Griffenfeld, do you not?"

"Good man," he exclaimed, "how did you know that?"

And, indeed, it was hard for him to guess how a Norwegian mountaineer came to know a secret which he had confided to no one, not even to General Levin.

Kennybol leaned toward him.{317}

"I wish you success," he observed in the same mysterious whisper. "You are a noble young man to labor thus for the oppressed."

Ordener's surprise was so great that he could scarcely find words to inquire how the mountaineer had learned the purpose of his journey.

"Silence!" said Kennybol, putting his finger to his lip. "I hope that you may gain all that you desire from the dweller in Walderhog; my arm, like yours, is loyal to the prisoner of Munkholm."

Then, raising his voice, before Ordener could answer, he added: "Brother, dear sister Maase, regard this worthy youth as another brother. Come, I think supper is ready."

"What!" interrupted Maase, "have you persuaded his worship to give up his plan for visiting the demon?"

"Sister, pray that no harm may come to him. He is a noble and worthy young man. Come, brave sir, take some food and a little rest beneath our roof; to-morrow I will show you your road, and we will set out in search,—you of the Devil, and I of my bear.{318}"

XXIX.

Comrade, ah! comrade, what comrade's son art thou? From what race canst thou have sprung to dare attack Fafnir thus?—Edda.

THE first rays of the rising sun were just reddening the highest peak of the rocks upon the seacoast, when the fisherman, who had come before the dawn to cast his nets off the shore opposite the mouth of Walderhog cave, saw a figure wrapped in a cloak or shroud descend from the rocks, and disappear beneath the much-dreaded arched roof of the cavern. Struck with terror, he commended his boat and his soul to Saint Usuph, and ran to tell his frightened family that he had seen one of the ghosts which dwell in the palace of Hans of Iceland return to the cave at daybreak.

This ghost, thenceforth the theme and dread of many a long winter evening, was no other than Ordener, the noble<sup>{319}</sup> son of the Norwegian viceroy, who, while both kingdoms fancied him absorbed in paying tender attentions to his haughty betrothed, had come alone and unknown to risk his life for her to whom he had given his heart and his future, for the daughter of a proscribed man.

Evil omens, sad forebodings, had thus far accompanied him. He had left the fisherman and his family, and as they parted, good Maase knelt and prayed for him. Kennybol and his six comrades, who had pointed out the right road, quitted him within half a mile of Walderhog, and those dauntless hunters who sallied forth to face a bear with a laugh on their lips, gazed in terror upon the fearless traveller as he followed that unhallowed path.

The young man entered Walderhog cave as he might have entered a long-wished-for haven. He felt a transport of delight as he thought that he was about to accomplish the object of his life, and that in a few moments he might perhaps shed his last drop of blood for his Ethel. About to attack a brigand dreaded by an entire province, it might be a monster, a very demon, it was not that frightful image which filled his fancy; he saw only the figure of the sweet captive maid, praying perhaps for him before her prison altar. Had the object of his devotion been any other than it was, he might have weighed for an instant, only to scorn them, the dangers in search of which he had journeyed so far; but what room is there for reflection in a youthful heart throbbing with the double stimulus of heroic sacrifice and noble love?

He advanced proudly into the vaulted cavern, which<sup>{320}</sup> echoed and re-echoed the sound of his footsteps, not deigning even a glance at the stalactites and the century-old columns of basalt which towered above him amid mosses, lichen, and ivy,—a confused medley of weird forms, from which the superstitious credulity of the Norwegian countryfolk had more than once created hosts of evil spirits or long processions of ghosts.

With the same indifference he passed the tomb of King Walder, to which so many mournful legends cling, and he heard no voice save the long-drawn sigh of the north wind through those gloomy galleries.

He traversed winding passages, dimly lighted by crevices half stopped with grass and heather. Ever and anon he stumbled over strange objects, which rolled from beneath his foot with a hollow sound, and assumed in the darkness the shape of broken skulls or long rows of white teeth with fleshless gums.

But his soul was undismayed. He was only surprised that he had not yet encountered the much-dreaded inhabitant of this horrible cave.

He reached a sort of circular hall, hewn from the rock. Here the subterranean road which he had thus far followed came to an end, and the rocky walls were without exit, save for a few wide fissures, through which he saw the mountains and woods outside.

Amazed that he should have thus traversed the fatal cavern in vain, he began to despair of finding the brigand. A singular monument in the middle of the underground hall caught his attention. Three long, massive boulders, standing upright, supported a fourth, broad and square, as if three pillars might uphold a roof. Beneath this gigantic tripod was an altar, also formed of a single block of granite, with a round hole in the middle of its upper surface. Ordener recognized it as one of those colossal Druidic structures which he had often seen in travelling through Norway, the most amazing instances being found in France, at Lokmariaker and Karnak,—wondrous fabrics which have grown old, resting upon the earth like tents pitched for a day, and made solid by their mere weight.

The young man, lost in thought, leaned mechanically against this altar, whose stone lips were stained dark brown, so deep had they drunk of the blood of human victims.

All at once he started. A voice, apparently proceeding from the stone, fell upon his ear: “Young man, you come to this place with feet which touch the tomb.”

He rose quickly, and his hand sought his sword, while an echo, clear but faint as the voice of a dying man, repeated: “Young man, you come to this place with feet which touch the tomb.” At this instant a hideous face appeared on the other side of the Druid altar, a face crowned with red hair, and disfigured by a brutal sneer.

“Young man,” it again repeated, “you come to this place with feet which touch the tomb.”

“And with a hand which touches a sword,” calmly responded Ordener.

The monster emerged from beneath the altar, revealing his thick-set, muscular limbs, his wild, blood-stained dress, his hooked hands, and his heavy stone axe.

“It is I,” he cried, with a growl like that of a wild beast.<sup>{322}</sup>

“And I,” answered Ordener.

“I expected you.”

“I did more,” replied the bold young man; “I sought you out.”

The brigand folded his arms.

“Do you know who I am?”

“Yes.”

“And you are not frightened?”

“Not now.”

“Then you were afraid to come here?” And the monster tossed his head with a look of triumph.

“Afraid I might not find you.”

“You bid me defiance, and your feet have trampled on dead bodies!”

“To-morrow they may tread upon your own.”

The little man quivered with rage. Ordener stood motionless, in an attitude of haughty calm.

“Take care!” muttered the brigand; “I will burst upon you and rend you as Norwegian hailstones do a lady’s parasol.”

“Such a shield would be all-sufficient for me.”

Something in Ordener’s eye seemed to daunt the monster. He plucked the hairs from his mantle, as a tiger might devour grass before it springs upon its prey.

“You teach me what pity means,” he said.

“And you teach me what it is to scorn.”

“Child, your voice is soft, your face is fair, like the voice and the face of a girl; what death will you choose?”

“Your own.”

The small man laughed.{323}

“Know you not that I am a demon, that my spirit is the spirit of Ingulf the Destroyer?”

“I know that you are a robber, that you commit murder for the love of gold.”

“You are wrong,” broke in the monster; “it is for love of blood.”

“Were you not paid by the d’Ahlefelds to slay Captain Dispolsen?”

“What are you talking about? What names are these?”

“Do you not know Captain Dispolsen, whom you killed on Urchtal Sands?”

“That may be, but I have forgotten him, as I shall forget you three days hence.”

“Do you not know Count d’Ahlefeld, who paid you to steal an iron casket from the captain?”

“D’Ahlefeld! Stay; yes, I know him. I drank his son’s blood only yesterday, from my son’s skull.”

Ordener shuddered with horror.

“Were you not content with your wages?”

“What wages?” asked the brigand.

“Hark ye; the sight of you offends me; I must have done. You stole, a week since, an iron casket from one of your victims, a Munkholm officer, did you not?”

At the word “Munkholm” the brigand started.

“An officer from Munkholm?” he muttered. Then he asked, with a look of surprise, “Are you too an officer from Munkholm?”

“No,” said Ordener.

“So much the worse!” and his face clouded.<sup>{324}</sup>

“Enough of this,” rejoined the persistent Ordener; “where is the casket that you stole from the captain?”

The little man meditated for a moment.

“By Ingulf! here’s a paltry iron box that occupies many minds. I will promise you there’ll not be so much search for that which holds your bones, if ever they be collected in a coffin.”

These words, as they showed Ordener that the robber knew the casket to which he referred, revived his hope of obtaining it.

“Tell me what you did with that casket. Is it in Count d’Ahlefeld’s possession?”

“No.”

“You lie, for you laugh.”

“Believe what you will. What matters it to me?”

The monster had assumed a mocking air which awakened Ordener's suspicions. He saw that there was nothing to be done but to rouse him to fury if possible, or to intimidate him.

"Hear me," said he, raising his voice; "you must give me that casket."

The other answered with a savage sneer.

"You must give it to me!" the young man repeated in tones of thunder.

"Are you accustomed to issuing orders to buffaloes and bears?" replied the monster, still sneering.

"I would give this command to the very Devil in hell."

"You may do so ere long, if you like."

Ordener drew his sword, which gleamed in the darkness like a flash of lightning.{325}

"Obey me!"

"Nay," cried Hans, brandishing his axe; "I might have broken your bones and sucked your blood when you first appeared, but I restrained my wrath; I was curious to see the sparrow attack the vulture."

"Wretch," exclaimed Ordener, "defend yourself!"

"'Tis the first time I was ever told to do so," muttered the brigand, gnashing his teeth.

With these words, he sprang upon the granite altar and gathered himself together, like a leopard awaiting the hunter on a high cliff, ready to spring upon him unawares.

From this vantage-ground he glared at the young man, apparently seeking the best side from which to attack him. All would have been over with Ordener had he hesitated an instant. But he gave the brigand no time to consider, and threw himself violently upon him, aiming the point of his sword at his face.

Then began the most fearful fight which imagination can picture. The little man, standing upon the altar, like a statue on its pedestal, looked like one of those horrid idols which, in barbarous ages, received in that same spot impious sacrifices and sacrilegious offerings.

His movements were so rapid that upon whatever side Ordener attacked him, he always met the monster face to face, and encountered his blade. He would have been hewn in pieces at the first onslaught, had he not had the lucky forethought to wrap his mantle loosely around his left arm, so that the greater part of his furious opponent's

blows were foiled by this floating shield. Thus for some{326} moments both made useless though tremendous efforts to wound each other. The small man's fiery gray eyes seemed starting from their sockets. Surprised to meet with such vigorous and bold resistance from a foe apparently so feeble, his savage sneers changed to silent rage. The brutal immobility of the monster's features, and Ordener's dauntless composure contrasted strangely with the swiftness of their motions and the vigor of their attack. Not a sound was heard but the clash of weapons, the young man's quick steps, and the hurried breathing of both adversaries, when the little man uttered a fearful roar. The blade of his axe had caught in the folds of the cloak. He braced himself; he shook his arm frantically, but only succeeded in entangling the handle with the blade in the clinging stuff, which, with every fresh effort, wound itself closer and closer about it.

The dreadful brigand felt the young man's steel upon his breast.

"Once more I ask you," said the triumphant Ordener, "will you give me that iron casket which you stole like a coward?"

The small man was silent for an instant; then he said, with a roar: "Curse you, no!"

Ordener rejoined, still retaining his victorious and threatening attitude: "Consider!"

"No; I tell you no!" repeated the brigand.

The noble youth lowered his sword.

"Well," said he, "release your axe from the folds of my mantle, and let us fight it out."

With a disdainful laugh, the monster answered:{327}—

"Child, you play the generous man, as if I wanted your indulgence!"

Before the astonished Ordener could turn his head, the brigand had placed his foot on the shoulder of his loyal victor, and at one bound stood twelve paces away from him. With another leap he sprang at Ordener, and hung his entire weight upon him, as the panther hangs with teeth and claws to the flanks of the royal lion. His nails dug deep into the young man's shoulders, his bony knees were pressed into his flesh, while his fierce face showed Ordener a bloody mouth and cruel teeth ready to tear him limb from limb. He ceased to speak; no human words issued from his heaving chest; a low roar mingled with hoarse, passionate yells alone expressed his rage. He was more hideous than a wild beast, more monstrous than a demon; he was a man deprived of all semblance of humanity.

Ordener tottered beneath the small man's onslaught, and would have fallen at the unexpected shock, had not one of the heavy pillars of the Druid monument happened to be just behind to sustain him. He stood therefore half overthrown and gasping beneath the weight of his fearful foe. To gain any idea of the horrible spectacle offered at this moment, it must be remembered that all which we have described occurred in far less time than is required to write it.

As we said, the noble youth tottered, but he did not quake. He hastily addressed a farewell thought to Ethel. The thought of his love was like a prayer; it restored his strength. He threw his arms about the monster; then{328} seizing his sword by the middle of the blade, he pressed the point straight down upon his spine. The wounded brigand uttered a fearful scream, and with a sudden leap, which shook off Ordener, freed himself from his bold adversary's arms, and fell back some paces, taking in his teeth a fragment of the green cloak, which he had bitten in his fury.

He leaped up, supple and agile as a young deer, and the battle began again, for the third time, more terrible than ever. By chance there was, close by, a pile of huge stones over which moss and weeds had grown for centuries undisturbed. Two ordinary men could scarcely have lifted the smallest of these rocks. Hans seized one in both arms and raised it above his head, poising it toward Ordener. His expression was frightful. The stone, flung with great violence, moved heavily through the air; the young man had just time to spring aside. The granite boulder broke to fragments against the subterranean wall with a tremendous noise, which was echoed back for many moments from the depths of the cavern.

Ordener, stunned and amazed, had barely time to recover before a second mass of stone was poised in the brigand's grasp. Vexed that he should seem to stand like a coward to be pelted, he rushed toward the small man, with uplifted sword, to change this mode of warfare; but the fearful missile, launched like a thunderbolt, as it moved through the dense, dark air of the cave encountered the bare and slender blade; the steel was dashed to pieces like a bit of glass, and the monster's fierce laugh rang out. Ordener was disarmed.{329}

"Have you," cried the monster, "aught to say to God or the Devil ere you die?"

And his eye darted flame, and all his muscles swelled with rage and joy, and he flung himself with a thrill of impatience upon his axe, which, wrapped in the cloak, lay upon the ground. Poor Ethel!

All at once a distant roar was heard outside. The monster paused. The noise increased; shouts of men were mingled with the plaintive moan of a bear. The brigand

listened. The cries of pain continued. He hastily seized his axe, and sprang, not toward Ordener, but toward one of the crevices in the rock. Ordener, overwhelmed with surprise to find himself thus unnoticed, hurried in his turn to one of these natural doors, and saw in a neighboring glade a large white bear at bay, surrounded by seven hunters, among whom he thought he recognized Kennybol, whose words had made such an impression upon him the night before.

He turned back. The brigand had left the cave, and a fearful voice outside shouted: "Friend! Friend! I am here! I am here!"

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

[1] M. Charles Nodier, in the "Quotidienne" for March 12, 1823.

[2] Koran.

[3] A small coin worth twelve and a half cents. The name is still in use in Louisiana.

[4] Name of the Thronhjem morgue.

[5] The Norwegian peasants build nests for the eider duck, surprise them while sitting on their young, and strip them of their down.

[6] The Odelsrecht was a singular law establishing a species of entail among the Norwegian peasantry. Any man who was compelled to part with his patrimony might prevent the purchaser from transferring it, by declaring every tenth year that he intended to buy it back.

[7] The Persian god of evil.

[8] Bark bread, eaten by the poorer classes in Norway.

[9] Blood privilege, the right to have a hangman.

[10] It is granted.

[11] The waters of Lake Sparbo are greatly used for tempering steel.

[12] Frederic III. was the victim of Borch, or Borrich, a Danish chemist, and more especially of Borri, a Milanese quack, who declared himself to be the favorite of the Archangel Michael. This impostor, after startling Strasburg and Amsterdam with his pretended miracles, increased the sphere of his ambition and the boldness of his lies; having deceived the people, he ventured to deceive kings. He began with Queen Christina at Hamburg, and ended with King Frederic at Copenhagen.

[13] The dogfish are greatly dreaded by fishermen, because they frighten other fish.

[14] The ancient aristocracy of Norway, before Griffenfeld established a regular order of nobility, were entitled “hersa” (baron) or “jarl” (count). The English word “earl” is derived from the latter.

[15] The patron saint of fishermen.

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