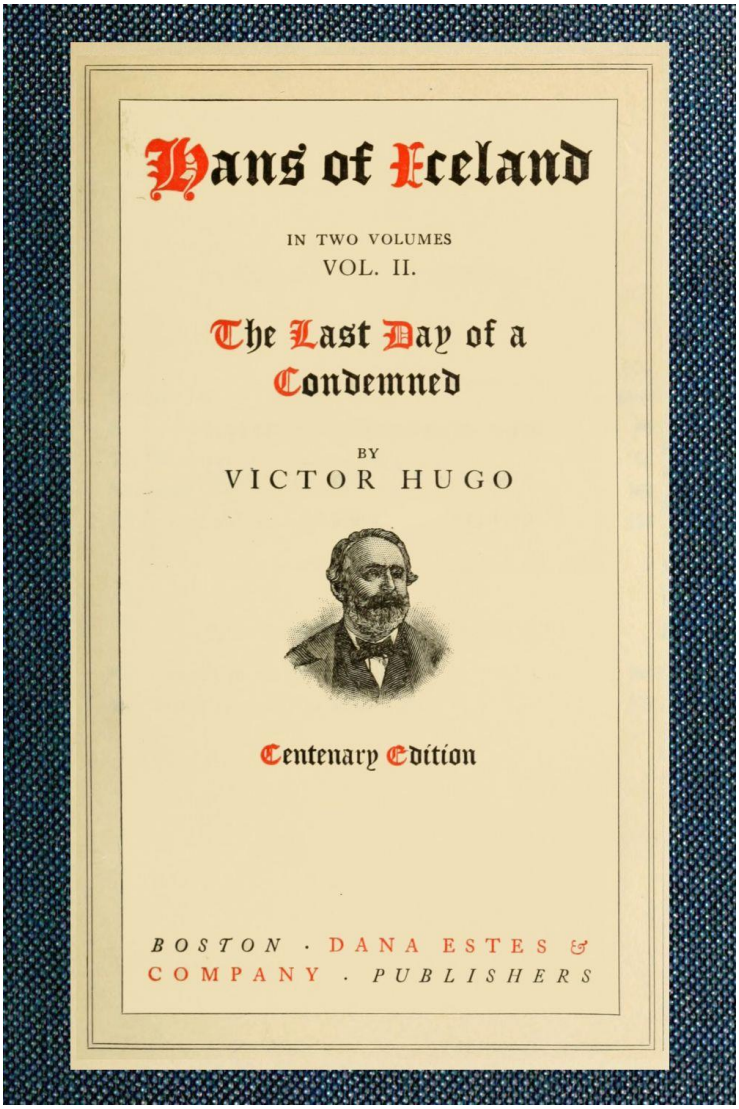

Contents:

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(etext transcriber's note)

HANS OF ICELAND

Ordener convicts Himself.

Etched by Léopold Flameng.—From drawing by François Flameng.

Hans of **I**celand

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

The Last Day of a

Condemned

BY

VICTOR HUGO

Centenary Edition

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

VOL. II.

THE LAST DAY OF A CONDEMNED.

{1}

HANS OF ICELAND.

XXX.

Peter, good fellow, has lost his all at dice.—Régnier.

THE regiment of musketeers from Munkholm was on the march through the narrow passes lying between Throndhjem and Skongen. Sometimes it moved along the brink of a torrent, and the long line of bayonets crept through the ravine like a huge serpent with glittering scales; sometimes it wound around a mountain, making it look like one of those triumphal columns about which curves an army of heroes in bronze.

The soldiers marched with trailing weapons and cloaks dragging in the dust, looking surly and tired, for these noble fellows are averse to anything but battle or inaction. The coarse banter and threadbare jests which delighted them but yesterday had lost their savor. The air was{2} chill, the sky clouded. Nothing would raise a laugh in the ranks, unless one of the sutler-women should get an awkward tumble from her little Barbary horse, or a tin saucepan should happen to roll over the precipice and rebound from rock to rock.

To while away the monotony of the journey, Lieutenant Randmer, a young Danish baron, accosted old Captain Lory, who had risen from the ranks. The captain, moody and silent, moved with a heavy but confident step; the lieutenant, light and agile, played with a twig which he had plucked from the bushes that lined the read.

“Well, Captain, what ails you? You seem depressed.”

“And I should say I had good cause,” replied the old officer, without raising his eyes.

“Come, come, no regrets! Look at me. Am I depressed? And yet I would wager that I have quite as much cause as you.”

“I doubt it, Baron Randmer; I have lost all I possessed; I have lost everything I loved.”

“Captain Lory, our misfortunes are precisely the same. It is not a fortnight since Lieutenant Alberick won my castle and estate at a single deal of the cards. I am ruined; but am I the less gay?”

The captain answered in a very melancholy tone: “Lieutenant, you have only lost your castle; but I have lost my dog.”

At this answer the light-minded baron seemed uncertain whether to laugh or sympathize; but he said: “Be comforted, Captain. Only think, I, who have lost my castle{3}—”

The captain broke in upon his words:—

“What of that? Besides, you may win back another castle.”

“And you may find another dog.”

The old man shook his head.

“I may find another dog, but I shall never find my poor Drake.”

He paused; great tears gathered in his eyes and rolled one by one down his hard, stern face.

“He was all I ever had to love,” he added; “I never knew my parents. God grant them peace, and my poor Drake too! Lieutenant Randmer, he saved my life in the Pomeranian war. I called him Drake in honor of the famous admiral. My good dog! He never changed, as did my fortunes. After the battle of Oholfen, the great General Schack patted him, and said: ‘You’ve a fine dog there, Sergeant Lory!’—for I was only a sergeant then.”

“Ah!” interrupted the young baron, slashing his switch, “how queer it must seem to be a sergeant.”

The old soldier of fortune did not hear him; he appeared to be talking to himself, and Randmer could only catch a word here and there.

“Poor Drake! After surviving so many breaches and trenches, to be drowned like a blind kitten in that confounded Throndhjem fjord! My poor dog! my trusty friend! You deserved to die on the field of battle, as I hope to do.”

“Come, come, Captain!” cried the lieutenant, “how can you be so despondent? We may get a chance to fight to-morrow.{4}”

“Yes,” contemptuously answered the old captain, “with a pretty enemy!”

“What! do you despise those rascally miners, those devilish mountaineers?”

“Stone-cutters, highwaymen, fellows who don’t know the first rudiments of warfare! A fine set of blackguards to face a man like me, who has served in all the wars in Pomerania and Holstein, in the campaigns of Scania and Dalecarlia; who fought under the glorious General Schack and the brave Count Guldenlew!”

“But don’t you know,” interrupted Randmer, “that these fellows are led by a formidable chief,—a giant as big and as brutal as Goliath, a rascal who drinks nothing but human blood, a very Satan incarnate?”

“And who may he be?” asked the captain.

“Why, the famous Hans of Iceland!”

“Pooh! I’ll wager that this great general does not know how to shoulder a musket or handle a carbine properly.”

Randmer laughed.

“Yes, you may laugh,” continued the captain. “It will be very funny, no doubt, to cross swords with scurvy pickaxes, and pikes with pitchforks! Here are worthy foes indeed! My brave Drake would have scorned to snap at their heels!”

The captain was still giving free vent to his indignation, when he was interrupted by the arrival of an officer, who ran up to them all out of breath,—

“Captain Lory! my dear Randmer!”

“Well?” asked both at once.

“My friends, I am faint with horror! D’Ahlefeld,{5} Lieutenant d’Ahlefeld, the lord chancellor’s son! You know, my dear Randmer, that Frederic—such a dandy! such a fop!”

“Yes,” replied the young baron, “a great dandy! Still, at the last ball at Charlottenburg my costume was in much better taste than his. But what has happened to him?”

“I know whom you mean,” said Lory; “you mean Frederic d’Ahlefeld, lieutenant of Company Three. The men wear blue facings. He neglects his duty sadly.”

“You will not have to complain of him again, Captain Lory.”

“Why not?” said Randmer.

“He is garrisoned at Wahlstrom,” coldly added the old officer.

“Exactly,” said the new-comer; “the colonel has just received a message. Poor Frederic!”

“But what has happened? Captain Bollar, you alarm me.”

Old Lory added: “Nonsense! The popinjay was absent from roll-call, I suppose, and the captain has sent the lord chancellor’s son to prison: that is the misfortune which distresses you so sadly; I am sure it is.”

Bollar clapped him on the shoulder.

“Captain Lory, Lieutenant d’Ahlefeld has been devoured alive.”

The two captains looked each other in the face; and Randmer, startled for an instant, suddenly burst out laughing.

“Oh, Captain Bollar, I see you are as fond of a joke as ever! But you can’t fool me in that way, I warn you.{6}”

And the lieutenant, folding his arms, gave way to mirth, swearing that what amused him the most was to see how readily Lory swallowed all Bollar’s ridiculous stories. As for the story, he said it was a capital one; and it was a most clever idea to pretend that Frederic, who took such dainty, such absurd care of his complexion, had been swallowed raw.

“Randmer,” said Bollar, seriously, “you act like a fool. I tell you d’Ahlefeld is dead; I have it from the colonel,—dead!”

“Oh, how well you play your part!” rejoined the baron, still laughing; “what a funny fellow you are!”

Bollar shrugged his shoulders, and turned to old Lory, who quietly asked the particulars.

“Oh, yes, my dear Captain Bollar,” added the irrepressible mocker; “tell us who ate the poor devil. Did he serve as breakfast for a wolf, or supper for a bear?”

“The colonel,” said Bollar, “received a despatch just now, informing him, in the first place, that the Wahlstrom garrison is retreating toward us, driven back by a large party of rebels.”

Old Lory frowned.

“In the second place,” resumed Bollar, “that Lieutenant Frederic d’Ahlefeld, having gone into the mountains three days since to hunt, was captured near Arbar ruins by a monster, who carried him to his lair and there devoured him.”

At this, Lieutenant Randmer’s merriment increased.

“Oh, how our good Lory swallows your stories! That’s right; keep up a sober face, Bollar. You are wonderfully{7} amusing; but you don’t tell us what this monster, this ogre, this vampire was, that carried off and ate up the lieutenant like a week-old kid!”

“I will not tell you,” impatiently answered Bollar; “but I will tell Lory, who is not such an incredulous fool. Lory, my dear fellow, the monster who drank Frederic’s blood was Hans of Iceland.”

“The leader of the rebels!” exclaimed the old officer.

“Well, Lory,” rejoined the scoffer, “do you think a man who handles his jaw so ably needs to know how to shoulder a musket?”

“Baron Randmer,” said Bollar, “you are very like d’Ahlefeld in character; beware lest you meet with the same fate.”

“I declare,” cried Randmer, “that Captain Bollar’s immovable gravity amuses me beyond expression.”

“And Lieutenant Randmer’s inexhaustible laughter alarms me more than I can say.”

At this moment a group of officers, engaged in eager conversation, approached our three speakers.

“Zounds!” cried Randmer, “I must amuse them with Bollar’s story.”

“Comrades,” he added, advancing to meet them; “have you heard the news? Poor Frederic d’Ahlefeld has been eaten alive by the barbarous Hans of Iceland.”

As he said these words, he could not repress a burst of laughter, which, to his great surprise, was received by the new-comers almost with shouts of indignation.

“What! can you laugh? I did not think, Randmer, that you would repeat such a dreadful piece of news so lightly. How can you laugh at such a misfortune?{8}”

“What!” said Randmer, much confused, “is it really true?”

“Why, you just told us of it yourself!” was the general cry. “Don’t you believe your own words?”

“But I thought it was one of Bollar’s jokes.”

An old officer interposed.

“Such a joke would be in very bad taste; but unfortunately it is no joke. Baron Vœthaün, our colonel, has just received the sad news.”

“A fearful affair! It is really awful!” repeated a dozen voices.

“So we are to fight wolves and bears with human faces,” said one.

“We are to be shot down,” said another, “without knowing whence the bullet comes; we are to be picked off one by one, like birds in a cage.”

“D’Ahlefeld’s death,” said Bollar, in a solemn tone, “makes me shudder. Our regiment is unlucky. Dispolsen’s murder, that of those poor soldiers found dead at Cascadthymore, d’Ahlefeld’s awful fate,—here are three tragic events in a very short space of time.”

Young Baron Randmer, who had been silent, looked up.

“It is incredible,” said he; “Frederic, who danced so well!”

And after this weighty remark he relapsed into silence, while Captain Lory declared that he was greatly distressed at the young lieutenant’s death, and drew the attention of private Toric-Belfast to the fact that the brass clasp of his shoulder-belt was not so bright as usual.{9}

XXXI.

“Hush, hush! here comes a man climbing down a ladder.”

. . . . . .

“Oh, yes; he is a spy.”

“Heaven could grant me no greater favor than to let me offer you—my life. I am yours; but tell me, for mercy’s sake, to whom does this army belong?”

“To a count from Barcelona.”

“What count?”

. . . . . .

“What is it?”

“General, one of the enemy’s spies.”

“Whence come you?”

“I came here, little dreaming what I should find; little thinking what I should see.”—Lope de Vega: *La Fuerza Lastimosa*.

THERE is something desolate and forbidding in the aspect of a bare, flat region when the sun has set, when one is alone; when, as he walks, he tramples the dry grass beneath his feet, the dead brown leaves drop rustling from the trees, he hears the monotonous cry of{10} the cricket, and sees huge, shapeless clouds sink slowly on the horizon like dead ghosts.

Such were Ordener’s gloomy reflections on the night of his vain encounter with the Iceland robber. Startled by his abrupt disappearance, he at first tried to pursue him; but he lost his way in the heather, and wandered all day through a wild and uncultivated country, where he found no trace of man. At nightfall he was in a vast plain stretching to the horizon on every side, where there seemed no hope of shelter for the young traveller exhausted by fatigue and hunger.

It would have been a slight relief if his bodily suffering had not been aggravated by mental distress; but all was over. He had reached his journey’s end without accomplishing his purpose. He could not even cherish those foolish illusions of hope which had urged him to pursue the monster; and now that nothing was left to sustain his courage, countless discouraging thoughts, for which he had hitherto had no room, assailed him. What could he do? How could he return to Schumacker unless he could take with him Ethel’s salvation? What was the frightful nature of the misfortune which the possession of the fatal casket would prevent, and what of his marriage to Ulrica d’Ahlefeld? If he could only free his Ethel from her undeserved captivity; if he could fly with her, and enjoy uninterrupted happiness in some distant exile!

He wrapped himself in his mantle, and threw himself upon the ground. The sky was dark; a tempestuous light ever and anon appeared in the clouds as if through a veil of crape and then vanished; a cold wind swept across the{11} plain. The young man scarcely heeded these signs of an immediate and violent storm; and besides, even could he have found shelter from the tempest and a place to rest from his fatigues, could he have found a spot where he might avoid his misery or rest from thought?

All at once confused sounds of men’s voices fell upon his ear. In surprise, he rose upon his elbow, and perceived at some distance a number of shadowy forms moving through the darkness. He looked again; a light shone in the midst of the mysterious group, and Ordener, with astonishment which may easily be imagined, saw the weird forms sink one after the other into the centre of the earth, until all had disappeared.

Ordener was above the superstitions of his age and country. His serious and mature mind knew none of those vain beliefs, those strange terrors, which torture the childhood of a race as well as the childhood of a man. And yet there was something supernatural about this singular vision which filled him with devout distrust against his better judgment; for who can tell whether the spirits of the dead may not sometimes return to earth?

He rose, made the sign of the cross, and walked toward the spot where the apparition vanished.

Big drops of rain now began to fall; his cloak filled like a sail, and the feather in his cap, beaten by the wind, flapped in his face.

He stopped suddenly. A flash of lightning revealed just at his feet a large, round well, into which he must inevitably have fallen headlong had it not have been for this friendly warning. He approached the abyss. A{12} faint light was visible at a fearful depth, and cast a red glow over the bottom of this huge opening in the bowels of the earth. The light, which seemed like a magic fire kindled by elves, only increased the immeasurable darkness which the eye was forced to pierce before reaching it.

The dauntless youth leaned over the abyss and listened. A distant murmur of voices rose to his ear. He no longer doubted that the beings who had so strangely appeared and disappeared before his very eyes had plunged into this gulf, and he felt an unconquerable desire, doubtless because it was so fated, to follow them, even should he pursue spectres to the mouth of hell. Moreover, the tempest now burst with fury, and this hole would afford him a shelter; but how was he to descend? What road had those he longed to follow taken, if indeed they were not phantoms? A second flash came to his aid, and showed him at his feet a ladder leading into the depths of the well. It consisted of a strong upright beam, crossed at regular intervals by short iron bars for the hands and feet of those who might venture into the gulf below.

Ordener did not hesitate. He swung himself boldly down upon the dreadful ladder, and plunged into the abyss without knowing whether it reached the bottom or not,—without reflecting that he might never again see the sun. Soon he could only distinguish the sky from the darkness overhead by the bluish flashes which lit it up at brief intervals; soon the rain pouring in torrents upon the surface of the earth, reached him merely as a fine, vaporous mist. Then the whirlwind, rushing violently into the{13} well, was lost above him in a prolonged moan. He went down and down, and yet seemed scarcely nearer to the subterranean light. He went on without losing heart, never looking below lest he should become dizzy and fall.

However, the air becoming more and more stifling, the sound of voices more and more distinct, and the purplish glow which began to tinge the walls of the pit, warned him that he was not far from the bottom. He descended a few more rounds, and saw plainly at the foot of the ladder the entrance to an underground passage lighted by a flickering red flame, while his ear caught words which won his entire attention.

“Kennybol does not come,” said an impatient voice.

“What can detain him?” repeated the same voice, after a brief pause.

“No one knows, Mr. Hacket,” was the reply.

“He intended to spend the night with his sister, Maase Braal, in the village of Surb,” added a different voice.

“You see,” rejoined the first speaker, “I keep my promises. I agreed to bring Hans of Iceland for your leader. I have brought him.”

An indistinct murmur followed these words. Ordener’s curiosity, already aroused by the name of Kennybol, who had so astonished him the night before, was redoubled at the name of Hans of Iceland.

The same voice continued:—

“My friends, Jonas, Norbith, what matters it if Kennybol is late? There are enough of us; we need fear nothing. Did you find your standards at Crag ruins?”

“Yes, Mr. Hacket,” replied several voices.{14}

“Well, raise your banners; it is high time! Here is gold! Here is your invincible chief! Courage! March to the rescue of the noble Schumacker, the unfortunate Count Griffenfeld!”

“Hurrah! hurrah for Schumacker!” repeated many voices; and the name of Schumacker echoed and re-echoed from the subterranean arches.

Ordener, more and more curious, more and more amazed, listened, hardly daring to breathe. He could neither believe nor understand what he heard. Schumacker connected with Kennybol and Hans of Iceland! What was this dark drama, one scene in which he, an unsuspected spectator, had witnessed? Whose life did they wish to shield? Whose head was at stake?

“In me,” continued the same voice, “you see the friend and confidant of the noble Count Griffenfeld.”

The voice was wholly unfamiliar to Ordener. It went on: “Put implicit trust in me, as he does. Friends, everything is in your favor; you will reach Throndhjem without meeting an enemy.”

“Let us be off, Mr. Hacket,” interrupted a voice. “Peters told me that he saw the whole regiment from Munkholm marching through the mountain-passes to attack us.”

“He deceived you,” replied the other, in authoritative tones. “The government as yet knows nothing of your revolt, and it is so wholly unsuspicious that the man who rejected your just complaints—your oppressor, the oppressor of the illustrious and unfortunate Schumacker, General Levin de Knud—has left Throndhjem for the{15} capital, to join in the festivities on the occasion of the marriage of his ward, Ordener Guldenlew, and Ulrica d’Ahlefeld.”

Ordener’s feelings may be imagined. To hear all these names which interested him so deeply, and even his own, uttered by unknown voices in this wild, desolate region, in this mysterious tunnel! A frightful thought pierced his soul. Could it be true? Was it indeed an agent of Count Griffenfeld whose voice he heard? What! could Schumacker, that venerable old man, his noble Ethel’s noble father, revolt against his royal master, hire brigands, and kindle a civil war? And it was for this hypocrite, this rebel, that he, the son of the Norwegian viceroy, the pupil of General Levin, had compromised his future and risked his life! It was for his sake that he had sought and fought with that Iceland bandit with whom Schumacker seemed to be in league, since he placed him at the head of these scoundrels! Who knows but that casket for which he, Ordener, was on the point of shedding his lifeblood, contained some of the base secrets of this vile plot? Or had the revengeful prisoner of Munkholm made a fool of him? Perhaps he had found out his name; perhaps—and this thought was painful indeed to the generous youth—he wished to ruin the son of an enemy by urging him to this fatal journey!

Alas! when we have long loved and revered the name of an unfortunate man, when in our secret soul we have vowed everlasting devotion to his misfortunes, it is bitter to be repaid with ingratitude, to feel that we are forever disenchanted with generosity, and that we must renounce{16} the pure, sweet joys of loyal self-sacrifice. We grow old in an instant with the most melancholy form of old age; we grow old in experience, and we lose the most beautiful illusion of a life whose only beauty lies in its illusions.

Such were the dispiriting thoughts that crowded confusedly upon Ordener’s mind. The noble youth longed to die at that instant; he felt that his happiness had vanished. True, there were many things in the assertions of the man who described himself as Griffenfeld’s envoy which struck him as false or doubtful; but these statements, being

only meant to deceive a set of poor rustics, Schumacker was but the more guilty in his eyes; and this same Schumacker was his Ethel's father!

These reflections agitated him the more violently because they all thronged upon him at once. He reeled against the rounds of the ladder on which he stood, and listened still; for we sometimes wait with inexplicable impatience and fearful eagerness for the misfortunes which we dread the most.

"Yes," added the voice of the envoy, "you are to be commanded by the much-dreaded Hans of Iceland. Who will dare resist you? You fight for your wives and your children, basely despoiled of their inheritance; for a noble and unfortunate man, who for twenty years has languished unjustly in an infamous prison. Come, for Schumacker and liberty await you. Death to tyrants!"

"Death!" repeated a thousand voices; and the clash of arms rang through the winding cave, mingled with the hoarse note of the mountaineer's horn.{17}

"Stop!" cried Ordener.

He hurriedly descended the remainder of the ladder; for the idea that he might save Schumacker from committing a crime and spare his country untold misery had taken entire possession of him. But as he stood at the mouth of the cave, fear lest he might destroy his Ethel's father, and perhaps his Ethel herself, by rash invectives, took the place of every other consideration, and he remained rooted to the spot, pale, and casting an amazed glance at the singular scene before him.

It was like a vast square in some underground city, whose limits were lost amid endless columns supporting the vaulted roof. These pillars glittered like crystal in the rays of countless torches borne by a multitude of men, armed with strange weapons, and scattered in confusion about the cave. From all these points of light and all these fearful figures straying among the shadows, it might have passed for one of the legendary gatherings described by ancient chroniclers,—an assembly of wizards and demons, bearing stars for torches, and illuminating antique groves and ruined castles by night.

A prolonged shout arose.

"A stranger! Kill him! kill him!"

A hundred arms were raised to strike Ordener down. He put his hand to his side in search of his sword Noble youth! In his generous ardor he had forgotten that he was alone and unarmed.

“Stay! stay!” cried a voice,—the voice of one whom Ordener recognized as Schumacker’s envoy.

He was a short, stout man, dressed in black, with a{18} deceitful smile. He advanced toward Ordener, saying: “Who are you?”

Ordener made no answer; he was threatened on every side, and there was not an inch of his breast uncovered by a sword-point or the mouth of a pistol.

“Are you afraid?” asked the little man, with a sneer.

“If your hand were upon my heart, instead of these swords,” coldly answered Ordener, “you would see that it beats no faster than your own, if indeed you have a heart.”

“Ah, ha!” said the little man; “so you defy us! Well, then let him die!” And he turned his back.

“Give me death,” returned Ordener; “it is the only thing that I would accept from you.”

“One moment, Mr. Hacket,” said an old man, with a thick beard, who stood leaning on a long musket. “You are my guests, and I alone have the right to send this fellow to tell the dead what he has seen.”

Mr. Hacket laughed.

“Faith, my dear Jonas, let it be as you please! It matters little to me who judges this spy, so long as he is condemned.”

The old man turned to Ordener.

“Come, tell us who you are, since you are so boldly curious to know who we are.”

Ordener was silent. Surrounded by the strange allies of that Schumacker for whom he would so willingly have shed his blood, he felt only an infinite longing to die.

“His worship will not answer,” said the old man.{19} “When the fox is caught, he cries no more. Kill him!”

“My brave Jonas,” rejoined Hacket, “let this man’s death be Hans of Iceland’s first exploit among you.”

“Yes, yes!” cried many voices.

Ordener, astounded, but still undaunted, looked about him for Hans of Iceland, with whom he had so valiantly disputed his life that very morning, and saw with increased

surprise a man of colossal size, dressed in the garb of the mountaineers. This giant stared at Ordener with brutal stupidity, and called for an axe.

“You are not Hans of Iceland!” emphatically exclaimed Ordener.

“Kill him! kill him!” cried Hacket, angrily.

Ordener saw that he must die. He put his hand in his bosom to draw out his Ethel’s hair and give it one last kiss. As he did so, a paper fell from his belt.

“What is that paper?” asked Hacket. “Norbith, seize that paper.”

Norbith was a young man, whose stern, dark features bore the stamp of true nobility. He picked up the paper and unfolded it. “Good God!” he exclaimed, “it is the passport of my poor friend, Christopher Nedlam, that unfortunate fellow who was beheaded not a week ago in Skongen market-place, for coining counterfeit money.”

“Well,” said Hacket, in a disappointed tone, “you may keep the bit of paper. I thought it was something more important. Come, my dear Hans, despatch your man.”

Young Norbith threw himself before Ordener, crying: “This man is under my protection. My head shall fall{20} before you touch a hair of his. I will not suffer the safe-conduct of my friend Christopher Nedlam to be violated.”

Ordener, so miraculously preserved, hung his head and felt humiliated; for he remembered how contemptuously he had inwardly received Chaplain Athanasius Munder’s touching prayer,—“May the gift of the dying benefit the traveller!”

“Pooh! pooh!” said Hacket, “you talk nonsense, good Norbith. The man is a spy; he must die.”

“Give me my axe,” repeated the giant.

“He shall not die!” cried Norbith. “What would the spirit of my poor Nedlam say, whom they hung in such cowardly fashion? I tell you he shall not die; for Nedlam will not let him die!”

“As far as that goes,” said old Jonas, “Norbith is right. Why should we kill this stranger, Mr. Hacket? He has Christopher Nedlam’s pass.”

“But he is a spy, a spy!” repeated Hacket.

The old man took his stand with the young one at Ordener’s side, and both said quietly: “He has the pass of Christopher Nedlam, who was hung at Skongen.”

Hacket saw that he must needs submit; for all the others began to murmur, and to say that this stranger should not die, as he had the safe-conduct of Nedlam the counterfeiter.

“Very well,” he hissed through his teeth with concentrated rage; “then let him live. After all, it is your business, and not mine.”

“If he were the Devil himself I would not kill him,” said the triumphant Norbith.{21}

With these words he turned to Ordener.

“Look here,” he added, “you must be a good fellow as you have my poor friend Nedlam’s pass. We are the royal miners. We have rebelled to rid ourselves of the protectorate of the Crown. Mr. Hacket, here, says that we have taken up arms for a certain Count Schumacker; but I for one know nothing about him. Stranger, our cause is just. Hear me, and answer as if you were answering your patron saint. Will you join us?”

An idea flashed through Ordener’s mind.

“Yes,” replied he.

Norbith offered him a sword, which Ordener silently accepted.

“Brother,” said the youthful leader; “if you mean to betray us, begin by killing me.”

At this instant the sound of the horn rang through the arched galleries of the mine, and distant voices were heard exclaiming, “Here comes Kennybol!{22}”

XXXII.

There are thoughts as high as heaven.—*Old Spanish Romanes*.

THE soul sometimes has sudden inspirations, brilliant flashes whose extent can no more be expressed, whose depth can no more be sounded by an entire volume of thoughts and reflections, than the brightness of a thousand torches can reproduce the intense, swift radiance of a flash of lightning.

We will not, therefore, try to analyze the overwhelming and secret impulse which upon young Norbith’s proposal led the noble son of the Norwegian viceroy to join a party of bandits who had risen in revolt to defend a proscribed man. It was doubtless a generous desire to fathom this dark scheme at any cost, mixed with a bitter loathing for life, a reckless indifference to the future; perhaps some vague doubt of Schumacker’s guilt, inspired by all the various incidents which struck the young man as equivocal and false, by a strange instinct for the truth, and above all by his love for

Ethel. In short, it was certainly a secret sense of the help which a clear-sighted friend, in the midst of his blind partisans, might render Schumacker.{23}

XXXIII.

Is that the chief? His look alarms me; I dare not speak to him.—Maturin: *Bertram*.

ON hearing the shouts which announced the arrival of the famous hunter Kennybol, Hacket sprang forward to meet him, leaving Ordener with the two other leaders.

“Here you are at last, my dear Kennybol! Come, let me present you to your much-dreaded commander, Hans of Iceland.”

At this name, Kennybol, pale, breathless, his hair standing on end, his face bathed in perspiration, and his hands stained with blood, started back.

“Hans of Iceland!”

“Come,” said Hacket, “don’t be alarmed! He is here to help you. You must look upon him as a friend and comrade.”

Kennybol did not heed him.

“Hans of Iceland here!” he repeated.

“To be sure,” said Hacket, with ill-suppressed laughter; “are you afraid of him?”

“What!” for the third time interrupted the hunter; “do you really mean it,—is Hans of Iceland here, in this mine?{24}”

Hacket turned to the bystanders: “Has our brave Kennybol lost his wits?”

Then, addressing Kennybol: “I see that it was your dread of Hans of Iceland which made you so late.”

Kennybol raised his hands to heaven.

“By Ethelreda, the holy Norwegian saint and martyr, it was not fear of Hans of Iceland, but Hans of Iceland himself, I swear, that delayed me so long.”

These words caused a murmur of surprise to run through the crowd of miners and mountaineers surrounding the two speakers, and clouded Hacket’s face as the sight and the rescue of Ordener had but a moment before.

“What! What do you mean?” he asked, dropping his voice.

“I mean, Mr. Hacket, that but for your confounded Hans of Iceland I should have been here before the owl’s first hoot.”

“Indeed! and what did he do to you?”

“Oh, do not ask me. I only hope that my beard may turn as white as an ermine’s skin in a single day if I am ever caught again hunting a white bear, since I escaped this time with my life.”

“Did you come near being eaten by a bear?”

Kennybol shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

“A bear! a terrible foe that would be! Kennybol eaten by a bear! For what do you take me, Mr. Hacket?”

“Oh, pardon me!” said Hacket, with a smile.

“If you knew what had happened to me, good sir,{25}” interrupted the old hunter, in a low voice, “you would not persist in telling me that Hans of Iceland is here.”

Hacket again seemed embarrassed. He seized Kennybol abruptly by the arm, as if he feared lest he should approach the spot where the giant’s huge head now loomed up above those of the miners.

“My dear Kennybol,” said he, solemnly, “tell me, I entreat you, what caused your delay. You must understand that at this time anything may be of the utmost importance.”

“That is true,” said Kennybol, after a brief pause.

Then, yielding to Hacket’s repeated requests, he told him how that very morning, aided by six comrades, he had pursued a white bear into the immediate vicinity of Walderhog cave, without noticing, in the excitement of the chase, that they were so near that dreadful place; how the growls of the bear at bay had attracted a little man, a monster, or demon, who, armed with a stone axe, had rushed upon them to defend the bear. The appearance of this devil, who could be no other than Hans, the demon of Iceland, had petrified all seven of them with terror. Finally, his six companions had fallen victims to the two monsters, and he, Kennybol, only owed his safety to speedy flight, assisted by his own nimbleness, Hans of Iceland’s fatigue, and above all, by the protection of that blessed patron saint of hunters, Saint Sylvester.

“You see, Mr. Hacket,” he concluded his tale, which was still somewhat incoherent from fright, and adorned{26} with all the flowers of the mountain dialect,—“you see that if I am late you should not blame me, and that it is impossible for the demon of

Iceland, whom I left this morning with his bear wreaking their fury upon the corpses of my six poor friends on Walderhog heath, to be here now in the guise of a friend. I protest that it cannot be. I know him now, that fiend incarnate; I have seen him!"

Hacket, who had listened attentively, said gravely: "My brave friend Kennybol, nothing is impossible to Hans or to the Devil; I knew all this before."

The savage features of the old hunter from the mountains of Kiölen assumed an expression of extreme amazement and childlike credulity. "What!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," added Hacket, in whose face a more skilful observer might have read grim triumph; "I knew it all, except that you were the hero of this unfortunate adventure. Hans of Iceland told me the whole story on our way here."

"Really!" said Kennybol; and he gazed at Hacket with respect and awe.

Hacket continued with the same perfect composure: "To be sure. But now calm yourself; I will present you to this dreadful Hans of Iceland."

Kennybol uttered an exclamation of fright.

"Be calm, I say," repeated Hacket. "Consider him as your friend and leader; but be careful not to remind him in any way of what occurred this morning. Do you understand?{27}"

Resistance was useless; but it was not without a severe mental struggle that he agreed to be presented to the demon. They advanced to the group where Ordener stood with Jonas and Norbith.

"May God guard you, good Jonas, dear Norbith!" said Kennybol.

"We need his protection, Kennybol," said Jonas.

At this instant Kennybol's eye met that of Ordener, who was trying to attract his attention.

"Ah! there you are, young man," said he, going up to him eagerly and offering him his hard, wrinkled hand; "welcome! It seems that your courage met with its reward."

Ordener, who could not imagine how this mountaineer happened to understand him so well, was about to ask an explanation, when Norbith exclaimed: "Then you know this stranger, Kennybol?"

"By my patron saint, I do! I love and esteem him. He is devoted, like ourselves, to the good cause which we all serve."

And he cast another meaning look at Ordener, which the latter was on the point of answering, when Hacket, who had gone in search of his giant, whose company all the insurgents seemed to avoid, came up to our four friends, saying: “Kennybol, my valiant hunter, here is your leader, the famous Hans of Klipstadur!”

Kennybol glanced at the huge brigand with more surprise than terror, and whispered in Hacket’s ear: “Mr. Hacket, the Hans of Iceland whom I met this morning was a short man.{28}”

Hacket answered in low tones: “You forget, Kennybol; he is a demon!”

“True,” said the credulous hunter; “I suppose he has changed his shape.”

And he turned aside with a shudder to cross himself secretly.{29}

XXXIV.

The mask approaches; it is Angelo himself. The rascal knows his business well; he must be sure of his facts.—Lessing.

IN a dark grove of old oaks, whose dense leaves the pale light of dawn can scarcely penetrate, a short man approaches another man who is alone, and seems to waiting for him. The following conversation begins in low tones:—

“Your worship must excuse me for keeping you waiting; several things detained me.”

“Such as what?”

“The leader of the mountain men, Kennybol, did not reach the appointed place until midnight; and we were also disturbed by an unlooked-for witness.”

“Who?{30}”

“A fellow who thrust himself like a fool into the mine in the midst of our secret meeting. At first I took him for a spy, and would have put him to death; but he turned out to be the bearer of a safe-conduct from some gallows-bird held in great respect by our miners, and they instantly took him under their protection. When I came to consider the matter, I made up my mind that he was probably a curious traveller or a learned fool. At any rate, I have taken all necessary precautions in regard to him.”

“Is everything else going well?”

“Very well. The miners from Guldsbrandsdal and the Färöe Islands, led by young Norbith and old Jonas, with the mountain men from Kiölen, under Kennybol, are probably on the march at this moment. Four miles from Blue Star, their comrades

from Hubfallo and Sund-Moer will join them; those from Kongsberg and the iron-workers from Lake Miösen, who have already compelled the Wahlstrom garrison to retreat, as your lordship knows, will await them a few miles farther on; and finally, my dear and honored master, these combined forces will halt for the night some two miles away from Skongen, in the gorges of Black Pillar."

"But how did they receive your Hans of Iceland?"

"With perfect confidence."

"Would that I could avenge my son's death on that monster! What a pity that he should escape us!"

"My noble lord, first use Hans of Iceland's name to wreak your revenge upon Schumacker; then it will be time enough to think of vengeance against Hans himself.{31} The insurgents will march all day, and halt to-night in Black Pillar Pass, two miles from Skongen."

"What! can you venture to let so large a force advance so close to Skongen? Musdœmon, take care!"

"You are suspicious, noble Count. Your worship may send a messenger at once to Colonel Vœthaün, whose regiment is probably at Skongen now; inform him that the rebel forces will encamp to-night in Black Pillar Pass, and have no misgivings. The place seems made purposely for ambuscades."

"I understand you; but why, my dear fellow, did you muster the rebels in such numbers?"

"The greater the insurrection, sir, the greater will be Schumacker's crime and your merit. Besides, it is important that it should be crushed at a single blow."

"Very good; but why did you order them to halt so near Skongen?"

"Because it is the only spot in the mountains where all resistance is impossible. None will ever leave it alive but those whom we select to appear before the court."

"Capital! Something tells me, Musdœmon, to finish this business quickly. If all looks well in this quarter, it looks stormy in another. You know that we have been making secret search at Copenhagen for the papers which we feared had fallen into the possession of Dispolsen?"

"Well, sir?"

“Well, I have just discovered that the scheming fellow{32} had mysterious relations with that accursed astrologer, Cumbysulsum.”

“Who died recently?”

“Yes; and that the old sorcerer delivered certain papers to Schumacker’s agent before he died.”

“Damnation! He had letters of mine,—a statement of our plot!”

“*Your* plot, Musdœmon!”

“A thousand pardons, noble Count! But why did your worship put yourself in the power of such a humbug as Cumbysulsum?—the old traitor!”

“You see, Musdœmon, I am not a sceptic and unbeliever, like you. It is not without good reason, my dear fellow, that I have always put my trust in old Cumbysulsum’s magic skill.”

“I wish your worship had had as much doubt of his loyalty as you had trust in his skill. However, let us not take fright too soon, noble master. Dispolsen is dead, his papers are lost; in a few days we shall be safely rid of those whom they might benefit.”

“In any event, what charge could be brought against me?”

“Or me, protected as I am by your Grace?”

“Oh, yes, my dear fellow, of course you can count upon me; but let us bring this business to a head. I will send the messenger to the colonel. Come, my people are waiting for me behind those bushes, and we must return to Throndhjem, which the Mecklenburger must have left ere now. Continue to serve me faithfully, and in spite of all the Cumbysulsums and{33} Dispolsens upon earth, you can count on me in life and death!”

“I beg your Grace to believe—The Devil!”

Here they plunged into the thicket, among whose branches their voices gradually died away; and soon after, no sound was heard save the tread of their departing steeds.{34}

XXXV.

Beat the drums! They come, they come! They have all sworn, and all the same oath, never to return to Castile without the captive count, their lord.

They have his marble statue in a chariot, and are resolved never to turn back until they see the statue itself turn back.

And in token that the first man who retraces his steps will be regarded as a traitor, they have all raised their right hand and taken an oath.

. . . . . .

And they marched toward Arlançon as swiftly as the oxen which drag the chariot could go; they tarry no more than does the sun.

Burgos is deserted; only the women and children remain behind; and so too in the suburbs. They talk, as they go, of horses and falcons, and question whether they should free Castile from the tribute she pays Leon.

And before they enter Navarre, they meet upon the frontier....

Old Spanish Romance.

WHILE the preceding conversation was going on in one of the forests on the outskirts of Lake Miösen, the rebels, divided into three columns, left Apsyl-Corh lead-mine by the chief entrance, which opens, on a level with the ground, in a deep ravine.{35}

Ordener, who, in spite of his desire for a closer acquaintance with Kennybol, had been placed under Norbith's command, at first saw nothing but a long line of torches, whose beams, vying with the early light of dawn, were reflected back from hatchets, pitchforks, mattocks, clubs with iron heads, huge hammers, pickaxes, crowbars, and all the rude implements which could be borrowed from their daily toil, mingled with genuine weapons of warfare, such as muskets, pikes, swords, carbines, and guns, which showed that this revolt was a conspiracy. When the sun rose, and the glow of the torches was no more than smoke, he could better observe the aspect of this strange army, which advanced in disorder, with hoarse songs and fierce shouts, like a band of hungry wolves in pursuit of a dead body. It was divided into three parts. First came the mountaineers from Kiölen, under command of Kennybol, whom they all resembled in their dress of wild beasts' skins, and in their bold, savage mien. Then followed the young miners led by Norbith, and the older ones under Jonas, with their broad-brimmed hats, loose trousers, bare arms, and blackened faces, gazing at the sun in mute surprise. Above this noisy band floated a confused sea of scarlet banners, bearing various mottoes, such as, "Long live Schumacker!" "Let us free our Deliverer!" "Freedom for Miners!" "Liberty for Count Griffenfeld!" "Death to Guldenlew!" "Death to all Oppressors!" "Death to d'Ahlefeld!" The rebels seemed to regard these standards rather in the light of a burden than an ornament, and they were passed frequently from hand to hand when the color-bearers were tired, or desired to mingle the discordant notes{36} of their horns with the psalm-singing and shouts of their comrades.

The rear-guard of this strange army consisted of ten or a dozen carts drawn by reindeer and strong mules, doubtless meant to carry ammunition; and the vanguard, of the giant, escorted by Hacket, who marched alone, armed with a mace and an axe, followed at a considerable distance, with no small terror, by the men under command of Kennybol, who never took his eyes from him, as if anxious not to lose sight of his diabolical leader during the various transformations which he might be pleased to undergo.

This stream of insurgents poured down the mountainside with many confused noises, filling the pine woods with the sound of their horns. Their numbers were soon swelled by various reinforcements from Sund-Moer, Hubfallo, Kongsberg, and a troop of iron-workers from Lake Miösen, who presented a singular contrast to the rest of the rebels. They were tall, powerful men, armed with hammers and tongs, their broad leather aprons being their only shield, a huge wooden cross their only standard, as they marched soberly and rhythmically, with a regular tread more religious than military, their only war-song being Biblical psalms and canticles. They had no leader but their cross-bearer, who walked before them unarmed.

The rebel troop met not a single human being on their road. As they approached, the goat-herd drove his flocks into a cave, and the peasant forsook his village; for the inhabitant of the valley and plain is everywhere alike,—he fears the bandit's horn as much as the bowman's blast.{37}

Thus they traversed hills and forests, with here and there a small settlement, followed winding roads where traces of wild beasts were more frequent than the footprint of man, skirted lakes, crossed torrents, ravines, and marshes. Ordener recognized none of these places. Once only his eye, as he looked up, caught upon the horizon the dim, blue outline of a great sloping rock. He turned to one of his rude companions, and asked, "My friend, what is that rock to the south, on our right?"

"That is the Vulture's Neck, Oëlmœ Cliff," was the reply.

Ordener sighed heavily.{38}

XXXVI.

God keep and bless you, my daughter.—Régnier.

MONKEY, paroquets, combs, and ribbons, all were ready to receive Lieutenant Frederic. His mother had sent, at great expense, for the famous Scudéry's latest novel. By her order it had been richly bound, with silvergilt clasps, and placed, with the bottles of perfume and boxes of patches, upon the elegant toilet-table, with gilded

feet, and richly inlaid, with which she had furnished her dear son Frederic's future sitting-room. When she had thus fulfilled the careful round of petty maternal cares which had for a moment caused her to forget her hate, she remembered that she had now nothing else to do but to injure Schumacker and Ethel. General Levin's departure left them at her mercy.{39}

So many things had happened recently at Munkholm of which she could learn but little! Who was the serf, vassal, or peasant, who, if she was to credit Frederic's very ambiguous and embarrassed phrases, had won the love of the ex-chancellor's daughter? What were Baron Ordener's relations with the prisoners of Munkholm? What were the incomprehensible motives for Ordener's most peculiar absence at a time when both kingdoms were given over to preparations for his marriage to that Ulrica d'Ahlefeld whom he seemed to disdain? And lastly, what had occurred between Levin de Knud and Schumacker? The countess was lost in conjectures. She finally resolved, in order to clear up all these mysteries, to risk a descent upon Munkholm,—a step to which she was counselled both by her curiosity as a woman and her interests as an enemy.

One evening, as Ethel, alone in the donjon garden, had just written, for the sixth time, with a diamond ring, some mysterious monogram upon the dusty window in the postern gate through which her Ordener had disappeared, it opened. The young girl started. It was the first time that this gate had been opened since it closed upon him.

A tall, pale woman, dressed in white, stood before her. She gave Ethel a smile as sweet as poisoned honey, and behind her mask of quiet friendliness there lurked an expression of hatred, spite, and involuntary admiration.

Ethel looked at her in astonishment, almost fear. Except her old nurse, who had died in her arms, this was the first woman she had seen within the gloomy walls of Munkholm.{40}

"My child," gently asked the stranger, "are you the daughter of the prisoner of Munkholm?"

Ethel could not help turning away her head; she instinctively shrank from the stranger, and she felt as if there were venom in the breath which uttered such sweet tones. She answered: "I am Ethel Schumacker. My father tells me that in my cradle I was called Countess of Tönsberg and Princess of Wollin."

"Your father tells you so!" exclaimed the tall woman, with a sneer which she at once repressed. Then she added: "You have had many misfortunes!"

“Misfortune received me, at my birth, in its cruel arms,” replied the youthful captive; “my noble father says that it will never leave me while I live.”

A smile flitted across the lips of the stranger, as she rejoined in a pitying tone: “And do you never murmur against those who flung you into this cell? Do you not curse the authors of your misery?”

“No, for fear that our curse might draw down upon their heads evils like those which they make us endure.”

“And,” continued the pale woman, with unmoved face, “do you know the authors of these evils of which you complain?”

Ethel considered a moment, and said: “All that has happened to us is by the will of Heaven.”

“Does your father never speak to you of the king?”

“The king? I pray for him every morning and evening, although I do not know him.”

Ethel did not understand why the stranger bit her lip at this reply.{41}

“Does your unhappy father never, in his anger, mention his relentless foes, General Arensdorf, Bishop Spolleyson, and Chancellor d’Ahlefeld?”

“I don’t know whom you mean.”

“And do you know the name of Levin de Knud?”

The recollection of the scene which had occurred but two days before, between Schumacker and the governor of Throndhjem, was so fresh in Ethel’s mind that she could not but be struck by the name of Levin de Knud.

“Levin de Knud?” said she; “I think that he is the man for whom my father feels so much esteem, almost affection.”

“What!” cried the tall woman.

“Yes,” resumed the girl; “it was Levin de Knud whom my father defended so warmly, day before yesterday, against the governor of Throndhjem.”

These words increased her hearer’s surprise.

“Against the governor of Throndhjem! Do not trifle with me, girl. I am here in your interests. Your father took General Levin de Knud’s part against the governor of Throndhjem, you say?”

“General! I thought he was a captain. But no; you are right. My father,” added Ethel, “seemed to feel as much attachment for this General Levin de Knud as dislike for the governor of Throndhjem.”

“Here is a strange mystery indeed!” thought the tall, pale woman, whose curiosity increased momentarily. “My dear child, what happened between your father and the governor?{42}”

All these questions wearied poor Ethel, who looked fixedly at the tall woman, saying: “Am I a criminal, that you should cross-examine me thus?”

At these simple words the stranger seemed thunderstruck, as if she saw the reward of her skill slipping through her fingers. She replied, nevertheless, in a tremulous voice: “You would not speak to me so if you knew why and for whom I come.”

“What!” said Ethel; “do you come from him? Do you bring me a message from him?” And all the blood in her body rushed to her fair face; her heart throbbed in her bosom with impatience and alarm.

“From whom?” asked the stranger.

The young girl hesitated as she was about to utter the adored name. She saw a flash of wicked joy gleam in the stranger’s eye like a ray from hell. She said sadly:—

“You do not know the person whom I mean.”

An expression of disappointment again appeared upon the stranger’s apparently friendly face.

“Poor young girl!” she cried; “what can I do to help you?”

Ethel did not hear her. Her thoughts were beyond the mountains of the North, in quest of the daring traveller. Her head sank upon her breast, and her hands were unconsciously clasped.

“Does your father hope to escape from this prison?”

This question, twice repeated by the stranger, brought Ethel to herself.

“Yes,” said she, and tears sparkled on her cheek.

The stranger’s eyes flashed.{43}

“He does! Tell me how; by what means; when!”

“He hopes to escape from this prison because he hopes ere long to die.”

There is sometimes a power in the very simplicity of a gentle young spirit which outwits the artifices of a heart grown old in wickedness. This thought seemed to occur to the great lady, for her expression suddenly changed, and laying her cold hand on Ethel's arm, she said in a tone which was almost sincere: "Tell me, have you heard that your father's life is again threatened by a fresh judicial inquiry? That he is suspected of having stirred up a revolt among the miners of the North?"

The words "revolt" and "inquiry" conveyed no clear idea to Ethel's mind. She raised her great dark eyes to the stranger's face as she asked: "What do you mean?"

"That your father is conspiring against the State; that his crime is all but discovered; that this crime will be punished with death."

"Death! crime!" cried the poor girl.

"Crime and death," said the strange lady, seriously.

"My father! my noble father!" continued Ethel. "Alas! he spends his days in hearing me read the Edda and the Gospel! He conspire! What has he done to you?"

"Do not look at me so fiercely. I tell you again I am not your enemy. Your father is suspected of a grave crime; I am here to warn you of it. Perhaps, instead of such a show of dislike, I might lay claim to your gratitude."

This reproach touched Ethel.{44}

"Oh, forgive me, noble lady, forgive me! What human being have I ever seen who was not an enemy? I have doubted you. You will forgive me, will you not?"

The stranger smiled.

"What, my girl! have you never met a friend until to-day?"

A hot blush mantled Ethel's brow. She hesitated an instant.

"Yes. God knows the truth, we have found a friend, noble lady,—one only!"

"One only!" said the great lady, hastily. "His name, I implore. You do not know how important it is; it is for your father's safety. Who is this friend?"

"I do not know," said Ethel.

The stranger turned pale.

"Is it because I wish to serve you that you trifle with me? Consider that your father's life is at stake. Tell me, who is this friend of whom you speak?"

“Heaven knows, noble lady, that I know nothing of him but his name, which is Ordener.”

Ethel uttered these words with that difficulty which we all feel in pronouncing before an indifferent person the sacred name which wakes within us every emotion of love.

“Ordener! Ordener!” repeated the stranger, with singular agitation, while her hands crumpled the white embroideries of her veil. “And what is his father’s name?” she asked in a troubled voice.

“I do not know,” replied the girl. “What are his family and his father to me? This Ordener, noble lady, is the most generous of men.{45}”

Alas! the accent with which these words were spoken revealed Ethel’s secret to the sharp-sighted stranger.

She assumed an air of calm composure, and asked, without taking her eyes from the girl’s face: “Have you heard of the approaching marriage of the viceroy’s son to the daughter of the present lord chancellor, d’Ahlefeld?”

She was obliged to repeat her question before Ethel’s mind could grasp an idea which did not interest her.

“I believe I have,” was her answer.

Her calmness, and her indifferent manner, seemed to surprise the stranger.

“Well, what do you think of this marriage?”

It was impossible to note the slightest change in Ethel’s large eyes as she replied: “Nothing, truly. May their union be a happy one!”

“Counts Guldenlew and d’Ahlefeld, the fathers of the young couple, are both bitter enemies of your father.”

“May their marriage be blessed!” gently repeated Ethel.

“I have an idea,” continued the crafty stranger. “If your father’s life be really threatened, you might obtain his pardon through the viceroy’s son upon the occasion of this great marriage.”

“May the saints reward you for your kind thought for us, noble lady; but how should my petition reach the viceroy’s son?”

These words were spoken in such good faith that they drew a gesture of surprise from the stranger.

“What! do you not know him?”

“That powerful lord!” cried Ethel. “You forget that I have never been outside the walls of this fortress.{46}”

“Truly,” muttered the tall woman between her teeth. “What did that old fool of a Levin tell me? She does not know him. Still, that is impossible,” said she; then, raising her voice: “You must have seen the viceroy’s son; he has been here.”

“That may be, noble lady; of all the men who have been here, I have never seen but one,—my Ordener.”

“Your Ordener!” interrupted the stranger. She added, without seeming to notice Ethel’s blushes: “Do you know a young man with noble face, elegant figure, grave and dignified bearing? His expression is gentle, yet firm; his complexion fresh as that of a maiden; his hair chestnut.”

“Oh!” cried poor Ethel, “that is he; it is my betrothed, my adored Ordener! Where did you meet him? He told you that he loved me, did he not? He told you that he has my whole heart. Alas! a poor prisoner has nothing but her love to give. My noble friend! It was but a week ago,—I can see him still on this very spot, with his green mantle, beneath which beats so generous a heart, and that black plume, which waved so gracefully above his broad brow.”

She did not finish her sentence. The tall stranger tottered, turned pale, then red, and cried in her ears in tones of thunder: “Wretched girl, you love Ordener Guldenlew, the betrothed of Ulrica d’Ahlefeld, the son of your father’s deadly foe, the viceroy of Norway!”

Ethel fell fainting on the ground.{47}

XXXVII.

Caupolican. Walk so cautiously that the earth itself may not catch your footfall. Redouble your precautions, friends. If we arrive unheard, I will answer for the victory.

Tucapel. Night veils all; fearful darkness covers the earth. We hear no sentinel; we have seen no spies.

Ringo. Let us advance!

. . . . . .

Tucapel. What do I hear? Are we discovered?

Lope da Vega: *The Conquest of Arauco*.

“ISAY, Guldon Stayper, old fellow, the evening breeze is beginning to blow my hairy cap about my head rather vigorously.”

These words were spoken by Kennybol, as his eyes wandered for a moment from the giant who marched at the head of the insurgents, and half turned toward a mountaineer whom the accident of a disorderly progress had placed beside him.{48}

His friend shook his head and shifted his banner from one shoulder to the other, with a deep sigh of fatigue, as he answered:—

“Hum! I fancy, Captain, that in these confounded Black Pillar gorges, through which the wind rushes like a torrent let loose, we shall not be as warm to-night as if we were flames dancing on the hearth.”

“We must make such rousing fires that the old owls will be scared from their nests among the rocks in their ruined palace. I can’t endure owls. On that horrid night when I saw the fairy Ubfem she took the shape of an owl.”

“By Saint Sylvester!” interrupted Guldon Stayper, turning his head, “the angel of the storm beats his wings most furiously! Take my advice, Captain Kennybol, and set fire to all the pine-trees on the mountain. It would be a fine sight to see an army warm itself with a whole forest.”

“Heaven forbid, my dear Guldon! Think of the deer, and the gerfalcons, and the pheasants! Roast the game, if you will, but do not burn it alive.”

Old Guidon laughed: “Oh, Captain, you are the same devil of a Kennybol,—the wolf of deer, the bear of wolves, and the buffalo of bears!”

“Are we far from Black Pillar?” asked a voice from the huntsmen.

“Comrade,” replied Kennybol, “we shall enter the gorge at nightfall; we shall reach the Four Crosses directly.”

There was a brief silence, during which nothing was{49} heard but the tramp of many feet, the moaning of the wind, and the distant song of the regiment of iron-workers from Lake Miösen.

“Friend Guldon Stayper,” resumed Kennybol, when he had whistled an old hunting-song, “you have just passed a few days at Throndhjem, have you not?”

“Yes, Captain; my brother George, the fisherman, was ill, and I took his place in the boat for a short time, so that his poor family might not starve while he was ill.”

“Well, as you come from Throndhjem, did you happen to see this count, the prisoner—Schumacker—Gleffenhem—what is his name, now? I mean that man in whose behalf we have rebelled against the royal protectorate, and whose arms I suppose you have on that big red flag.”

“It is heavy enough, I can tell you!” said Guldon. “Do you mean the prisoner in Munkholm fortress,—the count, if you choose to call him so; and how do you suppose, Captain, that I should see him? I should have needed,” he added, lowering his voice, “the eyes of that demon marching in front of us, though he does not leave a smell of brimstone behind him; of that Hans of Iceland, who can see through stone walls; or the ring of Queen Mab, who passes through keyholes. There is but one man among us now, I am sure, who ever saw the count,—the prisoner to whom you refer.”

“But one? Ah! Mr. Hacket? But this Hacket is no longer with us; he left us to-day to return to—”

“I do not mean Mr. Hacket, Captain.”

“And who then?{50}”

“That young man in the green mantle, with the black plume, who burst into our midst last night.”

“Well?”

“Well!” said Guldon, drawing closer to Kennybol; “he knows the count,—this famous count, as well as I know you, Captain Kennybol.”

Kennybol looked at Guldon, winked his left eye, smacked his lips, and clapped his friend on the shoulder with that triumphant exclamation which so often escapes us when we are satisfied with our own penetration,—“I thought as much!”

“Yes, Captain,” continued Guldon Stayper, changing his flame-colored banner to the other shoulder; “I assure you that the young man in green has seen Count—I don’t know what you call him, the one for whom we are fighting—in Munkholm keep; and he seemed to think no more of walking into that prison than you or I would of shooting in a royal park.”

“And how happen you to know this, brother Guldon?”

The old mountaineer seized Kennybol by the arm, and half opening his otter-skin waistcoat with a caution which was almost suspicious, he said, “Look there!”

“By my most holy patron saint!” exclaimed Kennybol; “it glitters like diamonds!”

It was indeed a superb diamond buckle, which fastened Guldon Stayper's rough belt.

"And they are real diamonds," he replied, closing his waistcoat. "I am just as sure of it as I am that the moon is two days' journey from the earth, and that my belt is made of buffalo leather.{51}"

Kennybol's face clouded, and his expression changed from surprise to distress. He cast down his eyes, and said with savage sternness: "Guldon Stayper, of Chol-Sœ village, in the Kiölen mountains, your father, Medprath Stayper, died at the age of one hundred and two, without reproach; for it was no crime to kill one of the king's deer or elk by mistake. Guldon Stayper, fifty-seven good years have passed over your gray head, which cannot be called youth except for an owl. Guldon Stayper, old friend, I would rather for your sake that the diamonds in that buckle were grains of millet, if you did not come by them honestly,—as honestly as a royal pheasant comes by a leaden bullet."

As he pronounced this strange sermon, the mountaineer's tone was both impressive and menacing.

"As truly as Captain Kennybol is the boldest hunter in Kiölen," replied Guldon, unmoved, "and as truly as these diamonds are diamonds, they are my lawful property."

"Indeed!" said Kennybol, in accents which wavered between confidence and doubt.

"God and my patron saint know," replied Guldon, "that one evening, just as I was pointing out the Throndhjem Spladgest to some sons of our good mother Norway, who were carrying thither the body of an officer found dead on Urchtal Sands,—this was about a week ago,—a young man stepped up to my boat. 'To Munkholm!' says he to me. I was not at all anxious to obey, Captain; a free bird never likes to fly into the neighborhood of a cage. But the young gentleman had a haughty, lordly{52} manner; he was followed by a servant leading two horses; he leaped into my boat with an air of authority; I took up my oars, that is to say, my brother's oars. It was my good angel that willed me to do so. When we reached the fortress, my young passenger, after exchanging a few words with the officer on guard, flung me in payment—as God hears me, he did, Captain—this diamond buckle which I showed you, and which would have belonged to my brother George, and not to me, if at the time that the traveller—Heaven help him!—engaged me, the day's work which I was doing for George had not been done. This is the truth, Captain Kennybol."

"Very good."

Little by little the captain's features had cleared as much as their naturally hard and gloomy expression would permit, and he asked Guidon in a softened voice: "And are you sure, old fellow, that this young man is the same who is now behind us with Norbith's followers?"

"Sure! I could not mistake among a thousand faces the face of him who made my fortune; besides, it is the same cloak, the same black plume."

"I believe you, Guldon!"

"And it is clear that he went there to see the famous prisoner; for if he were not bound on some very mysterious errand, he would never have rewarded so handsomely the boatman who rowed him over and besides, now that he has joined us—"

"You are right."

"And I imagine, Captain, that this young stranger may have far greater influence with the count whom we are{53} about to set free than Mr. Hacket, who strikes me, by my soul! as only fit to mew like a wildcat."

Kennybol nodded his head expressively.

"Comrade, you have said just what I meant to say. I should be much more inclined in this whole matter to obey that young gentleman than the envoy Hacket. Saint Sylvester and Saint Olaf help me! but if the Iceland demon be our commander, I believe, friend Guldon, that we owe it far less to that magpie Hacket than to this stranger."

"Really, Captain?" inquired Guldon.

Kennybol opened his mouth to answer, when he felt a hand on his shoulder; it was Norbith.

"Kennybol, we are betrayed! Gormon Woëstrœm has just come from the South. The entire regiment of musketeers is marching against us. The Schleswig lancers are at Sparbo; three companies of Danish dragoons await the cavalry at Loevig. All along the road he saw as many green jackets as there were bushes. Let us hasten toward Skongen; let us not pause until we reach that point. There, at least, we can defend ourselves. One thing more; Gormon thinks that he saw the gleam of muskets among the briers as he came through the defiles of Black Pillar."

The young leader was pale and agitated; but his face and voice still showed courage and resolution.

“Impossible!” cried Kennybol.

“It is certain! certain!” said Norbith.

“But Mr. Hacket—”

“Is a traitor or a coward. Depend on what I say, friend Kennybol. Where is this Hacket?{54}”

At this moment old Jonas approached the two chiefs. By the deep discouragement stamped upon his features it was easily seen that he had learned the fatal news.

The eyes of the two elder men, Jonas and Kennybol, met, and they shook their heads with one accord.

“Well, Jonas! Well, Kennybol!” said Norbith.

But the aged leader of the Färöe miners slowly passed his hand across his wrinkled brow, and in a low voice answered the appealing look of the aged leader of the Kiölen mountaineers: “Yes, it is but too true; it is but too certain. Gormon Woëstrœm saw them.”

“If it be so,” said Kennybol, “what is to be done?”

“What is to be done?” answered Jonas.

“I consider, friend Jonas, that we should do well to halt.”

“And better still, brother Kennybol, to retreat.”

“Halt! retreat!” exclaimed Norbith; “we must push forward.”

The two elders looked at the young man in cold surprise.

“Push forward!” said Kennybol; “and how about the Munkholm musketeers?”

“And the Schleswig lancers?” added Jonas.

“And the Danish dragoons?” continued Kennybol.

Norbith stamped his foot.

“And the royal protectorate; and my mother dying of cold and hunger?”

“The devil, the royal protectorate!” said the miner Jonas, with a shudder.

“Never mind!” said Kennybol.{55}

Jonas took Kennybol by the hand, saying: “Old fellow, you have not the honor to be a ward of our glorious sovereign, Christian IV. May the blessed king Olaf, in heaven, deliver us from the protectorate!”

“You had better trust to your sword for that benefit!” said Norbith, in a fierce tone.

“Bold words are easy to a young man, friend Norbith,” answered Kennybol; “but consider that if we advance, all these green jackets—”

“I think that it would be useless for us to return to our mountains, like foxes running from wolves, for our names and our revolt are known; and if we needs must die, I prefer a musket-ball to the hangman’s rope.”

Jonas nodded assent.

“The devil! the protectorate for our brothers, the gallows for us! Norbith may be right, after all.”

“Give me your hand, good Norbith,” said Kennybol; “there is danger in either course. We may as well march straight to the edge of the precipice as fall over it backwards.”

“Come on! come on!” cried old Jonas, striking his sword-hilt.

Norbith grasped them by the hand.

“Listen, brothers! Be bold, like me; I will be prudent, like you. Let us not pause until we reach Skongen; the garrison is weak, and we will overwhelm it. Let us pass, since we must, through the defiles of Black Pillar, but in utter silence. We must traverse them, even if they be guarded by the enemy.”

“I do not think that the musketeers have come so far{56} as Ordals bridge, beyond Skongen; but it matters not. Silence!”

“Silence! so be it!” repeated Kennybol.

“Now, Jonas,” said Norbith, “let us return to our posts. To-morrow we may be at Throndhjem in spite of musketeers, lancers, dragoons, and all the green jerkins of the South.”

The three chiefs parted. Soon the watchword, “Silence!” passed from rank to rank, and the insurgents, a moment before so tumultuous, looked, in those waste places darkened by approaching night, like a band of mute ghosts roaming noiselessly through the winding paths of a cemetery.

But their road became narrower every moment, and seemed by degrees to dive between two walls of rock which grew steeper and steeper. As the red moon rose among a mass of cold clouds hovering about her with weird inconstancy, Kennybol turned to Guldon Stayper, saying, “We are about to enter Black Pillar Pass. Silence!”

In fact, they already heard the roar of the torrent which follows every turn of the road between the two mountains, and they saw, to the south, the huge granite pyramid known as the Black Pillar, outlined against the gray sky and the surrounding snow-capped mountains; while the western horizon, veiled in mists, was bounded by the extreme verge of Sparbo forest, and by huge piles of rocks, terraced as if a stairway for giants.

The rebels, forced to stretch their columns over this crooked road compressed between two mountains, con{57}tinued their march. They penetrated those dark valleys without lighting a torch, without uttering a sound. The very sound of their footsteps was unheard amid the deafening crash of waterfalls and the roar of a furious blast which bowed the Druidical woods, and drove the clouds in eddying whirls about tall peaks clad in snow and ice. Lost in the dark depths of the gorge, the light of the moon, which was veiled now and again, did not reach the heads of their pikes, and the white eagles flying overhead did not guess that so vast a multitude of men was troubling their solitude.

Once old Guldon Stayper touched Kennybol’s shoulder with the butt-end of his carbine, saying, “Captain, Captain, something glimmers behind that tuft of holly and broom.”

“So it does,” replied the mountain chief; “it is the water of the stream reflecting the clouds.” And they passed on.

Again Guldon grasped his leader quickly by the arm.

“Look!” he said; “are not those muskets, shining yonder in the shadow of that rock?”

Kennybol shook his head; then, after looking attentively, he said, “Never fear, brother Guldon; it is a moonbeam falling on an icy peak.”

No further cause for alarm appeared, and the various bands, as they marched quietly through the winding gorge, insensibly forgot all the danger of their position.

After two hours of often painful progress, over the treetrunks and granite bowlders which blocked the road, the vanguard entered the mountainous group of pine-trees at{58} the end of Black Pillar Pass, overhung by high, black, moss-grown cliffs.

Guldon Stayper approached Kennybol, declaring that he was delighted that they were at last almost out of this cursed cut-throat place, and that they must render thanks to Saint Sylvester that the Black Pillar had not been fatal to them.

Kennybol laughed, swearing that he had never shared such old-womanish fears; for with most men, when danger is over it ceases to exist, and they try to prove by their incredulity the courage which they perhaps failed to display before.

At this moment two small round lights, like two live coals, moving in the thick underwood, attracted his attention.

“By my soul’s salvation!” he whispered, pulling Guldon’s arm, “see; those two blazing eyes must surely belong to the fiercest wildcat that ever mewed in a thicket.”

“You are right,” replied old Stayper; “and if he were not marching in front of us, I should rather think that they were the wicked eyes of the demon of Ice—”

“Hush!” cried Kennybol. Then, seizing his carbine, he added, “Truly, it shall not be said that such fine game passed before Kennybol in vain.”

The shot was fired before Guldon Stayper, who threw himself upon the rash hunter, could prevent it. It was not the shrill cry of a wildcat that answered the discharge of the gun; it was the fearful howl of a tiger, followed by a burst of human laughter more frightful still.{59}

No one heard the report as its dying echoes were prolonged from rock to rock; for the flash of the powder had no sooner lighted up the darkness, the fatal crack of the gun had no sooner burst upon the silence, than a thousand terrible voices rang out unexpectedly from mountain, valley, and forest; a shout of “Long live the king!” loud as the rolling thunder, swept over the heads of the rebels, close beside them, behind and before them, and the murderous light of a dreadful volley of musketry, bursting from every hand, and striking them down, at the same time disclosed, amid red clouds of smoke, a battalion behind every rock, and a soldier behind every tree.{60}

XXXVIII.

To arms! to arms! ye captains!
The Prisoner of Ochali.

WE must now ask the reader to retrace with us the day which has just passed, and to return to Skongen, where, while the insurgents were leaving Apsyl-Corh lead-mine, the regiment of musketeers, which we saw on the march in an earlier chapter of this very truthful tale, had just arrived.

After giving a few orders in regard to billeting the soldiers under his command, Baron Vœthaün, colonel of the musketeers, was about to enter the house assigned to him, near the city gate, when a heavy hand was placed familiarly upon his shoulder. He turned and saw a short man, whose face was almost wholly hidden by a broad-brimmed straw hat. He had a bushy red beard, and was closely{61} wrapped in the folds of a gray serge cloak, which, by the tattered cowl still hanging from it, seemed once to have been a hermit's gown. His hands were covered with thick gloves.

"Well, my good man," asked the colonel, sharply, "what the deuce do you want?"

"Colonel of the Munkholm musketeers," replied the fellow, with an odd look, "follow me for a moment; I have news for you."

At this singular request, the baron paused for a moment in silent surprise.

"Important news, Colonel!" repeated the man with the thick gloves.

This persistence decided Baron Vœthaün. At such a crisis, and with such a mission as his, no information was to be despised. "So be it," said he.

The little man preceded him, and as soon as they were outside the town, he stopped. "Colonel, would you really like to destroy all the insurgents at a single blow?"

The colonel laughed, saying, "Why, that would not be a bad way to open the campaign."

"Very well! Then station your men in ambush this very day, in Black Pillar Pass, two miles distant from the town; the rebels are to encamp there to-night. When you see their first fire blaze, fall upon them with your troops. Victory will be easy."

"Excellent advice, my good man, and I thank you for it; but how did you learn all this?"

"If you knew me, Colonel, you would rather ask me how I could fail to know it.{62}"

"Who are you, then?"

The man stamped his foot. "I did not come here to answer such questions."

"Fear nothing. Whoever you may be, the service which you have done us must be your safeguard. Perhaps you were one of the rebels?"

"I refused to join them."

"Then why conceal your name, if you are a loyal subject of the king?"

"What is that to you?"

The colonel made another attempt to gain a little information as to this singular giver of advice. “Tell me, is it true that the insurgents are under command of the famous Hans of Iceland?”

“Hans of Iceland!” repeated the little man, with peculiar emphasis.

The baron repeated his question. A burst of laughter, which might have passed for the roar of a wild beast, was the only answer which he could obtain. He ventured a few more questions as to the number and the leaders of the miners; the little man silenced him.

“Colonel of the Munkholm musketeers, I have told you all that I have to tell. Lie in wait to-day in Black Pillar Pass with your entire regiment, and you may destroy the whole rebel force.”

“You will not tell me who you are; you thus prevent the king from proving his gratitude; but it is only right that I should reward you for the service which you have done me.”

The colonel threw his purse at the small man’s feet.{63}

“Keep your gold, Colonel,” said he; “I do not need it. And,” he added, pointing to a large bag which hung from his rope girdle, “if you wish pay for killing these men, I have money enough, Colonel, to give you for their blood.”

Before the colonel could recover from the surprise caused by this mysterious being’s inexplicable words, he had vanished.

Baron Vœthaün slowly retraced his steps, wondering whether he should place any faith in the fellow’s news. As he entered his quarters, he was handed a letter, sealed with the lord chancellor’s arms. It contained a message from Count d’Ahlefeld, which the colonel found, with amazement that may be readily imagined, consisted of the same piece of news and the same advice just given him outside the city gate by the incomprehensible character with the straw hat and the thick gloves.{64}

XXXIX.

All must perish!
The sword cleaveth the helmet;
The strong armor is pierced by the lance;
Fire devoureth the dwelling of princes;
Engines break down the fences of the battle.
All must perish!
The race of Hengist is gone—

The name of Horsa is no more!
Shrink not then from your doom, sons of the sword!
Let your blades drink blood like wine;
Feast ye in the banquet of slaughter,
By the light of the blazing halls!
Strong be your swords while your blood is warm,
And spare neither for pity nor fear,
For vengeance hath but an hour;
Strong hate itself shall expire!
I also must perish!
Walter Scott: *Ivanhoe*.

WE will not try to describe the fearful confusion which broke the already straggling ranks of the rebels, when the fatal defile suddenly revealed to them all{65} its steep and bristling peaks, all its caverns peopled with unlooked-for foes. It would be hard to say whether the prolonged shout, made up of a thousand shrieks, which rose from the columns of men thus unexpectedly mowed down, was a yell of despair, of terror, or of rage. The dreadful fire vomited against them from every side by the now unmasked platoons of the royal troops, grew hotter every moment; and before another shot from their lines followed Kennybol's unfortunate volley, they were wrapped in a stifling cloud of burning smoke, through which death flew blindly, where each man, shut off from his friends, could but dimly distinguish the musketeers, lancers, and dragoons, moving vaguely among the cliffs and upon the edge of the thickets, like demons in a red-hot furnace.

The insurgents, thus scattered over a distance of a mile, upon a narrow, winding road, bordered on one side by a deep torrent, on the other by a rocky wall, which made it impossible for them to turn and fall back, were like a serpent destroyed by a blow on the back, when he has unwound all his spirals, and, though cut to pieces, still tries to turn and coil, striving to unite his separate fragments.

When their first surprise was past, a common despair seemed to animate all these men, naturally fierce and intrepid. Frantic with rage to be thus overwhelmed without the possibility of defence, the rebels uttered a simultaneous shout,—a shout which in an instant drowned the clamor of their triumphant foes; and when the latter saw these men, without leaders, in dire disorder, almost destitute of weapons, climbing perpendicular cliffs, under{66} a terrible fire, clinging with tooth and nail to the bushes growing on the verge of the precipice, brandishing hammers and pitchforks, the well-armed troops, well-drilled, securely posted as they were, although they had not yet lost a single man, could not resist a moment of involuntary panic.

Several times these barbarians clambered over a bridge of dead bodies, or upon the shoulders of their comrades planted against the rock like a living ladder, to the heights held by their assailants; but they had scarcely cried, “Liberty!” had scarcely lifted their hatchets or their knotted clubs,—they had scarcely showed their blackened faces, foaming with convulsive rage, ere they were hurled into the abyss, dragging with them such of their rash companions as they encountered in their fall, hanging to some bush or hugging some cliff.

The efforts of these unfortunates to fly and to defend themselves were fruitless. Every outlet was guarded; every accessible point swarmed with soldiers. The greater part of the luckless rebels bit the dust, perishing when they had shattered scythe or cutlass upon some granite fragment; some, folding their arms, their eyes fixed upon the ground, sat by the roadside, silently waiting for a ball to hurl them into the torrent below; those whom Hacket’s forethought had provided with wretched muskets, fired a few chance shots at the summit of the cliffs and the mouth of the caves, from which a ceaseless rain of shot fell upon their heads. A tremendous uproar, in which the furious shouts of the rebel leaders and the quiet commands of the king’s officers were plainly{67} distinguishable, was mingled with the intermittent and frequent din of musketry, while a bloody vapor rose and floated above the scene of carnage, veiling the face of the mountains in tremulous mists; and the stream, white with foam, flowed like an enemy between the two bodies of hostile men, bearing away upon its bosom its prey of corpses.

In the earlier stage of the action, or rather of the slaughter, the Kiölen mountaineers, under the brave and reckless Kennybol, were the greatest sufferers. It will be remembered that they formed the advance-guard of the rebel army, and that they had entered the pine wood at the head of the pass. The ill-fated Kennybol had no sooner fired his gun, than the forest, peopled as by magic with hostile sharpshooters, surrounded them with a ring of fire; while from a level height, commanded by a number of huge bowlders, an entire battalion of the Munkholm regiment, formed in a hollow square, battered them unceasingly with a fearful musketry. In this horrible emergency, Kennybol, distracted and aghast, gazed at the mysterious giant, his only hope of safety lying in some superhuman power such as that of Hans of Iceland; but, alas! the awful demon did not suddenly unfold broad wings and soar above the combatants, spitting forth fire and brimstone upon the musketeers; he did not grow and grow until he reached the clouds, and overthrow a mountain upon the foe, or stamp upon the earth and open a yawning gulf to swallow up the ambushed army. The dreadful Hans of Iceland shrank like Kennybol from the first volley of shot, and approaching him, with troubled{68} countenance asked for a carbine, because, he

said, in a very commonplace tone, at such a time his axe was quite as useless as any old woman's spindle.

Kennybol, amazed, but still credulous, offered his own musket to the giant with a terror which almost made him forget his fear of the balls showering about him. Still expecting a miracle, he looked to see his fatal weapon become as big as a cannon in the hands of Hans of Iceland, or to see it change into a winged dragon darting fire from eyes, mouth, and nostrils. Nothing of the sort occurred, and the poor hunter's astonishment reached its climax when he saw the demon load the gun with ordinary powder and shot, just as he himself might have done, take aim like himself, and fire, though with far less skill than he would have shown. He stared at him in stupid surprise, as this purely mechanical act was repeated again and again; and convinced at last that all hope of a miracle must be abandoned, he turned his thoughts to rescuing his companions and himself from their evil predicament by some human means. Already his poor old friend Guldon Stayper lay beside him, riddled with bullets; already his followers, terrified and unable to escape, surrounded on every hand, huddled together without a thought of defence, uttering distressing cries. Kennybol saw what an easy target this mass of men afforded the enemy's guns, each discharge destroying a score of the insurgents. He ordered his unfortunate companions to scatter, to take refuge in the bushes along the road,—much thicker and larger at this point than anywhere else in Black Pillar Pass,—to hide in the underbrush, and to{69} reply as best they could to the more and more murderous fire from the sharpshooters and the Munkholm battalion. The mountaineers, for the most part well armed, being all hunters, carried out their leader's order with a readiness which they might not have displayed at a less critical moment; for in the face of danger men usually lose their head, and obey willingly any one who has presence of mind and self-possession to act for all.

Still, this wise measure was far from insuring victory, or even safety. More mountaineers lay stretched upon the ground than still lived, and in spite of the example and encouragement offered them by their leader and the giant, several of them, leaning on their useless guns or prostrate with the wounded, obstinately persisted in waiting to be killed without taking the trouble to kill others in return. It may seem amazing that these men, in the habit of exposing their life every day in their expeditions over the glaciers in pursuit of wild beasts, should lose heart so soon; but let no one forget that in vulgar hearts courage is purely local. A man may laugh at shot and shell, and shiver in the dark or on the edge of a precipice; a man may face fierce animals daily, leap across fearful abysses, and yet run from a volley of artillery.

Fearlessness is often only a habit; and one who has ceased to fear death under certain forms, dreads it none the less.

Kennybol, surrounded by heaps of dying friends, began himself to despair, although as yet he had received only a slight scratch on his left arm, and the diabolical giant still kept up his fire with the most comforting composure. All at once he saw an extraordinary confusion in{70} the fatal battalion posted on the heights, which could not be caused by the slight damage inflicted by the very feeble resistance of his followers. He heard fearful shrieks of agony, the curses of the dying, exclamations of terror, rise from the victors.

Soon their fire slackened, the smoke cleared away, and he distinctly saw huge masses of granite falling upon the Munkholm musketeers from the top of the high cliff overlooking the level height upon which they were stationed. These bowlders succeeded one another with awful rapidity; they crashed one upon the other, and rebounded among the soldiers, who breaking their lines rushed in dire disorder down the hill, and fled in every direction.

At this unexpected aid, Kennybol turned; but the giant was still there! The mountaineer was dumfounded; for he supposed that Hans of Iceland had at last found his wings and taken his place upon the cliff, from which he overwhelmed the enemy. He looked up to the spot whence those fearful masses fell, and saw nothing. He could therefore only suppose that a party of rebels had succeeded in reaching this dangerous position, although he saw no glitter of weapons, and heard no shouts of triumph.

However, the fire from the plateau had wholly ceased; the trees hid the remnant of the royal troops, who were probably rallying their forces at the foot of the hill. The musketry from the sharpshooters also became less frequent. Kennybol, like a skilful leader, took advantage of this unexpected interval; he encouraged his men, and showed them, by the sombre light which reddened the scene of{71} slaughter, the pile of corpses heaped upon the height, and the bowlders which still fell at intervals.

Then the mountaineers in their turn answered the enemy's groans with shouts of victory. They formed in line, and although still harassed by sharpshooters scattered among the bushes, they resolved, filled with fresh courage, to force their way out of this ill-omened defile.

The column thus formed was about to move; Kennybol had already given the signal with his horn, amid loud cries of "Liberty! liberty! No more protectorate!" when the notes of trumpet and drum sounding a charge were heard directly in front of them.

Then the rest of the battalion from the height, strengthened by reinforcements of fresh troops, appeared within gunshot at a turn in the road, displaying a bristling line of pikes and bayonets upheld by rank upon rank as far as the eye could reach. Arriving thus unexpectedly in sight of Kennybol's division, the troops halted, and a man, who seemed to be the commanding officer, stepped forward, waving a white flag and escorted by a trumpeter.

The unforeseen appearance of this troop did not dismay Kennybol. In time of danger there is a point where surprise and fear become impossible.

At the first sound of trumpet and drum the old fox of Kiölen halted his men. As the royal troops drew up before him in line of battle, he ordered every gun to be loaded, and formed his mountaineers in double ranks, so that they might not offer so broad a mark for the enemy's fire. He placed himself at the head, the giant at his side,{72} as in the heat of action, for he began to feel quite familiar with him, and observed that his eyes did not flame quite so brightly as a smithy's forge, and that his pretended claws were by no means as unlike ordinary human fingernails as was claimed for them.

When the officer in command of the musketeers stepped forward as if to surrender, and the sharpshooters ceased firing, although their loud shouts, ringing out on every hand, declared them still ambushed in the forests, he suspended his preparations for defence.

Meantime, the officer with the white flag had reached the centre of the space between the two hostile columns; here he paused, and the trumpeter accompanying him blew three loud blasts. The officer then cried in a loud voice, distinctly heard by the mountaineers, in spite of the ever increasing tumult of the battle raging behind them in the mountain gorges: "In the king's name! The king graciously pardons all those rebels who throw down their arms and surrender their leaders to his Majesty's supreme justice!"

The bearer of the flag of truce had scarcely pronounced those words, when a shot was fired from a neighboring thicket. The officer staggered, took a few steps forward, raising his flag above his head, and fell, exclaiming: "Treason!"

No one knew whose hand had fired the fatal shot.

"Treason! Cowardly treason!" repeated the royal troops, with a thrill of indignation.

And a fearful volley of musketry overwhelmed the mountaineers.{73}

"Treason!" replied the mountaineers in their turn, made furious as they saw their brothers fall.

And a general discharge answered the unexpected attack from the royal troops.

“At them, comrades! Death to those vile cowards! Death!” cried the officers of the musketeers.

And both parties rushed forward with drawn swords, the two contending columns meeting directly over the body of the unfortunate officer, with a fearful din of arms.

The broken ranks were soon inextricably confounded. Rebel chiefs, king’s officers, soldiers, mountaineers, all pell-mell ran their heads together, seized one another, grappled like two bands of famished tigers meeting in the desert. Their long pikes, bayonets, and partisans were now useless; swords and hatchets alone gleamed above their heads, and many of the combatants, in their hand-to-hand struggle, could use no other weapon than their dagger or their teeth.

The same rage and fury inspired both mountaineers and musketeers; the common cry of “Treason! Vengeance!” sprang from every mouth. The fray had reached a point when every heart was full of brutal ferocity, when men walked with utter indifference over heaps of wounded and dead, amid which the dying revive only to make one last attack on him who tramples them under foot.

At this moment a short man, whom several combatants, amid the smoke and streaming blood, took for a wild beast, in his dress of skins, flung himself into the thick of the carnage, with awful laughter and yells of joy.{74} None knew whence he came, nor upon which side he fought; for his stone axe did not choose its victims, but smote alike the skull of a rebel and the head of a musketeer. He seemed, however, to prefer slaying the Munkholm troops. All gave way before him; he rushed through the fray like a disembodied spirit; and his bloody axe whirled about him without a pause, scattering fragments of flesh, lacerated limbs, and shattered bones on every side.

He shrieked “Vengeance!” as did all the rest, and uttered strange words, the name of “Gill” recurring frequently. This fearful stranger seemed to regard the slaughter as a feast.

A mountaineer upon whom his murderous glance fell threw himself at the feet of the giant in whom Kennybol had placed such vain trust, crying: “Hans of Iceland, save me!”

“Hans of Iceland!” repeated the little man.

He approached the giant.

“Are you Hans of Iceland?” he asked.

The giant, by way of answer, raised his axe. The small man sprang back, and the blade, as it fell, was buried in the skull of the wretch who had implored his aid.

The unknown laughed aloud.

“Ho! ho! by Ingulf! I thought Hans of Iceland was more skilful.”

“It is thus that Hans of Iceland saves those who pray to him for help!” said the giant.

“You are right.”

The two dreadful champions attacked each other madly.{75} Stone axe and steel axe met; they clashed so fiercely that both blades flew in fragments, with a myriad sparks.

Quicker than thought, the little man, finding himself disarmed, seized a heavy wooden club, dropped by some dying man, and evading the giant, who stooped to grasp him in his arms, dealt a furious blow with both hands on the broad brow of his colossal antagonist.

The giant uttered a stifled shriek, and fell. The little man trampled him under foot in triumph, foaming with joy, and exclaiming, “You bore a name too heavy for you!” and brandishing his victorious mace, he rushed in search of fresh victims.

The giant was not dead. The force of the blow had stunned him, and he dropped senseless, but soon opened his eyes, and gave faint signs of returning life. A musketeer, seeing him through the uproar, threw himself upon him, shouting, “Hans of Iceland is taken! Victory!”

“Hans of Iceland is taken!” repeated every voice, whether in tones of triumph or distress.

The little man had vanished.

For some time the mountaineers had realized that they must perforce submit to superior numbers; for the Munkholm musketeers had been joined by the sharpshooters from the forest, and by detachments of lancers and foot dragoons, who poured in from deep gorges, where the surrender of many of the rebel leaders had put a stop to slaughter. Brave Kennybol, wounded early in the fight, was made a prisoner. Hans of Iceland’s capture deprived the mountaineers of such courage as they still possessed, and they threw down their arms.{76}

When the first beams of the rising sun gilded the sharp peaks of lofty glaciers still half submerged in darkness, mournful peace and fearful silence reigned in Black Pillar Pass, broken only by feeble moans borne away by the chill breeze.

Black clouds of crows flocked to those fatal gorges from every quarter of the horizon; and a few poor goat-herds, who passed the cliffs at twilight, hastened home in terror, declaring that they had seen an animal with the face of a man in Black Pillar Pass, seated on a heap of slain, drinking their blood.{77}

XL.

Let him who will, burn beneath these smouldering fires.—Brantome.

“OPEN the window, daughter; those panes are very dirty, and I would fain see the day.”

“See the day, father! It will soon be night.”

“The sun still lies on the hills along the fjord. I long to breathe the free air through my prison bars. The sky is so clear!”

“Father, a storm is at hand.”

“A storm, Ethel! Where do you see it?”

“It is because the sky is clear, father, that I foresee a storm.”

The old man looked at his daughter in surprise.

“Had I reasoned thus in my youth, I should not be here.” Then he added in a firmer tone: “What you say is correct, but it is not a common inference for one of your age. I do not understand why your youthful reasoning should be so like my aged experience.”

Ethel’s eyes fell, as if she were troubled by this serious and simple remark. She clasped her hands sadly, and a deep sigh heaved her breast.

“Daughter,” said the aged prisoner, “for some days you have looked pale, as if life had never warmed the blood in{78} your veins. For several mornings you have approached me with red and swollen lids, with eyes that have wept and watched. I have passed several days in silence, Ethel, with no effort on your part to rouse me from my gloomy meditations on the past. You sit beside me more melancholy even than myself; and yet you are not, like your father, weighed down by the burden of a whole lifetime of empty inaction. Morning clouds vanish quickly. You are at that period of existence when you can choose in dreams a future independent of the present, be it what it may. What troubles you, my daughter? Thanks to your constant captivity, you are sheltered from all sudden calamity. What error have you committed? I cannot think that you are grieving for me; you must by this time be accustomed to my incurable misfortunes. Hope, to be sure, can no longer be the subject of my discourse; but that is no reason why I should read despair in your eyes.”

As he spoke these words, the prisoner's stern voice melted with paternal love. Ethel stood silently before him. All at once she turned away with an almost convulsive motion, fell upon her knees on the stone floor, and hid her face in her hands, as if to stifle the tears and sobs which burst from her.

Too much woe filled full the wretched girl's heart. What had she done to that fatal stranger, that she should reveal to her the secret that was eating away her very life? Alas! since she had known her Ordener's true name, the poor child had not closed her eyes, nor had her soul known rest. Night brought her no alleviation, save that then she could weep freely and unseen. All was over! He was not hers,{79} he who was hers by all her memories, by all her pangs, by all her prayers, he whose wife she had held herself to be upon the faith of her dreams. For the evening when Ordener had clasped her so tenderly in his arms was no more than a dream to her now. And in truth that sweet dream had been repeated nightly in her sleep. Was it a guilty love which she still cherished for that absent friend, struggle against it as she might? Her Ordener was betrothed to another! And who can tell what that virginal heart endured when the strange and unknown sentiment of jealousy found entrance there like a poisonous viper? When she tossed for long sleepless hours upon her fevered bed, picturing her Ordener, perhaps even then, in the arms of another, fairer, richer, nobler than herself? For, thought she, I was mad indeed to suppose that he would brave death for me. Ordener is the son of a viceroy, of a great lord, and I am nothing but a poor prisoner, nothing but the daughter of a proscribed and exiled man. He has left me, for he is free; and left me, no doubt, to wed his lovely betrothed,—the daughter of a chancellor, a minister, a haughty count! Has my Ordener deceived me, then? Oh, God! who would have thought that such a voice was capable of deceit?

And the wretched Ethel wept and wept again, and saw her Ordener before her, the man whom she had made the unwitting divinity of her whole being, that Ordener adorned with all the splendor of his rank, advancing to the altar amid festal preparations, and gazing upon her rival with the smile that had once been her delight.

However, in spite of her unspeakable agony, she never{80} for an instant forgot her filial affection. The weak girl made the most heroic efforts to conceal her distress from her unfortunate father; for there is nothing more painful than to repress all outward signs of grief, and tears unshed are far more bitter than those that flow. Several days had passed before the silent old man observed the change in his Ethel, and at his affectionate questions her long-repressed grief had at last burst forth.

For some time he watched her emotion with a bitter smile and a shake of the head; but at last he said: "Ethel, you do not live among men; why do you weep?"

He had scarcely finished these words, when the sweet and noble girl rose. By a great effort she checked her tears, and dried her eyes with her scarf, saying: “Father, forgive me; it was a momentary weakness.” And she looked at him with an attempt to smile.

She went to the back of the room, found the Edda, seated herself by her taciturn father, and opened the book at random; then, mastering her voice, she began to read. But her useless task was unheeded by her and by the old man, who waved his hand.

“Enough, enough, my daughter!”

She closed her book.

“Ethel,” added Schumacker, “do you ever think of Ordener?”

The young girl started in confusion.

“Yes,” he continued, “of that Ordener who went—”

“Father,” interrupted Ethel, “why should we trouble ourselves about him? I think as you do,—that he left us, never to return.{81}”

“Never to return, my daughter! I cannot have said such a thing. On the contrary, I have a strange presentiment that he will come back.”

“That was not your opinion, father, when you spoke so distrustingly of the young man.”

“Did I speak distrustfully of him?”

“Yes, father, and I agree with you; I think that he deceived us.”

“That he deceived us, daughter! If I judged him thus, I acted like most men who condemn without proof. I have received nothing but professions of devotion from this Ordener.”

“And how do you know, father, that those cordial words did not hide treacherous thoughts?”

“Usually men disregard misfortune and disgrace. If this Ordener were not attached to me, he would not have visited my prison without a purpose.”

“Are you sure,” replied Ethel, feebly, “that he had no purpose in coming here?”

“What could it be?” eagerly asked the old man.

Ethel was silent.

It was too great an effort for her to continue to accuse her beloved Ordener, whom she had formerly defended against her father.

“I am no longer Count Griffenfeld,” he resumed. “I am no longer lord chancellor of Denmark and Norway, the favored dispenser of royal bounty, the all-powerful minister. I am a miserable prisoner of State, a proscribed man, to be shunned like one stricken with the plague. It shows courage even to mention my name without{82} execration to the men whom I overwhelmed with honors and wealth; it shows devotion for a man to cross the threshold of this dungeon unless he be a jailer or an executioner; it shows heroism, my girl, for a man to cross it and call himself my friend. No; I will not be ungrateful, like the rest of humanity. That young man merits my gratitude, were it only for letting me see a kindly face and hear a consoling voice.”

Ethel listened in agony to these words, which would have charmed her a few days earlier, when this Ordener was still cherished as her Ordener. The old man, after a brief pause, resumed in a solemn tone: “Listen to me, my daughter; for what I have to say to you is serious. I feel that I am fading slowly; my life is ebbing. Yes, daughter, my end is at hand.”

Ethel interrupted him with a stifled groan.

“Oh God, father, say not so! For mercy’s sake, spare your poor daughter! Alas! would you forsake me? What would become of me, alone in the world, if I were deprived of your protection?”

“The protection of a proscribed man!” said her father, shaking his head. “However, that is the very thing of which I have been thinking. Yes, your future happiness occupies me even more than my past misfortunes; hear me, therefore, and do not interrupt me again. This Ordener does not deserve that you should judge him so severely, my daughter, and I had not hitherto thought that you felt such dislike to him. His appearance is frank and noble, which proves nothing, truly; but I must say that he does not strike me as without merit,{83} although it is enough that he has a human soul, for it to contain the seeds of every vice and every crime. There is no flame without smoke.”

The old man again paused, and fixing his eyes upon his daughter, added: “Warned from within of approaching death, I have pondered much, Ethel; and if he return, as I hope he may, I shall make him your protector and husband.”

Ethel trembled and turned pale; at the very moment when her dream of happiness had fled forever, her father strove to realize it. The bitter reflection, “I might have been

happy!" revived all the violence of her despair. For some moments she was unable to speak, lest the burning tears which filled her eyes should flow afresh.

Her father waited for her answer.

"What!" she said at last in a faint voice, "would you have chosen him for my husband, father, without knowing his birth, his family, his name?"

"I not only chose him, my daughter, I choose him still."

The old man's tone was almost imperious. Ethel sighed.

"I choose him for you, I say; and what is his birth to me? I do not care to know his family, since I know him. Think of it; he is the only anchor of salvation left to you. Fortunately, I believe that he does not feel the same aversion for you which you show for him."

The poor girl raised her eyes to heaven.

"You hear me, Ethel! I repeat, what is his birth to me? He is doubtless of obscure rank, for those born in palaces are not taught to frequent prisons. Do not show{84} such proud regret, my daughter; do not forget that Ethel Schumacker is no longer Princess of Wollin and Countess of Tönsberg. You have fallen lower than the point from which your father rose by his own efforts. Consider yourself happy if this man accept your hand, be his family what it may. If he be of humble birth, so much the better, my daughter; at least your days will be sheltered from the storms which have tormented your father. Far from the envy and hatred of men, under some unknown name, you will lead a modest existence, very different from mine, for its end will be better than its beginning."

Ethel fell on her knees.

"Oh, father, have mercy!"

He opened his arms to her in amazement.

"What do you mean, my daughter?"

"In Heaven's name, do not describe a happiness which is not for me!"

"Ethel," sternly answered the old man, "do not risk your whole life. I refused the hand of a princess of the blood royal, a princess of Holstein Augustenburg,—do you hear that?—and my pride was cruelly punished. You despise an obscure but loyal man; tremble lest yours be as sadly chastised."

“Would to Heaven,” sighed Ethel, “that he were an obscure and loyal man!”

The old man rose, and paced the room in agitation. “My daughter,” said he, “your poor father implores and commands you. Do not let me die uncertain as to your future; promise me that you will accept this stranger as your husband.{85}”

“I will obey you always, father; but do not hope that he will return.”

“I have weighed the probabilities, and I think from the tone in which Ordener uttered your name—”

“That he loves me!” bitterly interrupted Ethel. “Oh, no; do not believe it.”

The father answered coldly: “I do not know whether, to use your girlish expression, he loves you; but I know that he will return.”

“Give up that idea, father; besides, you would not wish him for your son-in-law if you knew who he is.”

“Ethel, he shall be my son-in-law, be his name and rank what they may.”

“Well!” she replied, “how if this young man, whom you regard as your solace, whom you consider as your daughter’s support, be the son of one of your mortal foes,—of the viceroy of Norway, Count Guldenlew?”

Schumacker started back.

“Heavens! what do you say? Ordener! that Ordener! It is impossible!”

The look of unutterable hatred which flashed from the old man’s faded eyes froze Ethel’s trembling heart, and she vainly repented the rash words which she had uttered.

The blow was struck. For a few moments Schumacker stood motionless, with folded arms; his whole body quivered as if laid upon live coals; his flaming eyes started from their sockets; and his gaze, riveted to the pavement, seemed as if it would pierce the stones. At last these words issued from his livid lips in a voice as faint as that{86} of a man who dreams. “Ordener! Yes, it must be so; Ordener Guldenlew! It is well. Come, Schumacker, old fool, open your arms to him; the loyal youth has come to stab you to the heart.”

Suddenly he stamped upon the ground, and went on in tones of thunder: “So they send their whole infamous race to insult me in my disgrace and captivity! I have already seen a d’Ahlefeld; I almost smiled upon a Guldenlew! Monsters! Who would

ever have thought that this Ordener possessed such a soul and bore such a name? Wretched me! Wretched he!”

Then he fell exhausted into his chair, and while his breast heaved with sighs, poor Ethel, trembling with fright, wept at his feet.

“Do not weep, my daughter,” said he, in gloomy tones “come, oh, come to my heart!”

And he clasped her in his arms.

Ethel knew not how to explain this caress at a moment of rage, but he resumed: “At least, girl, you were more clear-sighted than your old father. You were not deceived by that serpent with gentle but venomous eyes. Come! let me thank you for the hatred which you have shown me that you feel for that contemptible Ordener.”

She shuddered at these praises, alas! so ill-deserved.

“Father,” said she, “be calm!”

“Promise me,” added Schumacker, “that you will always retain the same feeling for the son of Guldenlew. Swear it!”

“God forbids us to swear, father.”

“Swear, swear, girl!” vehemently repeated Schumacker.{87} “Will you always retain the same feeling for Ordener Guldenlew?”

Ethel had scarcely strength to falter, “Always.”

The old man drew her to his heart.

“It is well, my daughter! Let me at least bequeath to you my hate, if I cannot leave you the wealth and honors of which I was robbed. Listen! they deprived your old father of rank and glory; they dragged him in irons to the gallows, as if to stain him with every infamy and make him endure every torment. Wretches! Oh, may heaven and hell hear me, and may they be cursed in this life and cursed in their posterity!”

He was silent for a moment; then, embracing his poor daughter, terrified by his curses: “But Ethel, my only glory and my only treasure, tell me, how was your instinct so much more skilful than mine? How did you discover that this traitor bears one of the abhorred names inscribed upon my heart in gall? How did you penetrate his secret?”

She was summoning all her strength to answer, when the door opened.

A man dressed in black, carrying in his hand an ebony wand, and wearing about his neck a chain of unpolished steel, appeared upon the threshold, escorted by halberdiers also dressed in black.

“What do you want?” asked the captive, sharply, and in astonishment.

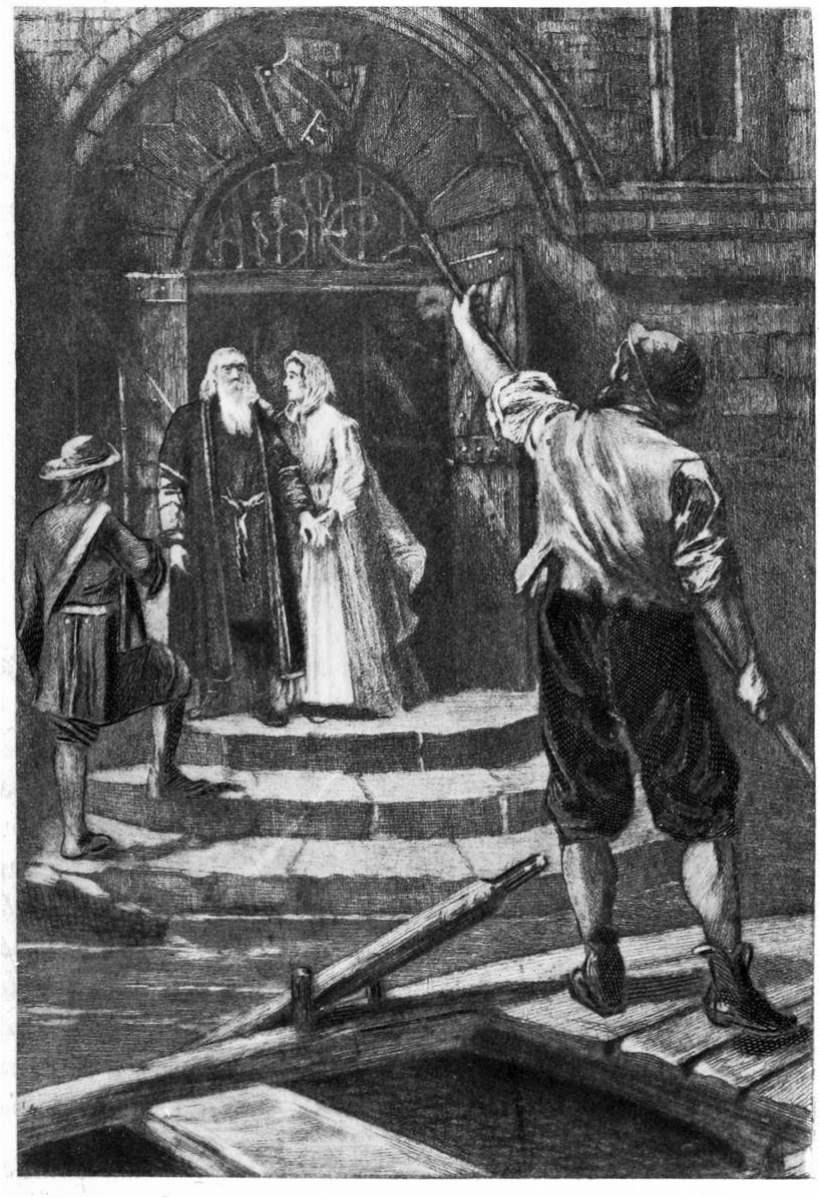
The man, without replying or looking at him, unrolled a long parchment, to which was fastened by silken threads a seal of green wax, and read aloud: “In the name of his{88} Majesty, our most gracious sovereign and lord, Christian the king. Schumacker, prisoner of State in the royal fortress of Munkholm, and his daughter, are commanded to follow the bearer of the said command.”

Schumacker repeated his question: “What do you want?”

The man in black, still immovable, prepared to re-read the document.

“That will do,” said the old man.

Then, rising, he signed to the surprised and startled Ethel to follow with him this dismal escort.



Schumacker and his Daughter made Prisoners.

Photo-Etching.—From drawing by Démarest.

{89}

XLI.

A doleful signal was given, an abject minister of justice knocked at his door and informed him that he was wanted.—Joseph de Maistre.

NIGHT had fallen; a cold wind whistled around the Cursed Tower, and the doors of Vygla ruin rattled on their hinges, as if the same hand had shaken all of them at once.

The wild inhabitants of the tower, the hangman and his family, had gathered about the fire lighted in the middle of the room on the first floor, which cast a fitful glow upon their dark faces and scarlet garments. The children's features were fierce as their father's laughter and haggard as their mother's gaze. Their eyes, as well as those of Becky were fixed on Orugix, who, seated on a wooden stool, seemed to be recovering his breath, his feet covered with{90} dust, showing that he had but just returned from some distant trip.

"Wife, listen; listen, children. I've not been gone two whole days merely to bring back bad news. If I am not made executioner to the king before another month is out, I wish I may never tie another slip-noose or handle an axe again. Rejoice, my little wolf-cubs; your father may leave you the Copenhagen scaffold by way of an inheritance, after all."

"Nychol," asked Becky, "what has happened?"

"And you, my old gypsy," rejoined Nychol, with his boisterous laugh, "rejoice too! You can buy any number of blue glass necklaces to adorn your long, skinny neck. Our agreement will soon be up; but never fear, in a month, when you see me chief hangman of both kingdoms, you will not refuse to break another jug with me."[1]

"What is it, what is it, father?" asked the children, the older of whom was playing with a bloody rack, while the little one amused himself by plucking alive a young bird which he had stolen from the nest.

"What is it, children?—Kill that bird, Haspar; it makes as much noise as a rusty saw; and besides, you should never be cruel. Kill it.—What is it, you say? Nothing,—a trifle, truly; nothing, dame Becky, save that within a week from this time ex-chancellor Schumacker, who is a prisoner at Munkholm, after looking me so closely in the face at Copenhagen, and the famous brigand of Iceland, Hans of Klipstadur, may perhaps both pass through my hands at once.{91}"

The red woman's wandering eye assumed an expression of surprised curiosity.

"Schumacker! Hans of Iceland! How is that, Nychol?"

"I'll tell you all about it. Yesterday morning, on the road to Skongen, at Ordals bridge, I met the whole regiment of musketeers from Munkholm marching back to Throndhjem with a very victorious air. I questioned one of the soldiers, who condescended to answer, probably because he did not know why my jerkin and my cart were red. I learned that the musketeers were returning from Black Pillar Pass, where they had cut to pieces various bands of brigands,—that is to say, insurgent miners. Now, you must

know, gypsy Becky, that these rebels revolted in Schumacker's name, and were commanded by Hans of Iceland. You must know that his uprising renders Hans of Iceland guilty of the crime of insurrection against royal authority, and Schumacker guilty of high treason, which will naturally lead those two honorable gentlemen to the scaffold or the block. Add to these two superb executions, which cannot fail to bring me in at least fifteen gold ducats each, and to entitle me to the greatest honor in both kingdoms, several other though less important ones—"

"But do tell me," interrupted Becky, "has Hans of Iceland been captured?"

"Why do you interrupt your lord and master, miserable woman?" said the hangman. "Yes, to be sure, the famous, the impregnable Hans of Iceland is a prisoner, together with several other leaders of the brigands, his lieutenants,{92} who will also bring me in twelve crowns apiece, to say nothing of the sale of their bodies. He was captured, I tell you; and I saw him, if you must know all the particulars, march by between a double file of soldiers."

The woman and children crowded eagerly about Orugix.

"What! did you really see him, father?" asked the children.

"Be quiet, boys. You shriek like a rogue protesting his innocence. I saw him; he is a giant. His hands were tied behind his back, and his forehead was bandaged. I suppose he was wounded in the head. But never fear, I will soon heal his hurt for him." Accompanying these brutal words with a brutal gesture, the hangman added: "There were four of his comrades behind him, prisoners too and wounded, like him, who were being taken, like him, to Throndhjem, where they are to be tried with ex-chancellor Schumacker by a court of justice presided over by the lord mayor and the present chancellor."

"Father, what did the other prisoners look like?"

"The first two were a couple of old men, one of whom wore a miner's broad felt hat, and the other a mountaineer's cap; both seemed utterly disheartened. Of the other two, one was a young miner, who marched along with head up, whistling; the other,—do you remember, Becky, those travellers who came to this tower some ten days ago, on the night of that terrible storm?"

"As Satan remembers the day of his fall," replied the woman.

"Did you notice a young man in company with that crazy old doctor with the big periwig,—a young fellow,{93} I say, who wore a great green cloak, and a cap with a black feather?"

“Yes, indeed; I can see him now, saying: ‘Woman, we have plenty of gold!’”

“Well, old woman, I hope I may never wring the neck of anything worse than a grouse, if the fourth prisoner was not that young man. His face, to be sure, was entirely hidden by his feather, his cap, his hair, and his cloak; besides, he hung his head. But it was the very same dress, the same boots, the same manner. I’ll swallow the stone gallows at Skongen at a single mouthful if it be not the same man! What do you say to that, Becky? Wouldn’t it be a joke if after I had given him something to sustain life he should also receive from me something to cut it short, and should exercise my skill after having tasted my hospitality?”

The hangman’s coarse laughter was loud and long; then he resumed: “Come, make merry, all of you, and let us drink. Yes, Becky, give me a glass of that beer which scrapes a man’s throat as if he were drinking files, and let me drain it to my future advancement. Come, here’s to the health and prosperity of Nychol Orugix, executioner royal that is to be! I will confess, you old sinner, that I found it hard work to go to Nœs village to hang a contemptible clown for stealing cabbage and chicory. Still, when I thought it over, I felt that thirty-two escalins were not to be sneezed at, and that my hands would not be degraded by turning off mere thieves and riff-raff of that kind until after they had actually beheaded the noble count and ex-chancellor, and the famous demon of Iceland.{94} I therefore resigned myself, while waiting for my certificate as hangman to the king, to despatch the poor wretch at Nœs village. And here,” he added, drawing a leather purse from his wallet, “are the thirty-two escalins for you, old girl.”

At this moment three blasts from a horn were heard outside.

“Woman,” cried Orugix, “those are the bowmen of the lord mayor.”

With these words he hurried downstairs.

An instant later he reappeared, carrying a large parchment, of which he had broken the seal.

“There,” said he to his wife, “there’s what the lord mayor has sent me. Do you decipher it; for you can read Satan’s scrawl. Perhaps it is my promotion already; for since the court is to have a chancellor to preside over it and a chancellor as prisoner at the bar, it is only proper that the man who carries out the sentence should be an executioner royal.”

The woman took the parchment, and after studying it for some time, read aloud, while the children stared at her in stupid wonder: “In the name of the Council of the

province of Throndhjem, Nychol Orugix, hangman for the province, is hereby ordered to repair at once to Throndhjem, and to carry with him his best axe, block, and black hangings."

"Is that all?" asked the hangman, in a dissatisfied tone.

"That is all," replied Becky.

"Hangman for the province!" muttered Orugix.{95}

He cast an angry glance at the official document, but at last exclaimed: "Well, I must obey and be off. After all, they tell me to bring my best axe and the black hangings. Take care, Becky, that you rub off the spots of rust which have dimmed my axe, and see that the hangings are not stained with blood. We must not be discouraged; perhaps they mean to promote me in payment for this fine execution. So much the worse for the prisoners; they will not have the satisfaction of dying by the hand of an executioner royal.{96}"