XLII.

Elvira. What has become of poor Sancho? He has not appeared in town?

Nuno. Sancho has doubtless contrived to find shelter.

Lope de Vega: *The Best Alcalde is the King*.

COUNT d'Ahlefeld, dragging behind him an ample robe of black satin lined with ermine, his head and shoulders concealed by a large judicial wig, his breast covered with stars and decorations, among which were the collars of the Royal Orders of the Elephant and the Dannebrog, clad, in a word, in the complete costume of the lord chancellor of Denmark and Norway, paced with an anxious air up and down the apartment of Countess d'Ahlefeld, who was alone with him at the moment.

"Come, it is nine o'clock; the court is about to open; it must not be kept waiting, for sentence must be pronounced to-night, so that it may be carried out by to-morrow morning at latest. The mayor assures me that the hangman will be here before dawn. Elphega, did you order the boat to take me to Munkholm?"

"My lord, it has been waiting for you at least half an hour," replied the countess, rising from her seat.

"And is my litter at the door?"

"Yes, my lord.{97}"

"Good! So you say, Elphega," added the count, clapping his hand to his head, "that there is a love-affair between Ordener Guldenlew and Schumacker's daughter?"

"A very serious one, I assure you," replied the countess, with a smile of anger and contempt.

"Who would ever have imagined it? And yet I tell you that I suspected it."

"And so did I," said the countess. "This is a trick played upon us by that confounded Levin."

"Old scamp of a Mecklenburger!" muttered the chancellor; "never fear, I'll recommend you to Arensdorf. If I could only succeed in disgracing him! Ah! see here, Elphega, I have an inspiration."

"What is it?"

"You know that the persons whom we are to try at Munkholm Castle are six in number,—Schumacker, whom I hope I shall have no further cause to fear, to-morrow,

at this hour; the colossal mountaineer, our false Hans of Iceland, who has sworn to sustain his character to the end, in the hope that Musdœmon, from whom he has already received large sums of money, will help him to escape,—that Musdœmon really has the most devilish ideas! The other four prisoners are the three rebel chiefs, and a certain unknown character, who stumbled, no one knows how, into the midst of the assembly at Apsyl-Corh, and whom Musdœmon's precautions have thrown into our hands. Musdœmon thinks that the fellow is a spy of Levin de Knud. And indeed, when brought here a prisoner, his first words were to ask for the general;{98} and when he learned of the Mecklenburger's absence, he seemed dumfounded. Moreover, he has refused to answer any of Musdœmon's questions."

"My dear lord," interrupted the countess, "why have you not questioned him yourself?"

"Really, Elphega, how could I, in the midst of all the business which has overwhelmed me since my arrival? I trusted the affair to Musdœmon, whom it interests as much as it does me. Besides, my dear, the fellow is not of the slightest consequence in himself; he is merely some poor vagabond. We can only turn him to account by representing him to be an agent of Levin de Knud, and as he was captured in the rebel ranks, it would go to prove a guilty connivance between Schumacker and the Mecklenburger, which will suffice to bring about, if not the arraignment, at least the disgrace, of that confounded Levin."

The countess meditated for a moment. "You are right; my lord. But how about this fatal passion of Baron Thorwick for Ethel Schumacker?"

The chancellor again rubbed his head. Then, shrugging his shoulders, he said: "See here, Elphega; neither you nor I are young novices, and we ought to understand men. When Schumacker has been condemned for high treason for the second time; when he has undergone an infamous death on the gallows; when his daughter, reduced to the lowest ranks of society, is forever publicly disgraced by her father's shame,—do you suppose, Elphega, that Ordener Guldenlew will then recall for a single instant this childish flirtation which you call passion, judg{99}ing it by the extravagant talk of a crazy girl, or that he will hesitate a single day between the dishonored daughter of a wretched criminal and the illustrious daughter of a great chancellor? We must judge others by ourselves; where do you find that the human heart is so constituted?"

"I trust that you may be right. But I think you will not disapprove of my request to the mayor that Schumacker's daughter might be present at her father's trial, and might be placed in the same gallery with me. I am curious to study the creature."

“All that can throw light upon the affair is valuable,” said the chancellor, calmly. “But tell me, does anybody know where Ordener is at present?”

“No one knows; he is the worthy pupil of that old Levin, a knight-errant like him. I believe that he is visiting Wardhus just now.”

“Well, well, our Ulrica will settle him. But come, I forget that the court is waiting for me.”

The countess detained the chancellor. “One word more, my lord. I asked you yesterday, but your mind was full of other things, and I could not get an answer,—where is my Frederic?”

“Frederic!” said the count, with a melancholy expression, and hiding his face with his hand.

“Yes, answer me; my Frederic? His regiment has returned to Throndhjem without him. Swear to me that Frederic was not in that horrible affair at Black Pillar Pass. Why do you change color at his name? I am in mortal terror.”

The chancellor’s features resumed their wonted com{100}posure. “Make yourself easy, Elphega. I swear that he was not at Black Pillar Pass. Besides, the list of officers killed or wounded in that skirmish has been published.”

“Yes,” said the countess, growing calmer, “you reassure me. Only two officers were killed,—Captain Lory and that young Baron Randmer, who played so many mad pranks with my poor Frederic at the Copenhagen balls. Oh, I have read and re-read the list, I assure you. But tell me, my lord, did my boy remain at Wahlstrom?”

“He did,” replied the count.

“Well, my friend,” said the mother, with a smile which she tried to render affectionate, “I have but one favor to ask of you,—that is, to recall Frederic as soon as may be from that frightful region.”

The chancellor broke from her suppliant arms, saying, “Madam, the court waits. Farewell. What you ask does not depend on my will.” And he quitted the room abruptly.

The countess was left in a sad and pensive mood. “It does not depend upon his will!” said she; “and he has but to utter a word to restore my son to my arms! I always thought that man was genuinely bad.{101}”

XLIII.

Is it thus you treat a man in my position? Is it thus you forget the respect due to justice?—Calderon: *Louis Perez of Galicia*.

THE trembling Ethel, separated from her father by the guards upon leaving the Lion of Schleswig tower, was conducted through dim passages, hitherto unknown to her, to a small, dark cell, which was closed as soon as she had entered it. In the wall opposite the door was a large grated opening, through which came the light of links and torches. Before this opening was a bench, upon which sat a woman, veiled and dressed in black, who signed to her to be seated beside her. Ethel obeyed in silent dismay. She looked through the grated window and saw a solemn and imposing scene.

At the farther end of a room hung with black and dimly lighted by copper lamps suspended from the vaulted roof, was a black platform in the shape of a horseshoe,{102} occupied by seven judges in black gowns, one of whom, placed in the centre upon a higher seat, wore on his breast glittering diamond chains and gold medals. The judge on his right differed from the others in the wearing of a white girdle and an ermine mantle, showing him to be the lord mayor of the province. To the right of the bench was a platform covered with a daïs, upon which sat an old man, in bishop's dress; to the left, a table covered with papers, behind which stood a short man with a huge wig, and enveloped in a long black gown.

Opposite the judges was a wooden bench, surrounded by halberdiers holding torches, whose light, reflected back from a forest of pikes, muskets, and partisans, shed a faint glimmer upon the tumultuous heads of a mob of spectators, crowded against the iron railing dividing them from the court-room.

Ethel looked at this spectacle as she might have beheld some waking dream; yet she was far from feeling indifferent to what was about to happen. A secret voice warned her to listen well, because a crisis in her life was at hand. Her heart was a prey to contending emotions; she longed to know instantly what interest she had in the scene before her, or never to know it at all. For some days, the idea that her Ordener was forever lost to her had inspired her with a desperate desire to be done with existence once for all, and to read the book of her fate at a single glance. Therefore, realizing that this was a decisive hour, she watched the sombre picture before her, not so much with aversion as with a sort of impatient, melancholy joy.{103}

She saw the president rise and proclaim in the king's name that the court was opened.

She heard the short, dark man to the left of the bench read, in a low, rapid voice, a long discourse in which her father's name, mixed with the words "conspiracy," "revolt

in the mines," and "high treason," frequently recurred. Then she remembered what the dread stranger had told her, in the donjon garden, of the charges against her father; and she shuddered as she heard the man in the black robe conclude his speech with the word "death," pronounced with great emphasis.

She turned in terror to the veiled lady, from whom she shrank with unaccountable fear. "Where are we? What does all this mean?" she timidly asked.

A gesture from her mysterious companion commanded her to be silent and attentive. She again turned her eyes to the court-room. The venerable bishop rose, and Ethel caught these words: "In the name of omnipotent and most merciful God, I, Pamphilus-Luther, bishop of the royal province and town of Throndhjem, do greet the worthy court assembled here in the name of the king, our lord, under God.

"And I say, that having observed that the prisoners brought to this bar are men and Christians, and that they have no counsel, I declare to the worthy judges that it is my purpose to aid them with my poor strength in the cruel position in which it has pleased Heaven to place them.

"Praying that God will deign to strengthen my great weakness, and enlighten my great blindness, I,{104} bishop of this royal diocese, greet this wise and worthy court."

So saying, the bishop stepped from his episcopal throne, and took his seat upon the prisoners' bench, amid a murmur of applause from the people.

The president then rose, and said in dry tones, "Halberdiers, command silence! My lord bishop, the court thanks your reverence, in the name of the prisoners. Inhabitants of the province of Throndhjem, pay good heed to the king's justice; there can be no appeal from the sentence of the court. Bowmen, bring in the prisoners."

There was an expectant and terrified hush; the heads of the crowd swayed to and fro in the darkness like the waves of a stormy sea, upon which the thunder is about to burst.

Soon Ethel heard a dull sound and a strange stir below her, in the gloomy aisles of the court; the audience moved aside with a thrill of impatient curiosity; there was a noise of many feet; halberds and muskets gleamed, and six men, chained and surrounded by guards, entered the room bareheaded. Ethel had eyes for the first of the six alone, a white-headed old man in a black gown. It was her father.

She leaned, almost fainting, against the stone balustrade in front of her; everything swam before her in a confused cloud, and it seemed as if her heart were in her throat. She said in a feeble voice, "O God! help me!"

The veiled woman bent over her and gave her salts to smell, which roused her from her lethargy.{105}

“Noble lady,” said she, reviving, “for mercy’s sake, speak but one word to convince me that I am not the sport of spirits from hell.”

The stranger, deaf to her entreaty, again turned her head toward the court; and poor Ethel, who had somewhat recovered her strength, resigned herself to do the same in silence.

The president rose, and said in slow, solemn tones, “Prisoners, you are brought before us that we may decide whether or not you are guilty of high treason, conspiracy, and armed rebellion against the authority of the king, our sovereign lord. Examine your consciences well, for the charge of leze-majesty rests upon your heads.”

At this moment a gleam of light fell upon the face of one of the six prisoners, a young man who held his head down, as if to veil his features with his long hair. Ethel started, and a cold sweat oozed from every pore. She thought she recognized—But no; it was a cruel illusion. The room was but dimly lighted, and men moved about it like shadows; the great polished ebony Christ hanging over the president’s chair was scarcely visible.

And yet that young man was wrapped in a mantle which at this distance seemed to be green; his disordered hair was chestnut, and the unexpected gleam which revealed his features—But no; it was not true. It could not be! It was some horrid delusion!

The prisoners were seated on the bench beside the bishop. Schumacker took his place at one end; he was separated from the chestnut-haired young man by his four companions in misfortune, who wore coarse clothes, and{106} among whom was one of gigantic stature. The bishop sat at the other end of the bench.

Ethel saw the president turn to her father, saying in a stern voice: “Old man, tell us your name, and who you are.”

The old man raised his venerable head.

“Once,” he replied, looking steadily at the president, “I was Count Griffenfeld and Tönsberg, Prince of Wollin, Prince of the Holy German Empire, Knight of the Royal Orders of the Elephant and the Dannebrog, Knight of the Golden Fleece in Germany and of the Garter in England, Prime Minister, Lord Rector of all our Universities, Lord High Chancellor of Denmark, and—”

The president interrupted him: “Prisoner, the court does not ask who you were, nor what your name once was, but who you are and what it now is.”

“Well,” answered the old man, quickly, “my name is John Schumacker now; I am sixty-nine years old, and I am nothing but your former benefactor, Chancellor d’Ahlefeld.”

The president seemed confused.

“I recognized you, Count,” added the ex-chancellor, “and as I thought you did not know me, I took the liberty to remind your Grace that we are old acquaintances.”

“Schumacker,” said the president, in a voice trembling with concentrated fury, “do not trifle with the court.”

The aged prisoner again interrupted him: “We have changed places, noble Chancellor; I used to call you ‘d’Ahlefeld,’ and you addressed me as ‘Count.{107}’”

“Prisoner,” replied the president, “you only injure your cause by recalling the infamous decree which already brands your name.”

“If that sentence entailed infamy on any one, Count d’Ahlefeld, it was not on me.”

The old man half rose as he spoke these words with great emphasis.

The president waved his hand.

“Sit down. Do not insult, in the presence of the court, the judges who condemned you, and the king who surrendered you to those judges. Recollect that his Majesty deigned to grant you your life, and confine yourself to defending it.”

Schumacker’s only answer was a shrug of the shoulders.

“Have you,” asked the president, “anything to say in regard to the charges preferred against you?”

Seeing that Schumacker was silent, the president repeated his question.

“Are you speaking to me?” said the ex-chancellor. “I supposed, noble Count d’Ahlefeld, that you were speaking to yourself. Of what crime do you accuse me? Did I ever give a Judas kiss to a friend? Have I imprisoned, condemned, and dishonored a benefactor,—robbed him to whom I owed everything? In truth, my lord chancellor, I know not why I am brought here. Doubtless it is to judge of your skill in lopping off innocent heads. Indeed, I shall not be sorry to see whether you find it as easy to ruin me as to ruin the kingdom, and whether a single comma will be a sufficient pretext for

my death, as one letter of{108} the alphabet was enough for you to bring on a war with Sweden."[2]

He had scarcely uttered this bitter jest, when the man seated at the table to the left of the bench arose.

"My lord president," said he, bowing low, "my lord judges, I move that John Schumacker be forbidden to speak, if he continue to insult his Grace, the president of this worshipful court."

The calm voice of the bishop answered: "Mr. Private Secretary, no prisoner can be deprived of the right to speak."

"True, Reverend Bishop," hastily exclaimed the president. "We propose to allow the defence the utmost liberty. I would merely advise the prisoner to moderate his expressions if he understands his own interest."

Schumacker shook his head, and said coldly: "It seems that Count d'Ahlefeld is more sure of his game than he was in 1677."

"Silence!" said the president; and instantly addressing the prisoner next to the old man, he asked his name.

A mountaineer of colossal stature, whose forehead was swathed in bandages, rose, saying, "I am Hans, from Klipstadur, in Iceland.{109}"

A shudder of horror ran through the crowd, and Schumacher, lifting his head, which had sunk upon his breast, cast a sudden glance at his dreadful neighbor, from whom all his other fellow-prisoners shrank.

"Hans of Iceland," asked the president, when the confusion ceased, "what have you to say for yourself?"

Ethel was as much startled as any of the spectators by the appearance of the famous brigand, who had so long played a prominent part in all her visions of alarm. She fixed her eyes with timid dread upon the monstrous giant, with whom her Ordener had possibly fought, whose victim he perhaps was. This idea again took possession of her soul in all its painful shapes. Thus, wholly absorbed by countless heart-rending emotions, she hardly heeded the coarse, blundering answer of this Hans of Iceland, whom she regarded almost as her Ordener's murderer. She only understood that the brigand declared himself to be the leader of the rebel forces.

"Was it of your own free will," asked the president, "or by the suggestion of others, that you took command of the insurgents?"

The brigand answered: “It was not of my own free will.”

“Who persuaded you to commit such a crime?”

“A man named Hacket.”

“Who was this Hacket?”

“An agent of Schumacker, whom he also called Count Griffenfeld.”

The president turned to Schumacker: “Schumacker, do you know this Hacket?{110}”

“You have forestalled me, Count d’Ahlefeld,” rejoined the old man; “I was about to ask you the same question.”

“John Schumacker,” said the president, “your hatred is ill advised. The court will put the proper value upon your system of defence.”

The bishop then said, turning to the short man, who seemed to fill the office of recorder and prosecutor: “Mr. Private Secretary, is this Hacket one of your clients?”

“No, your reverence,” replied the secretary.

“Does any one know what has become of him?”

“He was not captured; he has disappeared.”

It seemed as if the private secretary tried to steady his voice as he said this.

“I rather think that he has vanished altogether,” said Schumacker.

The bishop continued: “Mr. Secretary, is any one in pursuit of this Hacket? Has any one a description of him?”

Before the private secretary could answer, one of the prisoners rose. He was a young miner, with a stern, proud face.

“He is easily described,” said he, in a firm voice. “This contemptible Hacket, Schumacker’s agent, is a man of low stature, with an open countenance, like the mouth of hell. Stay, Mr. Bishop; his voice is very like that of the gentleman writing at the table over there, whom your reverence calls, I believe, ‘private secretary.’ And truly, if the room were not so dark, and the private secretary had less hair to hide his face, I could almost swear that he looked very much like the traitor Hacket.{111}”

“Our brother speaks truly,” cried the prisoners on either side of the young miner.

“Indeed!” muttered Schumacker, with a look of triumph.

The secretary involuntarily started, whether from fear, or from the indignation which he felt at being compared to Hacket. The president, who himself seemed disturbed, hurriedly exclaimed: “Prisoners, remember that you are only to speak in answer to a question from the court; and do not insult the officers of the law by unworthy comparisons.”

“But, Mr. President,” said the bishop, “this is a mere matter of description. If the guilty Hacket has points of resemblance to your secretary, it may be useful to—”

The president cut him short.

“Hans of Iceland, you, who have had such frequent intercourse with Hacket, tell us, to satisfy the worthy bishop, whether the fellow really resembles our honorable private secretary.”

“Not at all, sir,” unhesitatingly answered the giant.

“You see, my lord bishop,” added the president.

The bishop acknowledged his satisfaction by a bow, and the president, addressing another prisoner, pronounced the usual formula: “What is your name?”

“Wilfred Kennybol, from the Kiölen Mountains.”

“Were you among the insurgents?”

“Yes, sir; the truth at all costs. I was captured in the cursed defile of Black Pillar. I was the chief of the mountaineers.”

“Who urged you to the crime of rebellion?”

“Our brothers the miners complained of the royal{112} protectorate; and that was very natural, was it not, your worship? If you had nothing but a mud hut and a couple of paltry fox-skins, you would not like to have them taken from you. The government would not listen to their petitions. Then, sir, they made up their minds to rebel, and begged us to help them. Such a slight favor could not be refused by brothers who say the same prayers and worship the same saints. That’s the whole story.”

“Did nobody,” said the president, “excite, encourage, and direct your insurrection?”

“There was a Mr. Hacket, who was forever talking to us about rescuing a count who was imprisoned at Munkholm, whose messenger he said he was. We promised to do as he asked, because it was nothing to us to set one more captive free.”

“Was not this count’s name Schumacker or Griffenfeld, fellow?”

“Exactly so, your worship.”

“Did you never see him?”

“No, sir; but if he be that old man who told you that he had so many names just now, I must confess—”

“What?” interrupted the president.

“That he has a very beautiful white beard, sir; almost as handsome a one as my sister Maase’s husband’s father, of the village of Surb; and he lived to be one hundred and twenty years old.”

The darkness of the room prevented any one from seeing whether the president looked disappointed at the mountaineer’s simple answer. He ordered the archers to produce certain scarlet flags.{113}

“Wilfred Kennybol,” he asked, “do you recognize these flags?”

“Yes, your Grace; they were given to us by Hacket in Count Schumacker’s name. The count also distributed arms to the miners; for we did not need them, we mountaineers, who live by our gun and game-bag. And I myself, sir, such as you see me, trussed as I am like a miserable fowl to be roasted, have more than once, in one of our deep valleys, brought down an old eagle flying so high that it looked like a lark or a thrush.”

“You hear, judges,” remarked the private secretary; “the prisoner Schumacker distributed arms and banners to the rebels, through Hacket.”

“Kennybol,” asked the president, “have you anything more to say?”

“Nothing, your Grace, except that I do not deserve death. I only lent a hand in brotherly love to the miners, and I’ll venture to say before all your worships that my bullet, old hunter as I am, never touched one of the king’s deer.”

The president, without answering this plea, cross-examined Kennybol’s two companions; they were the leaders of the miners. The older of the two, who stated that his name was Jonas, repeated Kennybol’s testimony in slightly different words. The other,—the same young man who had noticed such a strong resemblance between the private secretary and the treacherous Hacket,—called himself Norbith, and proudly avowed his share in the rebellion, but refused to reveal anything regarding Hacket and Schumacker, saying that he had sworn secrecy, and had{114} forgotten everything but that oath. In vain the president tried threats and entreaties; the obstinate youth was not to be moved. Moreover, he insisted that he had not rebelled

on Schumacker's account, but simply because his old mother was cold and hungry. He did not deny that he might deserve to die; but he declared that it would be unjust to kill him, because in killing him they would also kill his poor mother, who had done nothing to merit punishment.

When Norbith ceased speaking, the private secretary briefly summed up the heavy charges against the prisoners, and more especially against Schumacker. He read some of the seditious mottoes on the flags, and showed how the general agreement of the answers of the ex-chancellor's accomplices, and even the silence of Norbith bound by a fanatical oath, tended to inculpate him. "There now remains," he said in close, "but a single prisoner to be examined, and we have strong reasons for thinking him the secret agent of the authority who has ill protected the peace of the province of Throndhjem. This authority has favored, if not by his guilty connivance, at least by his fatal negligence, the outbreak of the revolt which must destroy all these unhappy men, and restore Schumacker to the scaffold from which the king's clemency so generously preserved him."

Ethel, whose fears for Ordener were now converted into cruel apprehensions for her father, shuddered at these ominous words, and wept floods of tears when her father rose and said quietly: "Chancellor d'Ahlefeld, I admire your skill. Have you summoned the hangman?{115}"

The unfortunate girl thought her cup of bitterness was full: she was mistaken.

The sixth prisoner now stood up. With a superb gesture he swept back the hair which covered his face, and replied to the president's questions in a clear, firm voice: "My name is Ordener Guldenlew, Baron Thorwick, Knight of the Dannebrog."

An exclamation of surprise escaped the secretary: "The viceroy's son!"

"The viceroy's son!" repeated every voice, as if the words were taken up by countless echoes.

The president shrank back in his seat; the judges, hitherto motionless upon the bench, bent toward one another in confusion, like trees beaten by opposing winds. The commotion was even greater in the audience. The spectators climbed upon stone cornices and iron rails; the entire assembly spoke through a single mouth; and the guards, forgetting to insist upon silence, added their ejaculations to the general uproar.

Only those accustomed to sudden emotions can imagine Ethel's feelings. Who could describe that unwonted mixture of agonizing joy and delicious grief; that anxious

expectation, which was alike fear and hope, and yet not quite either? He stood before her, but he could not see her. There was her beloved Ordener,—her Ordener,—whom she had believed dead, whom she knew was lost to her; her friend who had deceived her, and whom she adored with renewed adoration. He was there; yes, he was there. She was not the victim of a vain dream. Oh, it was really he,—that Ordener, alas! whom she had seen{116} in dreams more often than in reality. But did he appear within these gloomy precincts as an angel of deliverance, or a spirit of evil? Was she to hope in him, or to tremble for him? A thousand conjectures crowded upon her at once, and oppressed her mind like a flame choked by too much fuel; all the ideas and sensations which we have suggested flashed through her brain as the son of the Norwegian viceroy pronounced his name. She was the first to recognize him, and before any one else had recognized him, she had fainted.

She soon recovered her senses for the second time, thanks to the attentions of her mysterious neighbor. With pale cheeks, she again opened her eyes, in which the tears had been suddenly dried. She cast an eager glance at the young man still standing unmoved amid the general confusion; and after all agitation had ceased in the court and among the people, Ordener Guldenlew's name still rang in her ears. With painful alarm she observed that he wore his arm in a sling, and that his wrists were chained; she noticed that his mantle was torn in several places, and that his faithful sword no longer hung at his side. Nothing escaped her solicitude, for the eye of a lover is like that of a mother. Her whole soul flew to the rescue of him whom she could not shield with her body; and, be it said to the glory and the shame of love, in that room, which contained her father and her father's persecutors, Ethel saw but one man.

Silence was gradually restored. The president resumed his examination of the viceroy's son. "My lord Baron," said he, in a tremulous voice.{117}

"I am not 'my lord Baron' here," firmly answered Ordener. "I am Ordener Guldenlew, just as he who was once Count Griffenfeld is John Schumacker here."

The president hesitated for a moment, then went on: "Well, Ordener Guldenlew, it is doubtless by some unlucky accident that you are brought before us. The rebels must have captured you while you were travelling, and forced you to join them, and it is probably in this way that you were found in their ranks."

The secretary rose: "Noble judges, the mere name of the viceroy's son is a sufficient plea for him. Baron Ordener Guldenlew cannot by any possibility be a rebel. Our illustrious president has given a clear explanation of his unfortunate arrest among the rebels. The noble prisoner's only error is in not sooner revealing his name. We request that he may be set free at once, abandoning all charges against him, and only

regretting that he should have been seated upon a bench degraded by the criminal Schumacker and his accomplices."

"What would you do?" cried Ordener.

"The private secretary," said the president, "withdraws the charges against you."

"He is wrong," replied Ordener, in a loud, clear voice; "I alone of all here should be accused, judged, and condemned." He paused a moment, and added in a less resolute tone, "For I alone am guilty."

"You alone guilty!" exclaimed the president.

"You alone guilty!" repeated the secretary.

A fresh burst of astonishment was heard in the audience. The wretched Ethel shuddered; she did not reflect{118} that this declaration from her lover would save her father. She thought only of her Ordener's death.

"Silence in the court!" said the president, possibly taking advantage of this brief tumult to collect his thoughts and recover his self-possession. "Ordener Guldenlew," he resumed, "explain yourself."

The young man mused an instant, then sighed heavily, and uttered these words in a tone of calm submission: "Yes, I know that an infamous death awaits me; I know that my life might have been bright and fair. But God reads my heart; God alone! I am about to accomplish the most urgent duty of my life. I am about to sacrifice to it my blood, perhaps my honor; but I feel that I shall die without regret or remorse. Do not be surprised at my words, judges; there are mysteries in the soul and in the destiny of man which men cannot penetrate, and which are judged in heaven alone. Hear me, therefore, and act toward me as your conscience may dictate when you have pardoned these unfortunate men, and more especially the much injured Schumacker, who has already, in his long captivity, expiated many more crimes than any one man could ever commit. Yes, I am guilty, noble judges, and I alone. Schumacker is innocent; these other unhappy men were merely led astray. I am the author of the insurrection among the miners."

"You!" exclaimed the president and his private secretary, with a singular look upon their faces.

"I! and do not interrupt me again, gentlemen. I am in haste to finish; for by accusing myself I exonerate these poor prisoners. I excited the miners in Schumacke{119}r's

name; I distributed those banners to the rebels; I sent them money and arms in the name of the prisoner of Munkholm. Hacket was my agent."

At the name of Hacket, the private secretary made a gesture of stupefied amazement.

Ordener continued: "I will not trespass on your time, gentlemen. I was captured among the miners, whom I persuaded to revolt. I alone did everything. Now judge me. If I have proved my guilt, I have also proved the innocence of Schumacker and the poor wretches whom you deem his accomplices."

The young man spoke these words, his eyes raised to heaven. Ethel, almost lifeless, scarcely breathed; but it seemed to her that Ordener, although he exculpated her father, pronounced his name most bitterly. The young man's language terrified and amazed her, although she could not comprehend it. Of all she heard, she grasped nothing but misery.

A sentiment of similar nature seemed to engross the president. He was scarcely able to believe his ears. Nevertheless, he asked the viceroy's son: "If you are indeed the sole author of this revolt, what was your object in instigating it?"

"I cannot tell you."

Ethel shivered when she heard the president reply in a somewhat angry tone: "Had you not an intrigue with Schumacker's daughter?"

But Ordener, though in chains, advanced toward the bench, and exclaimed, in accents of indignation: "Chancellor d'Ahlefeld, content yourself with my life, which I{120} place in your hands; respect a noble and innocent girl. Do not a second time attempt to dishonor her."

Ethel, who felt the blood rise to her face, did not comprehend the meaning of the words, "a second time," upon which her defender laid such emphasis; but by the rage expressed in the president's features, it seemed that he understood them.

"Ordener Guldenlew, do not forget the respect due to the king's justice and the officers of the law. I reprimand you in the name of the court. I now summon you anew to declare your purpose in committing the crime of which you accuse yourself."

"I repeat that I cannot tell you."

"Was it not to deliver Schumacker?" inquired the secretary.

Ordener was silent.

“Do not persist in silence, prisoner,” said the president; “it is proved that you have been in communication with Schumacker, and your confession of guilt rather implicates than exonerates the prisoner of Munkholm. You have paid frequent visits to Munkholm, and your motive was surely more than mere curiosity. Let this diamond buckle bear witness.”

The president took from the table a diamond buckle.

“Do you recognize it as your property?”

“Yes. By what chance?”

“Well! One of the rebels gave it, before he died, to our private secretary, averring that he received it from you in payment for rowing you across from Throndhjem to Munkholm fortress. Now I ask you, judges, if such a{121} price paid to a common sailor does not prove the importance laid by the prisoner, Ordener Guldenlew, upon his reaching that prison, which is the one where Schumacker was confined?”

“Ah!” exclaimed the prisoner Kennybol, “what your grace says is true; I recognize the buckle. It is the same story which our poor brother Guidon Stayper told me.”

“Silence,” said the president; “let Ordener Guldenlew answer.”

“I will not deny,” replied Ordener, “that I desired to see Schumacker. But this buckle has no significance. It is forbidden to enter the fort wearing diamonds. The sailor who rowed me across complained of his poverty during our passage. I flung him this buckle, which I was not allowed to wear.”

“Pardon me, your Grace,” interrupted the private secretary, “the rule does not include the viceroy’s son. You could therefore—”

“I did not wish to give my name.”

“Why not?” asked the president.

“I cannot tell you.”

“Your relations with Schumacker and his daughter prove that the object of your conspiracy was to set them free.”

Schumacker, who had hitherto shown no sign of attention save an occasional scornful shrug of the shoulders, rose: “To set me free! The object of this infernal plot was to compromise and ruin me, as it still is. Do you think that Ordener Guldenlew would confess his share in this crime unless he had been captured among the rebels?{122} Oh, I see that he inherits his father’s hatred of me! And as for the

relations which you suppose exist between him and myself and my daughter, let him know, that accursed Guldenlew, that my daughter also inherits my loathing for him,—for the whole race of Guldenlews and d'Ahlefelds!"

Ordener sighed deeply, while Ethel in her heart disclaimed her father's assertion; and he fell back upon his bench, quivering with wrath.

"The court will decide for itself," said the president.

Ordener, who, at Schumacker's words, had silently cast down his eyes, seemed to awake: "Oh, hear me, noble judges! You are about to examine your consciences; do not forget that Ordener Guldenlew is alone guilty; Schumacker is innocent. These other unfortunate men were deceived by my agent, Hacket. I did everything else."

Kennybol interrupted him: "His worship says truly, judges, for it was he who undertook to bring Hans of Iceland to us; I only hope that name may not bring me ill luck. I know that it was this young man who ventured to seek him out in Walderhog cave, to persuade him to be our leader. He confided the secret of his undertaking to me in Surb village, at the house of my brother Braal. And for the rest, too, the young gentleman says truly; we were deceived by that confounded Hacket, whence it follows that we do not deserve death."

"Mr. Secretary," said the president, "the hearing is ended. What are your conclusions?"

The secretary rose, bowed several times to the court,{123} passed his finger under the folds of his lace band, without taking his eyes from the president's face. At last he pronounced the following words in a dull, measured voice: "Mr. President, most worthy judges! It is a true bill. Ordener Guldenlew, who has forever tarnished the glory of an illustrious name, has only succeeded in establishing his own guilt without proving the innocence of ex-chancellor Schumacker and his accomplices, Hans of Iceland, Wilfred Kennybol, Jonas, and Norbith. I require the court to declare the six prisoners guilty of the crime of high treason in the first degree."

A vague murmur rose from the crowd. The president was about to dismiss the court, when the bishop asked for a brief hearing.

"Learned judges, it is proper that the prisoners' defence should be heard last. I could wish that they had a better advocate, for I am old and feeble, and have no other strength than that which proceeds from God. I am confounded at the secretary's severe sentence. There is no proof of my client Schumacker's crime. There is no evidence that he has had any direct share in the insurrection; and since my other

client, Ordener Guldenlew, confesses that he made unlawful use of Schumacker's name, and moreover that he is the sole author of this damnable sedition, all evidence against Schumacker disappears; you should therefore acquit him. I recommend to your Christian indulgence the other prisoners, who were only led astray like the Good Shepherd's sheep; and even young Ordener Guldenlew, who has at least the merit, very great in the sight of God, of confessing his{124} crime. Reflect, judges, that he is still at the age when a man may err, and even fall; but God does not refuse to support or to raise him up. Ordener Guldenlew bears scarce a fourth the burden of years which weigh down my head. Place in the balance of your judgment his youth and inexperience, and do not so soon deprive him of the life which the Lord has but lately given him."

The old man ceased, and took his place beside Ordener, who smiled; while at the invitation of the president, the judges rose from the bench, and silently crossed the threshold of the dread scene of their deliberations.

While a handful of men were deciding the fate of six fellow-beings within that terrible sanctuary, the prisoners remained motionless upon their seat between two files of halberdiers. Schumacker, his head on his breast, seemed absorbed in meditation. The giant stared to the right and left with stupid assurance; Jonas and Kennybol, with clasped hands, prayed in low tones, while their comrade, Norbith, stamped his foot or shook his chains with a convulsive start. Between him and the venerable bishop, who was reading the penitential psalms, sat Ordener, with folded arms and eyes lifted to heaven.

Behind them was the noise of the crowd, which swelled high when the judges left the room. The famous prisoner of Munkholm, the much-dreaded demon of Iceland, and above all the viceroy's son, were the objects of every thought, every speech, and every glance. The uproar, mingled with groans, laughter, and confused cries, rose and fell like a flame flickering in the wind.

Thus passed several hours of anxious expectation, so{125} long that every one was astonished that they could be contained in a single night. From time to time a glance was cast toward the door of the anteroom; but there was nothing to be seen, save the two soldiers pacing to and fro with their glittering partisans before the fatal entrance, like two silent ghosts.

At last the lamps and torches began to burn dim, and the first pale rays of dawn were piercing the narrow windows of the room when the awful door opened. Profound silence instantly, and as if by magic, took the place of all the confusion; and the only

sounds heard were the hurried breathing and the vague slight stir of the multitude in suspense.

The judges, proceeding slowly from the anteroom, resumed their places on the bench, the president at their head.

The private secretary, who had seemed absorbed in thought during their absence, bowed and said: “Mr. President, what sentence does the court, from whose decision there is no appeal, pronounce in the king’s name? We are ready to hear it with religious respect.”

The judge, seated at the president’s right hand, rose, holding a roll of parchment: “His Grace, our illustrious president, exhausted by the length of this session, has deigned to commission me, lord mayor of the province of Throndhjem, and the natural president of this worshipful court, to read in his stead the sentence pronounced in the name of the king. I am about to fulfil this honorable but painful duty, requesting the audience to hear the king’s impeccable justice in silence.{126}”

The lord mayor’s voice then assumed a grave and solemn intonation, and every heart beat faster.

“In the name of our revered master and lawful sovereign, King Christian, we, the judges of the Supreme Court of the province of Throndhjem, summoned to decide in the cases of John Schumacker, prisoner of the State; Wilfred Kennybol, native of the Kiölen Mountains; Jonas, royal miner; Norbith, royal miner; Hans of Klipstadur, in Iceland; and Ordener Guldenlew, Baron Thorwick, Knight of the Dannebrog, all accused of high treason and leze-majesty in the first degree (Hans of Iceland being moreover charged with the crimes of murder, arson, and robbery), do find:—

“I. That John Schumacker is not guilty;

“II. That Wilfred Kennybol, Jonas, and Norbith are guilty, but are recommended to mercy, because they were led astray;

“III. That Hans of Iceland is guilty of all the crimes laid to his charge;

“IV. That Ordener Guldenlew is guilty of high treason and leze-majesty in the first degree.”

The judge paused an instant as if to take breath. Ordener fixed upon him a look of celestial joy.

“John Schumacker,” resumed the judge, “the court acquits you and remands you to prison;

“Kennybol, Jonas, and Norbith, the court commutes the penalty which you have incurred, to imprisonment for life, and a fine of one thousand crowns each;

“Hans of Klipstadur, murderer and incendiary, you will be taken this night to Munkholm parade-ground,{127} and hanged by the neck until you are dead, dead, dead!

“Ordener Guldenlew, traitor, after having been stripped of your titles in presence of this court, you will be conducted this very night to the same place, with a lighted torch in your hand, and there your head shall be hewn off, your body burned, your ashes strewn to the winds, and your head exposed upon a stake. Let all withdraw. Such is the sentence rendered by the king’s justice.”

The lord mayor had scarcely ended these fatal words, when a shriek rang through the room. This shriek horrified the spectators even more than did the fearful terms of the death sentence; this shriek for a brief moment turned the calm and radiant face of the condemned Ordener pale.{128}

XLIV.

Misfortune made them equals.—Charles Nodier.

ALL was over now; Ordener’s work was done. He had saved the father of the woman he loved; he had saved her too by preserving her father to protect her. The young man’s noble plot to save Schumacker’s life had succeeded; nothing else mattered now; it only remained for him to die.

Let those who deem him guilty or foolish judge the generous Ordener now, as he judges himself in his own soul with holy rapture. For it had been his one thought, when he entered the rebel ranks, that if he could not prevent Schumacker from carrying out his guilty purpose, he might at least help him to escape punishment by drawing it upon his own head.{129}

“Alas!” he thought, “Schumacker is undoubtedly guilty; but embittered as he is by misfortune and imprisonment, his crime is excusable. He sighs to be set free; he struggles to acquire his liberty, even by rebellion. Besides, what would become of my Ethel if her father were taken from her; if she should lose him by the gallows, if fresh disgrace should blast his name, what would become of her, helpless and unprotected, alone in her cell or roaming through a world of foes?” This thought determined him to make the sacrifice, and he joyfully prepared for it. It is a lover’s greatest happiness to lay down his life, I do not say for the life, but for a smile or a tear, of the loved object.

He was accordingly captured with the rebels, was dragged before the judges assembled to condemn Schumacker, his generous falsehood was uttered, he was sentenced, he must die a cruel death, suffer shameful torments, leave behind him a stained name; but what cared the noble youth? He had saved his Ethel's father.

He sat chained in a damp dungeon, where light and air never entered save through dark holes; beside him was a supply of food for the remnant of his existence,—a loaf of black bread and a jug of water; an iron collar weighed down his neck; iron fetters were about his hands and feet. Every hour that passed robbed him of a greater portion of his life than a year would bear away from other mortals. He was lost in a delicious dream.

"Perhaps my memory will not die with me, at least in one human heart. Perhaps she will deign to shed a tear in return for the blood I so freely shed for her; perhaps{130} she will sometimes heave a sigh for him who sacrificed his life for her; perhaps in her virgin thoughts the dim image of her friend may sometimes appear. And who knows what lies behind the veil of death? Who knows if our souls, freed from their material prison, may not sometimes return to watch over the souls of those they love, and hold mysterious communion with those sweet companions still prisoned in the flesh, and in secret bring them angelic comfort and heavenly bliss?"

And yet bitter reflections would sometimes mingle with these consoling meditations. The hatred which Schumacker had expressed for him at the very moment of his self-sacrifice oppressed him. The agonized shriek which he had heard at the same instant with his death sentence had moved him deeply; for he alone, of all the assembly, recognized that voice and understood that misery. And should he never again see his Ethel? Must his last moments be passed within the self-same walls that contained her, and he be still unable to touch her soft hand once more, once more to hear the gentle voice of her for whom he was about to die?

He had yielded thus to those vague, sad musings which are to the mind what sleep is to the body, when the hoarse creak of rusty bolts struck harshly on his ear, already attuned to the music of the sphere to which he was so soon to take his flight. The heavy iron door grated upon its hinges. The young prisoner rose calmly, almost gladly, for he thought that the executioner had come for him, and he had already cast aside his life like the cloak beneath his feet.{131}

He was mistaken. A slender white figure stood upon the threshold, like a radiant vision. Ordener doubted his own eyes, and wondered if he were not already in heaven. It was she; it was his Ethel!

The girl fell into his fettered embrace; she covered his hands with tears, and dried them with her long black hair. Kissing his chains, she bruised her pure lips upon those infamous irons; she did not speak, but her whole heart seemed ready to burst forth in the first word which might break through her sobs.

He felt the most celestial joy which he had known since his birth. He gently pressed his Ethel to his breast, and the combined powers of earth and hell could not at that moment have loosed the arms which encircled her. The knowledge of his approaching death lent a certain solemnity to his rapture; and he held his Ethel as close as if he had already taken possession of her for all eternity.

He did not ask this angel how she had gained access to him. She was there: could he waste a thought on anything else? Nor was he surprised. He never asked how this proscribed, feeble, lonely girl, in spite of triple doors of iron and triple ranks of soldiers, had contrived to open her own prison and that of her lover; it seemed to him quite simple; he had a perfect appreciation of the power of love.

Why speak with the voice when the soul can speak as readily? Why not allow the body to listen silently to the mysterious language of the spirit? Both were silent, because there are certain emotions which can find expression in silence only.{132}

At last the young girl lifted her head from her lover's throbbing heart. "Ordener," said she, "I am here to save you;" and she uttered these words of hope with a pang.

Ordener smiled, and shook his head.

"To save me, Ethel! You deceive yourself; escape is impossible."

"Alas! I am but too well aware of that. This castle is crowded with soldiers, and every door is guarded by archers and jailers who never sleep." She added with an effort: "But I bring you another means of safety."

"No, no; your hope is vain. Do not delude yourself with idle fancies, Ethel; a few hours hence the axe will cruelly dispel them."

"Oh, do not say so, Ordener! You shall not die. Oh, spare me that dreadful thought! Or rather, no; let me behold it in all its horror, to give me strength to save you and sacrifice myself."

There was a strange expression in the young girl's voice.

Ordener gazed at her tenderly. "Sacrifice yourself! What do you mean?"

She hid her face in her hands, and sobbed almost inarticulately, "Oh, God!"

The struggle was brief; she overcame her emotion; her eyes sparkled, her lips wore a smile. She was as beautiful as an angel ascending from hell to heaven.

“Listen, my own Ordener: your scaffold shall never be reared. If you will but promise to marry Ulrica d’Ahlefeld, you may live.{133}”

“Ulrica d’Ahlefeld! That name from your lips, my Ethel!”

“Do not interrupt me,” she continued, with the calm of a martyr undergoing the last pang; “I am sent here by Countess d’Ahlefeld. She promises to gain your pardon from the king, if in return you will agree to bestow your hand upon her daughter. I am here to obtain your oath to marry Ulrica and live for her. She chose me as her messenger because she thought that my voice might have some influence over you.”

“Ethel,” said the condemned man, in icy tones, “farewell! When you leave this cell, bid the hangman hasten his coming.”

She rose, stood before him one moment, pale and trembling, then her knees gave way beneath her, and she sank to the stone floor with clasped hands.

“What have I done to him?” she muttered faintly.

Ordener silently fixed his eyes upon the flags.

“My lord,” she said, dragging herself to him on her knees, “you do not answer me. Will you not speak to me once more? Then there is nothing left for me but to die.”

A tear stood in the young man’s eye.

“Ethel, you no longer love me.”

“Oh, God!” cried the poor girl, clasping his knees. “No longer love you! You say that I no longer love you, Ordener! Did you really say those words?”

“You no longer love me, for you despise me.”

He repented these cruel words as soon as he had uttered them; for Ethel’s tone was heart-rending, as she threw her{134} adored arms around his neck, and exclaimed in a voice broken by tears: “Forgive me, my beloved Ordener; forgive me as I forgive you. I despise you! Great heavens! Are you not my pride, my idol, my all? Tell me, was there aught in my words but deep love and ardent adoration? Alas! your stern language wounds me sorely, when I came here to save you, my idolized Ordener, by sacrificing my whole life for yours.”

“Well,” replied the young man, softened by her tears, and kissing them away, “was it not a want of esteem to suppose that I would buy my life by forsaking you, by basely renouncing my oaths, by sacrificing my love?” He added, fixing his eye on Ethel: “My love, for which I am about to shed my blood!”

Ethel uttered a deep groan as she answered: “Hear me, Ordener, before you judge me so rashly. Perhaps I have more strength than usually falls to the lot of a weak woman. From our lofty prison window I saw them build your scaffold on the parade. Ordener, you do not know what fearful agony it is to see the slow preparations for the death of one whose life is an indissoluble part of your own! Countess d’Ahlefeld, at whose side I sat when I heard the judge pronounce your death sentence, came to the cell to which I had returned with my father. She asked me if I would save you; she proposed this hateful means. Ordener, my poor happiness must perish; I must give you up, renounce you forever; yield to another my Ordener, poor lonely Ethel’s only joy, or deliver you to the executioner. They bid me choose between my own misery and your death. I cannot hesitate.{135}”

He kissed this angel’s hand with respectful worship.

“Neither do I hesitate, Ethel. You would not offer me life with Ulrica d’Ahlefeld’s hand if you knew why I die.”

“What? What secret mystery—”

“Let me keep this one secret from you, my beloved Ethel. I must die without letting you know whether you owe me gratitude or hatred for my death.”

“You must die! Must you then die? Oh, God! it is but too true, and the scaffold stands ready even now; and no human power can save my Ordener, whom they will slay! Tell me,—cast one look upon your slave, your wife, and tell me, promise me, beloved Ordener, that you will listen to me without anger. Are you very sure—answer me as you would answer to God—that you could not be happy with that woman, that Ulrica d’Ahlefeld? Are you very sure, Ordener? Perhaps she is, she surely is, handsome, amiable, virtuous. She is far superior to her for whom you perish. Do not turn away your head, dear friend, dear Ordener. You are so noble and so young to mount the scaffold. Think! you might live with her in some gay city where you would lose all memory of this fatal dungeon; your days would flow by peacefully, without a thought of me. I consent,—you may drive me from your heart, erase my image from your thoughts, Ordener. Only live! Leave me here alone; let me be the one to die. And believe me, when I know that you are in the arms of another, you need not fear for me; I shall not suffer long.”

She paused; her voice was drowned in tears. Still{136} her grief-stricken countenance was radiant with her longing to win the ill-omened victory which must be her death.

Ordener said: “No more of this, Ethel. Let no name but yours and mine pass our lips at such a moment.”

“Alas! alas!” she replied, “then you persist in dying?”

“I must; I shall go to the scaffold gladly for your sake; I should go to the altar with any other woman with horror and aversion. Say no more; you wound and distress me.”

She wept, and murmured: “He will die, oh, God, a death of infamy!”

The condemned man answered with a smile: “Believe me, Ethel, there is less dishonor in my death than in such a life as you propose.”

At this instant his eye, glancing away from his weeping Ethel, observed an old man in clerical dress standing in the shadow under the low, arched door. “What do you want?” said he, hastily.

“My lord, I came with the Countess d’Ahlefeld’s messenger. You did not see me, and I waited silently until you should notice me.”

In fact, Ordener had eyes for Ethel only; and she, at the sight of Ordener, had forgotten her companion.

“I am,” continued the old man, “the minister whose duty it is—”

“I understand,” said the young man; “I am ready.”

The minister advanced toward him.

“God is also ready to receive you, my son.{137}”

“Sir,” said Ordener, “your face is not unknown to me; I must have seen you elsewhere.”

The minister bowed. “I too recognize you, my son; we met in Vygla tower. We both proved upon that occasion the fallibility of human words. You promised me the pardon of twelve unhappy prisoners, and I put no faith in your promise, being unable to guess that you were the viceroy’s son; and you, my lord, who reckoned upon your power and your rank when you made me that promise—”

Ordener finished the thought which Athanasius Munder dared not put into words.

“Cannot now obtain pardon even for myself. You are right, sir. I had too little reverence for the future, it has punished me by showing me that its power is greater than mine.”

The minister bent his head. “God is great!” said he.

Then he raised his kind eyes to Ordener, adding, “God is good!”

Ordener, who seemed preoccupied, exclaimed, after a brief pause: “Listen, sir; I will keep the promise which I made you in Vygla tower. When I am dead, go to Bergen, seek out my father, the viceroy of Norway, and tell him that the last favor which his son asks of him is to pardon your twelve protégés. He will grant it, I am sure.”

A tear of emotion moistened the wrinkled cheek of Athanasius.

“My son, your soul must be filled with noble thoughts, if in the self-same hour you can reject your own par{138}don and generously implore that of others. For I heard your refusal; and although I blame such dangerous and inordinate affection, I was deeply touched by it. Now I ask myself,—*unde scelus*?—how could a man who approaches so near to the model of true justice soil his conscience with the crime for which you are condemned?”

“Father, I did not tell my secret to this angel; I cannot reveal it to you. But believe that I am not condemned for any crime of mine.”

“What? Explain yourself, my son!”

“Do not urge me,” firmly answered the young man. “Let me take my secret with me to the grave.”

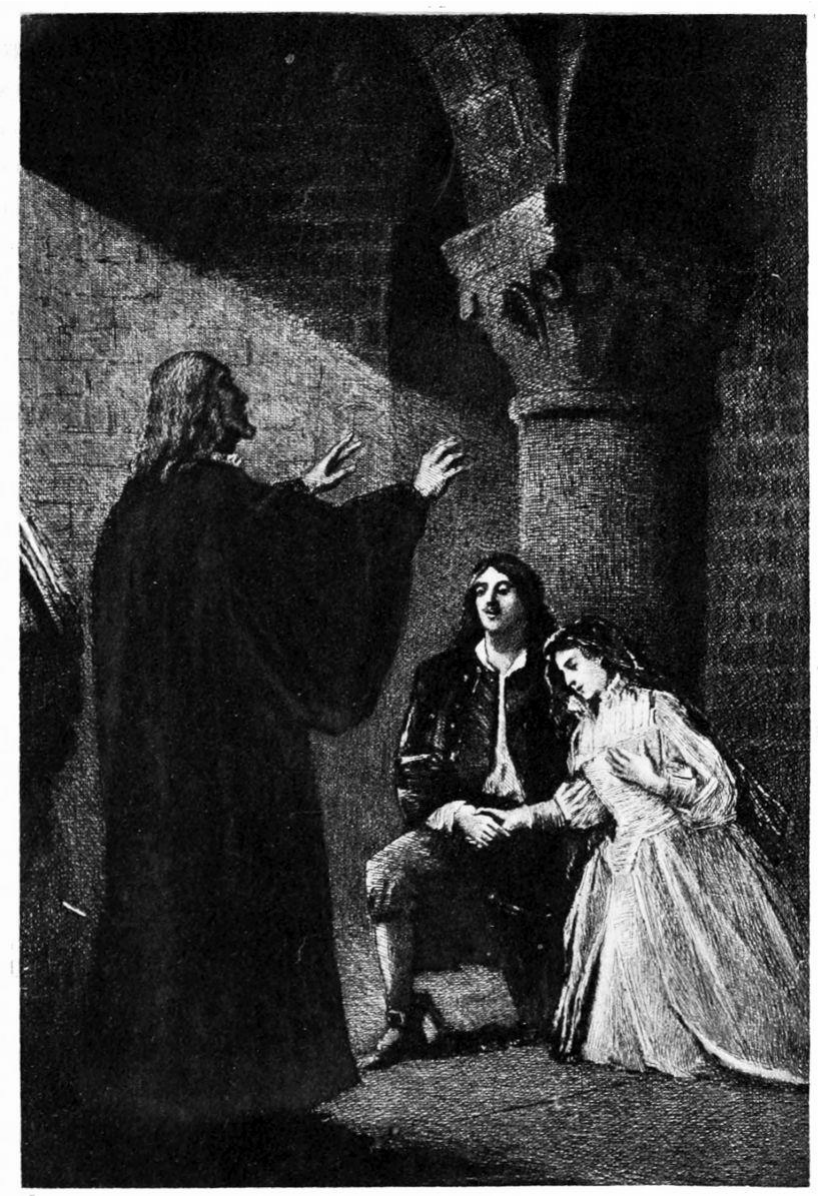
“This man cannot be guilty,” muttered the minister.

Then drawing from his breast a black crucifix, he placed it on a sort of altar rudely shaped from a granite slab resting against the damp prison wall. Beside the crucifix he laid a small lighted lamp which he had brought with him, and an open Bible. “My son, meditate and pray; I will return a few hours hence. Come,” he added, turning to Ethel, who during this conversation had preserved a solemn silence, “we must leave the prisoner. Our time has passed.”

She rose, calm and radiant; a divine spark flashed from her eyes as she said: “Sir, I cannot go yet; you must first unite Ethel Schumacker to her husband, Ordener Guldenlew.”

She looked at Ordener.

“If you were still free, happy, and powerful, my Ordener, I should weep, and I should shrink from linking



The Marriage of Ethel and Ordener.

Photo-Etching.—From drawing by Démarest.

{139}

my fatal destiny with yours. But now that you need no longer dread the contagion of my misfortune; that you, like me, are a captive, disgraced and oppressed; now that you are about to die, I come to you, hoping that you will at least deign, Ordener, my lord and husband, to allow her who could never have shared your life, to be your companion in death; for you love me too much, do you not, to doubt for an instant that I shall die with you?”

The prisoner fell at her feet, and kissed the hem of her gown.

“You, old man,” she resumed, “must take the place of family and parents. This cell shall be our temple, this stone our altar. Here is my ring; we kneel before God and before you. Bless us, and pronounce the sacred words which shall unite Ethel Schumacker and Ordener Guldenlew, her lord.”

And they knelt together before the priest, who regarded them with mingled astonishment and pity.

“How, my children! What would you do?”

“Father,” said the girl, “time presses. God and death wait for us.”

In this life we sometimes meet with irresistible powers, supreme wills to which we yield instantly as if they were more than human. The priest raised his eyes, sighing: “May the Lord forgive me if I do wrong! You love each other; you have but little time to love on earth. I do not think I shall fail in my allegiance to God if I legalize your love.”

The sweet and solemn ceremony was performed. With the final blessing of the priest, they rose a wedded pair.{140}

The prisoner’s face beamed with painful joy; he seemed for the first time conscious of the bitterness of death, now that he realized the sweetness of life. The features of his companion were sublime in their expression of grandeur and simplicity; she still felt the modesty of a maiden, and already exulted as a young wife.

“Hear me, Ordener,” said she; “is it not fortunate that we must die, since we could never have been united in life? Do you know, love, what I will do? I will stand at the window of my cell, where I can see you mount the scaffold, so that our spirits may wing their flight to heaven together. If I should die before the axe falls, I will wait for you; for we are husband and wife, my adored Ordener, and this night our coffin shall be our bridal bed.”

He pressed her to his throbbing heart, and could only utter these words, which for him summed up all human happiness: “Ethel, you are mine!”

“My children,” said the chaplain, in a broken voice, “say farewell; it is time.”

“Alas!” cried Ethel.

All her angelic strength returned, and she knelt before the prisoner: “Farewell, my beloved Ordener! My lord, give me your blessing.”

The prisoner yielded to this touching request, then turned to take leave of the venerable Athanasius Munder. The old man was kneeling at his feet.

“What do you wish, father?” he asked in surprise.

The old man gazed at him with sweet humility: “Your blessing, my son.{141}”

“May Heaven bless you, and grant you all the happiness which your prayers call down upon your brother men!” replied Ordener, in touched and solemn tones.

Soon the sepulchral arches heard their last kisses and their last farewells; soon the rude bolts creaked noisily into place, and the iron door separated the youthful pair who were to die, only to meet again in eternity.{142}

XLV.

I will give two thousand crowns to any man who shall deliver over to me Louis Perez, dead or alive.—Calderon: *Louis Perez of Galicia*.

“BARON VŒTHAÜN, colonel of the Munkholm musketeers, which of the men who fought under your command at Black Pillar Pass took Hans of Iceland prisoner? Name him to the court, that he may receive the thousand crowns reward offered for the capture.”

The president of the court thus addressed the colonel of musketeers. The court was in session; for according to old Norwegian custom, a court from whose sentence there is no appeal cannot adjourn until the sentence has been carried out. Before the judges stood the giant, who had just been led in again, with the rope round his neck from which he was soon to hang.{143}

The colonel, seated at the table with the private secretary, rose and bowed to the court and to the bishop, who had reascended his throne.

“My lord judges, the soldier who captured Hans of Iceland is present. His name is Toric-Belfast, second musketeer of my regiment.”

“Let him stand forth,” replied the president, “and receive the promised reward.”

A young soldier in the Munkholm uniform stepped forward.

“You are Toric-Belfast?” asked the president.

“Yes, your worship.”

“It was you who took Hans of Iceland prisoner?”

“Yes, by the aid of Saint Beelzebub, I did, please your worship.”

A heavy bag of money was placed before the bench.

“Do you recognize this man as the famous Hans of Iceland?” added the president, pointing to the fettered giant.

“I am better acquainted with my Kitty’s pretty face than with that of Hans of Iceland; but I declare, by the halo of Saint Belphegor, that if Hans of Iceland be anywhere, it is in the shape of that big devil.”

“Advance, Toric-Belfast,” said the president. “Here are the thousand crowns offered by the lord mayor.”

The soldier hurried toward the bench, when a voice rose from the crowd: “Munkholm musketeer, you never captured Hans of Iceland.”

“By all the blessed devils!” cried the soldier, turning around, “I own nothing but my pipe and the moment of{144} time in which I speak; but still I promise to give ten thousand gold crowns to the man who says that, if he can prove his words.”

And folding his arms, he cast an assured glance over the audience: “Well! let the man who spoke, show himself.”

“It is I!” said a small man, elbowing his way through the crowd.

The new-comer was wrapped in sealskin, like a Greenlander, his outlandish garb hanging stiffly about him. His beard was black; and thick hair of the same color, falling over his red eyebrows, concealed a hideous face. Neither his hands nor his arms were visible.

“Oh, it is you, is it?” said the soldier, with a loud laugh. “And who, then, do you say it was, my fine gentleman, that had the honor of capturing that infernal giant?”

The little man shook his head, and said with a malicious smile: “It was I.”

At this instant Baron Vœthaün fancied that he recognized the mysterious being who had warned him at Skongen of the arrival of the rebels; Chancellor d’Ahlefeld thought he recognized his host at Arbar ruin; and the private secretary, a certain peasant from Oëlmœ, who wore a similar dress, and who had pointed out the lair of Hans of Iceland. But the three being separated, they could not impart to one another this fleeting impression, which the differences of feature and costume, afterward observed, must have soon dissipated.

“Indeed! it was you, was it?” ironically observed the soldier. “If it were not for your Greenland seal’s costume,{145} by the look which you cast at me, I should be tempted to take you for another ridiculous dwarf, who tried to pick a quarrel with me at the Spladgest, a fortnight or so ago. It was the very day that they brought in the body of Gill Stadt, the miner.”

“Gill Stadt!” broke in the little man, with a shudder.

“Yes, Gill Stadt!” repeated the soldier, with an air of indifference,—“the rejected lover of a girl who was sweetheart to a comrade of mine, and for whose sake he died, like the fool that he was.”

The little man said in hollow tones: “Was there not also the body of an officer of your regiment at the Spladgest?”

“Exactly; I shall remember that day as long as I live. I forgot that it was the hour for the tattoo, and I was arrested when I got back to the fort. That officer was Captain Dispolsen.”

At this name the private secretary rose.

“These two fellows abuse the patience of the court. We beg the president to cut short this idle chatter.”

“By my Kitty’s good name! I ask nothing better,” said Toric-Belfast, “provided your worships will give me the thousand crowns offered for the head of Hans, for it was I who took him prisoner.”

“You lie!” cried the little man.

The soldier clapped his hand to his sword: “It is very lucky for you, you rascal, that we are in the presence of the court, where a soldier, even a Munkholm musketeer, must never resort to force.”

“The reward,” coldly observed the little man, “belongs{146} to me; for if it were not for me, you would never have won Hans of Iceland’s head.”

The indignant soldier swore that it was he who captured Hans of Iceland, when, wounded on the field of battle, he was just beginning to revive.

“Well,” said his opponent, “you may have captured him, but it was I who struck him down. If it had not been for me, you could never have taken him prisoner; therefore the thousand crowns are mine.”

“It is false,” replied the soldier. “It was not you who struck him down; it was an evil spirit, clad in the skins of wild beasts.”

“It was I!”

“No, no!”

The president ordered both parties to be silent; then, again asking Colonel Vœthaün whether it was really Toric-Belfast who brought Hans of Iceland into camp a prisoner, at his assent he declared that the prize belonged to the soldier.

The small man gnashed his teeth, and the musketeer greedily stretched out his hands for the sack.

“One moment!” cried the little man. “Mr. President, that money according to the lord mayor’s proclamation, was to be given to him who took Hans of Iceland.”

“Well?” said the judge.

The little man turned to the giant: “That man is not Hans of Iceland.”

A murmur of surprise ran through the room. The president and private secretary moved uneasily in their chairs.{147}

“No!” emphatically reiterated the small man, “the money does not belong to the cursed musketeer of Munkholm, for that man is not Hans of Iceland.”

“Halberdiers,” said the president, “remove this madman, he has lost his senses.”

The bishop interposed: “Will you allow me, most worthy President, to remark that you may, by refusing to hear this man, destroy the prisoner’s last chance? I demand that he be confronted with the stranger.”

“Reverend Bishop, the court will grant your request,” replied the president; and addressing the giant: “You have declared yourself to be Hans of Iceland; do you persist in that statement?”

The prisoner answered: “I do; I am Hans of Iceland.”

“You hear, Bishop?”

The little man shouted in the same breath with the president: “You lie, mountaineer of Kiölen! you lie! Do not persist in bearing a name which must crush you; remember that it has been fatal to you already.”

“I am Hans from Klipstadur, in Iceland,” repeated the giant, his eye riveted on the private secretary.

The small man approached the Munkholm soldier, who, like the rest of the audience, had watched this scene with eager curiosity.

“Mountaineer of Kiölen,” he cried, “they say that Hans of Iceland drinks human blood. If you be he, drink. Here it is.”

And scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when, tossing his sealskin mantle over his shoulder, he plunged a{148} dagger into the soldier’s heart, and flung his dead body at the giant’s feet.

A cry of fright and horror followed; the soldiers guarding the giant started back. The small man, swift as lightning, rushed upon the defenceless mountaineer, and with another blow of his dagger, laid him upon the first corpse. Then flinging off his cloak, his false hair, and black beard, he revealed his wiry limbs, hideously attired in the skins of wild beasts, and a face which inspired the beholders with even greater horror than did the bloody dagger which he brandished aloft, reeking with a double murder.

“Ha! judges, where is Hans of Iceland now?”

“Guards, seize that monster!” cried the startled judge.

Hans hurled his dagger into the centre of the room.

“It is useless to me if there are no more Munkholm soldiers here.”

With these words, he yielded unresistingly to the halberdiers and bowmen who surrounded him, prepared to lay siege to him, as to a city. They chained the monster to the prisoner’s bench; and a litter bore away his victims, one of whom, the mountaineer, still breathed.

It is impossible to describe the various emotions of terror, astonishment, and indignation which, during this fearful scene, agitated the people, the guards, and the judges. When the brigand had taken his place, calm and unmoved, upon the fatal bench, a feeling of curiosity overcame every other impression, and breathless attention restored quiet.

The venerable bishop rose: “My lord judges{149}—”

The bandit interrupted him: “Bishop of Throndhjem, I am Hans of Iceland; do not take the trouble to plead for me.”

The private secretary rose: “Noble President—”

The monster cut him short: “Private Secretary, I am Hans of Iceland; do not take the pains to accuse me.”

Then, his feet in a pool of blood, he ran his bold, fierce eye over the court, the bowmen, and the crowd; and it seemed as if each of them trembled with fear at the glance of that one man, unarmed, chained, and alone.

“Listen, judges; expect no long speeches from me. I am the demon of Klipstadur. My mother was old Iceland, the land of volcanoes. Once that land was but one huge mountain; it was crushed by the hand of a giant, who fell from heaven, and rested on its highest peak. I need not speak of myself. I am a descendant of Ingulf the Destroyer, and I bear his spirit within me. I have committed more murders and kindled more fires than all of you put together ever uttered unjust sentences in your lives. I have secrets in common with Chancellor d’Ahlefeld. I could drink every drop of blood that flows in your veins with delight. It is my nature to hate mankind, my mission to harm them. Colonel of the Munkholm musketeers, it was I who warned you of the march of the miners through Black Pillar Pass, sure that you would kill numbers of men in those gorges; it was I who destroyed a whole battalion of your regiment by hurling granite bowlders upon their heads. I did it to avenge my son. Now, judges, my son is dead; I came here in search of death. The soul of Ingulf oppresses me, because I must{150} bear it alone, and can never transmit it to an heir. I am tired of life, since it can no longer be an example and a lesson to a successor. I have drunk enough blood; my thirst is quenched. Now, here I am; you may drink mine.”

He was silent, and every voice repeated his awful words.

The bishop said: “My son, what was your object in committing so many crimes?”

The brigand laughed: “I’ faith, I swear, reverend Bishop, it was not like your brother, the bishop of Borglum, with a view to enrich myself.[3] There was something in me which drove me to it.”

“God does not always dwell in his ministers,” meekly replied the saintly old man. “You would insult me, but I only wish I could defend you.”

“Your reverence wastes his breath. Go ask your other brother, the bishop of Scalholt, in Iceland, to defend me. By Ingulf! it is a strange thing that two bishops should protect me,—one in my cradle, the other at my tomb. Bishop, you are an old fool.”

“My son, do you believe in God?”

“Why not? There must be a God for us to blaspheme.”

“Cease, unhappy man! You are about to die, and you will not kiss the feet of Christ—”

Hans of Iceland shrugged his shoulders.{151}

“If I did so, it would be after the fashion of the constable of Roll, who pulled the king over as he kissed his foot.”

The bishop seated himself, deeply moved.

“Come, judges,” continued Hans of Iceland, “why this delay? If I were in your place and you in mine, I would not keep you waiting so long for your death sentence.”

The court withdrew. After a brief deliberation they returned, and the president read aloud the sentence, which declared that Hans of Iceland was to be “hung by the neck until he was dead, dead, dead.”

“That’s good,” said the brigand. “Chancellor d’Ahlefeld, I know enough about you to obtain a like sentence for you. But live, since you do naught but injure men. Oh, I am sure now that I shall not go to Nistheim!”[4]

The private secretary ordered the guards who led him away to place him in the Lion of Schleswig tower, until a dungeon could be prepared for him in the quarters of the Munkholm regiment, where he might await his execution.

“In the quarters of the Munkholm musketeers!” repeated the monster, with a growl of pleasure.{152}

XLVI.

However, the corpse of Ponce de Leon, which had remained beside the fountain, having been disfigured by the sun, the Moors of Alpuxares took possession of it and bore it to Grenada.—É. H.: *The Captive of Ochali*.

BEFORE dawn of the day so many of whose events we have already traced, at the very hour when Ordener’s sentence was pronounced at Munkholm, the new keeper of the Throndhjem Spladgest, Benignus Spiagudry’s former assistant and present successor, Oglypiglap, was abruptly aroused from his mattress by a violent series of raps, which fairly shook the building. He rose reluctantly, took his copper lamp, whose dim light dazzled his drowsy eyes, and went, swearing at the dampness of the dead-house, to open to those who waked him so early from his sleep.{153}

They were fishers from Sparbo, who carried upon a litter, strewed with reeds, rushes, and seaweed, a corpse which they had found in the waters of the lake.

They laid down their burden within the gloomy walls, and Oglypiglap gave them a receipt for it, so that they might claim their fee.

Left alone in the Spladgest, he began to undress the corpse, which was remarkable for its length and leanness. The first thing which caught his eye as he raised the cloth which covered it was a vast periwig.

“Why, really,” said he, “this outlandish wig has passed through my hands before; it belonged to that young French dandy.... And,” he added, continuing his investigations, “here are the high boots of poor postilion Cramner, who was killed by his horses, and—What the devil does this mean?—the full black suit of Professor Syngramtax, that learned old fogy, who drowned himself not long ago! Who can this new-comer be that comes here clad in the cast-off apparel of all my ancient acquaintance?”

He examined the face of the dead by the light of his lamp, but in vain; the features, already decomposed, had lost their original shape and color. He felt in the pockets, and drew out some scraps of parchment soaked with water and stained with mud; he wiped them carefully on his leather apron, and succeeded in deciphering on one of them these disconnected and half-effaced phrases: “Rudbeck, Saxon the grammarian. Arngrimmsson, bishop of Holum.—There are but two counties in Norway, Larvig and Jarlsberg, and but one barony.—Silver mines exist only at Kongsberg; loadstone and asbestos, at Sund-Moer; ame{154}thyst, at Guldbrandsdal; chalcedony, agate, and jasper, at the Färöe Islands.—At Noukahiva, in time of famine, men eat their wives and children.—Thormodr Torfusson; Isleif, bishop of Scalholt, first historian of Iceland.—Mercury played at chess with the Moon, and won the seventy-second part of a day.—Maëlstrom, whirlpool.—*Hirundo, hirudo*.—Cicero, chick pea; glory.—The learned Frode.—Odin consulted the head of Mimer, the wise.—(Mahomet and his dove, Sertorius and his hind.)—The more the soil—the less gypsum it contains—”

“I can scarcely believe my eyes!” he cried, dropping the parchment; “it is the writing of my old master, Benignus Spiagudry!”

Then, examining the corpse afresh, he recognized the long lean hands, the scanty hair, and the whole build of the unfortunate man.

“They were not so much out of the way, after all,” thought he, shaking his head, “who charged him with sacrilege and necromancy. The Devil carried him off to drown him in Lake Sparbo. What poor fools we mortals be! Who would ever have thought that Dr. Spiagudry, after taking so many people to board in his hostelry of the dead, would come here at last from afar to be cared for himself!”

The little Lapp philosopher lifted the body, to remove it to one of his six granite beds, when he found that something heavy was fastened about the unhappy Spiagudry's neck by a leather cord.

"Probably the stone with which the Devil pitched him into the lake," he muttered.{155}

He was mistaken; it was a small iron box, upon which, on examining it closely, after wiping it carefully, he discovered a large shield-shaped padlock.

"Of course there is some deviltry in this box," said he; "the man was a sacrilegious sorcerer. I will hand it over to the bishop; it may contain an evil spirit."

Then, taking it from the corpse, which he placed in the inner room, he hurried away to the bishop's palace, muttering a prayer as he went, as a charm against the dreadful box under his arm.{156}

XLVII.

Is it a man or an infernal spirit that speaks thus? What mischievous spirit torments thee thus? Show me the relentless foe who inhabits thy heart.—Maturin.

HANS of Iceland and Schumacker were in the same cell in the Schleswig tower. The acquitted ex-chancellor paced slowly to and fro, his eyes heavy with bitter tears; the condemned brigand laughed at his chains, though surrounded by guards.

The two prisoners studied each other long and silently; it seemed as if both felt themselves and mutually recognized each other as enemies of mankind.

"Who are you?" at length asked the ex-chancellor.

"I will tell you my name," replied the bandit, "to make you shun me. I am Hans of Iceland."

Schumacker advanced toward him.{157}

"Take my hand," said he.

"Do you wish me to devour it?"

"Hans of Iceland," rejoined Schumacker, "I like you because you hate mankind."

"And for that reason I hate you."

"Hark ye, I hate men, as you do, because they have returned me evil for good."

"You do not hate them as I do; I hate them because they have returned me good for evil."

Schumacker shuddered at the monster's expression. In vain he conquered his natural disposition; he could not sympathize with this fiend.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "I abhor men because they are false, ungrateful, cruel. I owe to them all the misery of my life."

"So much the better! I owe them all the pleasure of mine."

"What pleasure?"

"The pleasure of feeling their quivering flesh throb beneath my teeth, their hot blood moisten my parched throat; the rapture of crushing living beings against sharp rocks, and hearing the shriek of my victims mingle with the sound of their breaking limbs. These are the pleasures which I owe to men."

Schumacker shrank in horror from the monster whom he had approached with something like pride in his resemblance to him. Pierced with shame, he hid his wrinkled face in his hands; for his eyes were full of tears of anger, not against mankind, but against himself. His great and noble heart began to revolt at the hatred he had{158} so long cherished, when he saw it reflected in Hans of Iceland's heart as in a fearful mirror.

"Well," said the monster, with a sneer,—"well, enemy of man, dare you boast your likeness to me?"

The old man shuddered. "Oh, God! Rather than hate mankind as you do, let me love them."

Guards came to remove the monster to a more secure cell. Schumacker was left alone in his dungeon to dream; but he was no longer the enemy of mankind.{159}

XLVIII.

Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked,
Preserve me from the violent man;
Who have purposed to thrust aside my step.
The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords;
They have spread a net by the wayside;
They have set gins for me.
Psalms cxl. 4.

THE fatal hour had come; the sun showed but half his disk above the horizon. The guards were doubled throughout Munkholm castle; before each door paced fierce, silent sentinels. The noises of the town seemed louder and more confused than usual

as they ascended to the dark towers of the fortress, itself a prey to strange excitement. The mournful sound of muffled drums was heard in every courtyard; now and again cannon growled; the heavy bell in the donjon tolled slowly, with sullen, measured strokes; and from every direction boats loaded with people hastened toward the fearful rock.

A scaffold hung with black, around which an impatient mob swarmed in ever-increasing numbers, rose from the castle parade-ground in the centre of a hollow square of troops. Upon the scaffold a man clad in red serge walked up and down, now leaning upon the axe in his hand, and{160} now fingering a billet and block upon the funeral platform. Close at hand a stake was prepared, before which several pitch torches burned. Between the scaffold and the stake was planted a post, from which hung the inscription: “ORDENER GULDENLEW, TRAITOR.” A black flag floated from the top of the Schleswig tower.

At this moment Ordener appeared before the judges, still assembled in the court-room. The bishop alone was absent; his office as counsel for the defence had ended.

The son of the viceroy was dressed in black, and wore upon his neck the collar of the Dannebrog. His face was pale but proud. He was alone; for he had been led forth to torture before Chaplain Athanasius Munder returned to his cell.

Ordener’s sacrifice was already inwardly accomplished. And yet Ethel’s husband still clung to life, and might perhaps have chosen another night than that of the tomb for his wedding night. He had prayed and dreamed many dreams in his dreary cell. Now he was beyond all prayers and all dreams. He was strong in the strength imparted by religion and by love.

The crowd, more deeply moved than the prisoner, eagerly gazed at him. His illustrious rank, his horrible fate, awakened universal envy and pity. Every spectator watched his punishment, without comprehending his crime. In every human heart lurks a strange feeling which urges its owner to behold the tortures of others as well as their pleasures. Men seek with awful avidity to read destruction upon the distorted features of one who is about to die, as if some revelation from heaven or from{161} hell must appear at that awful moment in the poor wretch’s eyes; as if they would learn what sort of shadow is cast by the death angel’s wing as he hovers over a human head; as if they would search and know what is left to a man when hope is gone. That being, full of health and strength, moving, breathing, living, and which in another instant must cease to move, breathe, and live, surrounded by beings like himself, whom he never harmed, all of whom pity him, and none of whom can help him; that wretched being, dying, though not dead, bending alike beneath an earthly power and an invisible

might; this life, which society could not give, but which it takes with all the pomp and ceremony of legal murder,—profoundly stir the popular imagination. Condemned, as all of us are, to death, with an indefinite reprieve, the unfortunate man who knows the exact hour when his reprieve expires is an object of strange and painful curiosity.

The reader may remember that before he mounted the scaffold, Ordener was to be taken before the court, there to be stripped of his titles and honors. Hardly had the stir excited in the assembly by his arrival given place to quiet, when the president ordered the book of heraldry of both kingdoms, and the statutes of the order of the Dannebrog, to be brought.

Then directing the prisoner to kneel upon one knee, he commanded the spectators to pay respectful heed, opened the book of the knights of the Dannebrog, and began to read in a loud, stern voice: “We, Christian, by the grace and mercy of Almighty God, king of Denmark{162} and Norway, of Goths and Vandals, Duke of Schleswig, Holstein, Stormaria, and Dytmarsen, Count of Oldenburg and Delmenhurst, do declare:—

“That having re-established, at the suggestion of the lord chancellor, Count Griffenfeld [the president passed over this name so rapidly that it was scarcely audible], the royal order of the Dannebrog, founded by our illustrious ancestor, Saint Waldemar,

“Whereas we hold that inasmuch as the said venerable order was created in memory of the flag Dannebrog sent down from heaven to our blessed kingdom,

“It would belie the divine origin of the order should any knight forfeit his honor, or break the holy laws of Church and State with impunity,

“We therefore decree, kneeling before God, that whosoever of the knights of the order shall deliver his soul to the demon by any felony or treason, after a public reprimand from the court, shall be forever degraded from his rank as a knight of this our royal order of the Dannebrog.”

The president closed the book. “Ordener Guldenlew, Baron Thorwick, Knight of the Dannebrog, you have been found guilty of high treason, for which crime your head shall be cut off, your body burned, and your ashes flung to the winds. Ordener Guldenlew, traitor, you have shown yourself unworthy to hold rank with the knights of the Dannebrog. I request you to humble yourself, for I am about to degrade you publicly in the name of the king.”

The president stretched his hand over the book of the

“Forbear,” said the Bishop.

Photo-Etching.—From drawing by Démarest.

{163}

order and prepared to pronounce the fatal formula against Ordener, who remained calm and motionless, when a side door opened to the right of the bench.

An officer of the Church entered and announced his reverence, the bishop of Throndhjem. He entered hurriedly, accompanied by another ecclesiastic, on whose arm he leaned.

“Stop, Mr. President!” he exclaimed with a strength of which a man of his age seemed hardly capable. “Stop! Heaven be praised! I am in time.”

The audience listened with renewed interest, foreseeing some fresh development. The president turned angrily to the bishop: “Allow me to inform your reverence that your presence here is wholly unnecessary. The court is about to degrade from his rank the prisoner, who will suffer the penalty of his crime directly.”

“Forbear,” said the bishop, “to lay hands on one who is pure in the sight of God. The prisoner is innocent.”

The cry of astonishment which burst from the spectators was only matched by the cry of terror uttered by the president and private secretary.

“Yes, tremble, judges!” resumed the bishop, before the president could recover his usual presence of mind; “tremble! for you are about to shed innocent blood.”

As the president’s agitation died away, Ordener arose in consternation. The noble youth feared lest his generous ruse had been discovered, and proofs of Schumacker’s guilt had been found.

“Bishop,” said the president, “in this affair crime seems to evade us, being transferred from one to another. Do{164} not trust to any mere appearance. If Ordener Guldenlew be innocent, who, then, is guilty?”

“Your grace shall know,” replied the bishop. Then showing the court an iron casket which a servant had brought in behind him: “Noble lords, you have judged in darkness; within this casket is the miraculous light which shall dissipate that darkness.”

The president, private secretary, and Ordener, all seemed amazed at the sight of the mysterious casket.

The bishop added: “Noble judges, hear me. To-day, as I returned to my palace, to rest from the fatigues of the night and to pray for the prisoners, I received this sealed iron box. The keeper of the Spladgest, I was told, brought it to the palace this morning to be given to me, declaring that it undoubtedly contained some Satanic charm, as he had found it on the body of the sacrilegious Benignus Spiagudry, which had just been fished out of Lake Sparbo.”

Ordener listened more eagerly than ever. All the spectators were as still as death. The president and private secretary hung their heads guiltily. They seemed to have lost all their cunning and audacity. There is a moment in the life of every sinner when his power vanishes.

“After blessing this casket,” continued the bishop, “we broke the seal, which, as you can still see, bears the ancient and now extinct arms of Griffenfeld. We did indeed find a devilish secret within. You shall judge for yourselves, venerable sirs. Lend me your most earnest attention, for human blood is at stake, and the Lord will hold you accountable for every drop that you may shed.{165}”

Then opening the terrible casket, he drew forth a slip of parchment, upon which was written the following testimony:—

I, Blaxtham Cumbysulsum, doctor, being about to die, do declare that of my own free will and pleasure I have placed in the hands of Captain Dispolsen, the agent, at Copenhagen, of the former Count Griffenfeld, the enclosed document, drawn up

wholly by the hand of Turiaf Musdœmon, servant of the chancellor, Count d'Ahlefeld, to the end that the said captain may make such use of it as shall seem to him best; and I pray God to pardon my crimes.

Given under my hand and seal at Copenhagen, this eleventh day of January, 1699.

Cumbysulsum.

The private secretary shook like a leaf. He tried to speak, but could not. The bishop handed the parchment to the pale and agitated president.

"What do I see?" exclaimed the latter, as he unfolded the parchment. "A note to the noble Count d'Ahlefeld, upon the means of legally ridding himself of Schumacker! I—I swear, reverend Bishop—"

The paper dropped from his trembling fingers.

"Read it, read it, sir," said the bishop. "I doubt not that your unworthy servant has abused your name as he has that of the unfortunate Schumacker. Only see the result of your uncharitable aversion to your fallen predecessor. One of your followers has plotted his ruin in your name, doubtless hoping to make a merit of it to your Grace."

These words revived the president, as showing him that the suspicions of the bishop, who was acquainted with the{166} entire contents of the casket, had not fallen upon him. Ordener also breathed more freely. He began to see that the innocence of Ethel's father might be made manifest at the same time with his own. He felt a deep surprise at the singular fate which had led him to pursue a fearful brigand to recover this casket, which his old guide, Benignus Spiagudry, bore about him all the time; that it was actually following him while he was seeking for it. He also reflected on the solemn lesson of the events which, after ruining him by means of this same fatal casket, now proved the instrument of his salvation.

The president, recovering himself, read with much show of indignation, in which the entire audience shared, a lengthy memorandum, in which Musdœmon set forth all the details of the abominable scheme which we have seen him execute in the course of this story. Several times the private secretary attempted to rise and defend himself, but each time he was frowned down. At last the odious reading came to an end amid a murmur of universal horror.

"Halberdiers, seize that man!" said the president, pointing to the private secretary.

The wretch, speechless and almost lifeless, stepped from his place, and was cast into the criminal dock, followed by the hoots of the populace.

“Judges,” said the bishop, “shudder and rejoice. The truth, which has just been brought home to your consciences, will now be even more strongly confirmed by the testimony of our honored brother, Athanasius Munder, chaplain to the prisons of this royal town.{167}”

It was indeed Athanasius Munder who accompanied the bishop. He bowed to his superior in the Church and to the court, then at a sign from the president, proceeded as follows: “What I am about to state is the truth. May Heaven punish me if I utter a word with any other object than to do my duty! From what I saw this morning in the cell of the viceroy’s son, I was led to think that the young man was not guilty, although your lordships had condemned him upon his own confession. Now, I was called, a few hours since, to give the last spiritual consolations to the unfortunate mountaineer so cruelly murdered before your very eyes, and whom you condemned, worthy sirs, as being Hans of Iceland. The dying man said to me: ‘I am not Hans of Iceland; I am justly punished for having assumed his name. I was paid to play the part by the chancellor’s private secretary; he is called Musdœmon; and it was he who managed the whole revolt under the name of Hacket! I believe him to be the only guilty man in this whole matter.’ Then he asked me to give him my blessing, and advised me to make haste and repeat his last words to the court. God is my witness. May I save the shedding of innocent blood, and not cause that of the guilty to flow!”

He ceased, again bowing to his bishop and the judges.

“Your Grace sees,” said the bishop to the president, “that one of my clients was not mistaken when he found so much resemblance between Hacket and your private secretary.”

“Turiaf Musdœmon,” said the president to the prisoner, “what have you to say in your defence?{168}”

Musdœmon looked at his master with an expression which alarmed him. He had recovered his usual impudence, and after a brief pause, answered: “Nothing, sir.”

The president resumed in a weak and faltering voice: “Then you acknowledge yourself guilty of the crime with which you are charged? You confess yourself to be the author of a conspiracy alike against the State and against one John Schumacker?”

“I do, my lord,” replied Musdœmon.

The bishop rose. “Mr. President, that there may be no shadow of doubt in this affair, will your grace ask the prisoner if he had any accomplices?”

“Accomplices?” repeated Musdœmon.

He hesitated a moment. The president wore a look of awful anxiety.

“No, my lord Bishop,” he said at last.

The president’s look of relief fell full upon him.

“No, I had no accomplices,” repeated Musdœmon, still more emphatically. “I concocted this plot through affection for my master, who knew nothing of it, to destroy his enemy, Schumacker.”

The eyes of prisoner and president met once more.

“Your Grace,” said the bishop, “must see that as Musdœmon had no accomplices, Baron Ordener Guldenlew must be innocent.”

“Then why, worthy Bishop, did he confess his guilt?”

“Mr. President, why did that mountaineer persist that he was Hans of Iceland at the risk of his life? God alone knows our secret motives.”

Ordener took up the word: “Judges, I can tell you my{169} motive, now that the real criminal has been discovered. I accused myself falsely to save the former chancellor, Schumacker, whose death would have left his daughter without a protector.”

The president bit his lip.

“We request the court,” said the bishop, “to proclaim the innocence of our client, Ordener Guldenlew.”

The president responded with a nod; and at the request of the lord mayor, they finished their examination of the terrible casket, which contained nothing more except Schumacker’s titles of nobility, and a few letters from the Munkholm prisoner to Captain Dispolsen,—bitter, but not criminal letters, which alarmed no one but Chancellor d’Ahlefeld.

The court then withdrew; and after a brief deliberation, while the curious crowd, gathered on the parade, waited with stubborn impatience to see the viceroy’s son led forth to die, and the executioner nonchalantly paced the scaffold, the president pronounced in a scarcely audible voice the death sentence of Turiaf Musdœmon, the acquittal of Ordener Guldenlew, and the restoration of all his honors, titles, and privileges.{170}

XLIX.

What will you sell me your carcass for, my boy
I would not give you, in faith, a broken toy.
Saint Michael and Satan (Old Miracle Play).

THE remnant of the regiment of Munkholm musketeers had returned to their old quarters in the barracks, which stood in the centre of a vast, square courtyard within the fortress. At night-fall the doors of this building were barricaded, all the soldiers withdrawing into it, with the exception of the sentinels upon the various towers, and the handful of men on guard before the military prison adjoining the barracks. This, being the safest and best watched place of confinement in Munkholm, contained the two prisoners sentenced to be hanged on the following morning, Hans of Iceland and Musdœmon.

Hans of Iceland was alone in his cell. He was stretched upon the floor, chained, his head upon a stone; a feeble{171} light filtered through a square grated opening, cut in the heavy oak door which divided his cell from the next room, where he heard his jailers laugh and swear, and heard the sound of the bottles which they drained, and the dice which they threw upon a drumhead. The monster silently writhed in the darkness, his limbs twitched convulsively, and he gnashed his teeth.

All at once he lifted his voice and called aloud. A turnkey appeared at the grating: "What do you want?" said he.

Hans of Iceland rose. "Mate, I am cold; my stone bed is hard and damp. Give me a bundle of straw to sleep on, and a little fire to warm myself."

"It is only fair," replied the turnkey, "to give a little comfort to a poor devil who is going to be hung, even if he be the Iceland Devil. I will bring you what you want. Have you any money?"

"No," replied the brigand.

"What! you, the most famous robber in Norway, and you have not a few scurvy gold ducats in your pouch?"

"No," repeated the brigand.

"A few little crowns?"

"I tell you, no!"

"Not even a few paltry escalins?"

"No, no, nothing; not enough to buy a rat's skin or a man's soul."

The turnkey shook his head: “That’s a different matter; you have no right to complain. Your cell is not so cold as the one you will have to sleep in to-morrow, and yet I’ll be bound you won’t notice the hardness of that bed.{172}”

So saying, the jailer withdrew, followed by the curses of the monster, who continued to rattle his chains, which gave forth a hollow clang as if they were breaking slowly under repeated and violent jerks and pulls.

The door opened. A tall man, dressed in red serge, carrying a dark lantern, entered the cell, accompanied by the jailer who had refused the prisoner’s request. The latter at once became perfectly quiet.

“Hans of Iceland,” said the man in red, “I am Nychol Orugix, executioner of the province of Throndhjem; to-morrow, at sunrise, I am to have the honor of hanging your Excellency upon a fine new gallows in Throndhjem market-place.”

“Are you very sure that you will hang me?” replied the brigand.

The executioner laughed. “I wish you were as sure to rise straight into heaven by Jacob’s ladder as you are to mount the scaffold by Nychol Orugix’s ladder.”

“Indeed?” said the monster, with a malicious grin.

“I tell you again, Sir Brigand, that I am hangman for the province.”

“If I were not myself I should like to be you,” replied the brigand.

“I can’t say the same for you,” rejoined the hangman; then rubbing his hands with a conceited and complacent smirk, he added: “My friend, you are right; ours is a fine trade. Ah! my hand knows the weight of a man’s head.”

“Have you often tasted blood?” asked the brigand.

“No; but I have often used the rack.”

“Have you ever devoured the entrails of a living child?{173}”

“No; but I have crushed men’s bones in a vise; I have broken their limbs upon the wheel; I have dulled steel saws upon their skulls; I have torn their quivering flesh with red-hot pincers; I have burned the blood in their open veins by pouring in a stream of molten lead and boiling oil.”

“Yes,” said the brigand, with a thoughtful look, “you have your pleasures too.”

“In fact,” added the hangman, “Hans of Iceland though you be, I imagine that my hands have released more human souls than yours, to say nothing of your own, which you must render up to-morrow.”

“Always provided that I have one. Do you suppose, then, executioner of Throndhjem, that you can release the spirit of Ingulf from Hans of Iceland’s mortal frame without its carrying off your own?”

The executioner laughed heartily. “Indeed, we shall see to-morrow.”

“We shall see,” said the brigand.

“Well,” said the executioner, “I did not come here to talk of your spirit, but only of your body. Hearken! your body by law belongs to me after your death; but the law gives you the right to sell it to me. Tell me what you will take for it?”

“What I will take for my corpse?” said the brigand.

“Yes, and be reasonable.”

Hans of Iceland turned to his jailer: “Tell me, mate, how much do you ask for a bundle of straw and a handful of fire?”

The jailer reflected. “Two gold ducats.{174}”

“Well,” said the brigand to the hangman, “you must give me two gold ducats for my corpse.”

“Two gold ducats!” cried the hangman. “It is horribly dear. Two gold ducats for a wretched corpse! No, indeed! I’ll give no such price.”

“Then,” quietly responded the monster, “you shall not have it.”

“Then you will be thrown into the common sewer, instead of adorning the Royal Museum at Copenhagen or the collection of curiosities at Bergen.”

“What do I care?”

“Long after your death, people will flock to look at your skeleton, saying, ‘Those are the remains of the famous Hans of Iceland!’ Your bones will be nicely polished, and strung on copper wire; you will be placed in a big glass case, and dusted carefully every day. Instead of these honors, consider what awaits you if you refuse to sell me your body; you will be left to rot in some charnel-house, where you will be the prey of worms and other vermin.”

“Well, I shall be like the living, who are perpetually preyed upon by their inferiors and devoured by their superiors.”

“Two gold ducats!” muttered the hangman; “what an exorbitant price! If you will not come down in your terms, my dear fellow, we can never make a trade.”

“It is my first and probably my last trade; I am bent on having it a good one.”

“Consider that I may make you repent of your obstinacy. To-morrow you will be in my power.{175}”

“Do you think so?” These words were uttered with a look which escaped the hangman.

“Yes; and there is a certain way of tightening a slip-knot—but if you will only be reasonable, I will hang you in my best manner.”

“Little do I care what you do to my neck to-morrow,” replied the monster, with a mocking air.

“Come, won’t you be satisfied with two crowns? What can you do with the money?”

“Ask your comrade there,” said the brigand, pointing to the turnkey; “he charges me two gold ducats for a handful of straw and a fire.”

“Now by Saint Joseph’s saw,” said the hangman, angrily addressing the turnkey, “it is shocking to make a man pay its weight in gold for a fire and a little worthless straw.”

“Two ducats!” the turnkey replied sourly; “I’ve a good mind to make him pay four! It is you, Master Nychol, who act like a regular screw in refusing to give this poor prisoner two gold ducats for his corpse, when you can sell it for at least twenty to some learned old fogy or some doctor.”

“I never paid more than twenty escalins for a corpse in my life,” said the hangman.

“Yes,” replied the jailer, “for the body of some paltry thief, or some miserable Jew, that may be; but everybody knows that you can get whatever you choose to ask for Hans of Iceland’s body.”

Hans of Iceland shook his head.

“What business is it of yours?” said Orugix, curtly;{176} “do I interfere with your plunder,—with the clothes and jewels that you steal from the prisoners, and the dirty water which you pour into their thin soup, and the torture to which you put them, to extort money from them? No, I never will give two gold ducats.”

“No straw and no fire for less than two gold ducats,” replied the obstinate jailer.

“No corpse for less than two gold ducats,” repeated the unmoved brigand.

The hangman, after a brief pause, stamped his foot angrily, saying: “Well, I’ve no time to waste with you. I am wanted elsewhere.” He drew from his waistcoat a leather bag, which he opened slowly and reluctantly. “There, cursed demon of Iceland, there are your two ducats. Satan would never give you as much for your soul as I do for your body, I am sure.”

The brigand accepted the gold. The turnkey instantly held out his hand to take it.

“One instant, mate; first give me what I asked for.”

The jailer went out, and soon returned with a bundle of dry straw and a pan of live coals, which he placed beside the prisoner.

“That’s it,” said the brigand, giving him the two ducats; “I’ll make a warm night of it. One word more,” he added in an ominous tone. “Does not this prison adjoin the barracks of the Munkholm musketeers?”

“It does,” said the jailer.

“And which way is the wind?”

“From the east, I think.”

“Good,” said the brigand.{177}

“What are you aiming at, comrade?” asked the jailer.

“Oh, nothing,” replied the brigand.

“Farewell, comrade, until to-morrow morning early.”

“Yes, to-morrow,” repeated the brigand.

And the noise of the heavy door, as it closed, prevented the jailer and his companion from hearing the fierce, jeering laughter which accompanied these words.{178}

L.

Do you hope to end with another crime?—Alex. Soumet.

LET us now take a look at the other cell in the military prison adjoining the barracks, which holds our old acquaintance, Turiaf Musdœmon.

It may seem surprising that Musdœmon, crafty and cowardly as he was, should so readily confess his crime to the court which condemned him, and so generously conceal the share of his ungrateful master, Chancellor d'Ahlefeld, in it.

However, Musdœmon had not experienced a change of heart. His noble frankness was perhaps the greatest proof of cunning which he could possibly have given. When he saw his infernal intrigue so unexpectedly exposed, beyond all hope of denial, he was for an instant stunned and terrified. Conquering his alarm, his extreme{179} shrewdness soon showed him that as it was impossible to destroy his chosen victims, he must bend all his energies to saving himself. Two plans at once presented themselves: the first, to throw all the blame upon Count d'Ahlefeld, who had so basely deserted him; the second, to assume the whole burden of the crime himself. A vulgar mind would have grasped at the former; Musdœmon chose the latter. The chancellor was chancellor, after all; besides, there was nothing in the papers which directly implicated him, although they contained overwhelming evidence against his secretary. Then, his master had given him several meaning looks; this was enough to confirm him in his purpose to suffer himself to be condemned, confident that Count d'Ahlefeld would connive at his escape, though less from gratitude for past service than through his need for future aid.

He therefore paced his prison, which was dimly lighted by a wretched lamp, never doubting that the door would be thrown open during the night. He studied the architecture of the old stone cell, built by kings whose very names have almost vanished from the pages of history, and was much surprised to find a wooden plank, which echoed back his tread as if it covered some subterranean vault. He also observed a huge iron ring cemented into the arched roof, from which hung a fragment of rope. Time passed; and he listened impatiently to the clock on the tower as it slowly struck the hours, its mournful toll resounding through the silence of the night.

At last there was a footfall outside his cell; his heart beat high with hope. The massive bolt creaked; the pad{180}lock dropped; and as the door opened, his face beamed with delight. It was the same character in scarlet robes whom we have just encountered in Hans of Iceland's prison. He had a coil of hempen cord under his arm, and was accompanied by four halberdiers in black, armed with swords and partisans.

Musdœmon still wore the wig and gown of a magistrate. His dress seemed to impress the man in red, who bowed low as if accustomed to respect that garb, and said with some hesitation: "Sir, is our business with your worship?"

"Yes, yes," hastily replied Musdœmon, confirmed in his hope of escape by this polite address, and failing to observe the bloody hue of the speaker's garments.

“Your name,” said the man, his eyes fixed on a parchment which he had just unrolled, “is Turiaf Musdœmon, I believe.”

“Just so. Do you come from the chancellor, my friend?”

“Yes, your worship.”

“Do not fail, when you have done your errand, to assure his Grace of my undying gratitude.”

The man in red looked at him in amazement. “Your—gratitude!”

“Yes, to be sure, my friend; for it will probably be out of my power to thank him in person very soon.”

“Probably,” dryly replied the man.

“And you must feel,” added Musdœmon, “that I owe him a deep debt of gratitude for such a service.”

“By the cross of the repentant thief,” cried the man,{181} with a coarse laugh, “to hear you, one would think that the chancellor was doing something quite unusual for you!”

“Well, to be sure, it is no more than strict justice.”

“Strict justice! that is the word; but you acknowledge that it is justice. It is the first admission of the kind that I ever heard in the six-and-twenty years that I have followed my profession. Come, sir, we waste our time in idle talk; are you ready?”

“I am,” said the delighted Musdœmon, stepping to the door.

“Wait; wait a minute,” exclaimed the man in red, stooping to lay his coil of rope on the floor.

Musdœmon paused.

“What are you going to do with all that rope?”

“Your worship may well ask. I know that there is much more than I shall need; but when I began on this affair I thought there would be a great many more prisoners.”

“Come, make haste!” said Musdœmon.

“Your worship is in a wonderful hurry. Have you no last favor to ask?”

“None but the one I have already mentioned, that you will thank his Grace for me. For God’s sake, make haste!” added Musdœmon; “I long to get away from here. Have we a long journey before us?”

“A long journey!” replied the man in red, straightening himself, and measuring off a few lengths of rope. “The journey will not tire your worship much; for we can make it without leaving this room.{182}”

Musdœmon shuddered.

“What do you mean?”

“What do you mean yourself?” asked the man.

“Oh, God!” said Musdœmon, turning pale, “who are you?”

“I am the hangman.”

The poor wretch trembled like a dry leaf blown by the wind.

“Did you not come to help me to escape?” he feebly muttered.

The hangman laughed. “Yes, truly! to help you to escape into the spirit-land, whence I warrant you will not be brought back.”

Musdœmon grovelled on the floor. “Mercy! Have pity on me! Mercy!”

“I’ faith,” coldly observed the hangman, “’tis the first time I was ever asked such a thing. Do you take me for the king?”

The unfortunate man dragged himself on his knees, trailing his gown in the dust, beating his head against the floor, and clasping the hangman’s feet with muffled groans and broken sobs.

“Come, be quiet!” said the hangman. “I never before saw a black gown kneel to a red jerkin.” He kicked the suppliant aside, adding: “Pray to God and the saints, fellow; they will be more apt to hear you than I.”

Musdœmon still knelt, his face buried in his hands, weeping bitterly.

Meantime, the hangman, standing on tiptoe, passed his rope through the ring in the ceiling: he let it hang until{183} it reached the floor, then secured it by a double turn, and made a slip-knot in the end.

“I am ready,” said he, when these ominous preparations were over; “are you ready to lay down your life?”

“No!” said Musdœmon, springing up; “no; it cannot be! There is some horrible mistake. Chancellor d’Ahlefeld is not so base; I am too necessary to him. It is impossible that it was for me he sent you. Let me escape; do not fear that the chancellor will be angry.”

“Did you not say,” replied the executioner, “that you were Turiaf Musdœmon?”

The prisoner hesitated for an instant, then said suddenly: “No, no! my name is not Musdœmon; my name is Turiaf Orugix.”

“Orugix!” cried the executioner, “Orugix!”

He snatched off the periwig which concealed the prisoner’s face, and uttered an exclamation of surprise: “My brother!”

“Your brother!” replied the prisoner, with a mixture of shame and pleasure; “can you be—”

“Nychol Orugix, hangman for the province of Throndhjem, at your service, brother Turiaf.”

The prisoner fell upon the executioner’s neck, calling him his brother, his beloved brother. This fraternal recognition would not have gratified any one who witnessed it. Turiaf lavished countless caresses upon Nychol with a forced and timid smile, while Nychol responded with a gloomy and embarrassed look. It was like a tiger fondling an elephant, while the monster’s ponderous foot is already planted upon its panting chest.{184}

“What happiness, brother Nychol! I am glad indeed to see you.”

“And I am sorry for you, brother Turiaf.”

The prisoner pretended not to hear these words, and went on in trembling tones: “You have a wife and children, I suppose? You must take me to see my gentle sister, and let me kiss my dear nephews.”

“The Devil fly away with you!” muttered the hangman.

“I will be a second father to them. Hark ye, brother, I am powerful; I have great influence—”

The brother replied with a sinister expression: “I know that you had! At present, you had better be thinking of that which you have doubtless contrived to curry with the saints.”

All hope faded from the prisoner's face.

"Good God! what does this mean, dear Nychol? I am safe, since I have found you. Think that the same mother bore us; that we played together as children. Remember, Nychol, you are my brother!"

"You never remembered it until now," replied the brutal Nychol.

"No, I cannot die by my brother's hand!"

"It is your own fault, Turiaf. It was you who ruined my career; who prevented me from becoming royal executioner at Copenhagen; who caused me to be sent into this miserable region as a petty provincial hangman. If you had not been a bad brother, you would have no cause to complain of that which distresses you so much now. I should not be in Throndhjem, and some one else would{185} have to finish your business. Now, enough, brother, you must die."

Death is hideous to the wicked for the same reason that it is beautiful to the good; both must put off their humanity, but the just man is delivered from his body as from a prison, while the wicked man is torn from it as from a jail. At the last moment hell yawns before the sinful soul which has dreamed of annihilation. It knocks anxiously at the dark portals of death; and it is not annihilation that answers.

The prisoner rolled upon the floor and wrung his hands, with moans more heart-rending than the everlasting wail of the damned.

"God have mercy! Holy angels in heaven, if you exist, have pity upon me! Nychol, brother Nychol, in our mother's name, oh, let me live!"

The hangman held out his warrant.

"I cannot; the order is peremptory."

"That warrant is not for me," stammered the despairing prisoner; "it is for one Musdœmon. That is not I; I am Turiaf Orugix."

"You jest," said Nychol, shrugging his shoulders. "I know perfectly well that it is meant for you. Besides," he added roughly, "yesterday you would not have been Turiaf Orugix to your brother; to-day he can only look upon you as Turiaf Musdœmon."

"Brother, brother!" groaned the wretch, "only wait until to-morrow! It is impossible that the chancellor could have given the order for my death; it is some frightful mistake. Count d'Ahlefeld loves me dearly. Dear{186} Nychol, I implore you, spare my life! I shall soon be restored to favor, and I will do whatever you may ask—"

“You can do me but one service, Turiaf,” broke in the hangman. “I have lost two executions already upon which I counted the most, those of ex-chancellor Schumacker and the viceroy’s son. I am always unlucky. You and Hans of Iceland are all that are left. Your execution, being secret and by night, is worth at least twelve gold ducats to me. Let me hang you peaceably, that is the only favor I ask of you.”

“Oh, God!” sighed the prisoner.

“It will be the first and last, in good sooth; but, in return, I promise that you shall not suffer. I will hang you like a brother; submit to your fate.”

Musdœmon sprang to his feet; his nostrils were distended with rage; his livid lips quivered; his teeth chattered; his mouth foamed with despair.

“Satan! I saved that d’Ahlefeld; I have embraced my brother,—and they murder me! And I must die this very night in a dark dungeon, where none can hear my curses; where I may not cry out against them from one end of the kingdom to the other; where I may not tear asunder the veil that hides their crimes! Was it for such a death that I have stained my entire life? Wretch!” he added, turning to his brother, “would you become a fratricide?”

“I am the executioner,” answered the phlegmatic Nychol.

“No!” exclaimed the prisoner; and he flung himself headlong upon the executioner, his eyes darting flame and{187} streaming with tears, like those of a bull at bay,—“no, I will not die thus meekly; I have not lived like a poisonous serpent to die like a paltry worm trampled under foot! I will leave my life in my last sting; but it shall be mortal.”

So saying, he grappled like a bitter foe with him whom he had just embraced as a brother; the fulsome, flattering Musdœmon now showed his true spirit. Despair stirred up the foul dregs of his soul; and after crawling prostrate like a tiger, like a tiger he sprang upon his enemy. It would have been hard to decide which of the two brothers was the most appalling, as they struggled, one with the brute ferocity of a wild beast, the other with the artful fury of a demon.

But the four halberdiers, hitherto passive spectators, did not remain motionless. They lent their aid to the executioner; and soon Musdœmon, whose rage was his only strength, was forced to quit his hold. He dashed himself against the wall, uttering inarticulate yells, and blunting his nails upon the stone.

“To die! Devils in hell, to die! My shrieks unheard outside this roof, my arms powerless to tear down these walls!”

He was seized, but offered no resistance; his useless efforts had exhausted him. He was stripped of his gown, and bound; at this moment a sealed packet fell from his bosom.

“What is that?” said the hangman.

An infernal light gleamed in the prisoner’s haggard eyes. He muttered: “How could I forget that? Look{188} here, brother Nychol,” he added in an almost friendly tone; “these papers belong to the lord chancellor. Promise to give them to him, and you may do what you will with me.”

“Since you are quiet now, I promise to grant your last wish, although you have been a bad brother to me. I will see that the chancellor has the papers, on the honor of an Orugix.”

“Ask leave to hand them to him yourself,” replied the prisoner, smiling at the executioner, who, from his nature, had little understanding of smiles. “The pleasure which they will afford his Grace may lead him to confer some favor on you.”

“Really, brother?” said Orugix. “Thank you! Perhaps he will make me executioner royal after all, eh? Well, let us part good friends! I forgive you all the scratches which you gave me; forgive me for the hempen collar which I must give you.”

“The chancellor promised me a very different sort of collar,” said Musdœmon.

Then the halberdiers led him, bound, into the middle of the cell; the hangman placed the fatal noose round his neck.

“Are you ready, Turiaf?”

“One moment! one moment!” said the prisoner, whose tenor had revived; “for mercy’s sake, brother, do not pull the rope until I tell you to do so!”

“I do not need to pull it,” answered the hangman.

A moment later he repeated his question. “Are you ready?”

“One moment more! Alas! must I die?{189}”

“Turiaf, I have no time to waste.”

So saying, Orugix signed to the halberdiers to stand away from the prisoner.

“One word more, brother; do not forget to give the packet to Count d’Ahlefeld.”

“Never fear,” replied Nychol. He added for the third time: “Come, are you ready?”

The unfortunate man opened his lips, perhaps to plead for another brief delay, when the impatient hangman stooped and turned a brass button projecting from the floor.

The plank gave way beneath the victim; the poor wretch disappeared through a square trap-door with a dull twang from the rope, which was stretched suddenly and vibrated fearfully with the dying man's final convulsions.

Nothing was seen but the rope swinging to and fro in the dark opening, through which came a cool breeze and a sound as of running water.

The halberdiers themselves shrank back, horror-stricken. The hangman approached the abyss, seized the rope, which still vibrated, and swung himself into the hole, pressing both feet against his victim's shoulders; the fatal rope stretched to its utmost with a creak, and stood still. A stifled sob rose from the trap.

"All is over," said the hangman, climbing back into the cell. "Farewell, brother!"

He drew a cutlass from his belt. "Go feed the fishes in the fjord. Your body to the waves; your soul to the flames!"

With these words, he cut the taut rope. The fragment{190} still fastened to the iron ring lashed the ceiling, while the deep, dark waters splashed high as the body fell, then swept on their underground course.

The hangman closed the trap as he had opened it; as he rose, he saw that the room was full of smoke.

"What is all this?" he asked the halberdiers. "Where does this smoke come from?"

They knew no better than he. In surprise, they opened the door; the corridors were also filled with thick and nauseating smoke. A secret outlet led them, greatly terrified, to the square courtyard, where a fearful sight met their gaze.

A vast conflagration, fanned by a violent east wind, was consuming the military prison and the barracks. The flames, driven in eddying whirls, climbed stone walls, crowned burning roofs, leaped from gaping window-frames; and the black towers of Munkholm now shone in a red and ominous light, now vanished in a dense cloud of smoke.

A turnkey, who was escaping by the courtyard, told them hastily that the fire had broken out in the monster's cell during the sleep of Hans of Iceland's keepers, he having been imprudently allowed to have a fire and straw.

“How unlucky I am!” cried Orugix, when he heard this story; “now I suppose Hans of Iceland has slipped through my hands too. The rascal must have been burned; and I sha’n’t even get his body, for which I paid two ducats!”

Meantime, the unfortunate Munkholm musketeers, roused suddenly from their sleep by imminent death, crowded toward the door only to find it closely barred.{191} Their shrieks of anguish and despair were heard outside; they stood at the blazing windows, wringing their hands, or dashed themselves madly upon the flagging of the court, escaping one death to meet another. The victorious flames devoured the entire structure before the rest of the garrison could come to the rescue.

All help was vain. Luckily, the building stood by itself. The door was broken in with hatchets, but it was too late; for as it opened, the burning roof and floors gave way, and fell upon the unfortunate men with a loud crash.

The entire building disappeared in a whirlwind of fiery dust and burning smoke, which stifled the faint moans of the expiring men.

Next morning nothing was left in the courtyard but four high walls, black and smoking, around a horrid mass of smouldering ruins still devouring each other like wild beasts in a circus.

When the pile had cooled, it was searched. Beneath a heap of stones and iron beams, twisted out of shape by the flames, was found a mass of whitened bones and disfigured corpses; with some thirty soldiers, most of whom were crippled, this was all that remained of the crack regiment of Munkholm.

When the site of the prison was searched, and they reached the fatal cell where the fire had broken out, and where Hans of Iceland had been imprisoned, they found the remains of a human body close beside an iron pan and a heap of broken chains. It was curious that among these ashes there were two skulls, although there was but one skeleton.{192}

LI.

Saladin. Bravo, Ibrahim! you are indeed the messenger of good fortune; I thank you for your joyful tidings.

The Mameluke. Well, is that all?

Saladin. What did you expect?

The Mameluke. Nothing more for the messenger of good fortune.

Lessing: *Nathan the Wise*.

PALE and worn, Count d'Ahlefeld strode up and down his apartment; in his hand he crushed a bundle of letters which he had just read, while he stamped his foot on the smooth marble floor and the gold-fringed rugs.

At the other end of the room, in an attitude of deep respect, stood Nychol Orugix in his infamous scarlet dress, felt hat in hand.

"You have done me good service, Musdœmon," hissed the chancellor.

The hangman looked up timidly: "Is your Grace pleased?"

"What do you want here?" said the chancellor, turning upon him suddenly.

The hangman, proud that he had won a glance from the chancellor, smiled hopefully.

"What do I want, your Grace? The post of executioner at Copenhagen, if your Grace will deign to bestow so great a favor on me in return for the good news I have brought you."

"*The poor mother was insane.*"

Photo-Etching.—From drawing by Démarest.

{193}

The chancellor called to the two halberdiers on guard at his door: "Seize this rascal; he annoys me by his impudence."

The guards led away the amazed and confounded Nychol, who ventured one word more: “My lord—”

“You are no longer hangman for the province of Throndhjem; I deprive you of your office!” cried the chancellor, slamming the door.

The chancellor returned to his letters, angrily read and re-read them, maddened by his dishonor; for these were the letters which once passed between the countess and Musdœmon. This was Elphega’s handwriting. He found that Ulrica was not his daughter; that, it might be, the Frederic whom he mourned was not his son. The unhappy count was punished through that same pride which had caused all his crimes. He cared not now if vengeance evaded him; all his ambitious dreams vanished,—his past was blasted, his future dead. He had striven to destroy his enemies; he had only succeeded in losing his own reputation, his adviser, and even his marital and paternal rights.

But he must see once more the wretched woman who had betrayed him. He hastily crossed the spacious apartment, shaking the letters in his hand as if they were a thunderbolt. He threw open the door of Elphega’s room; he entered—

The guilty wife had just unexpectedly learned from Colonel Vœthaün of her son Frederic’s fearful death. The poor mother was insane.{194}