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KING ERIK



Other Works by Mr. EDMUND GOSSE

IN VERSE

On Viol and Flute. New edition. 1890

Firdausi in Exile, and other Poems. Second edition. 1887

IN PROSE

Northern Studies. 1879. Popular edition. 1890

Life of Gray. 1882. Revised edition. 1889

Seventeenth Century Studies. 1883. Second edition. 1885

Life of Congreve. 1888

A History of Eighteenth Century Literature. 1889. Second
edition. 1891

Life of Philip Henry Gosse, F.R.S. 1890

Gossip in a Library. 1891. Second edition. 1892

The Secret of Narcisse. A Romance. 1892

Questions at Issue. 1893

KING ERIK.

A TRAGEDY

BY

EDMUND GOSSE

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

BY THEODORE WATTS



LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1893

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MAIN



It was recently discovered that a "remainder" of 250 unbound copies of the tragedy of "King Erik," which originally appeared at Christmas, 1875 (Chatto and Windus, 1876), was in existence. As the book in its original form has become rare, it has been thought that the re-issue of these copies would present a certain interest. In order, however, to give a special character to this limited publication, there has been prefixed to it, by the author's kind permission, the lengthy review of "King Erik," by Mr. Theodore Watts, which appeared in the "Examiner" for February 5, 1876. A peculiar value attaches to this essay, in that it was Mr. Watts's earliest contribution to the periodical press.

W. H.





INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

MR. TENNYSON'S *Queen Mary* has revived the question which at one time was thought to be settled for ever—Will poetic drama ever again have real vitality upon the English stage? At the end of the sixteenth century the greatest poet and the greatest play-wright was the joint-manager of the Globe Theatre, William Shakespeare. Now, with the single exception, perhaps, of Dr. Marston, our poets are not playwrights, and our playwrights are not poets. We do not say this disparagingly towards either—certainly not towards the playwrights—for to produce a good acting play, however devoid of what is called poetry, is to achieve something that is well worth achieving. Nay, there can be no really good acting play that is not rich in one kind of poetry—the poetry of situation. Nevertheless, it is a portentous fact that, throughout the entire field of literary activity there are no two men so exactly the opposites of each other as the typical poet (such a man, say, as the late Sydney Dobell), and the typical playwright (such a man, say, as Mr. Blank).

But in Shakespeare's time Dobell (the author of *Balder*,

be it remembered !) would have written for the stage as certainly as Mr. Blank would have written for it in blank verse.

Give any one of our contemporary poets a legendary or historical subject as the basis of a drama, and while he will perhaps follow with conscientious accuracy in the path of his legend or history, he will display not only an ignorance of the first requirements of the stage, but, very likely, an incapacity to develop at all a story by means of metrical dialogue. The movement of his verse will be entirely lyrical, most likely ; or else artificially rugged, like that of *Queen Mary*, or Mr. Browning's dramas. Poetic imagery will be sought for, to the ruin of dramatic truth. Fancy, and what the poet cherishes most of all, his private "thoughts" upon things in general, will clog his imagination till its wings will droop over-weighted, like the lost angel's pinions in the story, sunk hell-ward by the very gems of Arden with which he had been endowed.

Give the same subject to the playwright, and with what a different pair of eyes does he look upon it ! "Business" is his watchword. A play with him means literally a play—a series of situations—not a string of pretty speeches. These latter he very likely calls the "words," as the actors do. (Suggestive expression !)

Fidelity to history or to legend is good—if it will interest—enthrall an audience. What strong "situations," he asks himself, will the subject afford ; and often, having selected these, he consults the carpenter and scene-painter as to the tableaux and their practicability. Then he begins to write up to these tableaux. The

result is that he produces a play that will most likely act well. And, if you tell him that you cannot read it, his answer is crushing and conclusive: "It is not meant to be read." (Thomas Heywood gave it as his opinion that no plays are meant to be read.) Take the argument of *King Erik* as a good illustration of what we mean.

The story is partly original and partly a dramatisation of a Saga:—

Erik took to wife a German princess, Botilda. Soon after her coming to Denmark the Wends harried the shores of the Baltic, and did great mischief. Whereupon Erik made a league with the king of Norway, and in three great sea fights, broke up their power. Coming back to Roeskild, he called his lords and freemen round him, and swore to them that henceforth he would live among them to preserve peace in the realm, and above all to punish with death any who should kill a Christian man, untried. This he did to put an end to the dissensions among the people. But it happened that a Skald, one Grimur, nursed in his breast a passion for the queen, though she knew it not, and, Erik being told of this, in a sudden rage slew Grimur with his own hand, and disgraced the queen. But on his first coming to High Mass the Archbishop of Lund resolutely withstood him, saying that he had broken his own law in slaying a man untried. Whereupon Erik, smitten with remorse, vowed to make pilgrimage to the Holy City to heal his inward wound. Declaring this intention to the gathered Thing, the freemen threw themselves at his feet with tears, and prayed him to stay with them, but in vain. And, learning that Botilda was innocent of any fault, his sorrow became a passion, and drove him from the land. She went with him, having forgiven him, and they journeyed together to Micklegarth (Constantinople), where the Emperor Alexios received them with so much hospitality that they were fain at last to fly to Cyprus secretly yet not before one of the Emperor's bodyguard, a Dane, the foster-brother to Grimur, had heard how the Skald was slain. This man followed Erik and Botilda to Cyprus, where he slew the king just as he was about to embark for Palestine. Botilda took the body with her to the Holy Land, and died there. They lie buried side by side in a little valley at the foot of Olivet.

Now, pursuing our comparison, let us suppose that a playwright has had this story given to him as material for a play. As the first thing that occurs to him is to make a play that will act well, the last thing the slavish following of the Saga, he will try to get the play into four acts, perhaps into three. For there is no man of business in the world freer from any kind of autorial nonsense or shadow-hunting than the playwright. If you tell him that a play, to be classical, must be in five acts, because one, Horace (who, according to Wieland, was "poking fun" at the young Pisos when he said it) declared, with mock solemnity, that five acts and no more were indispensable to a play, he asks, with a smile, "why not fifteen or fifty—like a Chinese play? the number of acts depends upon the business to be done."

Yet the playwright would, almost certainly, keep the scene of action at Roeskild if possible—leaving Constantinople, Cyprus, and Saga to take care of themselves. For he has a great notion of the "unities" whenever he can keep to them. Not because he has any superstition about Aristotle—to say the truth, his knowledge of that author is limited—but because he has found, from experience, that the "unities" are based on the laws of that very human mind which it is his business to play upon. In the first act, and, perhaps in the first scene of our playwright's play, there would have been introduced an important personage whom Mr. Gosse does not even give a name to in his "argument," and does not introduce until the fourth act, and *that* far away

from the scene of the principal dramatic action which forms the *vis matrix* of the play. This personage is the "foster-brother," who is to act the part of the agent of Nemesis. From the first, the affection between him and the Skald Grimur would have been strongly and pathetically shown by the playwright; the very splendid situation of the mixing of the blood would not have been passed by. Most likely, too, the foster-brother would have acted as "monitor" as well as the agent of Nemesis, urging the erotic young Skald to escape from his fatal passion. And perhaps, to add to the importance of Nemesis, and to give further psychological complications to the story, the foster-brother would have had a great attachment to this very king whom, by the solemn sanction of his oath, he was fated in the result to slay. Immediately after the killing of Grimur, which is the true "revolution," as Aristotle would say, of the play, the foster-brother's revenge would hang threatening like a thunder-cloud over the whole of this "dramatic world;" and then after the reconciliation of Erik and his wife, down it would fall immediately—fall like a thunderbolt—and there would come a tempestuous end to the tragedy in the shape of a tremendous tableau.

Now altogether different from this is the poet's method. The probability is that he (the poet) never, or rarely, goes into a theatre. To him, consequently, the heading "Scene I." on the top of any page means something like "Chapter I." (while to the playwright it means "flats" and "practicable doors," and a world of stage carpentry).

He (the poet) is always thinking of what the characters

say, and how they say it, not of what they do. The consequence is, that his dialogue, which should be struck from the action like sparks from the trotting roadster's shoes, consists of lyrics in blank verse. After the true revolution has been reached, he does not, as the playwright does, hear in his mind the ominous rustling of shawls, the dreadful click of the opera-glasses as they close in the stalls, but he goes on for two mortal acts more, and, very likely, removes the scene of action to the other side of the world—having, in his innocent ignorance of his doom, of the "deep damnation" that awaits him, no thought of those stalls where soon not one white tie, not one white shoulder, will be seen to shelter him from the hisses of the dreadful pit.

Now, we do not mean that Mr. Gosse sins in all or half of the respects we have mentioned. But, most emphatically, he belongs to the poets, and not to the playwrights, and would be in dangerous case if arraigned before the gods above and the demons below. He has produced a work which, however symmetrical as a work of literary art (and symmetrical and very beautiful it is), would have to be shorn of many of its poetical beams before it would be looked at by any manager in London. For instance, this agent of Nemesis is not even heard of till the fourth act. And then he has no character. He is simply the agent of Nemesis. Yet, shadowy and insignificant as his personality is, and although, as a matter of fact, the real reason why the scene of action is removed to the East is the perfectly good one that the play should follow the Saga, the *apparent* reason—

and that is the important matter—is that Erik should meet with this shadowy personage there, and be killed there by him. Therefore, the most important character, as he appears when we reach the fourth act, is no character at all but an abstraction. Here we have a case, like many another of late, where the very excess of conscience spoils the work.

The true poet—and Mr. Gosse is a true poet, feeling the high mission of his art—cannot, dare not, travesty history. To him, truth is the highest poetry. This is why the poet, if he writes for the stage, will soon be driven altogether from history for dramatic purposes—will soon have to go, in every case, to those elemental sources whence History herself must go to draw the incidents—pathetic, beautiful, or sublime—which she offers. This is why the poet, having fallen upon days when strong situations and artificial compression of striking incidents are indispensable in acted drama, will soon have to leave history to the historian, and invent his own story and incidents for himself. The time having gone by, in short, when, if we want a sea-coast for Bohemia, we can give her one, we shall, in future, have always to invent our sea-coasted country for ourselves, and christen it with some other name than Bohemia. The poet says, ‘I cannot swerve from truth.’ The theatrical manager says, ‘I must have situations rapidly evolving situations, till a climax is reached, and then a sudden end, never mind what may become of your historical truth. Amusement, and not historical accuracy, is what I have to supply to the public.’

Both are right—all are right, manager, playwright,

and poet. Yet, till they are all reconciled, how can acted poetic drama ever live again? "*Situation*"—that is the name of the genius—the evil genius, if you will—who has worked all this change. The Elizabethans knew no such word. Their characters would walk off, at the end of a scene or an act, as quietly as they walked on. A poet cannot, he will tell you, write for "situations." And, as a rule, he must break the unities. Often one enormous advantage results from his doing this, however. It gives the dramatist, as here in *King Erik*, an opportunity of showing the growth of a character. This, indeed, is the great triumph of Mr. Gosse's play, the development of the character of Botilda.

Not often has the dramatist such an opportunity as this play affords, and if he had he would rarely have the required endowments to make good use of it, especially if the character to be developed is a woman's. For what are called women in dramas are often very sorry women indeed, depending for their feminine traits greatly upon their petticoats. Shakespeare's are an exception, of course. But even his women, compare them with the men!

Most women have no characters at all,

says Pope. And that is true. No characters they have, when seen from the point of view of the satirist, or the *roué*. But from another point of view, that of Charlotte Brontë, say, or George Eliot, they seem to have characters, something at least that might without offence to our own sex be called characters. The character of Botilda is, for a man's woman, a great and

most remarkable success, though here and there no doubt there may be traces of an uncertain hand in the delineation. It is a long time since anything so tender, so pathetic, and so true has been given to us in dramatic poetry; and whatever may be Mr. Gosse's shortcomings as a playwright, we now know the kind of beautiful work we have to expect from him.

During Erik's absence on the seas Botilda has had but one thought, but one longing—the return of her husband. Her soul is starving for him—literally that. Everything recalls him. She cannot talk to her maids about a piece of embroidery without bringing in his name at the end of every sentence. Some women's love is a *cultus* as well as a passion. Botilda is one of these. At last Erik comes. At last she is clasped in his arms, weeping. And now, if this woman were told, as she lies there, that she must burn at the stake for him,

Burn to save him from some peril,

she would shed tears perhaps, but they would be tears of joy. For there is no such bliss for such as she as that of self-immolation for the man they love. But she has a religious duty to perform. She had, on the night Erik sailed away to fight the Wends, gone to the Cathedral at Odense; and, at the shrine of Knud, made a vow that if she ever saw his face again she would

wend on foot,

And pay her offerings at the blessed shrine.

She starts on this mission at early morning in the cold. But in the market of Roeskild she unexpectedly comes

upon Erik and his bodyguard. This is the greeting she gets :—

BOTILDA. I am glad to see you ere I go !

ERIK. Go where ?

BOT. I thought, before your work was done,
We should be home again !

ERIK. Be home again ?
Where are you bound, Botilda ?

BOT. To the shrine
Of Knud, your brother ! When you sailed away
To fight the Wends, I went that very night,
And all the priests before my face read mass,
And broke the blessed wafer ; there I vowed,
At night, in the cathedral, Erik, think !
That if I ever saw your face again,
Bending above me, I would wend on foot
And pay my offerings at the blessed shrine.

ERIK. At Odense ?

BOT. Are not you glad I prayed ?
My vows have brought you back !

ERIK. Yea ! brought me back
Too early or too late, methinks.

BOT. What, love ?
You ought to take my hand in yours, and bless
My journey with a kiss. I do not care
For all those folk around us ! Dear, those eyes
Looked kinder when I bid you last farewell !
But you will let me go !

ERIK. To Odense ?

BOT. For women always ought to pay their vows.

* * * * *

Laugh, Erik, or your eyes will frighten mine.
Dear love, why do you look so strange at me ?
Will you not let me go to Odense ?

ERIK. No, by my God, I will not !

BOT. Erik, why ?

ERIK. No matter, but I will not ! C'et you home !

At present, however, she knows not what her trouble means. She only knows that it has broken her heart.

Soon follows the death of the contemptible Grimur.

Now the truth comes upon her. Erik has suspected her of falsity to him. All that infinite wealth of love, then, had been misunderstood, misprised by him. She knows that he has been cruelly and treacherously deceived. But what of that? There is no comfort there. If a troop of angels had come from Heaven and sworn to her falsity—her falsity to *him*—he, the Erik she had been worshipping, would, as his kisses closed upon her mouth, have laughed them out of court, *knowing* they were perjured. For neither angels nor God himself can make possible the impossible. But now the sacred bond that sometimes binds soul to soul is broken for ever.

Erik now finds, from the confession of his mother, that he has cruelly wronged his wife, and wrongly killed a manikin verse-monger, who, though his whole body's blood be not worth the stain it left upon a hero's sword, was nevertheless innocent, save of a little foolish rhyming about erotic mischief which, then as now, saved many a puberal poet from doing the mischief the unsinging puberals do.

Burdened and yet blessed with this knowledge, he meets Botilda, or rather he meets one that was Botilda. (For here comes the fine part of the play, to which we would call attention.) Her life has been cut in twain, as though by the blow of his sword. She who was so strong for loving that for everything else she could not but be weak, is so no longer. Sorrow has developed her

remembered that there is nothing so difficult as to write a "jealousy-play." If the hero's jealousy is justifiable, then the heroine, being guilty, loses our sympathies—if unjustifiable, then the hero must be duped by the machinations of the villain, or by his being entangled in an extraordinary web of maleficent circumstances. But these machinations or these circumstances must be so transparent to the audience that there be no question as to the heroine's innocence, upon whom devolves most of the pathetic business. But then, again, if these machinations or circumstances are so transparent as this, the simplicity of the hero's character must be so unusual as to border on actual fatuity as it does in the Spanish comedies, and as it very nearly does with regard to Ford in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and to Don Felix in the *Wonder*. Othello is only saved (and barely saved now and then) from losing our sympathies by his fatuity, from his exactly answering our idea of that frank, almost child-like, simple-mindedness which we imagine to be the characteristic of the British soldier-hero (though very unlike the Italian notion of a soldier in Cinthio's time). But then Othello has taken this place once and for ever; while Iago has equally monopolised the place of the designing villain. Consequently, the villain has had to change sex since Shakespeare's time, and becomes the mother-in-law, as in M. Dennery's *L'Aieule*, and in several of the comedies of Sardou and others, or the jealous mother or designing waiting-woman, as in the present play. To give us, therefore, a jealous hero who is not at all a fool and yet not at all Othello, induced by machina-

tions to suspect a heroine who is nevertheless worthy of our sympathies, being innocent, is a thing that is worth doing; and this Mr. Gosse, we think, has done.

The blank verse is fluent and good. The variation of the pauses, however, is too frequently adjusted in reference to the initial foot of the line, as in so much of Mr. Tennyson's later blank verse, not in reference to the initial foot of the sequence, as in Shakespeare's later verse. This gives an occasional monotony which would otherwise have been avoided.

THEODORE WATTS.

Feb. 1876.

KING ERIK.

A TRAGEDY.



KING ERIK.

BY

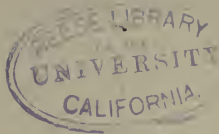
EDMUND W. GOSSE.



London :

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY.

1876.



TO ROBERT BROWNING.

*As young Greek athletes hung their votive strigils
Within the temples of the Powers above ;
As lovers gave the lamp that lit their vigils
Through sleepless hours of love ;*

*So I this lyric symbol of my labour,
This antique light that led my dreams so long,
This battered hull of a barbaric tabor,
Beaten to runic song,*

*Bear to that shrine where your dear presence lingers,
Where stands your Muse's statue white as snow ;
I take my poor gift in my trembling fingers,
And hang it there and go.*

*This very day one hundred years are over
Since Landor's godlike spirit came to earth ;
Surely the winter air laughed like a lover,
The hour that gave him birth.*

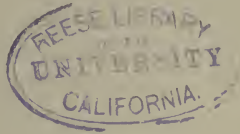
*Ah ! had he lived to hear our hearts' emotion,
What lyric love had strewn his path to-day !
Yourself had sung ; and Swinburne's rapt devotion
Had cleft its sunward way ;*

*And I, too, though unknown and unregarded,
Had thrown my violets where you threw your bays,
Had seen my garland, also, not discarded,
Had gloried all my days !*

*But since the world his august spirit haunted
Detains him here no more, but mourns him dead,
And other chaplets, in strange airs enchanted,
Girdle his sacred head,*

*Take thou my small oblation, yea ! receive it !
Laid at thy feet, within thy shrine it stands !
I brought it from my heart, and here I leave it,
The work of reverent hands.*

January 30th, 1875.



ARGUMENT.

AFTER King Knud died, his sons ruled Denmark one after another, but with little skill or fortune. Knud, the younger, slain in the church at Odense, was succeeded by Olaf, the most wretched of them all, and he by Erik, who was the wisest of men, and as lucky as his brothers were unfortunate. Under him Denmark flourished.

Erik took to wife a German Princess, Botilda. Soon after her coming to Denmark the Wends harried the shores of the Baltic, and did great mischief. Whereupon Erik made a league with the King of Norway, and in three great sea-fights broke up their power. Coming back to Roeskild, he called his lords and freemen round him, and swore to them that henceforth he would live among them to preserve peace in the realm, and, above all, to punish with death any who should kill a Christian man untried. This he did to put an end to the dissensions among the people. But it happened that a skald, one Grimur, nursed in his breast a passion for the Queen, though she knew it not. And Erik, being told of this,

in a sudden rage slew Grimur with his own hand, and disgraced the Queen. But, on his first coming to high mass, the Archbishop of Lund resolutely withstood him, saying that he had broken his own law in slaying a man untried; whereupon Erik, smitten with remorse, vowed to make pilgrimage to the Holy City, to heal this inward wound. Declaring this intention to the gathered Thing, the freemen threw themselves at his feet with tears, and prayed him to stay with them, but in vain. And, learning that Botilda was innocent of any fault, his sorrow became a passion and drove him from the land. She went with him, having forgiven him, and they journeyed together to Micklegarth (Constantinople), where the Emperor Alexios received them with so much hospitality, that they were fain at last to fly away to Cyprus secretly, yet not before that one of the Emperor's body-guard, a Dane, and foster-brother to Grimur, had heard how the skald was slain. This man followed Erik and Botilda to Cyprus, where he slew the King, just as he was about to embark for Palestine. Botilda took the body with her to the Holy Land, and died there. They lie buried side by side in a little valley at the foot of Olivet.

PERSONS.

ERIK EIEGOD, King of Denmark.

GRIMUR, Skald.

ÖSSUR, Archbishop of Lund.

MARCUS, an old Councillor.

SKJALM HVIDE, Governor of Zealand.

THOROLF, Leader of the Væringar.

EGIL, }
GUNNAR, } Two lords of Erik's following.

SIGURD, the Herald.

GISLI, Grimur's foster-brother.

BOY, serving Anna Comnena.

The LEADER of the Thing.

Also soldiers, priests, boys, Væringar, etc.

BOTILDA, Queen of Denmark.

ANNA COMNENA, Greek Princess.

ADALBJÖRG, mother of King Erik.

SVANHILDA, }
THORA, } Maids of Botilda's Court.

LADIES of the Court.

The action in the year 1103 A.D., first in Roeskild, the capital of Denmark, afterwards in Constantinople, and finally in Cyprus.



KING ERIK.

ACT I.



KING ERIK.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

Botilda's bower in Roeskild. BOTILDA with her embroidery-frame before her sits on a dais; below her, working, sit SVANHILDA and THORA.

SVANHILDA (*to THORA*).

Draw the gold thread twice through the silken woof,
And then your work is over. Ask the Queen
What flower she will have woven for the hem.

THORA (*to BOTILDA*).

Madam, what flower?

BOTILDA.

A lily worked in red.

SVANHILDA.

But, madam—

BOTILDA.

Well ?

SVANHILDA.

The wedding-gown you brought
From Germany was wrought with lilies too,
Gold lilies, buds and blown ones, round the edge.

BOTILDA.

And while we waited at the altar steps,
To let the old Archbishop find the psalm,
Did you not mark how in his strong red hands
King Erik took the swept edge of my robe
And through his fingers let the gold and white
Glide in a little stream ? And afterwards
He found a moment's idle space enough
To praise the flowers, reminding me how first
He saw me by the river-side at Mainz,
A half-blown water-lily in my hair. |
And so, since nothing ever slips his ken
Of great or small, perchance when I shall go
And meet him on the margin of the fiord,
'Twill please him that I wear the flowers again.
Have you red silk enough ?

THORA.

This little skein,
Will be enough for all I have to do.

SVANHILDA (*to* BOTILDA).

And will you that we sing above our work ?

BOTILDA.

Yes ! Any simple air I have not heard,
 Or any Danish ballad ! Nay ! Not now !
 I cannot sit to hear you ! Let us talk !
 How hot the air is ! How the hours are slow !
 The summer days are long here in the north.
 I wonder when the ships—(*breaks off*).

THORA.

For these two months
 Your patience and your cheerfulness have been
 So sweetly constant in their silent hope,
 That I am fain to marvel, if I may,
 That these last hours should find you so distrest.

BOTILDA.

Oh ! not distrest, and yet not happy either !
 I think to sleep the tiresome hours away,
 Yet waken very early ; think to school
 My fancy into dreams of other things,
 And ever more before the last hour comes
 I strain my hope, and thought, and wish, away,
 Lest at the last some unseen blow should fall.
 I dare not hope, now that the end draws near.
 I think he will not come !

SVANHILDA.

Madam ! Not come ?
 Have you not heard the news ?

BOTILDA. (*smiling*).

What news ?

SVANHILDA (*not noticing*).

A lad

At nightfall yesterday, from Elsinore,
Came galloping across the court, and cried
That standing on the cape, above the Sound,
He had seen the dragons of the King go by,
Northward, with music at the prow, and sails
Set in the south wind.

THORA.

Yea! and said he not
That foremost in the fleet he saw the King,
And knew him, taller than the tallest there,
And saw his gold helm flashing in the sun?

BOTILDA.

That is no news now! Ere the words were said
Old Marcus dragged him hither by the arm,
I sitting here alone. The fellow came,
Shamefaced to see me, waxing red and pleased,
And pulling at the hair about his mouth;
I made him tell his story twice, and laughed,
Because the stripling, seeing I grew glad,
Would fain grow cunning, and had seen the King
Do wonders in that moment. I broke off
Some inches of the gold around my arm—
The serpent, see, is shorter—gave it him,
And bade him have a care of Roeskild mead!
I was so happy! When the young man goes

Back to our faithful town of Elsinore
He'll say, "The Queen is mad."

SVANHILDA.

The wind blows fair ;
They lose much time in tacking up the fiord,
Yet must they surely, ere the sun goes down,
Moor at the harbour.

BOTILDA.

Surely after this
The pirate Wends will scarcely dare again
To push their black prows into Christian bays,
And ravage field and homestead. Why ! last year
When Erik and King Magnus Barefoot met
Below the Gota River, Magnus said,
"These Wendish devils only need a man
As young, hardhanded, and as brisk as you
To save our priests and people from this plague !"
The wise old Northman said so ; thereupon
The young king and the old king plighted troth
And sailed against the heathen ; but this year
Erik has gone alone to burn the hive
And drown the hornets in the Middle Sea ;
God speed him for his church's sake and mine.

THORA.

Well has he sped ! No thing he touches fails,
His words are seed of wheat in fertile ground,
His deeds are like the acts of warrior-saints,
And all he does is fortunate.

SVANHILDA.

They say
That all his fortune comes to him from God ;
That like the knights, Ganore or Galahad,
The old French priest was singing of, his strength
Rests in himself, because his heart is pure.
What say you, madam, for you know him best ?

BOTILDA.

The land is all ablaze with health and glee
Since Olaf Hunger died, and men may deem
That all this good is fruit of Erik's reign,
Fair crops and dewfall, rain and stormless sea,
And so God's very gifts augment his fame ;
So do not I, who strive beyond my love,
As one who strains across a sunny sky
With level shading palm, to see the man
Below the glory of his life and fame.
But still I fail, for love engulphs it all,
And blanches all my judgment with white light.
What say you, and what say the rest of him ?
Do any judge him hardly in their sleeve,
Or mutter fiercely when they see him pass ?

SVANHILDA.

I think not one ! I hear no word but this,
That he is kingliest king and manliest man,
Too proud to be discourteous to the least,
Too wise to vex his heart with idle words,

Too strong and young to scorn the old and weak,
And stained with no one drop of Christian blood.

BOTILDA.

That is most true. At home, in Germany,
The feuds run high betwixt this house and that ;
My brother killed a man in open street
The year that we came hither. Erik said,
A flame of anger smothered in his voice,
“ We spill not men’s blood in the Danish streets,
And yet we are not cowards.” God be thanked !
I know he never slew a Christian man.

THORA.

How gallantly he rides !

BOTILDA.

You foolish maid,
You know I cannot chide you for such talk,
Which wastes your time and mine.

[*Knocking without.*]

Ah ! who is there ?

[*To SVANHILDA.*]

Go see who knocks, Svanhilda ! If it be
Marcus or Grimur, let him in, and then
Pass out into the court and feed the doves.

[*Exit SVANHILDA.*]

BOTILDA (*to THORA*).

It must be Marcus. Rise, and fetch my lute !

[*Enter GRIMUR.*]

GRIMUR.

Madam, your maid was loath to let me in,

And if I had not heard your voice declare
 I was not quite unwelcome, I believe
 I could not have withstood her crabbed face.

BOTILDA (*smiling*).

It seems she does not love you !

GRIMUR.

Do you mark
 This broken rose I wear upon my breast ?
 When dawn was shooting first across the sea
 This morning, in the garth below, I saw
 These red leaves dropping like rose-flakes from heaven,
 And saw your whiter hand stretched out, as though
 The morning wind had scarcely spent your sleep.
 I kept the shattered core of it to wear
 Upon my heart.

BOTILDA.

It is not worth the pains !

Far better blossom round the window there.

[THORA *returns with the lute. To her :*]

Before you come
 Gather a white-rose cluster in your hand,
 For Grimur wills to chose one.

GRIMUR.

Madam, nay !

The blood-red-hearted flowers are all I love ;
 White roses are for maidens and dead brides.
 I pray you let me keep the broken core.
 [*A pause.*] I come to say farewell !

BOTILDA.

Farewell? To-day?

To-day the King comes back! Have you not heard?
How strange to go to-day.

GRIMUR.

The hour has come.

I go to Odense, and there perchance
The bride will meet me whom I go to wed!
Madam, I mean to sit among the graves
And learn the marriage vows from aged priests,
And in a little while to wed!

BOTILDA.

'Tis well!

There is not any bar; I wish you both
A happy life before the blessed end!,
Whom shall you marry?

GRIMUR.

Will you hear her name?

Men call her Thanatos!

BOTILDA.

The sound is Greek!

I know you have been often in the south,
But you have never let me hear before
That you had found a bride there! You abode
A year—you told me once, in Micklegarth!
And does she dwell there always?

GRIMUR.

Nay! elsewhere

She has her pilgrim-stations. Only there
Her lovers seek her most ; they love her best
Who are most weary, and of weary men
The pale-eyed Greeks are weariest, yet I more !

BOTILDA.

Is she the only daughter of some king
To have so many suitors ?

GRIMUR.

Yea ! of him
Who rules all kingdoms of the nether world !

BOTILDA.

Grimur ! What, Cæsar's daughter ? Ah ! you mock
My foolish fancy with some riddling word ;
What is this strange Greek girl ?

GRIMUR.

Not Greek nor Dane,
But queen, and spouse, and mother of us all,
And here we call her Death !

BOTILDA.

And you will die ?
Grimur, you mock me still ! What need to die
When life rekindles at the King's return ?
My life redoubles beyond dream of death !
What thing can slay you ?

GRIMUR.

Nay ! I will not say.
There have been men to whom the mummer Love

Came rattling bones and grinning, and who died
Not knowing it was Love who laughed the while.

BOTILDA.

We have been friends, if such a queen can be,
Whose state must be most lonely when her king
Sits not beside her. Yea, I will say friends,
For here in this clear air of Danish life
A king and queen are not too highly perched
For subjects' eyes to light on. Then, if friends
We be, before you ride into the west,
And meet new life, or, as you deem it, death,
Speak frankly once and let me see your soul.
Here in the North men have few words to say,
And say them shortly ; you have lived and moved
So long among the shifting Greeks, that you
Shift also, winding in a coil of words.
You speak—and out upon my woman's wit
That will not teach me what it is you lack—
As though your spirit bled from some deep wound
That no one found a herb to stanch ; and yet
I know not why you half-confide your loss
To me, a simple and unlearned girl,
Nor why this strange fire gathers in your eyes.
You have been often here since Erik went !
Stay two days more, and tell your heart to him.
Could I have helped your want, I know ere this
You had revealed it.

GRIMUR (*passionately*).

None could help so well !

(With a sudden change.)

Oh madam, pardon me ; I came to tell
 Your Grace a story that I learned but now,
 Of how a maid in some outlandish place
 Looked upward with dumb lips and eloquent eyes
 At the land's king who passed her, and how he,
 Although he had a noble queen to wife,
 Left all to win this girl, and crossed the seas,
 And how they died together. But the tale
 Is hardly worth your patience. Let me go !
 At Odense the bones of sainted Knud
 Draw maimed and halt and leprous folk in crowds,
 Who swarm for healing to his porphyry shrine.
 Thither I, too, will go ! Perchance the saint,
 Who loved and hated in his worldly days,
 May yield the secret of some sovereign balm
 Whose touch may cool this fever. Ere I go,
 So, kneeling on the ground, I pray you, friend—
 At least you will permit I call you friend—
 Then, friend, forget me not ! Farewell !

BOTILDA.

Farewell !

[Exit GRIMUR.]

How strangely he was moved. Ah ! Shall we go
 Across the court and up the winding stair ?
 The furthest turret overlooks the sea !

[Exeunt.]

SCENE II.

The Palace of Roeskild. The Royal Hall adorned as if for a reception. On the dais, the King's throne, empty, and a little lower, on each side, a chair of state. On the one at the right hand of the throne ADALBJÖRG sits, the other is empty. SVANHILDA and THORA busy themselves in the hall.

ADALBJÖRG (*very old, muttering to herself*).

So many times, so many days of state,
 So many sons to welcome! One by one,
 Slain by the gods, the people, or the priests,
 They come no more from viking! Now the last,
 My youngest, whom I ever loved the least.
 Strange that a mother should not love her last!
 Knud was my darling, with the thick short neck
 And mighty chin, his father's very son—
 His father's, who has never seen me old,
 Who loathed a woman's wrinkles. So did Knud,
 And lived to curse me, though I loved him best.
 This Erik is a kinder, softer man,
 Set in another mould. Most women love
A man like Erik! How this simple slip
Of German sugar-meat and watered blood
Adored him! Well! I may have had my day,

But I was ever true at heart to Svend ;
This idle German woman frets my eyes,
To see her eyes so lightly laugh and move.

I would that Erik had not married her ;
He set aside the woman of my choice,
A girl to make a queen of, not a fool
Like this Botilda, with her empty laugh.

(To SVANHILDA).

Why came you not to deck my bower to-day ?

SVANHILDA.

Madam, I waited on the Queen.

ADALBJÖRG.

Till when ?

SVANHILDA.

Till noon. Her robe—

ADALBJÖRG.

And were you there alone ?

SVANHILDA.

No ! Thora waited also.

ADALBJÖRG.

Did you sing ?

SVANHILDA.

Nay ; for before the Queen had bidden us
 One came to greet her, parting, and I went.

ADALBJÖRG.

Who came ? Not Össur ?

SVANHILDA.

Grimur, the young scald

Who sings Greek songs below the eaves at dawn,
He with the shifting lips.

ADALBJÖRG.

So ! Grimur came ?

Is Grimur so familiar in our court
That queens receive him daily with their maids ?
Who is this Grimur ?

SVANHILDA.

From the south he comes,
I know not whence before, but Thora knows.
Thora (*to THORA*), what landsman is the grey-eyed scald ?

THORA (*who comes over*).

Iceland, they say ; but he has roamed abroad
In France, and Rome, and Greece for years and years.

ADALBJÖRG.

How came he here ?

THORA.

I heard him tell the Queen
From Lübeck last, not half a year ago.
Ere she came hither he had known the Queen.

ADALBJÖRG.

Enough of idle talking. Thora, set
Those scutcheons lower on the further wall !
They stand too high. (*As THORA goes over, in a lower voice.*)

And so Botilda's hours
Are spent in leaning over from her bower,
And listening to this poet sing below !

And has he come since Erik is away
Each day to greet her as to-day ?

SVANHILDA (*hesitatingly*).

The hawk
Sent in the magpie for a bone he saw,
And when the bone was brought him, killed the pie !

ADALBJÖRG (*in a higher voice*).

Woman, your proverbs are not worth your breath.
(*Soothingly*.) Svanhilda, you were ever wise of head
And clear of judgment. Let me know the truth.
This man comes often to Botilda's bower ?

SVANHILDA.

The world knows that. Men use to in the north,
When they are cunning scalds and play the lute.

ADALBJÖRG.

And does he play the lute and nothing else ?

SVANHILDA.

But men must rest their fingers now and then.

ADALBJÖRG.

And tongues ?

SVANHILDA.

A poet sings above his lute.

ADALBJÖRG.

What songs ?

SVANHILDA.

Nay, Grimur always sings of love ;
For war we call in Marcus. Grimur comes
From Micklegarth, where life is only love.

ADALBJÖRG.

And what has life been in Botilda's bower
Since Erik went out sea-wards ?

SVANHILDA.

Only love !

ADALBJÖRG.

Girl, do you love the Queen ?

SVANHILDA.

I love my life.

ADALBJÖRG.

I swear you need not fear me ; answer !

SVANHILDA.

Nay

ADALBJÖRG.

I also hate her ! Do you fear me now ?

SVANHILDA.

Madam, what would you ?

ADALBJÖRG.

Ask you one thing more ;

Believe you that this Grimur seeks the Queen ?

SVANHILDA.

With all the blind desire of one grown wild !

ADALBJÖRG.

And has Botilda set the balance up

And weighed the men, here Grimur, Erik here,

And let her soul perceive the heavier scale ?

SVANHILDA.

I know not, but I think so !

ADALBJÖRG.

And her choice—?

SVANHILDA.

Is Erik, madam, else my heart is blind.

Believe me, I have watched her—

ADALBJÖRG.

Erik! Ah!

I thought we might have sent her queenship back
Unqueened, and robed in weeds, and spat upon,
To mourn her folly till her kinsmen took
Some pity on her shame and ran her through,
Or locked her in some castle all alone,
And threw the vault-key out into the moat ;
But if she loves her husband, all is lost !

SVANHILDA.

Madam, perchance the issue is not yet.

Our cause has one strong friend at its right hand,
Who cannot fail to help us if we wait ;

Grimur is maddened with his dangerous love,

And when I passed him in the courts to-day

His wild drawn face and passion-hungry eyes

Drove, with a flash, a new thought to my brain.

I will not speak it, for my life ! Poor fool,

He is gone to-day to Odense, forsooth,

Because he cannot face his lord the King !

I wonder how his lord the King would fare

If any bird should drop into his soul

The seed that might spring up and bear for fruit

This certainty, that, knowing he would come,
 Botilda sent her lover over sea
 Lest haply Erik might suspect her truth?

THORA (*who has climbed to the window and looks out*).

A sudden shouting at the harbour-side !
 Svanhilda, come ! The ships must be in sight.

SVANHILDA (*running to the window*).

The dragons will come singly up the fiord ;
 I would the hillside did not hide the sea.

THORA.

But we shall see them anchor.

ADALBJÖRG (*to herself*).

Softly, soft !

The spider started when she felt the fly ;
 That starting loosed the web around the wings !

SVANHILDA.

I see the flag !

THORA.

And now I see the prow !

Hark, how the people shout, and hark ! the bell.
 The priests have seen him from the belfry tower ;
 Madam, (*running over to ADALBJÖRG*) the dragon of the
 King has come !

ADALBJÖRG.

Go, child, and watch the sight. For many a year
 I care not much whoever comes or goes.

THORA.

I see the King ; can *you* not see the King,
 Svanhilda ?

SVANHILDA.

Yea, I saw him long ago !

(aside) God knows, my heart would see him in the dark !
Look ! down the line of men Botilda goes !

THORA.

She was not soon enough to greet him first ;
He spoke to Marcus ere she came ; her robe
Looks well there in the sun.

SVANHILDA *(laughs)*.

He does not glance
Down at her gay red lilies !

THORA.

Yet he seems
To have no eyes for any face but hers.
He does not notice that the Bishop kneels.
See how the helmets sparkle in the sun !
I am glad the town will have its men again,
The streets are dull with only maids and babes.

SVANHILDA.

Ah ! now he puts her arm beneath his own,
And curbs his footsteps to her tender scope,
And up the shining street they come.

THORA.

The priests
Have gathered round the Bishop, and walk next.
I think the fighting men should lead the train.

SVANHILDA.

The priests and bishops have us by the nose ;

They follow the King only. Take you heed ;
You may not die before they lead the King !

[They come from the window.

The fighting men have had their passing hour ;
They should have let King Knud be at his prayers,
The day they smote him in St. Alban's church.
His falling rosary turned into a sword
That any priest may brandish, and those drops,
That stained the altar and the choir with red,
Cry out at Rome against our men at arms.
What crowds of shaven pates and sandalled feet
Throng all our corridors since Erik went
To pray the Pope for pardon for us all !
Believe me, not so lightly go they hence.

[They retire to the back.

[Enter King ERIK and Queen BOTILDA, followed by Archbishop ÖSSUR, priests, warriors, waiting men, and a great crowd that fills the hall. ERIK and BOTILDA ascend the dais, and ERIK bows to greet ADALBJÖRG.]

ERIK.

Hail, mother ! Give me welcome !

ADALBJÖRG.

Hail, my son !

ERIK.

How has it been with you !

ADALBJÖRG.

Nay ! Hot and cold,
Hot when the sun burned on me, cold and chill

Whenever my old blood-beats felt the shade.
I stir about the house less day by day.

ERIK.

Yet you look brightly !

(To BOTILDA). Sweet one, sit you there !

[BOTILDA takes the chair to the left ; ERIK stands before his throne, looking down the hall. There is great confusion, but when they see him about to speak they suddenly become silent.]

ERIK.

My lords and warders of the royal house,
And ye who daily serve the blessed saints,
And all who stand within these walls to-day,
Receive my thanks, that with such ready grace
Your loyal hearts have met the warmth of mine,
And welcomed us here coming from the sea.
Not now the first time do I test your love
Returning ; twice and thrice before to-day
Your shouts have filled my homeward-hurrying sails,
And taught the winds that Denmark loves her King
Once more, receive my thanks, and know in truth
That, tired with wandering on the uncertain sea,
Your King, for every "welcome" that he hears
Could fain return you double. Yea ! and dwell
Upon the sweet and unfamiliar word
As one who never thinks to wander more.
So alway at the happy sight of home
The heart folds up its weary wings, and dreams

Of rest till life is done, remembering not
That in a little while the old desire
To push with sail and oar into the sea,
And feel the short waves break again, and bound
Sunwards, against the salt and gathering wind,
Will grow into a passion and prevail.
Yet this one time I do not think to change ;
Nor hardly can the smell of hollowed pine,
Nor white lines of the breakers out at sea,
Nor burdens of the rowers any more
Wake in me the wild longing to be gone,
Since time, still hurrying by on feather and foot,
Flits by us ere we know, and leaves us old,
I trow we should not drop our work undone,
But leave the last hours fruitful as the first.
Yet from my heart of hearts I thank my God
He gave my youth some toil to do for him
Abreast the foam and surf of the wild sea,
For so my first years have been sweet ; but now
My ships are anchored and my viking done.
For when I left you, friends, three months ago,
We crept along the blue line of the fiord,
And out into the northern sea, and met
A pirate fleet that fled with shattering sails
Before a gale from Norway ; them we chased,
And after sun-down, by the Swedish coast,
With never a star to guide us, rode them down
And sent their souls out screaming in the dark.

Heavy with prey from Danish shores they sailed,
And under hatches in the largest craft
A Christian man sat trembling ; him we fed
And comforted with wine till strength returned,
And with a quivering tongue, too faint for speech,
He murmured what the heathen planned to do.
Here in Roeskild it was their dream to set
The banner of their fiendish gods, and slake
Our altar-tapers in our own hearts' blood.
Then no more did I parley with small schemes,
But set our prows, before the glint of morn,
Southward, and, ere the sun set, passed the Sound.
Nor longer need I speak of all our deeds ;
The men that fought and fell not at my side,
Stand there and mingle with your welcoming crowd :
Their tales will last you many a winter's night.
The Wends will never come to mar us more,
And so my work upon the waves is done.
Now other harvests wait for me to reap
In steadier furrows ; dear and loyal friends,
I do not think to leave my realm again.
Twice for the Church, with weary steps and long,
Through German forests to the southern slopes,
I passed to greet Pope Urban, and three times
My harrying keels have cut the northern sea.
Now rest and household labour wait me ; laws
That build the settlement of popular life,
And henceforth never any Christian blood

Shall stain our Danish earth, but pure and strong
Our kingdom flourish in perpetual peace.

[*Applause expressed by the crowd.*]

[THE CURTAIN FALLS.]

SCENE III.

A balcony overlooking the Cathedral-close, and the sea beyond.

ERIK and ADALBJÖRG enter in conversation.

ADALBJÖRG.

I came out here the morning you set sail,
And, finding that the place was warm and dry,
I've taught my girls to set my tables here
On shiny afternoons ; here, if you will,
Be seated. Welcome, though you come not soon !

ERIK.

Mother, your pardon that I creep so late
To this, our first still interchange of words !
I thought to come an hour ago ; I thought
Ere this to have dropped the story of three months
In your attentive ear, but should even now
Be still a loiterer in Botilda's bower
If that red tower between us and the sun
Had rung no clanging summons of the hours
To waken my remembrance.

ADALBJÖRG.

Had you then
So many secrets for each other's ears ?

ERIK.

No secrets ; nay, nor had she much to ask,
Nor I desire to answer. For one hour
We only looked into each other's eyes
And murmured little words ; or else I drew
Her hair out web-wise in my sidelong hands,
Whereat she laughed, but could not turn, and spanned,
Or tried to span, my wrist with her small hands,
And laughed to see the white mark on the red
When they broke from her. And then she laughed again,
And strained her lips and kissed me unawares
So suddenly that I was fain to laugh ;
And then we sat, her hand gulphed up in mine,
Quite grave and sad, and still found nought to say.
You know the ways of lovers, mother ! Fie !
That we should be such children still.

ADALBJÖRG.

Ah ! well,
And found ye then at last no words to say !

ERIK.

Ah yes ! At last I rose and must begone,
But just before I went away she found
A question that I must not leave unsolved.
And so we sat awhile again. And, then,

Just ere I went a second time, I thought
Of one more thing to speak of, till the bell
Boomed suddenly, and up I leaped and came.

ADALBJÖRG. J

A wise man is as foolish as a child,
And wanton, if a woman whispers "Wait!"
But now for men's talk, Erik! Let me hear,—
If you will take your mother to your heart,—
What schemes are these to base the public weal,
State changes that you hinted of to-day?

ERIK.

Yea, I will tell you! But yet not to-day.
To-morrow is for business. Though I deem
That man a traitor to his better thought
Who dallies with a good intent, and lets
The sword slip through his indolent finger-tips
With promise of another time for war,
A luckier season, yet for these few hours
That separate the violent time that's past
From golden peace that's coming, I would wait
Poised in the present. Like a man that stands
Right on the jut of some dark seaward rock
And sets his eyes against the sun, and feels
The soft air winding round his freshened limbs,
Stript for the swimming, I, who come but now
From heat and travail of the dusty wars
Would pause awhile, tip-toe, before I plunge
Downward into the sea of rest and love.

ADALBJÖRG.

Rest ! what is rest ?

ERIK.

The fighting man's reward ;
I, who have fought and conquered, now seek rest,
Or leisure for some better work than war.

ADALBJÖRG.

But rest is like the dangerous mandrake-flower,
A medicine if it fall into your hand,
But if you drag it from your span of life
Before its time, it hath a deadly shriek,
And slays the spirit unaware. Such rest
Makes women mad ! We will not talk of this !
What think you of Botilda ?

ERIK.

She is pale,
With flushes in the cheeks, but else not ill.

ADALBJÖRG.

I have not seen her often since you went,
But every morning, every evening, heard
The multitudinous twitter of girls' tongues
Chirping within her bower ; she hath not pined !
Her days with lutes and laughter have been gay.

ERIK.

I would not have her sad when I am gone ;
She told me how she sighed sometimes !

ADALBJÖRG.

But that

I could not hear, I lay too far away.

ERIK.

'Tis nothing that she laughed. We laughed and sang
 At night above our beer, my men and I,
 And drowned the long wash of the wandering seas
 With riot of loud voices.

ADALBJÖRG.

Yet a wife
 Is somewhat sorry when her lord is gone,
 At least it was so in old-fashioned days.
 Germans have lighter hearts. Ah! have you watched
 That little cloud climb up out of the sea
 In the mid-heart of sunlight? See how black
 It grows that was so white a while ago! (*Cries out.*)

[*Enter SVANHILDA.*]

My cloak, and haste or it will rain.

It comes.

Erik, I fear the chill. Come in and talk. [*Exit.*]

ERIK (*to SVANHILDA, who will follow*).

Stay! What is your name?

SVANHILDA.

Svanhilda!

ERIK.

Well!

Svanhilda! Have I seen you with the Queen,
 Or in my mother's hall? A face like yours
 No man forgets!

SVANHILDA.

I wait upon the queen!

ERIK.

As one of her bower-maidens? Stay awhile!
 My mother has her cloak! and, see, the cloud
 Is passing, and you need not fear the rain.
 Why do you tremble so?

SVANHILDA.

It is the chill;
 I do not use to shake at all; my lord,
 What service have you to command of me?

ERIK.

How have your days passed since I went away?
 Girl, you may tell me any truth you will,
 Nor blush to speak a thing so small. The Queen
 Was sad when I set sail?

SVANHILDA.

Oh yes! my lord.

ERIK.

So little sad! Why, girl, you must forget;
 I know that she was very white and wan.
 I saw her from the quay. And when some days
 Went by and I was gone, did she grow fair
 And, like the inmost windings of a shell,
 Pearly and rosy once again!

SVANHILDA.

Oh yes!

Most hurriedly, my lord.

ERIK.

Nay, not too soon!

I am quite sure that she was pale at first,
And sighed as if a weight were on her heart,
And often turned aside, and would not show
How wet her cheeks were ! Did she not ?

SVANHILDA.

Why, no !

Or else I never marked it !

ERIK.

If you loved
Your eye would see such signs. I know she did,
And often sighed, and sat for hours and hours,
Her face between her hands, and looking out
Along the blue that leads us to the sea.
What did you there, within the bower, of nights ?

SVANHILDA.

We danced and sang the wildest, merriest songs.

ERIK.

Poor love ! She felt how dull and sad it was,
And made you dance before her, as a King
Whose only daughter is a long while dead,
Fights with his grief, and makes his jester leap,
And shake his bells and squeak, in hopes one day
To be betrayed out of his tears and smile.

SVANHILDA.

The Queen danced also.

ERIK.

Girl, that is a lie,

And if you were a man I'd strike you for it !
She did not dance.

SVANHILDA.

My lord, she did not dance.

ERIK.

And were you all alone there, she and you
And all the other maidens ?

SVANHILDA:

Every day
The poet Grimur came and sang to her.

ERIK.

Not every day ! Forgetful, witless girl,
The poet would not come there every day ;
The Queen would drive him thence. But now and then,
Since he is cunning in the lute, he brought
His instrument to charm her grief away,
And now and then she listened to his song.
Was it not so ?

SVANHILDA.

It was, my lord, it was !
And now and then he lingered a long while.

ERIK.

You senseless girl ; you mad, unreasoning girl,
He never lingered ! Could a knave so dare
To insult a widowed queen ? And when he came
What said they ? Did he tell of wondrous deeds,
Hakon and Palnatoke, men like me,

Who fought upon the ridge of the green wave,
And reddened it with slaughter?

SVANHILDA.

Nay, my lord.

He sang of ladies who at night-fall heard
Their lovers in the garden-walk, and rose,
And lifted the green satin of their robes,
Lest it should rustle in their husbands' ears.

ERIK.

Their husbands'! Nay, he never sang of that;
You know you lie now—

SVANHILDA.

Oh, I had forgot:

He never sang such songs. But mostly, sir,
The queen and Grimur spoke the German tongue,
And what they said we could not understand.
But let me go, sir, for your mother calls. , [Exit.

ERIK.

These idle maidens say they know not what.
The silver on the sea-side of that cloud
Is gone; how like a bird it hovers, poised,
Ready to burst in deluge! It will pass,
For the wind rises, and it bows not low.

[Enter MARCUS.]

Welcome, old counsellor of days long gone!
Your memory wakened in me ere you came,
For I was thinking of those boyish days
When you so wisely could control my fits

Of anger and despair ; and now I feel
I need such help again. An hour ago
My heart was like a singing bird, and now
Like one that sings not, battered with the rain.
And why, I know not.

MARCUS.

In those olden days
Your eager heart could easily o'erturn
The balance of the nerves, and oftentimes
Watching your ecstasy or violent joy,
I've prophesied and proved a sudden change
To uttermost dejection. In the boy
It was my place to check the wild delight,
And whisper prudence. To the man, the king,
Such counsel would be folly, and your race,
Whose veins run swift with a strong tide of blood,
Were ever thus. But if you question why—

ERIK.

Marcus, while I was fighting on the seas
Where were you ?

MARCUS.

Here in Roeskild all the while,
Save that two months ago, for one short day,
My friend the Abbot of—

ERIK.

And you passed the time
In singing to the harp ?

MARCUS.

Nay, most of it
In shaping that great song that will for ever
Join my poor name with yours in deathless fame,
The saga of your fights by land and sea,
To which I now must add these glorious deeds
Against the pirates. Since your heart is sad
I pray you let me pour into your ear
The music of the stave you have not heard.

ERIK.

Not now, dear Marcus. Poets are like leaves
For commonness, in Roeskild now, meseems.

MARCUS.

Why so? Nay, nay! Since Eistein went to France,
I stand alone in skaldship, for the priests—
Saint Knud forgive me—are poor doggrel knaves.

ERIK.

Then what is Grimur?

MARCUS.

Grimur! very right,
I had forgotten Grimur. But, my lord,
His paltry rhythms and bars from Micklegarth
Would scarcely please you. If I might begin—

ERIK.

I would see Grimur!

MARCUS.

But, dear master, but!—

ERIK.

I tell you fetch me Grimur !

MARCUS.

Lo ! I would—

How harsh you are to-day to an old man,
Who loves you—lo ! I would, but, dear my lord !—

ERIK.

Are you so set on singing your own stave
You cannot—

MARCUS.

But he is not in Roeskild !

Before the noon to-day he saddled horse
And rode away to westward, and ere night,
Should sail across the Belt to Odense.

ERIK.

To Odense ! To-day ! This very noon !
At noon my ships were winding up the fiord !
Why stayed he not to greet me ?

MARCUS.

Nay ! I know not !

I asked him wherefore part in such hot haste.

ERIK.

What answered he ?

MARCUS.

He drew his long thin lips,
Moving the little forkèd beard, and laughed ;
Said presently, he should have gone before ;
That foxes should not prowl about the coops

Much after sunrise ; then laughed more and went,
His little lute swinging across his arm,
A peacock feather in his hat.

ERIK.

Well, well !

I care not what he wore ! I am in haste,
I go to seek my mother !

MARCUS.

Sire, farewell !

[Exit different sides.]

KING ERIK.

ACT II.



ACT II.

SCENE I.

The market-square of Roeskild. Two priests, one singing in a dolorous drawling tone, and the other joining in the burden.

FIRST PRIEST.

He knelt at his prayers in St. Alban's choir,
And the stars were few overhead ;
Red was the glare of the altar-fire
And the northern lights burned red.

BOTH.

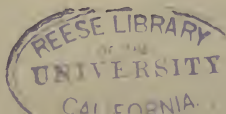
Our martyr and king Saint Knud !

FIRST PRIEST.

Outside, in the dark, the grim men howled
And hammered against the door ;
But the shadows fell from the clerestory
And flickered along the floor.

BOTH.

To our martyr and king Saint Knud !



FIRST PRIEST.

They broke the door and they thundered in,
The saint rose up and stood ;
He held between his life and their sin
A cross of carven wood.

BOTH.

Our martyr and king Saint Knud !

FIRST PRIEST.

They broke the rail of the altar-stair,
They quenched the altar-light ;
They clutched the saint by the long fair hair,
And stabbed him in God's sight.

BOTH.

Stabbed our king Saint Knud !

FIRST PRIEST.

The blood ran over the carven cross,
And his cold white face turned east,
And his body lay spread in the holy choir
Like the corpse of a murdered priest.

BOTH.

Our martyr and king Saint Knud !

SECOND PRIEST.

Ah, brother, very sad !

FIRST PRIEST.

Nay ! what is sad ?

SECOND PRIEST.

You sing not well to-day, you are but hoarse.

FIRST PRIEST.

These vapours tell upon a tender throat ;
 I was not made for matins. Out and fie !
 When I begin to sing before the queen
 My voice will vanish like an organ-pipe's
 When no man blows the bellows !

SECOND PRIEST.

Ugh ! 'tis cold !

These misty mornings reddening in the west
 Are cruel for the lungs. If I should cough
 When the queen bows herself in silent prayer,
 I pray thee, brother, smite me on the back,
 For that relieves the tonsils.

FIRST PRIEST.

That I will !

SECOND PRIEST.

O cold, cold, cold ! how bitter cold it is !
 Ah ! here they come, with banners and the pyx,
 And two boys swinging censers.

FIRST PRIEST.

Ah ! the queen !

[*Enter, from the right, BOTILDA, her ladies and maidens,
 some priests and boys.*]

BOTILDA.

Perchance these good men will be wise men too,
 And know the latest tidings. Have you heard
 What time the lord archbishop came from Lund
 Last night, or if he came at all ?

FIRST PRIEST.

He came

So late last night that he abode till dawn
 Within a hospice just outside the gates,
 And sent us on as heralds to your Grace,
 To pray you to have patience for so long
 As he perforce must tarry ; but even now
 He should be hastening here.

A LADY.

And must we march

To meet the sea ere sunset ?

BOTILDA.

Sweet, no man

Could hurry so far although his feet were winged !
 Nay, we shall go by stages, and to-night
 Be housed in Aastrup cloister.

ANOTHER LADY.

Shall we ride ?

What are these palfreys ?

BOTILDA.

We will ride by turn ;

For since this going is a pilgrimage
 We needs must walk a little, yet I think
 The saint would never have us die !

A LADY.

Besides, ,

The good archbishop is quite sure to ride,
 He is so short of breath !

BOTILDA.

He comes at last !

[*Enter at the left ERIK and his body-guard.*]

BOTILDA.

Oh ! Erik, welcome ! welcome !

ERIK.

So, dear love,

You did not think I should be back so soon.

We found the knave at once ; he saw our helms

Shining beneath his castle in the wood,

And when we came it was to boltless doors,

And I have brought him with me. But, sweetheart,

So early walking in the dewy streets !

I thought to find you nestled in your bower !

And all these ladies too ! and all these priests !

[*They move forward.*]

BOTILDA.

I am so glad to see you ere I go !

ERIK.

Go where ?

BOTILDA.

I thought before your work was done,

We should be home again !

ERIK.

Be home again ?

Where are you bound, Botilda ?

BOTILDA.

To the shrine

Of Knud, your brother ! When you sailed away
 To fight the Wends, I went that very night,
 And all the priests before my face read mass,
 And broke the blessed wafer ; there I vowed,
 At night, in the cathedral, Erik, think !
 That if I ever saw your face again,
 Bending above me, I would wend on foot
 And pay my offerings at the blessed shrine—

ERIK.

At Odense ?

BOTILDA.

Are you not glad I prayed ?
 My vows have brought you back !

ERIK.

Yea ! brought me back
 Too early or too late, methinks.

BOTILDA.

What, love ?

You ought to take my hands in yours, and bless
 My journey with a kiss. I do not care
 For all these folk around us ! Dear, those eyes
 Looked kinder when I bid you last farewell !
 But you will let me go ?

ERIK.

To Odense ?

BOTILDA.

For women always ought to pay their vows,
 Lest up in heaven the holy saints should frown

And stamp the sapphire pavement, like the priest
When giggling girls break silence at the mass.
Laugh, Erik, or your eyes will frighten mine.
Dear love, why do you look so strange at me?
Will you not let me go to Odense?

ERIK.

No, by my God, I will not!

BOTILDA.

Erik, why?

ERIK.

No matter, but I will not! Get you home!

[ERIK goes over to his men, who follow him. Exeunt.

BOTILDA half shrieks, sinks on a stone seat, and covers her face with her hands. The ladies and maids, who have kept aloof, flock round her.]

THORA.

Madam, what ails you?

A LADY.

Ah! how pale she is!

ANOTHER LADY.

Nay! she is hot as fire!

BOTILDA.

Oh! let me breathe,

Svanhilda, hold my hands! Dear friends, forgive;
The air is froze; I am not wont to rise
So early!

SVANHILDA.

Hush! and have you any pain?

BOTILDA.

Yes ! at the heart. But it will pass ! Dear friends
O do not look so anxious. I will rise !
Thora, your arm ! You see I am quite well,
Indeed, indeed, quite well !

A LADY.

The archbishop comes !

ÖSSUR (*enters with a train*).

Madam, this early pilgrimage of yours
Commends your zeal and chides my tardiness,
Yet when I tell you all,—ah ! help the queen,
She faints ! support her !

BOTILDA (*resolutely rising*).

It is nought ! forbear !

Dear friends, it passes ; I again am strong.
Össur, the king is in Roeskild again !

ÖSSUR.

So soon, and is his work of justice done ?

BOTILDA.

Himself will tell you all ; but for the rest
He brings such tidings to himself and me,
As breaks our course of action. Friends, you saw
How suddenly it moved me ! When he heard
That we had planned this pilgrimage to-day,
He would that I should hold to it, and go !
Nay ! when I prayed in this new urgent need,
(Whereof I will not speak at large) to stay,
And share in its doubtful issues, how his voice

Grew loud in his dissuasion, ye all heard,
 Who watched us ! But at last my wish prevailed,
 And if ye go to Odense at all
 It must be without me.

ÖSSUR.

But all your vows !

BOTILDA.

I will redeem them later, or if not
 The saint shall lose no honour for my sake,
 Some other way of worship being found.
 But leave us, I would see his Grace alone.

[*All exeunt but BOTILDA and ÖSSUR.*]

BOTILDA.

O let us sit awhile ; 'tis early still !
 The town has scarcely yet begun to stir.
 I pray you tell me, do you love the king ?

ÖSSUR.

Next after God, the best I know. Since first
 I held his span-long body at the font,
 And felt his tiny grasp, I've watched his growth
 In manly attributes of body and soul,
 With pride and godly hope. Why do you ask ?
 You knew the answer ere it came.

BOTILDA.

I did !

My heart is sick and faint with rootless fear,
 And I would stay myself on you !

ÖSSUR.

Alas !

What secret thing is this that shakes you so !
Will you not tell me ?

BOTILDA (*starting*).

There is nought to tell !

I will go home again ! Is this a dream ?
Oh ! crush my wrists together with a rope,
Strain back my hair like mad-folk's hair, for I
Am mad,—or dreaming ! Nay, I am quite well !
Let us sit down again and rest and talk !
How strange it is to think that you have known ;
My Erik ere he was a man !

ÖSSUR.

Ah, say !

Shall we not go ? Your cheeks are drawn and white ;
I know not what strange flame is in your eyes.
You are not well !

BOTILDA.

Yes, very well ! Not yet !
When folk come by, I'll rise and take your arm !
But speak to me of Erik in his youth.
Not as a child ; I do not dare to think
Of him as less in stature than myself ;
But how he reached the fulness of his height
And bloom of earliest manhood, that strange time
I love to dream of ! When I saw him first
Young as he was, the passion of the wars
Had lined his face with furrows. Was he fair
In earlier days ?

ÖSSUR.

Yea! as God's angels are,
With perfect limbs and a most faultless face,
Save that the mouth was set and somewhat hard.

BOTILDA.

But now the yellow hair conceals the lips!
How strange, I never saw his mouth! (*Aside*) To-day
I am glad at heart I never saw his mouth.
Father, when you were first a country priest
Did common peasant women who were sad
Come weeping to your cloister, tell you all,
And sob till they were quiet?

ÖSSUR.

Yea, sometimes!

BOTILDA.

If such a time should come that I should be
So desolate, and weak, and sick at heart
That sitting, leaning in my satin sleeves,
With perfumes in the air I breathe, my eyes
Should watch a beggar in the streets below,
And envy her, and pray that I were dead,
Say, will you let me come to you, and pour
The torrent of my sorrow in your ears,
And weep till I am still, and rock myself
As some poor nurse may rock a fretful babe,
That dozes, worn with wailing. (*She kneels before him.*)

ÖSSUR.

Madam, rise!

Oh ! rise, dear daughter ! I entreat, entreat !
 What sorrow can assail you so ! What fear
 Has power to shake your soul with such distress !
 O tell me !

BOTILDA (*rises*).

I am weak and overstrung !
 Forgive this foolish passion ! When the king
 Came suddenly to-day, he had strange news !
 I was not ready, knew not how to bear it !
 I have not learned to school my face to follow
 The brain's behests, it shows too much the heart—
 My weak, flushed heart, made faint with extreme love.
 The town is waking ; listen ! Let us go !

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

A garden in Roeskild. THORA weaving flowers.

THORA.

I wish there were more yellow flowers in June ;
 My garland is too full of reds and blues !
 Now, cowslips would be best ; but they die soon,
 And those white stars with little cups of gold
 They put upon the altar-cloth in Lent,
 Are over, too ; and tulips fall abroad !
 Well ! I must keep to roses ! Oh how still
 The grass and trees are in the afternoon.

I wonder where the birds are? All the bees
Are fallen asleep upon their thymy beds.

I am tired of this low bubbling of the well,
In Roeskild one can never get so far
As not to hear some fountain !

[*Enter GRIMUR.*] (*To GRIMUR.*) Back again?
I thought you were in Odense !

GRIMUR.

You did? !

Well, so I thought myself !

THORA.

What brings you back ?

GRIMUR.

What took me forth, free fancy and light heart !

THORA.

I wonder you should chance to find me here,
We maids come here so seldom, but the queen
Frequents this little plot, and loves to lie
Full length upon the summer grass and watch
The moving shingle at the well-spring's heart.

GRIMUR.

Yea, I have seen her so. And will she come
This afternoon to wander here alone?
I grew so tired of exile from the court,
I never crossed the sea; for when I came
Down to the shore and saw the hills of Fyen,

A kind of horror took me for the life
 That I should lead there. Roeskild is the sun,
 The rest of Denmark but a moor at night ;
 Here only men can act and women speak,
 In other places mere uncultured boors,
 Like beasts of burden, spin out doleful lives,
 With sordid, paltry loves and hates and fears.
 A man of spirit craves a busier scene.

You are the first that I have spoken with
 Since I set out ; the rest one whistles to
 As to a hound that fawns to be caressed,
 Or sneaks away to deprecate the lash.
 The common folks are curs.

THORA.

You cannot be
 A Dane at heart ; you are not one, nor know
 The spirit of our people. I wax red
 And hot to hear you speak so. Such as you
 Stir the hind's heart beneath his fustian coat,
 And though he answers not, some bitter day
 You will remember and he not forget.

GRIMUR.

Enough, enough ! you do not know the world !
 You should have ridden beside me as I rode
 By William Rufus through the farms and thorpes
 In England, three years since ! Hah ! that was life
 Worth living in the country. Oh ! to see
 The people flying out into the woods,

To miss the red king's whip ! I swear I thought
I should have died of laughter as I rode !
Poor William, dead this year ! He drank so deep,
Knew a hound's points, and women— ! Well ! ah well !
The best of men die soonest ! Where's the queen ?
You have not told me how Botilda fares !

THORA.

You cannot see her, she is faint to-day ;
And lies in the white chamber.

[*Enter* MARCUS.]

MARCUS.

Grimur, hail !

I saw you from the terrace, and came down.
An hour ago I heard of your return.

GRIMUR.

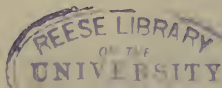
You give me a cold welcome ! By St. Knud,
I did not wish a warmer, hoped to come
Unseen and unreported, and so crossed
The fiord below the haven, climbed the hill
And won the town first by the palace gate.
Who told you of my coming ?

MARCUS.

Why, in truth—
If you will know—the mother of the king.

THORA.

Svanhilda must have seen you ; ere I came



She passed me on the terrace, would not speak,
But hastened on—

GRIMUR.

Yea ! tell me now at once

What crime against this people have I done
That all men peep and whisper where I go ?
Am I not free to ride away in peace,
One day, and on the next day come again ?
What do these women think that I have done ?
Am I a beast to eat them ? Have I slain
Their gallants secretly, and gouged their eyes
To mix in magic salve ? It makes me mad
Thus to be spied upon and tracked and trapped !
Learn once for all that I am the queen's friend !
The queen shall know how much ye vex my life.
(*Aside*) Go, Thora, tell the queen that I am come—
She knows it last of all, I warrant you—
And pray her, if she rest enough by then,
To let me speak to her to-night. The sky
Is broken ; it will clear at sundown. Go !
And pray her meet me underneath her bower
To-night at moon-rise. If she will not come,
Then tell her that I sail away at dawn,
And plead with her to come to say farewell.
I send no other message. Oh ! plead well !
Thora ! To-night at moon-rise ! Thora ! Stay !

[*Exit* THORA.]

MARCUS.

By chance, have you seen Erik since you came ?

GRIMUR.

No, wiseacre, nor shall before I go !
You are too wise, sometimes ! Before I reached
The strip of sea that parts us off from Fyen,
I heard in Sorö cloister, where I lay,
That Erik had gone west to Kallunborg,
To chasten some offender. I know well
He will not see Roeskild again for days !

MARCUS.

And so you thought the hour for your return
Propitious !

GRIMUR.

Nay ! I do not heed this king
More than a paste-king at a puppet show.
But I have changed my journey, bent my vows
From Danish Knud to Bridget of the Swedes,
And go to Lund to worship at her shrine.

MARCUS.

You talk too much of worship. Men like you
Would liefer dawdle at a lady's train,
And kneel before her in her bower, than bend
A fearful knee in church at a saint's shrine.
Your twinkling eye-lids give your words the lie ;
Nay, Grimur, not so glibly talk of prayer !

So ! will you let those jangling strings be still,
And listen ? Pray you, may I question you ?

GRIMUR.

Speak out, most reverent age !

MARCUS.

First, then, what words
Were those you whispered when the maiden went ?

GRIMUR.

I prayed her bring a psalter !

MARCUS.

Ribald youth,
What words were those you spake about the queen ?

GRIMUR.

I bid the girl go tell her how my face
Was withered with my fasting !

MARCUS.

Idle knave !

GRIMUR.

Diligent graybeard, it is my turn now !
Pray you, what right have you to question thus ?

MARCUS.

The right of one who serves the king and queen,
And doubts him of your fealty to both.

GRIMUR.

Doubt not ! I am most loyal to the queen.

MARCUS.

What is your mission to Botilda now ?
Why did you leave the town, and why return ?
Why did you stay here chattering to her maid ?

GRIMUR.

I wait to hear another "why" ! Behold,
I have not patience to endure your tongue ; .
Marcus, your fame is rife in all the court,
The little boys and busy chattering girls
Point at you for a dullard that will push
His beard into the smallest hinge ajar
To peep and listen. Yet, lest you should go
With lifted hands and eyelids to the king,
Or prattle to his mother, learn that I
Come hither in my friendship for the queen
To kiss her robe in parting. I am tired
Of barren dunes and spaces of cold sea ;
To-morrow I go southward ; while I lay
At Sorö, in the monk's refectory
I met a man who told me that my friend,
Count Roger, reigns in Sicily ; his name
Woke memories in me of the golden days
When he and I went harrying down the coasts
Of Tunis and Algiers. I go to him ;
There by the borders of the summer sea
Men lead a merrier life, and love their days,
And drink large draughts of pleasure till they die.
So, since Botilda is my only friend,

Here in Roeskild, methinks the boon I crave
Of saying just farewell to her is small.
And let me warn you, Marcus, dare to pass
Between me and my will,—you may not live
To finish your great saga of the king !

MARCUS.

I do not fear you, nor your tags and rhymes,
My verses are of nobler pitch than yours.
Go sing your staves and little pretty songs
To women of light loves in Sicily.
But let me teach you that the king is here,
Here in Roeskild, here in the court ; that he
Has heard what shame your idle words and songs
Have wrought for the queen's honour. Pure is she,
Clear-thoughted as a maiden, and reflects
No stain of yours upon her perfect heart,
But if you would not that the king should come
And bid his men to bind you hand and foot,
And mar your body, as men did last year
To Magnus, up in Norway—

GRIMUR.

What did they ?

MARCUS.

Bound down the lad, and took away his eyes,
And worse than that ; and then while still he moaned,
Made hopeless in his pain, and strove to die,
They bore him to a prison by the sea,

And nursed him so that still he lives and moans,
Barren and blind.

GRIMUR.

So shall not I be bound,
To-morrow I will journey.

MARCUS.

Best to-night
Let your sharp hoof-falls ring along the road.
Each hour you stay is perilous !

GRIMUR.

Forbear.

My life is mine to do with what I will,
Your words and thoughts I neither need nor heed.
I feel within my heart we shall not meet
More, before death. It may be, you being old,
That I shall linger in the flowery south
Till you are dead and buried. Fare you well,
And leave your harp and saga when you die
For me to sing and twangle.

MARCUS.

Fare you well.

But oh ! once more, be wise, and ride to-night !

[Exeunt different sides.]

SCENE III.

Terrace under Botilda's bower. Enter GRIMUR. Moonlight.

GRIMUR.

How strange is love ! It grips us by the throat,
Shuts up the eyes of reason, drugs the soul,
And leads the body prisoner where it will.
Why am I here ? I have not here one friend ;
This castle, this whole town, this very land
Are in his hand who hates me. At this hour
His axes may be waiting for my blood,
And his worst ruffians with a wary thumb
Trying the murderous edge. Why am I here ?
Can just a woman's countenance so change
The wholesome temper of my brain and will,
That I can walk into the jaws of death
Merely to see her ? If she had been mine,
If once and for one moment's space her mouth
Had brushed my lips and trembled there and gone,
That memory might now nerve me ; or if once
Her wrist had throbb'd within my tender grasp,
Or once my arm stole round her, but why now,
When never the least favour that love gives
Her frosty eyes have granted, I should dare
Torture and death to see her once again,

Passes my skill. Cold moon, that ey'st me there,
The light long clouds that hurry across thy face
Fly and are gone ; thou dost not stir for these,
But o'er the impassive beauty of thy round,
Like fugitive thoughts that tremble at themselves,
These stains of vapour pass and fade and fly.
Oh ! that my body were stedfast as thy sphere,
Thou crystal-hearted loveliness ! But I
Am led by that that mars me, flagging pulse
And kindling runlet of the passionate blood.
They move not thee, but this has power to guide
My panting body whither it will, and stirred
By love as by a wind that flickers and falls,
It leads me on to perilous walks of death.
Shame on this helmless spirit of mine, and shame
On thee, quick stream, whose throbbings stir me so.
I will be master of my blood ! Chaste moon,
Draw my whole being to thee, and drop thy frost
Down on my spirit. So ! I will be calm,
Will bridle in my breath, and teach my heart
To think not of my love. Now ! I am cold !
Cold as the sea that frets against those rocks,
Falling and moaning. I am still at last !
I wait not here for any ! In the world
There is no woman who can move me now.
Hush ! how the wind has fallen. Still, so still !
Calm as my heart that recks no more of love.

(Starting up.)

Oh love, love, love ! Would God I had her here

To wind my arms tight underneath her hair,
And crush her to my breast, and feel her heart,
And press her lips asunder in a kiss !
Ah ! doth the moon not redden ? Lo ! methinks
Her heart repents her of her frosty will,
And blushes with new passion ! Hush ! what's that ?
The measured murmur of the voiceful sea
Sounds, but nought else ! How still it is, but hark !
A door that opened and that closed. She comes !
I hear her footsteps on the grass ! My heart,
Break not and fail not in this supreme hour !

[*Enter THORA.*]

Thora ! She will not come ? Oh ! say not so ?
Flatter my ears and tell me she will come,
Then break the sad news to me word by word
As maids tell children when their mothers die ?
Why is it that she will not come ?

THORA.

She will !

She rose and drew her hair back from her eyes,
First when the moon was rising. She was faint
With walking in the sharp air of the dawn,
And sudden meeting of the king. She lay
Half swooning on her bed when I came back
Full of your message ; when I told it her
She spoke not, and I thought she heard it not,
But when I said the words again, she cried
With sharpness strange to her familiar mood,

“I hear you! vex me not!” and turned herself
 Round to the wall, and would not speak or stir,
 And now she bade me tell you that she comes;
 But when you see her you will find her changed,
 So pale she is, with slumber-hungry eyes,
 Dark founts of pent-up tears. I pray you, sir,
 Afflict her not in parting! Say your will
 As briefly as you can. She is but weak,
 Nor for another gentleman than you
 Would come to say farewell. But hush! she comes!

[*Enter BOTILDA. GRIMUR starts forward but restrains himself. She comes slowly towards him, but not very near, and stops.*]

BOTILDA.

Grimur!

GRIMUR.

O blessed mouth to speak my name!
 Botilda! Let me—let me touch your hand.

BOTILDA.

My friend, you see how like a ghost I am,
 And half the bodily life seems dead in me!
 I have slept ill of late, and changes come,
 And time is not as golden as youth says.
 Methinks I have so little corporal life
 That I would fain you touched me not. My maids
 Were lost in wonder that I came to-night.
 I wonder, too! but when I heard your tale,

And how the purpose of your journey stood,
I thought that I would speak our last farewell.
So! Have you found your bride!

GRIMUR.

She flies me still ;
Sometimes I think her face is very near,
To-night she might come walking here and find
Her bridegroom on this grass.

BOTILDA.

I am not now
So simple as I was a week ago,
For wit grows fast when sorrow warms the sod.
You mean that death might find you here to-night?

GRIMUR.

Why, yes! 'tis true!

BOTILDA.

Death walks not in these courts,
With noiseless footfalls and a girdled knife ;
There is no fear of death. Yet you say well
Saying that danger stares you in the face
Haunting this plot of maiden turf by night.
Why do you come?

GRIMUR.

Ah! cannot eyes like yours
Interpret eyes like mine, nor your wan cheeks
The hollow writing in the lines of these.

BOTILDA.

I cannot see your eyes.

GRIMUR.

But if you did
You'd see the starting tears that dim them so
That they are blind to yours.

BOTILDA.

What would you say?
Oh! let us hasten through our hearts' farewell.

GRIMUR.

Not hearts'; it may be lips'. Where'er I go
My heart remains your thrall, and when you die,
'Twill rise with you to heaven, though all the rest
Be buried and forgotten.

BOTILDA.

Yea! our hearts':
It is my heart that comes to bid you go,
And pray God speed for ever. Oh, my tongue,
Trip not, but push the matter to an end!
I cannot frame the very words I would,
Although I learned them! Ah! men say they love
A woman, yet they grieve her to the soul,
And will not understand the thing she means,
But force their rough love straight into her face
When all she asks is friendship. Till to-day
I did not know, I cannot yet be sure,
That you desired--How strange, how very strange!

GRIMUR (*kneeling*).

Madam, forgive me !

BOTILDA.

Rise, the hour grows late

And I have somewhat left for me to say.

Grimur, if any little word of mine,

Spoken in laughter, set your heart on fire,

I pray your pardon !

GRIMUR.

Shall I rather fall

And kiss the white feet of your perfect truth ?

BOTILDA.

Once more ! If ever I have seemed to smile

At any wanton song that like a bird

Percht on my maids' lips, warbling, and so shook

The honour in your heart and wrought its fall,

Pray you forgive me !

GRIMUR.

Purest saint and queen,

Stay, your words stab me !

BOTILDA.

Have I given you cause

In any sorry jest about the King

To doubt my wifely steadfastness or faith ?

GRIMUR.

Never !

BOTILDA.

Then if it was this face of mine
That innocently slew your inward truth,
Henceforward I will veil it to the world,
Since something in its fashion must belie
The will that dwells within it.

GRIMUR.

Hush, I go !
Profane not that fair beauty ! Like the snow
Be cold and silent, beautiful and pure !
I will not mar your peace ; my broken heart
Shall plead no more against a froward fate.
Sweet saint, whose virtue leaves me pilotless,
I push the frail boat of my life once more
Out into the strange seas, I know not how,
And care not whither ! O be thou the star
For my tossed soul to steer by ! Since no more
My shattered heart may dream of earthly love,
Guide it to heaven with prayer. Ah ! when you pray,
Remember me in secret.

BOTILDA.

Yea, I will !
And may the words that glide from out your lips
So smoothly, be the index of the soul !
Grimur, we part, and if we meet again
Not you, nor I can know, but I trow not.
Once, this last hour, I will be frank and speak,

Put off the woman's trick of measured words,
And like a man be brazen. Then, if love
Be this, to feel a heightened pulse of life
Beat when the loved one's footsteps touch the stair,
To lose all drooping sense of bodily ill
When he is near and smiling ; to grow sad
And weary, when 'tis sure he will not come :
Then once, and only once, since time began,
Has love come down into this heart of mine,
Grimur, I never reddened when you came ;
Your presence never stirred the little pains
That vex our idle hours ; and never yet
Those hours seemed leaden for their lack of you !

[*A pause.*]

And now I must be gone, and though we part,
Your best remains behind you ! You have sung
Too many songs that memory dare not lose,
To fade from ours, and when we touch the lute
We'll speak of you as of our father's friend,
A poet dead and gone. Dead friend, farewell !

[*Exeunt BOTILDA and THORA.*]

GRIMUR (*lying on the ground*).

Gone ! Now for silence ! Hark ! what's that that beats
Aloud and is no bell ? It is my head,
So hot and throbbing, and so like to burst.
Hush ! is she gone ? I thought I heard a step !
Oh that the sea would roar, the wind would howl,
I cannot bear this stillness ! Hush ! what's that !

I wonder if one lay awake like this
All night upon the cool bed of the grass,
Whether towards sunrise one would hear the blades
Starting at dewfall? Will the Queen not come?
I thought Botilda said that she would come?
Dead! She is dead! And I am like to die,
Am dead already! How the waves are light
That wash across my bones in this dead sea!
Ah, me! how near I am, not dead, but mad!
I cannot yet remember—ah! she said
Farewell! O what a doleful thing to say
To one who never yet has fared but ill.
Why did I not take hold of both her hands
And kiss them while she stood there! Like a stock
I let her say what grievous thing she would
And made no answer! Now it is too late,
I know I shall not touch her till I die. [A pause.]

[Enter THORA. GRIMUR starts up.]

THORA.

Still here! Make haste to horse and ride away
Now in this moment!

GRIMUR.

Ride away?

THORA.

Yes! yes!

Stay for no last words now, lest they should come
And find you here, and bind you hand and foot.

For when we came again into the bower
We found the maids all pale-eyed and aghast,
And one, Svanhilda, gone ! See, there are lights
Moving high up the towers, and see they come
Nearer, and shadows flicker in the hall.
Svanhilda hates you, knows that you are here,
And, if my instant thought betrays me not,
Has flown to tell your secret to the King.
Fly, while the hunters give you space and time !

GRIMUR.

I will ;—but, Thora, tell me ere you go
How looked Botilda as you climbed the tower ?

THORA.

Oh ! do not stay for questions !

GRIMUR.

Did she laugh ?

THORA.

Laugh ? No ! She moved the corners of her lips,
But more for tears than laughter.

GRIMUR.

Was she sad ?

Sad that she would not see me any more ?

THORA.

Fly, stay not here ! Oh yes ! she was not glad !
I swear to you her eyes were full of grief,
Go, only go !

GRIMUR.

Ah ! was she sad, dear love !

She could not mean those cruel words she spake !
 Perchance she tried my love with me ! Perchance
 She loves me still, has loved me from the first,
 And tempts me now to try me ! Yea ! I go !
 Fear not, I go ! My horse is near the gate
 They shall not find me, Thora !

THORA.

Then farewell ! [*Exit.*]

GRIMUR.

But yet I will not go till I have sung
 One little bird-like song she used to love,
 A carol with the live heart of regret
 Yearning within it ! She shall hear, and know
 I burn to clasp her though she bids me go !

[*He takes his lute, and walks underneath the window,
 where the light is moving. He sings.*]

*Autumn closes
 Round the roses,
 Shatters, strips them, head by head ;
 Winter passes
 O'er the grasses,
 Turns them yellow, brown and red ;
 Can a lover
 E'er recover
 When his summer love is dead ?*

*Yet the swallow
 Turns to follow
 In the northward wake of spring,
 To refashion
 Wasted passion
 With a sweep of his dark wing,
 As returning
 Love flies burning
 To these stricken lips that sing!*

[*During the song* ERIK *has come across the stage, and stands behind him.*]

ERIK.

Good knave, a word with you.

GRIMUR (*turning*).

The end is come!

ERIK.

Fine sir, what want you here?

GRIMUR.

My lord, I sing

As I have often done before, to charm

The august slumbers of the saintly queen!

ERIK.

A very saintly song for holy ears!

So! you would sing, forsooth? Ah! by St. Knud,

'Tis wonder that I did not thrust you through

But now, when you were whining! Go your way!

[GRIMUR *glances up at BOTILDA'S window.*]

What, cur, you look up yonder ere you go?
 What then, can nothing teach you but the sword,
 That queens are for your masters? Curse and die!
(*Stabs him.*)

GRIMUR.

Oh! pray for me, Botilda!

ERIK.

Pray for you?

Go down to hell, and wait for her to come!
 Perchance she loves you so that she may pray
 To die before her time.

GRIMUR.

It ebbs away!

Love, anger, sorrow, fade into the air;
 I wish I may die quickly! Erik, bow
 Your ear to me, for I am fainting! Hark!
 About the plot I had to win the queen,
 And hope to feed my passion at your shame,
 I swear she never knew it.—Help! More breath!
 How dark it is! O Erik, drive them off!
 These devils push their fingers in my eyes!
 God's mother, save me!
(*Dies.*)

ERIK.

Dead, with fruit of lies
 Around him, and one flower upon his lips.

[*Enter THORA.*]

THORA.

What's that? O mercy!

ERIK.

'Tis a dog that's gone

Where he shall never taste of mercy more.

Look at him with the little face turned up,

The goodly cloven chin, the wanton lips,

The love-curls draggled not with wine but blood.

Look at him well! See him as he is now,

Before I bid my men to come and throw

His carrion out upon the shore to rot,

For you must go back to your mistress' bower,

And tell her how you found him, and then shut

The door, and put some black weeds on her limbs,

And let her moan her matins like a nun—

The world and I shall never see her more.

[THE CURTAIN FALLS.]

KING ERIK.

ACT III.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

Before Roeskild Cathedral. The doors of the Cathedral are closed; within the church is heard a noise of singing. A priest stands in the porch. A man-at-arms of the king enters.

SOLDIER.

Room in the church! King Erik comes to mass.
Open the doors!

PRIEST.

It must not be so yet.

Within the Lady Chapel in the east,
They read the last dread litany that gives
The unannealèd spirit of the slain
Its purgatorial freedom.

SOLDIER.

Yet the King
May enter in and worship in the choir.
Who is this dead man that they bury?

PRIEST.

One,

Whose corpse was taken from the shuddering sea
That touched it at full tide. A murdered man,
I know not whom! But till the Archbishop comes
I dare not let the doors be thrown apart.
He strictly charged me, let no creature pass.

SOLDIER.

The King's command is weightier than your lord's.

PRIEST.

Nay, for in him I hear the Church and God.

SOLDIER.

Here comes the king. Quick! Open, or move aside!

[*Enter ERIK, with his train.*]

ERIK.

What! waiting with shut doors? But overnight
I told the lord Archbishop to prepare
The church for mass betimes. I thought to find
The aisles already misty with the smoke
Swung thick and heavy round the censer-boys,
And flowers about the threshold, and a line
Of nodding priests along the porch and nave.
So late on such a day as this! Good man,
Are you the only waker up betimes
The morning that King Erik comes to mass,
Ere he can meet his burghers?

PRIEST.

Pardon, Sire !

But if your men-at-arms made less to-do
 With iron heels upon the holy pavement,
 You'd hear the sound of singing in the church.
 We have been stirring, all of us, since dawn.

ERIK.

Then throw the gates wide open. It grows late.

PRIEST.

Oh ! pardon still, I dare not ! Össur said,
 I must not turn this door upon its hinge,
 Till all the singing ceased above the dead.

ERIK.

What ! means the good Archbishop then to keep
 Our blood and bones a-cold in this sharp air ?
 I like not these strange customs. Hush ! the choir
 Has ended ! Turn aside, and let us pass !

[*The doors fly open, and ÖSSUR appears, filling the doorway
 with his robes and holding up a crucifix.*]

ÖSSUR.

Behold, behold these bleeding wounds and blush !

ERIK (*bowing*).

I do my Saviour reverence ? (*rising*). Össur, haste !
 The morning wears away ! I hear outside
 The hoofs of all the burghers as they come
 To constitute the Thing. You do not well

To stay me with these mummeries and psalms ;
Prepare the holy Mass, and let me kneel
And take between my fingers in the choir
The comfortable wafer. If you will,—
With these new-fangled fashions fresh from Rome,—
Put it yourself between my lips, but haste
Whate'er you do, I fret till it be done.

ÖSSUR.

The blood of Abel cries out of the ground.

ERIK.

Have I not bowed already to the Cross ?
Behold I bend again upon one knee !

ÖSSUR.

Lo ! who is this that with such bloody hands
Comes reeking to the temple of our God !
Lo ! who is this whose feet are stained and shod
With Christian blood outspurted like the juice
Of grapes in the world's winepress ? Who is he ?

ERIK.

Össur, if but your looks were like your words
That thunder with no meaning, I should doubt
You had not your clear senses.

ÖSSUR.

My lord king,
If with the inner eye I could not see
How all your soul is stained with innocent blood,
My heart would deem yours spotless.

ERIK.

Let me in !

You waste my time and yours with blood-red words
That bear no meaning in them. Has the strain
Of such unwonted vigil after dawn
Smitten your reason ?

ÖSSUR.

You, with those red hands,
Those feet that burn with slaughter ? Let you stand
Here in the presence of the milk-white Lamb,
Whose blood purged our iniquities, whose life,
Thrown like a rose of sacrifice to fade
In the inmost flame-heart of the wrath of God,
Passed into death that we might never die ?
I will not ! Go ! I dare not let you in !

ERIK.

You dare not ? Dare not ? Are you mad, or I ?

ÖSSUR:

This morning, when the earliest dawn-light broke,
The birds began to whistle in the trees,
And half in a half-dream I heard them sing :
Sister, will you fly south with me to-day ?
I cannot stay here longer ! and the next
Answered, Yea, brother, for this Christian land
Is outraged and undone ! And then the first,
This king that should have ruled the land so well

Is fallen, and so sunk in deadly sin
That all is lost for Denmark, all is lost !

ERIK.

What means this foolish babble of dream-birds ?

ÖSSUR.

These birds were my sad thoughts, that each to each
Murmured and mourned ! And when I came and saw
The tokens of your passion, when my priests
Drew the dark cloth away from side and back,
And showed me the red cleft your anger made,
And showed me where the raw edge of the bone
Stared out, and where the sobbing lips of flesh
Oozed with the life your violence stabbed to death,
I could have spread my hands to heaven and cried,
Not this man's life but mine, my old spent breath,
Take with a sudden word, O Lord, and spare
Our land the anguish of this shameful sin !

ERIK.

Come, have an end of frantic words like these,
They shame your reverent hair, that should be crowned
With sober speech as with a garland. Cease !
I know not of what deed of mine you rave,
But having spent your wrath in this one burst,
Flow backward like a wasted wave, and let
Your zeal in service overweigh the wrong
Of this unmannered welcome, which had been

Right sharply chastened in a lesser man,
But shall be now forgotten. Lead the way !

ÖSSUR.

It must not be ! Here ! slay me if you will,
Slay me as strange men slew your brother Knud,
But clinging to this cross I'll bar the way,
Yea ! even in death.

ERIK:

Ungrateful priest, unloyal and untrue,
To whom the schemes and trickeries of your church
Are dearer than the honour of your king,
Listen, before I smite you ! From whose hand
Came all those honours that have given you power
To stand and snarl like some unlovely dog
That barks his master from the kennel-door
Wherein that master housed him ? All these years
When have I ceased to heap upon your head
The glories of my kingdom ? By whose power
Have all the wide-spread church-lands of the North
Passed from the see of Hamburg, and been laid
Before your thankless feet, who tread them down
And spurn them back, and from such vantage-ground,
Spit out the rancorous poison of your spite
On my fair fame and kingship ?

ÖSSUR.

Oh ! my lord——

ERIK.

Was ever king so dear a son as I
To my own country's church? That I might found
The archbishopric of Lund, and set your grace
Higher than all the churchmen of the North,
Did I not go in person to the Pope,
And win him to my wishes? Graceless man,
How long have I not known you, seen you smile,
And thought a heart smiled in you. Blush you not,
To think how I have loved you, and to know
That you have loved me never? Quick, repent!
Return to your old service, lest my hands
Be sharp to smite and you die unannealed.

ÖSSUR.

Your words are swords, and if you smote with steel
You could not wound me deeper! All these things
My heart remembers, and is like to break!

ONE OF THE SOLDIERS.

Sire, will you that we enter here by force?

ANOTHER.

Strike the Archbishop to the earth.

THE FIRST.

He prays!

See what a glory flashes from his face.

ÖSSUR.

Erik, I know not why you hold them back,

That raven for my life? Ah! best to die,
Since all that made life sweet is broken and gone?

ERIK (*to the soldiers*).

Peace! Touch not the Archbishop! That man dies
Who stirs his robe until I give command!

ÖSSUR.

How should we hold our heads up any more,
When all men mocking point to us and say,
Ye boasted that ye were not wild as we,
Staining your streets with Christian blood, or racked
With party strifes among yourselves, and now
Your king, in whom you bid the world behold
A mirror of pure knighthood, like a churl,
Who stabs his neighbour in a drunken brawl,
Murders a guiltless man! Nay, though the world
Point to our fall with laughter, I alone,
If no man else withstand you, will withstand!
Go, take those blood-stained hands, those guilty feet,
Far from the precincts of the Lord, nor dream
That he, before the lightning of whose eyes
Men's thoughts are as their actions, night as day—
Is blind to your iniquity. Hush! Hark!
They sing the last soft requiem that lulls
The murdered soul of Grimur in his sleep,
The innocent Grimur you have foully slain!

ONE OF THE SOLDIERS.

Lo! shall he say such words and be not smitten?

ANOTHER.

Death to the ribald priest !

THE FIRST.

Ho ! drag him down !

THE SECOND.

Break through the doors !

ANOTHER.

First snatch the cross away !

ERIK.

Silence ! and gather to my heel like hounds !
Am I not strong enough to plead my cause
Alone with one old man ! Go ! wait without !

[*They go out. ERIK, alone, comes nearer to ÖSSUR, who remains gazing up, with the cross before him. ERIK falls at his feet.*]

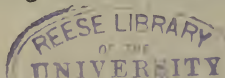
Alas ! is there no hope for me ? O plead !
For you have all the favour of the saints,
And know the ways of heaven ! Plead for me !
Lo ! I have sinned and broken my dearest vows,
Am stained with Christian blood, and splashed with sin.
And yet he was a cur, and yet I think
You even had stabbed him had you been as I !
Have you not heard ? It was so hard to bear,
So hard to come from war upon the sea,
Made brown with the salt wind, and not so fair
As smooth lads seem to women, and then find

This gay bird fluting in the garden-walks
That I had set to sing in ; ah, the dog !
I wish that I had spared him for slow death !
Ah ! pray for pardon for me ! Yea ! I said
That henceforth never any Christian blood
Should flow for rage in Denmark any more.
Is there no hope ? Oh ! pray to all the saints !
My brother Knud, whose heart was flame like mine
Before he reached his saintship, pray to him !
How can I wash my sin away ? Look down !
Cease communing with angels ! See, I lie
More like a broken beggar than a king,
Bowed at your feet ! Oh, help ! you will not see
The devils gibber at me in your teeth,
And pluck at me for pastime, and not spread
Your holy hands to shield me ! Ah ! I die !
Listen ! I vow before the saints and God,
To rest not till I kneel in passionate prayer
Before the holy shrine in Palestine,
And worship in Jerusalem. Perchance
Such penance and such prayer may serve to heal
The anguish of my spirit's inward wound !
Össur, I perish ! Ah ! record my vow !

[ÖSSUR *slowly letting fall his hands, touches ERIK's bowed head with the crucifix.*]

ÖSSUR.

My son, the smoking flax God will not quench,



Nor break the bruised reed ! Depart in peace !
 Set all your ways in order, take the staff
 Of pilgrimage, and mourn with contrite soul
 The sins of the irrevocable past.
 God give that in the evening there be light !

SCENE II.

The Thing at Roeskild. An enclosure in the open air, on a plain ground in sight of the Cathedral. On a high seat at the top ERIK sits ; around him are seats for the nobles. The rest of the space is filled with the freemen, who bustle about, and speak noisily together. SKJALM HVIDE rises to address the people.

HERALD.

Silence among the freemen ! Skjalm will speak.

SEVERAL IN THE CROWD.

Hear him ! Good Skjalm, who loves the people's cause !

SKJALM.

My friends, the lawyers' cases are all solved,
 The suits all pleaded, but before we part
 One thing remains unspoken and undone.

A VOICE.

We came from home to hear the King's resolve.

SKJALM.

Hear it you shall, and shortly ! But before
 King Erik rises to dissolve the Thing,

Old law and custom teach that I should ask
If any man in all your ranks desire
The King's decision on a knotty point
Of disputable action? Twelve long months
Must pass before he hear the like again,
So let him speak, or wisely hold his peace.

THE LEADER OF THE FREEMEN.

The heads of every province, ere we met,
Inquired in all the families what wrongs
The Thing should judge in meeting. It seems strange
That none assembled here to-day by law,
White-headed though some be by dint of years,
Remember such a peaceful Thing as this.
No blood-feuds to atone for, no great sins
Of rapine or of subtlety to clear
With death or gold ; no tales of fire or flood,
That lead a weeping train of orphaned babes
To pray the King for pity ; such a dearth
Of heart-o'erwhelming incidents of loss
No man remembers since his days began.
For this has been a year of fruitful fields,
Soft sunshine, genial rain, and now at last
Of such a harvest that the granary-doors
Creak, well-nigh bursting. But when Olaf reigned
The hungry land wailed for a little corn,
And starving hands clutched at the steel that saves.
King Erik is our corn-giver ; the crown

Of lasting peace in Denmark, and the sun
That shall not set till all our days are over !

A VOICE.

Hail for King Erik, hail !

ANOTHER.

The best of kings
That e'er made Denmark happy !

ANOTHER.

Length of days,
Honour and power and glory to the King !

SKJALM.

Are there no suits, then, for the King to try ?

LEADER.

Not one ; what few disputes there were to solve
The lawyers have decided. All is peace !

AN OLD MAN.

I have come from far to see the King, and hear
His voice before I die.

ANOTHER.

Good father, stay !
The King will rise within a little space.

A VOICE.

I left my farm in Bornholm by the sea,
Because I heard the King would speak to-day.
A long, slow voyage, and the wind was rough !
I hope he will not fail us.

ANOTHER.

Hush ! He comes !

[ERIK comes forward to the centre of the enclosure. There is considerable noise and excitement].

ERIK.

Perchance there is not one man here but knows
 How lately from long sailing on the seas,
 My ships came back to Denmark. In my face
 The colour of the sea-wind is still red,
 That fades with inland weather. Ye have heard,
 Yea ! those of you that come from very far,
 Where Jutish sand-hills stop the long ground-swell
 Setting from England, on your journey hither
 Have heard what power God gave us in that fight,
 And how we shattered Jomsborg. Lo ! to-day
 Not one black keel is cutting the calm sea
 With pirate Wends within it, and their power,
 Pressed inland, threatens Russia and not us.
 So when the summer scent of the green corn
 Blew on us first, returning, and when first
 My dragon faced the current of the fjord,
 And Denmark lay around me, in my heart
 I counselled with my spirit and with God.
 Ye know me well ; I am no man of war,
 Nor ever joyed, as other kings may do,
 To trample the red vintage of men's flesh,
 For pastime or ambition ; time may be,
 As time has been, that vengeance for wrongs done

May call me out to battle with your foes ;

Lo ! twice the Wends have fallen, and will not rise.

But ever when the change of seasons brought
Conquest and calm, my heart in me has burned
To live here in the midst of you in peace.

And never more than on the very day
Whereof I speak ; and when the chieftains came
To bid me gracious welcome, when I spake,
I told them I would never wander more.

My friends, I was a younger man that noon,
Younger, meseems, by years and years. To-day
The hopes that sprang so lightly in my heart,
Are sere and blown to ruin by all winds.

I thought to bind this people like a sheaf
To stand up in the field of nations, firm
Among its scattered neighbours ; thought to build
Such bulwarks of the hearts and hands of men,
That other kings should gnash their teeth for rage,
Seeing that hope of harming us was gone.

Alas ! what stubble of dry fields is thought !
And how the flying tongues of passion twist
And blacken and devour it in an hour !

I was a young man, and I now am old ;
Already, though ye see my hands and hair
Fresh with the morning, on my brain and heart
The cankering dew of nightfall lies and broods.
I said no Christian blood should ever again
Be shed and unatoned for here in Denmark ;

One man has slain another man untried,
Here in our midst, in Denmark! Ask not who!
He stands so near to my own throne, I dare not
Chasten his crime with death. But for this shame
I bow myself in anguish. And to you
Would speak some brief words more before I cease.
God thank you Danes for all your love and truth, }
And for the wondrous goodness you have shown
My father and my brothers, your dead kings,
And, lastly, me who may be dead ere long.
I bear you witness you have served me well
While we have been together. But now I
Must pass out of your life a little space,
And, no man knows if you shall see me more,
Since in my sorrow for that ill deed done,
I vowed a vow before the gates of God,
To wend to his dear city in the East,
And heal the inward anguish of my soul.
Nor dare I linger, since until I stand
Within those sacred precincts, feet of mine
Must touch no plot of consecrated ground.

[*The KING returns hastily to his throne; there is deep and prolonged silence among the people. At last SKJALM HVIDE comes forward and will speak, but cannot, and then breaks out.*]

. SKJALM.

Lord King, we stand here, and the earth swoons round,
The sky seems trembling, and that sacred tower

Shudders as in an earthquake ! Lo ! our ears
Roar with that last strange saying that your lips
Poured into them, and, as it seems, no mouth
Has power to utter the heart's burning thoughts !
If one had come and told us that the sea,
Risen a man's height above its wonted tide,
Had wasted all our level-lands and towns,
Or if another hurrying here had brought
New of some strange disaster, pestilence,
Or fire or flood, or rage of plundering Wends,
Such news had not so moved us. O my Lord !
Turn back and tell us that our ears heard wrong,
Hearing you bid your land farewell ! If not,
God send us Danes quick death and end of toil,
For all the little rest that Denmark knew
And all her dawn of sunshine's over now
Since you, her sun, are setting ere your time.

[*Silence, and sound of weeping among the people.*]

A VOICE FROM AMONG THE CROWD.

My little one died this day seven'night !
It is not hard to bear it now ! Saint Knud
Be thanked because he took him !

ANOTHER.

Yea, 'tis true !

This land is not so merry for young lives,
Nor meet to nourish children !

ANOTHER.

Had I known
The King would speak such sorry words as these,
I had not left my homestead.

ANOTHER.

See the King !
He presses on the lion of his throne
With one hand, and the other shades his eyes.

THE FIRST.

How grave he looks, and wan !

SECOND.

And grown so old.
Who was so young and comely. Hush ! but look !
Again Skjalm speaks and rises ! The good Skjalm !

SKJALM.

Sire, if it trouble not your mood too much,
Be so far gracious to your loyal Thing,
And these assembled freemen, to declare,
Once more, if there be found no other way
To keep your vow and save the church from wrong,
Than this, that you should sail away and leave
Your loving people orphans ?

ERIK (*from the throne*).

There is none !

[*Silence, and whispering in knots.*]

[*The Leader of the Freemen, and others come forward and kneel before him weeping; at first they cannot speak.*]

LEADER.

Lord King, you know the temper of our hearts,
And how there is not one man here to-day,
So mighty towards you is our love and faith,
Who would not fly upon a wall of spears,
Pierced with a hundred wounds, to guard your life.
'Tis needful that I speak of this our love,
And pray you now to bear it well in mind,
Lest words that may come after vex your soul.
My Lord, it had been simpler for ourselves,
And more the way that loyal subjects use,
If we had heard your charge with foreheads bowed,
And then without one murmur had gone home.
But now, within our hearts to-day, all hope,
All fear of blame and all desire of help
So utterly have passed away and gone,
That we are dead before you, and as men
Once dead have no more fear of their liege lords,
We count not your displeasure, nor can go,
Though you should chide us, till we plead one more.
We pray you, then, before you leave your crown,
And give your kingdom and your fame away,
And leave us without father, without shield,
To think what wrong you do us ! Nor, so soon,
And for the breath's sake of a spoken word,

Or lightly for a promise to a priest,
Desert your nation's honour ; oh ! think well !
Can such a journey made for such a vow
Be half so pleasant in the sight of God,
As kingly governance of free-born men ?
My Lord, it is a strange thing and a new,
That shaven priests with crucifix in hand,
And muttering prayers in Latin all day long,
Should come between the people and their king.
It was not so in olden time ; ah ! Sire,
If steel in any foeman's hand should dare
To seek what colour flowed in a King's veins,
No priest would hew the caitiff down, nor words
Of Latin, but rough Danish curse the deed.
And if the church must rule, oh ! deign to judge
If even the church be half so well sustained
In exile as in presence of our King !

ERIK.

Dear friends, I were not worthy of your love
If such a proof of constancy and faith,—
Albeit your will is contrary to mine,—
Could stir me into wrath. In truth, your words
And all your wealth of tears and passionate prayers
Are like to make a woman of my heart,
And melt it into weeping. Ah ! would God
That all might be again as all has been !
But this thing that you pray for cannot be ;

My vow was far too solemn and too strong,
To fall asunder lightly. Nay! should I,
Moved by your prayers, put these my words aside,
No fortune would attend my reign, but heaven
Be iron, and the angry earth be brass.

SKJALM.

Your nephew, Svend, is in the south, and fights
Beneath the red-cross banner. Oh! let him
Be bearer of your vows before the shrine.

ERIK.

Ah! Skjalm! You have not heard what came but now,
Sad words from that most Christian potentate,
The Emperor of Trebizond, who writes
That Svend, my gallant nephew—hard of hand,
And goodly as he was,—that Svend is dead!
He stormed Nicea first, then Antioch,
And stood the foremost always in the breach;
But resting, with his armour laid aside,
And that Burgundian princess, who had left
All things for love of him, within his arms,
And all his soldiers round him in a wood,
The Paynim hordes rushed in and slew him there.
So one more brave and comely man is dead.
Ah, friends! I pray you hold me not, nor hope
To stem the stedfast current of my will
That flows to Palestine and dares not swerve.

LEADER.

And yet once more, if you will pardon me,
As mouthpiece of this people, I am fain
To lay their humble words down at your feet.
Your subjects here assembled in the Thing,
Desirous by whatever means they may,
To hold their King and not to let him go,
Do promise here in conclave, one and all,
To give the third part of their worldly goods
To ransom you from all your vows, and hold
Their King, once more enfranchised, in their midst.
This, Sire, is no light promise that we make,
Nor are we all so ready to give up
The third of what we have, that with no thought
We press such largess gladly on the church,
But so assured are all of us at heart,
That we are ready almost to resign
Our liberty itself to keep you here.
Ah ! be not so unhandsome to your land !

ERIK.

Good friends, it is in vain ! Your many words
Are powerless as are rain-drops on a rock,
To stir me from my purpose. Cease to strive.
I will not take your wealth away, nor even
Permit my going hence to drain your store,
But journey to the East at my own cost.

Skjalm Hvide, whom you know so well and love
Shall rule the country while I must be gone,
I pray you till I come again in peace
To do him honour in my kingly stead.
And now, farewell ! And deem me not, my friends,
Unmindful of your loyal faith and love,
Nor dream because I hold me to my vow,
I have not weighed your pleading in my heart,
And thanked you for your passion. Now I go.
My sails will fill with the next western wind
That presses hence for Russia. Friends, farewell !

SCENE III.

[*A hall in the Palace at Roeskild. ERIK alone pacing up and down.*]

ERIK.

The west wind sets from Kjöge more and more,
And if we would not wait until it shift
'Twere well we lingered not ; there's but small space
For anchorage at Kjöge. All is done !
All set in order to the hand of Skjalm,
Who bears his kingship like a grave wise man.
But yet it seems I must before I go
See that fair woman who was once my wife ;
I'd rather wrangle with a fourfold Thing
Than smite a little lower with my words

That small gold head that will be bowed so low,
So anxious for forbearance ; like a king
I may be kingly in my latest hour,
And ere I go forgive her ! Come what may,
Whatever tender thing she find to plead,
I will not touch her with my lips or hands,
But let her go with downcast eyelids hence,
Unto our summer palace in the woods !
I wish that it were over !

[*Enter SVANHILDA.*]

SVANHILDA.

Ah ! my Lord,

They told me I might chance to find you here.

ERIK.

Have you forgotten when you found me last ?

SVANHILDA.

Oh no !

ERIK.

The torch-light on your face that night
Flickered like blood. I do not think you blushed,
But you are whiter now.

SVANHILDA.

Alas ! my lord,
That was a night of blood, and my wan cheeks
Took something of the tincture. Yet I think
I never felt much colder in the lips
Than when I left you last.

ERIK.

Now these two times
You cross me with your counsels ; and no man,
Not he who lies stabbed through in the church choir,
Has ever changed my purpose in me more.

SVANHILDA.

Saint Knud ! you will not kill me !

ERIK.

Fear me not,
I may be splashed and stained with Christian blood,
But it is man's, not woman's. If your will
Has striven with mine and conquered, not for that,
Nor for the cunning of your soft, low speech,
Would I so honour as to slay your life.
Say quickly, maid, what message brings you here,
And then make haste to take you from my sight !

SVANHILDA.

Sire ! had you always spoken to me so
I would not now be weeping ! Idle maids
Misread the courtesy of kings ! Forgive—

ERIK.

I know not what you say ? Make haste to tell
What brought you hither.

SVANHILDA.

That your mother lies
And calls upon your name.

ERIK.

I will not see her.
Three times already I have said the word.

SVANHILDA.

She lies there for the most part of the day
Like one in a deep stupor, with her hand
Crushing her brows as though the blood within
Pressed her and pained her ; then at night she wakes
And wails for you, and cries that you should come.

ERIK.

What word have I to say that she can bear ?
'Tis best I should not see her.

SVANHILDA.

And she wails
“ He pushes me away with both his hands,
With both his hands he thrusts me out of sight,
And bruises with the mail upon his hands
The breasts of her that bare him !” So she cries,
Until the sound is like an iron bell
Clanged in our ears, and I have come to pray
That you will see her ere you sail from port ;
It cannot be but she is near her death.

ERIK.

Another woman to forgive !

SVANHILDA.

She says
“ If he will listen, I will tell him all,

Yea ! though he curse me, I will tell him all,
 That when they lay me in the minster-vault
 My shriven body need not fear the worms
 That else should creep about me," and I know
 Her heart has that should make it hard to die ;—
 She taught me, yea ! if I did wrong, my lord,
 It was your mother taught me !

ERIK.

I will go.

[*Exit*]

SVANHILDA.

So ends the hopeless saga of my life !
 No woman knows a sadder lot than this,
 To love, and love, and be the fool of love,
 And in the end be pitied and despised.
 This bane rest on all serving-maids who dream
 That they may love their masters. Let them love,
 And not be killed or cursed for it, but pitied !
 Ah ! here comes our new king.

[*Enter SKJALM HVIDE and MARCUS.*]

MARCUS.

I saw but now
 Erik in haste come hither. Maiden, say,
 Where is the King ?

SVANHILDA.

He sits with Adalbjörg,
 Who lingers on the light side of her grave.

[*Exit* SVANHILDA.]

SKJALM.

When sudden changes strike across the life
They always bring some horror. Each new thing
Seems somewhat dreadful to a sober man ;
But time goes by, and life adjusts itself,
And so the wheels run smoothly as before
In new-cut grooves. When first the King made known
The purpose of his heart, we lost all hope,
And nothing less than ruin of the State
Loomed in the popular vision. I have sent,
By counsel of the King, to Saxony,
Where, in the warlike court of Duke Lothaire,
The nephew of our Erik bides his time,
Knud, called the Masterful, and he shall rule
His uncle's kingdom till the King return,
A sturdy youth, and wise to govern men.

MARCUS.

I go not with the train ! the King desires
That I should follow when the winter's past,
And bring him news of all things.

SKJALM.

You will see
The golden city that the elfins built,
And stand at last in Micklegarth.

MARCUS.

Well, well !

Roeskild is large enough for me. I'm old,
And not too apt for travel.

SKJALM.

Wait awhile !

The time is not come yet. These autumn months
Will give you space to fashion your great song,
Then bear it with you when you go, and lay
The finished homage at its hero's feet.

MARCUS.

Ah ! but time alters purposes and wills ;
I meant not that my poem should be laid
Directly at the footstool of the King,
But in some primal verses, not yet framed,
Had willed to pray Botilda take my gift
And bear it to the King.

SKJALM.

Too late, too late !

We cannot more than whisper when we grieve ;
Grieving, your grief forgets, and is not wise.
We speak not of her more.

MARCUS.

Yet here she comes.

[*Enter BOTILDA and ÖSSUR.*]

SKJALM *and* MARCUS.

Hail, madam.

BOTILDA.

Hail, good friends ! (*To SKJALM*) I pray you, sir
Tell me what time to-day the King sets sail.

SKJALM.

He journeys not so shortly ; it may be
 In two days or in three he will depart ;
 He will not sail from Roeskild, but will ride
 To Kjöge—

BOTILDA (*aside to ÖSSUR*).

It was at Kjöge, on the sands,
 At sunset—ah ! 'tis not so long ago,
 Do you remember ? Ah ! how sweet it seemed
 To come, a queen, to Denmark, and to meet
 The princes of a land that should be mine !

ÖSSUR.

I knew not that the love of temporal sway
 Stood foremost in your thought, and least of all
 That now such vain regrets could stir you so !

BOTILDA.

I said but now you knew me not ! Methinks
 The love of rule is pulsing like a fire
 This hour within my veins : yea, I can laugh,
 Albeit not very loudly. But, good sirs,
 Do so much favour to his grace and me,
 As to depart and leave us.

[SKJALM *and* MARCUS *exeunt.*

Have you heard
 What happened to King Frode in old time ?

ÖSSUR.

That when he died, they set him up in state,

Crowned, with a sceptre in the nerveless hand,
Muffled with furs, a puppet-king?

BOTILDA.

Even so!

And all the freemen, kneeling far away,
Knew not that he was dead, but worshipped him.
So am I queen in Denmark.

ÖSSUR.

Ah! not so,
The blood flows redly in your veins to-day,
There is more flush than often in your cheeks.

BOTILDA.

Yet am I a dead queen, and fitter far
To hurry out of sight into the dust
And deathly dampness of a twilight crypt,
Than sit here in my dainty gems and vair.
Think you that such a one as I can live,
Having lost the spotless honour of my name,
Dragged down into the mire and made a jest
For every pothouse churl to gibe against?
What is it I have done? Ah me! ah me!
I am a helpless woman, soft as air,
As frantic as a sea-wave, and as weak,
Spent with the tempest of my own wild words,
And fluttering when my heart should bear or break.
Come Death and take me!

ÖSSUR.

Weep not, rave not so,
And let us hasten to the inmost courts,
Lest haply Erik come and find us here.

BOTILDA.

I came that I might see him.

ÖSSUR.

You were then
Stronger and nerved to bear his utmost wrath ;
This passionate wind of sighs and piteous words
Has left you broken.

BOTILDA.

Yet I will not go !

ÖSSUR.

Ah ! if he come and strike you !

BOTILDA.

Fear you not.

Lo ! if he strike me I shall die at once ;
The breath within my body is so faint
One blow from him would quench it.

ÖSSUR.

If he come—

BOTILDA.

I shall be strong to meet him ; if I bleed,
'Twill be an inward runlet. Hark ! I hear !
The clank of spurs, a striding heel, he comes !

For no man walks like Erik ! Össur, stay !

I faint ! I cannot bear it ! Let us go !

[ÖSSUR goes to the left to open the door, but BOTILDA remains in her seat clutching the elbows of the chair. Enter ERIK, from the right. BOTILDA keeps her eyes upon the ground. ERIK starts on seeing BOTILDA. ÖSSUR returns and stands by the Queen.]

ERIK.

Össur, your presence will be welcomer

There, whence I come !

BOTILDA (*aside to ÖSSUR*).

O leave me not !

ÖSSUR.

My lord,

Permit that first I lead the Queen away ;

She is but weakly.

BOTILDA (*faintly*).

Nay ! I will remain !

Go, my good Össur, go !

[*Exit ÖSSUR.*

[*After a pause.*

BOTILDA (*sharply, looking up and clutching the chair*).

Whence do you come ?

ERIK.

From watching by my mother.

BOTILDA.

Said she aught

Of me or of my sorrows.

ERIK.

Yea ! some words.

BOTILDA (*starting up*).

Where is she ? I will go to her, and you,
You shall be near us ! God shall be our judge.

ERIK.

God is the judge of all of us, but now
She stands before him nighest.

BOTILDA.

What ?

ERIK.

She's dead !

BOTILDA.

Dead ? With a lie upon her lips, a crime
Reddening within her mouth, gone up to God
From soiling a white soul. Ah me ! ah me !

(Sinks back.)

ERIK.

Of all the words she said I caught but these,
"Forgive me, I have erred ! I hoped for good,
Did evil that the good might come, have sinned
Before the saints and one pure woman's heart."
She said not whom she meant !

BOTILDA.

But I know whom !

Ah ! now I see it. Erik, can you dare
To stand there like a judge, and wait for me

To throw myself before you in the dirt,
 To grovel for a little grace, to pray
 For so much sufferance from my injured lord
 That I may choose this prison and not that?
 Lo! if I pleased you so, and bowed to gain
 The promise of your favour, made my heart
 The footstool for your pride, and sank to rise
 Retaken, a soiled suppliant, to your breast,
 For love, and not for honour, it were well
 You thrust your spurred heel deep into my brain,
 And crushed me there and slew me.

ERIK.

Let me speak!

I stand not as a judge here in your sight.
 But rather at the anger in your eyes
 Shrink like a guilty thing, abashed.

BOTILDA (*baring her arm*).

You see

The scar there, bleeding! Mind you how it came?

ERIK.

No.

BOTILDA.

You were spurred and ready for the chase,
 And just as you were starting, and I hung
 Close to your side, your wild roan reared, and sharp
 The rowel of your spur was in my wrist.
 It has not bled since then until to-day.

ERIK.

Weep not, but hear me speak—

BOTILDA.

Now all day long

The sharp edge of your anger in my heart
Cuts and drinks blood and is not turned away!
Slay me and let me sleep!

ERIK.

Yet I will speak,

Although your righteous anger, like a flame,
Burns me to flying ash of shame and grief.
Behold, I am all broken, spirit and will,
For I have learned my own disgrace, and seen
How fair your fame is, and how true your soul,
And cursed my brutish passion.

BOTILDA.

You should fall

There, on the pavement, on your knees, to beg
Pardon for your gross anger; men have thoughts
So foul a woman cannot feel them stir
And not shriek out and rave. And now I leave you—

[BOTILDA *hastily goes but is arrested by* ERIK.]

ERIK.

Botilda, stay!

BOTILDA.

Why should I?

ERIK.

Go not yet !

Listen before you break my heart ! Oh, love !
 I swear I know that you are clear as light,
 Pure as the sea, fresh as new-fallen snow,
 The only perfect thing that God has made,
 The earthly image of a saint—

BOTILDA.

You thought

That I was base enough—O God, O God !

ERIK.

Forgive me that I thought at all ! Poor fool,
 Tricked by the beating of my jealous heart,
 Ah ! had I loved you less I had not been
 So mad, and to my own dishonour swift.
 Ah ! can you not forgive me ?

BOTILDA.

Dear, I do !

But oh ! what sorrow you had spared us both,
Had you been trustful.

ERIK.

Ah ! how sweet you are

How beautiful the light upon your hair,
 Your living hair, so dull an hour ago.

I never loved you as I love you now ;

Red lips, bright eyes, the living face that moves
 Changeful and changeless like the radiant sea ;

My own desire, my only one delight,
Leave me not now, but let us hand in hand
Go up into the Holy Place, and kneel
Together at the shrine.

BOTILDA.

I do not dare
So long a journey, and so far from home.

ERIK.

Ah! will not you go with me?

BOTILDA.

If you say
That I can dare to do it, I will dare.

ERIK.

My brave Botilda.

BOTILDA.

You may kiss me now!
I never loved another man than you! (*They embrace.*)

[THE CURTAIN FALLS.]

KING ERIK.

ACT IV.



ACT IV.

SCENE I.

A plain two miles north of Constantinople. The Royal Tent in the Danish Camp. Enter BOTILDA and SVANHILDA.

SVANHILDA.

Madam, the daughter of this emperor
Has sent you flowers and fruits, with loving words ;
Her gifts stand piled within.

BOTILDA.

The messengers
Had found a warmer welcome in my heart
Had they been sent to lead us to the town.

SVANHILDA.

What answer shall I give ?

BOTILDA.

What boy or man
Came with the present ?

SVANHILDA.

Neither man nor boy,
Or if a man, so withered, wrinkled, parched,
So yellow in the eyes, so foul of face,
He rather seemed the ape out of a show
Than man or Christian, yet he spoke in Greek.

BOTILDA.

How weary is this hot and windless air !

[*Enter* ERIK.]

Have you not come to strike away the gyves
That bind our wrists and ancles? One may stir
As nimbly as a hind, and yet be bound
With bonds that eat the life out.

[*To* SVANHILDA.]

Go and say

The Queen thanks Cæsar's daughter for her gift
And hopes ere long to tell herself as much.

[*Exit* SVANHILDA.]

Erik, I die !

ERIK.

What ?

BOTILDA.

Can you cease to fret
Curbed at this last strange moment of our life
Here at the gates of Micklegarth? Methought
Our cousin Vladimir was over-fain
To spur us on our journey to the south,
But here we rust and fume, and cannot stir.

ERIK.

Some subtle fear must move Alexios much.

BOTILDA.

This is the outer portal of that shrine
Whose holiest holy is Jerusalem.
Now were we near our end.

ERIK.

Ere many hours
Entrance must be vouchsafed.

BOTILDA.

Ah ! but not thus
Came all the other Northern men of war,
Stealing to Micklegarth ; but with their keels
Ploughing the sunlight of the Golden Horn,
Like Sigurd Jorsalfar, with cedar oars
And sails of silk ; or like the wandering sword,
King Harald Haarderaade, he who fled
The passionate sorceress Zoë, as we heard
But lately in our cousin's court. But you,
Though ringed about with splendour of a king,
And on a grave and holy errand bent,
Are left outside, and flowers are sent to me,
Flung to appease, as bones to famished dogs.

ERIK.

Justice, sweet Queen, and patience for the Greeks,
Not given, as we, to sudden strokes in the light.
This Emperor has lost in years gone by

Much honour by the wandering wake of kings,
And all the rabble at the sacred heels
Of such as go crusading, oft has marred
His treasures and temples.

BOTILDA.

But our folk
Are noble, and too great in heart and name
To itch for gold, or bite the ruby-stones
Out of God's mother's jewelled feet in church.

ERIK.

The man yet knows us not, and would be ware.

BOTILDA.

'Tis easy to think ill when one's own heart
Is bowed to some dishonour.

ERIK.

Fret you then
To see the painted walls, the streets of gold,
The silver spires, and all the gallant things
Heaped up by vanished Cæsars?

BOTILDA.

Nay, not so !
Erik, you know me better. All these things
Had gulled me once into a wondering mood,
But now I heed them little. Ah ! my love !
Dream you that I forget, but for one hour,
The final deed, the expiating prayer,

The silence and the incense and the shrine,
Then when we kneel together hand in hand
Where God's dear house, no more by Turks profaned,
Stands waiting for all pilgrims? We may have
Sweet hours for wonder on our slow return,
But now I pant to see Jerusalem,
And have no wish beside it.

ERIK.

Yea! till then
A ghostly sorrow parts us like a knife.
But fear not, we will bend Alexios soon.

[*Enter SIGURD.*]

SIGURD.

My Lord, a troop of glittering men-at-arms,
Danes like ourselves, stand marshalled at the door.
Their leader bears a message on his lips,
From Cæsar.

ERIK.

We will see them. Bring them here.

[*Exit SIGURD.*]

[*ERIK and BOTILDA seat themselves. Enter attendants, bringing in THOROLF, the leader of the Væringar, and his troop. Enter also EGIL, GUNNAR, and other chiefs of ERIK's following, who stand around the King. THOROLF and the Væringar do homage to ERIK.*]

THOROLF.

Hail, King !

ERIK.

Hail, chieftain ! Give these men to drink !

[*Servants give wine to THOROLF and his men, who all pledge the King.*]

ERIK.

How fares your august master ?

THOROLF.

He who rules
The Greeks and Turks, Alexios, lives in peace.

ERIK.

Came you from him ?

THOROLF.

Sir, by his leave we came,
But on no mission from the Imperial Court.

BOTILDA (*aside*).

Death will reach first !

ERIK.

Whence come ye then to-day,
If not from audience of the Emperor ?

THOROLF.

Lord, we are Danes, and many years are spent
Since we were young and turned our footsteps south,

And saw the last of Denmark. Nor since then,
Though many motley princes have gone by,
Has even in all our days one Danish king
Come to Constantinople : Yea ! and we,
Though bondmen in some sort, and hired to keep
Our master's person safe by night and day,
And sparkling in his silver mail, and shod
With shoes of Cæsar's service, cannot deem
That we are wholly his ; our ears have heard
What good and gracious things your hand has wrought
At home, in Denmark, and we come this hour
To lay our heart's allegiance at your feet,
Being Danes and hard of hand, and sick to see
The gold sword slip out of these poor weak hands
Of Greeks a shadow frightens. So we prayed
Alexios, that his grace would let us come
And tender you our homage.

ERIK.

Good my friends,
I thank you for your courtesy ! I find
That free-born hearts beat under silver mail,
As under rougher armour ! You have sought
A softer service than our North can give,
And finding it, disdain it not. These lords,
Here standing by my hand, would scarce be fain
To lead such gallant gentlemen as you,
In scarlet and in silver.

THOROLF.

Ah, my king !

We have to clothe ourselves as he commands
Who rules the loose-robed and voluptuous Greeks ;
Chide us not for this tinsel. Ah ! to be
In some deep forest among Paynim hordes,
To stain our silver plasquets with their blood !
You'd find our thews unsoftened.

GUNNAR.

Are you bound

By any pledge to serve this Emperor,
Of whom you speak so slightly ?

THOROLF.

Pledges snap

Like bent withs in the sudden flame of th' blood.

EGIL.

How ! would you leave your Emperor for our King ?

THOROLF.

Ours also ! Are not we too, we too, free ?
No drop in all our veins is Greek ! No word
In all our speech but has the old home sound !
King Erik, we are weary of our lives,
Tired of the sun, tired of the worn-out men,
Tired of the eunuchs chattering all day long,
Tired of the faded women in the streets !
Alexios needs us now no more ; the East

Is still, and Godfrey keeps the Turk at bay.
We long to live the natural life of man,
Free servants of a noble king, whose face
Shall lead us on to battle ; here we kneel,
No more the slaves of any Greek on earth,
But soldiers of King Erik ! Bid us march
Back to the city ; lo ! we know it well,
Know where the palace, where the treasury lies ;
Strike but one blow, and all the world is yours !

ERIK.

Ye Væringar, I bid you make good speed
Back to your liege Alexios. It is well
That sight of faces fresh from colder air,
And coloured with the north, should stir your hearts ;
Nor do I wholly cast your homage back,
But take it from you as a Dane from Danes,
Being your king by birthright. But, as king,
I bid you all remember who you are,
Sons of what fathers, honoured with what grace.
To ring about with circles of strong hands
The Emperor of all the world, and guard
His sacred head from sorrow. Bear in mind
How solemn and how grave a charge is this,
How worthy of such lordly men as you,
How pleasant to the saints above, since he
Stands up the very bulwark of Christ's church,
Warring the Sarazin ; and this high meed

Ye owe to valiant northmen of past time,
Whose eagle eyes and stalwart arms, and hands
Sturdy to grip and hew, brought Denmark's name
High honour in these countries. For their sake
Be no less noble than your past deeds were.

THOROLF.

Yet there be some not dead who bear in mind
How Harold fled away from Micklegarth
By night, with all the Væringar, yet he
Was noble, and his fame without a stain.

ERIK.

A wasted woman, no more fair or young,
Crusted with blood, and seething with worn lust,
Stood in his path and held a sword to slay.
Had Zoë, like the Devil, made her nest
In God's sweet city, Sarras, in the sky,
The saints had pardoned a young fighting man
Who fled to earth to 'scape her.

THOROLF.

Sire, in war
We fought our best for Cæsar ; now in peace
Have we not leave to choose our own designs ?

ERIK.

Nay, for before you heed, from east or west,
War, like a storm upon an inland sea,

May smite you in a moment. But, good friends,
I pray you, not command you, seek to give
The charge your hands received from men now dead,
Unharm'd to your successors ; as you love
Your country and your king, so love them still,
But set your honour higher. Be alert,
Cautious and temperate, chaste and wise in peace,
But when the trumpets blow and standards fly,
Forget to love your children, wives and friends,
Yea ! even forget that ye are Danes and mine !
Care less for life than glory ; shame on him
Who blinks before the scimitar's white edge.

THE VÆRINGAR.

Hail for St. Knud, and for King Erik hail !

ERIK.

But if at last but one of you should wend
With honour back to Denmark before death,
His deeds with lands and gold, as shall be meet,
I swear that I will guerdon ; and should one
Pour out his blood on some heroic field,
Him will I not forget, but lift his name
And make it golden for his friends at home.
So now return, and when you find him, greet
The Emperor from Erik, King of Danes,
And tell him if it please him not to mark

Our standards nodding in the sacred streets,
I will take ship across the Euxine Sea,
To Trebizond, and thence find ways and means
To reach the holy city of our God.

THOROLF.

So will we say; and now, our king, farewell.

ERIK.

Farewell.

THOROLF (*to Botilda*).

O Lady, rose of the heart's love,
Farewell!

BOTILDA.

Dear friends, till next we meet, farewell!

[*Exeunt THOROLF and the Væringar.*]

GUNNAR.

Sire, had these warriors had their loyal will,
Ere now we had been half our way——

EGIL.

What spoils

The magic city carries in its heart
Our Danish shrines will never know. My king,
May we not call them back?

BOTILDA.

Meet chastisement
Had made this churlish emperor reflect
On what is due to strangers.

GUNNAR.

With the key
Of Europe and of Asia in your hands,
Sire, you would stand the highest king on earth.

ERIK.

Lo ! how ye miss my purpose ! Not to win
Fresh glory, or new provinces, or gold,
Have I with little retinue or train
Come southward through the painful Russian steppes,
Here to the gates of Micklegarth. In peace,
More like a journeying prelate than a king,
I strike my course as swiftly as I can
Straight to the Holy Land ; and gifts of war,
Spoil, or rich raiment, gems, or slaves, or ore,
Would be but like a fair-embroidered scarf,
Heavy with workmanship of precious stones,
Wound tight around the naked feet and thighs
Of one who runs to snatch his life from death.
So will not I be trammelled ; and I hold,—
Knowing the wily purpose of those Greeks,—
That in the armed battalion of our friends
Alexios had his spies, who, when they bring
True tidings of my peaceful words and ways,
Will strengthen him to courage ; you, dear love,
Who long to see the gates behind our back,
Be of good cheer ; behold, I prophesy

Before a day be past, our cheeks will glow
Honoured with this Alexios' welcoming kiss !

BOTILDA.

So be it, for I am sick at heart. But come
And look what gifts this princess dowers me with !

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

A gallery of the Palace at Constantinople, opening into a garden. The wall is covered with bas-reliefs ; between the pillars are pots of flowers, and in front a fountain.. In the gallery the Princess ANNA COMNENA ; before her a Boy with a lyre.

ANNA COMNENA.

Have you no leaf to wind into your hair,
My Eros ?

BOY.

When I tore that jasmine-spray,
I meant it for a crown, but these lyre-strings
Pleaded in such a plaintive monotone
For shelter from the noon-heat, that I wound
The arrowy leaves and little trumpet-flowers
Round them to cool them.

ANNA COMNENA.

Sing ! My ears are tired
With listening to the fountain's spurt and splash.

BOY.

*I bring a garland for your head,
Of blossoms fresh and fair,
My own hands wound their white and red
To ring about your hair :
Here is a lily, here a rose,
A warm narcissus that scarce blows,
And fairer blossoms no man knows.*

*So crowned and chapleted with flowers,
I pray you be not proud ;
For after brief and summer hours
Comes autumn with a shroud ;—
Though fragrant as a flower you lie,
You and your garland, bye and bye,
Will fade and wither up and die !*

The tune is mine, madam !

ANNA COMNENA.

And whose the song ?

BOY.

A Roman wrote it, though the words be Greek.

ANNA COMNENA.

I would not that the Bishop heard you sing
Such Pagan melodies !

BOY.

Why, all the town
Sings wilder songs than that ; yea ! and at night
Under the lamps, when no shorn priests are near,
Love-ditties of the olden time, strange words
I can not nor I would not understand.
I love to sit here best and sing.

ANNA COMNENA.

But now

Rise up and pass among the myrtles there,
For by the noise of doors that shut I know
That these barbarians come.

[*Enter a train of Imperial servants ushering in ERIK,
BOTILDA, and their attendants.*]

THE HERALD OF THE PALACE.

Illustrious maid,
Dread princess born in the purple, half-divine,
The King of Denmark and his Queen are here.

[ANNA COMNENA *advances ; she embraces BOTILDA, and
gives her hand to ERIK, who falls on one knee to kiss
it. She takes one hand of each in hers and leads them up
to her divan, and seats them on either side of her.*]

ANNA COMNENA.

Thanks that you come so frankly and so soon !

BOTILDA.

Ah ! you speak Danish ! That, indeed, is well,
For I not Greek.

ERIK.

So need I not to strain

My northern lips to spoil your liquid south,
Your delicate speech that palpitates with wings,
Warbling and soaring.

ANNA COMNENA.

Will you that we bid

These fellows leave us to ourselves ?

[*The attendants retire. The boy goes out into the middle of the grass-plot, and sits down leaning his head against a marble pedestal.*]

ERIK.

Princess,

I fain would know by what unusual chance
You honoured with your study our strange tongue.

ANNA COMNENA.

So many of your countrymen are here
Marshalled within the palace ; all my days

The knowledge of strange worlds has been a thirst
Unslaked within my nature. I have learned
Your Northern speech from women of your land,
Wives of the guard.

ERIK.

Not many of the Greeks,
Sure, are so troubled with our uncouth speech ?

ANNA COMNENA.

Alas ! we rulers of the South know well
Our sovereign day is over. To a friend
Trusty as you, I say it with no fear !
Our mood is pictured on these antique walls,
Carved out in Parian for some Cæsar dead,
Where mad with love a wild hermaphrodite
Clings to a flying faun ; so we late Greeks,
Being double-natured and half strong, half soft,
Catch at the vigour of your brawnier race,
That flies and will not have us. See these guards,
Who cluster round my father's sacred head !
Lo ! when a Danish King was near the town,
Their honour, faith, allegiance all forgot,
They would have straight betrayed us. Yet we cling
About their feet and will not let them go,
Although they cannot love us.

ERIK.

So ! you heard
What passed within the camp ?

ANNA COMNENA.

Think you such men
Meet in strange places and no spies are near ?

BOTILDA.

The Emperor had no need to fear so much.

ANNA COMNENA.

Madam, my august father knows not fear ;
But for the general safety of the realm,
And seeing what office for the church he holds,
'Tis meet that he should hear what all men say.

ERIK.

Yet has he graced us with his heart's right hand
And lordly welcome to his golden town.
He cannot more mistrust us.

ANNA COMNENA.

Nay, my friend,
But greets you as his brother, and a king
Whom he delights to honour. But since I
Can lisp a little in your tongue, and longed
To show some courteous cousinship to her
Who shares your pious exile, it was planned
That I should first receive you. On my troth
I know not when I was so pleased at heart
With any unknown faces. Sweetest Queen,
Say, can our soft ways please you ?

BOTILDA.

All is strange,
And we unused to much magnificence.

ANNA COMNENA.

But you must stay till all is no more strange,
For by the rood, I love you ! We will make
Your stay here like a triumph ! Here's my hand,
Let me kiss yours !

BOTILDA (*kissing her*).

You see I have with me
The violets you sent me.

ANNA COMNENA.

Ah, but, sweet

You should have twined them in a crown. Ah me !
How soon flowers die, and beauty fades like flowers
Here in our hot, harsh air. How old are you ?
I think you must have two years more than I,
And I am withering while you bloom with youth.

ERIK.

O Princess, you are like an opening rose.

ANNA COMNENA.

Study and care and weariness of life
Have blanched the petals ere they broke in bloom !
But let me bring you to the Emperor,
He waits to meet you in the inmost heart

Of all our palace-corridors. His light
Is hidden from sight by half a hundred walls,
Lest it should blast the vulgar. But your eyes,
Made bright with innate kingship, will not quail.

[*At a sign from the PRINCESS who rises with ERIK and BOTILDA, her attendants and Erik's draw near, and the whole procession passes into the palace. SVANHILDA loiters behind, and stands between two pillars of the gallery looking down the garden. The BOY, rousing himself, and taking his lyre, sings, without seeing SVANHILDA :—*]

*O short delight of life ! O weep, wan eyes,
For Time that knows not whither nor whence he flies !
Ah ! while we batten, and our pulses creep,
Given up to pleasure now, and now to sleep,
The sudden years on swift precipitate wings,
Plumed with all hopeless and all dolorous things,
Hurl themselves on us, pass, and leave behind
Sheaves of waste manhood barren as the wind.*

[*BOY sits down again at the statue's foot.*]

SVANHILDA:

The little wanton boy ! How sweet and sad
His song was ! Though I know not half the words,
I know that they were sad. Ah me ! ah me !
Would that I knew how all these journeying days

Will end, and whether peace will come of them !
For now the passion of my life at home,
And all the vain sweet waters of my hope,
That turned so brackish, seem as strange and far
As Roeskild with its myriad bubbling wells.
I have a new thirst at my heart for peace,
Rest of the spirit, and if time brings us home,
Some pure hushed nunnery where the heart is free,
Shall win my soul to silence.

GISLI (*coming forward*).

Maiden, hail !

Art you not fresh from Denmark ?

SVANHILDA.

Yea ! And you

A guardsman, by your silver mail, I know !

I am from Denmark.

GISLI.

Chance you to have met

A wandering skald, one Grimur ?

SVANHILDA.

Bright of eye,

Fork-bearded, with a song upon his lips

Always, and underneath the song a jest ?

GISLI.

Even so.

SVANHILDA.

I know him. Is he kith of yours ?

GISLI.

Nay. But where saw you him ?

SVANHILDA.

In Roeskild last.

GISLI.

Lo ! I will tell you, maiden ! He and I
Are foster-brothers.

SVANHILDA.

Here in Micklegarth,
Pledged you firm friendship at the wine-cup's brim ?

GISLI.

Nay, in the north, and in the best old way.
Ah me ! I mind me of the very night ;
'Twas summer, up in Jutland, by the sea.
We met two days before, in drinking deep
Within a salt-sea hostel by the sands,
For mariners. I loved him from the first,
And so the second midnight to the cliff
We went. I mind me how the round moon rose,
And how a great whale in the offing plunged,
Dark on the golden circle. There we cut
A space of turf, and lifted it, and ran
Our knife-points sharp into our arms, and drew
Blood that dripped into the warm mould and mixed.

So there under the turf our plighted faith
Starts in the dew of grasses.

SVANHILDA.

Now, perchance
The feathery pasture waxes brown and thin.

GISLI.

What say you, maiden ?

SVANHILDA.

Has your heart and hand
Been ever faithful to his absent cause ?

GISLI.

Else may the good saints blast me.

SVANHILDA.

Well then, now
Summon your patience till you hear the worst.
You have no foster-brother.

GISLI.

He is dead ?

Well, well ! To every man that walks the earth,
Soldier or skald, death comes at last. But he
Was young and goodly, and a pleasant man
For women. Well ! so we shall meet no more,
Nor laugh aloud, nor dip our mouths in drink
For ever ! Dead ! Poor Grimur, cold and dead !
One thing is well, that in Roeskild he died.
Said you not so ?

SVANHILDA.

I might, for that is true.

GISLI.

He always said himself that he should die
A straw-death in his bed ! Ah ! many times
I've heard him say so laughing. By what death,—
Fever or ague from the Danish flats,—
Say, did he die ?

SVANHILDA.

By none of these, but slain.

GISLI.

Slain ! By what man ? And for what cause ? And how ?

SVANHILDA.

Stabbed deep between the shoulders.

GISLI.

By the saints !

That was no good death for a man to die.
Say, had he time to turn, and send a knife
Home to the coward's heart who slew him ? Quick !
Tell me what end came of this stabbing work ?

SVANHILDA.

Nay, but he died, and did not strive to strike.

GISLI.

Who killed him ? For what cause ?

SVANHILDA.

As I have heard—

GISLI.

In service of some woman ! Waste no breath
To tell me that. But let me briefly hear
His name who slew him.

SVANHILDA.

Wherefore would you know ?

GISLI.

Lo ! think you not that I will go and thank
This knave for doing such a gracious deed,
And taking from the light the only man
I loved, my own heart's brother ? Yea ! I swear
That I will go and lie about his feet,
Kissing the dust and them, and thank him so !
Or rather meet him wheresoe'er he goes,
Eye against eye, and, plucking out my sword,
Send out his ghost to meet with Grimur's ghost,
Wandering in cold gray air. Who is the man ?
Lives he ?

SVANHILDA.

Yea ! Are you pledged by any vow
To slay him ?

GISLI.

Yea ! by all the darkest oaths
That bind the heart to service.

SVANHILDA.

If you found
It was some grave lord nigh about the king?

GISLI.

So would I seek and slay him.

SVANHILDA.

Though in no ill thought,
But blindly, in a natural heat of blood,
He thrust your foster-brother through, what then?

GISLI.

Then I would slay him. Let me know his name.

SVANHILDA.

Oh! I shall die! Ah! let me go in peace.

GISLI.

Until you speak I will not let you go.

SVANHILDA.

St. Knud! It is a man so near the throne,—

GISLI.

Yet princes are but mortal. He shall die.

SVANHILDA.

He shall not, cannot! Fool, it is the King,
Erik, who slew your friend! Oh, cruel world,
My heart will break!

[She runs out to the right.]

GISLI (*feels his sword*).

Steel, sharp must be your tongue,
To plead against so great a king as this.

[*Exit slowly to left.*]

[*The Boy rises, takes his lyre, and sings again :*]

*Till winter rivets her bands,
The river as long as it can
Struggles, till, bound and pent,
It yields to the curb of the frost ;
So Fate takes hold with her hands
Of the hope and desire of a man,
And his will is shaken and spent,
And his life thrown over and lost.*

[THE CURTAIN FALLS.]

SCENE III.

The Lower Part of the Hippodrome, by the steps leading down into the Imperial Gardens. Enter GISLI.

GISLI.

Until this day I never feared to die
Fighting a man, nor greatly cared to know
If he or I should bite into the sod
Dying, but now I have a thirst to live

Until the bright edge of this dear good sword
Be reddened, and the red be turned to black,—
If, ere I can be near him, all his lords
Should ring him round and save him——! Yesternight
I faltered in my purpose, chose to live
Rather than, slaying, die; I will not see
The eyes of that Ianthe any more,
Lest her sweet breath bewitch me from my will,
As yesternight! but when the moon was up,
Sleep brought the dead man his desired revenge;
I thought he came and found me here; and cursed
My woman-wasted purposes, and scoffed
To know me such a changeling. Fear me not,
Sad ghost! Our blood upon that Danish moor
Kindles to-night, and is a flame that scares
The fisher toiling on the deep. I know
Your buried heart is panting without cease,
Till my revenge can soothe it.

[*ERIK crosses the stage, and goes down into the Palace Gardens.*]

Ah! who's that?

It is the King! It is himself—alone.
I have not ever seen his face so near.
How nobly and how like a king he walks,
Half as a god might! Ah! now he is past,
And if I had but stept across his path
And struck him, he were dead ere this, and I

Free of my vow ! Lo ! there among the trees,
Doubtless he lingers ! I might slay him still ;
And yet I will not smite him in the dusk,
So, like a coward, but in open day,
Before the sun, and in the clear high air
Purge him from slaughter. Ah ! how hard it is
To summon strength of will to kill a king !
I would that Grimur had not met his bane
From this one man of all men, robed about
With majesty and honour. That I die
I care not much, but fear lest, ere I strike,
Some godhead flash into my frenzied eyes,
And break my vain endeavour.

[*Enter SVANHILDA and THOROLF.*]

SVANHILDA.

This is the man !

THOROLF.

A guardsman of my troop !

SVANHILDA.

Believe me, though I tell not all the tale,
I know he has some scheme against the King,
Speak to him wisely.

[*They advance to GISLI.*]

THOROLF.

Gisli, from this maid
I hear our good friend Grimur is no more.

GISLI.

'Tis too late now to drain the horns of mead
Over his grave. They tell me that the grass
Is green and full of daisies where he lies !

SVANHILDA.

I did not tell you so !

GISLI.

Ah ! did not you ?

I must have dreamed it ! Be it so or not
'Tis too late now to mourn him. When you spoke
I had forgotten that my friend was dead.

THOROLF.

How so ?

GISLI.

I thought that he was by my side,
And talked with me.

THOROLF.

So then your mind was set
Firmly upon his memory ?

GISLI.

Why, yes !

We were such loving brothers in days past.
But now I put him out of mind, nor mourn !
All men must die.

THOROLF.

That's spoken like a man !

Why fret about a parcel of grey bones
That huddle with a little clinging dust
Some feet below our footsteps ! Dead and gone
Is buried and forgotten, so say I !
It glads me that we find such wholesome wit,
Gisli, within you ; for I heard but now
That when the sad news struck you first, you lost
The balance of your temper, yea ! and vowed
Revenge for Grimur's slaying. Was't not so ?

GISLI.

I knew not then who slew him.

SVANHILDA.

Yea ! you knew,

I told you ere I left you.

GISLI.

Still at first
The ashes of my anger glowed blood-red,
Forgetting that a king has power of death
Over the best of common subject men ;
But now I bow and leave it.

THOROLF.

That is wise,
Be stedfast in that wisdom ; year by year
We'll talk of Grimur as the months come round
And bring the day he died on.

[*Exit* THOROLF.]

GISLI.

What sharp pain
Fits best a babbling woman whose light tongue
Wrests men from their endeavour?

SVANHILDA.

Are you wroth
I told the captain half the words you said?
I knew not you would soften, and I feared
Lest some dishonour to the King and you
Might issue from your anger.

GISLI.

Fool! you feared?
Yea! women are all fears, an aspen wood
When the north-easter whistles! Put off fear,
It is a most uncomely robe, and trips
The feet of him who wears it! Fare you well! [*Exit.*]

SVANHILDA.

Gone, with a juggling word upon his lips!
I know not what grief may grow out of this,
For though the man has gentler words to-night,
I hold in memory how his eyes flashed out
When first he heard that Grimur had been slain.
If I but loved the Queen,—but—nay! I'll wait,
And watch this Gisli as he comes and goes.

[*Exit.*][*Enter ERIK and BOTILDA.*]

ERIK.

Full night at last, and, see, the golden moon
Just tips the topmost cypress-shoot, and glides
Up, slowly up, to quench the zenith stars!

BOTILDA.

As you, my love, through changing wars and woes,
Rise slowly towards the glorious end, and quench
The sometime fame of past and present kings
Blazing above them.

ERIK.

All is silent here!
Was that bright spark a lamp behind the trees?

BOTILDA.

Nay! but a firefly!

ERIK.

Here then let us stay.
From pomp and all the formal rites that ring
This weary-hearted Emperor, I fly
To rest, though but a moment, sweet, with you.

BOTILDA.

Else would they slay us with their gracious deeds,
Starve us with jewels, strangle us with silks,
Shoot us to death with sandal-wood! ah me!
When shall we fly away and be at peace,
Turning our backs on all this glare and gold,
Pilgrims once more, and journeying towards the East?

ERIK.

Botilda, do you mind the summer night
When first we met at Mainz ?

BOTILDA.

The river ran
Shining beneath a golden moon like this,
But through a fresher air.

ERIK.

Ah ! sweet, to night,
I am too sad to think out all my thoughts ;
I had willed to speak of certain things with you,
But, if you pardon, I will rather lay
My head against your bosom and be still.

BOTILDA (*kisses him*).

And I will pray above you while you sleep.

ERIK.

Move your arm round me, let my throat lie thus
Pressed by your fingers. I shall hardly sleep.

BOTILDA.

To-morrow you have many things to do,
First, lifted in a curule chair, you watch
The petty warfare of the Hippodrome ;
Next to an audience of the Emperor
We hasten, perfumed, garlanded, and robed ;
Next to this palace they have decked for us
The learned Princess with the eternal tongue
Comes for a long state visit. Best sleep now.

ERIK.

Love, if your fingers gripped me fast and tight,—

BOTILDA.

They scarce would move you more than petals can
The pavement that they fall on.

ERIK.

Ah ! but say,
I slept, and you, and some man came behind
And drew a cord beneath your finger-tips
Sharply, and fled, and left me cold for ever !

BOTILDA.

O hideous thought ! It is not well to stay
Here in strange gardens ; let us rise and go !

ERIK.

Nay, all is safe here, and we shall not sleep.
Say, are you weary yet of Micklegarth ?

BOTILDA.

Oh ! weary to the heart.

ERIK.

If I were dead
Would this place seem the fairest left on earth,
Would you come back here when the rites were done,
To dream your life out slowly ?

BOTILDA.

Nay, not here !
I only just endure it all for you,

Since honour being done you in such wise
It seems not gracious to be glad to go,
Yet when you tell me that our stay is past,
And that we leave the town at break of day
I shall be happy.

ERIK (*rising*).

Oh how strange it is
To feel the cold vicissitudes of life,
Like currents in a river, whirl and clasp
The unwilling soul, and wind it from its aim !
Oh ! how I longed and how I long to live

[*Walking up and down.*]

How much of work is left for me undone,
What love unloved, what errors unredeemed,
What ghosts of wasted wishes unannealed,
And how the invisible bands of coiling fate,
Winding and winding round my limbs and soul,
Frustrate my purposes and drug my hopes
And almost slay my heart in me for grief !
Ah ! for a certain span of years of life
What would I throw not of my pomp and power
Like stubble to the furnace, to be free !

BOTILDA.

Yet had we all things that the heart desires,
There still would be one yearning unallayed,
One hope, one passion that no bliss could fill.

ERIK.

The spring-tide of my kingship blossomed well
In the April light of youth, and, as I grew,
A manlier purpose towards the heights of thought
Shot through all deeds and wishes ; then there came
One swift false step, one shuddering evil hour,
And who shall tell me what the end will be ?

BOTILDA.

How sad a place this is ! It taints our thoughts.
I feel as though I should not start to see
A choir of bone-white skeletons creep out
From clusters of the cypress, and dance round,
Playing on rebecks, while the grass grew gray.
Erik, this silence makes you dream of death ;
Heed not such portents.

ERIK.

Nay ! I do not heed,

But all day long I hear amid the crowds,
Amid the light and fire of gold and wine,
And through the tempests of the mad wild lyres,
And under all the rose and myrtle-flowers,
A voice that murmurs in a monotone,
Strange, warning words that scarcely miss the ear,
Yet miss it altogether.

BOTILDA.

Oh ! God grant,

You be not fey, nor truly near your end !

Ah ! what a sharp sound has the name of death
To one who lives on loving !

ERIK.

There below
Our ships lie anchored in the Golden Horn !
Say, are you ready to step down and go
Seawards to-night, and leave our palace here
As suddenly as forefathers of mine
Their homes, who went a-viking ?

BOTILDA.

Yea ! at once !
Give me one hour and I will gladly go,
Pleased at however short a note to leave
This gilded town for ever.

ERIK.

Be it so ;
The moon will set ; our folk lie all at hand ;
I go to rouse them silently. My heart
Springs into gladness at this new design,
I shall not die but live ; yea ! very soon
We kneel together at the shrine, and then
Back to our Denmark like a conquering host
Our little band will hasten. Ah ! my queen,
I never loved you as I love you now !

BOTILDA.

Not when I came to you at Kjöge first ?

ERIK.

Ah ! then you were a child, a simple girl,
Sweet as a flower with dew upon its leaves,
Tender and breathless, innocent and frank ;
I loved you for your fresh young heart, but now,
Chastened and strengthened with the winds and fires
Of sorrow and experience, you stand
Before me in your womanhood, and bow
My soul to adoration ! Hush, dear heart !
Speak not, but let me gaze into your eyes.
If now Death came behind us unaware,
And took our breathing from us with no pain,
I hardly think I should be sad to die.
Love cannot reach a loftier height than this,
Nor pure strong passion fuse the body and brain,
Spirit and will, with more seraphic art
Than now, and in this bosom. Love, my love,
My only love, I shall not die but live,
Live on through death, immortal in your love !

[*Exeunt.*]

KING ERIK.

ACT V.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

The Quay at Baffa, in Cyprus. A crowd of persons hastening here and there.

FIRST CITIZEN.

These be fine days for Baffa.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Say not so !

The whole town's being is turned upsidedown,
And walks, its feet in the air.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Such stirring hours

We meet not often in the months and years.
Small blame to us if all men, young and old,
Leave shop and stall to crowd here by the sea,
And watch the blond barbarians.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Where's the King?

FIRST CITIZEN.

Ah! neighbour, though you sneer at all the rest,
Your tongue's your master still. Why, *where's the King?*
Is all the question Baffa asks to-day.
I trow he must be near.

GISLI.

Your pardon, friend,
The King of Denmark is not here at all;
He's not yet landed.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Hark you, neighbour, hark,
This soldier tells us he's not here at all,
Not landed.

SECOND CITIZEN.

You are one of his array?

GISLI.

Yea, soldier of his guard, and left the port
That hour the King did, but a gale arose,
Scattering our ships to east and west of Rhodes,
And brought me soonest hither.

FIRST CITIZEN.

He will come?

GISLI.

And shortly ; if I marked the pennon right.
The bark that moored before the break of dawn,
There in the offing, and now tacks to shore,
Is his.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Come, neighbour, hurry to the quay.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Your pardon, friend ! we thank you ! Neighbour, come.

[*Exeunt*

[GISLI *passes to the back of the stage.*

[*Enter* MARCUS *and* THORA.]

MARCUS.

It cannot be. Yet all the good saints know
'Twere well for us and Denmark if the King
Touched not this island, but ere fall of day
Went homeward straightway over the Greek sea.

THORA.

Then strain your throat to move his will with prayer,
Meet him before the landing-place, and lay
The burdens of the people at his feet,
Bar him from Cyprus as a cliff would do,
Kneel and not rise, be instant in design,
Untired in execution ! Else I trow
Our land will perish ere it sees its king.

MARCUS.

The times wax dark and desperate at home ;—
But how to tell him all, and yet not vex
His noble heart to anger ?

THORA.

It may chance,
That weary of long exile, he'd be fain
Of fair excuse to end it.

MARCUS.

Nay, not so !
I thought we should have found him journeying back,
So many months have slipped away and died
Since first he started. Then a word from me
Had sent him hurrying homeward like the wind ;
But first too long in Russia, then too long
In Micklegarth he lingered, and not yet
Has knelt at prayer within Jerusalem.
Wherefore I know he will not choose to come.

THORA.

Yet should a people's agony outweigh
The lightness of a vow.

MARCUS.

But not with him,
This ardent, tender, swift, self-torturing man
Strikes once in haste, and then is slow to strike ;
Unreasoning in his impulse, and as firm

In purpose, when the purpose comes to birth,
As rock beneath our footsteps.

GISLI (*coming forward*).

By your leave !

Have you not Danish faces ?

MARCUS.

From Roeskild.

GISLI.

I pray you pardon, Master, that I spoke,
And crossed your speech the while, but as I passed
I heard you talk of Denmark.

MARCUS.

It is well !

We are from Denmark, and have news from home
As fresh as can be told you. Have you kith,
Perchance, in Sjælland ?

GISLI.

Nay, Sir, but a friend,
Whose fame, for his was higher rank than mine,
Was not so small in Denmark. I would learn,
If so you chance to know, where Grimur lies ;
He was my friend, this Grimur, and is dead !

THORA.

Oh ! what a name to greet our ears with here !

GISLI.

Why ! lady, 'tis a good name, and a true,
And he was a brave man who bore that name ;
You need not blame it !

MARCUS.

Thora, do you mark
This soldier is a guardsman of the Greeks,
And has not heard the story.

THORA.

Speak no more.

GISLI.

Nay, say no more to vex me ; I will go—
And mar your peace no longer. Tell me first,
For I perceive you know, where Grimur lies ;
Since, look you, Sir, I loved him, and I fear
Lest they have thrown him out into the field,
Or marred his body shamefully. At night
I gnaw my heart to think so !

MARCUS.

Be at peace.

He lies beneath the pavement of the porch
At Roeskild, buried just within the church,
Alone, and has no word graved on the stone.
But when you go to Denmark, you may win

To write some scripture on the blank white slab,
If so you plead for't humbly.

GISLI.

When I go?

Yea, when I go, I'll do the thing you say.

Ah! when I go! But for your gracious speech

I thank you!

[*Exit.*]

MARCUS.

There is sorrow in those eyes!

THORA.

And some fell purpose in those lips and hands!

I fear that man, I know not why. Methought

That I had seen him somewhere, and I fell

A-trembling when he spoke, albeit his words

Were gentler than his looks were.

MARCUS.

A tall man,

Strong in his limbs!

THORA.

But say, how comes he here?

A Dane in Baffa, and not one of us,

Since Erik has not landed?

MARCUS.

But more ships

Than Erik's left the Golden Horn that night.



So much I learned at day-break ; yea ! a fleet,
 With guardsmen of the Væringar on board,
 Came with him, and their rank being struck with storm
 Was scattered in the Rhodian seas to meet
 In piecemeal here at Cyprus.

THORA.

Then with those
 Who came with us from home, and with the bands
 Already landed, and with those to land
 Soon with the King, the isle will swarm with Danes
 And know not its own people.

MARCUS.

Yea ! in truth

And all be one to greet the King and strew
 His path with their devotion, till the air
 Becomes one rose whose every leaf will be
 A Danish face in rapture.

[*Exeunt.*]

[*Enter citizens in confusion.*]

FIRST CITIZEN.

Stay here, and if you crane above the crowd
 You'll see him.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Now the oars are all drawn in.
 It turns broadside and trembles to the quay.

FIRST CITIZEN.

How slow it is ! There see, that tallest man

With silken hose, and gold upon his coat
Must be the King.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Fool ! think you that's the King ?
Why, that's the trumpeter. See, now he blows
A clear alarum to the town, as though
We needed waking. Put the brass away,
Young man, we've all rubbed sleep out of our eyes !

FIRST CITIZEN.

See, there's the King now !

SECOND CITIZEN.

And the lady there
That smiles to him, and reddens, that's the Queen.

FIRST CITIZEN.

And he smiles too. Ah ! what a goodly man.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Yet pale and wan, and older than I thought ;
But what a sweet soft rosy thing is she !
Bloom of the oleander, that's most like
Such cheeks as hers are.

FIRST CITIZEN.

In the morning light
Her red-gold hair is like—

SECOND CITIZEN.

And what a throat !

That shaft of marble tinted like a peach
 Within Our Lady's chapel shines the same !

FIRST CITIZEN.

We grow poetical ! Come down, my friend,
 And hurry round, and meet them in the town.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

A terrace in front of the Castle of Baffa. Enter ERIK, BOTILDA, with many maidens and gentlemen. Enter on the other side MARCUS, who kneels to the King and kisses his hand.

MARCUS.

Hail, Sire !

ERIK.

And welcome, good old friend, at last !
 We glanced among the faces red and brown,
 The tresses gold and ebon, Cypriotes, Danes,
 For these dear locks, now whiter than of old,
 These features so familiar, but in vain !
 Yea ! Marcus, I am jealous of my Queen,
 Who saw you sooner !

MARCUS.

Yet I strove to come,
 But knowing little of the island-speech,
 And being caught within the tortuous mesh

Of these strange streets of Baffa, lost my way,
And was too late for sunrise.

ERIK.

Ah !^h the moon
Has told the sun your zeal, and all that haste.
But say, for now my heart is like a flame
To hear it, how my kingdom fares at home ?

MARCUS.

Ask me not this, for hideous are the feet
Of them that bring ill tidings. Ah, my liege,
I will not with a little word or sigh
Touch on the past, but with a resolute face
Gaze on the coming sorrow in my speech.
The commonwealth, that was so fair and strong,
Grows weak and totters as a frail old man,
Whose joints grow past their function ; him you left
To guide the realm, our worthy Skjalm, is dead ;
And when Lord Knud came hastening from the court
Of Duke Lothair in Saxony, he found
Four other princes wrangling for your crown,
Each calling you their only liege and head,
And so we know not whom to serve.

ERIK.

It seems

A king is more a father than men think,
For if the king abide not in his realm

Children and serving-men with little skill
Do call their riot ruling.

MARCUS.

And the Wends
Hearing that you, their terror and their bane,
Had gone away to exile, have made bold
To fall upon our coasts. The day I left,
Men brought the news of how a score of maids
Were caught in Falster, sporting on the sands,
And borne away to slavery and shame.

BOTILDA.

Hath God forgotten ?

MARCUS.

And your own wise laws,
That held the people as a child is held
Lest, witless, it should fall, in lapse of time
These too have lost their vigilance and strength,
And in a sensual trough of swinish deeds
Men plunge and batten with a foul excess,
Forgetting what they were and that chaste sword
You wielded.

ERIK.

O that I had never left
The helm of state, but through the driving night,
While all is black except the sharp-shot foam,
And not a star is shining but that one
Of duty to my country and my God

Had kept the good ship steady. Ah, and now
I long to have the wind between my lips,
And under me the rocking, rushing State !

(To the Lords.)

Shall we to Denmark !

ALL.

Yea ! my lord, at once.

ERIK *(to BOTILDA)*.

Shall we return ?

BOTILDA.

It must be as you will ;

My heart, like yours, is yearning to be home,
And yet—

ERIK.

I would that you would tell me all.

BOTILDA.

Nay, surely, it is best that we return.

ERIK.

Ay, but not now ; for, lo ! when first I heard
This tale of sorrow that our Marcus brings,
My heart within me leaped with a great throb
Of tender longing love towards this my child,
Denmark, a weak child, prodigal and vain ;
But now I mind me of our one design,
And how the pressure of my holy vow
Trammels my footsteps.

MARCUS.

Must it be your own ?
Can you not send a ship, with priests and gifts,
To Jaffa, and yourself set out for home ?

ERIK.

If at the last, after so many prayers,
So many oaths to heaven and all the saints,
So great desire, and such a constant heart,
My soul could break its promises to God,
Marcus, this hand, and this my royal will
Would be things frailer than a smoking flax,
More helpless than a bruised reed ; and now,
I will not waste another day, but start
Straightway, nor cease from journeying until
I pour my heart out on the mount of God.

BOTILDA.

I would not cross you, but your mind is mine.

ERIK.

Yea ! and so steadfast am I, that if now
Some grievous bolt out of the blue above
Should strike you dead, yea, you ! yea, even you !
I would not linger, but would haste away
My broken heart and your untimely corpse
And bury both in Olivet at last.

MARCUS.

So then I yield ; but shifting in my suit
Would pray you grant me leave to follow too.

ERIK.

Gladly : and with the fair winds' furtherance
We soon shall be returning, calm at heart
And with the wounded conscience washed in balm,
The inward bleeding staunched. Now very soon
The burden that has weighed my soul, and marred
The well-springs of my youth with sad salt tears
Remorseful, and that sorrow that has been
So amorous of my spirit night and day,
That ghosts in dreams have muttered jangling rhymes
About it in my ears, and night's live eyes
Writ it in damning star-fire round my walls,
Shall all be past and gone and washed away,
No more remembered than a curse inscribed
On level sands at ebb, which next full flood
Obliterates for ever ; yea ! and then,
Made young anew, and strong and free from fate,
My hand will grasp the helm, and steer once more,
And break the wave and guide the bark to port.

Enter GISLI.]

GISLI.

I fain would see the King.

A LORD.

You cannot now.

THORA (*to* MARCUS).

The guardsman with the hollow flaming eyes !

MARCUS.

Nay, not the man we spake with !

THORA.

Is't not he ?

What will he with the King ?

MARCUS.

Believe me, maid,

'Tis not the man we talked with yesterday,

This is of merrier cheer.

GISLI.

Where is the King ?

I have a matter for the King to judge.

A LORD.

This is no place to plead a law-suit in.

Go hence, and wait a more propitious hour.

ERIK.

What is this hubbub ?

MARCUS.

It is naught, my lord,

They send away a fellow that would vex

Your leisure with his business.

GISLI.

Lord the King,

They thrust me from you !

BOTILDA.

Erik, but not now !

ERIK.

Yea, wherefore ? In a little time we start

For Palestine. I'll see the good man now.
Yea! bring him here.

[*To GISLI.*]

What would you of my grace?

GISLI.

Sire, I would have you judge a suit of blood.

ERIK.

Speak out.

GISLI.

I had a brother, that I loved,
And lo! a man has slain him unawares,
In no fair fight, but thrust a dagger down
Between his shoulders, and no ill deed done,
And he that rules our band in the Greek guard
Will not that I revenge him.

ERIK.

Unto me
Revenge belongs. When I return in peace
I will remember.

GISLI.

Yea! but he who smote
Is no vile peasant but a lord of lands.

ERIK:

There is no difference made of rich or poor,
Of jarl or peasant, where the judge is just,

And guiltless blood in Denmark is not shed,
Without full retribution.

GISLI.

Ah, my lord,
My ears wax glad to find you of such mind.
Methought you would be swift with glosing words
To cover up a mighty man's offence
And prove it nothing. These your royal words
A trumpeter should blow about the world
Till all kings hear them. Just and righteous judge,
I will await your verdict ; yet if chance

[Coming closer

Should bring that man that stabbed my friend to death
Before me, face to face, by noon or night,
I fear I should not have the grace to stay
Until our judge came homeward, but might hap
To feel my veins boil up into such zeal
As would not brook restraining, and my hands
Strike suddenly and slay, as here, and now.

[Strikes the King to the heart.

Grimur, sleep well !

ERIK.

Ah ! let me feel your face
Botilda ! Nay, I have no pain. Farewell.

[BOTILDA bends over him, wailing.]

[*Enter SVANHILDA, hastily.*]

SVANHILDA.

He came this way ! He must not see the King !

[*Rushes in.*]

Oh ! oh ! Too late ! too late ! ah ! woe is me !

[*While some of the lords attend to the King, others secure GISLI.*]

MARCUS.

Yea ! take and bind and tear him on the rack !

Let him not slip you !

GISLI (*breaking away*).

It was bravely done.

For all your wit, ye cannot bring him back.

Grimur is well avenged, and I may die.

[*Stabs himself and dies.*]

ERIK.

Love, let me hold your hand till this is past.

[*Dies.*]

MARCUS.

The Queen will die, too. Thora, hold her up,

So ! lest her heart break.

BOTILDA.

Nay, I shall not die,

Not yet ; I pray you, Marcus, let the ships

Be ready in the port at dawn of day,
For lo! the King and I are fain to come
As swiftly as we may to Palestine,
Where shortly ye shall leave us, for I know
That after all the sorrow of our lives
We shall not toil nor wander any more,
But seek the sacred river and find rest.

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