



Helen E. Haines

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THIODOLF THE ICELANDER.

A ROMANCE.

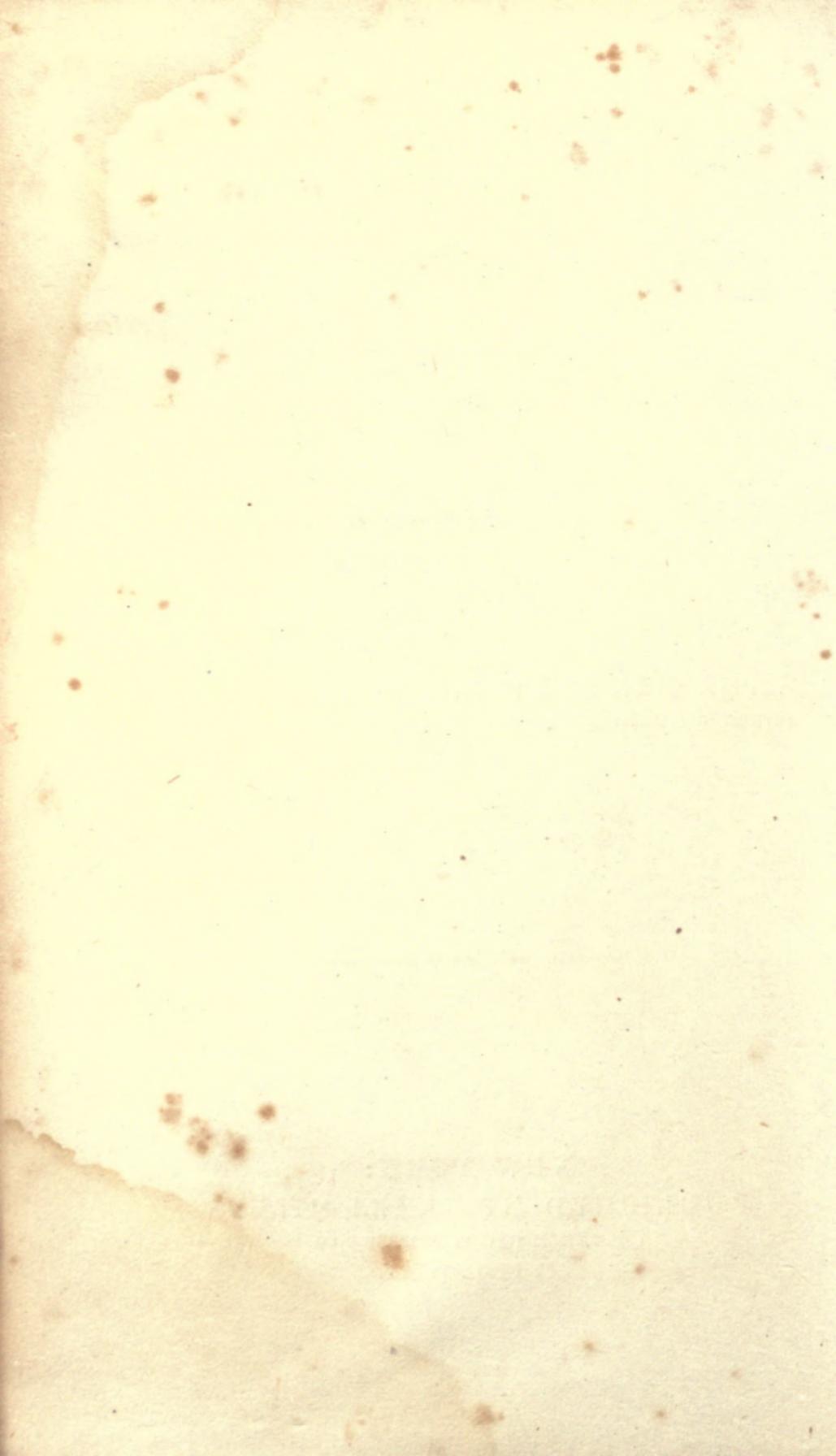
FROM THE GERMAN OF

THE BARON DE LA MOTTE FOUQUÉ.

AUTHOR OF "UNDINE," "SINTRAM," "ASLAUGA'S KNIGHT," ETC., ETC.



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PREFACE.

THIODOLF, Fouqué calls his most successful work. It is the spontaneous offshoot of a mind filled with all requisite materials, and inspired by the idea to give them life and form. Indeed there can be little doubt that Sir Walter Scott carried this tale, as well as *Undine*, in his mind in more than one of his works. He speaks of them in equal terms of admiration, and induced a Mr. Gordon to undertake the translation of *Thiodolf*. Nor can the Berserker rage, so frequently mentioned in *Thiodolf*, be better illustrated than by the following quotation from *Harold the Dauntless* :

“ Profane not, youth—it is not thine
To judge the spirit of our line—
The bold Berserker’s rage divine,
Through whose inspiring deeds are wrought
Past human strength and human thought.
When full upon his gloomy soul
The champion feels the influence roll,
He swims the lake, he leaps the wall—
Heeds not the depth, nor plumbs the fall ;
Unshielded, mailless, on he goes
Singly against a host of foes ;
Their spears he holds like withered reeds,
Their mail like maidens’ silken weeds ;
One ’gainst a hundred will he strive,
Take countless wounds, and yet survive.
Then rush the eagles to his cry
Of slaughter and of victory ;
And blood he quaffs like Odin’s bowl,
Deep drinks his sword—deep drinks his soul ;

And all that meet him in his ire
 He gives to ruin, rout, and fire ;
 Then, like gorged lion, seeks some den,
 And couches till he's man agen.”*

The Translator thus feels that in making the English public acquainted with this tale, the great authority of Sir Walter Scott is followed, and an additional illustration is gained for his works. It is also believed, on the authority of Fouqué himself,—who takes the credit of always carefully searching and putting forward real historical details, tinged of course with romantic coloring,—that it will be found a curious and interesting picture of the Northman and Byzantine manners of the tenth century.†

The following passage from *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (ch. lv.) may serve to explain the strange position of the Scandinavian or Varangian‡ troops at Constantinople. Having traced their origin as the founders, and for three generations the upholders, of the Scandinavian dynasty in Russia, the historian shows that Wladimir the First, feeling himself securely settled, and in danger but from his own friends, induced them, by representing the superior wealth of the South, to proceed to Constantinople ; previously, however, warning the Emperor of the character of his self-invited guests. He then continues ;—“ The exiles were entertained at the Byzantine court ; and they preserved, till the last age of the empire, the inheritance of

* The full history of this strange possession, which reminds the reader of the Malay “running a-muck,” may be seen in Ihre, *Glossarium Sino-Gothicum*, sub voce ‘ Berserker.’

† The contrast of the luxurious Byzantine Court with the rough and self denying Northmen, the material of Thiodolf, forms also the subject of Sir Walter Scott’s last work, *Count Robert of Paris*.

‡ The word means Corsair.

spotless loyalty, and the use of the Danish or English tongue. With their broad and double-edged battle-axes on their shoulders, they attended the Greek Emperor to the temple, the senate, and the hippodrome; he slept and feasted under their trusty guard; and the keys of the palace, the treasury, and the capital, were held by the firm and faithful hands of the Varangians."

The expedition of Thiodolf against the Bulgarians is probably imitated from that of John Zimisces against Swatoslaus in 970.

In this translation the greatest care has been used to imitate, as closely as possible, the simple severity of the original.



BOOK I

BOOK 1

THIODOLF THE ICELANDER.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE waves were yet very high, the fragments of the wrecked ship were driven wildly over the sea ; even the mast, by clinging to which the knight Pietro had safely brought his beloved to shore, was now borne back by a towering wave into the boundless ocean.

Pietro heeded it not, although he had fastened a kerchief full of jewels and gold to the mast, and had not yet detached it ; in this moment he had noticed nothing in the world but the fair pale being in his arms, who had not yet reopened her heavenly eyes. The storm played roughly with her dark silky hair, and drove it now in wild beauty half over her white face, and now threw it back from her smooth forehead ; drops of rain fell on her delicate cheeks, and twigs torn from the trees rustled round her. But neither that nor Pietro's agonised, almost despairing, cry to his beloved could awaken her from that deep, death-like slumber. The sun was sinking in the west, and still the fair form lay motionless, stiff, and mute.

At length the calm of approaching evening began to overcome the storm. The winds blew more gently, and the broken clouds sailed over the sky with slackened speed. Then a gleam of the setting sun broke brightly through the grey mist, and rested with a pleasant light on the delicate features of the maiden. The wild anguish of Pietro's heart was hushed, a soft sorrow seemed to speak to him in flute-like tones ; he bent over the senseless form and sighed, while tears of love filled his eyes : " O Malgherita, my only joy ! Malgherita ! " And, as if it had been granted to

none but the gentlest sounds and lights of nature to awaken so tender a beauty, Malgherita opened her eyes at this caressing greeting, and smiled kindly on the evening gleam and on her lover.

With all the tender care and thankful rapture with which man can cherish and tend the lost and unexpectedly recovered treasure of his life, Pietro strove to show his joy to the fair maiden, and to find wherewithal to refresh and strengthen her after the rough storm. But around them stared nothing but brushwood and bare rocks. The two lovers sat on a small platform, whose length and breadth measured but a few hundred steps; behind them rose a steep height, which formed a half-moon, reaching to the coast, and was covered with tall old trees, to which it was easy to see axe and saw had never been laid; hard by a mountain-stream rushed impetuously down into the sea, adding to the wild noise of the urge.

"Where are we, Pietro?" asked Malgherita smiling and rubbing her beautiful eyes, as if she thought it was but a dream, and felt sure that, when fully awake, she should find herself in a well-known beloved country.

The knight understood the movement, and was much troubled at it. "Malgherita," said he, after a silence, "it is, alas, no dream which places thee on this inhospitable coast! But I cannot tell thee how it is called. The storm has tossed us hither and thither for many days over the wild sea, till not the steersman himself could tell where we were driven, for by night the stars were veiled with impenetrable darkness, and by day a covering of wet mist concealed the sun."

"I recollect more and more about it," said Malgherita thoughtfully. "We have been very, very long tossed about, and at last we were shipwrecked. Is it not so?"

"Yes, truly," said Pietro. "The blind, deaf sea did not show that reverence for thy holy, patient beauty which all nature ought to feel for so bright an apparition. All became ungodly and rugged as this shore which we hardly reached, and which, perhaps, we are the first to tread, and to give it a name by our mischance."

"Then let it be called the shore of love," said Malgherita with

a heavenly smile ; “ and speak not, O my beloved, of any mischance which has befallen us ! Build me here, by the sea, a little straw hut : it shall be my father’s castle near Marseilles ; and when thou returnest with thy prey from the chase, I will adorn thee as a victor with reeds and sea-side flowers, as of yore I adorned thee with gold and jewels, after a gorgeous tournament. This is a knightly thought, Pietro ; and we will spend our whole life in quiet innocent sports. We need but think that we are again become children ; and has not love long ago done that for us ? ”

In spite of the pleasant images that floated before her mind, here Malgherita suddenly shuddered, and looked fearfully at some bushes behind them. Pietro turned his eyes eagerly in the same direction, at the same time putting his hand to his side, and discovering, to his comfort, that the sea had at least left him the precious well-tempered dagger in his belt.

“ Didst thou, too, hear anything ? ” asked the terrified maiden, after a pause. “ It seemed to me as if some one laughed behind that thicket. ”

“ Perchance it is but a mocking echo, ” said the knight soothingly, though without looking away from the spot. “ But happen what may, Malgherita, be at ease ; thou art under Pietro’s safeguard. ”

The maiden, calmed and cheered, again gazed smiling on the sea, trusting fearlessly in her lover, and rejoicing that her life and safety lay in his valor. “ See, Pietro, ” said she, “ how brightly the setting sun streams to us over the waves ! What a broad dazzling path of light ! The storm is past ; a peaceful, untroubled night seems to rise out of the waters. ”

But a distinct laugh was now heard close to them, and, while Pietro in angry alarm started up, a slender youth of gigantic height came forth from the bushes ; an immense battle-axe was on his shoulder ; he was still laughing, as he said in broken language, half Italian, half Provençal : “ Oh, how little the maiden knows about storms ! It will blow, and thunder, and rain, all night. Dost thou not see how low the sea-birds are skimming ? Thou must be a little foolish, dear lady. ”

“ Bold man, be silent, ” cried Pietro, and drew his dagger.

“Leave your little knife in its place—leave it,” said the stranger, laughing; “I will do you no harm. But if you attack me, see, I have a battle-axe—a dozen of your little knives would not make one like it.”

“Though the sea has swallowed up my arms,” said Pietro, proudly, “that will not hinder me from defending, with the last that is left me, the beauty whom thou hast insulted.”

“Insult beauty! no, not insult,” said the stranger, suddenly becoming grave. “If I spoke uncourteously, it was because I only bungle at your language. I have not myself been to that land whence you probably come, sir knight and lady, but my father and uncle have often. You come from Italy, do you not?”

“From Marseilles, dear stranger,” said Malgherita; and as he nodded familiarly, to signify that he understood the difference, she continued, a sudden longing rising in her heart, “Are we, then, very, very far from the bright Provençal coast?”

“We are here in Iceland,” said the stranger, gently; “but it is not so terribly far. Wait a little, lady, perhaps half a year, then the best season will come—the gay spring—and then you can sail away.”

“Iceland!” said Malgherita, turning pale, and looking down. “Ah, Pietro, shall we ever see thy fair knightly castle of Tuscany?”

“Why not,” said the stranger. “Iceland is in this world,—Tuscany is in this world; and a gallant of the right sort may well reach both the one and the other.”

Then he raised his voice, and sang, in his own tongue, the following words:—

“The Northman sails both north and south,
Sees many lands, and knows them all;
The one he greets with kindly gifts,
The other 'neath his sword doth fall.”

“I shall take my first flight next spring,” continued he again, in broken southern tongue; “and then I will take thee home, pretty lady, and thee too, sir knight, if thou behave civilly and leave thy little knife quiet in its proper place.”

Pietro and Malgherita, when they listened to the rough-sound-

ing song, recollected that these tones had been heard by them in their far-off blooming home, sung by some noble Normans who had sailed over from Sicily. To honor these strangers many had learnt their language; and so it came that the two lovers could speak to the Icelfander in his own tongue, whereby arose far better understanding between them.

“If I take you to your home so full of golden fruit and sunlight,” said the Icelfander, “I shall soon learn Italian. Hitherto I have never left this island. Will you come with me to my uncle’s?—I tell you that the rain will soon pour down again,—and then you can see how you like what will be your winter quarters. Autumn storms are very wild here; we shall not be able to set out before spring.”

“A winter in Iceland!” sighed Malgherita: “it is very strange.”

“What is there to wonder at?” cried the Icelfander. “A brave man cares little where he winters; but, indeed, you are not a brave man, lady—something very different. Will you both come to my uncle’s? I live there also, and we have good cheer: plenty of mead and ale, and songs and legends as many as one can wish for.”

The lovers, in their need, accepted without delay the hospitable invitation; and perhaps the kind and honest heart, which shone forth from the large blue eyes of the youth, would have hindered them, even in more favorable circumstances, from giving him an uncourteous refusal. So they all three went up the hill by a wild path skirting the wood.

CHAPTER II.

IN the deepening darkness something like a wall was seen through the branches, and Pietro asked the Icelfander if that was his uncle's dwelling.

"No," was the answer; "it is the dwelling of my father—his honorable grave. I never like to pass by without singing him a song,—if you would wait one little minute, pretty lady,—the rain is not yet so very near."

"You good son," said Malgherita, with a mournful smile, "do according to your pious custom. I will gladly give you time."

They were now close to the lofty grave, on whose grassy summit towered high an immense stone inscribed with strange marks and figures; Pietro and Malgherita sat down under a wide-spreading elm, while the Icelfander hastened up the mound and climbed upon the stone, whence he sang words like the following:—

"My father long ago was slain
By the wild robbers of the main:
He resteth now in sleep profound
Beneath the elm-tree-shaded mound,
His first-born, vigorous, young, and brave,
Contemplates from his parent's grave
That unknown world, that distant strand,
For which he leaves his father-land.

Oh, to thy son, dear father, tell
Where thou dost now in spirit dwell:
Is it with Christ, we call the White?
Or in Walhalla's halls of light?—
Fight bravely on, beloved youth,
And thou shalt know the hidden truth
When, yielding up thy parting breath,
Thou join'st him in the vale of death.

Since first this ancient earth began,
Innumerable tribes of man
Have sprung to life, then pass'd away,
Like flowers that live but for a day.
But, old or new, they all are gone ;
And 'tis the hero's name alone
That lives for aye in minstrel-lays
And songs of never-ending praise."

Then the youth sprang gaily down from the stone, went to the lovers, and then all set off again together. But Malgherita, since his song, could not help looking on him somewhat askance ; and at length she said,—

" You have not yet made known to us who you yourself are."

" Ah ! that indeed can be done but too easily and too shortly," answered he. " See, if I tell you that I am called Thiodolf and am the son of Asmundur, and that both my parents have long ago passed into the grave, you know all my history, so far. That of my glorious father may have sounded a good deal farther, and so shall mine in time. Only ask again after a couple of years."

" I did not mean that," said Malgherita. " But you sang just now such strange heathen words ; and yet in the midst of them came the name of our Lord Christ."

" Yes, yes," interrupted Thiodolf, " I know that. In your country they believe entirely in the white Christ."

" The white Christ !" said Pietro, in surprise ; " what does that mean ?"

" Why, it means your—your own Christ," answered Thiodolf. " Many Christian priests come to our island ; they want us to let ourselves be sprinkled with water, after their fashion, and believe on the Crucified. What they tell us of Him sounds so beautiful and sweet that we listen gladly to them, and we too love the Christ, and call Him white, as we do all good spirits."

" Then why do you not let yourselves be baptized in His holy Name ?" asked Pietro.

" Many of us have done this," answered Thiodolf ; " but they believe likewise in our good old gods. They think they may take the One and not leave the others."

" Pietro, Pietro, whither are we come ?" whispered Malgherita, trembling, and clinging closer to her lover.

“Oh! don't be frightened,” said Thiodolf, kindly. “It is only on account of our sorceries that we are not entirely of your belief. They are quite needful for us here amongst our elves and sprites; those merry folks who will give you many sports during the winter, lady.”

“What thou, Ice-giant, callest sport,” muttered Pietro, discontentedly, to himself; and then asked aloud, “Art thou and thine uncle baptized or not, Thiodolf?”

“We are marked,” answered Thiodolf; “that is, we have let ourselves be marked with the cross, as a first step, and now we can hold intercourse with Christians as well as with heathens. Your bishops themselves ordained this: but baptism will not come till long afterwards. Many times we take pleasure in the thought of it, and many times not.”

“I still have thee, Pietro,” said Malgherita softly to herself, strengthening her sorrowful heart with this sweet trust; and her knight, who understood her, pressed the delicate hand of his beloved joyfully to his heart with increased confidence in himself.

At this moment a sudden turn of the path brought them to an immense far-spreading building, which rose up dark and misshapen against the evening sky.

“Here we shall pass the winter together,” said Thiodolf.

CHAPTER III.

AT the entrance a hammer was hanging to an iron chain ; the young Icelfander seized it and thundered it three times against the gate. " Gently, gently !" a strong voice was heard to cry from afar. " I knew at the first stroke that it was Thiodolf. Thou needst not shiver the planks of the door." And at the same time a deep laugh sounded, and soon there was a going hither and thither in the court-yard, while the loud bark of dogs burst forth from all sides.

" Only let me come in, you brutes !" cried the youth ; " and I will tell you to know Thiodolf better. Silence !"

The barking ceased instantly ; but a shaggy monster quickly appeared on the walls, who looked around with fiery eyes, then gathered itself up for a spring, and bounded down amongst those who were waiting at the gate. Malgherita screamed in terror ; but Thiodolf, patting the head of the creature who was fawning upon him, said : " What is there to be so frightened at ? It is not even one of the hounds ; it is only my wolf ; and when I or my uncle are near he bites no one."

By this time the double gates of the strange building were open, and several men with long beards, clothed in wolves' and bears' skins, with great flaming pine-torches in their hands, appeared within. Malgherita, hiding her terror, went in with Pietro, and passed through the double rank which the men formed, to the entrance of the main building, from whose large hall the hearth-light shone through the open door. The bearded men bowed lowly and kindly as the guests passed them ; and Thiodolf, as he went by, gave orders that the best and most refreshing food should be prepared for the wondrously lovely little lady and the noble knight whom he had brought with him ; whereupon the servants ran with ready zeal in different directions. The wolf trotted joyfully behind his master, and showed his teeth fiercely at the

dogs, who stretched their dark heads out of many corners of the building ; and then Thiodolf pinched his ear till he howled. They entered the hall of the house ; there were sitting on each side of the hearth, on high stools, a stiff and stately man and woman, both very old, and dressed in strange but rich clothing. They looked almost like two images ; and for such Pietro and Malgherita at first took them, thinking that the fire before them was consuming some idolatrous sacrifice.

But Thiodolf went up to them, saying : " Uncle Nefiof and Aunt Gunhilda, I bring you two fair guests ;" and forthwith the old man got down from his high position, greeted Malgherita in no uncourteous manner, and led her to his seat ; while the old woman quietly kept her place of honor, and only offered her hand kindly to the visitors. It was strange to see how the blooming, slender Malgherita, and the old, solemn Gunhilda, sat opposite to each other, on their high stools ; and Thiodolf, who, with his uncle and Pietro, had taken lower seats round the fire, said : " The pretty stranger is still prettier to look at since she has sat near my good old aunt. It is like that bright future of which the Christian priests always talk, compared to the old fallen Odin's time. Wait just a moment, Aunt Gunhilda, you must see it too." Then he sprang up in simple-hearted haste, took down from the wall a shield bright as a mirror, and asked good-humoredly, as he held it before the two women, " Is it not true, Aunt Gunhilda ? is it not a pretty picture ? I mean from the contrast."

Pietro could hardly keep from laughing, and the old Nefiof laughed out most heartily, saying : " He never does otherwise. He must go out far into the world before he learns its ways."

Gunhilda, too, laughed good-humoredly ; and Thiodolf quietly put back the shield in its place, appearing accustomed to his uncle and aunt's well-meant jests at him, and not much troubling himself to make out what they found so wonderful in him. But Malgherita could not join in the laugh ; all here seemed to her so mysterious, and solemn, and magical ; and since her place near Gunhilda had separated her from Pietro, tears of sadness stood in her eyes, and she trembled violently. The good old woman saw this, and, at the same time, first perceived that Malgherita's clothes

were soaked with sea-water ; so she hastened to take her lovely guest into her chamber to provide her with dry garments, looking back reproachfully at her nephew because he had said nothing of this, and doubtless in his thoughtless ways had unnecessarily delayed the delicate maiden on the road.

“ Yes, indeed, indeed,” said Thiodolf, shaking his head, as if angry at himself ; “ I did just what aunt says. But then why is that Provençal child so fair ? who could think of chill when looking at her ? It is just as if a bright, all-powerful mermaid had risen from the sea, which would be natural for her.”

Old Nefiof, in the meanwhile, had made the knight also take off his wet clothes, and had dressed him in costly furs, adorned with golden clasps. Malgherita soon came back with Gunhilda, dressed in a rich northern garb, and looking indescribably lovely in her strange attire. They all again sat round the fire ; the attendants brought mead and food, and it seemed as if the northern dress had made the northern home more natural to the two strangers. The old man spoke of his expeditions in Sicily, and sang many songs which he had brought thence ; Pietro spoke of the heroes of northern race, and how they upheld the Norman name in knightly honor on the southern coasts. Thus a bridge was, as it were, thrown over from one far-distant home to the other, and soon it seemed to Malgherita that Iceland was much nearer to Marseilles than it had at first appeared to her. They separated to go to rest, when Gunhilda, who had heard from Malgherita that she was only Pietro’s betrothed, not his wife, took the maiden into her chamber ; the uncle invited the knight to share his place of rest. “ For,” said he, “ if you sleep near Thiodolf, you will probably be roughly awakened ; for at every howl of a bear, he rushes, were it midnight, out into the wild forest.”

“ I cannot help it,” answered Thiodolf. “ This is what I think : it is better to hunt than to sleep ; for I shall have time enough to sleep when they carry me to my father in his mound of earth, and shut the stone door upon me. It is true that the dead hunt in Iceland. Some nights ago, when the moon had thrown her cold white mantle far over the mountains”

"Thou must not tell fearful things before sleeping-time," said Gunhilda. "Dost not thou see how the maiden shudders?"

"She is nothing but an aspen-tree, with her tremblings and shakings!" cried Thiodolf, vexed; and he left the hall: the others at the same time went to their chambers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE sun had but just risen from the sea when Malgherita, hardly less beautiful and bright, came forth from Nefiolf's court. She carried in her hand a lute, which she had found in the hall, and drew from it as she went some sweet sounds; although the instrument was too large for her to carry, and she held it uneasily in her arms. The strings were also too far apart, and much too hard and rough to bend beneath so small and delicate a hand. But Malgherita still caressed her awkward companion softly and fondly, till many delicious sounds swept over the island in its morning brightness. Then she hastened with winged steps to reach a neighboring height, whence the sea would lie open before her in all its majesty. As she stood on the height, she looked around with a long, thirsty gaze; but then sighing deeply, and shaking her head as if unsatisfied, she sank down upon the grass, touch'd the heavy lute as gently as she could, and sang to it this song

“ Thou glorious sea, upon whose sand
I spent my infant hours,
Gathering beside thy fragrant strand
Its sweetly blooming flowers;
Thou didst allure me from my rest
To gaze upon thine azure breast,
With thought that, as of yore, thou sea,
Thou wouldst look brightly up at me.

I came, beheld, my joy was o'er,—
O melancholy doom!
Dark hangs the mist above this shore,
The waves are beautiful no more,
The very heaven is gloom!
No, naught is left me but to die!
Both have deceived me—sea and sky.
Yea, all is false, save love's sweet light,
Which can illumine e'en Iceland's night!”

Malgherita had hardly finished, when she heard from the sea-shore the sound of a lute ; she at first took them for the echo of her own, till at last a not displeasing man's voice joined with them, and sang these words :

“ And dost thou so long for thy beautiful land,
Little stranger, whom tempests have toss'd on our strand ?
Oh say, doth this island so gloomy appear,—
Its ocean so dark, and its heaven so drear ?

Yet here in the meadows, in forest and fell,
The elves and the fairies delight them to dwell,
And to speed through the air, and to dance on the sand,—
They are called the ‘ good folk ’ by the men of this land.

And indeed they are truly a good little race,
They are full of good-will, and of kindness, and grace ;
Your home they will prosper, your hearth they will bless,
With gambol and frolic, with smile and caress.

They weave a sweet harmony all the night long,
Which is call'd in our country ‘ the good people's song ;’
And be thou but pleased with their frolicsome lay,
The good people will guard thee by night and by day.

They will hover around thee, and watch by thy bed,
And shield from all danger thy beautiful head ;
Thy house they will build, thy mead they will brew,
And many more things the good people will do ;

For the fairest of gifts they bestow on the fair.
Then yield thee not, lady, to gloom and despair :
When thou longest for home, oh, remember the while
That the elves and the fairies enliven this isle.”

Malgherita had listened to this song with shuddering pleasure ; it was as if the unearthly delicate elves, of whom the strains spoke, had themselves brought those strains out of their wild echoing grottoes. But then again the true-hearted powerful voice of the singer restored her confidence that the sound came from the breast of a man where beat a living heart.

And she was right ; for as the song ended, Thiodolf came, with a friendly smile, out of the thicket at the foot of the hill, hung the lute to which he had sung on a tree, and went up to the maiden,

greeting her heartily. She greeted him gently in return, and bade him sit on the grass beside her; for his song about the elves had pleased her, and she would willingly hear more of those wonderful beings whom he called "the good people." He granted her wish so soon as it had passed her fair lips, and told her much concerning the elves—how they were very little, but most wise creatures, dwelling in beautiful habitations beneath the earth—how, both by word and deed, they helped those who were friendly to them, sometimes even supplying them with household-stuff and arms, but returning every insult with much sharper and more painful insults.

"Shame!" said Malgherita; "who could provoke the kindly little creatures? I would give much to know for certain that they are always around me here."

"They certainly do not stir or move from thee," answered Thiodolf. "They would be very silly elves if they had not a special pleasure in serving thee, for thou art very nearly the fairest maiden that ever trod the earth."

Malgherita turned away with a confused blush, plucking and plating some blades of grass. Then she asked, "Have you, then, ever seen these elves, Thiodolf?"

"Yes, indeed," answered he, "whole troops of them—only in my dreams, though. But I have heard them singing, really and truly, when awake—at times when I have been quite alone, by night in distant woods; and I am much mistaken if they have not often helped me in my fishing and hunting."

"Greet the good people from me," said Malgherita, smiling, "whenever you meet them again, either sleeping or waking: they please me much."

"That tune to which I just now sang my little song," said Thiodolf, "we call, after them, the good people's tune. But it commonly sounds freer, and runs to the ends of the lines much more boldly and simply. This time your Provençal song, which flowed so softly over your lips, put a graver measure into my head; and the good people's tune was altered to that."

He stopped short, and looked at Malgherita as if wondering and inquiring. And when she asked the reason, he answered: "I am only thinking whether thou art not thyself a bright child

of the good people, who, after their custom, art making sport of me. Thou mayest have risen out of the sea with thy lover. Men tell many a tale of elves where the same thing happened."

"It may be!" said Malgherita; and a shade of sadness passed over her fair face. "Truly I did rise from the sea with my lover; but he is no unearthly elf; and still less was our terrible coming out of the sea a jest. We are two poor shipwrecked beings, and I a frightened wandering dove."

"Only be happy," said Thiodolf; "I have many sports for thee in my mind, and one especially, which will make thee think that thou art again in the midst of thy south country. But I must wait for the opportunity."

Malgherita smiled gratefully, and went back with him to the house, where the old people and Pietro were already sitting at the door. Thiodolf repeated with great joy that he had now indeed promised something to the maiden which pleased her, and it would certainly come to pass even better than she expected.

CHAPTER V.

SINCE this time Thiodolf was but seldom, and then unwillingly, away from Malgherita ; and she, too, liked to have beside her the true-hearted kindly Icelfander, who spread out before her a whole treasure of beautiful, though sometimes fearful, elfin stories. Now, as he almost always called the elves, after Icelandic fashion, the "darlings," and yet to please Malgherita strove to speak in his broken southern dialect, it might happen that words which could be misunderstood fell upon Pietro's ear, and for many days made him become more and more grave and gloomy, though Malgherita in her guileless innocence remarked it not. Thiodolf, too, who meant well to all men, never had a thought that any one could deem otherwise of him, or could therefore wish him evil.

Then it happened one evening that the youth spoke of the Iceland breed of falcons, and how true they were to their own master, if he treated them kindly, so that only in death would they part from him.

"You speak of hounds, probably," said Pietro ; and he laughed scornfully. "As concerns falcons, you must abate a good deal of what you say."

"I am no trafficker, so why should I abate of their value?" said Thiodolf, good-humoredly. "And I was *not* speaking of hounds, but of falcons. He must be a witless fellow who would say one word and lets another escape his tongue. But, as it seems so incredible, I will fetch my favorite falcon : you shall keep him in your chamber ; and if he takes any food from your hand, I will forfeit him to you. Then, after three days, let him fly away ; and he will follow me to the farthest end of the island, where I will go this very evening."

But Malgherita forbade the trial, saying that it would be wrong in God's sight to torment a good faithful creature, only for the sake of proving which was right.

Thiodolf smiled joyfully at this, and said, in his broken Provençal language, "If the pretty maiden wills it not, there is an end of the wager. It is a very good thing that fair Malgherita is so kind to the falcon; his master thanks her for it; and it is like one of the good people to be so gracious to the poor little creature."

Malgherita nodded, agreeing to what he said, and Pietro was silent; but after a while, when all the others were engaged in other talk, he softly touched Thiodolf's shoulder, and whispered in his ear, "I must speak to you alone. Let none know of it." Therewith he left the hall, and Thiodolf quickly followed him.

Pietro was standing in the court; but when Thiodolf drew near to him, he silently went on, beckoning the youth to follow until they came to a distant wood. There Pietro loosened from his belt a battle-axe, which he had taken out of the armory of old Nefiof, and always wore at his side near his dagger, saying, "Make ready, Thiodolf. We must fight together."

"Praise be to Odin and all the gods of Walhalla," cried the Icelfander, "that such a wise thought has come into thy head! We two young men have been too long gazing at each other idly without trying our strength. But lay aside the battle-axe; the thing is very sharp."

"Does not, then, that long sword cut which hangs at thy side?" said Pietro, with a displeased smile.

"Truly it cuts but too sharply," answered Thiodolf; "and therefore will I go and fetch blunt weapons, wherewith we shall not hurt one another in our trial of skill."

"Blunt arms! trial of skill!" cried Pietro; and his wild laugh rang through the forest. "The strife about the falcon thou couldst indeed forbid, O Malgherita; but here the bloody strife shall be ended undisturbed; and one of us, if not both, must part with life in it."

"Ay, is it so?" said Thiodolf. "Wilt thou indeed fight for life and death? Well, it is not the first time I have so fought. Come on, thou dear stranger knight."

His sword was drawn, and he awaited what Pietro would do. The knight had taken his dagger in his right hand, and was brandishing it to arid fro, preparing to fling it; so that it could be seen

he meant to decide the combat by one mortal throw. Thiodolf looked sharply and steadily, now at Pietro's eye, now at his hand.

The small, glancing weapon flew, and Thiodolf's sword met it so firmly in its rapid course, that it sprang up whirling in the air, and then dropt on one side amongst the bushes. Then the combatants fell upon each other with battle-axe and sword. Pietro did not wield the axe with the strength and ease of a northern warrior, but he moved more lightly and dexterously; so that Thiodolf saw himself attacked now on this side, now on that. The gigantic Icelander did not for that move from his place; his feet remained as if rooted in the ground; and only his long gleaming sword followed the strokes of the rapid Italian; so that it seemed almost as if Pietro were thundering the blows of his axe upon a slight, enchanted tree, which was defended on all sides by strange lightnings.

The lightning defended him well, and Thiodolf stood calm and unwounded; but the axe did not defend so well, for the northern steel suddenly pierced Pietro's right arm; his weapon fell; in the vain endeavor to recover it his foot slipped, and he too fell to the ground. Thiodolf stooped over him, and placed the point of his sword at the breast of his vanquished foe. "Dost thou yield?" asked he. And as Pietro was silent in angry shame, the harmless victor broke forth in a loud clear laugh.

Pietro's anger rose, and he cried out, "Strike me at once, thou churlish, scoffing boor. Thou mayest well laugh over the mad fate that has let thee conquer a knight like me."

"Nay," answered Thiodolf; "I do not laugh at that—it seems quite natural. But it makes me merry to think how many attempts thou madest to hew me down, and at last they caused thee thyself to fall on thy nose. Yes, yes; so it is. Who sprang upon his prey and broke his own teeth? that was the wolf in the trap. For the rest," added he more seriously, "reviling does not become your condition, and yet less one who thinks himself a pattern for courteous knights. I may be a boor, for I often till the ground; but I am also the son of a hero and a prince. You may ask all Iceland if it is not so. And that I am no churl. . . See!"

With unlooked-for dexterity he bent over Pietro, grasped him

round the body, and placed him on his feet ; then smiled, and said, " Couldst thou do this ? only try ; I will lie down. But, indeed, I am somewhat too heavy for thee."

Pietro stood before him, crimson with shame ; and, with a slight bend of his head, stretched out his hand in token of reconciliation. Thiodolf shook it violently, looked at Pietro's wound, which, being trifling, he bound up quickly and without giving pain, and then said : " Now tell me, dear knight, why did we let fly at each other so very seriously ? I could not ask before the fight ; for it is better to say ' yes ' at once to such invitations than to seek long for the how or wherefore. But now the feast is ended, may I know in whose honor we have entertained each other ?"

Pietro seemed not yet to have recovered the power of speech ; but it was a much gentler feeling that now held him silent than his former vehement spite. At length he said, in a low voice, " Ask me not to tell thee, young hero. I was blinded by a great, bewildering error, which thy bright joyousness has caused to fall from my eyes like scales."

" I noticed something of the sort myself," answered Thiodolf, " when in the midst of thy challenge thou spakest of Malgherita. But, sir knight, as a reasonable knight, how could such a thought come across thee, even in thy dreams ? Hearken, I will confide something to thee : I am very fond of Malgherita, and like to give her joy ; but even had she not been another's bride, I should never have wooed her."

" This excuse," said Pietro, suddenly becoming gloomy, " almost forces me to ask anew from thee a bloody reckoning, and on better grounds than before. Thou shalt not so speak of my lady."

" Why not ?" asked Thiodolf, laughing. " I might as well woo one of the elfin women as Malgherita. The little creature would be obliged well nigh to dislocate her neck if she would look into my eyes ; and there would be no pleasure to me in kneeling before her. She does very well for thee."

Pietro could not but laugh ; and Thiodolf, fetching some water from a near spring, washed the blood from his friend's garments, and most carefully concealed the hurt. " Malgherita must know nothing of this," said he ; " for the delicate flower has quickly pearly tears in her eyes ; and thou art her chiefest joy. Besides,

then there might come the telling of the whole story ; and it seems to me as if it would be vexatious for one who has a betrothed to speak to her of a fight without victory. Or is it otherwise ?”

“No, no,” answered Pietro, smiling, but ashamed ; “it is as thou sayest.”

Thiodolf searched for Pietro’s dagger in the bushes, and with it gave him good advice to go to fight in future rather with a sword than with the northern battle-axe, which was sure to bring him to the ground ; and then they returned arm-in-arm to the castle.

CHAPTER VI.

As they sat together in the evening around the hearth, Pietro was so bright, so humble, so full of delicate tenderness towards Malgherita, that it seemed as if he would make amends to all for his former injustice, although it had not been spoken of. All were greatly pleased with the accomplished knight; and Malgherita shone upon him in her still joy with heightened love, like a morning rose. Amongst others, he sang in his mother-tongue the following lay :

“O my lovely distant home,
Where the sun doth ever shine;
Land of rivers, fruits, and flowers,
Holy rood and holy shrine;—

“I have left thee far behind,
I have found a dreary spot;
Yet my bosom, never sad,
Cheerful bears its gloomy lot.

“For, the while thy fairest rose
Blossoms loving at my side,
Easy 'tis to smile at storms,
And defy the raging tide.

“Yea, fair land, I have thee too;
For, whene'er we sing thy lays,
O'er our brows the breath of spring,
Soft and balmy, fluttering plays.”

“Ah! it must be very fair in your country,” said Thiodolf; “and glorious adventures must have befallen you that could drive you forth from that land of flowers. I think you will relate them to us here this very evening.”

But a displeased look fell upon him from Uncle Nefiof, who

said, "Art thou so without good manners that thou canst ask a guest whence he comes, and what has driven him to our hearth? Shame upon thee!"

Thiodolf shrugged his shoulders, and said, "There is amongst us a good old proverb: 'What is more helpless than a lame bear, a leaky ship, or a youth who has not yet been in foreign lands?' You must have patience with me till after my first flight, then I shall soon get good manners."

But Pietro grasped his hand, saying to Nefiof, "If it be not unpleasing to you and your wife, I would gladly take the opportunity to relate what has befallen Malgherita and me. We feel strange to one another as long as a veil hangs before the past."

"Right well," answered Nefiof; "if it seems good to you, I shall hear it myself willingly. We shall henceforth, without doubt, live together in greater confidence."

Pietro began his tale in the following words:

"On a gentle height, whence can be seen the fair Provençal coast and the rich port of Marseilles, there rises a stately castle, above whose walls many noble chestnuts, growing in the inner court, stretch their topmost branches; so that the traveller is allured, not less by this leafy green than by the grandeur of the building, to ask hospitality there, without fear of repulse. And truly he would not seek in vain, for it belongs to a very noble and powerful lord, who is commonly called in all the country round, 'the great baron.' Now, as a noble and knightly mind is seldom without the love of song and poetry, the great baron was wont to hold yearly, on an appointed day, a splendid feast, to which the most skilful troubadours of the province were invited from far and near; the minstrels especially, from all lands, had free entrance. Then arose among them all an harmonious contention, from which the victor departed, crowned with an olive-wreath by the two daughters of the baron, and the other minstrels with valuable gifts of gold and gear.

"On one of these days a knightly expedition, undertaken from joy of heart and youthful curiosity, brought me into the neighborhood of the castle. On all sides were streaming towards it joyous companies of knights and ladies, burghers and peasants; and over the chestnut-trees of the castle there floated a sweet

sound of bugles, flutes, and harps, as if the more surely to attract all friends of song to the pleasant strife. The meaning of the festival was soon explained to me, and I quickly found means to put on the dress of a troubadour. I never travelled without my dear lute at my side ; and as I was from childhood familiar with the gay science, with poetry, song, and music, I dared to hope that I might take a not unworthy place with the other challengers, and perchance adorn my brows, already often overshadowed by bloody laurel-wreaths, with the gentler olive-wreath of this day.

“ I entered the spacious court of the castle, and perceived that in the midst there was a lofty olive-tree ; its slender stem was wreathed with flowers, and on each side, leaning against the tree, were seated two bright, graceful female forms. You may have seen, Father Nefiof, in your southern voyages, lamps or delicate vases which have been dug out of the ruins of Roman cities, and which, in like manner, represent female figures leaning against a slender pillar or against a vase.”

“ I have, indeed, seen the like, and I can well think how beautiful must have been the baron’s daughters by the olive-tree,” answered the old man ; and a gleam, which seemed to have wandered from the young south, rested on his withered face.

“ There was one difference,” continued Pietro ; “ the two lovely statues were not of the same height. The one, beaming in majestic, somewhat stern, beauty, rose up like a tall lily—that was the elder sister, called Isolde. You can readily judge how lovely was the younger, who resembled a tiny blooming rosebud, when I tell you that she was called Malgherita, and now sits near us by the fire.”

The maiden blushed brightly, and all looked at her with admiration, while Pietro continued thus : “ Opposite to the lofty Isolde had ranged themselves such of the troubadours as purposed to sing stately lays, called *sirvents* by the Provençals, or some other solemn strains. Before the delicate Malgherita we stood, who meant to try our skill in lighter, more joyous measure ; and in the noble hall, just in front of the olive, was the great baron in all his pomp, begirt with vassals and retainers. Each of the maidens held already in her fair hand a wreath wherewith to adorn the most favored minstrel, and, with this sight before us, we

gave little heed to all the splendor of the majestic baron. The minstrel-tourney began in fair order; our melodious weapons poured through the blue air streams of sweetest harmony; and higher and more confidently did the hope beat in my heart that I should receive the wreath from Malgherita's hand. I may fearlessly say that I had almost gained the prize, but the deepening passion that thrilled through me at the sight of my beloved; the fancy, or perchance the certainty—oh, blush not so brightly, my sweet bride!—that a kindly glance of her eye fell on me—all this slackened the rapidity of my light song. A minstrel from Marseilles, emboldened by the feebler tones of my voice, raised a noble exulting strain, and the judges awarded him the prize. Anger and sorrow kept me from looking up as he knelt before Malgherita, and she wove the olive-wreath in his hair. The jewels and pearls which were proffered to me as second in skill, I divided, in the bitterness of my heart, amongst the bystanders, and then went hastily towards the castle-gate. My victor meant to bear his honors humbly, and had therefore drawn back into the crowd, so that we unexpectedly met near the gate. He had modestly taken off the wreath and held it in his hand, so that accidentally, in the press of people, it touched my hair. A sudden thought flashed through me. I snatched from my bosom a jewel worth a baron's castle, which I carried with me, lest I might need a large sum on my journey, and held it before the minstrel's eyes, saying: 'Let us make an exchange. You will not let your wreath adorn your head; and who sees it where you now hold it?' Dazzled by the splendor of the offer, the minstrel began the unworthy folly of bargaining. I was ashamed of his baseness, however much the wreath rejoiced me, and, as I gave him the jewel, I struck him sharply on the hand with my dagger, saying, 'Take a lesson with your bargain, and learn to mend your evil ways.' He shrieked out, and the blood spouted up as from a fountain. All pressed round me in displeasure and anger. In one moment I had placed the wreath on my head, and drawn my sword; the crowd, seeing that I was protected by a chestnut-tree behind me, drew back in terror from my threatening looks. But the baron stalked wrathfully towards me. Already my contempt of his gift of pearls and gold had made him hate me, and he

seemed glad that my outrage on the security of his castle gave him a pretext to revenge himself. He would not hearken to me, but only desired, as he held over me his naked sword, that I should instantly give up my arms, and surrender myself to his judgment, whether for pardon or condemnation. With eyes flashing fire, I sprang upon him, threw him on the ground by a dexterous stroke, and then rushed through the gate, securing safety to myself, my lute, and my olive-wreath. How I afterwards lingered for months in the neighborhood without ever falling into the power of the baron, though he diligently searched for me; how I succeeded in approaching Malgherita under many disguises, and at last won her pure love,—let me pass over for to-day the many-colored tale, which I would rather put hereafter into the bright light of some song or ballad. The night is growing darker, and I have yet much to relate. As soon as I had gained the knowledge of Malgherita's love, I repaired to a baron who had long received hospitality at my castle in Tuscany, and now very gladly repaid it me after the true knightly fashion. In his company, and with all the splendor which befitted my rank, I went openly to the castle of the great baron, and excited no small wonder in him, when, in the person of the troubadour he had so tyrannically pursued, I presented to him the Marquis of Castel-Franco. He offered me all knightly satisfaction; but when I, instead, asked for the hand of his youngest daughter, his large flashing eyes looked thoughtfully down. My companion had already warned me that, according to an old sacred custom of his house, the baron would hardly give his younger daughter in marriage before the elder; and that the proud Isolde looked so coldly on all knights, that not one of her many lovers had ever dared to approach her as wooers. I thought I saw a rejection ready to pass his imperious lips; but suddenly the great baron seemed to collect himself, a kindly gleam passed over his features, he grasped my hand and said, 'So let it be.' Perchance he thought that Malgherita's fame might suffer by any other issue of my suit, and he might find no fitting cause for its rejection; in short, my beloved was to be affianced to me, and the evening appointed for the solemn betrothal had arrived. The castle, lighted up with torches and lamps, shone out far into the valley. Lofty banners of my colors and

the baron's floated from every tower in the torchlight ; the guests were assembled, and, glowing with joy, I entered the hall, leading Malgherita ; her father walked before us. He was about to speak the words which were to make my happiness, when Isolde approached with solemn grace, and said, so that all could hear : ' Since you, O beloved father, betroth one of your daughters, and bright earthly hopes arise in long succession to you for future times, you will the more willingly let your other child likewise make a vow, after which she has thirsted from her heart for long years—a vow which has its object beyond this world, and betroths me to a heavenly Lord. To speak openly—and blame it not in me as pride, ye honored guests—I think not to find any other bridegroom who shall be worthy of me. I therefore here solemnly declare that it is in my mind to live and die as a nun.' ”

“ Ha, ha ! ” interrupted Thiodolph, “ I know about that ; uncle has told me of it. It must be a pretty catch to take one of those nunneries ; I hope to have that sport in some of my future voyages.” And then, as Malgherita looked at him in some displeasure, he added : “ Nay, I will do them no harm, those wonderful cloister-maidens ; only I should like to see them, and then I would open wide the doors and say : “ Such of you as will, go forth into the world, children. Those who will remain let them do so. No man must break his heart for such.’ ”

“ The baron thought very differently,” said Pietro. “ He first used entreaties, then threats, to make Isolde withdraw her overhasty word, and as she showed by her calm firmness that it was no question here of over haste, and that she had no thought of retracting, he broke forth into the wildest fury against me, asserting that I had come but to insult and ruin him, injuring and provoking him in every way ; and sooner would he give up both his daughters to the cloisters, yea, even to death, than give one of them to my arms. It was vain to speak to him, he broke off every engagement with me ; and as I turned to Isolde, she said, coldly : ‘ I grieve for you both—you were well mated ; but I cannot help you, for truly I can find my mate in no mortal.’ ”

“ Wait awhile,” murmured Thiodolf to himself ; “ I may yet make thee repent of this, proud maiden. Art thou, then, too good for a noble knight ? The tables may still be turned.”

Pietro was about to continue, but Malgherita laid her hand on his mouth, saying: "Say nothing to-night of how thou carriedst me away, beloved. Fearful things would be told, and sleep and dreams are drawing near."

"So be it," said Pietro; "I will then only say farther, that I carried my sweet prey on board ship; we did not sail at once for the coast of Tuscany, that we might deceive the boats which the baron and his allies of Marseilles undoubtedly sent in pursuit of us. We took the contrary direction, reached the open sea, and were driven, first by threatening ships and then by still more dangerous tempests, to this coast, where all, save Malgherita and myself, found their death."

"The rest were no great loss," said Thiodolf. "One can see that they were no Iceland sailors, or they would have better resisted the storm, and known more where they were. Those who have to do with sea-water will have to swallow some of it. But, Malgherita, do not be too much vexed that you are come to Iceland. I hope, I hope very much that you will soon have a glorious sport."

CHAPTER VII.

IMAGES of her fair home passed soothingly through Malgherita's mind ; so soon as she had closed her eyes in sleep, gales, as from orange-groves in spring, breathed upon her eyelids, and her ears were filled with songs of nightingales, and murmurings of the silvery streams which run through the Provençal plains. But hardly had she noticed this with deep delight and longing hope, when a hoarse voice broke in upon the sweet sounds, saying, " Who bade thee strike so madly in the dark, sir knight ? Knowest thou whom thou hast struck ? " And a bloody head seemed to look sharply into her eyes through their closed lids. She knew well that the voice and head were those of her father's castellan, whom Pietro, when he carried her away, had wounded, it might be mortally. Then she started in affright from her slumbers ; deep darkness lay around her, and old Gunhilda breathed heavily, in her sleep, from under the covering of her bed. Malgherita lay down again shuddering, and closed her eyes. Then lights danced before her, and reminded her that she had not put out the torches in her chamber the night of her flight, whereby her father's castle might have been set on fire,—a thought which often pressed heavily upon her, and now wove itself into a fearful fiery dream. It seemed to her that all the chestnut and olive-woods of Provence were in flames, and that the whole of her sweet native land was, through her fault, laid waste by an inextinguishable fire, which destroyed knightly castles, towns and villages, cloisters, and hermitages.

In the midst of these fearful visions, a voice pierced through Malgherita's sleep, crying out, " Hurrah, hurrah ! the fire-sport is begun !—the fire from the south has reached us ! " Malgherita sprang up with a shriek, and a red stream of light, pouring in through the window, met her eyes. Flames fearfully bright were darting up from the summit of a high mountain opposite,

changing night into day ; and a gigantic man was seen balancing himself on the branches of an elm close to the window, his dark form marked out against the dazzling light, while he clapped his hands, as if he took pleasure in the terrifying sight, and perhaps had caused it. Malgherita trembled, and murmured softly, " Ah, gracious God, now truly have I lost my senses, or the end of the world is coming ! " Then the tall man on the tree struck against the window, laughing ; and the maiden in breathless terror, threw herself on the bed of Gunhilda, who was only now fully awakened.

" Gently, gently," said she, after looking awhile through the window at the flames, " it is but an old acquaintance, which has never brought harm to our island, but is its most brilliant ornament. Mount Hecla is giving out flames ; there is nothing to fear—we are in no danger."

Malgherita looked up at her, half-comforted, half doubtful, and was about to question her, when the giant on the tree again began to move, and sang the following words :—

" Rocky cauldron's flaming stream,
Flicker upwards, dance and gleam !
Many elfins stir the same—
Laugh, good people, o'er the flame !

Echo, give your answer back !
Bluster, winds ! and, lightnings, crack !
Shrieks, and yells, and torches glowing,
Blazing torrents ever flowing !
Yells, and shrieks, and torches bright !—
Ha ! behold a glorious sight !"

And again he turned to the window, laughing and clapping his hands. Malgherita hid her face in the garments of the old woman, whom she implored to save her from that dreadful spectre. Gunhilda went quickly to the window, and cried angrily, " Mad nephew, what art thou doing ? Wilt thou frighten to death the tender maiden here with thy uncouth singing and clapping ? "

" What ! " answered Thiodolf, gently from without, " am I again mistaken ? Is she not pleased at this ? My uncle has so often told me that there are fire-mountains in the south, just like

this. I have been hoping so long that there would be an eruption of our Hecla, because I thought that little Malgherita would then be quite at her ease, and comfortable with us as if at home. And is it not so? Perhaps there is not noise enough,—as she said lately that the sea here was not blue enough. Wait a while: I will just sing a magic song or two to the flames, then they will rage as wildly as Loki the bad god, when the serpent's poison trickles on him." And he began anew to attune his voice for the fearful song; but Gunhilda called to him that Malgherita lay half senseless from the terror he had already caused her. Then Thiodolf climbed down from his tree, shaking his head, and very much troubled.

Gunhilda's tender soothing at length made Malgherita lift up again by degrees her delicate trembling form; and she looked out not without a feeling of awful pleasure, at the burning Hecla, of which a few broken stories had reached her ears in Provence, and which she now with her own eyes saw so wonderfully near her.

Rest was over for this night; morning began to dawn, and the men were heard assembling in the hall. Gunhilda led her trembling foster-child down the dark stairs, across which fell occasionally gleams of the distant flames as they shot upwards.

Nefiof, Pietro, and Thiodolf were seated round the hearth. The women took their usual raised seats, and many reproofs and scoldings were given to the wild youth who had so terrified the delicate maiden. He heard them all very humbly, with sunken head; only murmuring at times that it was most unheard of and perverse ill-luck, which had thus spoilt the pleasure that he had so long been expecting for Malgherita. In future he would think of other and much better sports.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE fire-stream from Mount Hecla had ceased ; for several days the island had lain calm, and of a misty grey, in the midst of the wide sea ; it was cold, for already wintry storms breathed their wild notes across the plains. Long before had been heard the loud flapping of the wings of the wild swans, as they swept away to the south ; the trees were dripping with heavy moisture, and let fall their brown leaves, like a solemn covering, over valley and plain. At this time Thiodolf was very little in the house ; he thought that now the woods were in their gayest dress. How could one ever dream of more beautiful trees than these in their golden, many-colored hues ! He was sure that not the far-famed south itself could boast of brighter. Pietro and Nefiof laughed at him, but could not refrain from taking part in the youth's delight in hunting, and often went with him through the misty forests.

While these expeditions lasted, Malgherita felt often oppressed and ill at ease in the dark lofty house. Gunhilda's grave activity, and the solemn occupations of the household, chilled her whole existence : and then at times she thought that Pietro was gone forth never to return again, and that she should at length stiffen in the cold world around, and pass the rest of her troubled, joyless life like one enchanted, whom none could understand. One thing alone stood out brightly before her eyes, and in some way bound her to this northern island,—the elfin tales of Thiodolf, and the sweet name given to these invisible little creatures, the "good people." She had learnt all the many lays about them, and often sang them in her soft Provençal tongue. She loved one of these especially, which told how the elves visit youths and maidens in their dreams, and give them riddles ; and whoever the next day rightly guesses a riddle, finds, as a reward, a little golden tablet on the grass, with beautiful pictures on it. Now it

often seemed to Malgherita, when she awoke, as if a band of elves had held their dance before her bed, and that the fairest of these tiny, beautiful and many-colored creatures had approached her with courteous salutation, and proposed a riddle to her; but she could never, when awake, recall what this riddle was. Then she would go forth thoughtfully into a neighboring valley, more fertile and fair than the others, and where the high grass looked as if amongst it might be found the golden prize tablet. And often, when the last rays of the early setting sun slanted over the valley, and the stream ran more wildly over the pebbles as the night-wind rose, Malgherita would still stand musing under the tall shrubs, and still come back to the house without her riddle or her glittering tablets.

As she stood thus one evening, a light seemed suddenly to flash upon her mind, and brought to her at least one or two verses of the elfin riddle. What she could collect ran somewhat as follows:

“Far in the land of vines two sisters dwell;
 Two mighty swords are buried among rocks;
 The sisters twain pour out a foaming drink;
 The swords draw forth a stream of royal blood.
 When the two sisters dwell by the same hearth”

.

Then some lines were wanting; again she recollected clearly

When the two swords the same stout arm
 Shall wield”

Here she failed again, and a shudder came over her as she tried to recall what followed. A few detached words, of which she could not gather the meaning, increased, as they came up before her, her indistinct terror, and she sighed: “Ah, thou riddle, I shall never win me a bright tablet through thee.”

Just then something shone near her brightly amidst the high grass, and she joyfully went towards it. But what was her horror when two huge shining horns stretched up from a grim hairy bear's head, and slowly arose the figure of a tall growling monster, covered with various skins, and wound about with wreaths

of moss and rushes. The frightful apparition danced several times around Malgherita, who remained motionless from fear; then he climbed up a young slender tree, bent it down towards the next tree, to which he swung himself, and thence on to another and another in succession. The leaves of the shaken trees fell rustling; and at length Malgherita also sank down on the fallen leaves, dizzy with affright. Immediately the monster sprang to the ground, caught up the maiden in his arms, and bore her away, now so completely senseless from terror, that she could not hear one of his kind words; for many kind words did he speak, in most hearty and sincere trouble for his delicate burden. It was none other than Thiodolf, who, to amuse Malgherita, had meant to appear before her as an elfin king. He always fancied that the dainty little creatures were subject to a terrible gigantic man; and now, again, all had turned out so vexatiously and perversely!

As he went through the wood with steps more and more hasty, that he might the sooner bring the maiden to the house, and give her to Aunt Gunhilda's tender care, Pietro, who was on the track of a wolf, came from an opposite direction. He, perceiving his betrothed in the arms of her fearful bearer, threw forthwith his dagger at him to stop his rapid course. The dagger struck, but rebounded harmlessly from the dress of skins; and Thiodolf strode on as calm and indifferent as if he had not noticed the attack. Pietro's wrath and fear for Malgherita burnt higher; he hurled, with his utmost strength, one of the two northern lances which he carried for his chase, and again struck the same spot; so that Thiodolf slightly bent his body, but without slackening his speed. But when Pietro raised the second spear, Thiodolf tore the strange covering from his head, and flung it against Pietro's breast with such force, that the knight staggered back a step, calling out, at the same time, "Leave me alone, I tell thee, with thy foolish lances! I am taking little Malgherita to Aunt Gunhilda, and there is need of haste." Pietro, perceiving that it was his strange friend, would have asked how all these wonders had come to pass; but Thiodolf only answered, "I have again been playing the fool. I will tell thee all when we are within."

They reached the house with rapid steps. The wise old aunt,

who guessed the whole story from her nephew's strange attire, shook her head as she took the unconscious maiden into her skilful hands, and by degrees, with Pietro's help, brought her back to life ; whilst Thiodolf took off the rest of his disguise, and then bound up the deep wound, which he now first discovered that Pietro's spear had made in his hip. Old Nefiolf joined them, and in his joy that all was ended so happily, he bade the youth refresh himself with a goblet of mead. Malgherita herself smiled, and held out her little hand to him, as she told him to be comforted ; she knew how kindly he meant towards her, and she wanted nothing more. But Thiodolf sorrowfully drew near, saying, "That is not enough—that is not enough, by a great deal. You, indeed, always forgive my crazy freaks ; but I see now very well that I am much too rough a tool to dare remain any longer near such a delicate and brittle little image. I might break it in two, without knowing I had done it. I always like her to be merry ; and when I try to make her merry, she faints away. Good night, uncle ; good night, aunt ; good night, you fair betrothed. We shall not soon see each other again."

Then he sought out diligently for the best amongst the arms which hung round the walls, took a good supply of them, left the hall greeting his friends and sighing, and went out into the dark night.

CHAPTER IX.

ALL disturbances vanished with Thiodolf. The days came and went still and peaceful; the stiller as now winter, stark and cold, lay upon the island, stretching its snowy icebergs far into the sea. The still flame of Pietro and Malgherita's love burnt as in a cold grave. When they looked in each other's brightening eyes, they felt indeed the heavenly magic power of love, and they stood as in the midst of a blooming garden; but a glance out into the snowy court, or upon the yet more snowy mountains, fearfully reminded them of their loneliness in Iceland. The old couple often sighed deeply; and it was easy to see that their sighs were for their nephew, so that Pietro and Malgherita felt that they had troubled and brought evil to their hosts; and all from the depth of their hearts wished the wondrous Thiodolf back again. One evening, when the fierce cold without had covered with ice the coloured windows of the hall, and the trees were creaking in all their branches beneath the cutting storm, the inmates of the house sat mournfully around the hearth. The old Gunhilda, who was wont to be calm and quiet in all winter-storms, like a grey-haired prophetess who had taken root in the land, now shuddered if the cocks crowed without; or the hounds howled, or the wild beasts of the forest roared around. At length she asked Pietro to relate something cheering of his blooming southern land, something about that time when, under various disguises, he wooed Malgherita. He began as follows:—

“My fair bride was sitting one day with her mighty father under a tall linden-tree, which spread far before the castle-gate; the shades of evening were already falling very dark, and night-birds were skinning close to the ground, touching brooks and streams with their wings, and giving warning of approaching rain. Grey heavy clouds lowered in the heavens—”

“I thought,” interrupted old Gunhilda, “that you would tell

us something cheerful and pleasant, which would bring us fair images in our dreams, and now you come out with such strange words."

"Have patience," said Pietro; "all will be bright and happy afterwards. I was passing sorrowfully through the valley, and my only pleasure was when the night-wind sighed through the strings of my lute. It is true that they seemed attuned to the dismal sound, and only gave forth distressed discordant tones, such as a dying man breathes in his last agony."

"Pietro, Pietro," cried Malgherita, "what art thou saying? why do only such fearful words come to thy lips?"

"I know not," answered Pietro, after a short pause. "But you must all have patience, and my tale will soon be brighter; thou thyself knowest, Malgherita, that it will be so, and that all turned to a joyous love-sport. I would have given much to have gone up to my beloved, whose gentle whispers reached me in the valley below, as she spoke to her father; but I knew not how this would have been borne by my enemy. Then came a priest towards me through the valley, muttering prayers. I knew the great baron would willingly receive me if I wore a priest's garb, and so I might be able to whisper a few words in Malgherita's ear. I rapidly and unexpectedly went up to the traveller, seized him with a strong grasp, and drew him into the chestnut-grove; my dagger glittered before his eyes—"

Nefiolf here interrupted him, shaking his head, and saying: "We here in this island have indeed sometimes slain Christian priests. The bones of one of them are mouldering under the roots of the elm-trees, where I myself helped to bury him; but how thou, an Italian knight, couldst murderously attack a priest of thy religion—"

"I did him no harm," said Pietro, "though truly the passion of love often wakes other passions. The exchange which I offered to the old priest was rich for him; the gold about me, the jewels on my mantle, might be well worth half his monastery. But I thought it a merry jest that he should deem himself plundered by a robber, and then when his senses returned should find himself royally enriched. The priest's features were distorted through terror, and as some moonbeams which penetrated the

thick bushes fell upon his face, they made him look like a hideous corpse. His eyes were fixed, his voiceless mouth open—”

“Just so looked the priest whom we buried beneath the elm,” said Nefiof. “May it not have been his ghost which appeared to thee in Provence?”

These words sounded very awful to all present. They looked at each other, and shuddered; no one took courage to ask for an explanation, for each thought that involuntarily yet more fearful words might pass their lips. At that moment the doors of the hall turned very gently on their hinges, and a little dark figure of a man glided in. As he came near, all saw that he was a deadly pale Christian priest. The sitters around the fire shrank back trembling, the new-comer trembled likewise; and as they thought that he did so like one who was a guest of the dark cold grave, they drew yet closer to each other, until at length he raised his voice with these words:

“He who whirled me hither like a stormy wind may well know what I have to do here; but I know it not. Receive me kindly. Did I know that any Christian was present, I would say that my Christian name is Jonas—I am called the poor priest Jonas; and I was hurled here as by a mighty Iceland whale, no doubt to the praise and glory of our Lord God, for all turns to that, even in this so deeply erring world.”

Pietro gave him his hand, saying: “Even if your hosts are not your companions in faith, yet Christian people sit by the fire, and you may, without fear, relate what has driven you hither. I, a Christian knight, will insure you from all danger.”

“There are other Christians in this island,” answered Jonas. “A good pious man has a house yonder, in that milder region nearer to the valley, which is called Hlidarende. He has been won to our blessed faith, and is called Gunnar. I have been kindly received and protected by him; yea, he promised that none should dare disturb me by force so long as I remained his guest.”

“Assuredly no Icelfander would venture upon that,” said Nefiof. “Gunnar is great and powerful in our land. When I say Icelfander, I speak of men of flesh and bones; for as to elves, none can answer for them.”

“I think it was a man who bore me hither from the hall of

Gunnar," said Jonas. "Tall and giant-like, he appeared before me as I was walking near the house of my protector; he threw me over his shoulders as a man would throw a burden of light weight, and severely wounded two of Gunnar's servants who came to my help. Thus he passed over hill and through valley, and across the raging Marhar river, and at length flung me down in your court just before the door of this hall. It was truly no delicate alluring elfin spirit; and I believe he yet tarries, in his giant bulk, close to your dwelling."

"So help me Thor!" cried Nefiof; "I think it is none other than my madcap nephew who has begun this game."

"Begun and ended too," said Thiodolf, as he came into the hall, kindly greeting all. "But what have you to say against it, and, above all, what cause is there for wonder?"

"What?" cried old Nefiof, in great wrath. "Recollect only, thou wild youth, that Gunnar is the mightiest and richest inhabitant of our whole island. Is a murderous war to break out amongst us through thy mad pranks? Take thyself away from us, if thou canst not keep quiet. It will be a bloody work to protect thee, and yet I cannot let thee fall. Take thyself away from us, I say, and leave at least my house, and if it may be, the whole island, in peace."

At first Thiodolf had listened very quietly; by degrees a deep red colored his face, his eyes flashed like two stars through stormy clouds, he doubled his fists, seized an iron cauldron which stood beside him, and flung it on the ground so that it bent in like thin tin; then he strode firmly and rapidly up to his uncle. Nefiof had suddenly become calm; he looked down on the ground, and did not again open his lips. But Thiodolf broke forth, crying with a voice wildly loud: "I am to go forth from thy dwelling! Uncle! I am to go forth from the island! Send me some one who will drive me forth. I deem thou mayst search long before thou canst find such a one. Have a care, old brother of my father! I have as much right to this dwelling as thou, and my arms and hands are—the great Thor knows it—far stronger than thine. Thou doest well to keep thyself quiet. I may perchance be a fool, and of rough uncultivated mind, and I do not make a

noise without cause : but when I am chid over-much I feel all my blood boil. Keep quiet, uncle ; I advise thee for thy good." Old Gunhilda trembled violently ; Nefiof did not move ; he only said softly in Pietro's ear : "He is fearful in his wrath. We call it in northern tongue the berserker rage, that which is now upon him. At such times a strong man like him cannot be overcome, and knows neither father nor brother. Beware, in the name of all the gods, that thou do nothing to excite his wrath. We should all be lost, as many as are in this hall."

Malgherita had heard some of these words, and she held her little hands before her face and cried in silence. After a time Thiodolf looked at her, and became at once quiet and gentle.

"Little Malgherita," said he, "thou must not frighten thyself. It was only for thy good and Pietro's that I came here so unexpectedly. This evening we will have a wedding. I can bear no longer that you two, who love each other dearly, should not yet be man and wife. And since a priest is needed for that, who serves the white Christ, I found out this old man, and without more ado brought him with me hither. Now, old Sir Jonas, join them together, and all will be right."

Malgherita and Pietro, trembling at this sudden happiness, and the others at the hardly restrained outbreak of Thiodolf, and at the solemn hour, yielded to Thiodolf's will. The priest gave his blessing to the lovers, less terrified at the storm which whistled and howled dismally round the house than the terrible youth at his side ; and Gunhilda took the newly married pair to their chamber, while the wind and the snow-flakes from the sea beat against the windows.

CHAPTER X.

"WE have then had a wedding in Iceland!" said Thiodolf, as they all sat the next morning at breakfast in the hall. "How did you like it, dear bride and bridegroom? I think that though you were a little frightened at first, and the storm sang a wild song without, you are yet well pleased with the whole business, as it all fell out, and not altogether displeased with me. Is it not so!" And he stretched out both his hands to the young husband and wife with hearty good-nature; Pietro and Malgherita warmly pressed them.

"There is but one thing to be thought about," said Nefiof, "but that is a very important one."

"Now," cried Thiodolf, "I shall be glad to hear this marvellous fact."

"But what can I do?" answered the old man. "When I begin to speak out what is in my heart, it is all one as to begin to chide thee; and then thou wilt break forth into thy berserker rage, which belongs to our race as to all the northern hero-races, and thou wilt destroy us all."

"Uncle," said Thiodolf, "after the berserker rage one becomes powerless as a child; then you can bind me and take every sort of vengeance on me which comes into your head."

"And when we all are slain by thy wild hand," returned his uncle, "who is there to take vengeance on thee?"

"That is true," answered Thiodolf, shaking his head; "that makes it a very bad business. I will tell you something, uncle; only scold me in moderation, and then I think I can keep myself quiet. All the year through, you know, I am used to a certain amount of grumbling. It is true that yesterday somewhat of the old rage broke loose in me, and therefore to-day I can less answer for myself than usual."

"Just so," said Nefiof; "one must be very much on one's guard with thee."

“Ay!” replied Thiodolf; “but if my berserker rage is strong, I am strong too, and I can keep it down for a good while. If it gets too much for me, I will stamp with my feet; and then leave off at once, my very dear uncle, if your neck is precious to you. And now take courage, in the name of all the gods.”

“Well, then,” began his uncle, “what couldst thou mean by putting so completely out of sight respect and good manners towards the noble Gunnar? Like a forward, impatient boy, thou didst tear the pious priest from his protector, and bring to pass with noise, injustice, and outrage, what might have been done with peace, gentleness, and justice. Didst thou think, my boy, that thou wert the Mount Hecla, who pours forth fire and smoke over Iceland according to its good pleasure? Nay, truly, thou art not that; and if thou chooseth to fancy thyself to be such, we must, as soon as may be, bring thee to thy senses again, by showing thee at once thy mad handywork. I will do my best in this; and Gunnar, unasked, will do as much. With all his relations and allies—”

Then Thiodolf stamped on the ground, and the old man was silent. But the youth only cried out: “I rather like you to scold me; for I can then think on the face of my dear father, as he lay so still, and stiff, and dead, when the spear of the sea-robber had struck him, and they bore him to the grave, and I followed him, moaning. But I pray you earnestly to abstain from the like foolish threatenings about Gunnar and his relations. Let him come, with uncles and cousins, and, if he pleases, with aunts and sisters to boot. I have long had a great wish to make face against a little body of five or six warriors, who would come upon me all at once; and if every one in this court wishes to encounter but half the number, it would be light play with Gunnar.”

At this moment one of the household entered, announcing that a messenger from Gunnar stood without, of wrathful mien, and bearing a red shield, after a warlike fashion. He demanded that the Christian priest, Jonas, should be restored, and would not hear of receiving hospitality.

“There is not the least need that he should!” cried Thiodolf, still somewhat wild from what had been said; he then seized the priest by the arm, and hastened out with him, to give such answer

as he thought fit. Pietro would have followed to protect his fellow-Christian, but Nefiof implored him to remain.

“My wild nephew,” said he, “is not wicked, and will assuredly do the old man no hurt. But since yesterday evening the blood runs madly in his veins, and he does not so master himself that any one can speak to him uninvited without some mischief probably ensuing.”

At the same time Malgherita held fast her husband with her little hands, anxiously and caressingly, so that Pietro could in no ways leave the hall.

In the meanwhile Thiodolf, mounted on the outer wall of the court, held the old priest over the oak palisade, suspended in the air, and called out to the messenger: “Since thou hast made thy request so boldly and after such unmannerly fashion, it would be a rightful return to thee if I were to throw thy jewel broken at thy feet. But I myself love him too well for that. Wait a little, and I will bring him down to thee forthwith.” Then he drew back the priest, stroked his cheek lovingly, and carried him down to the door with the attention and reverence of a son. As he gave him over to the messenger, he said to the latter, “Take that dear good old man carefully home for me. I should have done it myself, had you not made so needless a noise with this coming of yours. And you may tell your lord that it need not come to war between us. I will give myself up to him at the next assembly on the Rock of Justice, and submit to what he himself shall acknowledge to be fair.” Therewith he returned to his friends around the fire, and said, smiling: “Be in no trouble about a war. I see that with fellow-countrymen that is not to be thought of. Still I will not be threatened; and I know well how I can peaceably get out of the business. But if Gunnar will have war and tumult,—well, then, it is his fault, and I shall no longer be in the least sorry for it.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE powerful protector of the old Jonas seemed not to believe in the peaceable intentions which Thiodolf had notified to him through his messenger ; on the contrary, he diligently furnished himself and his friends with arms and horses, and summoned from afar all his allies, merely, he said, to lead them in the beginning of spring to the general assembly of the people at the Rock of Justice ; but it could plainly be seen, by the disciplining of his troops, that he looked rather to do, or to prevent, some bold deed, than to make preparations for an august and imposing appearance. Jonas spoke on this subject to his noble host with affectionate earnestness, and required that he, as a Christian, should show himself like his heavenly Master, by agreeing to a peaceful reconciliation ; but Gunnar answered :

“ Dear old sir, I do all this only from necessity ; for the unruly youth, I tell you, will do none of all those just things that he has promised me.”

“ Ay, ay,” said Jonas, shaking his old head, “ you good Icelanders assuredly belong to that noble German race from which we Englishmen also are proud of having come. And can you thus doubt one another’s word ? To me that wild young lion appeared a noble creature of the Lord.”

“ I will not deny it,” said Gunnar ; “ on the contrary, we Icelanders look upon him as a glorious scion of his house, who in time will bring much honor to our island. Neither do I say that he means to tell me falsehoods ; only you yourself cannot deny that he is wild as a storm in autumn ; and who knows whither the storm may carry him ? But, at all events, the bold son of Asmundur will not easily get over this business ; for although many former things have been passed over and forgiven him in the assembly of the people, they are all very wrath with him this time. They might be too harsh with him ; and as I am a

rich and powerful man, it is my duty to look carefully to this, for the sake of the whole island."

They had often thus spoken together ; for Jonas, although he had not much to say against Gunnar's arguments, yet always led him back to the subject, thinking by slow degrees to bring him to milder thoughts. The mid-day sun was now shining bright over the snow, and it looked almost as if a kindly sun were rising in Gunnar's mind. He showed more mirth than disgust at Thiodolf's wild impetuosity ; and he owned that bold mad deeds were not uncommon amongst the youths of Iceland ; only, he added, none had ever been quite so daring as Thiodolf's. Just then an old servant entered the room ; he looked vexed and astonished, and said that one of the foreign soldiers, who were now pressing into Gunnar's service on account of the high pay, had just struck dead the finest bull of the herd, because the noble creature on its way home had a little threatened him with his horns. Gunnar was about to burst forth ; but Jonas said, smiling :

"Now truly, dear sir, the weal or wo of Iceland is not here concerned, and you may, without blame, show yourself to be a patient Christian."

Gunnar nodded an assent, and desired that the soldier might be brought in. A tall stalwart figure entered, clothed in iron, with a cap of bear-skin half drawn over his face, his chin and upper lip covered with a thick grizzled beard.

"Why didst thou kill the bull?" asked Gunnar.

"It was but stroke of axe against stroke of horn," answered the soldier. "The return seems to me fair ; and such an exchange has been heard of before. I should have been but a bad help to you in peril, had I, instead, cautiously avoided the danger. Trust me, my way was much the quickest and best."

"The quickest, may be," said Gunnar, half-displeased and half-laughing ; "but as to the best?"

"If my way pleases you not," answered the soldier, "then let me go. I will not take your pay any longer. Things are here very different from what I looked for,—neither bear-hunting nor other fights ! There are indeed bear-skins for us to sleep on ; but except that, you have hardly the least thing which an honorable man can take pleasure in."

Gunnar's wrath was kindled, and he struck with his drawn sword at the speaker ; but a beseeching look from the Christian priest softened him at once, and he said : " Go, if it please thee."

" Yes, with a wound," answered the soldier ; and stretched out his arm, from which the hot blood ran from a scratch which Gunnar's sword had made.

Gunnar offered him in amends gold and weapons ; but the indignant soldier would take nothing at first, until at last he changed his purpose, and breaking off the head of a beautiful lance which Gunnar held towards him, he cried out : " I will take away this as a memorial ; and now all is well. But, Lord Gunnar, swear to me, before this witness, that you will in no ways bring a complaint against me at the Rock of Judgment, and that our strife is dead and buried for ever."

Gunnar did so, before Jonas and the troops who had come into the hall ; and the soldier, wrapping the spear-head in his mantle, strode out of the house. Jonas praised Gunnar's conduct ; but found him after this compliance, which he rated high, less willing than ever to give up his warlike preparations against Thiodolf.

The bold youth was the while following the winter-chase in the mountains and on the sea-coasts ; he came very rarely to his home, where much anxiety was felt about him by those who knew the power and the wrath of his rich enemy. But all this did not disturb him ; and as soon as spring sent its first thawing breath over the sea, he prepared with light cheerfulness for his journey to the assembly of the people.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE is in Iceland a high rock, which stands up in the midst of a green valley, once overgrown with shady bushes, so that a man could lie under them, and hear and see whoever was speaking from the summit of the rock. In the days of Thiodolf, this rock was called the *Rock of Judgment*; and it was the custom at the beginning of spring, or any appointed time, to meet there, and to speak of what was for the good and welfare of the whole nation. For Iceland was then a free country, and the people were judged by none other than certain judges whom they themselves chose, and who were called *Lagmann*.

In the spring we are speaking of, the brave Icelanders were standing or sitting together all armed, as beseems noble and brave men; so that many bright spear-points flashed through the branches, and many polished shields shone on the fresh grass, as they lay at their masters' feet. Some had also brought their hounds and falcons with them. Many a large, beautifully marked dog lay stretched by his brave lord; and cunning falcons sat on their shoulders, or swept around their heads with slow and well-trained flight.

Thiodolf was thus standing in the throng, with his faithful falcon on his shoulder; and he held his tame wolf by a chain, which he could let slip, if he pleased, in an instant. He had refused all other companions: his uncle he thought too old and thoughtful for many things that might come to pass on this occasion; had Pietro come with him, Malgherita would have wept till her bright eyes were dimmed; and as to warriors of lower rank, he could protect himself as well without them as with them. In truth, it was easy to see that he was more likely to give help than to need it; and in spite of the brilliant company of kinsmen, friends, and soldiers who surrounded the rich Gunnar, the two sides did not seem so very unequal. But all the Icelanders now looked ask-

ance and vexed at the youth whom they had so dearly loved, full of sorrowful displeasure for the harm which he had brought upon himself.

Then Gunnar ascended the rock, and with many wise words he made known the terrible outrage that Thiodolf had offered him,—outrage yet more terrible to the security of their beloved island, which hitherto their fathers had preserved in peace and honor, safe from the tyranny of imperious chiefs. But could it be called decent and seemly, when every bold youth might break through the limits of the law, plundering and attacking to his heart's content? This misdeed must be punished, and Thiodolf must declare what expiation he will make for his offence,—whether he will give gold, arms, horses, or a piece of land,—or whether he will betake himself to exile for many years.

When Gunnar had finished his rather long speech, he made as though he would have left the place to his enemy; but Thiodolf called up to him, "Remain thou there: we shall have room side by side, and the business will soon be over."

Gunnar perchance thought of a bloody ending; for he drew tighter the fastenings of his armor, put on his iron cap, and said with forced calmness, "Come up, thou wild adversary; I await thee here."

Thiodolf fastened the wolf's chain securely to an oak, bade the monster to be quiet, and then the next instant sprang, with all his powerful activity, beside Gunnar on the rock. The falcon hovered high above them both.

"Hast thou now done with thy speech?" asked the youth, boldly; and as Gunnar answered that he had, Thiodolf broke forth into a loud, merry laugh, saying, "That is well; for thou hast already used many needless words, which will profit thee nothing during thy whole life."

"Do you hear it, Icelanders?—do you hear how he scorns me and your laws?" cried Gunnar, angrily; and a murmur of deep threatening wrath was heard through the whole assembly, foretelling a speedy outbreak. But Thiodolf stamped with his foot till the rock seemed to shake under him; while he called out to the people below, with his loud penetrating voice, "Silence!" No sound was heard again but that of the wolf, who howled loudly

and fiercely ; but no sooner had his master cried, "Hold thou too thy peace—the business concerns thee as little as those others," than he laid himself quietly down, and curled up like an obedient dog.

"Countrymen," said Thiodolf, "you must not again begin to be angry, if I again begin to laugh ; for see now, I cannot think of the long-drawn-out speech of the wise rich man without laughing. He has taken so much trouble about it ; I think I can see him in his dwelling, how he pondered over it, and tried it before his household, and perhaps before his guests ; and they all marvelled greatly at it, and at length knew it so well that they could even help him, did he stumble at any part ; and then he at length clambered up this rock, and brought his wisdom with him ; and then—all these pains and majestic appearance are in vain—my children, I must laugh ; so, have a little patience, I will soon make you see how very much he has wasted his breath."

He broke out again into a loud laugh ; and the wild youthful merriment was caught by the whole assembly, till none, not even those who had Gunnar's business most at heart, could resist the infection.

Then the irritated complainant grew more wrathful ; he lowered the point of his spear towards Thiodolf. But the latter immediately grasped his adversary's arm, and cried out, "Beware, that thou dost not make me angry. I could easily break thy bones in pieces, and I should be sorry to do it in this honorable assembly ; but the guilt would be thine own. How goes it with the bear, when he seizes the wild bull ? But be patient, open thine eyes, and say thyself whether this broken lance does not forbid thee to bring any complaint against me." And he held before Gunnar's eyes the broken polished head of a lance ; and, for further proof, he drew back his sleeve, and showed a deep scar, which gave sure evidence that he was the same with whom Gunnar had made a solemn reconciliation before witnesses, on the occasion of the slaughtered bull. Gunnar looked down surprised and ashamed. At length he declared, while his cheeks glowed with shame and displeasure, that he was truly outwitted, and that the whole business was ended. Hardly had the words passed his lips, when Thiodolf clasped him lovingly in his arms, and kissed him heartily,

saying: "Bear me ill-will no longer; indeed, I used no craft in the matter, but it all turned out so of itself. I had lately met the old pirate Mordur on the sea-coast as I went to fish, and I slew him dead with my battle-axe."

A loud cry of joy interrupted the youth, for this same pirate Mordur had been the terror of the whole island, and none had dared to oppose him hand to hand. Some voices in the crowd asked wherefore the youth had so long kept back the good news; but Thiodolf stamped violently on the rock, and thundered out, "Silence! What more is there to be said," continued he, "when one soldier has thrown down another never to rise again? It has often happened before, and will often happen again, in this world. But when I had dug a grave for the grim old fellow, and was about to lay him in it, it came across me that if I had such a long grizzled beard on my lips and chin, none would know me again. I cut off his wild bush of hair, made myself a good beard with it, drew my bearskin cap over my face, and first only thought of having a little sport with the gentle Provençal lady who lives in our house. But as she has already been twice almost killed by my jokes—she is not, indeed, very strong by nature—I thought to myself, thou hadst better try it at once on Gunnar; perchance thou mightest do him some service which would reconcile him to thee. If that may not be—well, I must submit, if I am banished the island for some years, at the Rock of Judgment; at all events, I meant to go forth to seek adventures. Then it all happened as Gunnar himself can best relate. Dear Gunnar, be pacified; in truth, I have meant nothing but good towards you."

The true-hearted youth obtained ready forgiveness from Gunnar; and to honor his valiant deed of slaying the pirate Mordur, the noblest inhabitants of Iceland accompanied the brave Thiodolf to his home with the sound of horns and joyful cries.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN one of those lovely days which spring brings to the earth, and with which she rejoices even the remote and far-north Iceland, Pietro and Malgherita had wandered down to the sea-shore. Their way had led them unconsciously to the same spot where, in the autumn, they had reached the land after their shipwreck; and as all now looked bright and blooming around them, and the sun gaily flashed upon the blue waves, thoughts of the past came over them, and they sang together this lay :

PIETRO.

A fisher wander'd by a brook
Which water'd Provence' flowery land,
And dewy pearls fell from his eyes,
And dropt into his hollow hand.
A golden lute upon his shoulders gleam'd,
And almost like an errant-knight he seem'd.

MALGHERITA.

A maid upon the castle-wall
Gazed on the meadows from above,
And then there came a tuneful sound,
Which floated as on wings of love.
It was the fisherman who pass'd that way,
And sang, O heaven! a most harmonious lay.

PIETRO.

An ancient bearded warrior knight,
Lord of that castle fair,
Came back from hunting through the fields,
And rein'd his proud steed there.
" Say, fisher, hast thou taken aught this day?
Come with me, and thy toil I will repay."

MALGHERITA.

A maiden saw them from the wall,
As underneath they past,

And fearful paced she up and down,
 And her heart beat thick and fast.
 Full well she knew the gentle fisher youth,
 And wish'd that no one else should guess the truth.

PIETRO.

A fisher pass'd the castle gate,
 He gain'd the castle-hall :
 " How came so many fish, fair youth,
 Into thy net to fall ?"
 " My lord, I draw them with my singing sweet,
 Well nigh with all the world I might compete."

MALGHERITA.

An ancient warrior has desired
 To hear the fisher's lays ;
 " He need not now ride far," he said,
 " To win his meed of praise."
 In sooth, the old knight's daughter, young and fair,
 With her sweet song and lute, was ready there.

PIETRO.

A maiden on the fisher gazed
 When he had sung his lay,
 And by the golden gate of song
 Love found his silent way.
 And when the fisher turn'd him to depart,
 Ah me ! he bore away her little heart !

MALGHERITA.

A fisher left the castle-gate,
 His eyes were filled with dew ;
 The shaft of love was in his heart,
 And pierced it through and through.
 Again, again he came disguised that way.
 Again, again he sang his gentle lay.

BOTH TOGETHER.

A noble knight and lady fair,
 In northern fields of snow,
 Sang of the sweet and sunny south,
 And their hearts were fill'd with wo.
 They sigh'd, they wept, their cheeks with crimson burn'd,
 And for the flowers of home their bosoms yearn'd.

And as in these verses they recalled one of the pleasant devices

which Pietro had formerly planned and accomplished, that he might see Malgherita in her father's castle, a longing after their fair southern land arose in their hearts, and they gazed on the sea as if beseeching it to bear them back to Tuscany, to the blooming valley above which shone the noble castle of the Marquis Pietro Castelfranco. Then there sounded to them from the sea the following song :—

“ Who will go forth with me
Over the glassy sea ?
A fast-sailing vessel and beauteous is mine :
Swift will she bear ye,
Aye swiftly and surely,
Back to the land of the olive and vine.”

This time Malgherita thought indeed that she heard the voices of some of those elves whom Thiodolf called “ good people,” who perhaps had had the wish to help her. And suddenly a beautiful vessel came in sight, full of men in shining armor ; her rowers plied their oars with strong and practised arms over the smooth sea, while her snow-white sails caught the breeze, and she seemed to rejoice in her bold but easily directed movements. At length they cast anchor in the bay. The noblest of all the mailed warriors on board sprang into the sea, and swam in complete armor through the surge to land, then stood before Malgherita and Pietro, greeting them, and said, as he pointed to the ship: “ I have been carefully building that for you all through the winter, and, if it seems good to you, we will in a few days sail forth upon the joyous sea, and I will steer you with my own hand back to your gay southern land, whereby I shall also see it after my own fashion.”

Then first they saw that it was Thiodolf who spoke to them, and they very heartily thanked him. But he urged them to come quickly with him to Nefiof's dwelling, that they might there get all in order for their intended journey.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEFIOLE and Gunhilda looked grave now that the departure of their nephew and of the guests, who had become very dear to them, drew so near. But yet they thought that the right time was come, and they hastened to prepare all things quickly and properly for the beloved travellers.

There was, indeed, much to be thought of in the furnishing of arms, meat, and drink; as well as of apparel and ornaments. Amongst other difficulties, no one knew what was to be done with young Thiodolf's tame wolf. To take it with him, his uncle thought, would never do; and little as Thiodolf could understand how there could be any company in which his dear wolf could seem strange and unnatural, so little would he set himself against the authority and experience of his father's brother. "I will leave the noble fellow here with you," said he; "only take good care of him for me. I will first have a little quarrel with him, and you shall take him under your protection, so that he may the better get used to you; else, when he misses me for too long a time, he will run away from you, and, may be, will give you a few tugs all round, as he takes leave. It is true his teeth are not very sharp; he blunted them a good deal on my armor when I first took him, as he often gnawed at it in his wrath; so, at the worst, he will not bite you very badly."

But Aunt Gunhilda said that it would be better not to put this to the proof.

One day, therefore, Thiodolf went up to his wolf, and tore out of his mouth a piece of raw flesh, which he was devouring. The angry beast sprang at him, and the contest began. Thiodolf had taken, instead of his usual weapons, a knotty club, that he might not by accident kill his fierce favorite; the combat was, therefore, a hard one for him, and almost dangerous; indeed, he bled before it was over; but at length the beast was forced to fly,

howling, to take refuge by the hearth. Then the old man stood up, and, as they had agreed, hid the wolf beneath his garment, while Thiodolf retreated. Since that day it was not easy to make the wolf leave Nefiolf's side.

"That is now settled," said the uncle. "But, dear nephew, what sword dost thou think of taking with thee? Wilt thou look out for one quite new and unused, or one with which noble deeds have been done, and which bears some old and renowned name?"

"Uncle," answered Thiodolf, "I have thought it over many times. First it seemed to me that I should go into my father's grave, and fetch thence his strong sword, which is called Schürebrand."

"Truly," said his uncle, "thou wouldst then have the best of all swords. Schürebrand could open for himself a hot-path through the fight, and shields and breast-plates broke before him like glass. But I am not sure whether it would please the old man in the grave. Dead heroes are wont dearly to love their weapons."

"That is what I afterwards thought," answered Thiodolf. "I had meant not to fear my dead father, and to assure him that now I can use the good sword Schürebrand much better than he. But no way would I do anything that might displease him. Even if he said 'Yea,' and yet afterwards, in many a dark stormy night, he should seek through the grave for his trusty weapon, and then should shake his bony head at his covetous Thiodolf—No, uncle, that must never be."

"Thou art quite right, thou brave son of Asmundur," said Nefiolf; and he stroked his cheek.

"Besides," continued Thiodolf, "it is a very good thing when one names an unnamed sword, whose name afterwards waxes glorious with one's own. There hangs in the corner a very beautiful sword, with silver hilt and dazzling bright steel scabbard. It has a lovely sound if you draw it out and then thrust it in again. That sword, as I think, is well worthy of receiving name and renown from Thiodolf."

His uncle took it down from its place and gave it to his favorite, saying, "It has not yet been used by hand of man; it is the brother of the sword which the great Helmfrid forged for himself

when he, many years ago, sailed away from this island; and therefore was it that no man ever seemed to deserve the honor to wear it at his side. But wear thou it henceforth in Odin's name. I deem it will prosper with thee. How wilt thou name it?"

"Throng-piercer it shall be called," said Thiodolf; "for I think that with it I shall pierce so bravely many a throng of enemies that they will quickly give me place."

Nefiolf would next have given a polished helmet to his nephew; but the youth liked better to wear a headcovering that he had prepared from the head of a mighty wild bull, which his father had slain in the Norwegian mountains. It was held together by strong iron bands, and still adorned with the immense horns. It is true that Malgherita said she should tremble before him when he showed himself with this wild cap; but in this he would not be shaken. In all other respects his armor was rich, complete, and brilliant.

When the night before their departure had arrived, Thiodolf stood erect in complete armor on the grave-stone of his father, and sang aloud in the stormy darkness a song to the honor of the dead; so that his powerful voice was heard in many neighboring dwellings. Among others came forth the following words.

"What here, in measured lay,
I may no longer sing,
Renown shall from a distant land
In sounding echoes bring.
Thou wilt rejoice, thou dead,
If, by my warlike deeds,
I weave a glorious laurel-wreath
To crown thy funeral weeds!"

Malgherita lay the while in strange dreams. The elves formed circles around her, and screamed shrilly into her ears that she must not forget the "good people;" for with them there was no narrow, confining dwelling-place, but even in the south she should hear of them, though, indeed, almost always in her sleep. Then they repeated the mysterious riddle of the two sisters and the two swords, and the rest of their wonderful communication, until, in the dawn of the cool morning, Pietro, ready for the journey, stood beside her bed and awoke her. The trumpets of such of Thiodolf's

followers as were already in the ship blew loudly, to call the others from the shore.

All was grave and solemn at the leave-taking, and very calm. Uncle Nefiof and Aunt Gunhilda laid their hands on the heads of the young travellers, then kissed and pressed them very close, while their tears started, but without a word being said, till the old man shut the heavy doors and bolts of the building with a mighty noise behind the departing guests, as if to keep himself and his wife from following them.

As now the three went together through the valley, and the sea more and more opened upon them, looking unspeakably solemn and mysterious in the rosy glow of morning, half-veiled by the early mists, Thiodolf said: "I cannot help thinking now of a very beautiful tale which your Christian priests used to relate; I mean of how the white Christ was slain and buried, and yet rose from the grave, and went about the earth to comfort His true friends, who were mourning so heavily for Him, for they had hoped that He would have delivered them from many evils as a king and hero. Besides, they had spent so many blessed peaceful hours with Him; and the sweet remembrance of such hours never passes away from a true heart. And when they now did not rightly know how it would be, whether He had arisen from the grave or not,—for a very few had seen Him since with their own eyes,—then some of His most beloved friends went a fishing in the early morning on the sea-shore,—that brave soldier whose sword struck so sharp when his Master was taken was amongst them,—when suddenly the true white Christ stood on the shore, and called them to Him; and at first they knew Him not, but at last they saw who He was, and rejoiced,—ah! they rejoiced so very much. Truly He must have been a good Spirit, your white Christ."

Pietro and Malgherita were deeply moved by the relation, so full of meaning, which poured from the lips of the true-hearted youth: they could almost think that they saw before them the Sea of Tiberias in the Holy Land. They longed to speak more to him of the holy narrative; but there sounded a deafening blast from the trumpets. Soldiers came with messages and questions to their young leader; and as Malgherita was seized with a

womanish terror at embarking, and the knight was busied with tender care for the safety and comfort of his young wife, they both forgot everything else; and all only gave their earnest attention to what was just before their eyes.

At length all were on board, the anchor was raised, and the ship bore away with swelling sails out into the open sea, in the direction of the rising sun. The Iceland sailors sang joyous songs under the brightening blue sky; and many sea-birds swept on rapid wing over the heads of the travellers, as if to accompany them to the last with parting greetings from land. All were well pleased; only Malgherita, who sat at the helm between her husband and Thiodolf (the young leader himself had determined to steer), looked about her at times uneasily; and the clearer the day became, the more anxiously did her eyes glance over the deck.

“What is it ails thee, fair lady?” asked the steerer at length; “thou seemest to miss something in our vessel.”

“Ah no, Thiodolf,” answered she, “I miss nothing. Rather I fear to see what I would fain never came before my eyes in my whole life. I know you are a good, kindly man, and that one may freely speak out with you. See now, in our native land they say that you heathens never go to sea without carrying with you fearful idols, and that is what I so greatly dread. It must be a hideous sight.”

“A hideous sight!” said Thiodolf, laughing; “I do not know that. See there that great hammer on the fore part of the ship? That is Asa Thor’s hammer. We pray to it, and we sacrifice to it sometimes; that is all.”

“Ah, you are but hiding something from me,” said Malgherita. “Where are then Mahmoud, and Apollo, and Trevisant, the horrible lords of heathendom?”

Thiodolf laughed yet more heartily, and said: “Whether amongst other people there are those gods whom you have named, I know not, though I shall probably learn it in time during my voyages; but as for us, we know nothing of any such wonderful names.”

“But, in God’s name,” cried Malgherita, “what then do you believe? You must have some belief.”

“Yes, truly” said Thiodolf. “We believe in the hero-father

Odin, and in his dead son Balder, and in all the great Asas, and, besides, in the Almighty Father, who will rule over all in full power when the world has been destroyed by fire."

"Pietro," said Malgherita, turning to her husband, "does it not seem to thee as if thou heardest a child stammering the mysteries of our blessed faith?"

Pietro bent his head in thoughtful acquiescence; and the three friends had henceforth often talk on the same subject, but there always came some interruption which called them away to other things: now it was a ship which was seen in the blue distance, and of which it could not be known whether she were friend or foe; then a terror of Malgherita's at something unexpected in the sky or on the waves, or perhaps a loving jest of Pietro's, when he would liken his lovely wife to one of the fair heathen goddesses of whom Thiodolf spoke.

CHAPTER XV.

THEY had now been embarked many days, when one evening the sun went down behind dark clouds, and the sea looked unquiet. Malgherita, mindful of the former storm which in the autumn had thrown them in such hapless plight on the shore of Iceland, trembled violently; but Thiodolf said, laughing: "Oh, lovely little lady, I have already told thee that the men who then managed your ship deserved nothing better than what befel them, so awkwardly and cowardly did they oppose the storm; but now brave Icelanders guide this ship, and Thiodolf is at the helm. And, more than all, hast thou so little trust in the white Christ?"

Malgherita felt ashamed and strengthened at the same time. She wished good night to Thiodolf, who had determined not to move from the helm, especially during the night, and went with her husband to rest. It might have been soon after midnight when suddenly a loud cry was raised on board the ship; the terrified Malgherita saw torches shining through the cabin-window out in the dark night, and Pietro noticed, with no less alarm, that the light must come from another ship, which must in the darkness be sailing fearfully close to their own. A moment decided their fate, and that happily. The two vessels disappeared from each other, and nothing remained but a light contest with the sea, which had now again subsided, and offered little resistance. Pietro and Malgherita again closed their eyes in sweet slumber.

The early morning sun shone brightly on the water; the young Provençals had risen, and after wishing each other joy of their escape, were about to leave their cabin, when Thiodolf came towards them radiant with joy. "Oh, my friends," cried he, "good fortune is following us with eagle wings. It is not enough that we escaped being run down by the stranger ship when we touched so closely in the darkness, but that ship is a marvellously glorious prize. See, that other steersman is rejoicing certainly

over us, and is sailing towards us with as hearty a longing as we towards him, since we have both recognized in the joyful morning light our flags and colors."

"Then it is some very dear friend," said Malgherita, "who guides that vessel? Or perchance it brings tidings of some festivity?"

"A friend? No, that I cannot say," answered Thiodolf. "But festivity? Yes, it may bring us that. For see, he on the stranger ship yonder is Swartur, the sea-robber, a brother of Mordur's, whom I slew. Now he would fain take vengeance on me for his dead brother; and I would fain win peace for Iceland, by altogether destroying this bad brood. Thou shalt see presently, little Malgherita! It will be, indeed, a right joyous festivity."

And as Malgherita shook with terror, he tried to comfort her by saying, "Thou knowest not yet how gloriously northern spears whistle over the roaring waves. And then Pietro, I hope, will share in the merry sport. He already can throw spears right well."

"Yes, surely, I will have my share," said Pietro, glowing with joyful knightly thoughts. "And, Malgherita, I pray thee earnestly not to oppress my heart, and the hearts of the other brave fighters, by needless lamentations. Harken, how very near to us the enemy is blowing his war-trumpet."

"Be at ease, thou fair little creature," cried Thiodolf. "My shield shall be always at hand to cover Pietro; and, if need is, my breast likewise. Ah, he will be a thousand times dearer to thee when he returns victorious."

The two young heroes hastened on deck. Malgherita stretched forth her hands imploringly, partly after them, partly up to heaven; whilst Pietro, soon completely armed with Thiodolf's careful assistance, stood before the troops.

The fight began. Those who have never known what knightly joy there is in throwing heavy iron-pointed spears, can hardly imagine the gladness which a sea-fight brings to the northern heroes, when the deadly weapon glances close to their temples, or falls back powerless against the resounding shields; then hurled again into the enemy's ranks with fearless strength: oftentimes the same spear, which had but just flown past the thrower, threaten-

ing death to him, and sinking, still trembling from the force with which it was flung, deep into the planks of the deck. Every spear which struck in an enemy's breast, or even in an enemy's shield, on the one side steeled the arm with a confident strength, and on the other inflamed to a more deadly wrath.

As Thiodolf had truly said to Malgherita, the spears whistled with a peculiar sound over the roaring waves. Pietro, from his warlike exercises with Thiodolf in Iceland, threw like a practised Northman. He was less expert with the use of his shield as a covering; but Thiodolf stood at his side like a guardian angel, turning off with rapid movements what approached too dangerously near his friend, without delaying, for one moment, his own mighty throws, and often crying out, "Only boldly fling far into the storm, comrade! I will receive the rain-drops meant for thee on my iron covering."

The ships in the meanwhile drew nearer and nearer; and as the desire for combat was equally strong on both sides, each party threw out long iron hooks into their enemy's deck, and thus drew the ships close with such immense power that suddenly they struck with an unexpected crash. While all on board both ships staggered from the shock, Thiodolf had darted like an eagle into the midst of the enemies, had seized the fierce Swartur by the throat, and after twice striking violently on his helmet with the spear, he flung him far into the sea; so that the stunned pirate, after once only rising to the surface, sank for ever in the deep.

This decided the combat; the men on board the pirate's ship lowered their spears, and Thiodolf granted them pardon. He made his followers take possession of the ship, and assigned different posts to such of the pirates who swore to serve him.

He then led Pietro to Margaret, saying, "Dost thou see now how I have brought him safe back to thee? So must thou be brave and cheerful if this happen again; for we shall have more meetings of the like kind. But thou seest that spears do not always devour a man."

And whilst the young pair were speaking loving and thankful words to each other, Thiodolf went over the decks of both ships, seeking out the best and most ornamented of the spears that had been thrown, for he had a great love for them. While he was

about this, he fell into talk with one of Swartur's warriors, whom he asked whither they were bound.

"We were bound," answered the man, "for Norway, to the neighborhood of Bergen. A great feast is to be kept in memory of the victory once gained there over the famous Icelandic chief, Helmfrid; when he was forced to leave his shield, after he had in vain striven to win a fair princess. You must have heard that in your native songs."

"Yes, I know it well," said Thiodolf. "The brother of Helmfrid's sword hangs at my side; and how might it be if I won the shield to wear with it?"

"You will find there a great multitude of armed men," said Swartur's soldier, "and a mighty opposition."

Thiodolf did not answer; he went to the helm of his ship, and steered it full towards the south-west.

Not far from the island of Faroe, to the west of the town of Bergen, there rises a high mountain, called by the people, on account of its strange shape, "the Monk." There, when the sea is not too high, ships can find a good harbor; and the ship which in a storm can reach "the Monk" lies concealed.

Thiodolf had directed his eyes to this port. He left at its entrance his own ship, and many trusty soldiers to protect her; and with the pirate's vessel he prepared to approach the shore of Bergen. As he did not summon Pietro to accompany him, the knight came up to him with a displeased look, and said, "Did I then show myself so unworthy in the last combat, that thou wilt not take me with thee on this new adventure which now thou art planning in thy mind?"

"Thor and all the mighty gods forbid!" answered Thiodolf. "Thou art my well-beloved and brave comrade in arms. I but thought that thou shouldest remain here with Malgherita; because there may be rather warm work for us on the coast of Norway."

Then Malgherita drew near, and said with an effort, but proudly, "I pray you, Thiodolf, never again to think of rejecting the brave arm of my lord by reason of that childish utterance of my fears. You will here leave me such a guard as befits my

rank ; and for the rest, I commit the renowned Marquis of Castelfranco to God's keeping."

Pietro pressed a warm kiss on the lips of his noble wife. Thiodolf bent low before her, saying, "I cannot tell you, lady, how gloriously bright you shine before me at this moment. The fair maidens who fill the cups of the heroes in Walhalla must look like you. But we, Pietro, must not less brightly shine after our fashion than thy fair wife after hers ; and therefore let us hasten to Bergen, where many noble deeds are to be done."

The friends went on board the pirate's vessel, and set sail singing for the woody strand. There, beside two great glowing fires which extended from the summit of a height down to the sea, sat many warriors in full armor feasting, while the sound of harps floated joyfully above the revellers. High up on the hill an almost gigantic golden shield was seen brightly shining from between the branches of some linden-trees ; and at certain parts of the song the guests rose from their seats, greeted, as it were, the shield, and struck together their silver-edged drinking-horns. It was beautiful to see how the festal torch-light shone upon the dark green of the leaves, and seemed to vie with the brightness of the golden shield.

As Thiodolf and his companions left their vessel, and, going along the shore, approached the banqueters, they heard the following words of the song :

"For a king's daughter didst thou fight, brave youth,
But won pale death instead to be thy bride ;
Helmfrid, thou hero of the northern isle,
Too lightly didst thou think of Norway's sons.
Thou fondly didst anticipate the joy
Of winning here a wreath of victory—
Of holding here thy splendid marriage-feast—
But thy spear broke, thy shield fell to the ground.

Upon the turf it fell, and thy red blood
Gushed over the bright gold in trickling streams ;
Scarce could thy warriors bear thy vanquish'd form,
Thy wounded body to thy ships again.
Go forth, thou valiant fighter, thou brave knight,
Thou hast found thy master in this hero-land.
Henceforth, when Iceland is the minstrel's theme,
Let Norway's noble deed be louder sung !"

“That may well be, ye noble Northmen,” said Thiodolf, when, after the old hospitable custom, he and his companions had been desired to sit down, and had received drinking-horns. “But I think we shall try it to-day once again; unless perchance you will give me with your good will the shield of Helmfrid up yonder, and receive in exchange as a friendly gift this one on my arm, which, in truth, is no bad piece of armor.”

“That bargain could hardly pass,” said an old Norman, shaking his head. “How art thou called, thou that thinkest to offer thy shield in the place of Helmfrid’s?”

“In sooth I am not called Helmfrid, but only Thiodolf,” answered the youth, and bent his head modestly. “You have, indeed, never yet heard this name; for this is my first expedition out in the world. But have patience and forbearance, sirs, and take my shield instead of that one. I promise you that in two years at latest it shall be of no less worth.”

“You look like one who would hold his word,” said the old Norwegian, “and I feel no doubts about you; but yet the exchange you propose can in no ways be effected.”

“Then a fight must come to pass,” said Thiodolf, rising up; “for I am firmly resolved either to remain dead upon this coast, or to carry off with me Helmfrid’s shield. So, choose you out, my dear German countrymen, certain of your warriors who shall defend the shield against me. I have five-and-twenty soldiers with me; send an equal number to oppose me, or if it seem good to you, a double number.”

“It would be strange,” said the old man, “if Norway’s warriors used superior numbers to secure victory. I will myself defend the hill on which the shield hangs against you; and I will draw lots for five-and-twenty comrades—not one man more.”

“That was just what I myself expected of you,” answered Thiodolf, with a kindly nod of his head.

The preparations for the fight were made. The path which led through the two fires up to the shield was to be stormed and defended; all attacks from the sides or the rear were forbidden in the trial of strength between the Normans and the Icelanders, as disturbing and likely to confuse the clear judgment which was to be formed on the valor of the two parties.

The old man had drawn the lots, and now he stood on the linden-hill with twenty-five noble warriors; the golden shield shone over their spears to inspire them; the war-trumpets sounded, and the combat began.

The lances flew high among the branches of the trees, so that fresh boughs fell together with the heavy spears, like wreaths of victory, on helmet and armor. One of the Norwegian warriors, whom death had struck at the first throw, lay covered with broken branches, as beneath a beautiful fresh grave in spring.

And now they drew nearer to each other with swords and battle-axes, and a fearful and mighty strife began. The heroes fought in silence; but there was often heard a long-drawn breath and a groan amidst the clank of arms; for each warrior exerted his strength to the very utmost, well knowing that he had to do with adversaries who could not be repulsed with less effort. Sounds from the harps of the gazers-on arose, doubtful and uncertain, as if preparing for a song of victory, when the combat should be decided.

Throng-piercer, the lately named sword of Thiodolf, had already done great honor to its name. The Norwegians fell before it in their blood; the old hero, who had led them on, stood almost alone in front of the golden shield; but he stood so firm and ready for the fight, and he hurled the spears, which lay thick around this hot place, so rapidly and with such certain aim, that none could yet say confidently that the victory was won by the Icelanders. Thiodolf, meaning to decide all with one blow, threw his shield over his back, seized Throng-piercer with both hands for a mighty stroke, and sprung wildly up to the old man. The spear of the latter flew with a steady aim towards his face; but Pietro turned away the weapon with his shield, while at the same moment a lance struck the knight's unprotected side, and stretched him breathless on the grass.

Thiodolf by this time had reached his enemy, and thundered such a blow on his steel helmet that the old man fell down with a heavy groan, and the victor, unopposed, flew like an arrow up the linden-tree, seized Helmfrid's golden shield, and, springing down again as rapidly, he swung the recovered armor high over

his head, and a tumultuous shout of victory rang through the forest.

The warriors of Norway sank spears, and swords, and battle-axes, slowly towards the ground, and raised a solemn, somewhat mournful, song of praise in honor of the stranger victor. He the while knelt beside his beloved Pietro, and looked at his wound, scolding him sharply. "How, then, shall I show myself to that little Malgherita," cried he, in angry sorrow, "if I bring thee wounded to the Monk's Rock—perchance wounded mortally? Did I ever tell thee to cover me with thy shield? why didst thou do anything so foolish? Such a mad deed! Wait a little! if thou diest, thou shalt have to answer me for it, I can tell thee."

At these words a smile passed over Pietro's pale face, but he had no strength to answer. Then there came one to help the Icelanders in his care for the knight, who rubbed the wounded man with strong oil, and spoke earnestly to Thiodolf: "Shame on thee! such a choice fighter, and such a bad leech to tend the wound of thy friend! I hope that when thou art older, thou wilt get more skill. Look more narrowly before thou beginnest to scold and to lament. The skin is hardly broken; and he is faint, not from the wound, but from the stunning blow."

Thiodolf and Pietro looked into the face of the grave speaker, and knew him to be the old warrior who had defended the shield against them, and who wore a broad bandage around his unhelmed head, which ached and smarted from the blow of Thiodolf. He gave his hand kindly to his victor, saying: "It need not be said that the Helmfrid's shield is now thine. But I would pray thee, in the name of this whole assembly, to abide by the exchange thou first spoke of, and to leave us in possession of the Thiodolf's shield. We know now what we shall possess in it."

Thiodolf bent respectfully, and offered his bright shield to the old man, who took it from his hand; and the Norwegians forthwith, to the sound of harps, and with loud cries of joy, hung it on the same branch where the shield of Helmfrid had before hung.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN the old chief's favorable opinion of Pietro's wound had been found correct, Thiodolf hastened to take him back to Malgherita. The brave men of Norway accompanied their renowned guests to the shore with songs and music, and horns filled with mead; and thus the victors sailed joyously back to their comrades. Thiodolf stood on the fore part of the ship, Pietro at his side, and the golden shield at the end of a lance sparkled in front of them, so that it gave out the happy tidings to the Monk's Rock long before the ship had touched the strand.

Thiodolf said to Malgherita, as she joyfully approached them, "Hearken, pretty lady; thou didst very well to let thy husband come with me to the coast of Bergen. To speak the truth, he owed me a little too much till to-day for the services I have done him; and perhaps that interferes somewhat with a true, open friendship. But now all is right. Without him, I should be lying pale and cold on the linden-hill, or else in a Runic grave; and Helmfrid's shield would be hanging in his old place. Embrace me, brother Pietro; for equal and equal are good companions."

The two young heroes embraced; and Malgherita looked up at her knight with yet more joyful pride and happier love.

After Thiodolf had left them awhile to see to the embarking, Malgherita pointed to the Monk's Rock, which looked strangely in the red evening glow, half-veiled by mists, and said: "Ah, Pietro, I would that huge stone had never come before my eyes; it will now often appear to me again in my dreams. For, trust me, those who have once seen the iron north so stern and unchangeable will never lose it from their mind, even when the most balmy flowers and fruits of the south bloom around them in full luxuriance; and that fearful image which we see yonder greatly increases the gloomy impression."

Pietro strove to disperse her fears; but she repeated, that at

all times so terrible a monk's figure would rise frightfully before her.

Just then the trumpets sounded for their departure ; and the sails were given to the wind as the stars began to appear.

A soft breeze blew over the sea, bringing, as it were, a southern greeting to the voyagers, who were yet in the north. And Thiodolf said to Pietro and the fair lady : " The moon shines bright upon the waters. Could you not sit awhile beside me at the helm, and we might talk together in this pleasant twilight ? "

" Willingly," said Malgherita. " Tell us the history of that golden shield which you have won to-day. "

" If it give you pleasure, I shall do it joyfully," answered Thiodolf. And he began in the following manner : " There was a man called Helmfrid ; he was the best of all the spearmen, swimmers, and mariners of Iceland. Besides, he was of high courage, and of so noble stature that none could be compared with him. Our old people, who were young men with him, know not how to speak enough of him. As he grew to man's estate, and yet never seemed to think of wooing any lovely maiden, his comrades would ask him whether he bore no love to fair women ; and once Helmfrid thus answered : ' Great love I bear to fair women ; but yet the fairest that I have hitherto seen are not fair enough for me, far and wide as I have been in the world. But I have heard speak of a king's daughter in Norway, who is fair above all on earth ; and I will go forth after her, and win her for me, for she belongs to me or to none. ' And soon afterwards he had sailed for Norway.

" When he arrived there, the king's daughter, who had, perchance, heard of the bold and presumptuous speech of her suitor, showed herself beyond measure proud towards him. She also imposed upon him trials of skill in arms, unheard of among other warriors ; she would now bid him throw spears of gigantic force, then bring wild horses and tame them, and many like exploits ; all with the intention that he should fail in some one of them, and thus his proud spirit would be brought low. But he came out of all these trials more and more glorious ; and the maiden knew not what else she could lay upon him. Then she once met him on a hill of linden-trees, and spoke thus to him : ' Thou mighty

Helmfrid, thou speakest fairly of thy love for me ; but what thou hast done to prove its truth are only warlike games, which thou thyself lovest, and which help to increase thy renown. But now I would give thee another trial,—to leave something undone for my sake.’

“ And as he prayed her earnestly to make known her pleasure to him, she said that he must doff his armor, and become, for love of her, a poor fisherman. He did so that very day ; but before three weeks had passed, the other fishermen looked upon this so brave and skilful comrade as their master ; so that he was wont to be called the fisher-king, and was held in great honor.

“ Again the king’s daughter met him, and reproached him with turning everything to his advantage, bidding him now throw away his nets, and become a smith. He obeyed her ; and what did it avail ? very soon no man would wear arms which were not forged by the smith Helmfrid ; his door was thronged with noble horses, which he was to shoe ; and the soldiers showed more reverence to him than to the king, who was father of the maiden.

“ At length she bade him put on the garb of a Christian monk—he had been christened during one of his expeditions—and not come forth again from the linden-forest, or hold intercourse with any in the world. He bore this with great firmness and gentleness ; only showing himself somewhat impatient with those who would visit him, notwithstanding his prohibition, for he lamed some with the stones that he flung at them.

“ And now the maiden felt that the love and truth of the brave Helmfrid had melted her hard heart. She came to him one bright evening in the linden-forest, gave him her fair hand, and said that she was his bride. From that moment an overweening pride came back into his heart : he would give a good word to no man, for the sake of his love ; and arming himself again in bright steel, he went, with several Icelanders, who had come with him into Norway and obeyed him in all things, into the presence of the king and his court, saying : ‘ Thy daughter and I are one ; she goes back with me to Iceland as my wife. Say a hasty farewell to her ; for my pennons are waving, and my sails are swelling.’

“ But the Norwegian prince took this ill ; and when Helmfrid

would have carried her away by force, a sharp fight ensued. There would have been no harm in that, but that the mighty Helmfrid had forgotten that his strength had departed while he lived the austere life of a hermit. Thus was he conquered for the first time, and pressed so sorely that his companions could hardly bring him in safety to his ship, for he was senseless from his wounds ; and his golden shield remained in possession of his enemies.

“He never could forget this disgrace, nor ever again showed himself among the ranks of the north. But, from the south, wondrous tales of the hero-deeds which he has accomplished have come over to us. It is said that the Norway king once offered him peace and his daughter’s hand ; but Helmfrid, red with shame and wrath, answered : ‘ My shield is lost ! all is lost ! my love and all !’

“Then the king’s daughter left the world, and went into an old sea-fortress of her father’s, where she now still lives, a very aged maiden. They say of her that she sings this song :

‘ On Iceland I look back,
Over the foamy sea ;
But, with victorious laurel crown’d,
No Helmfrid comes to me.

‘ The lurid moon and pale
Sinks in the ocean’s bed,
Like to a bloody, bloody shield •
Wo to the omen dread !’

“But now, as the moon is again quite pale, and is going to dip into the sea, and midnight is come, I think that you must go to rest, dear friends ; and I will steer you on a good way while you sleep.”

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER several weeks' voyage they approached a fair land, which allured the voyagers by its high green trees, gentle hills, and noble castles, and which even Thiodolf immediately knew: for he had learnt much from his uncle's teaching, and now also everything was pointed out to him by some old experienced seamen who accompanied him.

He forthwith went to Pietro and Malgherita, and said: "See! that is your fair France, and her north coast; I might almost say my fair France, for in her live many brave northern knights—many who are nearly related to me, as the family of Montfaucon. We have always kept in brotherly friendship, and it would be a great joy to me to go and visit them in this land; only it is asserted that these lords are the choicest knights in all the world; so that in Germany, Italy, and Spain, and wherever man can go, they are held as mirrors of good courtesy. Now, how I might appear beside them none can know but the gods and goddesses of Asgard. It is, therefore, most advisable that I let myself first be a little knocked about in the world, and be polished with fitting tools, before I show myself to their dainty lordships."

"Thou hast much of the diamond about thee, Thiodolf," said Pietro, looking at him with a kindly earnestness; "and therefore must thou be diligently and sharply polished, and many a less noble stone would be ground to dust by such polishing. But when once the work is over!—Thou art a happy highly-gifted being, dear youth!"

"Well," answered Thiodolf, laughing, "even were I now fully polished and smooth, we might in no ways stop on this French coast; for we must go round all Spain until we can cast anchor before Malgherita's own beautiful land, and time is a precious thing."

"Cast anchor before my own land!" exclaimed Malgherita.

“Nay, we must go to Tuscany. Or wilt thou ruin us? Dost thou not know how my father rages against us?”

“Let the old lord do that, if it pleases him,” answered Thiodolf. “At the very worst, thou and thy husband are under the protection of brave northern warriors; but what is much better, I have resolved to bring about a reconciliation. I have thought on that for a long time; and a good strong will can do much.”

“Strange it would be,” said Pietro, after some thought, “if it fell to our friend Thiodolf to bring about, with his simple true-heartedness, what so many wise Provençals and Italians, both knights and priests, have in vain attempted.”

“Ah!” said Malgherita, smiling at the wonderful Icelfander; “noble, hospitable hero, if thou couldst but do that for us!”

“We cannot tell for what we are destined,” said Thiodolf. “It may even be that all this is now unnecessary, and that your father has of his own accord put away his anger. Uncle Nefiof and aunt Gunhilda have very often scolded me; but now I know well their hearts are sad by reason of me. To say the truth, mine too yearns after the dear old people. I so often dream of them, and wake up suddenly and find they are so far from me.” He paused for a moment, and put his hand before his eyes; but then he added with a smile, “It is marvellous how men come to love one another when a little space of sea lies between them. At home, I can tell you that the good old couple were often sufficiently contrary. But now, in regard to our doings on this Provençal shore, I earnestly beg you both to let me contrive it all as I have planned in my own head, and do not worry me with many questions; for if I had to give a full regular account, it would drive me mad.”

Pietro and Malgherita could not but smile at their strange friend; but as they knew that he meant kindly by them, and as at worst they had not much to lose in Provence, they left it entirely in his hands to carry out the whole scheme.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE shapes of the clouds, and reflections in the sea, and birds sailing by, and sweet odors mysteriously wafted, had now for many days called up before Malgherita's mind the image of her home, more and more alluring and bright. She spoke only in the Provençal tongue, in which Thiodolf could now answer her almost as well as Pietro. She hardly ever laid aside a mandoline that she had bought during the voyage, and she sang to it all the songs which had lulled her infancy. In short, she was like a flower-bud opening at the breath of approaching spring. She would fain have blown upon the sails in her sweet impatience to hasten the course of the ship; and truly both wind and weather seemed to have entered into a faithful agreement to further the wish of the gentle beauty. Both vessels swept evenly, and lightly, and rapidly over the mirror-like sea; in which Malgherita, with pure rapture, saw again that deep sparkling blue which she had so unwillingly missed in the north.

"Lovely little lady," said Thiodolf to her one evening, "you must do me one single favor. We are now close to your coasts; the blue misty streaks yonder show them. But when evening darkens, go into your chamber, and hang a curtain before its little window, and do not look out till I call you. It would please me so much to be present when your blooming native land, in all the splendor of the early dawn, shines for the first time before your blooming face. Will you do this?"

Malgherita smiled and agreed, and went back into her little cabin; Pietro remained on deck with Thiodolf. And now that all was so still and quiet in the ship, and it glided with arrow-like swiftness on its way, Malgherita thought of the time when in her childhood she was waiting for the Christmas-tree and its gifts. At times she slumbered, and smiling dreams came to her, as if she already saw before her the beloved shore of Provence; and

when she awoke in joy, and saw that she was yet in the ship's cabin, with a little lamp hanging before her bed, she returned again with unspeakable calm and deep delight to her quiet hopeful waiting.

As the morning began to glimmer through the veil hung up before the window, she arose and adorned herself very carefully, like a bride, in order to welcome her fair home most joyfully. She had not long to wait before Thiodolf came and knocked at the little door, which he opened at her friendly "Enter!" and then stood as if dazzled.

"Oh, all ye gods!" cried he, bending low, "how beautiful is Malgherita become! But come forth into the light of day, thou blooming child of Walhalla; the glimmer of the lamp is not nearly bright enough to give thee light."

And then as she went forth, and Pietro clasped her with loving wonder, and she from his arms looked out upon that near land, with its sunny meadows and shades of chestnut and olive-groves, and its silvery gliding streams, and her father's castle shining afar, and on the other side the princely port of Marseilles—dear reader, thou too hast a native land! it may be much less fair than that garden of Provence; but remember how joy filled all thy senses, when, after a long absence, it was allowed thee unexpectedly to see it in the blessed brightening light of early morning and of love!—Malgherita stood smiling and motionless as some lovely statue, while the ship was steered with a still and even motion nearer and nearer to the land. They cast anchor, and a little boat was lowered, while a troop of brave Icelanders plunged with all their arms into the foaming sea, and swam singing to the strand. Malgherita raised her head somewhat frightened.

"That is your and Pietro's body-guard, bright lady," said Thiodolf, as he pointed to the swimmers; "and the boat is for you two and for me. I will row you to land; for at least you must touch your fair native land, and pluck her flowers, come what may afterwards of my undertaking."

"But when we are once on land, Thiodolf," said Malgherita doubtfully, "are we safe then?"

"Chide her, Pietro," said Thiodolf, turning to him; "chide her well and heartily. What, has that delicate child so brave and

skilful a husband, and does she tremble while under his care? Besides, there is your body-guard yonder. I will answer on my head for any evil that befalls you!"

The Icelanders were already on the shore shaking the water from their armor, their shields, and their spears, and then stood ranged in order, reverently waiting. Malgherita gave her hand to her knight, and let her bear him into the boat; Thiodolf with a light leap sprang after them, seized the oar, and plied it with such powerful strength, that the little vessel seemed to fly, and yet touch the shore gently without any shock.

Thiodolf looked around with a keen and rapid glance. "That wood, yonder," he said, "is just fitted to shelter Malgherita, until I bring her good news from the castle. We shall certainly find some pleasant openings in the wood, whence thou, Pietro, canst gain a sight of the sea and of the boat; two men shall remain to watch her; the rest shall go with thee into the wood. If against my expectation any mischance should befall me, I will give a blast on my horn. Thou wilt hear it easily in this chestnut-wood, if I wind it from the castle; and then rise up quickly and put Malgherita in safety in the ship."

"But what, then, would become of thee?" asked Pietro.

"Thou wilt not," was the answer, "do me the wrong to suppose that a Northman can so easily be stopped by danger, when he has none to care for but himself. But if anything do go cross with me, thou wilt notice if I am not back in an hour; and then, brother Pietro, thou wilt take the crew of the pirate's ship, thou wilt bring them to land, and come threateningly against the castle of the great baron. The rest will all be easily managed in such a case. But now, say no more of this; and let us find out the securest and pleasantest resting-place for Malgherita on the mother earth of her beautiful Provence."

They went into the lofty chestnut-grove. The massive dark-leaved branches joined as if to form a shady, protecting hall, and soon a fitting place was found for the lady on the flowery grass, whence they could catch a sight of the boat between the leaves, and yet remain concealed from the view of any who perchance might be passing through the forest.

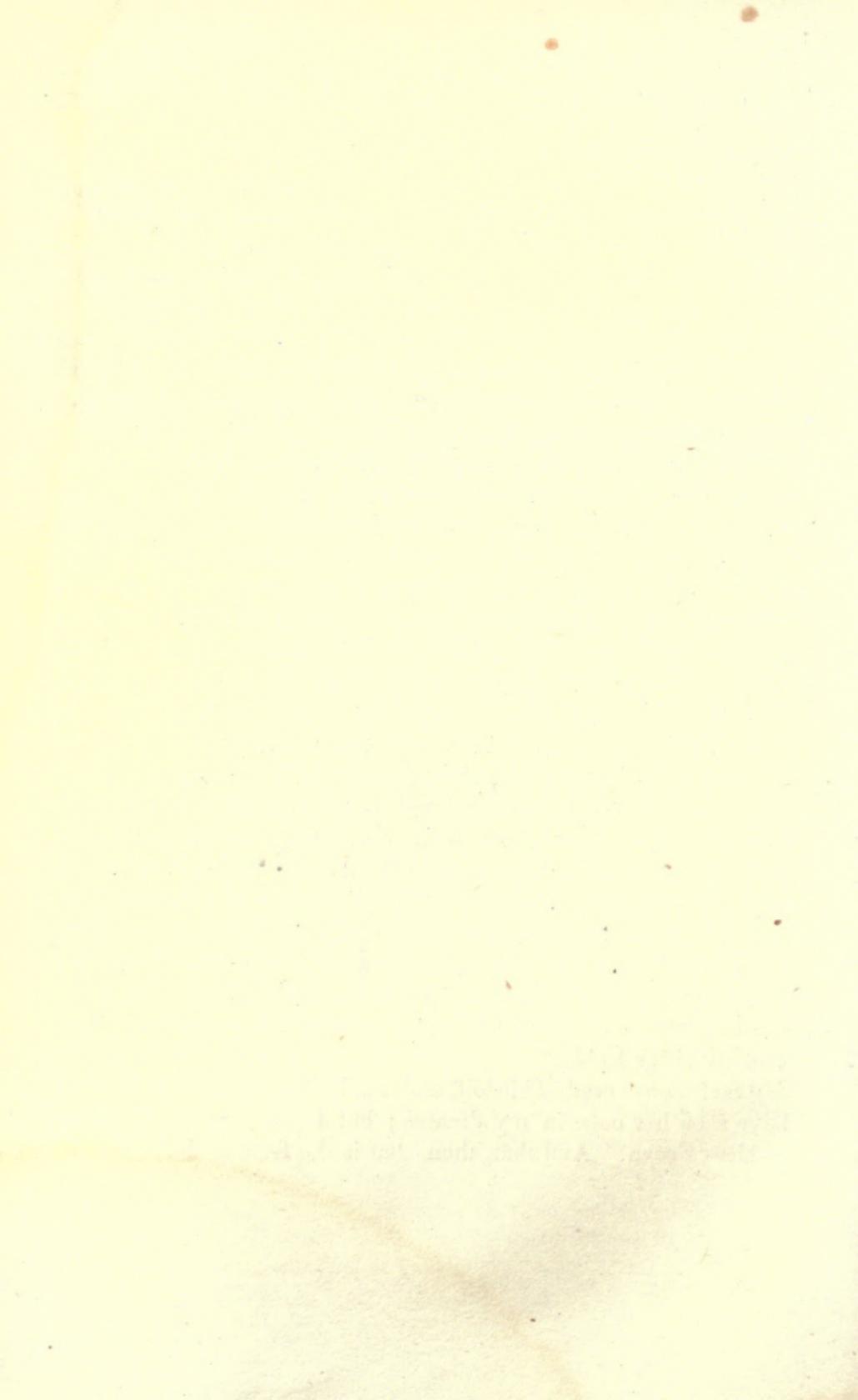
Just as Thiodolf was about to take leave of them in order to

pursue his way to the castle, the joyous notes of horns sounded through the wood, and it was easy to perceive that a hunting party which had left the principal road was about to pass close to the place where Malgherita and her companions were standing. Thiodolf therefore thought it better to give her the protection of his arm and spear, until the numerous band that were approaching should have passed by. Malgherita let fall a thick veil over her face; while the northern dress which she and Pietro still wore would yet more certainly conceal them from the eyes of any acquaintance who might pass.

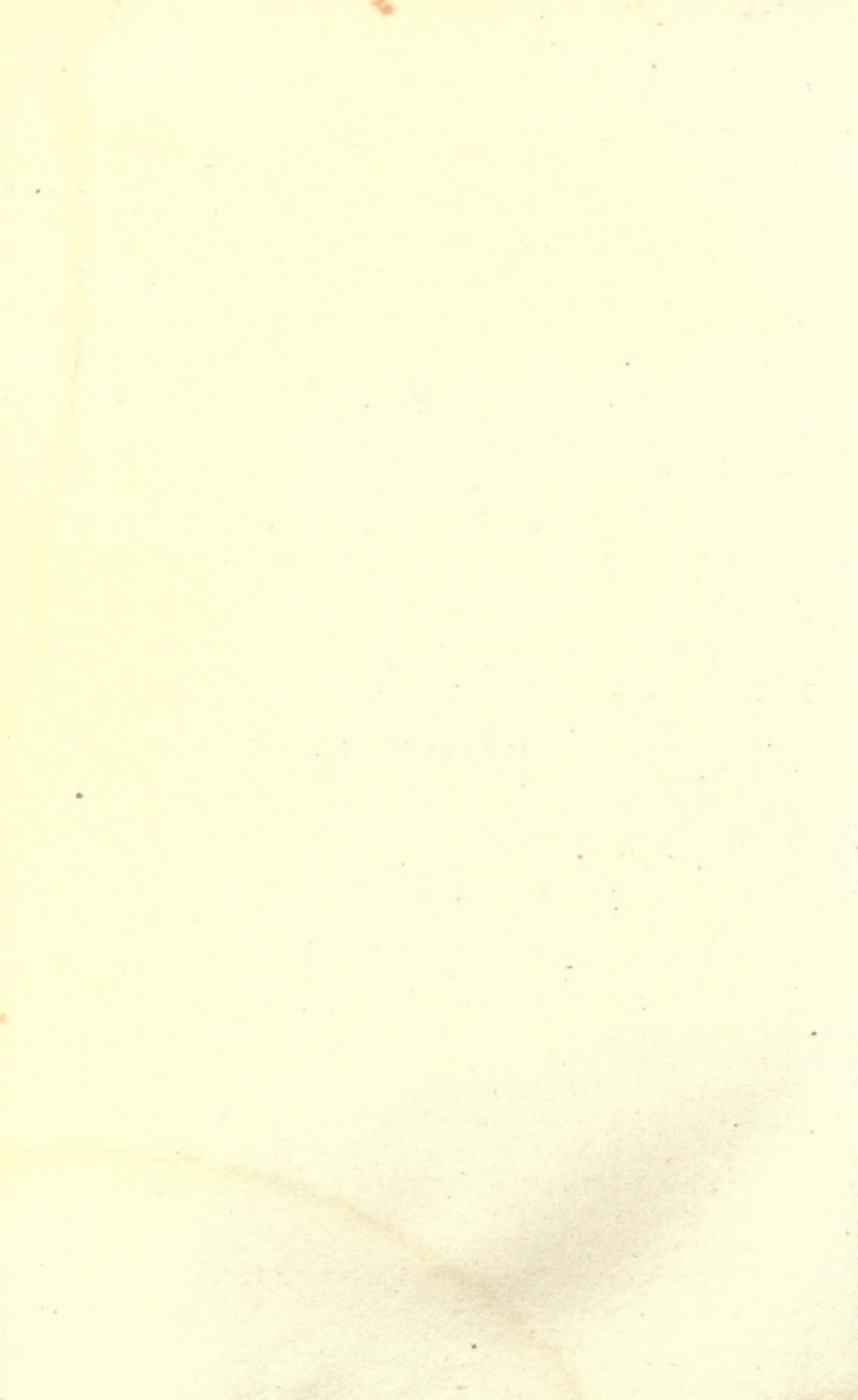
The procession was opened by some pages on foot, clad in green and gold, bearing in their hands gilded lances. Then came huntsmen on white horses; they wore grey dresses embroidered with silver, and sounded the choicest tunes on their great silver hunting-horns. They were followed by noble knights in various gaily adorned hunting dresses, mounted on Arab horses; but the form that came after them, in the midst of other noble knights, was so dazzling and glorious, that the trees around seemed well nigh to sparkle in its radiance. A tall, slender maiden, in the most richly embroidered robe, sat on a snow-white palfrey; all felt that the pomp around was merely to do her honor, and she alone seemed unconscious of this as she gazed with her large deep-blue eyes on the blue of heaven. Only as the procession passed the travellers, the pause which the escort of the lady made at their strange appearance drew her attention for an instant. She looked kindly at the tall noble-looking Northmen, greeted yet more kindly their brilliant leader, and then rode gravely on, again fixing her eyes like an eagle in the direction of the sun.

“Oh, heavens!” sighed Malgherita, after a long silence, “that was my sister Isolde.”

“So!” answered Thiodolf, and sank into deep thought. “I have seen her once in my dreams; but I took her then for the goddess Freya. And that, then, that is the form of Isolde!”



BOOK II.



CHAPTER I.

A LOFTY vaulted passage led into the castle of the great Provençal baron ; from its open arches one looked down upon a thicket full of deer, which yet lay within the outer wall of the castle. It was a pleasant sight to look over upon the deep green summits of the trees, between which shone out now waving grass, and now the waters of little crystal ponds and of the moat. The deer could be heard rustling through the bushes, or feeding on the branches, and at times they could be seen playing together in the open parts of the wood.

A beautiful crucifix, painted on the wall of the vaulted passage, recalled to mind the founder of the house, who had been a skilful painter, although his wielding of the pencil had never interfered with his wielding of the sword. He was equally dexterous with both, and had painted the image of the Saviour in this spot, which was especially dear to him, that he might sanctify and soften by the holiest thought the joy which here flowed in to him from the chase and life in all its freshness. It was said, too, that he had concealed in the wall a very mysterious prophecy relating to some of his descendants, but the exact spot was no longer known. In short, most of the dwellers in the castle, and the great baron himself, looked with more awe than satisfaction on this part of the building ; for wonderful tales were told about it, how the shade of Huldibert—thus the founder of the family was named—at times swept along the gallery, and would often appear in the same spot, taking part in the concerns of the family.

The beautiful Isolde was quite a stranger to this fear ; so far from it, she loved this place above all others : and when the great baron, in the vain endeavor to turn her from her longing for the

convent, almost forced upon her diversion after diversion, she would often take refuge in this spot, calming and relieving her earnest mind by prayer and reflection ; for in this place, shunned by all, even her imperious father did not dare in the slightest degree to disturb her.

And so it happened that on the evening after the stately hunting-party, when Thiodolf for the first time had gazed on Isolde, she went in deep thought to her beloved arched walk. Visions of a heavenly love shone about her, and, doubting whether the like could ever be realized on earth, she looked forward with longing desire to the solemn life of the cloister. She felt sure that just such a longing had driven proud, noble spirits away from the littleness of this earth to seek an invisible glory ; and that thus the rules of nuns and monks were founded. She thought also that perchance the prophecy of the founder of her race might signify something like this, and her burning wish was to discover the mysterious prophecy ; but she too dearly loved the old wall, painted with many bright figures besides that image of the Saviour, to dare injure it on only a bare conjecture. This day, as often before, she walked to and fro in this spot with the awful but cherished wish that her ancestor Huldibert might but once give her a sign, and raise her to the mighty existence and movements of the other world, even though terror and bewildering dread might bring the gift to her.

While she stood in deep thought, leaning against a column, a sound as of wings rustled past her. She started in sudden womanish fear, but instantly her mind, awaking to something of supernatural that perhaps was about to reveal itself according to her desire, she raised her stately form with queen-like pride, and said : " Who is it that would speak to me ? Here stands Isolde, the eldest daughter of the great baron, who will not yield in courage and high spirit to the noblest of her ancestors."

Again there flew something close to her dark locks, and she saw with a quick glance that it was a beautiful falcon ; at the same moment a knight, in shining armor, but with a strange head-covering, sprang over the balustrade of the gallery, close to her, and said : " I know well that Isolde stands here, and for that reason do I too stand here."

She recognized the Northman chief whom she had before seen in the chestnut-wood, and to whom she had given a kindly look ; but now, vexed at her hope of something higher being deceived, she turned away displeased, saying : " Return, sir stranger, whence you are come. The ear of Isolde is not open to you, and all you could say would here be an idle and useless fooling."

" I would fain know that somewhat more certainly," said Thiodolf, without stirring from the spot. " Harken, beautiful maiden : thou art an image of all that is lovely and gracious, but yet, in sooth, thou art no goddess, and therefore thou must listen before thou canst know that my speech is fooling, else thou thyself would be foolish, and that were pity."

Isolde fixed on him a long, wondering look ; her pride had well nigh vanished before this calm, simple, and almost childishly expressed strength ; but, endeavoring to confirm her haughtiness by another thought, she said : " I know not by whose permission you stand in this place, nor, indeed, how you are come hither."

" That will I relate to thee," said Thiodolf. " See, I came, as was seemly, to the great gate of your castle, but it was in no seemly fashion that some rude halberdiers on guard asked me my name, and who I was. I gave them for answer, that theirs were bad, inhospitable manners to begin by asking a stranger after such things, and not at least to give him first a cup of honor ; thereupon one of them would have made a grimace, as if to laugh at me, but I struck him on the mouth, so that he fell down, and then I went forth. The others were not so well satisfied with this that they should wish to follow me ; so I went all round the castle, and, as I am accustomed to much more rugged paths amongst rocks, I easily climbed over the outer walls, and afterwards up here to thee, by the balustrade of the gallery. Now, hearken to the rest patiently, and then thou wilt perceive that no foolish word shall pass my lips."

Isolde shook her head, and seated herself on a projection of the wall ; she looked down for a moment thoughtfully, and said at length : " You are a strange, unheard-of guest ; but yet speak to me."

" That will be easily done," answered Thiodolf : " for hearken, what sweet sounds of horns and lutes float over to us from the

court of the castle. A true heart can speak out incomparably well to such sounds."

In truth, many notes from wind and stringed instruments were heard from the halls of the castle. They came from some troubadours who there held a trial of skill.

Thiodolf began as follows: "In those northern regions whence I come, there live tender spirits who cannot bear the bright day. By night and by moonlight they are allowed to trip their graceful dances; but one single glance of the keen, powerful sun turns them to stone. Now, there lived once amongst them a haughty maiden, who thought that unless she could dance in the sunlight, bold and proud as the strongest beings in all the world, she would not dance at all. She followed her own will in spite of all wise opposition; and she who had been but now the flower and perfection of youth, became a cold, dead stone. Wouldest thou also become a stone, Isolde?"

The maiden looked proudly and steadfastly in his eyes. "Youth," she said, "thou must forthwith depart. I perceive well that thou hast not the slightest understanding of that which stirs my heart."

"Have I not?" asked Thiodolf, smiling. "In my heart as well as in thine there arises often an overweening pride. But I do like a true strong son of the north, and I tread her under foot till she loses all wish to speak. It is true that thou, poor weak maiden, fair and noble as thou art, canst not do the like, and I therefore have great compassion for thee. But thou must be patient. The Almighty has not created thee for anything stronger."

Isolde smiled proudly at Thiodolf, or strove to do so; but he said very earnestly: "Oh, make not so hateful a grimace; it becomes thee ill, believe me. Yes, I can say yet more: your white Christ certainly never looked so in His whole life."

"How sayest thou—your Christ? Art thou, then, a heathen?" answered Isolde, bewildered.

"Whatever I may be," cried Thiodolf, "in this moment I am truly better than thou, for thou haughtily wouldest send me away, and I bring thee joy and peace in rich abundance."

"Show me the joy and peace, if I am to believe in them," said

Isolde, without being able to raise her eyes from the ground. A blush like dawning morn passed over her cheeks.

“Ah, thou messenger of the gods!” sighed Thiodolf, “when thou lookest so lovely, like a heavenly flower, I must humbly confess all to thee. This is what I meant: thy father must forgive that poor gentle Malgherita, and then I will carry away by force from her castle that proud, disdainful thing, Isolde, who thinks that there is no knight good enough for her, and marry her after the Christian fashion. I shall afterwards take her away with me. Thus would it be well with us all. Thy father will have married his eldest daughter, and, in sooth, to the son of a Northman prince; Pietro and Malgherita will find grace with him; Isolde’s proud spirit will be broken, and I—well, then, a brave man must always think of himself last, and my wife may be perverse as she will, yet will she not be able to embitter my delight in daring adventures.”

“I must be dreaming—thou art mad!” said Isolde, putting her hand to her forehead.

“Nay, lady,” answered Thiodolf, “thou art not dreaming; but thou hearest how a brave Northman will deal with his wife if she is such an one as I had imaged thee to myself. But thou wilt be far otherwise. Dear, lovely, noble Isolde, what I did for the sake of Pietro and his wife, I now do for my own sake alone. Oh, give me thy fair, proud hand. I pray thee, dear Isolde, hearken how the harps breathe to us from afar. They may urge my suit; I feel that I, a poor, rough Northman, cannot do it so well.”

It seemed almost as if Isolde were about to answer this strange speech mildly; but the strains which but just before had only breathed in soft whispers, now suddenly arose in triumphant and stately measures, so that Isolde drew herself up like a queen, and said: “Hence, thou bold, deluded man! What passes for enchantment in thy poor snowy north here happily avails nothing. Thy daring is now known to me, and I tell thee that I will never stoop myself to thee, the less because thou hast shown thyself so overbold.”

“Oh, ho!” said Thiodolf, “the aspect of things is changed. Now must I return to the plan which I had first formed. Pietro

and Malgherita must on no account be the sufferers, and I will soon see how I can overcome thee, thou fair, unruly thing!"

So saying, he took Isolde in his arms, and bore her down the steps of the arched walk. In the same way he passed through the garden, and she was far too stunned and terrified by this unexpected attack to be able to call for help; and, perchance, no help would have availed against Thiodolf's anger and heroic strength.

CHAPTER II.

WHILE these things were passing, a forester had joined himself to those who waited in the chestnut-grove; his appearance made Malgherita tremble violently, and wrap herself still more closely in her veil. He was a large, noble-looking man, past the prime of life, lordly and proud in his bearing, and yet courteous, or even gracious, towards the strangers. At times, when his hair was thrown back from his forehead, and the shadowing plume of his cap was driven aside by a certain rapid movement, which occasionally contrasted with his usually grave manner, the scar of a deep wound was seen above his eyes.

Once as the noble huntsman turned to put a question to the Northmen regarding their long and heavy lances, Malgherita whispered in Pietro's ear: "Ask him how he received that frightful wound; oh, ask him that. My blood will else curdle with a horrible doubt."

When the stranger again turned to them, the Tuscan knight said: "Dear sir, make known to us who has so deeply marked you above your brow, if, at least, you are not averse to speak of it."

The forester was silent for a time, and his countenance was sad; then he said at length, pointing to the large castle which was shining in the distance: "In that castle there is an arched passage, which has often seen many awful bewildering things. Thence my youngest daughter was once stolen from me. I am the lord of the castle; and when I, awakened by the noise, glided forth in the darkness—methinks it was my ancestor Huldibert who awoke me—the ravisher sprang towards me with drawn sword. He may have taken me for the seneschal, for he was hardly so without fear of God as to have struck wittingly at the father of his beloved. In short, he gave me this deep wound,

and I fell senseless in the passage, where the blood-stains may yet be seen. I have laid a heavy curse upon any who dare attempt to wash them out. Grandchildren and great-grandchildren shall speak of that curse."

He shuddered at his own words, and silently fixed his eyes on the ground; then again raised his voice, and said: "I sent a curse after the fugitives, and that may every one know, as well as the wicked deed which preceded it, so that other children tempted to evil may consider it, and deliver their souls and bodies. I have laid a malediction on my daughter, that she shall never lay a living child on her bosom until"—. He stopped, and added, after a pause: "The condition is impracticable, and need not be repeated; but that the curse should lie heavy is the main thing,—and it does lie heavy, children, you may believe me, on the accursed one."

He smiled bitterly to himself. Malgherita gave a shriek of anguish. The old baron drew himself up slowly, stared, now at the lady, now at the knight, and said at last: "I have, doubtless, the ravisher before my eyes, perchance also her he bore away. Strike me now dead, ye evil ones; for I tell you, you are otherwise lost without deliverance."

Neither Pietro nor Malgherita dared to move, and the great baron went his way through the chestnut-forest with threatening words and blowing on his horn.

The terrified lady wrung her hands and wept hot tears, and the only words she could bring forth were, "Flight, speedy flight!" In vain Pietro opposed to her repeated entreaties that they must await the return of Thiodolf, or, at least, the signal from his horn; in vain the brave Icelanders assured her that not the least evil should befall her even did the baron come with all his force. She continued to implore that they would retreat to the ship, if they loved and honored her. At length the Iceland warriors said to Pietro: "Sir knight, you will do very wrong if you do not at once grant the prayer of that lovely little lady. We are appointed to protect her in this country; therefore it depends solely and entirely on her will what shall be done and what left undone."

Pietro, to whom the whole world was but a ring where Mal-

gherita shone as the jewel, gladly agreed to this. He asked again of his gentle love what was her pleasure ; and as she, in anxious haste, pointed to the sea, and commanded that no one should remain behind—so that all traces might be lost to her angry father—they altogether went to the boat, and, with rapid strokes of the oars, they returned to the larger vessel.

CHAPTER III.

NOT long afterwards, Thiodolf came with Isolde to the appointed spot in the wood, and finding it deserted, he looked around, with angry flashing eyes. "Vanished?" he cried out. "Has, then, the earth opened her mouth, or have the spirits of the air carried them away? For assuredly my glorious Icelanders would never have let themselves be driven away without leaving some traces of combat; at least, arms would be scattered about here, and a heap of the bones of the dead. But I will soon find out some watch-tower, where I can see all around." And therewith he climbed up a lofty chestnut-tree, calling back to Isolde: "Give not thyself the useless trouble of running away, maiden. In a very, very little time I should catch thee again; so, I advise thee, remain quiet under the chestnut-shade."

Isolde obeyed the strange direction. Like some fair image, she stood motionless beneath the branches, and truly she was deadly pale as a marble statue, and her eyes looked out in fearful fixedness from beneath her beautiful brows.

Then came a richly-attired youth riding through the forest. He was called Glykomedon, and was from the great Greek capital Constantinople. Skilled in many delicate arts, equally diligent in the employments of a merchant and of a knight, sprung from a noble and princely race, and yet rich in connexions with merchants, he was held in equal honor in the city of Marseilles and in the castle of the great baron. As he now came through the shade of the forest with a waving plume in his cap, a richly embroidered scarlet mantle wrapped around him, and a costly sword at his side, Isolde stretched, imploringly, her right hand towards him, while she laid the finger of the left on her beautiful mouth, commanding silence. Glykomedon, who had long sighed for the love of the fair lady, went softly towards her with a beating heart; but a second sign of Isolde, who pointed out to him the northern

giant, looking around from the topmost branches of the tree, checked his daring hope. A few whispered words of the lady said what was to be done ; but he did not grasp, as she meant and desired, the glittering sword at his side, but rather stood still thoughtfully, and, as it seemed, somewhat doubtfully, sending up a sharp glance to the top of the chestnut-tree. Suddenly he tore the red mantle from his shoulders, shrouded Isolde in it, placed his plumed cap on her head, and then, as friend might do with friend, he took her by the arm, and passed on with her into the deeper shade of the forest.

The eagle-glance of the young Iclander had soon ascertained that there was no trace of Pietro and Malgherita, nor of his soldiers, to be discovered on the coast. And when, looking down, he also missed Isolde, he sprang from the tree full of rage ; and seeing only two youths sauntering quietly through the wood, he ran after them with rapid steps, and reached them in a few strides. "Boys," he said, "have you not seen a tall, beautiful maiden, who must have run somewhere from the place whence I come ? Perchance to the castle yonder ? Hide nothing from me, you dainty youths, I pray you earnestly, for I might otherwise tear you to pieces in my wrath."

Isolde trembled violently, and concealed her face yet deeper in the bright mantle ; but Glykomedon pointed, with courteous mien, to the right, and said, "Yonder, dear sir, I saw her run, and it appeared to me, in sooth, that she took her way to the castle."

And then he went with Isolde into the thicket to the left, while Thiodolf flew with quickened speed along the opposite path, which had been pointed out to him.

He had not gone far when he met a troop of the great baron's retainers, who were riding, in armed array, towards the coast. He wished to avoid the troop, in order not to delay his pursuit ; but two other detachments in conjunction with the first formed a semicircle which reached to the sea, connected by some detached marksmen and riders, and apparently bent upon seizing all whom they should meet in the space which they surrounded.

"Give place !" cried Thiodolf to them. They heeded him not, and only pressed on, more on their guard, and more prepared for fight. But then a lofty knight, in a splendid hunting-dress, on a

beautiful grey horse,—it was the great baron,—called out : “ I find them not in the chestnut-grove. Seize me that man : he must give an account of them ! ”

“ Must I ? ” cried Thiodolf. And he threw one of the two spears that he held in his hand so rapidly and so surely, that the horse of a trooper, who was dashing towards him, lay stretched on the ground, pierced through. The other lance he threw, as if in sport, vigorously upwards, and caught it again ; then slowly took his way back to the sea-shore, at times holding out the shining spear-point towards his pursuers. They slackened their pursuit ; and none dared to advance towards him, all looking upon him as a wild beast already surrounded and captured, which must yield itself soon to the immense superiority of numbers.

Thus the Icelfander reached the strand, where they thought surely to take him ; and those nearest to him covered themselves with their cloaks and mantles, that they might escape the lance-stroke with which his practised hand threatened them ; but Thiodolf sprang lightly into the sea, as if it had been but a bath prepared for a joyous sport, and with powerful strokes of his arms swam back to his ship. Hardly could the astonished pursuers collect themselves enough to send some arrows after him ; and they hissed harmlessly in the water. They stirred up Thiodolf’s wrath, however ; and while a boat came towards him from the ship, and he swung himself into it, he threw his spear to the shore, and struck down dead the boldest of the archers, crying out, “ There, you have a slight token from me. Henceforth beware of such as me ! ”

CHAPTER IV.

ONCE on board the ship, Thiodolf cast fearful glances around him. It was easy to see that the Berserker rage was beginning its terrific work within him. He looked fixedly at Pietro, tried with alarming care the edge of a battle-axe that he had caught up, and cried to the seamen: "Raise the anchor! give the sails to the wind! Everything has failed here; and I can well take vengeance during the voyage. Ye shall see a somewhat bloody tragedy, but one well worth noting."

The seamen of both ships dared not oppose the slightest resistance to the will of the wrathful hero, and put to sea. He at first walked to and fro with frightful calmness, and at length went slowly with lifted battle-axe towards Pietro, who, well knowing that no words of his could now avail, held himself prepared for a combat for life or death. But then Malgherita—her usual timidity overcome by this overwhelming terror—placed herself between the combatants:—"Thiodolf," she said, and pointing to her beating heart, "turn hither thy weapon. It must be all one to thee to kill me so, or by terror and grief; and I truly am alone the guilty one."

"That I believe not," answered Thiodolf; "and I need not believe it; for I have already one before me on whom I may take vengeance. Take thyself out of my sight! Thou wouldst die before my eyes if the old dark spirit of my race gained full power over me! Thou couldst not even bear the sight of Mount Hecla! Away, I tell thee!"

"Never!" sighed the pale lady. "I know now that I must die; but I will die with Pietro. And here, so close to the gate of death, I swear to thee that I alone am guilty of all. Thou saidst that thou didst need no help but thine own."

"I did say so, truly," said Thiodolf, his anger softening; he lowered the battle-axe, and looked for a time steadfastly in Malghe-

rita's face. At length he cried out: "How has that child power to allay the Berserker rage with her pure eyes! Ah, and she is like Isolde also, though truly she is but a tiny image of her!"

Then he flung away his battle-axe, went up cordially to Pietro, and said: "But, my good brother in arms, wherefore didst thou leave the shore before I blew on my horn?"

When he now had heard all, and how Pietro had throughout resisted, and only yielded to the imploring prayers and commands of Malgherita, he became very thoughtful and still, and said, at last, to the oldest of the Icelanders: "If ever I show myself so mad again, I give thee full power to have me held, and, if necessary, to bind me. I should never through my whole life have known peace again if my beloved brother had fallen so undeservedly by my own hand."

The old man looked at him, and shook his head, saying: "I ween thou couldst sooner bind us all together than we thee, especially when once thou art possessed by the true Berserker rage."

"That might well be," answered Thiodolf, thoughtfully, "and so much the worse both for me and the whole ship's crew."

He sighed deeply, and placed himself at the helm; and for the rest of the day no one could draw forth a word from him, though in other respects he showed himself kind and submissive to every one.

The next morning he looked better pleased. "I will take the greatest heed to myself," he said, taking Pietro and Malgherita's hands; "and if, in spite of all, I begin to thunder and lighten, then tell me some stories of how your white Christ came to His disciples, who were fishers, on the sea-coast, in the grey mists of morning. I know not how it happens, but when I hear such tales I feel such a longing in my mind, and I become so soft and kind. But now let me talk to you, dear children, of what concerns us at present."

And then he related to them all that he had wished to do, and how all had failed. Malgherita and Pietro could not but smile at times at his strange wild true-heartedness, but he himself could nowadays understand why all had not turned out well. He ended by saying that he would but take them first in safety to Tuscany, and then return to fetch Isolde, and assuredly bring about a re-

conciliation in his own way. "Ask me nothing about it, children," he concluded. "You do not understand, I see plainly, our northern schemes; and as at the very worst it is only my own skin that will suffer, and that of my sworn companions, no one has anything to do with the business but myself."

CHAPTER V.

IN the blooming land of Tuscany, one beautiful evening, there sat several shepherds together under some shady trees; while the sea, in the golden light of evening, glittered before them. The eldest of them touched a guitar, to whose tones another sang the following song:

“ The Lady Laura’s castle grey
 Stands lonely on the steep :
 Owl, bat, and swallow, flap their wings
 Around the towers, while reptile things
 Along the pavement creep.

Once belted knights, with gallant grace,
 Here held the gay tourney,
 And couch’d the lance in mimic strife :
 How did all pleasure and all life
 So quickly pass away ?

The bold Moors came, well arm’d and fierce,
 In ships that court the breeze :
 Warder and watch before them fell.
 Oh, say ! who taught the infidel
 The fairest prize to seize ?

The sweetest flower is pluck’d away
 From out our summer crown :
 Put hand to lance, and heel to spur,—
 Knights, ride ye forth, and rescue her,
 For Tuscany’s renown.”

“ And so was it done !” said a third. “ Truly our knights rode from here—but one went to Florence, another to Sienna, a third to Pisa; and while our nobility there showed their prowess, and took their pleasure with their own and the burghers’ blood, our coasts remained open to the sea-robbers. See how many beautiful castles shine all around on our heights, and all stand empty as the castle of the ravished Countess Laura !”

“Were but the Marquis Pietro of Castel-Franco here!” said the one who had sung. “He was always the mirror of our chivalry; he would never have suffered the outrage, more especially because the Countess Laura was the wife of his late cousin.”

“It is still to be proved,” answered the other, “whether he could have done anything in the matter. Thou must remember how the Count Paolo died. The unknown knight in Moorish garb, who pierced him mortally with a lance in the tourney held in his own castle-court, appeared to all the guests mysterious, and almost like a wizard; and the fair countess herself was not free from all suspicion. It is said that it was in displeasure against her that Marquis Pietro went forth on his voyages.”

“He may have had what motive he pleased,” said the old shepherd; “evil enough has his absence brought to us. Ah! how mournfully Castel-Franco looks down from the mountains! It seems far more like a ruin than a castle, although all the stones are firm knit together; for the soul has departed from the castle with its lords. Let it but for a short time longer remain desolate and shut up, and brambles will shoot forth from the stones, and branches wave from the towers instead of banners. Yes, it appears as if already rampart, gate, and wall, had fallen down together, and I was seeing curious travellers wandering among the ruin.”

All were silent in melancholy thought, when suddenly one of the circle started up in terror:—“May all the saints have mercy!” he cried out. “A Norman pirate-ship comes towards us with swelling sails!”

They all looked, and saw the threatening appearance; and while one called for arms, another urged to send for help, and a third proposed to drive the flocks farther inland, the old shepherd said: “Be not too hasty, children, with your needless terrors. You may see that the ship bears a flag of peace. Only go to meet her as friends, and all will be well.”

Some still were doubtful, and thought that the flag of peace was only to draw them on to their destruction. But the old shepherd reproved this with solemn words, reminding them that the vessel bore nothing of a Musselman appearance, but a Norman;

and the Normans, it was well known, played no tricks with their flags and banners.

Then all did after the old man's advice; and they did well, for the strangers had been sent on before by Thiodolf, to spread through castle and village the news of the approach of Pietro and Malgherita.

A joyful stir was forthwith seen on all the coast. The maidens came forth with wreaths of flowers; the wives with choice fruits, and bright veils floating in the air; their fathers and husbands, whether husbandmen, shepherds, or hunters, with their sharp polished scythes, and crooks, and weapons. The soldiers who were still in the neighborhood, having been wont to fight under the banner of the ancient race of Castel-Franco, likewise gathered together, and went down to the coast to give a joyful welcome. The bells of the villages around rang out, and the sound of many guitars joined to them like the joyful notes of spring birds. But only those who bear already in their minds the sweet summer sounds of the south can imagine the delicious songs of the women and girls, now sportive, now touching.

The travellers landed; and while Pietro by his courteous knightly bearing, and Malgherita by her beauty and gentle grace, won all hearts, Thiodolf walked beside them as in a waking dream. Now his look was fixed on the deep-green tops of the trees, which looked so fair against the bright sky with their reddening fruits; then he strode on over the rich grass carpet; and then again paused at some graceful villa and its dazzling garden. With a happy smile and a sigh, he said to himself, "Truly Uncle Nefiof told no falsehood when he spoke of this glorious land of the south; but he described it rather stiffly and coldly, the poor man!"

"And is it only here that you first find all that you fancied?" said Malgherita smiling. "You will make me angry if you put my sweet native Provence so far below Tuscany."

But he answered kindly: "In Provence, dear Malgherita, I thought but of thee, and—let all the gods bear the blame—much, far too much, of Isolde, so evil-minded, but ah! so wondrously fair."

As they thus spoke, they reached the castle, where already the traces of neglect and desolation had almost disappeared before the

joyful activity of all. Sunshine lay on every face ; only a momentary but very deep shade passed over the features of the noble knight when he was reminded of the fair widow of his cousin, the Countess Laura, who had been carried away by pirates from *Barbary*. Thiodolf thought that his sadness was caused by this outrage, and was about to promise his help to deliver her, when the marquis said : " Trouble not thyself about the cast-away. May my eyes never see her again ! "

" Well," answered Thiodolf, " that wish may very easily be fulfilled ; and if it please thee, it pleases me likewise. "

Therewith he sat down, laughing, beside Pietro and Malgherita, at the sumptuous table, covered with noble wines and beautiful fruits ; and, contrary to his custom, he threw away his clattering sword *Throng-piercer*, saying that all here was much too bright and joyous for any to dare talk of cold steel.

With almost childlike joy, Thiodolf ate of the golden fruits of the south, and let the sparkling wine flow into the polished glass, and then trickle in slow drops on his tongue. " Sing, Malgherita, sing, then," he prayed the while, " a little song to thy mandoline ; and, dear people, open the window, that the balmy air may pour in from without, and the rays of the golden moon. My children, your land is unspeakably glorious. I will win for myself a castle or two in the neighborhood, so that we may always dwell together. "

But in the midst of all this bright feasting and enjoyment, he arose gravely from his seat, looked out at the stars, buckled on his clanking sword, and said : " It is time. I must, before all, get *Isolde* out of the *Provençal* castle ; and so, ye dear joyous friends, good night. "

All endeavors to withhold him from the voyage were in vain. He blew his war-horn at the open window till the singing birds were silenced by it as by a thunder-clap ; and forthwith the Icelanders were seen in busy tumult, hastening over the moonlit meadows down to the sea, preparing their ships for departure, and pouring forth strange songs, never before heard in *Tuscany*. The dwellers in the land, men, women, and children, went after them in astonishment, but lovingly and confidingly.

In the meanwhile Pietro had made a sign to the company to leave

the hall ; and when alone with Thiodolf and Malgherita, he said : " Since thou wilt leave us so quickly, brother-in-arms, I am bound to give thee an account of what has passed with respect to the widow of my cousin, the fair Laura, who has been carried away ; so that thou mayest not deem that any unknighly feeling has hindered me from hastening after the ravisher."

" Many foolish thoughts go, indeed, through my head," answered Thiodolf ; " but never one so foolish as that, I hope."

" Distance is a bad pleader," said Pietro ; " and it seems to me as if we shall not meet again for a long time."

" That may well happen," said Thiodolf ; " for I should not willingly return to you without Isolde, and it may be that it will be somewhat hard to win her. But for what thou sayest about distance, I understand it not : it sounds to me very mistaken. Thou knowest how dear to my heart Uncle Nefiolf and Aunt Gunhilda have become since they have been so far away from me. Thou thinkest, perchance, that they were not very beautiful to look upon. Ah ! beloved Pietro, distance has done no injury to the proud, lovely Isolde. But if thou hast somewhat to relate to me, say on, in the name of all the gods : I love to hear stories."

And Pietro spoke as follows :—" As the choicest of the Tuscan chivalry strove to win the hand of the beautiful Laura, many wondered when the fair prize fell to the share of my noble and rich, but somewhat aged, cousin Paolo. I myself could the less understand it, because I knew that Laura lived wholly in the by-gone world of the Greeks and Romans, collecting around her their statues, parchments, and other remains, of which the good Count Paolo had never thought in his whole life. Be it as it may, Count Paolo led the fair lady to the altar, and both lived together for some time in great joy and much festivity. There came at length a young minstrel to the castle ; he bore on his arm a lyre, such as the old Greeks used to strike ; he sang very deliciously, and greatly pleased the Lady Laura in his flowing Moorish dress, though people in general held him for an unbaptized Moor."

" Unbaptized !" interrupted Thiodolf ; " she might have loved him for all that. I myself am unbaptized. But a Moor ! Shame upon her ! The creatures are as black as night to look upon."

Pietro told him, smiling, that many noble Arabs dwelt on the

Spanish and African coasts who were of no darker complexion than Italians, and who were only called Moors because they had come from the ancient land of Mauritania.

This satisfied Thiodolf; and Pietro continued: "But the minstrel did not at all please Count Paolo, and he once drove him from the castle in a stormy night. The exact circumstances are not known; only this is known for certain, that the Lady Laura behaved as if nothing important had happened, and showed herself so sweet and loving to the old lord that she won him to give a splendid tournament in his castle-court on her birth-day, at which he himself appeared in the lists most richly attired, and bearing himself right manfully. But our gay sport soon turned into sorrowful earnest. An unknown knight, in strange attire, who tilted after an unwonted fashion, struck the noble host with such wonderful dexterity through the vizor, that Paolo at once fell lifeless on the sand; while the veil of the lady, waving in sign of peace, forbade to us combatants any outbreak of our quickly kindled wrath. Afterwards, when we would have summoned the murderous stranger to justice and judgment, he had vanished in an incomprehensible manner. And for many months our intercourse with the widow remained doubtful, and unsatisfactory, and uncertain. Neither was vengeance to be taken, nor friendship and confidence kept up. Then I took my resolution, and went forth, forsaking castle and native land, and kindred, seeking for myself an untroubled happiness in foreign countries, and a more joyous life. Gracious Heaven has granted me this in Malgherita's arms; and the unworthy beauty has been carried beyond our reach by a fortunate storm."

"It will not end well with that woman," said Thiodolf. "An old proverb of our country says, 'Cast away from thee guilt and curse, or thou wilt never draw down to thee the falcon, happiness, from the clouds.'"

Then he stretched out his hand lovingly to his friends to take leave, and went out of the hall, bidding them not to follow. "For," said he, "we are all three, I feel it, somewhat sad; and we should but drive the sting of parting as many times into our hearts as there are steps from here to the sea-shore. The knife had better go in sharp once for all, and quickly come out again,

and then the wound will heal soon and healthfully. Good night, children ; I love you from my very soul."

He was out of the hall, and Malgherito and Pietro looked at each other pale and sorrowful. But on Malgherita's face lay a far other paleness than that which the sadness of parting brings. Pietro marked it, but dared not ask the cause, for a like mysterious feeling stirred within himself.

"Didst thou hear the saying with which Thiodolf parted from us?" said Malgherita after a time, gravely and solemnly: 'Cast away guilt and curse, or thou canst never draw down to thee the falcon, happiness, from the clouds.' Pietro, we shall never draw him down to us—at least not so without trouble, as we had boldly thought."

Pietro would have answered her with soothing words, but his tongue seemed powerless. At length he brought himself to ask whether they had not had enough of trouble and hardship in their shipwreck, and their winter in Iceland, and many other things that they had suffered ; but Malgherita answered: "Deceive not thyself. No portion of our hearts has yet been touched, and that must come assuredly. Hitherto Fate has but mocked us, and sounded her trumpet to prepare us for a fearful dance. But our undutifulness and the wound of my father call for more. Thou knowest, Pietro, that I bear a child in my bosom ; and does not the thunder of that mysterious father's curse roll in *thy* ears also?"

"Let us, then, but suffer together!" answered Pietro ; and clasping each other, they sank down in prayer, weeping hot tears.

The while was heard from the coast the joyful song of the Icelanders, who were now gaily setting sail in the bright moonlight.

After some days of prosperous voyage, Thiodolf cast anchor before the coast of Provence. He had found out a shady creek, where he was the more secure, as hardly any but bold Icelanders would have chosen this difficult spot for landing. With the choicest of his troops he ascended a neighboring hill, whence they could see almost into the streets of the fair city of Marseilles, and also have in sight the rather more distant castle of the great baron. Thiodolf seemed to be forming a plan of attack for the

castle ; but at length he said : " We must know first how matters stand. Therefore will I go and make inquiries in the city, which, besides, I shall be glad to see nearer."

Some of his soldiers put before him the danger in which he would place himself after all that he had but just before attempted on this shore, and begged that he would rather send one of them. But of this he would hear nothing, saying that it had never been the way of his race to keep back from any kind of danger. And when two of the Icelanders pleaded their age and experience against him, he cried out, with kindling eyes : " You are come with me to help me, not to direct me!" whereat they all remained humbly silent. Then he became gentle again, and said, soothing them kindly : " The people yonder will not eat me. But if I perish there, and you hear that they have overcome me by numbers, then do not let the city escape : overthrow it till what is lowest becomes highest ; and take heed that a mighty grave for Thiodolf be raised, which may be seen far out at sea, like a high mountain."

Then he gave them a friendly greeting, and walked gaily towards the brilliant city. But before he reached it, a path which wound through flowery fields, and which he followed, marvelling at its trimness and evenness, led him to a fair meadow where a joyous drinking-party sat under shady branches, and music sounded merrily in the sunny air, while beautiful maidens and youths were dancing on the smooth sward. This much pleased the good-humored Thiodolf, and he would gladly have joined them, but he knew not how to set about it. He often thought of taking part with either the drinking or the dancing party, but he feared that he should frighten them ; and he would on no account have troubled this pleasant company. A few, indeed, looked wondering at the stalwart gigantic form, and at his strange head-gear ; but those who dwelt in the rich merchant city were too much accustomed to strangers from all the known parts of the world to dwell long upon any one ; and so Thiodolf stood solitary and thoughtful in the midst of the gay rout, leaning upon his spear.

At length his eyes fell upon a pretty building, before whose door was hung a garland ; and many people were hastening in with empty flasks, and coming out with full ones. " Aha !"

said he to himself, "yonder must be the source of all these good things; and we must try how we too can get a drink out of it."

He walked towards it, and asked a smiling maiden, who was giving out food and drink to many passers-by, whether he might dare to join the guests.

"Wherefore not, good Sir Giant?" answered she, playfully; "if you have but money enough."

"Money!" asked Thiodolf; "what has that to do with giving hospitality?"

"Very much," answered the maiden, laughing: "the host gives his gifts for money; and if you have no money, his gifts are not for you."

"I would not be such a host," said Thiodolf, shaking his head. "But I can get over the difficulty. I have truly no money with me: but yet—can I have for this two flasks of wine, and of the right kind,—fiery, sparkling, and bright?"

He broke a gold clasp from his cloak, and held it towards the maiden.

"Ten flasks, if so please you, and more," answered she, bending low, and quickly seizing the clasp. "Will it please you to drink within, or under a bower?"

"Under a bower, if it may be," said Thiodolf. "And as for ten flasks—ay, bring at first only five, but let them be somewhat large; we can then see about more."

He was very speedily served. And he said, letting himself sink down in the fragrant bower, "It is truly somewhat foolish to be a guest after this fashion; but I should lie if I said it was unpleasant."

He had already almost emptied one flask when he first noticed that he was not alone in the bower. A little good-natured-looking man, in very respectable attire, was sitting opposite to him, and looking at him with keen eyes; but there was so much kindness about his friendly mouth, that it always seemed ready to explain or excuse what the sharp eyes might discover. Thiodolf, who willingly allowed himself to be looked through, because all within him was pure and bright as a mirror, looked on his part at the

stranger with a smile, nodded at him, and said, "It is very pleasant here!"

"Yes, truly," answered the friendly man; "and I am very glad that you feel that so strongly."

"Let us drink together," said Thiodolf, and the stranger accepted; but he brought out two flasks of a far more costly wine.

It was soon made known, in their confidential talk, that Thiodolf's companion was a merchant of Marseilles, who, during great part of the year, was forced by his business to live in foreign and often inhospitable lands; but then that only made his repose afterwards the sweeter and fuller.

"To our good brotherhood!" cried Thiodolf, making their glasses touch; "for in fact, dear sir, we are both of the same trade; only that you commonly give money for the goods of foreign lands, and I thrusts of spears, and blows of swords, and blood."

"Well," said the merchant smiling, "there may still be some little difference; for men freely give up their wares to us, and according to a settled agreement. But, on the other hand, you often repay with knightly help, or a joyful victory; and that is so noble a coin, that none other on earth may be compared to it. I, and my like, may gladly agree to the brotherhood you speak of."

"And arms!" said Thiodolf. "You use arms on your voyages?"

"Never without necessity," said the merchant; "but never without courage."

"That is right!" cried Thiodolf, and he seized his companion's hand in his powerful grasp. "Dear, brave man! it is easy to see that you may be spoken to without thoughtful reserve. Boldly out with our words as beseems valiant men. Tell me, in the name of all the gods, how goes it now in the castle of the great baron?"

"One of your countrymen has but lately made sad havoc there," answered the merchant, and he shook his head and looked keenly in the eyes of the questioner.

“So! has he?” replied Thiodolf rather hurt. “But tell me now what has come of it.”

“What well nigh *must* come of it,” said the merchant. “The proud and lofty mind of the baron has become bewildered by his wrathful sorrow. Neither by day nor by night will he come out of the vaulted passage which leads to the castle from the park, and which was always looked upon by him and most of his household as a mysterious and ill-fated spot. There he wanders about with an old heavy hammer, and strikes against the painted walls to find the hollow place where the prophecy of his ancestor, Huldibert, lies concealed. That prophecy he thinks will throw light upon the fearful destiny which has robbed him of both his daughters.”

“Both his daughters? Both?” asked the astonished Thiodolf. “Isolde but left her home for half an hour, and has long ago returned to it.”

“You are misinformed,” answered the merchant. “Isolde has been forcibly carried off by that Northman; probably at the desire of Malgherita, who but just before had sprung up again like an apparition.”

“Yes,” said Thiodolf, striking the table till flasks and glasses clattered together, “that I know well. But she made her escape from him, and is long since with her father.”

“Dear sir,” answered the merchant smiling, “you are in error, however strong assertion your fist may make on the table. A wild Northman, who had been both seen and felt at the castle-gate,—for a porter is now lying in bed half dead from a blow of his fist—”

“He must have been a proper fool of a porter!” interrupted Thiodolf. “A little bit of a blow.”

“Be it as it may with him,” continued the merchant; “but this Northman had afterwards a fight with the baron’s troops on the shore, and escaped back to his two vessels, to which he had undoubtedly before contrived to convey Isolde.”

“Nay, sir, that he had *not* contrived,” cried Thiodolf with a displeased laugh; “and more the pity.”

“You contradict strangely,” said the merchant.

“Oh, sir,” answered Thiodolf, “he who contradicts strangely

is yourself. None can know the story so well as I; for I am that wild fellow of whom it pleases you to speak."

"Is it so? that makes indeed a difference," said the merchant laughing heartily; but soon falling into grave thought, he looked down silently for a while, and asked at length, "In heaven's name, have you then no knowledge where Isolde may now be?"

"It was that which I would ask you," cried Thiodolf. "And you may give me the information with a very safe conscience; for I have no other thought than that of the reconciliation of the whole house; and therefore it was that I wished to carry off Isolde, and even to marry her."

"Ah, good friend," said the merchant smiling, "that last many men have already heartily wished."

"But not so honorably and so honestly as I," said Thiodolf; "I would wager that."

"And I too," answered the merchant; "though perchance you would set about it somewhat strangely. Thus much is certain: you alone can now deliver Isolde, who must have fallen into the hands of a most unworthy ravisher."

"I shall probably grind him to dust," said Thiodolf.

"But let me now think," continued the merchant, "how we can find a trace of who he is, and whither his course may have turned." After a pause he said, "It can hardly be any other! The proud Arab, Prince Achmet, must have done the deed. At that very time he was cruising about our coasts, and his corsairs have often been seen on shore. Except his vessels and yours, there have been only merchant-ships peaceably lying in the harbor of our city, and they would never have ventured on any deed of violence; least of all against a daughter of the great baron."

Already on his feet, and with his spear in hand, Thiodolf asked, "Where shall I find Achmet?"

"They say that he sailed hence to Sicily," said the merchant. "And if you find him not there, he must be gone to the African coast. He has there a large noble castle, not far from the spot where the old Carthage stood; and without doubt he must have thought of concealing there the stolen treasure."

"Thanks, my brave, wise informant," said Thiodolf, shaking

the merchant's hand; "and before we part let me hear your name."

"I am called Bertram," answered he. "And I, too, would make you a request. There is in the neighborhood of Achmet's castle an old Arab called Haroun, who has in keeping some very precious jewels of mine. I have never sent for them, because there has been no opportunity sufficiently safe; but now I wish that you would take them into your brave hands, and bring them to me in Marseilles when you restore Isolde. You will think that I am a selfish man, who has nothing before his eyes but his own business and profit."

"Wherefore not?" said Thiodolf. "It is the greatest joy and pleasure in the world, when one man takes another by the hand, and finds his own advantage in bringing about an intercourse between good people."

"Truly," said Bertram, "Haroun may do you a good turn in helping you to recover Isolde. Give him this seal-ring from me, then he will know you to be my friend, and you may trust him blindly under all circumstances. You will readily find him. Every dweller on the coast will show you the way to old Haroun's house. See, my valiant Northman, the thought which you just now spoke out is the very one that makes me joyful and bold in traffic, and gives me hope that my life spent in it is well pleasing to God."

"Long live merchants! Long live warriors!" cried Thiodolf, as he emptied his glass, pressed the merchant to his heart, and hastened with two flasks of the noble wine under his arm gaily back to his ship. Immediately the anchors were raised, and towards midday they set sail with a favorable wind.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN after some time the fertile Sicily, with her smoking mountain, arose out of the waves in sight of the voyagers, all the Icelanders stood on the decks of their vessels, and joyfully stretched out their arms towards the beautiful vision. "Hecla's brother!" they cried out. "Welcome, Hecla's brother! Is it not as if we were looking upon our old beloved fire-mountain itself?" And then they broke forth into the following song:

"Deep in the bosom of the earth,
Day and night a furnace rages;
Flames as ancient as the world,
Yet unknown to man for ages.
But when, smoking in her wrath,
Hecla lifts her thousand voices,
And when Etna threatens loud,
Then the soul of man rejoices;
Glorious thoughts his heart inspire,
That the world is girt by fire!"

"I cannot now understand," said Thiodolf to himself, "how Malgherita could help taking more pleasure in the fiery-red Hecla. Etna here only sends out smoke into the air, and yet how joyfully my heart beats at the sight!"

While they were casting anchor before the fertile island, they heard the song of some fishermen who were rowing about, singing words like the following:

"In the red glow of evening
Came o'er the blue sea
The strong northern hero,
So bold and so free.
That his sword is unsparing
Shall Musselmans find;
But to woman he ever
Is gentle and kind.

“When the battle is ended,
The mazes he'll trace,
Of the song and the dance
With skill and with grace.
He who boldly meets death,
And who fears not to dare,
He also shall vanquish
The hearts of the fair.”

“Would to the gods that it were so!” said Thiodolf with a sigh. “Then would Isolde not have shown herself so ungracious towards me; for as to meeting death firmly, that I think I could do as well as any other. But I must speak to those good fishermen at any rate.”

He beckoned to them; and as at that time there were many true and brave Normans on the island, their countrymen were received without the smallest distrust. The fishermen rowed gladly to the vessel, and prayed the noble lord to rest a while in a bower which they had made near the shore of orange and plane branches interwoven.

“Have you any wine there?” asked Thiodolf. “I will pay you well for it, and I greatly like it.”

“Good wine of Syracuse,” answered the fishermen; and without more ado he went with them and some of his companions to land.

As they now drew near to the orange-shade, he whispered to his Icelanders, “Children, there is no help for it; this time you must go on and make inquiries about Achmet. It is so very pleasant here under the branches. Besides I see bright flasks glisten; and as it is a land of friends, I can well remain behind. Now make yourselves thoroughly well informed; you will surely find me here when you return, if even you are rather long away.”

The soldiers dispersed, and Thiodolf went with his friendly hosts into the leafy bower.

“Children,” he said, as they sat with their glasses before them, “you were singing just now a beautiful song of a brave and courteous Northman. Of what hero were you then speaking?”

“Of the great knight Helmfrid,” answered a fisherman. “He bore himself so gallantly, that not only castles and ships, but also the hearts of the noblest and fairest women could offer him no

resistance. And often indeed has he wooed a lovely lady ; but when he was just about to hear the sweet consent from her lips, he colored up as if in anger and shame, turned away, and sought some other path."

"That was well," said Thiodolf. "I can easily guess at the reason. But if I only knew where he now is, I would bring him a certain shield, and with it lull to rest his wrathful sorrow."

"You would come too late, dear sir," answered the fisherman ; "at least too late as far as regards his love-adventures. The great knight Helmfrid must now be an old man."

"They say," added another, "that he is become the head of the northern guard which the rich Greek emperor keeps at his court, and which is called the troop of the Væringers. He must be there a very mighty and glorious prince."

"Then he is what beseems him," said Thiodolf ; "and the people who have made him such have not done a tittle more than their duty. So help me Odin ! what a joy it must be to look only for once into the face of such a warrior !"

While they were thus speaking, a blooming graceful woman joined them. She belonged to the fishermen, and helped to bring wine and pour it out. At length she said to him who was her husband, "These are other and pleasanter guests than the corsairs who were here of late."

"Corsairs !" and Thiodolf sprang up. "Could you not tell me whether the Arab prince Achmet was their leader ?"

"That he was," answered the woman. "I know that as well as any one. For when they had tormented us long enough, and were just about to sail away, I was called to the ship in order to dress and plait the hair of a beautiful lady."

"Indeed !" cried Thiodolf. "O thou dear woman, thou art to me like a guiding star, and one very fair and kindly to look upon. Tell me now, how went it with the beautiful lady ?"

"I plaited her silky tresses," answered the woman, smiling ; "and the while the Arab prince knelt before her on rich cushions, and spoke tender and loving things to her ; but I could not hear much of them, for all around were youths and maidens singing to their Moorish instruments. The lady in the midst of these flattering sounds looked like a very queen, so steadily and brightly

did her eyes look out upon the green of the sea and the blue of heaven."

"Oh, I know that!" murmured Thiodolf to himself. "Just so did I see her for the first time: as if she were a sunflower, the proud maiden, and naught but the sun was worthy of her gaze. Did you not hear," continued he, turning to the woman, "whither they were steering?"

"I think, dear sir," answered she, "that they were going to Africa. At least much was said in the songs, and also in the speech of the Arab prince, of a castle that stands near the ruins of the old Carthage, or perhaps on part of them, and where the true joy of love was to rise up out of a fallen world."

"I have it!—thanks be to all the gods!" cried Thiodolf, springing up and seizing his horn. But quickly turning again to the fishermen, he said kindly, "Be not afraid, children, if I blow somewhat loud. I must do it this once, for I have not a moment of time to lose." And forthwith the thunder of his mighty horn echoed through the flowery valleys. The Icelanders came hastily running back, and he called out to them in his native tongue:

"Wise warriors scour the land,
Aye for tidings seeking;
Their leader, the while, bright wine is quaffing.

"The best of tidings came,
As the goblet he raised.
The secret is known. We must be sailing!"

Then he put two golden rings into the hand of the pretty fisher-wife, who bowed, full of thanks, to the noble hero, and hastening to his companions on board, steered full of joyful hopes to the African coast.

The beams of the sinking sun fell with a strange brightness on the ruins of the overthrown Carthage. High grass and fragrant shrubs, which sprang up out of the clefts of the stones, whispered in the sea-breeze, as if repeating with mysterious sounds the marvellous deeds of the past. The voice of a shepherd-boy sang these words from amongst the mounds, which might have been taken for graves:

“ When banish’d Marius, once a Roman chief,
 On Carthage’ ruin’d fragments sat him down,
 He thus pour’d forth his bosom’s sad complaint :
 ‘ O changeful life !’ he cried ; ‘ say, what art thou ?
 More than a passing shadow—a mere shade ?
 Or less than the forerunner of grim death ? ”

A beautiful woman who passed just then, leaning on the arm of a Moorish prince, trembled painfully at this song, and he immediately took her back to a splendid castle which rose up not far from the spot.

Soon after Thiodolf came across the plain. He had landed some hours before ; and had, as he was wont, taken upon himself alone to make inquiries in this land of enemies. His answer to some well-meant remonstrances of his companions had been : “ In the first place, it makes less noise when I go alone ; and then I can get more honor from all that may befall me. Keep quiet in your posts, and let no man interfere with me.”

They well knew what that meant, and did not venture on another word of opposition ; remaining on the shore listening and prepared for combat, that they might run at the first sound of the horn, wherever their young leader should call them.

Now as Thiodolf was striding over the ruins, he heard the song of the boy as it gave out these words :

“ The brilliant green of summer’s days
 Changes to autumn’s mournful brown.”

“ There is not much harm in that,” said Thiodolf. “ Autumn is a beautiful season ; but thou, to whom it seems so mournful, come out for a while from thy heap of stones. I have to speak with thee.”

The stripling shepherd drew near to the young hero, greeting him courteously.

“ Thou fair boy,” said Thiodolf, “ canst thou show me the way to old Haroun’s dwelling ? ”

“ I will do so gladly in the morning, dear sir,” answered the boy ; “ but this evening it is all too fearful around the old building. Besides, many wild beasts cower there in the night-time ; and before we could complete our journey, the moon would be already risen high.”

"Leave the moon to rise if she will, dear child," answered Thiodolf. "Thou art under the safeguard of a strong Northman. Before a hair of thy head can be touched, I must be lying dead on the ground ; and that would not be so easily done."

"I well believe that, thou great noble man," said the boy. "I will go with thee ; but I must first collect my flock."

Thiodolf was content with this. The boy drove his flock into a space surrounded with a half-fallen wall, closed the entrance carefully with hurdles, and went his way with his knightly companion. They went over the level coast, only passing at times detached lonely buildings, or low brushwood, breaking the sameness of the way, while the deepening shades of evening more and more overcame the power of the setting sun. Clouds of deepest sorrow and longing came at the same time over Thiodolf's mind. The friends he had left behind in Iceland, and the proud beauty who had fled from him, came before him as if the past and the future, half severe and half alluring. He was tempted to think that all the joy which he was pursuing was but an unreal cloud. His faithful relations in Iceland he might never see again, and never win the love of that glorious maiden. Some chords which the boy drew forth from the lute sounded mournful likewise, and now and then a heavy tear fell from his large blue eyes, almost like the rain-drops which fall from the clouds when a mighty storm is about to burst forth.

When the moon had been long up, and the sands appeared golden yellow in her light, the wanderers perceived a ruined building which rose upon a gentle hill. All around grew thick bushes of shrubs strange to look upon ; some of them spreading wide, others shooting up high ; every leaf recalling to a stranger how far off is his beloved home, and in what remote wild country he is wandering.

"Yonder lives old Haroun," said the boy, and he pointed with his hand towards the moon-lit building ; but he suddenly remained in this position as if spell-bound.

"What is the matter, boy ?" asked Thiodolf. "Go onwards, or we shall find old Haroun already asleep."

"Dost thou not see it ?" whispered the child, but without moving. "Yonder is cowering a fearful lion, ready to spring on us ; if we move, he will be upon us."

“Truly the lion must be a bad beast,” answered Thiodolf. “If only I could see him!” And cautiously looking through the bushes, he said at length, “Look now, there is a beautiful great dog, quite gold-colored; he shall help us in our chase.” But as he was about to call the dog, it sprang fiercely out upon him. “Come on!” cried Thiodolf; but at the same moment he felt his round shield almost torn from his arm, and the creature’s teeth in his side. “Dost thou so love to bite, sirrah?” he cried, and let his battle-axe fall on the beautiful head of the beast, dividing it into two bloody halves, so that the wild aggressor fell to the ground with a loud far-echoing cry, and then stretching out his limbs in death immediately expired. “Pity for the beautiful noble dog!” said Thiodolf compassionately. “I have never seen so large a one. But why was the creature so ill-conditioned?—And now, where shall we find the lion?”

The astonished boy had difficulty in convincing him that there lay the lion, and that it was one of the most fearful that could be met with on the African coasts.

“So, so!” said Thiodolf, bending down to observe the fallen beast. “So that is a lion! Well, it is a very beautiful and powerful creature; but I can tell thee I had pictured to myself it would be something more.”

An old man, with a venerable beard and high turban, had approached them. “Could you not tell me, my children, who killed here this mighty lion? I know very well that it may have been a thunderbolt. But how came it that I heard nothing of it, and yet that the fearful death-cry of the beast rang through my chambers?”

“Thunderbolt?” answered Thiodolf. “Yes, if you call this a thunderbolt.” He held his battle-axe towards the old man, and added, “But you are mistaken.”

“And yet I might well-nigh call it a thunderbolt,” said the old man, now looking at the edge of the axe, and now at the animal’s wound; and the boy whispered in Thiodolf’s ear that this was the rich old Haroun, to whom they were going.

“Dear Haroun,” said Thiodolf kindly, “I have to give thee a greeting from thy friend Bertram.”

The old man looked at him, his eyes sparkling with joy, and

said: "Truly, thou valiant youth, thou hast the look of one who may be the friend of my friend, and thou beseemest thyself as such; but yet I must ask for another assurance."

Then Thiodolf held the seal-ring before his eyes; and forthwith Haroun grasped the hand of his guest with youthful warmth and youthful strength, and led him up into the building, promising at the same time hospitality and a night's lodging to the shepherd-boy, so that in the morning he could return in the safety of daylight to his flock.

The two men sat opposite to each other in a great hall, painted with figures of very ancient date, and talked over their business. Between them stood a table covered with rich fruits, and a flask of precious wine shone before Thiodolf, who diligently applied himself to it. Faithful to discharge the commission of his friend, he settled about the transfer of the jewels before he began to ask after Isolde and Achmet.

"The bold prince lately returned home with a wondrously fair woman," answered Haroun; "and a succession of feasts has been held in his splendid castle. I will give thee a counsel, dear friend. Go thou to-morrow towards evening to the castle as a player on the lute,—thou canst strike its strings?"

"Not much worse than I can wield a sword," answered Thiodolf, nodding confidently.

"That is well," proceeded the old man; "then that will be the best way to search out how matters stand there, and then to make plans accordingly."

"I must say one thing to thee first. If I can go there as I am now, so let it be. But to disguise myself as a Musselman, that I can do neither now nor ever. I will live as a Northman, I will die as a Northman; and no single moment shall come between in which it can be said that I have passed for aught else."

"Thou art a strange man," said Haroun with some displeasure, "and takest too much thought. When the alchymist can change metals for ever, why should a man be scared at putting on another garb for two or three hours?"

"With an Icelfander such tricks are not so lightly played," answered Thiodolf indignantly.

"Well, well," said the old man kindly; "it must, then, be

done after another fashion. * In the castle they much love all that is called song or melody ; and the gates would open all the quicker before the wonderful appearance of an Icelandic minstrel."

"Yes," said Thiodolf, "that is the way with doors when Icelanders knock at them : if good words cannot do, good blows can."

At this moment he perceived a large figure painted on the wall in vivid colors, on which the lamp, as he turned it in order more conveniently to help himself, threw a bright light. "That must be a very old painting ?" he asked.

"Truly it must be of the time of Carthage," was the answer, "for our law forbids us to make such images."

"That is a strange law," cried Thiodolf, "which would forbid man to make beautiful images, in which other people will find pleasure for many hundred years afterwards. If I am not mistaken, I would never let myself be so hindered."

"The prophet," answered Haroun, "says that all such figures will one day, before the judgment-seat of God, ask of those who made them souls for the pictured bodies."

"That sounds very serious," said Thiodolf ; "but yet I think, if the pictures are of the right sort, there is nothing to be said against them. But now, my noble host, declare to me what those figures on the wall may mean,—the young knight, who stands before an altar, solemnly stretching out his hands toward heaven, and the old chief near him, who appears as if he were giving him grave warning."

"There was, in the old Carthaginian times, a very great hero, who had yet a far greater hero for his son. And now because the city of Carthage had such a strife with the city of Rome that it was easy to see that one of them must be overthrown, the old hero made the young hero, whose glorious and unequalled greatness he well foresaw, take an oath that he would be an enemy to all Romans, and know of no reconciliation with them till death. The young hero joyfully took the oath, and kept it fast through his whole life ; so that the great city of Rome was well-nigh swept away from the earth before his wrath."

"I like that well," said Thiodolf ; "and if the people on the wall both look somewhat strange and harsh, and very passionate in their whole appearance, one can yet see that they are of the

right good sort. Such an oath, and his weapons first put into his hand,—it is very beautiful ; and I would fain that something like it could now be found in the world. But not an oath only against the Romans, or against this or that one in particular, but against all that is bad, and for all that is good.”

“The Christians have such a kind of knightly oath amongst them,” said Haroun ; “but he who would learn it must first be baptized.”

“That is a pity,” cried Thiodolf ; “I would else have taken it.”

At the same time he was about to offer to his host a parting cup ; and he then first remarked that Haroun let no drop of wine pass his lips.

“Why is that now ?” asked he. “Your law has not forbidden you that likewise ?”

“Yes,” said Haroun, “our law does forbid it ; and the great Mahomet has given us an example of obedience. He could lift himself to heaven in his ecstasies without the help of a drop of the intoxicating liquor.”

“Mahomet !” repeated Thiodolf, thoughtfully to himself, “that must be the Mahound of whom Malgherita was asking in the spring. No, all the gods be praised ! he belongs not to us. It was well if he was so full of inspiration in himself ; but he should not have forbidden the joyous wine to other brave people !”

“Mock not !” interrupted Haroun, very gravely.

“Nay, truly I am not mocking,” answered Thiodolf, good-humoredly. “I honor greatly the hero who could despise so precious an earthly gift, and yet, as you say, could soar up to heaven. Only I do not understand him well ; and also I am not the man to imitate him.” So saying, he emptied a newly brought flask almost at a draught, and wished good night to his host.

When he was on his bed he could hear the sounds of a harp, and Haroun singing from the flat roof of a building below him. The song spoke of the joys of Mahomet’s paradise, and the many lovely maidens who were there to greet the heroes with ever-changing love. But in Thiodolf’s heart was the *one* Isolde, whom he hoped next day to recover ; and he fell asleep, smiling, with her image before his closing eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

A PART of the following day was spent in arranging and putting together Bertram's jewels, so that Thiodolf could carry them away with him as soon as he had gained his object.

"The only thing to be considered is, that you dwell so far from Achmet's castle. Perchance I may succeed by a sudden unforeseen stroke, and then I shall have to come here again, it may be, to stake my prize on a second throw."

"Hearken, friend," said Haroun, after some reflection, "I believe we should do best if you take the whole packet with you. Bertram has chosen your brave arm for the defence of his treasure, and I think you will take it in safety through everything."

"Assuredly," answered Thiodolf. "At the same time, Bertram would never wish his jewels to be as fetters to my undertaking. At the worst I will make him tell me what they are worth, and I will somewhere take their full value for him. There are many precious stones in the world. But none shall easily take these from me; give them to me."

And then, with a lute of the old man's under his arm, he took again the way that he had passed yesterday, and reached Achmet's castle in the cool of the evening.

"It seems pleasant here," said he to himself; "and I wish that all things may go peaceably, so that I need not sprinkle the smooth polished walls with blood."

But as he was about to go in, it struck him that his faithful companions might be missing him too long, and perhaps at nightfall might come inland to seek for him. So he went up a hillock, whence his ships could be seen, and blew on his horn, but in slow, measured tones, which spoke of peace and waiting.

At the first sound of the well-known horn, all the Northmen sprang to arms; but understanding the call to rest and stand still, they laid aside their arms again with sighs, and seated themselves in a circle, to repeat old legends to each other.

In the meanwhile Thiodolf once more approached the noble building, and was hospitably admitted at his knock and call. He asked for the lord of the castle, and a handsome man in Moorish garb came to him out of one of the beautiful alleys in the garden, and made himself known as such.

Then Thiodolf thought to do as Haroun had advised, and to begin the conversation with a song. He powerfully grasped the strings of the lute, but two strings broke in the rough pull; he pressed the delicate instrument yet harder, and the wood-work flew asunder. He flung it angrily on the ground, and broke it entirely with his foot; then looked at the lord of the castle with some embarrassment.

"My dear guest," said the Moor, with a hearty laugh, "what dost thou then want with me?"

"What do I want?" answered Thiodolf: "I wanted, indeed, to play before you; but see, that thing under my feet was altogether too tender, and broke in two."

"That was unfair of the lute, when you touched it so delicately," said the other, still laughing; and he invited his guest, from whom he expected much amusement, to follow him to a joyous evening meal in the palace.

"Have you here no women?" asked Thiodolf, as they entered together a splendid hall, where richly dressed men already were lying on cushions round a brilliant table.

"Not *women*," answered Achmet, "but one woman; and a fairer one than is in the paradise of Mahomet. But after thou hast so treated thy own lute, thou canst not blame me if I first make trial how far thou art fit to be taken into her presence. The fair one is in a neighboring chamber."

"Well," said Thiodolf, "we will wait." And he threw himself on a cushion, and gaily poured out wine. "It is wise of thee," said he, after a pause, during which the others had stared at him with laughing astonishment, "not to deny thyself the beloved juice of the vine; for I lately heard that such is the custom with you of the high turbans and crooked swords."

"In this castle we keep every custom that stirs the spirit of life most nobly and joyfully, and makes the blood flow quicker through the veins," cried Achmet; and "Long live god-like freedom!"

added he; wnereat the other revellers made their golden cups touch and give forth a clear sound.

But Thiodolf shook his head, and said to himself: "That might carry you far,—perchance somewhat farther than would please you."

"Thou art muttering something to thyself, dear hyperborean sage," said the laughing prince. "Wilt thou not let us hear what the Muses have granted to a priest from so far north?"

"I understand not thy strange words and expressions," answered Thiodolf.

"How, dear sir?" said a mocking guest; "hast thou never been in Greece? dost thou not know the godlike Homer? nor the joyous Aristophanes? After their free, unsophisticated way we spend our lives; and we know of none other rule than that which comes down to us from the heavenly halls of science, and which is as needful as it is lovely. And now, my refined and polished guest, without doubt thou comprehendest my words, and that which keeps us together."

"I understand not one single word of it," said Thiodolf, gently; "nor do I understand why the company here all make such jesting faces. But this I assuredly know, that none shall get either song or sport from me until I have seen the fair woman who dwells in this castle."

"Then the risk must indeed be run," said Achmet, laughing. And some of the guests cried, "Yes, by all means."

The prince went out, and soon came back, leading a slender veiled lady, of tall and noble stature. "Now, then, wilt thou sing, young Orpheus?" asked he, smiling.

"I am not called Orpheus," was the answer; "I am called Thiodolf, the son of Asmundur. And I will not sing till she has flung back the veil from her fair face."

"Oh, ho! my dainty sir," answered Achmet; "perchance that price might be paid beforehand for a glorious song, but not for some strange kind of noise."

"The price!" muttered Thiodolf, half rising from his cushion; and all involuntarily shuddered at the strong, graceful motion. But soon leaning back again quietly, he continued with earnest friendliness, "I see not why we should spoil each other's lives

with so many tricks and turnings. That veiled woman is, without doubt, the one whom I seek. In many ways I am pledged to her relations to bring her back again; and I look for great joy to myself in the deed. Be pleased, Prince Achmet, to restore the fair lady to me peaceably. It will thus be best for us all."

An inextinguishable laughter broke forth from Achmet's lips, and excited that of all the guests, till the sound drew together all the dwellers of the castle; and as one related to another the words and demands of the stranger, all laughed, till the lowest of the crowd pointed with his fingers at Thiodolf as a most diverting and unheard-of monster. The lady alone appeared to be seized with some foreboding sadness, and retired to her chamber with unsteady steps.

For a space Thiodolf sat quite still under the gibes and laughter of the strange, unknown forms. But a silent, mighty flame rose ever hotter and hotter in his eyes. It was almost as when in a time of threatening danger torches shine from the windows of some high watch-tower. At length he rose, looked around sharply and severely, and said, with a voice of thunder which sounded clear through the tumult, "Wilt thou give her to me now forthwith? I mean, the lady thou hast carried away. Wilt thou?"

It seemed as if Achmet foresaw something of the fearful strength which stormed in Thiodolf's wrath. He tried now to speak kindly and peaceably to him; and the others, too, became suddenly silent. But it was too late—Thiodolf's Berserker rage had awoke. Once again he asked with flashing eyes, "Wilt thou give her to me? Is she ready to depart?" And the delay of the answer was the signal for the most fearful outbreak.

Knives and other sharp instruments, caught up at the moment by the furious Icelfander, flew on all sides of the room like a shower; and many fell senseless or dead to the ground, on whose lips a bold smile yet rested. As the rest rushed in anger and terror against the raging youth, a mighty stroke of the battle-axe struck the breast of the foremost; and then the good sword Throng-piercer began its fearful meal.

It was less a fight than the annihilating wrath of nature's strength let loose against man's weakness. Soon only bloody

corpses were lying about in the hall, just before so gay ; and a few wounded men, with every sign of terror, were tottering down the stairs. The fearful Thiodolf stood alone in the deserted blood-stained hall.

The overpowering weakness, which is wont to follow the Berserker rage, began to creep through all his limbs as soon as the horrid victory was won. He felt the approach of unconsciousness, and wished to hasten and take his prize into a place of safety. He called out repeatedly in the Provençal tongue, "Isolde, come forth ! I bid thee, Isolde, come forth ! I will take thee uninjured to thy sister, by the honor of my race, and as surely as the bones of my father are resting in the earth !"

But when all was still silent, he collected his last exhausted strength, and broke open the door with his foot. The veiled lady, whom he had before seen leaning on Achmet's arm, sank trembling on her knees before him, and stretched out her hand imploringly.

"Come, then, Isolde," he said, kindly. "In sooth, no man in the world can less think to put thee to pain than Thiodolf the son of Asmundur. But throw back thy veil, that I may drink in strength and joy from thy sweet eyes."

It seemed as if the lady in her great fear understood few of Thiodolf's comforting words ; but the same fear made her hasten to obey such as she did understand as a command. She unveiled herself.

But how was it with poor Thiodolf when a face, very fair indeed, but quite unknown, looked upon him with pale, beseeching features ?

"Lady," he said, faltering,—“ ah ! lady, conceal nothing from me. Are you, then, the only woman here in this castle ?”

"Yes," stammered she ; "except my two black slaves, there is none other here. I would not dare to inform you falsely, my mighty lord."

"So, so," answered Thiodolf, as in a dream ; "that is another and a very bad thing. Truly I have greatly erred. Forgive me, thou unknown, alas ! quite unknown beauty ; but sleep presses upon me as with leaden weight." And he sank down

amongst the dead in heavy exhaustion, more overcome by the weight of grief than by his swoon.

He must have long lain thus, when unconsciousness passed away, and he felt himself again fresh and strong. His first thought was for Bertram's property. It was still lying safe on his breast. Whilst he was further recovering his recollection, he heard the voice of the lady close to him saying, in displeasure, "Cease from giving needless succor, Haroun, I repeat. Thou knowest that Achmet has escaped from that ghastly bath of blood, and will soon be here with some slaves to put that wild beast yonder in chains, which he will not easily break. Then will we take vengeance on him, and on thee, unless at once thou leavest him and takest thyself from our castle."

"He is my guest," answered Haroun. "I will do by him as is the duty of a brave Arab; and if you do me harm for that, you will have to answer for it to yourself."

And he began anew to rub diligently the temples of the youth with a strong sweet-smelling balsam; but Thiodolf suddenly sprang up, his arms rattling, and stood firm and joyful on his feet. He grasped Haroun's hand, saying, "It is good of thee to have come thus to assist me. Fear no more from any man; I am once more in my full strength." He only gave a contemptuous look to the trembling woman, adding, "Fie, shame on thee! So fair, and yet so wicked!"

At this moment many people ran hastily up the steps. "You come to me in a happy moment," said Thiodolf to himself, smiling bitterly; he seized Throng-piercer firmly, and walked straight to the door.

Achmet sprang in with five or six slaves carrying fetters in their hands; but when they saw the hero standing with his glittering sword, they all remained pale and motionless.

"Ye are those for whom I wait!" said Thiodolf. "Why do ye delay? Will ye not come in?" The black slaves took to flight. "Fly away!" cried Thiodolf after them; "but thou, Achmet, thou must not run from me. I am swift as a deer and by all means must I have thee."

Achmet manned himself, threw the chains on the ground, and drew near with drawn sword. The swords flew clashing one

against the other for some time ; but Throng-piercer had the advantage. Achmet's weapon fell to the ground ; Thiodolf seized him, bound him, and then stood calmly before him, saying, "Now, methinks it would serve the fellow right if I were to sink him thus bound in a pond, or in fault of that in the sea ; for he did a coward's deed when he came with five or six others upon an unconscious man."

"Thou wilt not kill this prince without taking my life also," said the lady, as she stepped firmly between Thiodolf and Achmet. "He is now the light of my life, and I will not leave him. Beware of dishonoring thy hands with a woman's murder !"

"Oh, fear not for that !" answered Thiodolf. "I am one, believe me, who with my right hand would cast him in, and hold thee back with my left till he has sunk. What thou wilt afterwards do, thou must answer for."

"I would entreat thee, my strange, fearful guest," said Haroun, "to show thyself a milder conqueror. It would too much grieve me to see a stain upon thee, thou noble hero."

"Thou art right, my friend," answered Thiodolf. "I would gladly be a wise and faithful judge, since for that I think I have been sent into this castle." After some grave thought he sat down on the cushions in the hall, and said, "I will here do my very best to act and to speak rightly. But answer me carefully, and lie not. I can indeed first let thee loose," said he immediately afterwards to Achmet ; "for there is no fear of thy escaping. But I warn thee not to attempt it, for evil would happen to thee." Therewith he loosed his bands, sat down again on the cushions, and ordered the prince to relate how he had come by the fair lady.

It soon appeared that the lady was the Countess Laura ; of whom, as the unworthy widow of his kinsman, Pietro had made such severe and bitter complaints ; and Prince Achmet, the Moorish youth with the lute, and also the knight before whose spear the old lord had fallen in the tournament.

"That does not much mend the matter," said Thiodolf, shaking his head. "On the contrary, the murder of old Paolo weighs very heavily on you ; though one can see that you carried away the lady with her own free will."

“ I killed Count Paolo unintentionally,” answered Achmet. “ I sought no more than to show to the lady my knightly skill and dexterity. But the excitement of the combat, and the different manner of fighting which prevails with us and Christian knights, brought it to so sad and bloody an ending.”

“ If one could but trust that smooth-tongued man !” said Thiodolf. “ But his coward deed just now, when he would have bound me as I lay senseless—it witnesses too much against him ; and, behold, it goes against his life.”

“ Will it, then, come to that ?” cried Laura, wringing her hands. “ And we had pictured to ourselves a life of endless joy for long, long years !”

“ Yes,” answered Thiodolf ; “ but why did not you have better thoughts ? Such inglorious luxury could never bring to noble things. I am sorry that I must kill him ; but I see well that I may not do otherwise. Achmet, is there here in the neighborhood a pond or lake, where I can quickly make an end of thee ?”

“ Thiodolf,” said Haroun, “ if thou wert to lay upon him and upon her some purifying penance, would not that be enough ?”

The young judge sat for a time motionless in deep thought. At length he said, “ In good sooth, I believe that so it may be. We have a proverb in Iceland which says : ‘ A pillow cures the sick woman ; a horse or a ship the sick man.’ Now it cannot be otherwise with deluded people ; and I will try if I can heal you both. Thee, Laura, by a year or more of great stillness and quiet, and him by the same period of warlike activity in storms by sea and dangers by land. I will at once take the Countess Laura to a convent ; there she shall reflect whether it were not much better to remain in it for ever, on account of the many serious events which have happened in her life. In the mean while Achmet shall sail to my home in Iceland, and there greet for me my uncle Nefiolf and my aunt Gunhilda, and bring me word of what they are doing, and also of how it goes with my dear tame wolf whom I left behind there. See, children, that will help us all ; for I must fairly tell you that I have long since wished for such a messenger. And you both will perchance become good orderly people ; a joy to gods and men. But if not, then may Achmet take his wicked Laura out of her convent.”

“But where shall I find thee again?” asked Achmet.

“I will see to that,” answered Thiodolf. “I will leave so bright a track behind me, that there shall be no fear of losing the way.”

Achmet offered to take an oath that he would fulfil Thiodolf’s commands; but the latter would not allow him. “You have taken care,” said he, “that no man should trust to such words from your mouth; but I know of another curb that I will put upon you.”

In the dawn of morning they took their way to the strand. Laura and Achmet went before, ashamed and troubled; Thiodolf and Haroun walked gravely behind them. As the old Arab took leave on the shore, he said, “Mahomet grant, my brave Northman, that I may meet thee again in the bowers of his paradise.”

“We shall not truly meet sooner,” said Thiodolf, earnestly; “and who indeed can say whether we shall even there? For see, old sir, this is now the third abode I have heard of where brave people meet after death, and yet I firmly believe there can be but one place of the kind. Well! the great Father will soon make it known; and I think that we shall both assuredly be in it.”

The Arab bowed reverently; and when far from the shore, still greeted his guest with his unbound turban.

As the coast of Africa began to vanish from the eyes of the voyagers, Thiodolf sang:

“A huge yellow lion prowl’d over the plain;
By the son of Asmundur that lion was slain.
In the proud castle-hall was high revel prevailing;
But the son of Asmundur he turn’d it to wailing.”

He would have sung more, but the thought of Isolde came over him; the joyous song of victory died on his lips, he bent low his head, and two great tears rolled from his eyes on to the golden shield of Helmfrid.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON a promontory of southern Sicily there stood a fair and solemn convent. The country all around looked retired and lonely. None there knew whether peace or war prevailed in the world. But whatever news, whether threatening or promising, pierced this deep retirement, was thought of as an important event, and was spoken of perchance for fifty years or more, until some new occurrence interposed.

It happened that one day the armed vessels of Thiodolf approached the coast ; some of the nuns looked upon themselves as lost, others thought it a solemn trial sent from God, while others again expected something glorious and joyful. Whatever might be the result, the gates of the holy building were opened in humble submission, and the light of colored torches streamed forth from the sacred enclosure. The abbess stood at the door with all her nuns ; and they sang as the wonderful hero drew near :

“ Come ye here with death’s decree ?
Martyrdom will set us free !
As weary pilgrims do ye come ?
Welcome to our humble home !
Come ye but as pious guests ?
Heavenly joy will fill your breasts !”

Thiodolf greeted them by stretching out his left hand, while with the right, in sign of peace, he so threw his lance that it fell to the ground with its point downwards.

“ We understand your courteous greeting,” said the abbess ; “ and we thank God that He sends you to us with gentle thoughts. Make known to us what you want from our poor convent.”

“ Ah, holy dame,” answered Thiodolf simply, “ we ask for nothing, we bring you something instead ; but whether the gift is

worthy of thanks, experience must first show. This fair young lady, whose guardian I have become after a somewhat strange fashion, you are to keep with you for a year, or perchance rather longer, as it may happen. If in this time she has found no delight in the cloister-life and in penance, then you may let her go forth again into the world; but in no wise before this gold ring has been brought to you." He held out to the abbess a ring inscribed with Runic characters, so that she might sufficiently consider them, and then said, as he turned to Achmet, "See, this ring shall be given to thee as a token as soon as thou hast brought me news of Uncle Nefiolf and Aunt Gunhilda, and my dear wolf; but not a moment sooner. And now I think I hold thee fast enough; for thou couldst never be so shameless as to forget Laura entirely."

Achmet said some words of protestation to Thiodolf, and some tenderly soothing ones to Laura which clearly came from his heart; but she seemed to give little heed to them, so completely changed was she since she had looked upon that still convent in its solitude between sea and mountain. It could not be known whether the consciousness of her guilt, solemnly punishing and purifying, had stirred in her heart at the sight of the silent dwelling, or whether she acted from worldly wisdom to gain the goodwill of her future companions.

Thiodolf appeared to ponder earnestly over this. As the abbess repaid caresses on her beautiful humble novice, he said to himself, "He who has bought a horse should not rejoice in it till after the first day's journey, and a new ship should first be praised when it has withstood the first storm at sea. But Heaven grant that holy woman may be a prophetess, and I a deluded man." Then he gave many jewels and gold-pieces to the abbess, requesting that she would entertain the lady according to her rank; but at the same time watch her carefully. For," added he, good-humoredly, "hitherto she has not gone on very well."

He then asked to be conducted round the convent, and inquired how the nuns lived, and what they did in order to serve their God. He listened for a long while very patiently; but at last he struck his spear against the marble-floor of the church, so that the maidens trembled, and cried out, "Was Isolde made for that?"

Never! It may do for others; but not, in sooth, for that proud, lofty, princely being. Spread the sails, Icelanders, that we may find her before a mad vow has passed her lips. For ah! if she has once taken it, I must myself bid her keep it, and my heart would break in twain!" And with furious haste he flew out of the convent, down to the sea and to his ship, and had no rest till the barks, driven by favorable winds, were sweeping on over the blue surface. But when no more could be done, he became gentle and quiet, and smiled as he looked back at the convent, saying, "It is strange! I had always purposed if I once came to such a house to set it open, that all the maidens might run out if so they pleased; and now I myself have brought one into it. Marvellously seldom can man know how things will come to pass."

CHAPTER IX.

IN that night when Thiodolf on the African shore had taken dreadful vengeance in Achmet's palace, strange and fearful things had happened at Castel-Franco. Malgherita some weeks before had given birth to a beautiful boy, and the father's curse was not accomplished in her hour of peril, although both she and Pietro expected tremblingly some threatening apparition. But all care did not vanish from their mind at the first smile of their sweet child. Malgherita recollected well the explicit words of the baron, that she was never to hold a healthy child on her lap till the fearful hidden condition of the curse was fulfilled. And when the nurses held out to her her smiling darling, she turned away, dreading lest the predicted death could and must reach him in her arms. She had desired that he might be baptized by the name of Tristan, mindful of the sorrowful clouds which even from his birth lowered over his young life, and thinking also of the name of her sister Isolde, who was a threatening and troubling star to the poor child, as that fair queen, of whom legends tell, was to another Tristan, though in a far other way.

In the night we speak of, Pietro and Malgherita were wandering beneath the orange-trees of their castle-garden. A soft dew fell from the moonlit clouds, the balmy leaves and branches softly whispered together, and from the castle shone forth like a star the light in the chamber where stood Tristan's cradle.

"She within dares," sighed Malgherita, "she dares lull thee on her maternal bosom, thou angel just come down from heaven! Stern father, thy cruel curse has debarred me from that joy!"

Pietro sighed deeply, and could find no words of comfort. So they walked in silence to and fro, weighed down as by a thunder-cloud in the midst of all the happiness of love. Then was heard a rustling at the gate which opened into the fields, and some one groaned and knocked as in distress. Malgherita started back

trembling, and would not suffer Pietro to open it, thinking that there certainly stood without some hideous spectre. He took her up, therefore, to a side-wing of the castle, and then went to look after the nightly guest. But Malgherita, with frightened curiosity, leant out of the window, and looked down over the castle-wall. The figure of a monk all drawn together cowered without. At sight of him Malgherita shrieked in agony: "O heavens, the messenger of ill! He it is whom the fearful Monk's Mountain disclosed to me on the coast of Norway."

Not long after, Pietro returned with his guest. He thought to quiet his trembling wife; for it was the same priest Jonas who had married them in Norway. But Malgherita only gathered fresh terror from this; recollecting old Nefiol's mournful descriptions and thoughts of the dead Christian priest, and all the sad forebodings which had hovered around their wedding. The old priest seemed, in fact, to bring no joyous tidings. Pietro in his first haste, and in the joy he had to see the witness and the promoter of his happy love, had not allowed him to speak a word; but now the old man began to talk seriously of a dark, numerous, armed array which was coming with hostile intentions against the castle. The knight now doubted whether the old man was not somewhat bewildered in his mind with his strange information, and desired to know how he had brought himself so suddenly into the south.

"My children," answered Jonas, "your guardian angel has brought me hither, if only you give heed to my warning. Let it be enough for you to know, that those who like me are devoted to the converting of our heathen brethren, are never fast bound to one place. Our superiors call, and we obey. After such a voyage I landed here. I heard in a remote creek certain men speak of falling upon the castle of the Marquis of Castel-Franco with fire and sword. Then I hastened hither to give warning; and, dear children, either fly with the swiftness of the wind, or defend yourselves strongly. Your enemies are numerous; and I believe that the great baron from Provence himself leads them in person."

At these words a maddening terror came over Malgherita. Now she urged her husband to take to flight, now to defend him.

self; and if he would leave the room, or only approach the window to summon his vassals, she fell at his feet in convulsive shudderings, and would not let him move from the spot. Then she called eagerly for her child, and again far more eagerly and anxiously she desired that he might be guarded from the approach of father and mother, lest the curse should break forth, and the little Tristan be for ever lost by Isolde's means. In the midst of these terrors other terrors arose. In truth, the great baron had already in his wild wrath stormed, and as quickly taken a part of the castle. Flames broke forth from that part, and a fierce cry of victory resounded through halls and garden. The men of the castle fled, or fell in their blood. It was with difficulty, and only with the effort of despair, that Pietro, with Malgherita in his arms, made his way through the soldiers intoxicated with victory, and took refuge with her in a neighboring wood. Of the infant Tristan not the smallest trace remained.

When the sun rose, the castle of Castel-Franco looked much as the old shepherd before had seen it in his foreboding mind. It lay a huge desolate heap of ruins; a few flashes of flames darted up from it as if in sorrow. Pietro gazed with fixed eyes on the ruined dwelling of his ancestors; Malgherita wept bitterly for her child, and hid her face in her husband's bosom, saying, "Now has fate seized on our very heart's core. Is it not so, Pietro?"

Then old Jonas, who had faithfully followed them hither, took leave of them with great emotion, and sighed forth, "Wherefore may I not remain by you? you who so need comfort! But I must gird myself for what the Most High commands; and His holy will drives me forth to a far distant unknown heathen land."

CHAPTER X.

THE ruins of Castel-Franco lay for many days untrodden by human feet, save those of the unhappy Pietro, who sought often amongst them for traces of his lost child, without being able to discover any. It had become certain, from repeated evidence of the peasants, that the baron had not carried away the child with him; and thus the last sad hope vanished. He sought amongst the stones for the remains of Tristan; but as soon as the sun went down, a sudden terror drove him from the ruins.

At length it happened that two mighty men met together there by starlight. The one was Thiodolf, the other the great baron. The Icelfander, who had first left his ship as night had closed in, could not find out where he was. He had gone up the hill to Castel-Franco, and now wandered bewildered amidst the heaps of stones. "Strange!" he said to himself; "I can always find my way; and now instead of reaching a hospitable friendly house, I am come upon demolished walls." At this moment he became aware of the tall figure of the baron, as he sat upon the highest heap of ruins and leant his head on his hand. With unwonted shudder there came over Thiodolf the recollection of the song of the shepherd-boy, which he had heard on the African shore, of the Roman chief Marius on the ruins of old Carthage. Yet but the more firmly he collected himself, went straight to the apparition, and asked, "Who art thou, night-wanderer?"

It seemed as if the baron started somewhat at the unexpected greeting; but soon with his old stern firmness he answered, "Who I am, may each man know. I am the father of the sinful Malgherita; and since I have with right and might destroyed this castle, which was hers and her lover's, I may also be allowed to sorrow nightly over these ruins."

“ Ah! if it is so,” cried Thiodolf, “ I have not lost my way ; but I have been brought here in happy hour for a single combat of vengeance.”

“ Welcome !” said the baron, rising and drawing his broad sword. “ I can wish for nothing better. If only thou, there standing before me in the starlight with thy strange horned helmet, wert the same who stole from me my eldest daughter Isolde !”

Then Thiodolf let go the good sword Throng-piercer, and said gently, “ I cannot fight with thee. I am of another mind ; thou hast the right of it as it regards me.”

The baron stood in astonishment, leaning with both hands on his sword. At length he cried out, “ Whether thou art mad, or possessed by some spirit of the night, I know not. But thou wantest not strength ; that can be seen by thy words and deeds. What wilt thou then with me ?”

“ Harken, thou too stern avenger !” said Thiodolf. “ He who takes to him the sword of justice, may well in the end have his own heart pierced through with it ; and methinks this has already come to pass in thy case. Recall, recall the curse which rests on Malgherita’s head. We can soon rebuild the castle ; and if I do not traverse sea and land until I bring home thy eldest daughter, then call me a knave false to my word and to my honor. These are the best salves which I can apply to thy wounds ; and in sooth I do it from a good heart.”

“ Good fool !” said the baron, sighing. “ Recall the curse which rests on Malgherita’s head ! Who can do that but appeased destiny alone ?”

“ Yet the mailed hand of a brave soldier may bridle destiny,” answered Thiodolf.

“ So !” cried the baron angrily, till his words echoed fearfully through the desolate ruins. “ A brave warrior may cause Isolde, that stern cloister-maiden, to glow with love ?—so that she to save a hero’s life. . . . And how much more ! Oh, leave me, deluded man ! For before all that comes to pass, Malgherita will never bear on her bosom a healthy child. Hul-dibert, the stern old knight and limner, has said it already.”

He turned away in wrathful despair, and went down from the

ruins. Thiodolf said quietly, "Well, that is something. In time, we shall find out the other conditions." And forthwith he hastened from the hill in order to find Pietro and Malgherita, in the already dawning light of day.

CHAPTER XI.

UNDER some thick olive branches, of which Pietro had formed a bower or hut, lay Malgherita, in a morning sleep ; her knight sat near with a pale and troubled countenance, watching the sweet sleeper after a far different fashion than of old in sportive love during their happier days. A gleam of the early sun fell upon Malgherita's eyelids ; she sat up, smiling ; but immediately a gush of bitter tears streamed over her face, as if to quench that bright light of a joy which no more belonged to her life.

Pietro, deeply moved, pressed her to his heart. "Oh, how far happier were we when thou didst awake in my arms in Iceland !" he exclaimed. "And yet we then thought ourselves forsaken and needing help."

"In Iceland !" repeated Malgherita, pausing, and checking her tears. "Pietro, I have again held intercourse with Iceland in this morning's dreams. Knowest thou that it seemed to my fancy as if the good people—thou rememberest that the elfin race are so called—were dancing around me, and wished again to tell me riddles. Some swung themselves on the neighboring fruit-trees, and tasted the fruits, and laughed because they were so good, and, with friendly jests, threw down the choicest of their feast to the dancers. Then they nodded lovingly to me, and chanted that they had followed me even from the very far-off Iceland to give me good advice, but there was always a joyful reward for those who served fair women. My heart grew light, and I could not but smile, till the sun-beam fell on my eyes, and I felt again so deeply and bitterly the loss of our dear child."

She began anew to weep ; and Pietro felt his eyes moistened, so that he turned away his face to hide his tears. Then Malgherita said : "Dearest, the good people have brought me one comfort ; whether it be nothing but a dream, or whether it foretells

something happy, I know not ; but I know well that they sang to me, besides the old mysterious verses of the two sisters—which must mean Isolde and me—other new ones of the fair land of Greece and of the imperial city Constantinople. It seemed almost as if I should there find our little Tristan. At any rate, I feel that were I once there, I might perchance recover from my grief.”

“ Oh, let us then go forth for it at once !” cried Pietro ; and he sprang up, accustomed to comply with Malgherita’s lightest wish. But remembering his present poverty and inability, he sank back again in indignant grief by the side of his weeping wife.

They sat together a while, sorrowing ; when at length a rustling was heard over their heads, and they saw the point of a spear thrust forward, as if to penetrate the bushes, and moved impatiently to and fro as if by a powerful hand. “ By heavens !” cried Pietro, “ that is a northern spear !”

“ Yes, truly, best beloved brother !” said a well-known voice ; and dropping his lance among the leaves, Thiodolf sprang through the branches to his two friends. But when he looked in Malgherita’s weeping eyes, bright tears broke forth from him ; he knelt down before her on the grass, stroked her hands and Pietro’s, repeating, “ O beloved friends, I left you so joyful, and do I find you again broken-hearted !”

Malgherita poured forth the while, in soft accents, their unhappy story. As she now related the loss of the child, Thiodolf started up, his armor rattling fearfully, and cried out : “ Ah ! wherefore did I not know that last night on the ruins of Castel-Franco ?” But immediately seating himself quietly again on the grass, he said : “ No, it is very well that I knew nothing of it. It might have come to a wild ending ; and now, dear children, it will assuredly yet come to a good one. See ! the curse of the great baron may be recalled ; and I know somewhat of its strange purport. Isolde is mixed up with it ; and, believe me, I shall find her again.”

“ Is she, then, not with our father ?” asked Malgherita. “ In heaven’s name, where is she ?”

“ Ay, who knows that ?” answered Thiodolf. “ Harken, Mal-

gherita, it is a somewhat perplexed story, and time would fail to narrate it. Tell me rather how I can now do you service."

She spoke of her dreams, and of her longing after Greece and Constantinople. And immediately Thiodolf cried out:—
"Ah! Malgherita, my dear child, why are my ships lying with hoisted sails near shore, but to carry thee whither it pleases thee?"

"But only," answered she, smiling at him gratefully, "if this voyage should make thee lose the traces of Isolde!"

"The traces!" said Thiodolf, somewhat vexed. "Trace me out something on the furrows of the blue waves, or above on the path of the glittering air! I have no better traces of Isolde than these. But had I any, I would first take thee wherever thou wishest to go; for thou art so very good and delicate, little Malgherita. If a man ask but boldly, especially with the steel tongues of spears and swords, he can find out all the traces in the world, though it be somewhat large and far-spread."

As now the three, again fellow-travellers, went down to the sea, they saw many sad remains of the wild attack of the great baron. Burnt huts, with their blackened beams and stones, were seen among the bushes; pale figures wandered about, amongst whom could be recognized some of the former gay revellers at the feast given on Pietro and Malgherita's arrival. "As I said before," muttered Thiodolf, "it is very well that I did not know many things when last night I met that great proud man on the ruins of Castel-Franco."

Then he blew on his war-horn till the terrified dwellers on the coast trembled violently at the sound. But they were soon aware how little cause for fear they had. The Northmen, who hastened to the sound, were commanded to bring gold, and precious stones, and food out of the ship; and all passed so quickly and so bountifully from the hands of the young chief, that again and again they had to fetch more; and the faces, so lately pale with sorrow, glowed again with joy at riches thus suddenly bestowed, the like of which they had never dreamt of, even in their happiest days.

Some experienced Icelanders seemed about to make a thought-

ful representation to their generous leader ; but he looked at them with a glance, before which they were wont to restrain every word. They therefore gained nothing, but that some shepherds, in their gay impatience, mocked at the grave faces, which made Thiodolf laugh very heartily, and leave the shore in a merry mood.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE bright sunny day, the voyagers, after crossing many seas, arrived at a blooming island overshadowed by beautiful groves. Malgherita gazed at it with so longing a glance, that Thiodolf did not ask what was her wish, but steered at once for the shore, and cast anchor. He then took his beloved guests on the pleasant beach ; and while a tent was being prepared for them, he commanded the Icelanders who were with him to fetch from a neighboring village the choicest fruits and wines, behaving themselves the while courteously and kindly.

"How, then, are we to obtain all that?" asked an old Icclander, with a displeascd smile. "We are not to break loose, and rob, and plunder people who have not done us the least harm?"

"All the gods of Asgard forbid!" cried Thiodolf. "No, you must get from the ships what gold you will need, that you may richly pay them for all that we require."

"We cannot give them the least payment," answered the discontented old man. "We have spent much treasure since we left Iceland, and have gained none. And now your wild prodigality on the Tuscan coasts has entirely squandered the rest—for you would listen to no remonstrance—and we have well-nigh nothing more wherewith to buy aught, unless we sell our arms and ships."

"That is a very foolish story," said Thiodolf. "How is it possible that the like can befall a son of Asmundur?"

"It is very possible indeed," was the answer, "if a son of Asmundur shut his ears to all wise counsels, and bescem himself like a thoughtless child."

Then Thiodolf started up in over-hasty anger, and he lifted a broken branch which lay beside him, in order to chastise the bold reprover ; but then, at once feeling that this gesture was insulting, he again let fall the unknighly weapon. But this rash threat had been too much for the honorable old warrior and for the sur-

rounding group of his companions. They all, as if by one movement, laid their hands on their swords, and pressed round Thiodolf with bitter reproaches. He stood with the glow of shame on his face, his eyes fixed on the ground, and let them all say what pleased them of reproof and warning.

But when the storm was somewhat allayed, he said, with gentle voice: "Northmen, I have erred in a fearful way; I know nothing that can excuse me, but that in my rage I took the branch of a tree for a battle-axe, though I know well that I ought to have seen better. But the thing has happened; and there is no other means whereby the blot can be wiped from him and from me than an honorable single combat. For that I am ready this very moment, so soon as we have removed that delicate lady far from us. Pietro, go with her to the ship, and send to us here as many witnesses as thou canst spare without leaving the ship unguarded."

It was done as he commanded; for each one felt that there could be no question here of making peace or of relenting. Even Malgherita did not attempt to dissuade her friend; she honored and respected him far too highly. But as she gave him her hand at parting, she could hardly breathe from terror, for his old opponent looked very powerful, and accustomed to conquer.

When now the whole band of soldiers was collected, and some were about to mark out the place of combat with hazel wands, according to the northern fashion, Thiodolf said: "Nay, halt! I have another proposal to make. Ye know how our ancestors were wont often to fight—blow for blow, and the one threatened must neither give way nor defend himself, nor even move an eyelash; and so it goes on till one lies dead on the ground. I think we may fight now after this manner, for I have long wished for such a trial; and, besides, here is a cause serious enough for it. I need not say that my injured adversary shall have the first blow."

No opposition was made to this, though the once far-famed northern custom had long been disused; and they solemnly, and with grave earnestness, prepared for the terrible work. Two chosen warriors placed themselves opposite to each other, and stretched out their drawn swords, in order to make sure of a distance not too fatally near nor too harmlessly distant; and when

they had agreed upon this, they stamped deep marks on the ground with their iron heels, withdrew, and Thiodolf and his opponent took the places thus marked out.

Thiodolf stood there unprotected and unencumbered, Helmfrid's golden shield hanging at his back, his sword lowered in his right hand, his large blue eyes looking joyously at his adversary, awaiting the fearful blow which was about to fall. The sword whirled once in the air with a dazzling flash—not a feature of the young hero changed; and now it seemed that the blow must thunder down, when suddenly the old warrior drove his weapon with noise into its sheath, and cried out: "No, I cannot strike after this way that young noble shoot of an old stem were all the gods of Asgard to say, 'Hew him down!' He stands there too bright, and bold, and beautiful."

"Then what else shall be done?" asked Thiodolf, in displeasure.

"Young sir," answered the old man, "that will chiefly depend on your answer to a question that I will put to you. If I had now struck you, but not so as to kill nor disable you, how would you have struck me in return?"

"With all my strength," answered Thiodolf; "so help me Odin! And I believe, old sir, it would have been your last."

"Well, then," said the old man, "we may be reconciled. You would not have spared me as if I had been helpless. My beloved Thiodolf, you have offered yourself to my blow; you would likewise have struck me; the offence is past and gone, and I give you the kiss of peace with my whole heart, noble son of a prince. But I will break the neck of any who dares say a word against this reconciliation."

The joyous clashing of arms showed how the old man need encounter no adversary. They all rowed or swam back to the ships, with increased love to their young leader; and Malgherita, when she heard how gloriously all had ended, could not but offer a kiss from her rosy lips to her valiant friend; Thiodolf bent down joyfully to the delicate lady, and Pietro stood by without the least return of his former foolish jealousy, knowing well what secure treasures he possessed in his wife and his brother in arms.

CHAPTER XIII.

“YES,” said Thiodolf, after a time, “all is now right and good ; we love each other heartily, and we could live as happy as kings, only by ill-luck we have not yet got at any gold. What is there about here that we can take ? For I tell you I will go no further with empty purses. We must see how we can do the people here some great service, for which we may receive, without shame, a rich recompense. Or, what would be yet better, we may search out for some pirates or other rogues, whom we may kill, and, with a clear conscience, take away what they possessed. How is that island before us called ?”

“Sir,” answered an experienced seaman, “that is the fair island of Cephalonia.”

“Cephalonia !” repeated Thiodolf, thoughtfully ; and looking at another island which was seen in the distance, “then that yonder must be Zante.”

“You have guessed right, my young lord,” said the old man.

“There was nothing to guess about,” said Thiodolf. “Uncle Nefiof has so often told me of these two islands, and of deeds which he did there, together with my noble father, that I must have been deaf or a blockhead if I did not know how these islands lie. Know ye, children, that our money could not have come to an end in a better place than here. The men of Zante owe me, through my father, tribute and treasures. He and Uncle Nefiof helped them against those of Cephalonia, and the people, in return, promised gold and goods in great abundance,—if I am right in my belief, I shall claim enough of it,—but when the time for payment came, they would hear nothing of it, and joined themselves to the Cephalonians ; a storm drove the two northern heroes far out to sea, towards a shore where my father won a fair love, and so forgot the whole adventure ; and Uncle Nefiof also did not attack the allied islands. But wait awhile. Now shall they

pay every farthing, and a good fine besides. Lift the anchor, my children, and prepare for a fight !”

“ Ah, Thiodolf,” sighed Malgherita, “ another fight already ? Forgive them rather ; I pray thee earnestly forgive them the whole debt.”

“ Lady,” he answered, “ I would rather give them as much more than refuse thee anything ; but the worst is, that we ourselves have nothing.”

“ Thou hast nothing ?” asked she, with surprise. “ Are, then, those precious jewels nothing which thou bearest with thee, and with whose sparkling brightness thou hast so often amused me ?”

“ Yes, little Malgherita,” said Thiodolf, “ they are very well to look at, and play with, but beyond that they avail us nothing, for they belong to Bertram.”

“ I know that,” answered the lady, smiling ; “ and I also know Bertram well, and I will answer for him that he would lend you, with joy, the half of his treasure ; and a few stones alone will bring us out of difficulty.”

“ That may well be,” said Thiodolf ; “ but Bertram himself is not here ; and to borrow from one who cannot refuse you, or withhold his purse, seems to me not the most honorable proceeding. Besides, why borrow when we need only fight a little sharply to win back our lawful property ? Thou must not oppose me too much, little Malgherita, or we shall end by being quite under woman’s rule.”

And both ships forthwith sailed gaily towards Zante. When now they drew near to the port, all the northern warriors stood in order on deck, in full, heavy armor, with their large shining shields held before their breasts, and with the points of their spears, which glittered in the sun, directed forwards, so that those on the island could know at once that the strangers came with warlike intentions. The Iceland war-horns blew a wild blast. There was also a great movement on the shore ; signal-fires were kindled, warlike banners were unfurled, much people ran or rode to and fro. Thiodolf looked on with a steady eye, and said at length, with a displeased smile :

“ Ay, if they cannot prepare themselves better and with more

order, they will do but little, and we shall have but a pitiful fight with them."

But it appeared that he was not even to have that; for a little bark, from which floated many flags of peace, was seen steering towards the largest ship. As it was allowed to approach, it cast anchor, and a man in it began to hold forth an eloquent and diffuse speech touching the blessings of peace, into which he skillfully wove pleasant tales from the old Grecian legends.

"Dost thou see, Malgherita," said Thiodolf to his gentle companion, "now are we come to the people who believe in the Apollo of whom thou once spokest to me. I have already long ago found the worshippers of Mahound; and perchance we shall soon meet those who hold to the Trevisant."

But with what astonishment did he hear that the man at length concluded with a Christian exhortation, and that he professed to believe in Him whom Thiodolf, with reverential meaning, was wont to call the white Christ.

"Ye people!" he cried, stamping on the ground; "you might be amongst those who hold it an honor to call upon the white Christ; and you bring forward your Apollo, and who knows what besides! Have ye not enough of One; and He so great? I pray you to take half a dozen more, and mix up in your speech Mahound and Trevisant, so that all may find in it what will suit their taste. Only I desire that you leave out of your medley our hero-gods of Asgard. They will not tolerate such a motley fool's-game; and many a Northman could so pay you for it, that your whole island would be destroyed by sword and flame."

The wise man stood opposite the angry youth, with mouth wide open, and knew neither what had raised this sudden storm, nor how it could be appeased.

Thiodolf soon became calm again, and continued: "However, I do not care much for you; and if you will pay me that which you owe me, I will sail on in peace. For, my good people, you do not seem to be very warlike, but rather a good deal more fearful than is seemly. Come boldly to my ship, there I will reckon up with you, and we shall soon agree together."

The envoys did as the young chief directed; and he told them what they owed to his father, and also what, on account of the

long delay, he meant now to require of them. Then they raised great complaints that they were unfairly dealt by, and said that they would hardly have paid so much treasure to the largest squadron.

“That depends upon the squadron,” said Thiodolf, “whether it would take more or less, or rather if it could get at more or less. But I judge that this is sufficient; and I am not wont to take pattern by other people.”

He remained, however, quite gentle, and let the envoys exhaust themselves in wise and well-stated reasonings. But when they at length began greatly to lament themselves, he said :

“Now be not so sorrowful. For to show you that I mean you no evil, I will do you a pleasure. My uncle will have to send again for his share, and you will have a second fight. So you can count me out two shares, and I will take his with me.”

But when the envoys grew yet paler, and looked upon this offer as an insult, Thiodolf waxed wrath, and cried out :

“An honorable man would sooner have fire in his house than the property of another; and you would keep my uncle’s. Wait awhile. I see that you would rather not pay Uncle Nefiolf’s share; a little more delay, and I will land without further negotiation on your island, and I will take myself what belongs to us—perchance also a little over; for swords are rules with which it is difficult to measure exactly.”

Then the envoys grew very humble and very submissive; and before long, many boats rowed from the shore, laden with gold, and purple stuffs, and silver vessels, and carried them to Thiodolf’s ships, where they were taken in.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE dreaded Northman, as soon as the islanders became submissive, and ready to pay him his dues, spoke to them so gently and kindly that they soon lost all fear, and they looked with some pleasure upon the young stranger, so tall and so beautiful; some of them even seemed to think that the strange acquaintance had not been bought too dearly with their share of the treasure. They knew likewise, that those who could boast of a friendship with one of the northern sea-heroes were thereby secure from all his fearful countrymen. In the midst of this peaceful intercourse, Thiodolf began to ask whether a lady, such as Isolde, had not appeared on their coasts; and he described the princely dazzling form with such clear and distinct words, that Pietro and Malgherita smiled at one another, and felt that it was as if some magician had called up the image of the lost one from the sea by his enchantments.

The islanders also smiled as if the reflection of a bright apparition had spread over their countenance; and soon many voices were heard, declaring that in truth such a noble woman had been seen some months before on their coast, in company with the knightly merchant-prince Glykomedon; but that he had quickly sailed further on with her; it was not known whether to the shore of the freemen of Lacedemonia, or whether further round the peninsula of the Morea.

Malgherita knew well the name of the far-travelled Glykomedon, and even thought that she had before seen him at a minstrel-feast in her father's castle. Thiodolf made the people describe him; and then repeated the description, suddenly crying out: "The coward must have cruelly deceived me! he it was who was walking under the chestnut-trees, with another youth, as I thought, on his arm; but it was in truth none other than Isolde!"

The fearful light began to flash from his eyes, and the island-

ers shrank back frightened. "Be not afraid, children," he said; "Glykomedon is not amongst you. How did she beseem herself towards him?"

"Half reluctantly, half confidingly," was the answer; "at least, so it seemed. Sometimes she fixed her queen-like eyes on him as if inquiringly, till he trembled as if struck by an arrow. Then, again, he would speak to her of strange things—of the destruction of her father's castle—"

"That is a falsehood," interrupted Thiodolf.

"And how the whole country lay in smoke and flames, through a fearful Icelfander, and how he was now pursuing them."

"Enough!" said Thiodolf. And after a long silence, seizing Malgherita's hand, he sighed deeply, saying: "Hear, oh! hear, she flees from me, and goes through the world with that deceitful boaster!"

He looked like a man dangerously wounded, who yet, with the noble pride of a leader, holds himself erect before his troops. But suddenly returning to his former joyous strength, he asked again: "Towards the coasts of the Morea?" And on the affirmative answer, he commanded the anchors to be raised, and the sails given to the wind; but first he lavished so much gold and precious things on the islanders, that, had not for once the entreaties of the old men prevailed, the whole of the Asmundur tribute would have been scattered from his hands.

CHAPTER XV.

THE night brooded darkly over the rocky coasts of Lacedemonia as the ships passed cautiously through the foaming surf; and Thiodolf, from the rudder, bent forwards his head and breast, saying: "A solemn and inspiring breeze comes to me from those heights and woods. Here great deeds must once have been accomplished."

"So it is," answered Pietro, who stood at his side. "In this country did the most manly and fearless warriors of all ancient Greece receive their existence. A wild and war-loving race, it is said, dwells here to this day. They are called the Freemen of Lacedemonia; they pay the Greek emperor a rare and hardly-won tribute; and defenceless strangers avoid the inhospitable robber-city."

"O Pietro," exclaimed Thiodolf, with great joy, "then men such as we are come to the right place. But tell me some of the old legends of the better times, when heroes yet dwelt here who were not only a terror but a joy to men."

And many glorious stories poured from Pietro's lips, especially the deed of Leonidas and his three hundred, and how the only one who fled away wandered about, pointed at and dishonored, until he fell in another glorious strife, and death washed out his shame in his own heart's blood.

"That was right!" said Thiodolf, with kindling eyes. "Oh! may his good star preserve every brave man from anything which might be called a stain falling on his honor! For see, brother, the poor survivor, of whom thou speakest, did not mean to do so wrong. He thought perchance that some one must carry the tidings; yet see what came of it."

He remained long in deep sad thought, and then he roused himself by saying: "Well, still he found an honorable end, and the gods will never deprive a true heart of that, however sorely they may punish him in other ways."

They now cast anchor ; but the sea was very rough, and the ships had an uneasy swinging motion ; Malgherita came on deck and complained that she was unwell and frightened, and that only sounds of lamentation came to her saddened ears in the howling of the wind and the rolling of the waves, fear of her father's curse, and grief for her lost child.

" We will go on shore," said Thiodolf. " If the night is dark, our torches burn bright, and that trembling lady will feel more secure."

Malgherita, so long accustomed to Thiodolf's safeguard, had nothing to say against his proposal, and they landed. A path which seemed often trodden led up to a wooded height. The light of the torches, and their reflection from the armor, shone strangely on the leaves ; but a delicious scent of herbs was wafted up from the ground, and the clustered olive-branches formed festive arches over the heads of the wanderers. On the summit was a large open space—in the midst a stone wall. " It must be an altar of the old heathen times," said Pietro ; but he was astonished, as he stretched out his hand towards it, to feel fresh wreaths hanging from it. He was about to seize a torch to throw light upon it, when the dark figure of a man rose up from the foot of the altar, who sighed out : " Leave me in peace ; I have left the wild world to which you belong ; but the parting from it yet smarts in my bosom."

The Northmen shuddered and drew back in silence. But Thiodolf stepped forward, and said : " Art thou, then, he who survived at Thermopylæ ? and canst thou find no rest in the grave ?"

" Be content, and go hence."

" Brave hero-minstrels shall sing thy renown, for thou didst yet fall honorably before the enemy."

" I have not yet fallen honorably before the enemy," murmured the figure like a hollow echo, and sank slowly down again.

" Leave him," said Thiodolf, to his warriors ; " he is going to sink down again into his bed of earth."

But it could be seen by the faint star-light that he lay upon the grass. Then the soldiers brought torches near ; it was not the

face of a dead man that stared up at them, but of one dying ; and after a few heavy breathings, he lay there a corpse.

“It is one of the Freemen of Laconia,” said Pietro. “Just such has their strange dress and figure been described to me. He must have fallen in a sharp fight. See only out of how many deep wounds has the blood escaped from his breast and forehead.”

Malgherita trembled violently. “We are standing on a fearful spot,” she said. “Oh ! I pray you lift me on that wall ; my feet can support me no longer ; and if I here sink down upon the grass, it will ever seem to me that I have a corpse for my pillow.”

Pietro and Thiodolf lifted her on the altar ; the Northmen stood around, grave and silent, in the gloomy light of their torches. Malgherita wrapped herself in her veil ; and thus they remained till the sun sent his first beams over the eastern hill.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE morning rays discovered many strange things in the spot they had chosen for their night encampment. As Pietro had already felt in the darkness, the altar was indeed crowned with flowers; and they so fresh and abundant, that it was clear that a great festival must have been held on the day before.

"Strange!" said Pietro. "Do we, then, yet live in the old Greek heathen times?" And looking nearer, he read these words cut in the stone: *Consecrated to the sea-born Aphrodite.* "Dearest," said he, looking up at Malgherita, full of renewed and joyous devotion, "that is for thee. Thou didst leave the sea last night, and now thou art enthroned on the altar."

"Thinkest thou so?" answered Malgherita, very gravely. "But if I now lie as victim on the altar? Seest thou the bloody soldier yonder?—All here is fearful. Perhaps I am become an idol-image to be shunned by all."

Pietro shuddered involuntarily; but Thiodolf said, "Do not put foolish fancies into your head. Things are not so bad with you two; that can I answer for. But to drive away night-thoughts, we will wander a little further into the smiling country which glows in the morning light."

Therewith he lightly lifted Malgherita from the altar, and they all went down into a fertile valley towards the east. The bright blue morning sky above them, beside them the luxuriant dark green of trees and shrubs, and the gentle descent of the hill, clothed in soft fragrant grass, all drew the eyes of the travellers with a sweet enchantment, and poured a refreshing cheerfulness into their souls and bodies. The Northmen sang some lines of their love-lays, the tenderest of their native land; and even from Malgherita's lips, which since the loss of her child had given forth no songs, there came a few sweet, enchanting tones, mingling

with the fresh morning breeze. Thiodolf the while walked on with head bent down, but joy sparkling in his eyes.

“Dost thou then so delight in the flowers,” asked Malgherita, “that thou hast no look to raise to sky, and hill, and wood? And yet they are but autumnal flowers, dear Thiodolf.”

“Flowers! autumnal flowers!” said Thiodolf, awakening from deep thought. “Who was thinking of flowers? But look at these deep marks on the grass. They are made by spears, dear Malgherita; and truly I must be greatly deceived if they be not northern spears which have ploughed so deeply the grassy ground.”

The Icelanders agreed with their young leader, and followed these traces of their brave countrymen with a longing which only those can know, who, cast on a desert island, perceive the foot-marks of men on the sand of the beach. Then were heard voices in the troop, as they wondered, now at this, now at that spear-mark. “That spear,” cried one, “was flung by a bold hero.” “What sayest thou, then, to this one?” answered another: “see how deep it went into the ground; and the bloody trace shows that it had first gone through a foeman’s limbs.”

They went on deeper into the forest; and a few spears fast driven into the trees gave yet more plain proofs of the skill and strength of the thrower, as the shape of the weapons made it more certain that they had flown from a northern hand. While the soldiers here admired yet more the superior throws, now praising the depth the spear had penetrated, then the arch which it had described in its course, Thiodolf remained motionless before a laurel, in whose stem was a lance of almost gigantic size. All the Northmen collected around the spot, partly attracted by the immense size and beautiful shape of the weapon, and partly by the example of their young leader.

Thiodolf now gazed with reverence at the firmly fixed spear, now looked round inquiringly at his soldiers. At length he said, “My people, this weapon,—look once more at its mighty polished shaft of the most precious wood, the bright gold rim around the point, and the huge shining steel point itself,—this weapon can be none other than a spear of Helmfrid’s. But that we may know with entire certainty whether it do belong to the mightiest

of northern warriors, and whether his strong hand have flung it, let us each in turn approach and try to draw it forth from the stem."

It was done as Thiodolf commanded. Many a brave northern hand shook the shining weapon ; but it remained firm and immoveable in the tree. Pietro likewise in vain tried with his utmost strength. Then Thiodolf drew near, and even his first effort failed. He began again the trial, anger already flashing in his eyes ; and at length he tore the spear from the groaning and cracking laurel-stem, and with it fell his whole length on the grass, his armor rattling as he fell ; but he held fast in his hand the conquered spear. Then there bent over him a tall old man, shining in brilliant northern armor, whose approach none had perceived in the heat of the contest, and who now, with a grave smile, said in the Iceland tongue, " Young man, young man, who then has taught thee to draw forth from a tree the lance of Helmfrid ?"

CHAPTER XVII.

THIODOLF slowly arose, looking keenly into the old man's eyes, and still more keenly, till at length his haughty young head was bent, and he again sank slowly on his knees. The Northmen stood around in astonishment, leaning on their spears. But Thiodolf brought forward the golden shield which hung by a chain at his back, unfastened it, and said, holding it towards the old hero, "Take it, dear and honored master; for beyond all doubt you are Helmfrid."

The old warrior stepped back in wonder before the golden brightness of the shield; a deep crimson, half of shame and half of joy, flew to his cheeks, as he cried out, "In God's name, thou brave boy, how didst thou win this fatal shield?"

"Honorably, in open fight, as I need not say," answered Thiodolf. "My own steel shield, which I left in free gift, now hangs in the place where this once hung; high on the lindentree, on the Norwegian shore."

"I truly did not leave my golden shield as a free gift beneath the lindens," murmured Helmfrid in return; and he added, turning away, "O victorious boy! throw again that shield over thy back. Else I could not look at thee; for the only dishonored hour of my life is brought back to me with burning shame by its golden light."

"Dishonored?" cried Thiodolf, springing up with the swiftness of a deer. "Bid, I pray you, another than thyself speak thus, and I will so bring him back to reason that he shall wonder at himself. Dear, noble, mighty master, I am not surely the first to tell thee that a fight without victory is not always without glory. All the harps of the north resound with thy deeds on that day when thou wast borne senseless to thy ship."

"Do they so?" asked the old man, joy sparkling in his eyes. But then again he cast down his proud eyes to the ground, look-

ing like a wounded eagle, and sighing, "What can that avail? I yet there lost my shield!"

"My good star has chosen me to bring it back to thee," said Thiodolf, "little worthy as I am of the great honor. Though I am a brave and true-hearted fighter; that I may say without boasting."

"Ay," cried Helmfrid, "thou hast so beseemed thyself. He who could win back this shield,—the Norway warriors are powerful heroes,—he might honorably bring back the weapons of an emperor. But now name thyself to me, that I may know right certainly that such a precious gift was brought back to me not only by a friend, but by one of a friendly race."

And hardly had the words, "Thiodolf, the son of Asmundur," passed the lips of the youth, when Helmfrid clasped him in his strong arms, and asked after Uncle Nefiolf and Aunt Gunhilda, and many other Iceland friends and relations. And then he gave three mighty blasts on his war-horn, and called the while, "Hither, ye brave Væringers, hither! Great joy has arisen for your chief; great joy also for you!" Thiodolf would have given him the shield; but Helmfrid put it back, saying, "It must be done publicly and solemnly."

While now the valiant Væringers were approaching by degrees, Thiodolf presented to the great Helmfrid his friend Pietro and Malgherita, to whom the noble chief showed such gentle courtesy, and spoke such pleasant words, that the fair Provençale said, "See, Thiodolf, thou must also become like this. Take example from this noble knight, how courteous manners can be joined to northern strength and awfulness."

Thiodolf bent low and said, "I shall never be quite like him, Malgherita; but I will diligently copy him. Would that at once I might have fought before my princely master in arms. But we are, alas! come too late for the combat."

"Be not grieved for that, brave boy," answered Helmfrid. "We shall soon have more serious things to fight about together. The Freemen of Laconia are, indeed, bold and wild opponents. They often sacrifice to the old heathen gods, and thus preserve the memory, and part of the strength, of their great ancestors; but they have not enough of it, and the skill of leaders is quite

strange to them. There was no need that I should come here with a band of Væringers to force the unruly people to submit and pay tribute; but a real trial of war gives better teaching to young soldiers than all the schools for fighting, swimming, and riding in the world. So I offered my services to the emperor, and very few of my scholars have fallen in the earnest game. Thou wilt follow me to Constantinople, young man, and thy friends and retainers with thee?"

"I will follow thee through the world," answered Thiodolf. "Besides, my friends wish to go to the imperial city; and I would wish to go there too, if thou canst tell me that I shall there find a certain Glykomedon."

"Glykomedon!" said Helmfrid with surprise. "Yes, we shall surely find him there. But I know not what thou, young Iceland warrior, canst have to do with the feeble pompous merchant-knight."

"Well, it will be known!" said Thiodolf, half to himself; and he smiled at Malgherita with a joyful confident nod.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN the meanwhile all the Væringers had assembled, and kindly grasping of hands, and touching of shields and swords, had passed again and again between them and the followers of Thiodolf. Then Helmfrid held up his spear, and all stood still, while the old hero signed to Thiodolf to give him the shield, and lifted up his voice to sing. The others chimed in after their fashion ; and this sort of alternate song rose up from under the shade of the laurel-trees into the blue morning sky :

HELMFRID.

How is it called, that royal tree
With verdant, glittering boughs,
That strews the path of victory,
And wreathes the conqueror's brows ?

THIODOLF.

O linden-tree, thou shinest fair,
The first of noble trees ;
Thy branches court the summer air,
And wave before the breeze.

HELMFRID.

High words, bold youth, of sounding breath,
The linden wins from thee ;
And yet thou standest here beneath
A far more noble tree.

THIODOLF.

These groves, with princely canopy,
Shut out the noontide rays ;
But, ah ! their name is strange to me
And strange to northern lays.

HELMFRID.

Laurel, young soldier—thus we name
This tree in hero-songs ;

It heralds forth the victor's fame,
And to the brave belongs.

THIODOLF.

Fair laurel! ever fresh and green,
Whose bright leaves never fail—
Here Helmfrid's glittering spear was seen;
Hail to the laurel, hail!

HELMFRID.

And thou, my shield, well proved to stand
The stroke of foemen's blade.—
A hero gave thee to my hand
Beneath the laurel-shade.

THIODOLF.

I loosed that golden shield so true
From off a linden-tree:
Then hail unto the linden too;
And laurel, hail to thee!

THIODOLF'S WARRIORS.

Ye children of our home beloved!
Ye noble trees, so high and strong,
Whose grateful shade we oft have proved,
For ever live in minstrel-song!

HELMFRID'S WARRIORS.

Ye lofty stems that court the breeze,
And spread abroad your leafy boughs;
Ye joyous, brilliant laurel-trees,
For ever wreath our victor-brows!

ALL TOGETHER.

Verdant laurel—linden fair,—
Both together twine our hair;
Both together shower down
A never-fading hero-crown!

BOOK III.



CHAPTER I.

ONE bright autumn day many joyous crowds were seen in the crescent in which the princely city of Constantinople is built down to the sea. Idle groups hurried to the beach, heralds shouted, and at the windows and balconies were seen lovely and richly adorned women; for the criers had made known that the great Væring chief, the noble Helmfrid, was returning from his expedition with lightly waving sails, and two other northern ships in his company. While those on the shore looked with eager curiosity at the vessels, no less eager glances were sent from them towards land. Pietro and Malgherita, although from childhood accustomed to pomp and state, yet well nigh closed their dazzled eyes before such surpassing splendor. The sea, in its mid-day clearness, gave back, as if from a mirror, the brightness of the surrounding palaces, churches and towers. Above the golden roofs and domes and images was the soft blue sky and brilliant sunshine. Nearer and nearer came the murmur of the populous city; the strains of music from warlike bands, and from joyous groups of revelers, occasionally sounded. Every minute Thiodolf became more thoughtful and more grave; and at length he said to Helmfrid, with shame glowing in his cheeks:

“Master, what am I to do amidst that polished wise people? They have learnt the best and the fairest of all knowledge, as may be seen even from their buildings. I shall seem amongst them like a bear in a pleasure-garden. Were they but beleaguered, or in any fearful extremity, out of which they might be helped by weapons, then I would ride out to them, delivering them and rejoicing that they must love and honor me whether they would

or no ; but now ! Dear master, take a little care of me, or rather, much care, for, believe me, I shall be in great straits."

"The case is not so bad as it seems to thee," answered Helmfrid. "Dost thou then think, my noble boy, that they know not, in yonder glittering city, what is the worth of a brave son of the north ? They have now known us Væringers for many and eventful years ; I will answer for it they will receive thee as beseems a hero. But truly thou must take more gentle and courteous manners ; and thou wilt do so ; for gentleness and courtesy are so firmly rooted in thy noble mind, that they cannot do otherwise than bear flowers. This day I will present thee to the great Greek emperor."

"Is he not one of the mightiest warriors in all the world ?" asked Thiodolf.

"No," answered Helmfrid ; "I cannot boast that of him. He has indeed seen few other fights than such as are held before him for his entertainment on great occasions. But yet he is the lord of all the East ; and if we involuntarily feel respect in the presence of a hero,—deeming that one to whom God has given such strength of body must bear within him also a portion of God's omnipotence,—shall we not be of humble and serious mind when we stand before a man to whose care so great a portion of Europe and Asia has been entrusted !"

"In truth," said Thiodolf, "such a lord must be a very mighty giant ; and I think so to beseem myself towards him that he will be satisfied with me."

"Thou shalt also throw many a spear for him, and give many a sword-thrust for him," said Helmfrid.

The youth shook joyfully Throng-piercer's silver hilt, and the old man asked him, with a smile :

"Dost thou yet wish to turn back from that bright capital ?"

"Turn back ?" replied Thiodolf, with displeasure ; "that never has been and never will be my way. What wert thou thinking of, dear old master ? Ah ! if thou knowest what I have to seek in Constantinople. But though thou knowest not that, yet, let me tell thee, thou shouldst have known that such men as I think not so easily of turning back."

The old hero looked at his pupil with great delight. The

ships drew to land amidst the loud cries of joy of the people. Helmfrid, quickly springing to the shore, ordered a litter to be brought for Malgherita ; and the sorrowing mother, sadly veiling her eyes at the laughing faces of the children, was carried, by her own desire, under Pietro's care, away from the tumult into a quiet retired dwelling. Thiodolf, the while, had to choose one amongst the noble horses brought to carry the newly returned warriors to the imperial palace. He sprang upon the first and best of them ; but it sank beneath him, groaning. He quickly disentangled himself from the animal, and struck it on the head with his mailed hand, so that it lay motionless, saying : " That poor beast would have been lame for ever ; now it will have no more pain. I would rather go my way on foot."

But Helmfrid caused to be brought to him a fiery coal-black Arab horse, who joyfully reared up beneath the youth, and seemed to take pleasure in having a rider who could so strongly master him.

As they now rode through the streets, to the sound of joyous trumpets, many flowers and wreaths flew down from the balconies out of the hands of fair women. Thiodolf's heart beat high with a bold joy ; only he knew not whether he was expected to return thanks and greetings after the courteous fashion of the country, and therefore dared hardly raise his eyes from the ground. But when he saw that Helmfrid lowered his spear in the usual way of northern warriors, he gladly did the like ; and henceforth he left unsaluted neither balcony nor window where women's bright eyes smiled ; and the Arab horse foamed and fumed at the spur-strokes with which his rider urged him to take the boldest and yet the most graceful springs.

On one side was seen the church of St. Sophia, on the other the Hippodrome. Now to this, now to that, would Thiodolf turn his horse, alternately attracted by the noble and dazzling richness of both the brilliant buildings. Helmfrid could with difficulty keep him in the straight road to the imperial palace. But when the palace itself shone out before him, the young Iclander dropped his eyes, and murmured gently and thoughtfully to himself : " Can it be well pleasing to the gods that man should so dare to copy their city Asgard ?"

Having dismounted from their horses, they entered the court, which was perfumed with sweet-smelling shrubs, and cooled with fountains, and went up stairs of colored marble, with light gilt balustrades. Above, in the lofty saloons, there met their eyes now a rich profusion of polished porphyry tables, and golden frames on the walls, and now so vivid colors of the carpets, that for a moment they almost doubted whether, by some enchantment, the flowers which so richly cover the ground of a grove in spring had not here sprung up. Chamberlains in their gold-embroidered robes, and warriors in gold and silver armor, pressed rapidly beneath the lofty arches, and all greeted with deep reverence the mighty Væring chief and the tall unknown youth who walked beside him. Thiodolf might have taken many of them for the emperor; but the calm noble pride of his disposition made him not over hasty with his salutations, and he reached at length the chamber where the emperor awaited his renowned general, in great wonder, it is true, but with the loftiest and most befitting demeanor.

Around the brilliant throne there stood a train of many attendants and officers, all in such dazzling attire, that Thiodolf at first could understand nothing clearly, and he imitated the greetings of his leader without seeing him who received it. But when the emperor spoke, and Helmfrid answered, the bright eyes of the youth pierced through the surrounding splendor till they reached the ruler, and discovered the figure of an old man, somewhat feeble, with a countenance rather troubled than joyous. The first glance truly told him that here there was no question of a powerful warrior, so that he had not needed Helmfrid's previous information; but his own feelings verified to him the old hero's words of the reverence felt in presence of a man in whose hands were placed the destinies of so mighty a realm. "So it is!" thought Thiodolf to himself. "To him are addressed each day joyful thanks and cries for help. Every hour people come to him, who hear from his lips how it is to be with them and their countrymen. What tidings are brought to him! what answers he must have to give to all! It is very fearful to be before him, and truly a great thing to have come so far into the world as to see such a man face to face."

In the midst of these and like thoughts he hardly heard what Helmfrid said in praise and commendation of him. But when the emperor signed to him to come nearer, he went forward with pleased alacrity, and answered to the question of whether he would serve the emperor amongst the Væringers :

“Mighty lord and emperor, that is a gigantic chariot which you have to manage, and I wonder where you can find as many noble and obedient horses as you must need. As for me, I will draw vigorously, and I will be obedient too, as far as it can possibly be.”

The emperor bent his head with a kind smile, and desired the Væring chief to receive the young hero and his troop into his company. But Thiodolf had neither eye nor ear for what was further arranged either with Helmfrid or with other noble state-officers, for his look was fixed on a youth who had caught his eye as he stood near the emperor, arrayed in a brilliant dress, and treated by many with reverent attention. That very Glykomedon, whom he had seen in the chestnut-forest between Marseilles and the great baron's castle, stood assuredly before him, shining in all the light of court-favor, and of the respect ever paid by courtiers to favorites. Thiodolf gazed on him with unconcealed wrath ; a scornful smile seemed to play on the features of the merchant-prince, and words of anger and defiance came almost irrepressibly to the lips of the Icelfander ; but the presence of the far-ruling Greek emperor, to whom he had just sworn fealty, checked him. He remained silent, but fixed such flaming eyes on the cedar floor, that it seemed as though it must catch fire from the two ardent torches.

CHAPTER II.

THE emperor had left the presence-chamber; princes, knights, and courtiers walked through the ornamented halls, exchanging courteous words; many of them were drawn by the fragrant air from the garden, and the cool breeze, into an open gallery, which, from almost a dizzy height, gave a view over grottos and fishponds, woods and meadows, far beyond the city, out upon the glittering sea.

Thiodolf was reminded of the vaulted way which led from the great baron's castle to the park, and although everything here was infinitely more splendid and magnificent, yet a longing for that beloved spot arose in his bosom. "And who knows," he thought to himself, "whether castle, halls, and gardens, yet stand firm as I left them, so frail and perishable a thing is the work of man? That have I learnt at Castel-Franco."

In the midst of such thoughts and recollections Glykomedon had well nigh passed from his mind; but the more rapidly did his anger kindle when the haughty courtier,—it appeared purposely,—placed himself in his way, and let fall a strange smile upon him.

"We have met before!" said Thiodolf; and the dainty merchant-prince was forced to close his eyes for an instant at the angry glow which shone in the blue eyes of the north. But soon emboldened by the thought of his power at court, and the security of the imperial palace, he said, with light mockery,—

"Ay, truly, worthy sir, we have met before; but, alas, for too short a time. At first you were seated rather too high up in the chestnut-tree for me to treat you with beseeming courtesy, and afterwards you ran off rather too rapidly in an opposite direction, while I passed on with a certain fair lady to the port of Marseilles."

"You have probably taken her back to her father?" asked Thiodolf, calmly.

“That have I done as little as you would have done, ha: she chosen to go with you rather than with me.”

Thiodolf's eyes flashed more wildly, but otherwise he appeared perfectly calm. “Good sir,” he went on to Glykomedon, “how did you take her to your ship? For I should think violence would not be suffered in the port of Marseilles, at least not from you.”

“That was as it had pleased me!” answered Glykomedon, haughtily. “But, young sir, you made my task an easy one. What had I more to do than to tell her that the angry Iclander had levelled her father's castle to the ground, and was already destroying and burning a part of Marseilles in his pursuit of his lost and beautiful prey? Then she readily agreed to my taking her on board my ship in the darkness of night, and setting sail with her at once: the further we went from the coasts of Provence, the better did it please the terrified dove. And thus I went on with her till we reached the port of Constantinople.”

“But afterwards?” asked Thiodolf, still commanding his gestures and voice.

“You need not be wrath with me,” answered Glykomedon, “that I have lured her from out of your hands. She was fair indeed, but a cold-hearted hypocritical thing. When I found that she would not agree to any of my wishes, and I could not sell her, on account of her lofty renowned lineage, I let her go; and in truth I know not what has since become of her.”

“You know not?—in truth you know not?” muttered Thiodolf, through his fast-shut teeth. “Now, then, thou miserable, empty man, I believe thee in this, for it is like the rest of thee; but so much less is it needful that the joyous air of heaven should be longer polluted by the breath of one like thee.” And, with fearful dexterity, he grasped the unhappy man by the throat, and his cries for help were hardly heard before he was flung, with one powerful effort, far over the balustrade of the gallery into the abyss.

A long death-like stillness and horror followed the daring and fearful deed. Thiodolf, certain that this would be succeeded by a storm all the more wild, and that the crowd—who now, as if spell-bound, fixed their eyes on him—would in a few minutes break loose to take revenge, drew his helmet more firmly on, grasped

his spear tightly, and held his shield before his breast with cautious strength. But it came to pass far otherwise than he expected. Even the terrible business of revenge was transacted in the vicinity of the emperor in a grave and lawful fashion. Only soft whispers were at length heard to pass between the pale spectators; messengers went to and fro; a body of the imperial guard approached with measured tread, and formed a half-circle round Thiodolf. The courtiers drew back, while the captain of the troop came forward, and in the name of the emperor desired Thiodolf to surrender his arms.

"If the emperor himself said that to me," answered the youth, thoughtfully, "it might be that I would give them up, and it might also be that I would not. But now it is very different; for you, my good sir-messenger, although you may be a very brave man, have ventured much too far in this business. At all events, it will be easier for you to take my life from me than my arms; but I think that you will win neither."

"Then it must be done," answered the captain. "Forward, soldiers! and, if it be possible, bring him alive to the emperor."

A hollow laugh from Thiodolf appeared to make the troop shudder, but on all sides the half-circle drew closer in. The Berserker rage flashed from the youth's eyes. He brandished his spear.

Then suddenly Helmfrid appeared in the midst. "I will take him to the emperor," he said, turning to the captain; adding, with a voice of command, "Lower your spears! march!"

The captain lowered his weapon; all seemed ready to obey the order; and Helmfrid, taking Thiodolf by the hand, passed gravely through the apartments to the imperial chamber.

"Whither are we going, master?" asked Thiodolf.

"As I said," replied Helmfrid, "to the emperor; perchance also to a judgment of death."

"I shall still keep my arms?"

"Yes, if thou give thy word to injure no servant of the emperor with them."

"I will give it; and let us go on, in God's name. Now all is well with me."

In one of the halls they passed the bloody, crushed body of

Glykomedon, which had been brought from the palace-garden, and lay there previous to its solemn interment. It seemed as though even Helmfrid turned his eyes with horror from the disfigured corpse; but Thiodolf looked firmly at it, saying, "The fellow has had his just due."

They entered the innermost chamber; the emperor was standing with a few of his counsellors, and he looked at the young Ice-lander with a mixture of displeasure and astonishment. But soon he turned away from him, made a sign for the Væringier chief to approach, and spoke with him and the other counsellors apart in an opposite corner of the room, but earnestly, and often warmly. Thiodolf remained for a long time motionless and calm; but at length he frowned, and muttered to himself, "They may decide what they please; but I wish that they would soon come to some conclusion. Ye gods of Walhalla, what might not have been done while these great people are reflecting!"

At last the emperor spoke aloud to Helmfrid: "There remains no other way. Say to your too daring young countryman that he must submit to die: Glykomedon's blood cries for vengeance."

"Is it so?" answered Thiodolf; "strange enough! Hardly an hour ago I was thinking what solemn decisions must pass those imperial lips, and now one such solemn decision is pronounced on me."

Then he leant his spear against a wall, and Throng-piercer, the beautiful joyous weapon, flashed brightly in his right hand. The counsellors, terrified, pressed round the emperor, and Helmfrid, shaking his head in displeasure, said, "Young man, bethink thee of thy word."

"Dost thou think it needful to remind me of it?" asked Thiodolf. "Forget not that thou hast to do with a countryman. In truth, I mean to hurt no other servant of the emperor with this weapon save the youngest of the band, who has belonged to it but half an hour, and thus help him out of all difficulties, as it is decreed that he must now die."

He placed the silver hilt of his sword against the base of a column, and turned its point against his breast as he bent his body forward.

"Be not over hasty, rash boy!" cried Helmfrid, going towards

Thiodolf, who made a sign to him not to approach, saying, "Disturb me no further. I too may think that it is too early for me to go to Walhalla, but I will not give up my weapons, neither will I defend myself against the emperor, my new lord. What else remains to be done?"

"Sire," said Helmfrid, turning to the emperor, "you are about to shiver a very noble vessel."

The emperor sighed deeply, and answered, "Do I not myself feel that acutely enough? But what then would become of the safety of my palace? what of the merchants of the imperial city, if their chief should so miserably perish unavenged? Point out to me a gentler way, and I will follow it."

Helmfrid, greatly troubled, was silent; none of the counsellors knew how to answer. Thiodolf gazed more and more fixedly on the shining sword.

At that moment a page announced an envoy from the merchants. The emperor desired that he should be admitted; and then turned to Helmfrid.

"You see it," he said; "they can wait no longer to see vengeance taken for the death of their chief. Could you not remove that wild youth from here, that these sacred walls may not be stained with his blood, shed by his own hand?"

Helmfrid shook his head; and Thiodolf said, "Be not disturbed; this marble will not be the worse for having the blood of an Iceland hero sprinkled upon it."

The envoy entered. Thiodolf gave no heed to him; his thoughts were at the grave of his father, and in Walhalla; it even flashed through him at times whether he might not learn of the white Christ in the other world.

"Mighty imperial ruler," said the merchant the while, "he who now bends before you is not a subject of your sceptre. I come from strange lands to this capital; but not the less have all the merchants here dwelling, foreign or native, with one voice chosen me to carry to your imperial majesty a representation on the fearful fate that lately befell here the Prince Glykmedon, a moment before so rich and flourishing."

"I can divine the subject of your message," answered the

emperor, somewhat gloomily. "Be content, justice shall be fully done to you."

"We pray for that," said the merchant; "that is, we hope that your imperial majesty will not deem us so unworthy as to resent the deserved death of a fellow-merchant, because the slain was the principal and also one of the richest and most powerful amongst us. I will answer on my head for Glykomedon having run into the arms of his fitting punishment. Let not, therefore, your imperial majesty on this account deprive yourself of one of your bravest warriors. As a fine for the outrage perpetrated in the palace, the assembled merchants offer ten thousand pounds of gold; for to our associate belongs the guilt of this outrage, but not to the brave Northman, to whose hands fate entrusted a somewhat impetuous revenge."

The emperor bent his head kindly to the speaker, and commanded him to relate what he knew of Glykomedon's wicked deeds.

Then the merchant brought to light the unworthy manner in which he had carried away the lady Isolde, and offered to bring many witnesses who heard it from his own boasting lips.

"I need no other than you," said the emperor. "My noble French merchant, I know you well; and through you I thank the merchants of the city that they have given me the opportunity to be just, while clement. Helmfrid, thou mayest tell thy pupil that he is pardoned."

He left the room with his counsellors. Thiodolf threw Throngpiercer into its sheath, seized the merchant's hand in both his, and said, as he smiled in his face, "Truly I thought that thou wast Bertram of Ma seilles, thou brave friend and helper in time of need!"

CHAPTER III.

HELMFRID would have hastened to leave this inner apartment of the palace, into which none but the emperor and his attendants came, and such as had some immediate favor to beg of the supreme ruler,—but Thiodolf thought that there was no place on earth in which it was not seemly and fitting to restore to an honest man his own property. So he drew forth the jewels which he had received from Haroun, and gave them to the merchant.

“Thou wouldst not have lost them, dear Bertram,” he said, “even had I run my silver sword through my breast; for with my last breath I would have given them over to my master Helmfrid, and then they would have been in safe and careful hands. But tell me of Isolde.”

“It is high time for us to leave this chamber,” said Bertram. “You are, I hear, become a paid soldier, dear Thiodolf, and must now dutifully follow the will of him whom you have acknowledged as your chief.”

“That is true,” answered Thiodolf; and he hastened to the door, still desiring Bertram to tell him, by the way, what he had learnt of Isolde.

That was not much more than Glykomedon had before declared to the young Iclander, for Bertram’s knowledge came from the same source; only he added to it, that there were traces of Isolde being even now concealed in Constantinople, but that he could say nothing certain till he had obtained further information.

“That shall be this very hour,” answered Thiodolf; “one need only ask through the city from one room to another, and she will be easily found.”

But Helmfrid led him out on a balcony which they were passing by, and showed him the multitude of houses, saying, “That is not the fifth part of the city; now ask from room to room, my boy, and see how far thou wilt get.”

Thiodolf sighed deeply, and said, "Truly, that would not be so short and easy as I had thought; but yet it must be done. A true Northman can find his way aright through the wildest wood. Do we abide here long?"

"We shall not take the field again until the beginning of spring," replied Helmfrid.

"Oh! the whole winter!" cried Thiodolf. "It will be strange indeed if I do not find Isolde. Her brightness must shine out like the light of heaven, even through dark clouds, and from between hard rocks, so that she can never be long concealed."

Helmfrid and Bertram led their young friend through the palace-gardens, and through many sumptuous buildings such as his eyes had never seen: he often remained motionless, in bewildered astonishment, yet the name of Isolde was almost constantly on his lips, the thought of Isolde in his heart. Only, as they entered the august hippodrome, it seemed as though for an instant the brazen and marble figures on the walls drove out all that commonly lived and moved in his soul.

"These are the heroes of the north!" he exclaimed. "There are Niflungen, and Asas, and Ginkungen, and he with the dragon is no doubt the mighty Sigurd. Oh! how he is pressing down Faffner!"

"Thou art not altogether wrong, my boy," answered Helmfrid; "at least there is something very similar in their stories, though these statues are called by other names. Our northern legends yet live in their native land of Asia, which is only divided from this country by an arm of the sea. Besides, we Værings have brought with us many of the heroic lays of our father-land, and the poets have imitated them often in their songs. So thou wilt perhaps see the deed of Sigurd repeated on the stage in beautiful Grecian measure. I have often taken pleasure in it."

"That is joyful!" said Thiodolf; and he could not turn from the brazen Sigurd, the serpent-slayer; but at length he tore himself away, saying, "I must before all things, this very evening go to Malgherita, and to my dear brother in arms, Pietro; for, see, the evening sun looks down upon us aslant and sadly. I would wager that the little woman is weeping for her child; and I feel stirring in my heart a sorrowful longing for the hearth of my

home,—nothing better can come to both her and me than that we should speak together, and, if need be, weep together.” Helmfrid would have given him a Væringier to direct him through the great city; but Thiodolf said, “I want none to go with me, not even you this time, Master Helmfrid, nor my very dear Bertram. Stranger and intruder would be the same thing in such a visit. Only just describe to me well how I am to go; give me first the land-marks, and for my return direct me by stars, for they will then be high in heaven.”

Helmfrid did as the youth desired; and denoted to him the way to Pietro’s dwelling, and the return to the castle of the Væringiers, where the new Icelandic troop was already quartered.

“Right well!” answered Thiodolf; “and many thanks. Ice-lander can understand Icelanders. Have no fears about my finding the way aright.” And he flew away like an arrow along the road that had been pointed out to him.

Twilight, with its mournful shades, fell early on the little dwelling of Pietro and Malgherita, for many olive-trees before the window helped to shut out the daylight; and therefore it was with the bereaved mother exactly as Thiodolf’s foreboding had prophesied. She touched the strings of her mandoline, and sang the following song:

“Tristan, poor bereaved child,
Torn from thy mother’s hand,
Whither doth the tempest drive thee?
Whither lead the robber-band?

Tristan, Isolde is to thee
A baneful star, portending wrath.
Thou to all so good and gracious,
Threaten not my darling’s path!”

Thiodolf came in to them, and they received him with deep, heartfelt emotion. Much was said of the child, of Isolde, of the sweet past, and of the glimmering future; and Thiodolf mentioned the wonderful events of the day only in passing, adding:

“Dear children, an emperor’s court is a precious, solemn, and brilliant thing, but truly nothing when compared to the joy to si-

so confidently together as we are now doing, if only we were five ; but, ah ! Tristan and Isolde are missing !”

Then some one knocked at the lower window. Looking round, they were aware of a tall man, who, wrapped in his mantle, looked into the chamber with keen eyes, and said, with a somewhat hollow and indistinct voice, through the window :

“ You have forgotten the sixth ! Without him you can do nothing, and you may wring your necks off before you catch him.”

He had left the window, and vanished in the crowd of passers-by long before Thiodolf had got through the hall and the court into the street.

“ That must have been my father’s ghost !” said Malgherita, shuddering, when Thiodolf came back. “ You may believe me, it must have been indeed his ghost ; for the great baron would never have left the home of his ancestor Huldibert without being driven to do some terrible deed. That fearful word which he breathed just now would never satisfy him. We know already, Pietro, from dreadful experience, how each time that eagle has left his nest portentous things have followed.”

It seemed as if all trusting sympathy had been checked and stopped by that fearful exclamation. Soon afterwards, Thiodolf went forth, and passed through the now silent streets in deep thought, towards his yet unknown home, the Væringers fortress. On his way, as he was carefully watching the stars which were to be his guides, his look was drawn to the earth again by a solemn chant, and lights streaming out from a deep vault. He drew near ; it was the funeral of Glykomedon, celebrated in a subterranean chapel. The shattered corpse, clothed in white grave clothes, lay on a splendid bier. The torches threw upon it their brightest light ; a cold shudder thrilled through Thiodolf. “ I must know at once,” he said to himself, “ whether even a shade of guilt lies on me from my rash deed. This solemn place will make it known openly.” Therewith he went with slow steps through the press of priests and laity, near to the bloody corpse of the slain.

Then there arose from her knees, near the bier, a tall female form, veiled in white robes. Who could here have been praying by the body of Glykomedon, thrilled as a mystery through the

youth's heart? Was it a bride, was it a sister, whose tender bosom had been pierced through by his death-blow? The people reverently made room for the noble lady whilst some whispers were heard around: "There stands the murderer by the bier! It is he, the wild, gigantic Iceland warrior!"

"Yes!" said Thiodolf, aloud, and slowly: "has any one aught to say against me?"

As now there arose amongst the crowd a displeased murmur, the lady in the white veil turned back, and said, looking towards the corpse, "Most guilty!" And then again, looking towards Thiodolf, "Guiltless!" and left the chapel. All bowed before Thiodolf; and Glykomedon's relations covered their faces, ashamed, and sobbing. But Thiodolf looked long in the face of the dead; and as soon as he could bear this gaze without horror, he felt himself fully purified from all guilt. As he went out, he asked some men at the door who was the white figure who knelt by the corpse.

"What!" was the answer; "Know you not the Secret Helper?"

"Who is she, then?" asked he again.

"She may be a spirit," they answered; "but, beyond all doubt, she is a good spirit."

Far off, in the darkness, Thiodolf saw her snow-white garment shine; he shuddered inwardly, and could not but rejoice that his way led him in a directly opposite direction.

As the watch before the Væringier fortress cried out, in the familiar northern tongue "Who goes there?" he became again gay and joyful. He loudly returned the pass-word given to him by Helmfrid, and hastened through the gate into a spacious chamber, where he saw the northern lances glittering in the moonlight, as it streamed through the high arched windows. This was the guard-room of the Væringiers, where thirty bold warriors were sitting at their cups around the hearth, repeating the old lays of their father-land, amongst which were strangely mixed, at times, the lighter legends of the Greeks. One of these warriors sprang up to take the princely youth to his room; but he preferred spending the night in friendly talk; and also he desired to learn thoroughly, by experience, how watch was kept in the Væringier

fortress. He therefore went forth whenever guard was relieved, and stayed also with the sentinels on the wall, looking thoughtfully over the august, moonlit city. Visions of what had already happened to him in this eventful day, arose, like dreams, from all the still houses, and passed before his mind with strange forebodings of the future. He often sighed softly to himself: "Ah, Isolde! if thou art hidden in this mighty forest of houses, does not the beating of my heart awake thee from slumber, and draw thee towards me, thou beloved fugitive?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE following days passed in warlike exercises, which the people, —already used to wonder at the strength and dexterity of the Væringers,—now flocked to witness in much larger numbers, since Thiodolf far surpassed all his brave brothers in arms in throwing of spears, wrestling, and all the martial games which were most esteemed. He had soon so mastered the manner in which here the troops were led to the field, that nothing remained for him to learn ; and Helmfrid often took pleasure in entrusting the management of the different manœuvres of the whole Væringersquadron to his youthful friend ; he himself the while sitting by as only a pleased spectator, on his splendid Persian horse.

At length the noblest of the city came daily on horses and in chariots to the place where the Væringers were exercised, and took delight in the brilliant appearance of the young leader. The report of him even reached the emperor, who decided that his northern body-guard, in their increased splendor, should hold a mock-fight in his presence, and in that of his daughters and the other noble ladies of the court.

“Thiodolf,” said the Væringers chief, “since the emperor would see us in our full knightly pomp, put from thee, for my sake, that rough bull’s head helmet. There are helmets enow in my armory from which thou mayest choose. Follow me, and take that which pleases thee best.”

But that Thiodolf altogether refused. “If I may not keep my helmet of skin,” he said, “at least I alone shall forge myself a new one. I have enough gold and silver remaining of my tribute money from Zante ; and as to jewels, friend Bertram will surely lend me what I want.”

The merchant of Marseilles, who was present, readily held out to him the carefully preserved casket ; and as readily did Thiodolf accept it, as he had now the word and good-will of the lender,

For many days Thiodolf was seen incessantly hammering and knocking in the forge ; and his songs, also, were heard far beyond the wall of the Væringer fortress. At last, on the evening before the review, he came to his chief, with a new and almost entirely golden helmet in his hand, and asked, " How does this please you ?"

" Put it on, my boy," said the old man.

And when the new helmet shone on the youth's brow, it still looked like a bull's head, but most beautifully worked out of precious metals. The face of the animal looked fiercely and boldly out from the gold plates in front, the silver horns rose majestically above, two costly diamonds shone in the hollow of the eyes, and many rubies and emeralds sparkled in the fastenings and clasps.

" Thou art a wonderful man," said Helmfrid. " Thy work as a smith pleases me well ; but thou wilt look strange in it to many people."

" If it but please you, dear master," answered Thiodolf, " those who do not like it may look away. Have you any other commands to give ?"

Helmfrid smiled and shook his head ; and Thiodolf hastened forth to make the most careful and skilful arrangement for his Icelanders on the morrow.

The early glow of morning rose out of a moist refreshing autumnal mist. The grass glittered with many colors on the level space at the summit of the hill, where the Væringers, in two large bands, one commanded by Helmfrid and the other by Thiodolf, had placed themselves for the mock fight. A deep and broad stream divided the field, and some bridges, passable to man and horse, were thrown across it. It had been arranged for the knightly sport, that Helmfrid was to strive to win a passage over the water in some one spot, and to bring there suddenly an overpowering force before Thiodolf could collect one equally strong to defend the threatened bridge. The emperor, and the lords and ladies of his court, took their position on Helmfrid's side, partly out of respect for the glorious old age of the Væringer chief partly also that his being the attacking, not attacked party, the pursuit of the riders, and the hurling of spears of the foot-soldiers, were less likely to turn to wild disorder.

At the glance of the emperor, the piercing sound of a trumpet gave the signal to those who rode around him; the northern horns of the Væringers gave a joyous answer; and the fight began.

Many riders sprang from one side of the stream to the other, together with the light-armed foot-soldiers; and they threatened each other in many skilful evolutions, till at length they let fly their lances against their opponents. This seemed at first rather serious play to the Greeks; but they soon perceived that the lances flew so boldly among the ranks only because each man was satisfied that his adversary was skilful enough to avoid the blow, or else to receive it on his shield. The difference between this and a real fight was merely, that they called out before they threw their lances, and also shook them long in the air, in order to draw their enemies' attention. And at times lances flew gaily through the air without any warning, but then they only pierced deeply the sward, giving plain proof of the strength which had hurled them.

In the meanwhile the leaders, with keen sharp glances, held their position on the highest ground, as if on opposite watch-towers; the squadrons were directed partly by their looks, partly by the signals which they gave with their silver horns, partly by the orders of swift messengers.

Now collecting in the little valley, or drawn out behind bushes, the troops of Helmfrid ran and glided as if growing out of the ground, to make a sudden attack on one of the bridges; but as suddenly a detachment of Thiodolf's men appeared in a spot where none looked for them, and the assailants paused, threw their lances, and returned, each party retaining its first position.

Already the ladies, and those about the chariot of the emperor, began to fear that for this day the young Northman would only show his skill as leader, not his knightly prowess; for Thiodolf remained almost motionless on the hill, while in Helmfrid could be discerned more and more traces of that fiery impatient temper, which the fight on the Linden Hill in Norway had first roused in him.

The old hero, with increasing excitement, gave his war-cry, and rode rapidly backwards and forwards among his troops, singing some verses of the songs of the north, and not able to stay

himself from flinging spears with his own hand amongst his adversary's ranks. The eyes of the spectators were more and more fixed on him.

Then the fight so far changed as to appear to give a proof of Helmfrid's superiority. His troops rushed so quickly and unexpectedly towards a bridge, that Thiodolf was unable to oppose an equal force to them. The attacked were borne back from the bridge, Helmfrid passed, and the contest appeared decided.

Thiodolf blew loudly on his silver horn, till its shrill tones seemed to pierce through the uproar of the fight; and immediately his horse and foot troops, collecting from all sides, formed themselves into a long line, which, upon Thiodolf's joyous cry of "Forward, Northmen!" rushed behind their young leader over the nearest bridge to the opposite bank, and there so promptly, and in such good order, drew out against the troops of Helmfrid there posted, that they seemed overcome by this bold and unlooked-for attack, and knew no longer which way they should turn; while Helmfrid, with all who were with him on the other side, hastened to recross the bridge, that he might not with divided forces twice meet with an overwhelming opposition.

But this movement, unprepared, and begun in confused haste, was not effected quick enough. It was easy to see that Thiodolf would surround and defeat those left behind sooner than Helmfrid could pass the bridge; and the court spectators rejoiced at this brilliant display of the young Northman's dexterity; the ladies did not turn their eyes from him, their hearts beat with impatience for the noble knight to complete his bold undertaking; the emperor himself leant forward in his chariot with kindling eyes and approving gestures. When suddenly the detachment led on by Thiodolf, with the rapid movements of an eagle, to a narrow pass overgrown with bushes,—which it was necessary to gain in order to complete the victory,—made an unexpected halt. The spectators saw this with astonishment, the emperor almost with alarm, as he had taken so decidedly part with the young chief: he hastily commanded one of the courtiers to ride off and bid the youth to complete his victory.

The messenger galloped quickly over the plain, and having reached Thiodolf, he found him standing as a barrier at the en-

trance of the pass, and keeping back his own too fiery warriors with words and threats.

“Forwards, forwards!” cried the impatient Greek to the troops.

“Let none move from his place!” cried Thiodolf with his voice of thunder; and made a sign to the Greek, deeming him too unimportant to waste a word on him, to get out of the dust.

“In the emperor’s name!” cried the courtier.

“Ay,” said Thiodolf, “that truly changes the case; you must then come nearer. Do so, and look hither.”

He pointed to the pass, where women and children, who had come to see the fight, had before taken up their position, thinking that no danger could befall them in this safe place, and that the noble sport could here be viewed in quiet. Now, they were all running and shrieking in wild confusion. Children fell screaming over other children; and while their mothers tried to carry them off, they found their way barred by other mothers.

“It is no matter,” cried the Greek; “forwards! Why are people so careless in these reviews? victory is more important than their safety.”

“Halt!” cried Thiodolf to his troops;—adding, to the Greek, “Return whence you came.”

He, desirous to have the emperor’s command executed, cried to the troops, “I am Michael Androgenes, the imperial chamberlain. Forward!”

And he made a movement as if he himself would spring into the pass. The women and children screamed with terror. Then Thiodolf rode against the chamberlain, so that he and his horse fell together, saying, as they both rolled in the dust, “Now, it would ill please you if I let my iron-hoofed troops rush over you. See you now, we must never forget how we care for our own lives, when we so boldly speak against the bodies and lives of others. Or shall I cry, Forward?”

The abashed chamberlain gathered himself up, and went away somewhat limping.

In the meanwhile Helmfrid had again collected his forces and taken the bridge, so that Thiodolf now on his side seemed completely surrounded. It was much too late to break through the pass, which was at length clear; the only open spot led to a

broad foaming part of the stream, far from all the bridges. And near there the chariots of the court were standing, as the difficulty of the passage seemed to secure them from the throng.

But thither Thiodolf turned the rapid course of his riders and foot-soldiers. A cloud of dust arose round the chariots of the emperor's followers: the Icelanders gave their wild cry, the women shrieked fearfully, the courtiers seemed bewildered, and Thiodolf's glancing form flew close by the emperor's chariot. "Boldly through, my northern heroes!" he cried; and immediately the stream was covered with swimming men and horses; the chariots were untouched; only a thick dust remained, through which it might be seen how Thiodolf repeatedly plunged back into the water to assist with his powerful arm wearied swimmers and sinking horses.

CHAPTER V.

THE troops on both sides were again in their first position, the imperial trumpets sounded a halt, nobles of the court rode up to the two leaders, bringing the command that they should make their troops pass in review before the emperor. The chamberlain, Michael Androgenes, would not carry the message to Thiodolf for the second time, and hastened to become the messenger to Helmfrid's squadron.

The northern trumpets sounded; at the well-known national notes the soldiers formed into two well-ordered divisions; Helmfrid, with his, defiled first. Thiodolf closely observed the actions and demeanor of the old Væring chief; he rejoiced to see that after Helmfrid had passed, saluting the emperor, he returned and took his place near the royal chariot, while the troops went slowly on their way back. "Now," thought Thiodolf, "I can, at my ease, look on that noble prince, and, better still, on those delicate ladies."

As the turn came to him, and he had saluted with a warrior's greeting, all eyes were turned on him with friendly curiosity; and amongst them, two of rare beauty, belonging to the fair angelic face of a young maiden whom Thiodolf saw on the left hand of the emperor. Now was he heartily glad to have to remain beside the chariot. Hardly had he passed it when he wheeled round his Arab horse, urging him so impetuously back to the appointed place, and then checking him so suddenly, that the foaming horse reared high in displeasure, and, for a moment, threatened to fall back with his armed burden. Thiodolf's calm look rested on the lovely face of the maiden; he saw the rosy cheeks blanch in terror, he heard a warning cry, soft as a silver bell, pass the fresh lips; and he stroked his charger's slender neck, as if to thank him. The emperor asked him why he had not made his way through the pass.

"Mighty lord," answered Thiodolf, "I would rather have slain my noble horse with my own hand, than have driven him over those women and children who had so confidently and fearlessly collected there to see the sport. It was a very sad sight when they all cried and ran about. I was not joyful again till I saw them in safety on the hill, and beginning to laugh."

"You are a very soft-hearted soldier," said the emperor, with a friendly smile.

"Yes," answered Thiodolf, simply; "very much so with my good friends, but more especially with women and children; a true-hearted man would not crush a flower needlessly."

The emperor stretched out his hand towards him, and presented him to the two ladies who sat with him in the chariot. Then Thiodolf learnt that the lady at the right of the emperor was his daughter Zoe; the blooming beauty at his left, who had so fixed the eyes of the youth, and who now smiled on him with a sweet blush, was also called Zoe, and was the emperor's niece. Thiodolf then received the command to appear at the noon-day repast in the palace; and at a sign from the emperor, he sprang away, courteously greeting, and put himself again at the head of his troop, which had defiled past. As they now returned into the city, and he had rejoined Helmfrid, he said:—

"I pray you, dear master, how is it that the Zoe who is the emperor's daughter, can be the companion of such a blooming, lovely child as the other Zoe at the emperor's left hand? They do not look at all well together. Winter and Spring are better, as once when Aunt Gunhilda sat by little Malgherita; but such a mournful Autumn as that good, elderly Zoe, compared to her brilliant niece, truly that looks very cheerless."

"You must complain of that to Heaven, who has placed them both near the emperor," answered Helmfrid, smiling. "He waited long for the throne in vain expectation, and only ascended it a few years ago when he was already aged; he seems to have cast the joyless clouds of his existence upon his daughters. The eldest, Eudoxia, has already entered the cloister; the youngest, Theodora, is her austere pupil, and only appears at court on great festivals, as to-day, perchance, at noon; Zoe, the second, is drawing towards a sad, solitary old age, although she is looked upon

as heiress to the throne ; for who would try to win the affection of the grave, sorrowful princess ?”

“I know not,” said Thiodolf, “and in truth I care very little. You must tell me of the young, blooming Zoe, who has a good right to bear that name, since the Greek word means ‘life.’”

“She !” answered Helmfrid, “she is but a distant relation of the emperor, and has no hope of succeeding to the throne.”

“Ah ! my dear, brave master,” said Thiodolf with a sigh ; “you are surely become very old. You would certainly never have given such an answer on the Linden hills.”

Helmfrid frowned, as if in anger ; but suddenly looking at his golden shield, which Thiodolf had restored to him, he only said, “Thou strange boy !” and shook his head smiling.

Both heroes adorned themselves splendidly in the Væringer fortress before they went to the royal feast ; they carefully polished their arms, and put on yet more costly belts and scarfs than they had worn at the review. Then they gravely took the road to the palace.

The two princesses, who were called by the same name of Zoe, sat near each other at the sumptuous table, on the right hand of the emperor ; on the left, his other far more pale and grave daughter, Theodora. The place of the young chief, Thiodolf, was at some distance from the emperor and the noble ladies ; but as the sovereign frequently addressed his speech to him, and he answered in his strangely expressed but powerful and sometimes graceful language, he appeared to be the centre of the whole company. The young and blooming Zoe often turned her bright looks upon him, and, in their sunshine, flowers seemed to spring up in his heart, so that he could not forbear thinking of the songs and tales so dear to him of his native island.

“Zoe wishes to hear some of your northern songs,” said the emperor, speaking of his daughter.

But Thiodolf, as often as this name sounded, thought only of the young Zoe, and he answered with gay spirits :—

“O mighty sire ! whatever of delicate flowers may spring up in our valleys belong surely to the lovely princess.”

The elder Zoe bowed graciously towards the Northman ; and as he bent his head to the younger, who sat near her, no one was

aware of the error except perchance the young Zoe herself. At a look from the emperor, a lute was brought to the youth, and he began to sing as follows, taking care that it should not fare with this delicate instrument as with Haroun's in Achmet's castle :

“ Life ! thou source of all existence—
Breath of God ! mysterious flame !
Many a language hath attempted,
Far and near to give thee name.

Thou knowest what the Northman calls thee ;
Vita ! saith the Roman song ;
But the Greek in tenderer accent,
Zoe ! sighs with silver tongue.”

As the northern speech of the Væringers was now generally understood at the court, the emperor and the ladies seized the graceful meaning of the song, and again the two princesses behaved as before. The eldest bowed to Thiodolf, Thiodolf to the younger, who read well in his kindling looks to whom the song applied ; she looked down smiling, and the other guests remained in their error ; for as all the courtiers had eyes only for the heir-ess of the throne, they supposed that it must be so with every one. It happened that Thiodolf let fall a look on the face of the pale Princess Theodora. She was gazing very earnestly at him, and appeared almost like a vision recalling thoughts of death and eternity, which, visible only to one, came suddenly between him and all the joys of a feast. Thiodolf looked down in confusion, and gave away the lute. Soon after, the guests rose from table. Thiodolf in a half-dreamy state wandered out towards the dwelling of Pietro and Malgherita. The blooming figure of the fair Zoe flitted before him, and every kindly word, every sweet smile or greeting which she had addressed to him, returned like sunshine to his mind ; but then it seemed as if Theodora came and spread with her pale hands a large black mantle between him and the beautiful princess, concealing her from him.

“ That which is stirring in me to-day,” cried he, impatiently, “ must be known to him whom Christians call the devil !”

“ Are you swearing ?” said Bertram with a smile, as he accidentally met him from a neighboring street.

“ Ah !” cried Thiodolf, “ any time would be fitter than this to speak with you, who are bright as sunshine, and calm as noon-tide. I am little better than distraught.”

He hastened past hurriedly, and Bertram looked after him with a smile :—“ Thou wilt soon find rest, thou true foamy sea. It is Heaven’s best gift when it sends storms to try and purify the like of thee.”

Pietro and Malgherita the while were intent with wondering looks on a picture which had come to them in a mysterious manner. And even when Thiodolf had joined them, they could not turn away from its contemplation. They silently made a sign to him to approach, and turned the torches so that he could the better see the picture. After the first glance the guest remained no less dazzled and amazed than the hosts. What first caught his eye was the figure of Isolde in a pilgrim’s dress bending at the gate of a large convent as if praying for admission. But at the gate stood a pale, austere woman, from whose mouth came out the words, “ The house of the Lord is open to the lowly ; but iron bolts shut out the proud. Return, my daughter, when thou art changed.” And in another part of the picture Isolde was seen in a dark, dreary dwelling, praying before a crucifix. Implements of work around her showed how she spent the time which was not directly given to prayer. From her mouth came the words, “ Lord, if I am to go down as low as I once raised myself high, whither then shall I sink ?” When by degrees the gazers on the picture could express themselves in words, it appeared, that a pretty dumb maiden had, in the morning, brought the picture and immediately vanished.

“ That Isolde has painted the picture,” said Malgherita, “ there can be no doubt. Even from childhood the spirit of our great forefather has shown itself in her, not only by her proud and earnest character, but by the skill over pencil and brush which she has inherited. See how these figures are drawn, so bold and distinct, so free and so correct, so powerful in every feature. My friends, no one in the world can thus paint but Isolde.”

“ O Isolde !” said Thiodolf humbly and bending down his head, “ hast thou to remind me of thee thus ? Well didst thou say, I

was not worthy of thee. But thou, glorious sun, again risest in my heaven, and all delusions of night give place."

Pietro and Malgherita understood not his words ; and he only answered to their questions, " All is now right again ; but truly it had well nigh been very wrong. Shame, that a Northman's heart could beat so lightly and childishly."

Then he looked with a steady gaze on the picture, and cried out : " The pale woman who sends Isolde away from the convent-gate is truly and indeed the Princess Theodora. Isolde must be in Constantinople. Dry thine eyes, Malgherita ; in a few days she shall be once more beside us."

CHAPTER VI.

THE noble lady was not found so soon as Thiodolf had expected ; far otherwise ; in spite of every effort, Isolde remained as invisible as ever, and her friends began to doubt whether she had not sent that picture of her history to Malgherita out of some far-distant country. A deep sorrow began to twine itself round Thiodolf's existence, the deeper because he reproached himself with having forfeited the blessing of finding Isolde by the levity with which he had looked upon the Princess Zoe. Even now he could not always, when invited to court, as often happened, meet the eyes of the lovely lady without a beating of the heart ; but he checked this by paying assiduous attentions to the Elder Zoe. Yet the younger knew, by some wonderful instinct, who was the real object of them.

At this time, whenever Thiodolf showed himself in the streets of Constantinople, the citizens thronged around him, and often greeted him with loud words of approbation ; for the gentleness with which he had protected the women and children in the narrow pass drew towards him the love and honor of all hearts, and the very fearfulness of his giant-like stature only contrasted more beautifully with his kind and gentle disposition. It often happened, that some of the children whom he had saved would run out of the house-doors and spring towards his horse. Then he would lift one or other of them with safe dexterity before him on his saddle, and make his Arab horse curvet to delight them. He was the darling and the talk of the whole people. His great master Helmfrid rejoiced heartily at this, and also at his more mannerly and mild behavior at court, which his silent, inward sorrow helped him the more readily to acquire. For the continual struggle with himself, and ever-disappointed longing, quenched more and more his impetuous delight in rough mirth, though none knew of the deep grief which, as is the wont with strong minds,

he cherished as a most precious jewel to be kept for himself alone.

One day he went to Pietro's dwelling, holding in his hand his skaits ready for use. As the husband and wife looked at them with some astonishment, he said :

"There is nothing to wonder at. If I only use them to glide like an arrow over the ponds of the city ! And a good piece of the Propontis I should think must be covered with ice, even if it does not freeze all over. That would be still better, I can tell you."

Pietro and Malgherita, in spite of their sad state, could not refrain from laughing at his confident hope of skating in Constantinople, and told him how little it was to be thought of. He seemed almost disposed to shiver his skaits to atoms, but he checked his old impatience with calm strength, and said only very sadly :

"It is just as if this country had no love for me. She either answers me with bad alluring songs, or she says nay to all I ask and beg of her. Will you do me a kindness, dear friends ? Keep these poor skaits ; and if you go again to that happy land where there are bright ice-mirrors and solid seas,—but truly you will never go there again ; you do not long after it, and I am speaking foolishly."

He went to a window and looked wistfully up to the Pleiades, which were now rising in the darkening sky over the roofs of the city. Malgherita was much moved at his quiet sorrow, and prayed him to go out into the town with Pietro. She had passed a restless, dreamy night, and wished now to sleep awhile. They obeyed her ; and the two friends went and walked thoughtfully to and fro in one of the frequented open squares.

Suddenly Pietro stood still, seized his companion's arm, and cried out, "I am greatly deceived, or she yonder, in the colored turban, is the dumb maiden who brought us the picture of Isolde."

The falcon eyes of the Icelandic caught immediately the figure that was pointed out to him, but she disappeared at once in the twilight and the crowd of people, and vanished apparently in one of the neighboring streets.

"She can only have gone down to the sea, or towards the

church of St. Sophia. Take that way, brother, and I will take this, and he who can get sight of the strange figure, let him follow her unperceived to the house whither she goes. Then we must judge according to circumstances what is to be done. But at all events it will give us a sure track."

The friends hastened away, their hearts beating with hope, and followed the different directions.

Thiodolf had not gone far in the street which leads to St. Sophia's church, when he saw the colored turban again shine in the star-light not far from him. He had now only to check his impatient step, that the maiden might not be frightened by his pursuit. But as the crowd of men more and more disappeared from the street, and Thiodolf was left almost alone with the dumb maiden in the darkness, the poor child began to be terrified at the gigantic warrior who seemed to follow on her heels. She turned first to the right, then to the left, from the principal street into the neighboring lanes, from the lanes into the streets again,—still the tall figure followed as her shadow. At length, when she seemed not far from her destination, she sank trembling on her knees, and sought, by all that is touching in terror and dumb play of features, to implore the knight to cease from his pursuit.

"Dear child," said Thiodolf, "thou canst express thyself most persuasively; but the happiness and welfare of my whole life bids me follow thee. I cannot leave thee unless I find her whom I seek; or, which all the gods forbid, thy path does not lead to her."

The maiden wrung her hands in sorrowful anguish, and knew not whether to stay or to go on. When suddenly, a tall, white, veiled figure stepped between the two, and said to Thiodolf, "Thou bold man of war, back! I am the Secret Helper."

The shudder which had seized the youth at the midnight burial of Glykomedon passed over him now as if again called up. Yet he stood firm, and said, "Who art thou, Secret Helper? and what hast thou to do with me?"

"Who am I?" was the answer; "ask all Constantinople. What have I to do with thee? Bold man, thou wilt know it, alas, but too often!"

Thiodolf turned away trembling inwardly, and meant to depart;

but he felt the hand of the Secret Helper holding him back by his mantle.

“What dost thou yet want?” asked he with a stifled voice.

“Thy solemn word of honor,” answered the veiled figure, “that thou wilt never again attempt the same pursuit as to-day. It ill beseems a knightly warrior like thee.”

In shame and awe he gave the required promise, and hastened to fly back to the Væringers fortress, unwilling to show himself again this evening to Pietro and Malgherita.

While the two men were following their strange track, Malgherita, resting on the cushions of her sofa, slept, but her sleep was painful and bewildered. Whether what she saw during the time belonged to dreams or to reality seemed never clearly to be made out; but she related as follows, and affirmed that she had seen it with her own eyes.

Starting up from her troubled slumbers, she perceived with terror by the glimmering light of a lamp the figure of a tall old man. He sat near her on a chair, and grasped a half-broken lute, while he looked fixedly at her. As she looked nearer, it was the ghost of her father. Horror seized her, so that she could neither call her attendant nor close her eyes; stiff and motionless, and as if petrified, they remained fixed on the dreadful apparition. It struck the strings of the lute, and sang with a hoarse voice the following words:

“Dost thou know in fair Provence
The noble baron’s donjon keep?
Fiery flames it cast aloft,
Then became a blacken’d heap

He himself—that baron bold—
To the fire his home resign’d;
Half impell’d by grief and ire,
Half by his determin’d mind.

‘What, my grandsire, hast thou hid
Here within these castle walls?
Now the chilly morning air
Whistles through these smouldering halls.’

Now the consecrated stone,
Lo! the baron he hath broke;

And the ancestor hath smelt
Deadly fumes of flame and smoke.

Hurrah ! hurrah ! up flares the fire,
Down the ancient fortress falls !
Would ye know what there is found ;
Seek it not !—avoid the walls !

Oft the baron's moody ghost
Wandering through the courts doth go.
Thinks he then on Malgherita ?
Well thou know'st—what thou dost know."

Then the frightful figure drew some more discordant sounds from the lute, and went out with uncertain steps.

Pietro on his return found Malgherita in the shivering of a fever-fit.

The soothing light of the next morning restored the terrified lady to her senses, but her mind was possessed with an abiding terror. Pietro hoped to gain information from Bertram which would make the assertions of the apparition vanish into mere mist, and he hastened to him. Unhappily, instead of contradiction, he met only with a fearful confirmation. The merchant had received news from Marseilles how the castle of the great baron had been burnt some months before. It was also stated that the baron himself had kindled the fire in his nightly researches after the prophecy of his ancestor, and that he must undoubtedly have perished in the falling ruins of the dreaded arched walk.

CHAPTER VII.

As Thiodolf some days after came to an early meal in Pietro's house, Malgherita said, "Seest thou well, Thiodolf, how no words of the children of men fall to the ground; how none of their dreams vanish into formless air, for the Fates listen sharply. Dost thou remember how thy song at the window and Mount Hecla's fire so terrified me? It happened only because I was always dreaming that my father's castle was in ashes through my heedlessness. Now all is come true, though indeed in another sense. But yet I am still the one from whose hand the first spark fell on the mysterious building."

"Then the torch which kindled it flew out of my hand," answered Thiodolf. "Isolde's disappearance caused all the wild confusion. Had I only waited! But I rushed madly on, and brought down on our heads that hall in which we might have sat peaceful and blessed together."

Malgherita wept in silence, and Thiodolf said kindly, "Nay, do not look so very mournful, noble lady. The edifice of our happiness is not so altogether overthrown, and I think I shall find light by which to recover some of our buried treasures. I have indeed forsworn that mean—it must be said—unknightly way of seeking. But see you not there in the picture the pale princess Theodora. I will ask her openly and honorably what she knows of Isolde: that is against no solemn oath."

And forthwith he turned his steps to the palace, where he was again invited for the noonday meal.

The eyes of the blooming Zoe found him out amid a crowd of chiefs and knights,—he felt this, though he saw it not,—and he pressed the more rapidly to the elder Zoe, this time urged also by the wish of speaking to her sister Theodora. He was about to question the latter, but the pale face looked at him gravely and coldly, almost as if threatening; he could not but think of the Secret Helper, and he remained silent.

After the dinner he at length found courage to whisper to her, "For the sake of all that is dear to you, noble princess Theodora, refuse me not an answer to one single question."

Theodora looked at him with a deep, cold sternness, saying, "Impious heathen man, return to thy cares of this world, and leave me. But if thou art so eager and bold to question, go to the ruins of the castle near Marseilles, in the night season when none can disturb thee, and look deep into thine own wild heart. I deem that thou wilt there receive an answer, though perchance a fearful one."

Shuddering, Thiodolf said involuntarily, "Art thou, then, the awful Secret Helper?"

"Helper?" replied Theodora, "truly not thy Helper." And she turned from him and left the hall. Soon after, the whole company separated, and Thiodolf, troubled and bewildered, wandered through the manifold halls of the palace. At length he felt surprised that he did not reach the open air, and then first became aware that he had lost his way. The sentinels, supposing that the chief, honored and favored of the emperor, came on some weighty business, had opened the doors without breaking their reverent silence; so that he suddenly found himself in a part of the palace quite unknown to him.

A sweet sound reached him, now as of gold and silver bells, now as of warbling birds; and when he opened the nearest door, he stood beneath the wide-spreading branches of a golden palm-tree; golden birds sat amidst its leaves and sang; but at the bottom of the stem lay two large golden lions, who glared strangely with their eyes, and Thiodolf involuntarily laid his hand on his sword.

Then a side-door opened; the fair young Zoe was seen in a chamber filled with rich flowers and shrubs, and smiling kindly on the young Northman she said, "Ah, how can your brave hand be about to injure those golden figures, the fairest ornament of the palace? But I ought rather to ask you how have you reached my apartments. Without doubt you bring here some important message from the emperor; be that as it may, you are welcome, knightly hero."

"Then," answered Thiodolf, as he bent with all that grace

which he had quickly learnt from the knights of the court, " lady, you will forgive me if I do not answer exactly as I should. I am not a messenger of the emperor ; I have but lost my way in the labyrinths of this palace ; and standing here beneath the golden branches, the golden animals near me, and before me the image of all womanly beauty and loveliness, I cannot but feel as if, having gone astray in some enchanted wood, I was called upon to deliver the fair lady from her lion-guardians."

Zoe smiled at him graciously as she shook her head. " Strange man !" she said. " But now being here, you shall sing to me to the lute." She beckoned him to come into the room fragrant with flowers.

Then he sat down on some silken cushions near the lovely and dreaded maiden ; and before he had time for thought, she had placed a lute in his arms ; his hand wandered dreamily over the strings ; and as Zoe commanded him for this time to leave the austere Northern tunes, and to sing in Italian measure, the following song fell from his lips :

" Through arched corridors, through unknown ways,
The knight's enchanted pathway lies ;
Around him torches dazzling blaze,
Showing to his bewildered eyes
Fair beckoning forms on either side :
He follows a mysterious guide.

O wanderer, speak ! and say how far
A wondrous might shall lead thee ?
Are rest and peace yet very far ?
Oh ! whither dost thou speed thee ?
Do I myself the mystery know ?
Nay, hoping, doubting, on I go.
My own desires must be repress,
And I must wound my rebel breast.

Then came he to a chamber green,
Where sang the birds in sunshine bright ;
And golden lions there were seen,
Who threw sharp glances on the knight ;
And close to these a bower he found,
Whence came a lute's melodious sound.
' Alluring life ! here let me rest !'
He cried, and pleasure filled his breast ;
But Isolde will not grant him rest !"

“Forgive me, lovely princess,” he said, laying the lute at Zoe’s feet. “You can hear a thousand better singers than the perplexed and mournful one now before you.”

He bent humbly and left the room. He saw well that Zoe covered her eyes with her fair hand, and he hastened the quicker through halls and vestibules and down the stairs; and not till he stood beneath the starry sky did he look freely upwards as he was wont.

He now became aware that a sound which he had taken for the echo of his own footsteps was that of some one following him. Philip, a lively page whom he had often noticed with pleasure among the attendants of the emperor, stood behind him. As Thiodolf, perturbed by many things, turned towards him with some vexation, the youth bowed low to him and said, “Sir, dear, noble sir, do not look upon me as a spy, or any one the least resembling so unworthy a creature. Knightly and renowned parents have brought me up, and love and honor now draw me after your steps. Oh! grant me the one favor that I may be your shield-bearer when you go forth against the Bulgarians in the coming spring.”

“In the name of all the gods, dear boy, so let it be,” answered Thiodolf; “it pleases me well. But thou knowest that the emperor’s consent is first of all necessary; and then, thou kind and loving child, we Væringers ride hard, we fling the spear mightily, we pass boldly through streams and floods. Thou must at once enter our ranks to learn what thou yet lackest.”

Philip smiled, and only answered, “I have then your word, dear master.”

And as Thiodolf bent his head in acquiescence, the boy sprang back into the palace, giving a soldier’s salute. “There then is another!” said Thiodolf to himself; and looked after the boy as he sorrowfully shook his head. Then he smiled at the sound of his own words, and went on. “Another? what other did I mean? He is a youth! a joyous, hopeful being, to whom all around seems bright as morning’s dawn! Am I, then ——?”

That feeling of inward grief which often makes youth give place to approaching manhood smote with sudden convulsive

strength on Thiodolf's heart as he paused. He pressed both hands firmly on his eyes, and stood as if stunned.

"This is a strange bewildering climate," he said at length, and rattled his weapons as if to awaken himself, and was about to take quickly the way homewards.

Just then the church of St. Sophia with her many bright lights shone upon him in the growing darkness; soft, holy strains floated over the dark earth from the glorious edifice. A solemn service was there celebrating for the repose of a long-deceased emperor, according to an ancient custom. "If this were morning twilight instead of evening twilight, that shining church might be likened to the white Christ when He stood by the sea of Tiberias and gently called His disciples to Him. He did not indeed, perchance, look so splendid, but much rather mild and full of meaning, like moonlight. Ah! what must it have been to be allowed to gaze on Him!"

The sweet sadness arose in him which this recollection was wont to awaken; he walked slowly and solemnly towards the church, and softly entered the peaceful building.

The service was just ending; and when it quite ceased, two choirs of nuns approached the tomb, according to the custom; they sang without the accompaniment of instruments the following hymn of questions and responses.

"Who upon Tiberias' sea
 Stands in raiment white as snow?"—
 "He whose eyes have moisten'd been
 For human sorrow, human wo."
 "Our sorrow?"—"Eternal sorrow."
 "Who destroys eternal wo?"—
 "He who on Tiberias' shore
 Stands in raiment white as snow."

TOGETHER.

"Man, whene'er thine eye is wet
 Thinking of eternal wo,
 He is gently calling thee
 From Tiberias' tranquil sea,
 Clothed in raiment white as snow."

Thiodolf, during this hymn, which so brought home to his heart

the most touching image which he knew, had sunk on his knees weeping bitterly, and all present were edified by his devotion.

When the song had ended, and the lights one after another were extinguished, he was turning to go out; then a noble matron, with much feeling and reverence, held towards him the holy water; but Thiodolf having already seen how it was applied answered, "Trouble not yourself, too gracious lady! Alas, I understand but a thousandth part of the white Christ, and I dare not demean myself as one of His peaceful flock."

The lady turned away in surprise; and a man, whom Thiodolf knew to be the chamberlain Michael Androgenes, said to some bystanders, "I have long thought that he was no Christian, he never seemed to me like one."

But Thiodolf turned and said, "You judged quite right, good sir; but I wish that you had not let your unpleasant voice be heard in this solemn moment."

CHAPTER VIII.

SOME days after, the emperor summoned Thiodolf to his apartment at an unusual hour. The reverend old monarch sat at a table, on which lay a large open Bible.

“What thinkest thou of this book, young man?” he asked. “I knew from the first that thou didst not belong to its firmest believers, but now one of my attendants informs me that thou rejectest the faith entirely and openly.”

“Mighty king, the answer is somewhat difficult,” replied Thiodolf. “I know not yet what that great, beautiful book, which lies before you, is. But if it speak of the blessed white Christ, and especially if it tell the story of His appearing on the sea of Tiberias to His faithful disciples ——”

“Yes, it is all in this book,” answered the emperor; “and, Thiodolf, if its contents are so dear to thee, why dost thou not confess them?”

“Sire,” said Thiodolf, “we may very dearly love what we understand but indifferently. So it is with me as regards the white Christ. I look upon him as a good and gentle Spirit; but how He, as man, can be Son of God, that I understand not. So I keep aloof, lest I should do Him wrong either by ignorantly praying to Him, or by boldly rejecting Him.”

“I almost love thee the better for thy manly hesitation,” said the emperor, thoughtfully. “And yet on that account must I dismiss thee,—at least, I cannot suffer thee to remain so high in my favor and confidence as hitherto.”

“That is unlucky, gracious king,” said Thiodolf; “but a brave man must keep an untroubled mind in regard to all that cannot be changed; therefore, only command what seems good to you.”

“There are in my countless squadrons many soldiers who have not attained to the eternal truths of religion,” said the emperor; “yea, even some of the Væringers are in the same condition as

thyself. Remain, then, if thou wilt, my knightly commander, as before; but to drink wine out of my goblets, to sit at my side amidst the noble ladies of the court, is a privilege which can belong but to a Christian. I must not, and will not, invite thee again, Thiodolf, until thou hast received the washing of holy baptism."

"Oh," said the youth, "it is easy for me to take leave of your table, never to see it again; and in spite of the honor and joy which I shall thus lose, it may perchance be a very happy thing that thus it should happen to me. For the rest, sire, a little while ago I might have let myself be baptized, for it seemed to me a thing indifferent that water should be poured over me, and a few words spoken. But now I have determined that I will be a steadfast firm disciple of the blessed and holy white Christ, or not one at all."

"Get instruction, then, in the knowledge of Christianity, my dear son Thiodolf," said the emperor; "I will send two learned bishops to thee."

"In the name of God, my kind and gracious lord!" cried the youth. "And if they teach only half as diligently and zealously as I mean to learn, without doubt all will be soon and well done."

The emperor nodded, and dismissed him graciously, as he added, "When thou passest through the palace-gardens, Thiodolf, and meetest me or the princesses, thou needest not turn away on that account. We shall be unwilling to lose thee altogether, and an accidental meeting cannot be against my duty or my dignity."

Thiodolf thanked him, and went out with a light heart. It had often before disturbed him, that it should be thought that he belonged to Christ, while he yet stood body and soul in the wilderness, lighted only by the old idol-images and sacrificed victims.

Michael Androgenes with a shudder drew closer to the wall when Thiodolf came out of the imperial chamber. The young Væring chief stopped before him and looked at him for some time with a smile. At length he said, "My good chamberlain, you become paler and paler: what does that mean? Ah, now I

understand. You are thinking that we are near the gallery over which I once hurled Glykomedon and broke his neck. Be calm; I will do you no harm. Glykomedon had troubled my life far, far more than you, worthy sir, will ever be able to do. On the contrary, good chamberlain, you have done me a great service by your reports; besides, I understand the customs and privileges of the palace-life much better than I then did. God be with you, sir chamberlain; you have my best thanks."

Thiodolf went on with a quick rapid step, and Michael Androgenes continued to make excusing bows, till the laughter of his companions apprised him that the dreaded Northman had long left the apartment.

The religious instruction of Thiodolf took a strange course, and the two bishops who had been appointed to give it were themselves almost perplexed by the wonderful things which occurred while they were so employed. At one time Thiodolf, like a docile child, would agree to all that was said to him, and would listen, with a pleased smile and consenting nods, for hours together. But then, again, at other parts of the instruction, the young hero remained as if rooted to the same spot, like a restive unmanageable horse, and would take in no explanations. There even came, at times, such violent outbreaks, that Thiodolf would assure his instructors that they were only faint-hearted men, and deserved that he should drive them out of the Væringers walls; from which he abstained only and solely because he respected the laws of the emperor.

At such hard words the eldest of his instructors once answered, that unless he showed himself more patient and mannerly they would at once leave him, and he would fall for ever into that unholy power which even now exercised such strange influence over him.

Thiodolf looked at them, and shook his head. At length he raised his voice, and said, "Men, if you truly believe what you profess to believe—if you believe it with your whole soul—how can it come into your mind to abandon me for an angry word? They scourged, and mocked, and slew the blessed white Christ, and yet He came straightway forth from the grave to help poor sinners, even that one who had pierced His side with a spear. Ah, un-

worthy followers are ye of the white Christ! Surely a very different heart beats beneath your splendid robes than that which beat beneath His woollen garment. Look into yourselves, do as He did when He cast the sellers of doves and the money-changers out of the temple: then will it go better both with your hearts and my conversion."

The bishops looked down, and were tempted to believe that he had only been proving them, and that in his heart he was an advanced Christian, very superior to themselves. But then they soon again perceived, by his over-bold fancies and his heathenish invocations, that he was still in his old confused faith, and that it was only at times that the flaming torch of Truth gave flashes of light to his noble mind.

Then they labored the more hopefully and perseveringly at his conversion, because the emperor, who loved the young hero, and all Constantinople, who almost idolized him, looked with deep interest to the result of their endeavors. Yet they gained no step; far from it, Thiodolf became colder and more impatient towards his instructors, and vouchsafed seldom a friendly look. When they complained of this, he would answer, "If you were right, all would go the right way, and I should have been right too long ago. You want to make a bell sound, and you pull vigorously at the rope, but it wants a clapper, and so all your labor is in vain, and goes for nothing."

And then he became ever graver and sadder; for the less he could succeed in understanding the white Christ, the more deeply did he long after Him; and he would often, in the evening, say, with a disturbed look, to Malgherita, "A vain search! those must be the Runic words which the bad sorceress carved on the lindentree at my birth. How long have I sought after Isolde! and now I am seeking as diligently for the white Christ, and I know not how to find either of the beloved images! Ah, they will not let themselves be found—they play at hiding themselves from me!"

The quickest and surest way of recovering his gladness after such times he found in warlike exercises with Philip. The page had obtained leave from the emperor to go with Thiodolf in the next campaign, and to prepare for it at once by necessary exer-

cises in the Væringers fortress. Strength and joyous confidence sparkled in the brave boy's eyes, and animated his limbs, especially when horses were brought to him that he might train them to the boldest and most active movements, or that he might hurl his spears while riding at the wildest speed. The gallant animals seemed to know and love the young esquire; and Thiodolf would often say to him, "It is well that 'Philip,' in the Greek tongue, means 'lover of horses;' thy parents were quite right to name thee so."

CHAPTER IX.

SPRING had in the meanwhile arrived, and the sky smiled over the gardens and fountains of the city as if visibly strewing flowers; sweet songs and the clear music of guitars and flutes were wafted up from the meadows to the bright sunny blue above.

Thiodolf was better satisfied than he had been for months before. "See," he would often say to Philip, "it is not only that now every day we are nearer to the time for taking the field, but I have been heartily weary of this winter. In my own land, where the lakes freeze, and the valleys are filled with snow by the mighty northern blast, and become firm shining paths for warrior and huntsman,—in my land, where so many thousand winter stars sparkle on the fields of ice in the beautiful cold moonlight, till one well nigh forgets the stars of heaven,—in my land, where the bears come forth angry with the frost, and walk upright, their skins covered with snow and ice till they glitter like the princes of an enchanted region,—O Philip, I have there often looked upon spring with no friendly face when it came over the sea with its moist clouds of dew! But here your winter is neither hot nor cold, almost like my two bishops; and your spring resembles a blooming, vigorous child. I give praise to the spring in Constantinople!"

In these lovely days the imperial gardens stood open to all comers; only around the part where the sovereign or his family walked were stationed sentinels, who, with courteous gravity, warned away the uninvited. Thiodolf, according to the formerly expressed will of the emperor, often met the royal personages, and was ever kindly welcomed by all, for the pale princess Theodora never took part in these walks.

One beautiful evening, as he wandered by a hedge of orange-trees, he unexpectedly came upon the royal family, who were resting on costly cushions or on soft moss, around the edge of a

clear lake, in the midst of which a springing fountain gushed up as if in beautiful sport. A renowned wandering minstrel, Romanus by name, had been commanded to resort hither to delight the fair ladies and the knightly lords with his sweet songs and skilful music. At times he gave out an ingenious riddle, which forthwith every one tried to solve, so as to make the answer, given likewise in rhyme and measure, afford new delight to those who were less quick in discovering the meaning. This had now become a regular amusement, and the blooming Zoe shone in it by her ready grace.

As the young Northman was seen through the flowery hedge in his full armor with his golden helmet on his head,—he had just been at a warlike exercise,—all present, the emperor himself not excepted, involuntarily started a little at the knightly figure in his clanking armor. Romanus struck a false chord, two of the strings broke, and made a sound like a mournful cry through the bushes. Thiodolf with noble grace excused himself; and when, at the emperor's command, he had taken the only vacant place, a low bank of moss at the feet of the young Zoe, the terror of the singer soon passed away. He exchanged his instrument for another that was offered to him, touched the strings, and sang the following words, as he fixed his eyes with friendly meaning on Thiodolf:

“ A sword so bold, of burnish'd gold,
Prepared to fight for Cæsar's might;
Dazzling flakes of frozen snow,
Drifted lightly, sparkling brightly,
To bedeck fair Grecia's brow.

Fairy bowers, a field of flowers,
Lightnings flashing o'er each wreath,
Which many a knight hath doom'd to death;
A cloud that wars on forests wildly,
Yet doth shelter infants mildly;
A sunbeam from the gloomy north;
In the feast a ray,
To the foe dismay.”

All looked with kindly eyes on Thiodolf; the riddle seemed to need no solving. Then the blooming Zoe opened her pretty lips

and said, as she looked down with a strange smile on the hero sitting at her feet :

“ A wretched thing,
Which flees from life,
And weaves its death
In mournful ring ;
It might gladly live in summer's ray ;
But yea it says to Death,—to Life, nay !”

The courtiers looked surprised. “ Niece,” said the emperor, “ I think that you are mistaken ; we all deem that the minstrel's riddle means one whom your verses cannot allude to.”

“ Oh ! forgive me, my royal uncle,” answered she, with a look half of careless indifference, half of saucy mirth. “ I have over-passed the bounds of our game. My verses only relate to themselves, and offer a new riddle. He whom you all, lords and ladies, seem to name as the object of the former riddle, may now solve the one I have begun.”

Thiodolf was pressed to obey the princess ; he bent his head in quiet sadness,—for, alas ! he had but too well understood Zoe's meaning. Accustomed, however, according to the manner of the North, to these ingenious games of riddles, he quickly turned the double meaning of her verses into rhyme, and said after a pause :

“ Oh ! leave it to its lonely round,
Poor reptile of the dust ;
Its lot is fix'd—not what it *will*,
Alas ! but what it *must*.

It presses on to meet its death ;
And, building its own tomb,
Prepares, whate'er the charms of life,
To meet its coming doom :

Content if from its web of death
It weave for woman fair
A garment meet for beauty's form,
A robe both rich and rare.”

“ The silkworm !” cried many voices, without letting him speak further ; and a general praise was heard on all sides of the

skill and gracefulness of his answer. Only he was reproached with not having answered the princess in the same measure which she had employed.

“He had good reasons for it,” said the lovely Zoe, repressing the tears which stood in her eyes. “The order of the game had been before disturbed, and that by me. But see now how the mist is spreading like a covering over the meadows. All pleasure is at an end; for the flowers veil their heads, and the slender flowering branches let fall dew like tears. Oh! let us cease our sports, and return to the chambers where there is still light.”

She veiled her fair head, as if to guard against the damps of night, and looked thus like one of the lovely flowers which, she said, were drawing a veil of mist around them. The court dispersed; Romanus took leave; and Thiodolf remained alone in the now silent spot.

He could not tear himself from the flowering orange-tree against whose stem Zoe had leant when she sat, as if under a canopy of love. Involuntarily he sank down on the grass amongst the flowers which had been heaped up to form wreaths and carpets for her; and as he thought on Zoe's tears, he broke forth himself into bitter irrepressible weeping.

The moon had risen and shone brightly through the branches of the orange-tree; the waters of the fountain sparkled like gold in its light, and the meadows lay around cool and clear; Thiodolf's tears had become calmer and gentler, when Romanus passed through a distant walk with his lute, and sang the following words, which the soft evening breeze brought distinctly to Thiodolf's ears:

“Can this be true which now mine eye perceives,
What erst but ancient fable could relate?
Chains round the hero strong the princess weaves,
Who, though he struggles, still adores his fate

In vain, beyond the furthest distant land,
Gold boughs o'er golden apples glow above;
They shine untouch'd by Hercules' strong hand
He deeper sinks in the soft woes of love.”

“Do all sounds mock me?” murmured Thiodolf, springing up. “Or—ah!” and he sank back again on the grass, “would they rather allure me on?”

Romanus sang on :

“Fair Zoe! balm of life! on whom love’s queen
Her gifts, as on a darling child, hath strew’d;
Gods even must with joy in thee have seen
Their own celestial grace again renew’d.

Of an heroic love is rumor loud,
Or might a minstrel claim thee as his own;
But if thou lov’st to lean on warrior proud,
Both with unfading wreaths the bard will crown.”

Thiodolf lay as if sunk in a magic dream; the strains, as if they meant to draw him after them, sounded farther and farther through the dark grove; death and life seemed struggling in the breast of the youth. Then there whispered close to his ear the sweet voice of a woman :

“Thiodolf, Thiodolf! hearken unto me, knightly and beloved hero!”

He dared not look in the face of the slender form in floating white garments who bent over him, deeming that the only danger which he must and ought to fly was now approaching him. He therefore buried his face in the grass, and answered :

“Blame me not, noble lady, that I dare not reply more courteously to your greeting. You see before you a man sick unto death.”

“Ah, Thiodolf! poor Thiodolf!” whispered the figure, “I know that too well. But your cure lies in your hand and in mine.”

“That is what the goddess Freya has often repeated to me in dreams,” answered Thiodolf. “She was white-veiled like you, and whispered in sweet accents like you. But she bears a face which will never smile kindly down upon me but in dreams; and poor Thiodolf can never be cured till it smiles upon him waking.”

“You mean the face of Zoe,” said the figure hardly audibly. Thiodolf shook his head silently. “O thou changing, unstable man!” continued the veiled lady with much emotion; “how,

then, has it been with thy childish heart ! Hast thou not wooed Zoe with looks and sighs ? Or dost thou turn from her because she is not heiress to the throne ?”

An instinct of love, which passed through the youth's bosom, impressed still deeper in his heart the belief that it was Zoe herself who spoke to him. He buried his face yet more completely in the moist cool grass, and was silent. Then said the apparition :

“ Poor, deceived knight ! how art thou ashamed of thyself ! In sooth I pity thee much.”

“ Lady,” said Thiodolf, half rising up, yet without looking at the stranger, “ Lady, if I am ashamed of my own weakness, yet am I not so worthy of pity as you may fancy. Listen to me calmly, and you shall hear true, honest words from a Northman's heart. My life belongs to a heavenly image which is passing through the world in deep concealment, after having been twice seen by me ; waking, I mean, for in dreams I see her almost nightly ; and I saw her long ago in forebodings, only then I deemed that it was Freya, the goddess of love. It may not be seem noble heroes to name the sweet beauty who graciously hearkens to their love. But the lady who proudly and with averted looks passes by, and draws hearts after her to which she gives no return, she may well be named. The image in my heart is the princely maiden Isolde.”

“ Image !” echoed the veiled figure, gently sighing. “ Image ! oh, wilt thou, then, lavish thy life on a dead image ?”

“ Ay, lady ! hopes unfulfilled here will surely, if only we hope aright, have a blessed fulfilment in Walhalla. There wil Isolde bring me a victor's shield, more golden than the moon's disk which is now shining on us through those branches.”

“ And Zoe ?” asked the white figure with a trembling voice.

“ Yes, Zoe !” sighed Thiodolf. “ It is true she took me captive with her sweet looks and blooming cheeks ; but, so may the Great Father help me ! Isolde's name, the light of Isolde's beauty, ever breathed and streamed to me through the golden nets. Yet, in truth, a creature who has once been captive is no longer pure and beautiful as when it drank in the gales and springs of a blessed freedom. I am become unworthy of Isolde's looks.”

“ Then claim Zoe's hand : I tell thee I can and will win her for thee.”

Thiodolf was silent ; at length he said with a sigh, " Cease, thou fair alluring spirit, that temptest me with so sweet words ; O cease ! I may become yet more deluded, even yet more sinful ; but I will live Isolde's, I will die Isolde's ; thou hast my word for it as a prince, for a prince am I ; my ancestors were great in noble manly deeds, and neither in war nor in peace will I ever be other than they were."

" Isolde is lost to thee, lost for ever," said the figure in a low solemn voice.

" But I am not lost to Isolde," was Thiodolf's answer.

" Not lost ?" asked the apparition. " Thinkest thou so ? Isolde is unworthy of thee ; yes, thou unhappy one, the haughty maiden is unworthy of thee."

Then the youth angrily sprang up, and his heavy armor rattled : the figure drew back trembling.

" Forgive me," he said ; " I deemed it was a man"—but he stopped ; for she who now stood before him was not Zoe, but the fearful unknown Helper. She stretched out her arm covered with her veil towards Thiodolf, and said :

" Thus, then, I devote thee, thou noble hero, to the purifying flames of an earthly love until thy death."

Then she gathered her veil yet closer around her, and with bent head went forth into the entangled paths of the grove. Thiodolf said, shuddering :

" It may yet have been the goddess Freya !" and he hastened out of the moonlit garden to return home.

As he passed beneath the windows of the palace, Zoe's voice was singing to her lute :

" Love shakes his golden curly hair,
Allures and then his gifts displays ;
Yet if our hands to touch them dare,
They turn to darts with fiery rays.

With heart of flame I flee away,
I seek the gods' Olympian land,
Where Muses nearer to me stray—
Ah ! they but fan the burning brand."

CHAPTER X.

IN that same night in Iceland Uncle Nefiolf and Aunt Gunhilda were sitting on their high stools by the hearth wrapped up in furs ; the snow-storm raged without so fearfully, that the iron-bound doors rattled together ; the wolf lay cowering under Nefiolf's seat, and often howled in wild affright. Then the old warrior chid him, and attempted anew with his deep husky voice to sing one of Pietro's songs to the sound of a half-strung lute ; but the wind and the wolf howled too discordantly the while, and he was obliged to give up, especially when Gunhilda said :

" We shall but make our loneliness the deeper and drearier by the mournful echo of those bright days when the three blooming young ones sate here by us on the hearth. Ah ! in what land is our well-beloved Thiodolf now wandering, in sorrow or in joy ?"

They remained silent awhile ; only at length, as Gunhilda was looking earnestly and fixedly at the fire, Nefiolf said :

" Seest thou anything of our Thiodolf in the flashes of the flames ? I know that thou hast inherited the prophetic gift from thy mother."

" I am not this day of strong mind enough to divine," answered Gunhilda ; and her eyes filled with tears. " But yet it is as if the flames would tell me of Thiodolf, they flicker so strangely and significantly. Wreaths are wound this night round his head, —that I seem clearly to see, but there may be thorns woven with them."

Again all was silent ; at length the wolf got up and began to look round with glaring eyes, and to show his teeth. At the same time the hounds without, in their kennels, began a wild barking and howling.

" Sturle," cried Nefiolf to one of the attendants, " look over the out-works. A stranger must be at the gate. If there be but one,

or if he have not too many with him, let him in without further question. The poor stranger may have knocked long enough," said Nefiolf, again turning to Gunhilda, whilst the attendant was gone, "and neither man nor beast have heard him in the uproar of this spring storm. Ah! in sooth none know how to knock as boldly and loudly as our Thiodolf did."

The gates of the court turned on their hinges, the heavily-descending beams clattered down with their padlocks and fastenings, as the footsteps of many men were heard on the paved court approaching the hall. The inner doors were opened, and there entered, led in by Sturle, a tall youthful figure in a very strange garb; some soldiers dressed like him followed. The wolf opened wide his blood-red jaws upon the stranger-guests, and their leader grasped the curved sword which hung at his side from a splendid girdle; but Nefiolf called off the furious animal, and it curled itself up again quietly before the fire. In the meanwhile the old chief desired the servant to put seats by the hearth, and he held out to the strangers a drink of the choicest mead in a silver-bound horn.

"My errand first," said the foremost of the guests, bending his turbaned head almost to the ground. His followers imitated him. "I see plainly," he continued, "that I stand in presence of Uncle Nefiolf and Aunt Gunhilda, and also that Thiodolf's faithful wolf is lying on the hearth."

"Sir," answered Nefiolf, "your words make my heart swell with gladness and longing; but it would be for ever shame to me if I let a stranger do his bidding with me before he had tasted as a guest of my drinking-horn. Sit down, ye foreign men of war, and accept my hospitality."

The orders of old Nefiolf were obeyed; and during the meal which the attendants now furnished abundantly, the host began to speak of the joy which every Icelander would feel at there being in foreign lands such valiant seamen, who could govern their helms and spread their sails in spite of the wild storms of spring and the foaming waves, affording thus an opportunity for the voyage to these shores.

"You will less wonder at that, noble chief," said the guest, "when I tell you that we are Arabs."

“Ha! welcome, brave comrades on the sea!” cried old Nefiof joyfully. “My brother Asmundur and I, we have often ranged with you, now as friends, now as foes, on the southern coasts, where orange-trees blossom, and laurels cast their shade. I ought to have known you at once by your dress and your weapons; but those days are long gone by. Even in my dreams I have not for years seen an Arab. But it is ever a great joy to me to receive one like you and his faithful followers.”

“Sir,” answered the Arab, with an embarrassed smile, “I come not here altogether as a guest, but rather as a messenger, and that by constraint.”

Then Achmet, for he it was, related how he had been overcome by Thiodolf, and bound by solemn oath to inquire what Uncle Nefiof and Aunt Gunhilda were doing, and also to bring tidings of his dear wolf. The old people looked at each other with sparkling eyes, and Nefiof often asked:

“Was he alone in your castle, quite alone?”

Achmet colored as he answered yes. And his host begged him to rest with them till the rage of the spring storms was over, and then he could take back more assured and detailed news of Nefiof, and his wife, and the wolf. Achmet accepted the hospitable invitation, constrained thereto by the bad state of his ship, but with a certain scornful smile, which seemed to augur no good in the wolf’s opinion, for he suddenly made a rush at the stranger, grinding his teeth, and it was only with difficulty that his master could recall him.

When the guests and Gunhilda were gone to rest, Nefiof went up to the grave of his brother, and chanted to him, through the snowy mound, how bravely and gloriously his Thiodolf had behaved on the ruins of old Carthage.

CHAPTER XI.

ONE morning early Thiodolf was sitting thoughtfully at the gate of one of the courts of the Væringers fortress. He was waiting for some young Arab horses which he and Philip meant to mount ; and during the delay he had taken his lute in his hand, and drew forth from it sadly solemn strains. Philip stood beside him, and sang, without Thiodolf heeding him, the following words to the vibrations of the strings :

“ See, see and hearken !
 Where mists the sea-waves darken,
 ’Neath Ilium one doth weep—
 ’Tis Achilles sounds the lyre,
 Mighty knight, the Greeks’ desire—
 His breast doth all sorrows keep.

Now the battle lowers
 Against the foeman’s towers,
 Yet far from the fight I stray ;
 And her, my heart’s only pleasure,
 Briseis, my blooming treasure,
 Hath envy now torn away.

Silent in sorrow,
 I must die ere to-morrow ;
 Naught now can rescue me
 But her gentle accents sounding,
 Or the fierce joys of war surrounding,
 Could again make me bold and free.”

The sudden appearance of Helmfrid interrupted both lute and song. The great Væringers chief placed himself with kindling eyes before Thiodolf, and seized the hilt of the good sword Throngpiercer, saying :

“ Come forth, good sword, come forth now from thy too long

repose ! The Bulgarians have broken loose, their allies are with them, and to-morrow we take the field."

With a cry of joy Thiodolf sprang up. Philip knelt down, kissed the point of Throng-piercer, and said low :

"Where thou leadest the way, I will quickly follow, so help me God !"

At the same moment the young Arab horses were led up. Thiodolf went kindly up to them, patted one on the back, stroked the mane of another, and looked confidently into the bright eyes of the third, as he said :

"You poor beasts, you are not by a great deal as happy as we are ; for you cannot yet take the field with us. Say yourselves, my brave fellows, are you not still much too wild and untamed ? But have patience, and let yourselves be taught ; then in a year's time you can follow us, and I hope that the Bulgarians will hold out as long. Rather more than less ; for it is said that they are a bold and very warlike nation."

Then he ordered the horses to be taken away, sounded his silver horn, and when Icelanders and Norwegians had gathered around him, he spoke to them with joyous, encouraging words, making known to them the news of the war, and calling upon them to go forth to it with no less bright arms and clean equipments than they had been wont to exhibit before the fair ladies of Constantinople in their place of exercise. A gay clashing of shields gave the answer ; and when Thiodolf, bowing to them, dismissed them, the troop dispersed joyfully to prepare their horses and arms for their departure.

Helmfrid had seen with pleasure the demeanor of his young captain ; and now that he stood alone, he took him under the arm, saying :

"Beloved young hero, the emperor has a strong wish concerning thee. He desires that thou shouldst let thyself be baptized before thou goest forth, partly because he can then show thee more honor and favor, but chiefly because he would know that thy soul is safe in paradise, in case it be God's will that thou shouldst die in this war."

"The emperor is most kind and gracious," said Thiodolf, as if

smiling to himself; "but he can never desire that I should take the field with a lie in my mouth. There would be an end of all rejoicing in great deeds; and, I may say it to you, master, I hope to complete many such before we look again on the towers of this beautiful city."

CHAPTER XII.

THE next morning a countless multitude of people were collected before the church of St. Sophia, and all the troops of the city stood in their full, brilliant armor, while from the holy dome poured forth solemn songs of praise to the swelling tones of the organ. The emperor was about to assist at a high mass for good success to the departing army; and also many young nobles and deserving warriors were to be made knights. When the bells ceased, and the service was heard to begin, Philip bent forward to Thiodolf, who remained without with his band of Icelanders and the other heathen soldiers, saying:

“Beloved and noble master, blame me not if I now leave thee. Christ calls, and that alone can ever make me go away from thee.”

Thiodolf nodded assent kindly, and Philip went into the church. Sadly the northern chief remained behind. He so dearly loved the white Christ, and so dearly this church of St. Sophia, and yet had not gained the needful knowledge, so that he must keep aloof from the solemn service. How did his heart beat, when, high mass being ended, a herald came to the gate of the church, proclaiming that the order of knighthood was now to be conferred, and whoever thought he had any claims to it must place himself before the imperial throne; but if he were a heathen warrior, he must first receive the holy water of baptism, to administer which many holy bishops stood ready with willing hearts. The last part seemed added especially for Thiodolf's sake; it was almost as if his feet struggled violently to advance; but he said to himself, “Halt! for the honor and glory of the white Christ, halt!” And so he remained faithful, though in deep sorrow.

The herald went back into the church; and Philip, at the same moment, came forth, to take again his old place beside Thiodolf.

“How now, boy!” asked Thiodolf in surprise; “have they not chosen to make even thee a knight?”

Philip bent his head in silence.

“I understand not that,” continued Thiodolf; “thou art a Christian, born of a knightly race; thou wieldest well thine arms; and I see that the imperial pages have an especial right to this honor. Philip, I must know what shuts thee out from it, and, as thy chief, I command thee, by the duty thou owest me, to tell me the cause.”

Philip again bent low, and said: “I must no longer keep silence. Well, then, it is my own will that keeps me from knighthood. The disciple must not be above his master. When once the bravest of all Væringers has received knighthood, I will also receive it.”

Thiodolf, with deep feeling, pressed the youth to his heart, and could hardly bring out the words, “In troubles and in death, in joy and in sorrow, we are one, thou gallant boy, inseparably one!”

Then came the imperial family from the church; behind them were the new knights. The troops in the square stood to their arms, and Thiodolf, brushing from his eyes the tears of a blessed emotion, placed himself in grave warlike attitude at the head of his company.

The emperor in his full pomp passed close before him, and seemed for a moment about to pause that he might whisper words of warning and instruction into the ear of the young captain; but the solemnity of the moment made him pass on. He bowed with a sad fatherly kindness, and went by. His two daughters followed him; the elder Zoe greeted Thiodolf kindly and gently as ever, and even the pale Theodora looked this time with smiling graciousness on the once hateful Northman. Yes, she made with her white hand the sign of the cross over him, and whispered, “God grant thee light; thou art yet a noble branch, which gives promise of blossom.”

Again it arose darkly in Thiodolf's mind whether this was the Secret Helper who had parted from him so peacefully in the garden, and the goddess Freya under both forms; he could not unravel the thought, for the fair young Zoe now passed by, and his senses became confused. He only noticed that she kept her beautiful eyes firmly fixed on the ground, and seemed diligently to avoid

giving him a glance. Soon after came the new knights in their bright armor, looking gaily around, and were greeted with loud acclamations by the hopeful crowd. Then Thiodolf's heart waxed very heavy, but he turned and pressed Philip's hand, and the dawn of a bright hope for the future sprang up within him.

On the evening of this day, Pietro, who had been drawn forth into the city by the trumpets and horns and drums of the collecting troops, found, on his return, Malgherita busied in preparing a beautiful suit of armor, and adorning it with all that it yet wanted for full perfection.

"This will be thine, Pietro," said she, turning to him her pale, smiling face. "Since the Bulgarian war has been spoken of, I have prepared this noble armor for thee, and see, at the right moment it is ready. May this restore health to thee; only suffer me to put on these new arms, noble Marquis of Castelfranco."

Flushing with joy, Pietro grasped at the shining armor; but soon letting fall his hand, he said, "That is not for me. Could I leave thee all lonely, Malgherita?"

"Why not?" answered she with sad calmness. "All joy is over for me; and wherefore should I detain in my misery one who perchance may again in freedom look up into the blue of heaven? Pietro, I speak to thee for thy good; go into the field."

"To become untrue to my banner," murmured the knight angrily. "I ask thee thyself, Malgherita, what could ever be a holy and safe device for me were I capable of forsaking thee, the consecrated image, to whom I am pledged by vows, by joys, and by sorrows a thousandfold? Speak no more of it, and let the Bulgarian war rage as it pleases. It concerns me not."

Malgherita would not cease from her entreaties, and a strife, earnest as it was loving, arose between the two. At this moment the door of the room opened, and a tall armed man entered.

"Now then, Thiodolf may decide; he comes at the right moment!" cried Malgherita.

But Pietro looked narrowly at the gigantic stranger, and said, "Thiodolf, my brother-in-arms, where hast thou left thy wild-bull helmet? One cannot tell if it is thou or not."

Then the armed man spoke hoarsely out of his iron vizor:

“Pietro does well to remain here. And Malgherita, how dost thou dare to drive him forth? Thou poor, forlorn creature! Say only, where, where is thy Tristan, thy sad joy, unhappy wife?”

Malgherita sank trembling and weeping into Pietro's arms; the armed stranger threw up his vizard, and there stared forth the ghost-like features of the great baron; he turned away and went out of the room.

When at length Thiodolf himself, with looks half sad, half joyful, came to take leave, he found his friends still greatly troubled. Pietro related to him what had happened; and Thiodolf, falling back into his old familiar way, which he had put aside for more courtly manners, said, “Ay, little Malgherita, dear little Malgherita, thou didst very wrong to try to drive Pietro away from thee. Has he less than thou to do penance? Should he heap new guilt on his head, and so go forth into the field? Little Malgherita, that would very ill beseem a warrior. Armor weighs not heavily, blows of enemies fall not heavily; but one grain of guilt—my child, it is so heavy that it makes the gayest heart sick and sorry when the trumpets blow for an onset, and death stalks through the field of battle. I have not a very great deal of bad on my heart to answer for; but what I bear is a heavy burden to me, and therefore I can warn you so well. Keep henceforth such strange notions far away from thee, Malgherita, and then the apparition will not be able to frighten thee often again. And now, dear friends, we will forget all this history. Pietro remains with Malgherita, and Malgherita with Pietro; and I will tell you something very pleasant that befell me to-day.”

Then he sat down familiarly between them, and began as follows:

“The noble minstrel, who lately arrived here on his travels, and bears the name of Romanus, met me at noon-tide as I entered the imperial gardens. I remembered well his strains on a certain evening,—it does me no great honor, my friend, and therefore you will not ask me more about it,—and involuntarily I drew in the reins of my horse. Romanus looked kindly in my face, touched the strings of his guitar, and sang something after the following fashion:

“ Within the hollow lute Aslauga slept,
And plaintive music sounded when she wept.
O fairest flower, thou child of mystery,
Wondrous alike thy birth and destiny :
Shielded by gentle sounds and golden strings,
The minstrel’s skill thy quick deliverance brings.
But upon him, so careless erst and free,
An anxious care is fallen with the sweet charge of thee.”

‘ Friend,’ I said, ‘ what mean you by this verse ?’ ‘ That is asking too much of a poet,’ was his answer ; ‘ but what I may tell you concerning it is, that this beautiful northern legend of Aslauga came into my mind at the sight of you ; and it seems to me that my task is no less strange, though far more joyful and safe, than that of king Heimer, who carried about with him in his lute the child of Sigurd.’ Then he went back into the grove ; and my mind became strangely confused, till I could no longer distinguish between his form and that of king Heimer. But now that I am come to the end of my story, it strikes me that you will find nothing wonderful in it, dear friends.”

“ Wonderful !” repeated Malgherita thoughtfully. “ Dear Thiodolf, why should we wish for what is wonderful ? Is it, or is it not, wonderful that the ghost of my father follows me unremittingly ? I myself know not. But thy tale is heart-stirring, sweet and sad together. It speaks of a child, a lost, orphaned child ; oh, my Tristan !”

And weeping bitterly, she clung to her husband, feeling well that she must have been utterly desolate if he too had gone from her out into the wide world.

Thiodolf’s farewell was sad and solemn, and yet the sorrowing parents saw their friend depart with a sort of joy. Did it not almost bring them a glimmering of hope that the true-hearted Thiodolf was about to pass over wide tracts of distant lands ? If Tristan yet lived, might he not be as well found in this expedition as in any other way ? We will not wonder at these strange anticipations ; we know from our own experience the ever-trembling, never-despairing heart of man.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN Thiodolf returned home, he found the old chief Helmfrid standing in one of the courts of the Væringers fortress, and throwing, by moonlight, three lances of very different shape at a target; as Thiodolf entered, and closed the door, all the three lances were fast sticking in the centre; Philip went to take them out, wondering with glad amazement at the skill of the old chief.

“They are very good ones, dear brother-in-arms,” said Helmfrid, as he went towards the young captain and held out the three lances to him. “I have these last days been especially preparing them for thee, and employed thereon my best skill. See here, this small, slender lance,—it flies lightly through the air, and even a weak arm can fling it; but when directed aright it can rival the wind in speed,—I call it the Falcon, and deem that ’t will be a useful weapon to thee when in pursuit of a foe too ready to take flight. This second lance—I call it the Bear—thou canst better use, dear Thiodolf, in trials of skill than in actual combat. For he who can hurl the Bear may wield and hurl every other weapon. But it may so betide that a foe in full armor may, with wild wrath, come close up to thee—though it is not the fashion of the Bulgarians; but if such a one did come, then let fly the Bear, and I will promise thee that it shall pierce through whatever armor the haughty challenger may wear. This third lance, finally, with its shaft of noble wood—with its beautiful point of steel and circlet of pure gold—thou didst find the like sticking in the laurel-grove on the Lacedæmonian mountains when we made our first acquaintance—this weapon, dear youth, I call the King-lance; and thou must only use it on important and decisive occasions; it is as good to use in close combat as at a distance. Guard carefully these three spears, my beloved son; I will leave them in the hands of thy armor-bearer, Philip; and God will grant thee to do with them great and glorious things. Good

night, dear children. I ween that in all my life I have never so heartily rejoiced in any war as in this one. I know that you will fulfil the bright hopes of an old man; and, then, good night for me! good day for you!"

The trumpets sounded clear in the early dawn, which rose strewing gold and crimson over the waves of the Propontis, as the departing troops assembled gaily in the great square of the city.

"Be praised, Thou, Whom I know not!" said Thiodolf, devoutly smiling to himself; "be praised, Thou, to Whom we may be brought by the white Christ, or by Heimdal, the messenger of the gods; be Thou praised for the great gladness which streams through my young heart on this heavenly morning, and help me to bring to pass in the field of battle deeds brave and well-pleasing to Thee."

Then he sprang on his horse, who neighed with joy; and a soft kind voice, close by him, said, "Amen!"

Looking round, Thiodolf became aware of the noble merchant Bertram, and asked him, "To what do you say Amen, dear sir?"

"To your prayer."

"How is that, my friend? I certainly did not speak so loud that any man could hear me."

"That depends upon the kind of man, and his understanding. See, dear young knight, when just now you looked towards heaven so humbly and confidingly, so lovingly and solemnly, one hand on your breast, and the other firmly on your sword's hilt, then I knew of your prayer, and felt, without hearing a word, that I might say, Amen, with a glad heart."

Thiodolf stretched out his hand to Bertram with hearty love, looked for a time quietly in his wise, honest eyes, and then, bending down to him, whispered gently in his ear, "Seek after Isolde for me, my true friend. I know no man in the world to whom I would give the task but thee." Then he spurred his horse, and flew to the head of his company.

A knight in armor of peculiar elegance came towards him from another troop, and said, lowering his spear, "Sir Captain, let all rancor be at an end between us. I am the chamberlain Michael Androgenes, and I am going to take the field with you."

“You do well,” answered Thiodolf, kindly; “and God forbid that I should bear the least ill-will to a companion in arms, and in battle, who comes forward when danger is nearest and most urgent. It pleases me well, too, that you so mark yourself out by your beautiful armor; for brave warriors are glad when they can be recognized by the foe. It is for that that I so prize my wild bull’s helmet; for no man, but myself, in the whole army wears the like.”

Michael Androgenes smiled rather scornfully when he heard the strange helmet compared to his choice and delicate armor; but Thiodolf gave no heed to this, and left the chamberlain with a friendly greeting.

The trumpets sounded for the second time—the troops moved and began their solemn march. The following song sounded from the Væringers band as they began their joyous march:—

“As joyful in the varied crowd
 We wend upon the battle-road,
 The lance we poise, the song we raise
 With greetings the loved fair to praise.
 Soon will come tidings from afar
 Of gallant deeds achieved in war;
 And low will whisper maidens bright,
 ‘Fight bravely on, each gallant knight!’”

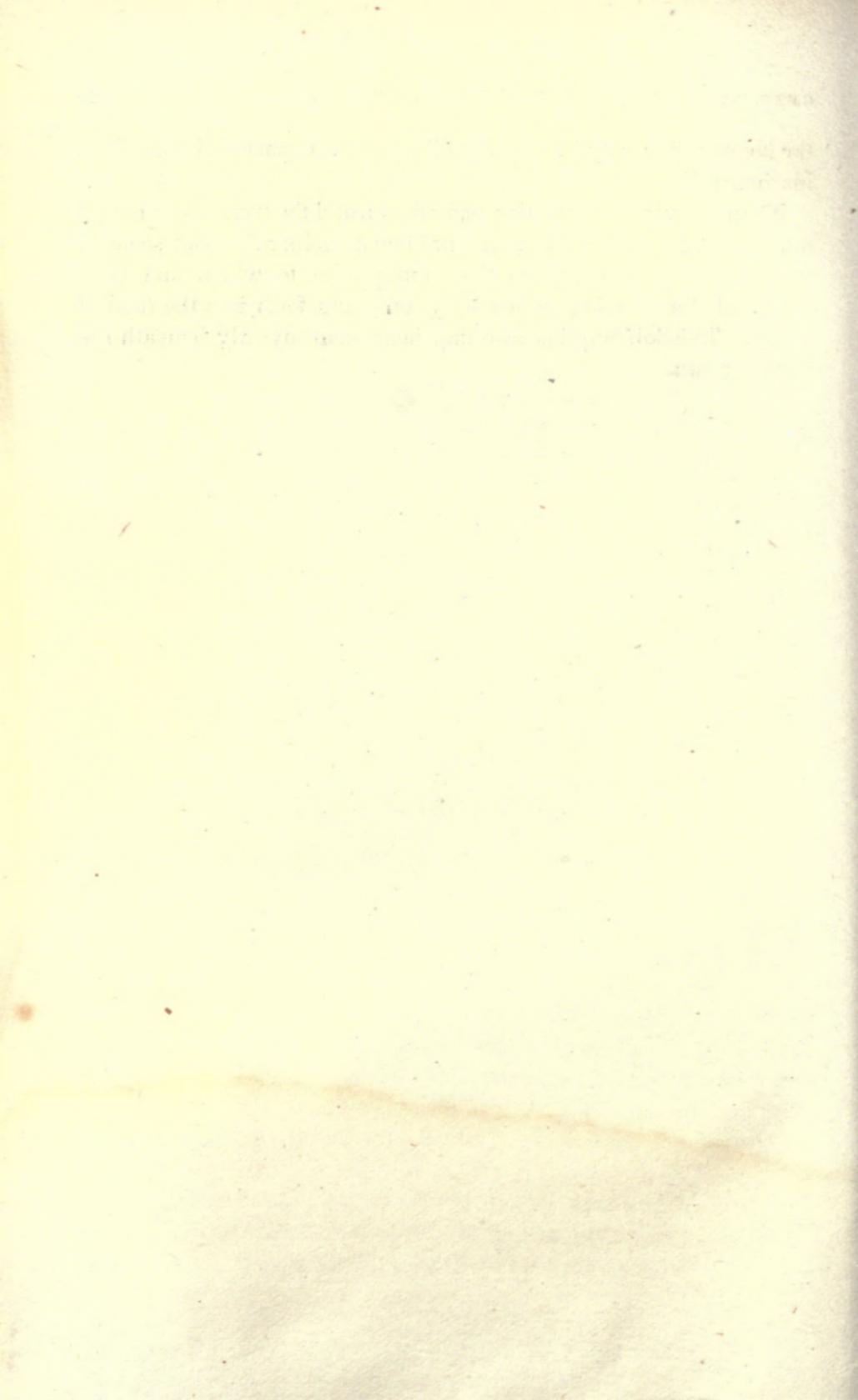
They passed the imperial palace: the sovereign, with many of his attendants, stood on a splendid balcony and kindly greeted those below. Thiodolf, guessing that the blooming Zoe might be there also, could not help looking up, excusing himself with the thought, “It may be a parting for life!”

The fair form appeared above, with tearful eyes; and as she returned the greeting of the young chief a green sprig flew from her hand, and fell on Thiodolf’s breastplate. Then he heard a sorrowful sigh; and as he looked round, Philip smiled at him with moistened eyes, and said, “Good betide you, my dear commander!”

A few steps further on, the crowd parted reverently; a veiled female form appeared, and cried out, as she bent before Thiodolf, “Hail, hail, to the noble northern hero! may he return victorious,

the honor of this city ! and may all sorrows be past and gone from his heart !”

Then the veiled apparition passed on ; and the wondering crowd murmured around, “ It was the unknown Helper !” But soon all voices rose to give joy to the young hero, to whom had been vouchsafed a greeting so heavenly, on going forth into the field of honor. Thiodolf’s quick swelling heart beat joyfully beneath the morning sun.



BOOK IV.



CHAPTER I.

BEYOND the Danube, on the shores of the sea of Azov, had appeared a mighty multitude, like a cloud of countless locusts thickening and darkening the air, from the most remote and well-nigh unknown plains. Warriors, almost naked, of brown and ill-favored countenances, bearing before them, as their sole defence, immense shields, with strange weapons hanging over their shoulders, whose use could only be in part understood by foreigners, with now and then a horse appearing amongst them, but generally all on foot, yet rapid and fearful in their movements,—thus came the Bulgarians across their boundaries, and the Greek empire trembled. Men thought of the time when this torrent had reached the outskirts of Constantinople, and lamentations were heard from more than twenty thousand families for their ravished loved ones, who had been borne back by the departing warriors into their endless deserts. On all sides the peasants took to flight; the citizens anxiously closed their gates; and the voice of prayer for protection and deliverance rose up to God and to His saints.

Protection and deliverance were at hand. The fugitives soon met on their sad way the vanguard of the advancing army; and with no small consolation they saw amongst the other troops the tall forms of the Northmen, and heard that the Væringers band was now taking the field stronger and more glorious than ever; they heard, too, that in its ranks was a young chief on whom all Constantinople, though so long accustomed to the noble northern warrior, gazed with wonder as the flower of heroic courage and strength. The wanderers slackened their weary steps, attended to the women, and children, and sick; and, resting in friendly villages, looked on with quiet hope to the exploits of the army.

“Master,” said Thiodolf one day to Helmfrid, as a group of fugitives halted near them, a part lying down on the goods which

they had rescued, and looking at the soldiers with confiding greetings,—“Master, for him whose heart does not swell in his bosom with the joy of war, all that is great and noble has passed away. The Bulgarians are a deluded people to send to us such reminders ; it will be small gain to the evil plunderers.”

“Thou art right, dear Thiodolf,” answered Helmfrid ; “and as I know that the precious Icelandic gift of song has been granted thee in rich abundance, I would that thou shouldst put these thoughts into a lay, which our soldiers may learn and carry with them into the fight.”

Then Thiodolf lifted up his powerful voice, which thundered through the ranks, and sang the following words :—

“Fresh o'er the fair plains
Speeds the host from afar :
In each warrior's proud veins
Bounds the life-blood of war.

Ye heroes, I ween
Ye will prove your swords' worth
In no gay festive scene,
In no game's jocund mirth.

Mothers now do ye see
The brave band fast meeting,
With their babes to be free
Your shelter they're seeking.

Hear ye now the sick groan,
For whom forwards ye hie ?
And the child's asking moan,
Why like eagles ye fly ?

The claw of the vulture
Will destroy and will seize,
While land rich with culture
Smoke and pillage now sees.

Soft doves fly for cover
Where verdant fields charm,
While eagle-wings hover
To shield them from harm.

The doves, naught now fearing,
Drink in their clear spring ;
Refreshèd appearing,
As they rest the tired wing.

But the birds of the sky
Who in war's pleasures live,
With proud pinions will fly
Strong protection to give.

They the vultures will seize
In their powerful flight ;
What escapes quickly flees
To the waste far from sight.

Then the doves coo on meads
Springing up brightly green.
Soon from Væringer deeds,
May this, brethren, be seen !"

The troops repeated this song with great delight, and its words were heard to sound through many a hot combat which was afterwards fought with the robber Bulgarians. Even the Greek soldiers learnt the song ; and the Væringers were soon called the Eagles, throughout the whole army. They quickly came to deserve this high name ; for the Bulgarians, eager for prey and for fighting, came down upon them, and it needed many hard blows before the wild enemy again learnt the fear which it once had for the assembled troops, and which their previous victories had well-nigh made them quite forget.

At the close of a bloody day, Thiodolf sat silent and thoughtful before his tent. Near him, Philip was sharpening and polishing his arms, at times turning inquiring looks on his master. At length he arose and came close to him, making spear and sword clash together, and looked lovingly in the eyes of the northern hero as he raised them at the well-known sound.

"Why dost thou take so much trouble, boy, with my good sword Throng-piercer?" asked Thiodolf. "It has not given a single blow during this whole expedition, and the foe keeps aloof and will never let us get at him. The King-spear and the Bear-lance I also carry in vain. If thou only wilt keep the Falcon in good condition, and always, as heretofore, wilt seek it out for me

on the battle-field, and besides keep a dozen other light lances in readiness, that is all that we need in this joyless war."

"Master," said Philip, and his face shone in heightened joy, "dear master, if thou wilt not look upon thine armor-bearer as a boasting fellow, who meddles in things for which his inexperienced youth is unfit, I would tell thee how we might contrive to force the foe to a stand-still, and bring on a glorious close combat."

"Speak, dear boy," answered Thiodolf kindly. "And even if thy words do not lead to deeds, it is still brave of thee so earnestly to have fixed thy thoughts on noble things."

"The wisdom is not mine, dear master," said Philip. "I have learnt it from one wiser than I. In one of the Greek bands there is a strong, gigantic trooper, who lets no comrade look upon his face; only his snow-white beard makes known that he is an old man, for it falls in two long curls through the links of his hauberk. No sound has been heard to pass his lips except in his dreams; but then his words are often mysterious, even almost prophetic. If he is asked concerning them when awake, he raises his hand with a menacing gesture and turns away in silence. After the last fight, I had to seek long after your beautiful Falcon-spear, you had hurled it so very far off; and I found it at last in a rocky valley, sticking in the skull of a Bulgarian who had fallen there in the grass. It was very bloody, and before I had washed it clean in the brook, night had closed in dark and cloudy. Having with difficulty returned to our army, I got into the wing opposite to ours, where was the very troop to which the strange old warrior belongs. He lay asleep by the fire, and his companions made a sign to me to be silent, because just then his wonderful prophetic words were escaping from his lips in broken sounds. He murmured about the rocky valley and the flying Bulgarians, round whom a magic circle must be drawn; the others seemed not to understand him, for they were listening more in sheer curiosity than with proper thoughtfulness; but those words of rocky valley and enemy sank deep into my soul. I have since had no rest, I have inquired of all the country people, I have almost ridden to death my beautiful chestnut, and now I am certain of the matter. Dear master, we can surround the

enemy in the rocky valley; truly and indeed we can; and he must wait for us, and we shall rejoice in a good knightly fight, man to man."

"How thou lightest up, boy!" said Thiodolf smiling at him. "I thought at first it was the evening glow which so brightly rested on thy cheeks; but now I see well that the sun which gives forth those rays lies deep in thy knightly heart."

Then he made Philip repeat to him all that he had learnt of the rocky valley, and the position of the Bulgarians; and he said at length, "Boy, keep all within thee pure; the gods will see to that which is without; for I say to thee, there lie in thee the seeds of a hero such as thy father-land has not seen for long."

Thiodolf hastened to Helmfrid, and after a short talk with him, he returned charged to begin and lead on the expedition. A few more arrangements on his part turned the scheme of Philip into a masterly manœuvre.

"My dear brave boy," said Thiodolf, "it would rejoice me to entrust thee with the management of the whole expedition, but for that thou art yet too young. But to give thee thy due, thou shalt choose our war-cry for the attack which thou hast so nobly planned."

Philip looked down a few moments; then he said, with sunk eyelids and glowing cheeks, "If my master so highly honors me as to leave me the choice—Well, then, 'Zoe' is our battle-cry!"

Thiodolf looked at him with surprise; a question nearly escaped his lips; but shrinking from giving words to a feeling, whose thought he avoided in his own mind as a destroying fire, he bent his head in assent, sounded his war-horn, and soon after rode forth with his young friend at the head of a stout Væringers band into the already dark night.

CHAPTER II.

THE noble band of riders passed in silence through the burnt ruins of desolated villages, till they reached a barren hilly ridge skirting a foaming stream, whose noise broke the stillness of the night, and, like a good ally, drowned the sound of horses' hoofs and of armor. As Thiodolf rode on in darkness, it bethought him how his whole life was not unlike this adventure, a going forth in darkness on unknown ways, after concealed objects which strove to escape his jealous search.

"The enemy here," he said softly to himself, "I may truly now grasp; but those holy, longed-for images, the white Christ and Isolde, I may never reach them."

Deep, heavy grief came over him, such as oftentimes filled his whole heart, and drops fell from his eyes, as formerly on the African shore just before his combat with the lion.

An unexpected circumstance now broke in upon these thoughts. An armed knight came riding down a neighboring hillock so rapidly that the horse slipped and fell on its knees close beside Thiodolf; but the rider silently raised it again by his great strength and dexterity, and then rode on quietly near the chief, as if he belonged to the troop. His whole armor proved that he was a soldier of the emperor's, but how he came to join this expedition Thiodolf knew not: he was yet more surprised at the stranger, as they rode together, appearing almost as lofty of stature as himself, for he seldom met with any so tall, especially in these southern regions.

He was about to question him, when Philip rode up on the other side, and whispered in his ear, "That is the strange horseman, dear master, from whose dreamy words I planned this expedition. He often rides about the country by night on his dark horse; and it may be that his wonderful gift of divining has made known our march to him. But I pray you, speak not to him, let him go on undisturbed with his vizor down; you might

else scare him away, and then we should lose a brave and powerful arm out of our band."

Thiodolf did as the youth desired ; at times he felt as if a spirit were riding near him, so strange was the awe that seemed to come over him from the gloomy iron-clad figure beside him.

It might have been about midnight when, on reaching the summit of a hill, the Væringers suddenly perceived on the plain below the almost endless watch-fires of the Bulgarians. The Christian troops had surrounded them, the rocky valley lay behind, and all that now remained was to choose the most favorable and decisive spot for an assault. But this was difficult in the dark, cloudy night, which made the watch-fires on the plain appear like a confused labyrinth of lights. Thiodolf paused at the head of his troops to reflect, the silent stranger was beside him, but a noble pride withheld him from asking the unknown what he would fain have heard from him ; for he would as little owe his victory to one who used unlawful arts as to one of an overweening pride.

He had almost decided to press on towards the fires where they were the thickest, feeling sure that the confusion of the surprise would be most fearful in the very midst of the countless multitudes ; then shone out over the dark woods the blood-red disk of the moon, and Thiodolf greeted her with out-stretched hands. How often in Iceland had his young heart burnt with hopes of future joy at the sight of this heavenly shield, and now it shone upon him at the right moment, as if a solemn messenger of victory !

The glorious disk rose and rose, and the whole plain soon shone bright in her clear radiance. Then Thiodolf seized with his quick glance the right place for the attack ; and his Arab steed neighed loudly, rejoicing at the level path and the approaching victory. The echoes caught up the sound and carried it like the tones of many trumpets, over the sleeping Bulgarians ; many of their soldiers started up at it, and saw by the moonlight the tall forms of the knights on the near hill.

"Forward, brothers !" cried Thiodolf. "Thanks be to the gods, the enemy has awakened, and offers us thus a more glorious fight. Forward !"

The troops rushed down the hill, giving out the newly learnt war-cry, "Zoe !"

How did the fiery Philip rejoice as he almost out-stripped his captain! But at the words, "Gently, my shield-bearer: we are not riding a race, but dashing with all the strength of our horses against the enemy!" he at once checked the course of his war-horse. It was only when Thiodolf first let fly the Falcon-lance against the approaching enemy, and then, spurring on his horse and swinging Throng-piercer high above his head, flew with full speed against the Bulgarians, protected by their gigantic shields, that the Væringers rushed on like lightning, and Philip dared to take in the full joy of war which glowed in his brave young heart.

The war-cry of the barbarians sounded wildly forth from all parts of their camp, and the awakened troops pressed on all sides to the fight. They deemed that their assailants were a party who had lost their way, and meant now in despair to force a passage; and they doubted not soon to overwhelm them by numbers. At every onset of the riders they placed their immense shields on the ground, knelt down behind them, and let fly a thick shower of arrows at the Væringers. When these had made their way through the darts, they found opposed to them a row of clubs hardened by fire and pointed, which the Bulgarians had rapidly and with great dexterity and regularity planted in the ground; and then they had to beat down long pikes, which they had never seen used in former encounters, before they could get into the ranks of the enemy. The worst of all was, that the noble horses were scared by the howling and whistling and shrieking which the Bulgarians kept up with a horrible facility, and also by the hideous forms which often suddenly started up behind the shields, and as suddenly dived down again with a hoarse laugh. But still the courage and military skill of the Væringers gained more and more the advantage, and more and more joyfully resounded the war-cry of "Zoe!" far over the dark battle-field.

The Bulgarian troops began in many places to give way; attempting again their usual fashion of fighting, as they now plainly saw that they had to do not with bewildered stragglers, but with well-armed and well-disciplined soldiers. But what they themselves had prepared as means of defence, immense barricades, deep and straight-drawn trenches and dykes, all now turned to

their own destruction ; for as the front of their camp was thus defended, and the Væringers had attacked the rear, they were hemmed in, and could not disperse themselves in endless swarms after their usual wild fashion of making war. So, against their will, the combat continued to be of man to man. A hillock, which shone in the moonlight, offered a clear view over all the field, and Thiodolf sprang up it, that he might observe the combat with a keener glance, and the more readily learn how to decide it. But when he stood on high in his brightness and majesty, several of the Bulgarian chiefs observed him ; and feeling sure that if he were overthrown, the best strength of their enemy would fall with him, they led troops up the hill from three different sides. Thiodolf, gazing at the distance, did not notice the secret attack that was about to be made, when suddenly all around him appeared the points of mighty spears, and he was surrounded by a wall of immense shields. In joyful anger he rushed upon the foe ; but the circle closed more thickly around him ; his noble Arab horse, touched by several spears, reared up wildly, and a blow on his breast-plate threw him, together with his rider, heavily to the ground. Thiodolf seemed lost ; for his horse had entangled itself in its fall with stirrup-leathers and bridle, and it could not rise up again. Still the Bulgarians hesitated to make themselves masters of him ; none dared to approach the noble, struggling horse, and the mighty sword Throng-piercer, which the hero's arm, in his golden armor, still brandished, glancing in the moonlight. All at once three heavy blows were heard, and thrice a soldier, mortally wounded, groaned as he fell in his blood. The Bulgarians looked round in surprise. Then appeared alone, without giving battle-cry, the tall old knight, dealing blows around from his black horse, and wherever he struck, a death-rattle was heard. The terrified Bulgarians gave way before him, crying out that the spirit of his race had come in ghostly form to succor the young hero. The old knight, without giving further heed to them, helped up the Væringer chief, and as the noble Arab was only slightly wounded, both riders were soon again on their horses. Thiodolf stretched out his hand to his deliverer, and said some kindly words to him ; but he raised his right hand towards heaven with a threatening gesture, turned away, and went forthwith, as

if in deep displeasure, out of the battle-field. His aid, indeed, was no longer wanted. Already the Bulgarians gave way on all sides; and when Thiodolf again appeared at the head of his troops, a few rapid, joyous assaults drove the shrieking enemy to irrecoverable flight.

The fight was fought; by the light of the rising sun a gentler, softer duty began, that of seeking out and freeing the prisoners whom the Bulgarians had taken, and whom, hitherto, they had carried on with them whenever they retreated. But this time it was impossible; for the few who escaped had with difficulty forced a way for themselves between morasses, and trenches, and barricades on one side, and on the other the Greek troops now approaching under Helmfrid's command. When Thiodolf had despatched his fiery Philip as a messenger of victory to the Væringier prince, he went diligently through the camp to console and refresh the liberated prisoners. As he approached a large tent, he heard from it the sweet sounds of a lute which, in some inexplicable manner, reminded him of the past. The soft strains in the midst of the wild field of battle attracted him with double force, and throwing back the hangings of the tent, he perceived a man clothed, indeed, after the Bulgarian fashion, but in a very choice and delicate garment. Before him, on costly silken cushions, lay a child which he seemed anxious to lull to sleep by his lute. He looked up at the entrance of the warrior; and Thiodolf forthwith recognized the minstrel Romanus, whose songs had once so strangely moved him in the palace-gardens of Constantinople.

"Welcome, my noble northern hero!" said Romanus kindly. "I knew well that you were amongst the troops who stormed this camp, yea, even that you were leading them on; but you had never thought to find me in the midst of the Bulgarians?"

"No, truly," answered Thiodolf; "least of all in this luxury and splendor, and tending a child. Is it a Bulgarian child?"

"No, noble sir," said Romanus; "I may almost call the boy my own child, so wonderfully has Heaven given him to me. But let me put the little screecher to rest; it is now more than a year since I have carried him about with me, and he is accustomed to be lulled to sleep by the sounds of my lute. Allow me after-

wards to go on conversing with music, then he will not disturb us. But enough of that."

He drew from the lute soft touching notes, till it almost seemed that a nightingale trilled, while he sang as follows :—

“ Where'er the minstrel wanders,
 Where'er his path is found,
 The privilege of genius
 Doth compass him around ;
 At the banquet of the monarch
 He is seated at the board,
 He is shelter'd from the tempest,
 He is shielded from the sword.

So when these lawless plunderers
 Pour'd down upon the land,
 And captive made our freemen,
 I was taken by their hand ;
 But my harp was on my shoulder,
 The hand they did not raise,
 And, instead of captive fetters,
 They loaded me with praise.

Amid those wild barbarians
 I learnt a gentle song
 Which, though rude strife encompass'd it,
 Rose sweet that strife among :
 Sir Knight, affection's precious links
 Are fast about thee wove—
 Then will thy heart the readier ope
 To a tale of faithful love.

Beyond the Ister's azure stream,
 In that fair fertile land
 Where Nature pours her riches forth
 Unwoo'd by tiller's hand,
 A gentle pair were seen to stray,
 Gathering the rich wild fruit ;
 Prince Wladimir, the young and brave,
 And Wlasta, fair, but mute.

Yet though no accents from her lips
 The lover's ears could reach,
 Her silent gestures spoke a tongue
 More eloquent than speech.

Her eye was language—from its ray
 The wicked fled with fear ;
 'Twas said that had she spoken too,
 Earth had not known her peer.

Now so it happen'd on a time,
 That from the southern east
 A pestilential blast arose,
 That slew both man and beast :
 Ill-omen'd birds obscured the air,
 And hover'd o'er the sea ;
 And from the temple spake the priest,
 This terrible decree :

' Naught can appease the angry gods,
 Naught for your sins atone,
 Till Wlasta be recall'd from earth,—
 Their lovely, silent loan.
 She must be consecrate to heaven
 At your approaching feast,
 Become a priestess of the gods,
 And marry our high priest.'

She yielded to be sacrificed,
 But marriage would she none ;
 With chaplets crown'd, the band of priests
 Wait near the bloody stone :
 The sacrificial knife was raised—
 When, through the idol-grove,
 Bold Wladimir, with all his troops,
 Rush'd to preserve his love.

The priests and their attendants fall,
 Drown'd in a purple flood ;
 The war-cry sounds, bright weapons clash—
 The altar swims in blood.
 ' Bear her away,' the prince exclaims,
 ' Till this wild strife be o'er :'
 And quickly borne to sunny fields,
 Safety is hers once more.

But soon she signs to those around
 To stay their hasty flight ;
 She weeps because her own beloved
 Still lingers in the fight.

And, unperceived, she steals away,
And backward tracks her path,
To yield her up, and save her love
From his wild people's wrath.

Whither she stray'd was never known ;
They waited all in vain ;
They sought her, but they could not find ;
She ne'er came back again.
Prince Wladimir all bleeding rode
To seek his castle-hall ;
No Wlasta to the casement flew,
Its courts were empty ail.

The priests and people said the gods
Had taken her from earth ;
But Wladimir sat down in wrath
Before his silent hearth.
In vain they summon to the field
The champion of the land ;
He will not hear, but sits and mourns,
His head upon his hand.

And, hero, when I call his form
Before thy mental eye,
Dost thou not feel what pierced his heart,
And made the mourner sigh ?
'Zoe!' thy warriors shouted forth—
We heard the well-known cry ;
Then knew I Thiodolf led the van,
And led to victory !"

Thiodolf arose in displeasure, and was about to call the minstrel to account for the bold ending of his tale. But Philip sprang into the tent with Helmfrid's good wishes to the victor, and with the information that a war-council was now assembling to deliberate on the advantage to be taken of the victory, and that Thiodolf must at once join it. Romanus wrapped the child in some rich coverings, and went out with a farewell smile. Thiodolf sprang on his horse, and urged it like lightning to the appointed spot.

CHAPTER III.

THE chiefs were assembled to take counsel in the midst of many tokens of victory ;—hideous idols, fastened to long lances to form standards, uncouth arms, and splendid coverings and robes of the skins of strange beasts, and instruments for their heathen sacrifices. As Thiodolf rode into the circle, all involuntarily bowed before him, and the great Helmfrid gave his hand to him as to a brother. But Thiodolf made a sign to Philip to draw near, and related how he had taken the first idea of the victory from the dreaming words of the brave, but, to all appearance, crazed old knight ; and then had worked it out so wisely and clearly, that the execution of it had been nothing more than the ordinary action of a chief. Helmfrid embraced the brave young shield-bearer, and, in the emperor's name, hung round him a golden chain ; but he knew why Philip still held back from the gilt spurs, and he silently honored his noble self-denial.

The deliberations, which had been interrupted by the arrival of Thiodolf, now went on. Many of the leaders were of opinion that nothing better could be done, now that the season was far advanced, than to take the way back to Constantinople ; the enemy by this defeat were now for many months as good as destroyed, dread of the imperial arms had again been roused, and tokens of victory were not wanting to enhance the greatness of the sovereign on their return to the city, and to afford to the people rejoicing and comfort in rich abundance. The principal speaker in favor of this proposal was Michael Androgenes, who, by his courageous and skilful behavior during the short combat of the main body of the army, had won the attention and respect of many of the chiefs.

Helmfrid, the great Væringier prince, and commander of the whole army, had listened silently to the speeches for and against. It was easy to see that his warlike spirit was not by any means

satisfied with what had been achieved in this expedition, and yet many of the reasons of those who wished to return seemed to weigh much with him.

Then Thiodolf opened his lips with the following speech: "Now wherefore did we go forth under this noble prince, ye brave Greeks and Northmen! Was it to gain peace to the city for two or three months, at most for a year? And shall the townspeople and the peasants, who, confiding in our victory, have returned to their dwellings,—shall they, after a short truce, again be plundered by a fresh inroad of barbarians, or be snatched away to an eternal slavery? * Ye lords, assuredly our great emperor did not send forth this mighty host for so poor a purpose. Bethink you well what ye are doing. If the Bulgarians again fall on this land, the curse of many a poor oppressed and ruined man will rise up to heaven, and thence come down heavily on your head, yea, perchance, on a higher head; and all through your guilt. No, let it not be so. Rather let us boldly go forward, following the enemy into forests, over streams, and up his barren hills, and there, seizing the evil by its roots, tear it out, as beseems brave defenders of their country. I tell you that merely to keep foes from the frontiers is difficult and almost impossible, unless where the sea girds them round protectingly, as our dear Iceland. Else when bad neighbors dwell on the other side, we must vigorously follow them till they are glad if we will give them rest; for so long as we must ask whether they will accept it, your peace is a miserable thing. Onwards then, dear brothers, and turn not back when old Winter draws near, for he is never so unkind as he seems at first sight. I know him by good and steady experience."

"The young hero has spoken well," said Helmfrid, and the eyes of the vigorous old man sparkled as the glow of Hecla. "In God's name, my comrades, let us face winter and the wastes! They who return afterwards shall have as victors a triumphant entry into Constantinople; they whose bodies lie yonder shall have a victor's entry into heaven."

He looked around, as if to ask if any one had aught to reply; many eyes flashed like his own; and where a sad heart kept down the noble fire, shame and sense of honor at least prevented

all opposition. The chiefs and captains rode rapidly back to their troops with orders to advance.

The daring march began. How it was conducted without heed to the lateness of the season, and often in spite of it, and how at length the astonished enemy was driven far beyond the Ister deep into his own deserts, after many victorious combats more or less severe, all this the writer of our tale need not describe. For though his thoughts ever willingly dwell on warlike deeds, and he endeavors to increase the number of the few combats in which he has shared by seeking out and examining others, yet that which he here has to relate takes him quickly over the details of the war, and obliges him to speak only of what concerns our northern hero and those dearest to him.

Thiodolf's skill as commander, which unfolded itself ever more boldly and more brightly during this last expedition, had drawn upon him the eyes of the whole army. Next to Helmfrid he was the most brilliant star amongst the leaders, and the great Væringar prince seemed himself again to grow young in the beams of this light, so precious to him. A joyous youthful spirit streamed forth over all the troops, and perhaps there was but one man who remained uncheered by it, and went on his troubled way cold as the ice-flakes of the Ister; it was the old knight with his visor always down, and who now was hardly ever heard to speak even in his dreams. When Helmfrid would have thanked him for the surprise of the enemy and the deliverance of Thiodolf, nothing followed but the usual threatening gesture, and the strange old man immediately saddled his horse and left the army for several days. But in the next combat he appeared once more valiantly fighting; so that henceforth no man ventured again to scare him away by addressing him.

For many weeks the army had encamped in huts, some of them the forsaken dwellings of the Bulgarians, and others made of the trees of the wide-spreading and untouched forests; the troops had thus rest during the severest cold, and time was gained to spy out the line of march they were about to take; for it was intended shortly to strike a decisive blow. The leisure of this pause allowed Philip to become the eager and zealous teacher of Thiodolf in polished language and manners. Whenever Thiodolf in

the slightest degree went against the Greek fashion either in words or gestures, his trusty shield-bearer made him observe his fault with the most courteous delicacy, so that the chief took pleasure in the correction, and would often make faults on purpose to provoke the youth's reprimand. Such teaching had also the best effect on Thiodolf's manners, especially as Philip did not give up the right he had once assumed, and used it without fearing reproof so long as the expedition lasted. And when Thiodolf would sometimes ask him with a smile, "Tell me, boy, why dost thou think to mould me to a well-spoken, courtly knight?" Philip would answer with a half jesting, half sorrowful smile, "Ah! master, when we return victorious to Constantinople, it will become plain to you, without the need of a poor boy like me to open his mouth about it. Shall not the foremost, who is destined to win the highest prize, be the foremost in all things! Oh! I would fain adorn you like some consecrated image in the holiest and most beautiful festival!"

But as bright tears often stood in Philip's eyes after similar speeches, Thiodolf after a time gave up all such questionings.

Before this camp was broken up, it was noticed with general astonishment that the hitherto timid Bulgarians suddenly made attacks with a boldness and a confidence such as neither Helmfrið nor any other old Greek warrior could remember to have seen before in them. They daily swarmed round the camp, and often pressed in compact bodies about the cabins, giving forth cries which sounded like shouts of victory and of contempt for an enemy now hopelessly lost. The less brave in the Greek camp began to lose their relish for the war, and even the more courageous looked anxiously after ambushes which might, perchance, render the retreat into the Greek dominions impossible. Helmfrið, Thiodolf, and others like them, answered with a smile to these fears: "At the very worst we shall fight our way through; but those hordes shall not escape a further inroad in their country. We have not yet got at the root of the evil."

Notwithstanding, pale faces became more common in the camp. At length Philip said, "The riddle can soon be read; I will take prisoner one of their chiefs, and he will quickly confess." There-

with he sprang forth on his light chestnut horse, a few chosen youths with him.

Before long he returned with his intended capture. A Bulgarian soldier, whose dress and demeanor showed him to be a leader, followed Philip's horse in chains ; for this wild people knew nothing of the fair knightly custom by which the word of a prisoner is given and taken, so that the captive must be closely watched, or he would escape.

The chiefs assembled, and the prisoner was brought before them. It was supposed that threats would be necessary to extort the cause of the rejoicings in the enemy's camp ; but the Bulgarian looked boldly and scornfully at his victors, and answered at once, " Ye would know wherefore ye are lost ?—well, then, I can afford you that joy ; for you are and must be lost as surely as the north wind brings cold, and the west wind rain. Know that the mightiest hero of our nation, the young Prince Wladimir, has arisen for your destruction. He sat still for long in his castle, and was not moved by the ruin of our land. Whether warrior fell, or village was destroyed, or cabin burnt in your wrath, it troubled him not ; for he was angry with us because he thought that his bride, the beautiful dumb Wlasta, had been sacrificed on our altar, or frightened away into the wilderness, where dwell evil, crafty beasts of prey. But now he has learnt that ye Greeks have stolen her from him ; and he has lift himself up with lance, and sword, and arrow. And at the same time will our great high priest come down from the mountains, bringing with him that ancient armor which none but himself may bear, and which is almost heavier than your armor. It comes to us from the old heroic times ; and soon will he and Wladimir be here. But Wladimir we value most. Water, air, fire, all have you in their power ! Ha ! ha ! ye are lost, ye men of Greece, lost !" He gave out the last words in a half-singing tone, and then made a joyous leap.

He was set at liberty ; and almost all the chiefs laughed, and hastened to spread through the camp how slight, or rather how groundless, were the hopes of the enemy. Their careless assurance soon had influence over all the troops, and they again looked forward with renewed ardor to advancing. But Thiodolf, who had

remained alone with Helmfrid, said to him, with a look of earnest brightness, "Now, indeed, the case seems to be more important than the talk of ambush and surprise could ever make it. A hero leads on the enemy—a hero burning with love and vengeance! But, thanks be to the gods, now we are coming near to a combat which may bring us some honor."

"It is as thou sayest, my brave comrade," answered Helmfrid; and they parted with a kindly greeting.

CHAPTER IV.

THE forces of the Greeks and of the Northmen again took the field ; this time to press forward till the subdued foe should be forced, at length, to conclude a peace which would beseem the dignity of the emperor and ensure the safety of his subjects. At every step, Helmfrid and Thiodolf became more fully aware that Wladimir was now truly with the Bulgarian army ; but so much the more they gathered strength to meet the power of the young hero. The other chiefs could not understand why all was now so difficult and embarrassing to them, as the Bulgarians had but received an unimportant reinforcement of men.

Summer was far advanced when the troops for the first time rested from their toilsome, though, as yet, always victorious march, in a valley whose approaches on all sides were well watched by horse and foot-soldiers. There evening fell calming and refreshing upon the banks of a cool stream, shaded with thick leafy bushes ; and as the stars rose, the eyes of all the warriors closed in sweet slumber, confiding in the watchfulness of their sentinels. Even Thiodolf had yielded his senses to slumber, after many days spent in combats and marches. Dreams played strangely around him. Now he was in Iceland ; and Uncle Nefolf and Aunt Gunhilda complained that the elves, the sportive good people, left them no peace with their questions about him ; but still they looked very lovingly on him ; only the wolf growled angrily, and laid himself under the uncle's seat, and would have nothing to say to his young lord. Then, again, the gardens of Constantinople suddenly bloomed around him, the lute of the minstrel Romanus sounded through the distant walks, and two tall flowers on his right and on his left assumed more and more the forms of Zoe and Isolde. Thiodolf turned with a mighty effort (for it was as if bands that could not be broken held him back) towards Isolde ; and was about to pour

forth to her his love, and sorrow, and unworthiness. At that moment a sword struck, with a sharp sound, on his shield, which lay close beside him on the grass. Starting up from his dream, Thiodolf saw the old silent knight beside him. It was very fearful, in the starlight, to see how the long grey locks of his beard fell through the links of his hauberk down to his dark cuirass.

“What dost thou want, thou madman?” asked Thiodolf, in displeasure at having to exchange the image of Isolde for the solitary knight, and preparing to lie down again to sleep; but he heard the vizor of the old man unbarring, and involuntarily he looked into the uncovered face. The features of the great baron stared, spectre-like, at him, not to be mistaken even in the uncertain glimmering light. With a cry of horror, Thiodolf sprang up and seized his weapons. Then again the vizor was sharply closed, and the figure vanished behind some dark bushes.

There was no time now to seek after the unearthly visitor; for as Thiodolf looked around, he saw the surrounding hills covered with figures whose outlines against the clear starry sky showed them to be the enemy's troops. It flashed like lightning through Thiodolf's mind that the sentinels were all either taken or slain; *how*, there was no time now to consider. To strike on his shield, to blow on his horn, and vigorously to begin to break the circle, was all that could now be done; and all was done by Thiodolf with the full strength of a Northman. The troops were quickly mounted, and quickly they rode up the hill against the enemy, but as quickly did the latter pour down upon the ranks of the already half-defeated Greeks. It was almost a repetition of the attack which, by Philip's advice, Thiodolf had made some months before against the Bulgarians. A mighty and confused combat arose throughout the valley.

Thiodolf remarked several times, with joy, amongst the swarms of foot-soldiers which constituted almost the whole host of the enemy, a tall horseman, who flew to and fro, directing and calling, and who appeared to lead on the whole attack. “That must be Wladimir, the avenging lover of the fair Wlasta!” said he to himself; and he called to the rider to measure arms with him. But Wladimir seemed too fully engaged, as chief, to heed this

challenge to single combat ; and Thiodolf could not blame him, but all the more earnestly did he wish to meet him.

The young Bulgarian chief had long disappeared from his sight, when a loud cry of joy arose from the enemy in another part of the valley. Thiodolf paused, and considered whether he might not now take the troop which he had collected to a more decisive combat elsewhere. Then Philip rushed breathless to him—"Helmfrid has fallen!" he cried. "The young Prince Wladimir aimed a blow at his head, and hurled him down from his horse. A whole band, with sabres and arrows, is upon him. Thou must help him, master ; I am wounded." At the same moment he fell from his chestnut horse to the ground.

Thou wilt not ask, dear reader, with what haste Thiodolf, so soon as he had learnt the place of Helmfrid's danger, rushed thither. If thou art a true soldier, or like-minded, thou canst judge of it for thyself.

Thiodolf brought help in the greatest need. The old hero had planted his spear firm in the ground, and held to it as if to a sure anchor ; while Wladimir spurred his horse, and pulled violently at the noose which he had thrown over the fallen man. A few wounded Væringers protected their chief with their shields, many others lay dead beside him, while a whole horde of barbarians thronged around, striking and stabbing at him. But when Thiodolf's force arrived, they all gave way ; even Wladimir let go the noose, forced to defend himself against the blows of the young chief ; he felt the blood trickle from his head, but his terrified horse, whom he could no longer master, bore him out of the combat. The Bulgarian troops, as soon as they missed him, more and more gave way. The assailants were all repulsed, and the field honorably remained to the imperial troops.

However beautiful the field of victory must always appear to the eyes of the combatants, the early sun shone this time on so much that was sad, that the cries of joy were almost smothered. The dead bodies of the sentinels lay in a fearful circle around the camp ; and at the farthest out-posts might be seen the chief cause of their defeat and their death,—the nooses which, unperceived, were thrown over them in the darkness of night, and

which suddenly threw them defenceless to the ground, and generally also strangled them.

“A shameful manner of fighting!” muttered Thiodolf to himself, as he rode amongst the dead; “I would not deal so with a bear, let alone an honorable warrior; and, Wladimir, how canst thou hope to meet thy Wlasta in the joy of victory, if thou hast nothing better to relate to her than hateful deeds like these?”

In the midst of these thoughts and of arrangements for his troop, a soldier interrupted him with a message: the great Væring prince lay near to death, and desired to speak to his beloved Thiodolf before he departed.

How hastily did the young hero fly over the field of victory; but starting tears darkened his way. It was only when he saw the chiefs of the army gathered round the fallen prince that he rode somewhat slower, wiped away his tears, and soon, with grave composure, entered the circle.

In the midst lay the great Helmfrid, stretched upon his golden shield, which was richly sprinkled with blood from his many wounds. Near him was the spear, driven into the ground, on which he had stayed himself against the swarm of Bulgarians, and which he even now grasped closely when the fever from his wound, or the wandering of mind before death, came upon him; on the other side knelt Philip, himself wounded and exhausted, but forgetting all, that he might tend the old hero.

As Thiodolf approached, the Væring prince raised his weary head, looked strongly around, as if fresh life had been given him, and said at length, fixing his eyes steadfastly on Thiodolf: “Let no man venture to bear the golden shield after me but he who won it back on the linden-hill in Norway. Dost thou hear, mine heir? I depend on thee!” Then he leant back again in the deep slumber of death, and all stood around in silence.

Again he raised himself, looked at his beloved pupil, and said: “Thiodolf is the new chief of the Væringers as soon as old Helmfrid dies.” He lay down once more, as if in a solemn dream. The Væring captains lowered their arms before their appointed leader.

For the third and last time the dying hero lifted himself up, seized firmly Thiodolf’s right hand, and cried out in a loud voice,

“I leave my commission, as general of the imperial forces, with unlimited right to make peace or war, in the hands of this young prince and chief.” And, sinking back on his golden shield, he drew down Thiodolf with him, and whispered in his ear, “My son, in this very moment the heart of the king’s daughter on the sea-coast is breaking. She has long mourned for me in her watch-tower, since for her sake I lost the golden shield: now is ended her sorrow and mine!” A last pang, it seemed to be for the lost shield, contracted his features. Then his mighty limbs relaxed, and the noble corpse of the hero lay peacefully smiling.

Helmfrid was buried in the sight of the whole host. It was a solemn and beautiful burial, and many eyes dropped tears. When the dead prince had been lowered into the open grave, Thiodolf went down also, kissed his brow and hand, and said:

“As it is thy will, dear master, I take from thee thy golden shield, and I swear never to cleanse it from thy blood and that of thy foes, until he who so treacherously overpowered thee is in my power either alive or dead.”

Then he came back into the light of day, with the bloody shield in his arms; and the Værings greeted their young chief, clashing their weapons. Many of the captains who had heard the last words of Helmfrid joyfully proclaimed him as their leader; and as the Værings, after the northern custom, raised him on the golden shield, the whole army shouted and hailed him as their general.

CHAPTER V.

THOSE who had hoped to return to Constantinople at the approach of winter were obliged to forego their hopes now that Thiodolf was the leader of the host. Some had attempted, indeed, to speak to him on the subject, saying, that the victories they had hitherto gained had been in no way doubtful, and that very much more than half the work was done; but Thiodolf had answered: "Half, or three-fourths, or as you may please to divide it—so long as the whole is not completed I call it nothing; and the host whom I lead must also call it nothing. If any one wishes to complain to the emperor, and to receive other orders, let him depart; I give him leave."

But it still less pleased the speakers to retrace alone the woods and plains which lay behind them, and they therefore preferred asserting that they were anxious to fight, and would remain with the main body.

It was easy to learn from the prisoners that the Greek army was drawing nearer and nearer to the lofty wide-extended building of wood, which was there called the Castle of Wladimir; for the Bulgarians still were confident that at this castle irretrievable destruction must fall upon their hated enemy. But not the less did Wladimir evidently strengthen all his defences, to make vain any attempt upon them; while Thiodolf perceived that from this strong point all the rest of the country could be easily subdued, or, in case of resistance, laid waste. Philip, who was now quite cured of his wounds, brought him, besides, certain information of the immense store of provisions and arms heaped up in this fortress of Wladimir. So, amidst so many combats, the Greeks pressed on ever more daringly.

One day the fight was raging on the bank of a stream, whose passage was to be effected, notwithstanding the desperate resistance of the Bulgarians. It was a battle-field somewhat like

that on which, two years before, Helmfrid and Thiodolf had fought at the review in the emperor's presence. Now, as then, Thiodolf remained quietly on a height, looking with his eagle glance on the points of attack, and sending his commands to the troops, now by his silver war-horn, now by Væringers horsemen.

"The troop to the right, led by Michael Androgenes, must go through the woody dell!" said he, at length; and a noble Væringers spurred his horse to fly over the field. But the troop did not move, and its commander himself returned with the messenger. "How now, sir chamberlain!" cried out Thiodolf; "what want you with me? The enemy is yonder! I pray you make your way without delay through the dell: it will decide the fight."

But Michael Androgenes, turning somewhat pale, said that it could not be done. The dell was filled with Bulgarians, with their immense shields and gigantic outstretched lances.

"Sir chamberlain," said Thiodolf, low, and stooping to Androgenes, "you must thank God for that, and go boldly against them; for you have never as yet had to fight man to man with the foe since the combat when the great Helmfrid fell; the Væringers who were about him whisper not the most favorable things of you."

Michael collected himself, and answered aloud, "Let him who doubts of me say so to my face. For the rest, I am not minded for any cause to lead the emperor's troops to sure destruction; and that I should do, did I take them through the dell."

"I will see it with my own eyes!" answered Thiodolf; and he flew down the hill, Androgenes following him. Having reached a spot whence the dell could clearly be looked into, Thiodolf, after a pause, said, gently, "It can be done, sir chamberlain; you must force your passage as I commanded."

"Not I!" answered Androgenes, with cowardly insolence. "I am answerable to the emperor for my troop."

Then flashed in Thiodolf's eyes a trace of the old Berserker rage. He grasped Michael's hand so tightly that his gauntlet pressed it as between iron cramps, and led him thus, without power of escape, before the troops. Then he said in his ear: "How didst thou speak when, at Constantinople, the women and children wept in the narrow pass? Didst not thou say 'Forwards!' and,

‘Victory before all?’ Now, seest thou, victory is to be before all, and yet thou dost not instantly cry ‘Forwards!’ Thou miserable chamberlain, I will ride thee down as I did then, and bring all thy own horse-hoofs over thee!”

“Let me alone be leader!” said Androgenes, in great agony. “My honor is lost, if, after my hesitation, you place yourself in my stead at the head of my troop.”

“Spoken like a valiant knight!” said Thiodolf, so loud that the whole troop could hear; then he rode aside, and Michael rushed into the dell.

The Greek riders victoriously cut their way through; and such of the enemy as were on their side of the stream, almost crushed by the onset, hastily repassed the water, and left free two bridges, over which Thiodolf immediately led some fresh squadrons, and carried on the combat upon the opposite bank. Victory was soon decided, and the pursuers already saw the strangely shaped turrets of Wladimir’s castle rising above a pine-forest. But in this forest the enemy had taken up its final position. The skirmishing ceased; and it was easy to see that here would take place the last but also the most desperate and dangerous combat.

Thiodolf had called together the chiefs of the army, in order to decide to whom amongst them belonged the honor of the victory. Their opinions quickly agreed; for every one had seen the decisive attack of the chamberlain, Michael Androgenes, and no one had heard the previous parley between him and Thiodolf. Even the Væringers pressed around him, and sought to atone, by their words of praise and friendship, for the injustice which they had done him by their mistaken opinion. According to the general wish, the chief called the chamberlain to him, and hung around his neck the badge of honor which the emperor had given for distinguished warriors. As Michael bent to receive the prize, his cheeks glowed deep with shame; but Thiodolf whispered in his ear: “Be not ashamed, Androgenes; thou didst overcome thyself, and put honor before all; the rest is past and gone!” And, with loud voice, he added, “I give thee joy from my heart, my brave companion in arms!”

Philip, who had gone into the wood with some light-armed troops

to discover the position of the enemy, now returned and related strange things. He had seen amongst the Bulgarians,—who were striving to render the passage of the wood impracticable by felling trees and digging deep trenches,—wonderful figures in the long, flowing garments of priests, but with heavy cuirasses girt above them, and wearing tall helmets on their heads, and such other armor as is represented on the monuments of the old Greeks. “It is,” he concluded his relation, “as if our forefathers had in anger risen up against us; or rather, as if a wicked enchanter had called them forth, and confined them in the hateful bodies of Bulgarians, leaving to them nothing of their old majesty save their armor.”

The prisoners being questioned on the subject, answered: “Ye poor, lost Christians, those are our priests! They bear arms which have been dug out of the magic graves of the old world, and they come not so much to fight in their solemn armor as to slaughter those already devoted to the gods of darkness, as is this your hapless host!”

Then they began to jump and dance; but Thiodolf said: “I have never yet found in my poor heart who is the highest God; but thus much I certainly know, that He does not thus reveal Himself. So let us on against these hideous jugglers! When we have destroyed what is false, it may perchance be vouchsafed us to discover what is true.”

He commanded the war-trumpets to be sounded, and, in the dewy freshness of an autumn morning, the army advanced towards the fearful shades of the pine-forest. Each division was well instructed what war-cry and what trumpet-signal to heed, that the movements of the whole army might be regulated by the will of the leader. The foot-soldiers had to make a way through the entangled thicket before the horsemen could enter it; there were even places where they were obliged to dismount before they could advance. Then those horses who had learnt obedience to their riders, by careful training and nurture, as in the Væringers troop, followed them well of their own accord; but the others rushed back in affright out of the forest, where arms were clashing, and war-cries resounding, and turned their riders into foot-soldiers. Thiodolf himself had already forced his way over many

barricades and entrenchments on foot, at the head of his Væringers ; for here the alternative was to advance or to perish, and the leader's eye had no power to pierce through the deepening labyrinth ; it was but from the sounds of the trumpets, and from the voices of the chiefs and captains, that he could understand what was happening in this place or in that, and send his orders accordingly. Philip kept close to his side with the three lances, and the faithful Arab horse labored after him unweariedly.

Soon the light Falcon-spear had flown from Thiodolf's hand, and overthrown in his blood a Bulgarian soldier, who was evidently hastening with a message to the other wing of his army. The confusion which followed showed plainly how important his fall had been ; and with a cry of victory the Greeks pressed onwards.

Then something like golden armor shone amongst the leaves ; and suddenly, rising out of a hollow, appeared the band of priests in their old Greek armor, singing horrible hymns, and terrifying man and horse. The most fearful of them all drew close to Thiodolf. Beneath his splendid helmet appeared a face distorted with rage, which contrasted so hideously with the graceful shape of his armor, that the young leader could not but shudder. Then the heathen priest said, as he swung a great sacrificial knife, "Stand quiet, boy—here is the chief-priest ! Stand quiet—thou art doomed ! Have patience, for it will not hurt thee !"

And he had almost placed the frightful blade beneath the eyes of his enemy,—for in sooth there seemed a paralysing magic power in his words,—when Thiodolf at the right moment recovered himself, and springing back, caught the Bear-spear out of Philip's hand, and drove it at the heart of the hideous foe. It broke through shield and breast-plate, and the heathen sank to the ground, howling in the agony of death ; and howling fled his companions through the wood. Then was it as if the sun shone brighter, and gleamed more joyously through the trees. Thiodolf took the King-spear out of the hand of his armor-bearer, saying, "See, Philip, now have I taken this royal weapon. May it not be that it is intended for Wladimir, to avenge the death of our noble Væringier prince ?"

But it happened otherwise than he had thought. For suddenly

a wild tumult arose near him in the thicket: some Bulgarians, with loud rejoicings, were dragging away, by the help of many cords, a rider and his horse, who had both been caught in their noose. Philip cried out, "By heavens, they have taken the old silent knight!" "Can they even take ghosts?" muttered Thiodolf to himself; but at the same time he hurled the King-spear against the leader of the wild band with such force, that the point, passing through his neck, entered the arm of the man nearest to him, and threw them both to the ground. As the rope fell out of their hands, the cunning knot became unfastened, and the dark horse sprang up, stamping fearfully: the old knight, indeed, had not power to rise, but his sword was vigorously swung around, and it struck the two nearest foes. At the same time Thiodolf and Philip sprang joyfully to the fight; and hardly had Throng-piercer flashed a few times hither and thither, when the wild troop were scattered.

Thiodolf raised the old man, dreading lest perchance he was raising the dry bones of a ghostly corpse beneath its iron covering. Philip, the while, endeavored to draw the King-spear out of the wounds of the two fallen men; but sorrowfully turning to his chief, he said, "Ah, master, the noble weapon is broken by the shock of the fall of those two enemies."

"Oh!" said Thiodolf, sighing, "and the great Helmfrid gave it me for the most glorious deed of my warrior life, and Wladimir lives, and is free!"

"Fool!" muttered the old man from behind his vizor, while he again mounted his horse,—“Fool! and dost thou then know what is the most glorious deed of thy life?”

So saying, he spurred on his horse to a more open part of the wood, suddenly disappearing from the eyes of the astonished chief and his armor-bearer.

"What have we to do now with bewildering thoughts?" cried Thiodolf, and sprang on his horse; for in this place the forest was less overgrown, and a gentle hill appeared to lead up to the castle of Wladimir. He flew up it, sounding his horn. Every one whose horse had followed rushed up after him; and so, at the end of the wood, he quickly drew up in order a troop of horse, stretching out so as to cover the dismounted and the foot-soldiers,

when in scattered detachments they issued from the wood. Philip, whose faithful chestnut horse had not left him, was sent to hasten the ordering of the troops; for the Bulgarians were flying over the plain, and Thiodolf dared to hope that by a rapid attack of the foot-soldiers the taking of Wladimir's castle might at once be effected.

Close before him lay the strange building, in the midst of many outworks and entrenchments. Uncouth towers, with oddly-shaped roofs, rose up heaped together on one side like so many adjoining houses; on the other side were none. With the same caprice bright colors were streaked over walls and battlements, and colored flags floated now from loop-holes, now from roofs.

"I prefer the house where Uncle Nefiof and I dwell in Iceland," said Thiodolf; "for it looks as if earnest men of one mind had built it, and that they knew what they liked."

A Bulgarian rider sprang forth from a distant part of the wood and galloped towards the castle; but he stopped when he saw the troop of horsemen and drew near to them, crying out, "Art thou not the great Thiodolf, thou yonder with the golden helmet, and the silver war-trumpet in thy hand? If thou art he, come forth! We two will bring the strife to an end. I am Wladimir!"

Thiodolf recognized the bold leader on that night in which Helmfrid fell. He joyfully spurred on his horse, and said, "Praise be to all the gods of Asgard, the time is come!"

Wladimir cried out, as he rushed against him, "Wlasta!" and a more joyous thrill passed through Thiodolf's bosom, as, with all the strength of his thundering voice, he exclaimed, "Isolde!"

The two young chiefs manœuvred for a time; Wladimir seemed about to hurl his spear, or to let fly an arrow from his bow, and kept at a distance, as if mocking his enemy. Thiodolf, who had already on this day gloriously used his three Helmfrid spears, and had for the time lost them, now would rather have decided the combat by his good sword Throng-piercer, and waited only for the first spear or arrow of his foe to close quickly in upon him, and to begin the decisive fight of sword to sword.

Then an arrow of Wladimir's flew close to Thiodolf's golden helmet, and almost as swiftly did Thiodolf fly upon his foe; but

this was apparently what Wladimir had wished, for he and his horse remained motionless, as if fixed by enchantment; and as Thiodolf struck in his spurs for the final rush he felt that a noose was thrown over his head, and he was dragged by it to the ground.

“Mean, unknighly, accursed warrior!” he exclaimed; but he already lay on the ground, and his horse bounded back, foaming and snorting.

Wladimir spurred his horse sideways, and pulled at the cord as when the old Helmfrid had been overthrown. But Thiodolf, with unexpected dexterity, had fixed his sword in the grass, raised himself by its help, and, planting his iron heel deep in the ground, he pulled at the rope so powerfully that Wladimir, who had bound it round his hand, was forced from his horse and drawn down to his enemy. Then Thiodolf knelt on his breast, and said to some of the Væringers, “Bind me this fellow with his own cords, for he has fought like a robber, not like a hero.”

CHAPTER VI.

A DISMAL howl arose from the Bulgarian castle, for from its ramparts it could be seen how Wladimir was overpowered and bound. At the same time the Greek infantry and the dismounted soldiers had been drawn up in order, and were advancing on all sides, with quick steps, against the fortress and its outworks.

Then suddenly something darted out of a window of the tower like a little tongue of flame. The first who noticed it thought it was a new gold-colored flag, but the glowing light spread on all sides more wildly, and similar ones flashed from all the openings of the building. "The castle of Wladimir is on fire!" exclaimed all the troops; and they flew towards it to rescue whatever treasures might there be found.

At that moment a Bulgarian chief appeared on one of the ramparts, leading with him an old Christian priest, whom he half suspended by a rope from a projection of the tower, calling out to Thiodolf, "Halt, thou daring Greek leader, and grant us peace and a free passage, or we shall throw over to thee, and dash to pieces, this man, who is holy in thy land."

But at a sign from Thiodolf, Wladimir was brought forward in bonds, and the young chief said, "Man for man—blood for blood! Place at once the Christian priest out of danger, extinguish the fire, and surrender, or there will be no mercy for your chief, no mercy for a living soul in his fortress. But if you surrender, by the honor of a general, you have to do with kindly warriors, and I will take you into an honorable captivity. Only one thing I desire, take no long time to consider."

They drew up again the Christian priest, and began to quench the fire, and soon came forth in solemn procession as prisoners of war, with their arms lowered.

"They might have decided on something better," said Wladi-

mir, gnashing his teeth. "Tell me, chief of the Greeks, how hast thou thus deluded them?"

"I have not deluded them," answered Thiodolf: "but it may perhaps be, that if a man desire something with a right strong and earnest purpose, few people are in condition to refuse him."

The prisoners were led on by the Christian priest, bearing a lofty crucifix. He placed himself directly before Thiodolf, and said, "In the name of Him who died for thee, show thyself a merciful conqueror."

"Ah, has He indeed died for me too?" sighed Thiodolf; and he looked with deep, sad longing at the image on the cross. But then he said, with a calm look, "It is not here a question of mercy, but simply and solely of keeping my word, dear sir; or did you not hear what I called up to those people? In the meanwhile tell me, if it is not painful to you, what storm has driven you into this wild land?"

"No storm," answered the priest. "The holy loadstone of faith drew me, and I followed it hither to bring to these poor benighted men the knowledge of our blessed Saviour Christ. The people received me better than I had hoped; and only in these last days did the war so excite them that they pronounced those fearful threats against me. But I do not think that in fact they would have thrown me down."

"No!" answered Thiodolf, with some anger; "but the threat was outrage enough, thou holy venerable man. Truly I cannot think how anything so wild could have come into a man's heart."

"Yet so it does at times," said the priest. "I was once in Iceland, and there was a noble young hero who held me suspended in the air over the battlements of his dwelling, only to frighten a messenger."

The old man paused, and looked smiling into Thiodolf's face. The youth recognized the good priest Jonas, whom he had so madly carried off from Gunnar's house to marry Pietro and Malgherita, and he looked on the ground in great shame.

Some chiefs and captains gathered around him, asking how the prisoners should be guarded and the booty divided. After he had arranged all gravely, mildly and generously, as he was

wont, he went, surrounded by the chiefs, to a stream which ran from the castle-hill to the plain, and there washed clean the golden shield, dried it, and polished the noble armor carefully, and then swung it on high glancing bright in the sunshine, while large cups of noble wine were brought to him and to those around him. Thiodolf raised his cup, and cried, while tears glistened in his eyes, "To father Helmfrid's memory!" and drank it down. All did like him; and there sounded through the camp, repeated by a thousand echoes of the troops,—“To the memory of father Helmfrid!”

Some hours afterwards Thiodolf had the captive prince Wladimir brought to his tent. The Iceland chief, disliking, as did his whole army, the gloomy, smoke-blackened cabins of the Bulgarians, had determined to continue in their tents, which were pleasantly pitched on the green grass. When Wladimir entered, Thiodolf unfastened his bonds, saying, "What was un-knightly in thy way of fighting shall now be forgotten: I will speak with thee as with a free and honorable man."

But Wladimir looked wildly away, and only answered, hardly repressing a curse—"Wlasta!"

"Thy heathen priest has deprived thee of her, and no other man in the world," said Thiodolf.

"I saw well," replied Wladimir, "that thy heavy lance overthrew him in his life-blood, and, in sooth, I could have loved thee in that solemn moment; for, as thou sayest, the high priest bears the first heavy guilt of my wo. But did not Greek plunderers come afterwards, and did they not carry away my queen-like love, when she was bewildered in the fearful forest? Shepherds of our nation passed by, and the robbers cried out to them in mockery that they were taking the fair dumb maiden to the imperial city, to be the property of one whom they called Glykomedon."

"Two years ago I broke Glykomedon's neck for him," said Thiodolf.

"Thanks!" cried the Bulgarian, seizing his hand. "I know well that a knight like thee cannot lie. But, in the name of all the gods, what dost thou know of my lovely silent Wlasta?"

Thiodolf remained a long time in thought. The fair dumb

maiden, by whom Isolde had sent her pictures, and whose trace he had himself so long followed, started up before his mind, and at length he said: "Wladimir, if all do not deceive me, Wlasta is in Constantinople, and I myself have seen her. Come with me, and we will seek for her. In truth, it is of little less importance for me than for thee to find her."

After the fashion of the Bulgarians, Wladimir fell to the ground, and would have kissed Thiodolf's feet; but the noble Icelander showed his aversion to this abasement, raised him up, and both the chiefs now held counsel together respecting peace.

The conditions which Thiodolf had determined on in his unlimited power were worthy of a free noble Northman. Wladimir was to hold the sovereignty over all the Bulgarian nation, and to govern them after their own customs and privileges, but as the sworn liegeman of the emperor. In order to receive a solemn ratification, and to tender his solemn oath, he must, together with some of the principal Bulgarians, go to the city of Constantinople; and henceforth the teaching of the Christian faith was to be freely permitted in all Bulgarian lands, and every Christian priest to be safe. Wladimir felt deeply the gentle earnestness and the noble clemency of these conditions, and he willingly gave himself up to the protection of Thiodolf and the Greek empire.

CHAPTER VII.

THE return into Greece was slowly effected, partly because the new possessions needed to be secured by the force of the Greek army, partly because the ever-increasing severity of the winter obliged them frequently to encamp. In the meanwhile mournful thoughts passed through Thiodolf's mind. He had in vain inquired after the silent knight, who had not been seen since the last combat. That he was no ghost, but the yet living father of Isolde and Malgherita, Thiodolf knew since the day when he had delivered him, and he then understood the whole circumstance. But the strange aversion of the old knight pressed sorely on him, and made him think that there would be no joyful fulfilling to all the hopes of his life. At first, indeed, he had rejoiced at meeting with Jonas, in the hope that he would help him to the right knowledge of the white Christ. But notwithstanding all the love and renewed longing with which he returned to the high lore, and all the hearty trust with which he threw himself into the arms of his revered teacher, the true insight into the Divine Nature of the Saviour remained closed to him, and his faith in it uncertain and doubtful. *

Wladimir, on the contrary, quickly and readily took in the instruction of the holy man. "My new faith," he would say, "leads me to my new recovered happiness, my sweet Wlasta in Constantinople; and who would not serve gladly for many a sad year for so glorious a pledge!"

But Thiodolf, at such speeches, would often say,—“My unseen love! Ah, heavens! it fills my whole heart with longing. Could I only first find the white Christ, I feel as if Isolde would come of her own accord!”

Thus it was that Wladimir was baptized during the march home, while Thiodolf rode on and on in heavy unmitigated grief. Winter passed, spring came, and all was as of old with the sad

young leader, who now drew near to Constantinople at the head of his victorious troops, amidst the rejoicings of the people, receiving him in every town and village with tokens of honor and gladness.

The chamberlain, Michael Androgenes, had spurred on, at the command of Thiodolf, to announce to the emperor all that had occurred ; and he now returned with thanks and greetings in rich abundance, and with the order that the army should advance to a country palace, where the court was now enjoying the lovely spring : the emperor would there review the troops, and afterwards feast them with splendid hospitality.

The clear blue of heaven was brightly reflected back from the Propontis, on whose shore the palace was situated ; in the meadows, lofty triumphal arches sprang up from the light green flowery grass, formed of branches and rich waving wreaths of roses, myrtles, and laurel-leaves. Choruses of youths and maidens, in the strangely beautiful dress of the old inhabitants of Greece, sang on all sides to the notes of flutes and citterns, and the name of " Thiodolf " sounded in all the songs, as some brilliant star. But the object of all this praise said to himself : " How far more joyous was I in Iceland, where, instead of these gales of spring, the winter storms howled, and, instead of these solemn songs of praise, Uncle Nefiof and Aunt Gunhilda would by turns scold ! Yet I feel, in the midst of this bitter sorrow of the south, a noble fruit is ripening within, and all will soon go better with me, much better than I had ever dreamt of."

The emperor rode forth to meet them in all his pomp. As Thiodolf sprang towards him, and then, bending low, confirmed the news of victory and of peace, the emperor hung round him a rich chain, whose links were partly sparkling diamonds and partly Roman eagles of gold. Then Thiodolf made a sign to Prince Wladimir, and presented him to the emperor, who, after a gracious reception, desired him to ride at his left hand ; the right was chosen to be Thiodolf's place.

They thus passed through many squadrons of the host, and the emperor spoke words of encouragement and gratitude now to the soldiers, and now to their leader. Among other things he said to Thiodolf : " Know you, my dear leader and chief of the Væringers,

that about a year ago we mourned you as dead? Report is a strange daring thing, which willingly makes sport of the fate of heroes. Therefore its discordant sounds spoke of you; and the eyes of many fair women were moist at the tidings."

"The Valkyrias passed by me then," said Thiodolf, gravely; "and called my master Helmfrid."

"The Valkyrias!" exclaimed the emperor. "What, Thiodolf, art thou then not yet such as thou shouldst be? Thou hast brought us home a noble convert, and thou, the noble victor——? But enough for this time. Lead the squadrons past the chariots yonder, where noble ladies are awaiting us."

The solemn march began. As formerly, at the mock combat, Thiodolf passed before the star-like eyes of the blooming Zoe; but the fair, blushing maiden greeted him with far more tenderness than then. And when he returned and took his place by the chariots, and the elder Zoe greeted him kindly, and even the grave, pale Theodora vouchsafed him a gracious word, such a soft alluring whisper first escaped the lips of the young Zoe, that his heart beat with emotion, and sweet undefined longing.

The troops held a splendid feast in the fields without the walls. Thiodolf, and with him Philip, Wladimir, and the principal captains, were invited by the chamberlain, Michael Androgenes, into the imperial gardens. The tables were prepared beneath bright flowery bowers. The notes of many instruments floated through the branches, and united to form the sweetest harmony. As evening darkened, the light of lamps glittered between the leaves, the guests left the tables, and began to wander through the high-arched avenues, or to sail in delicate boats on the many lakes and canals of the gardens. Thiodolf trembled as if in a strange dream, and words of love and sorrow, before unspoken, hovered on his lips, about to take a form; for almost ever at his side was the blooming Zoe.

Then suddenly, through a deep opening, was seen the Propontis, shining with all the majesty of the rising moon, and Thiodolf, with quick dexterity, disappearing in the crowd of knights and ladies, hastened, with inexpressible longing, to the element which was so dear to him. He reached the beautiful shore, but a thick hedge formed a wall between him and the sea which had allured

him; he knelt down, stretched out his arms lovingly, and called out to the sparkling ocean:

“O ye waves, who gird the earth and surround her with a thousand embraces, ye who live in eternal joyous friendship with those who scour the woody heights of Iceland, and with those who wander on Africa’s golden coasts,—I fly to you! Ye shall bear me witness that I have ever been a true and renowned warrior; ye shall bring me tidings of my stern home, of that pure beauty whom I have sought through many a year, heavy and weary from my inward sorrow. Ye shall cool my breast, burning with the glowing, scorching beams of the south; ye shall call up for me the shade of my glorious father. O father Asmundur! thy grave is far off, in our dear island of heroes; but lift up thyself from thy rocky bed, and float over the waves which in thy lifetime thou so often didst cross as a victor, float over them hither and help thy son. He calls not upon thee for help against foes which sword and lance may subdue,—thou knowest it, against such he can help himself,—he calls on thee for help against that which darkly and confusedly is raging in his heart, which he would fain not look at, and yet must see. Help, father Asmundur! bring me tidings of the gods of Walhalla; or, ah! if it might be, bring me tidings of the blessed white Christ. Thou seest how all that I love conceals itself from me in a dark cloudy veil, and will not that I should discover it. Father Asmundur, help! help, thou mighty, holy sea!”

No shadow swept over the sea, no voice arose from its glittering waves, but a sweet calming weariness came upon the suffering hero; more exhausted than even after the hottest fight, he sank back on the soft grass, and a gentle sleep soothed him.

CHAPTER VIII.

STREAKS of morning red were already coloring the eastern sky, when Thiodolf was awakened by the sweet sounds of a lute, which seemed wafted by the sea, softly whispering in the early gale. On looking up he saw a bark sail by, in which sat a man, whom he at once knew to be the singer Romanus. He held on his lap a boy of rare beauty, and played on the lute as he sang the following words:—

“ Sweetly the beams, fair child Giocondo, play,
And light thine infant features with their ray ;
Now downwards vanish night’s sad phantoms pale,
No taunting vision dares my child assail.
The wave it rocks the bard, the bard rocks thee
In tender arms. The spirits of the sea
With many costly gifts our bark pursue,
And quickly cheer us, though withdrawn from view.”

The bark swept on, and vanished behind a woody promontory, after Romanus had lovingly greeted the young hero, who stood looking on in amazement.

Thiodolf thought awhile whether this was more than a shadow of a fleeting dream, or whether he had really gazed on the pleasant sight ; he remained in uncertainty, and at length plunged into the cool waves of the Propontis to refresh himself, beneath the brightness of the blue heavens. Then he swam gaily back to shore, dried and polished his arms, and took joyfully the road to Constantinople, to visit Pietro and Malgherita.

In the court of the little dwelling he met a pale elderly man, whom, as he approached, he with difficulty recognized as Pietro. Much affected, they embraced each other. After a moment, Pietro stood up, looked at his friend, and said :

“ Thou art also changed, my glorious Thiodolf ; but truly in another way than I.”

“ Ye gods !” exclaimed Thiodolf, “ Malgherita yet lives ?”

“Yes!” answered Pietro; “as much as I do; we bear the burden alike,—only her unspeakable loveliness yet draws an enchanted circle round her fading form.” He firmly grasped his friend’s hand, and looked earnestly and steadfastly up to heaven. At length he said: “How sportively and joyously did our love begin; and how heavily and sadly has it again and again been broken up! But so it is. Man is a perverse, deluded child, who thinks that he can play with the high mysterious powers which influence his life. He pulls and drags at their dark garments, and suddenly they fall away from the giant-forms, and Medusa-faces stare round at him, till all his young blood curdles in his veins at the immovable phantom. Malgherita is yet sleeping, brother; come here another time, and do not wake her now, for sleep is truly the best of all the dark web which we here call life.”

Thiodolf parted from his unhappy friend in deep sorrow. He had not the heart to inquire after Isolde.

“Ah! were the glorious vision found,” sighed he, “so much that is mournful could not have remained in her presence,”

As he was returning to the Væringers’ fortress, he unexpectedly met a man, who looked at him with such bright, wise eyes, that light, as of morning, seemed suddenly to arise in his darkened heart. He recognized his beloved Bertram.

As the two men gladly shook hands, the merchant said with a smile: “It is a good thing that you no longer almost dislocate your friends’ arms from your warm-heartedness, as you used to do at Marseilles; and yet the old Northman strength can still be felt well in the grasp of your hand. It seems to me so in all respects, you conquering chief, you are as strong as ever, but the noble light has taken a milder form in this southern glow.”

“It may be so, my very dear friend,” answered Thiodolf; “but that glow makes sad, and almost burns away the marrow of our life. Wise and noble Bertram, almost my whole hope rests upon you. Do you bring me tidings of Isolde?”

A soft cloud seemed to pass over the bright face of the merchant. “I would I had something better to say to you,” answered he; “but it cannot be. Isolde seems to have vanished from the earth. Not only here, but in Marseilles, where I twice went during your

campaign, have I sought for her with zeal and care—in vain ! There, the black burnt ruins of the baron's castle rise up like grave-stones, touched by no sound, scarcely by any recollection of life ;—here, at times, traces of Isolde are discerned, but they vanish like the track of a ship on the waters. That she is the being whom the people here still honor under the name of the Secret Helper, I can hardly doubt. But whether she appears at the side of sick beds, or appeasing mortal strifes, or even by her sudden appearance dispersing and calming tumults, she ever vanishes again as promptly ; and I know not if I have had to do with a supernatural being, or one raised above the powers of earth. She is lost to you for this world."

"Neither can I find the blessed white Christ," said Thiodolf, and bent his head in deep sadness.

At that moment the trumpets of the Væringers troop sounded from the fortress, for the sentinels had perceived from afar the approach of their noblest chief, and he was now received with this warlike salute. Joyfully as an awakened eagle, the young leader looked around ; and as they entered, by a high-arched door, the largest court of the building, where the squadrons stood drawn up in their full splendid armor, clashing their shields and lowering their spears, Bertram said softly to Thiodolf, "Is it not true that there is a glorious consolation in this, and, what is more, a glorious promise ?"

"Yes," answered the young Væringers chief, with kindling eyes ; "yes, friend ; renown is a divine gift of the Almighty Father ; and the man whom she crowns with her inspiring laurels, will win, if he but remain true and upright, all that is highest and most blessed both on this side of the Runen-stone and beyond it."

Thiodolf was yet standing in the midst of his assembled troops, when Michael Androgenes came as a messenger from the emperor, and desired to speak alone with the chief. They went up together to Thiodolf's apartment, the same which old Helmfrid had inhabited. As they now entered the four grey walls, from which, instead of other ornament, old armor looked down, Thiodolf hung up the gold shield on the same nail where he had so often seen the old hero hang it. A sorrowful longing awoke in

the young leader's breast, but he commanded himself in the presence of the chamberlain so as to shed no tears, as he would else fain have done at such a moment. Feeling his dignity as successor to the old Helmfrid, he sat down, made a sign to the messenger to take a seat opposite to him, and said :

“ Pray heaven, sir chamberlain, that you bring me some great and glorious message. At this moment my mind is full of solemn thoughts.”

“ Yes, my noble lord,” answered Androgenes, “ the message I bring is indeed great ; it is the greatest that can be sent to any hero in the land of Greece from the emperor. I offer you in his name the succession to the throne, and the hand of the Princess Zoe.”

Thiodolf's armor rattled as he sprang up, and immediately sank back again in his seat, like one who, starting from the pain of a sudden wound, forthwith feels the exhaustion of death.

“ Let me speak on,” said Michael. “ It is natural that your arms should involuntarily stretch forth with fiery impatience to reach such a prize, as if you could already seize it ; but various conditions interpose. The emperor, since he came to the throne, has cherished the thought of choosing a successor in the husband of the princess Zoe, had the lady's inclinations honored one of the brave and thoughtful men who have shown themselves in the capital. I am permitted to inform you, that you are the first happy man on whom those illustrious eyes have rested,—perhaps even before the last expedition. And now your mighty renown in war, and the ever more courtly manners which show themselves in your whole demeanor, have removed whatever obstacles might have opposed themselves ; and the emperor merely desires that, to gratify the people, you should change your name into one of Greek sound”——

“ As Thiodolf I have conquered for this people,” interrupted the Væringers leader, “ as Thiodolf I will live and die.”

“ Your name,” continued Androgenes, “ bears in Icelandic tongue the meaning of ‘ helper of the people.’ You shall be called in Greek ‘ Laomedon,’ which is but a translation. At the same time, it may, perhaps, be allowed you to retain with it your northern name.”

“ Ah, that indeed is not the greatest difficulty,” said Thiodolf, with a sigh.

“ Certainly not,” replied the chamberlain. “ The emperor naturally requires, before all things, that you enter the pale of the holy Catholic Church. And then the noble Icelander Laomedon becomes the bridegroom of Zoe, and the declared heir of the Greek empire.”

“ Father of all !” cried Thiodolf, “ is any new attraction needed to take me to the white Christ !—I have so long sought Him with a longing heart, and could well nigh weep at not finding Him.”

“ That is what our great emperor well understands,” said Androgenes. “ He knows also, that He whom you call the white Christ calls to Him every one who, like you, seeks Him with the whole heart. Therefore, only pledge your word that you will at all times be true and faithful to the emperor, and a loving husband to the princess Zoe, and hereafter a benevolent ruler of this realm, and I greet you at once in the emperor’s name as Laomedon, the heir of the throne ; and this very evening you shall be presented to the princess Zoe as her bridegroom. The public declaration shall take place as soon as the rays of the true religion have sufficiently enlightened you to make you meet for holy Baptism.”

Plunged in deep thought, without sound or motion, Thiodolf remained in old Helmfrid’s seat. Only at times some rings of armor shook, bearing witness to the mighty conflict which the young hero was inwardly waging. Strange images passed before him. His father Asmundur, and with him all the ancestors of his race, together with the beckoning misty figure of their forefather Odin, all came by ; and it was as if their quenched eyes sparkled with youthful brightness in the reflection of the Greek crown which was suspended over the brow of their great descendant. Then, blooming in all her endless loveliness, the young Zoe arose from a bed of roses, and the cloudy train of the old heroes caught a gleam of this earthly light ; she held in her fair hands, with bashful grace, a floating wreath of flowers, which she waved to and fro as if in sport, then wove it in the imperial crown that was descending on his brows, and stretched out flowers

and chaplets towards the young hero. Then there sounded from afar a voice of mourning :—" Isolde is lost for thee—lost for this life irrecoverably ! Deluded hero, why dost thou yet hesitate ? Wreaths of love and crowns are sweeping past thee !"

Thiodolf pressed tightly his mailed hands upon his bosom, that none of the links of his breast-plate might burst asunder. He turned his eyes, and suddenly the golden shield sparkled before him, and it was as if old Helmfrid's image looked down from it, as when he spoke, even in death, of the Norwegian king's daughter ; and Thiodolf saw, too, the old fortress on the sea-shore, where the weary maiden sang to the moon, and where her heart broke in the same instant that her grey-haired love bled to death from the wounds of the Bulgarian lances.

" That is the right northern love !" exclaimed Thiodolf aloud ; " and he who would tempt me by other visions must be he whom Christians call the devil. May he be now and ever rejected by me ! Good sir chamberlain," he continued, turning to Michael, with a calm firm voice, " I lay myself at the emperor's feet with all that I am and all that I possess. He has offered me far more of honor and splendor than I ever can deserve. But I dare not reach out my hand to it, for in my heart I am a betrothed man."

" It is an emperor's daughter, the heiress of a throne, who will vouchsafe you her hand. All other engagements must give way to this."

" I have learnt much in your land of Greece," said Thiodolf gently, " but not so much as that, nor shall I ever learn it. Have the goodness to give my answer to the emperor. The business is ended."

Michael turned to the door with a proud, solemn bow ; but there he stopped, looked back earnestly with a suddenly awakened emotion, and said at length : " O my glorious chief ! whom I have to thank for the preservation of my honor, and for more, even for my courage itself (for, since you forced me into the combat, I have become another, a bolder, and a better man), O my heroic prince ! trust to me, and let me carry to the emperor a different message, or your message in different words ; these would be your destruction."

" I rejoice over you, dear Androgenes," said Thiodolf. " You

are become, I feel it truly, a worthy knight. But your accustomed clear-sightedness, I think, has now forsaken you. Why should this message be my destruction?"

"The emperor lives in his daughters," answered the chamberlain. "When they are concerned, that moderation and gentle justice which you well know belong to him, vanish. And when at length a bright star seems to rise on a fading, joyless existence, such as the princess Zoe's, and then dives again into the distant sea, as if in scornful sport"—

"What are you saying?" asked Thiodolf, with surprise. "A fading, joyless existence!—she the hardly unfolded rose-bud, the blooming Zoe?"

"Who speaks of her?" answered Michael. "The daughter of the emperor, the elder Zoe"—

"So!" said Thiodolf, and leant quickly back in his seat. "Much noise about nothing! why did you not say that to me at once? Friend Michael, you must learn that the 'no' would have come a good deal sooner and more readily from my lips. But I am grateful for the honor done me by the noble lady, and, of course, my answer remains the same. It would be so for all the women in the world except one only, and that only one—I need not speak of it further. God be with you, sir chamberlain; do my bidding properly."

"Let me only say," answered Michael, "that you are still too far from Christianity, or"—

"Not a syllable that is untrue," interrupted Thiodolf sternly. "Have you good morning, Androgenes. As I said, I have to-day much rejoiced over you, and I think that on the whole you may be satisfied with me."

At the same time he courteously accompanied him to the gate of the Væringers fortress, and then ordered his wild young horse to be brought to him, and joyously made him caracole hither and thither, as he exercised him in the riding-school of the castle.

CHAPTER IX.

THE horse was foaming and smoking ; Thiodolf had it led away, then stretched himself at his ease beneath a tree, and said to Philip, who just then passed by, " Now, dear lover of horses,"—for thus he generally called him in his happiest and brightest hours,—“ do as if thou wert still my armor-bearer, thou renowned comrade. Take a lute and sing to me. I feel so exceedingly happy, and my heart is longing for the sounds of music.”

Philip bowed with friendly earnestness, took up his beautiful lyre, and sitting down in the shade by Thiodolf, sang somewhat as follows :

“ Now joyful to the temple's gate,
With all the gorgeous pomp of state,
Achilles leads his lovely bride.
Loud the festal songs resound,
Graceful maidens whisper round,
' And who is this ?' they say aside ;
' The far-famed Phrygian boy ?
Or Achilles, scourge of Troy ?—
Where then the fear we had of late ?

Saw we not Achilles fighting
In the distant battle-field ?
The hero bold, in death delighting,
Made the stoutest foes to yield ;
Anger sparkled in his eye,
Death was e'er his company.
Now a softer glance
In his eye can dance,
And a gentler victory
Our hero doth achieve.

Softly may other tongues declare
How in his soul fear first arose ;
Fair Polyxena's gentle love

The hero's vanquished heart can move.
Sweet pride of maidens ! blushes now
Light thy bright cheeks. But streamlets flow
From stripling's eyes bedew'd with tears.
Mightier yet the prince appears :
Conquests must e'er his steps attend,
And we as conquer'd ever bend.' ”

Philip laid his lute on the grass, and sank down beside it ; and, as if he had been the boy of whom he sang, a stream of tears gushed from his eyes.

Thiodolf asked him with surprise, “ Philip, my dear Philip, what can move thy brave heart so deeply and so tenderly ? ”

“ The marriage-feast of Achilles,” answered Philip, looking up to his master with mournful affection. “ Master, I do not grudge the hero his fairest wreath, I rejoice that the loveliest of maidens weaves it in his hair ; but let him know that his armor-bearer Philip was a fool, and had himself dared, though without any vain hopes, raise his eyes to that princely Zoe who now with sweet blushes falls into the arms of the great Achilles.”

“ Boy,” said Thiodolf, shaking his head, “ if I understand thee right thou hast fallen into a strange error.”

“ Not so, dear master,” answered Philip. “ It is at the same time my joy and my grief. Do you not remember how I now wearied you, now pleased you, with my instructions about courtly customs and the correctest Greek ? I would fain then have polished the kingly hero, so that he might approach the altar of my goddess without blemish. Joy to you, great Achilles ! May I be in your train when you lead to the temple the blooming Polyxena, the brightest jewel of all lands, far or near ! I will gladly appear joyful as beseems a bridegroom's friend, and truly be joyful in my heart.”

“ Thou poor faithful youth,” said Thiodolf, clasping him close to his heart, “ I am not Zoe's bridegroom, on my honor ; I shall never be it ; but thou shalt, I pledge my body and my life on it, dear comrade.”

“ Master, master,” stammered Philip, and his eyes seemed to be dazzled, “ you are putting some bewildering northern spell upon me. Master, are those the wondrous magic words of the north ? ”

“Only trust me, my Philip,” answered Thiodolf, smiling. “Very soon myrtles of Greece shall spring forth from them, if the great Father grants me life and power.”

At that moment Wladimir suddenly rushed into the room. “I have not yet got her!” cried he to the Væringers chief. “Up, my victor, and help me in the search, as thou hast promised, thou mighty hero.”

“O ye enamored youths!” said Thiodolf, as he sprang up smiling, “you must yet leave me quiet and leisure for other things than to win your fair ones for you. Patience, my children, and all shall be done; but you must learn to wait. See, I have waited long, very long,—and I may have to wait till beyond the grave I learn what I am to believe of Walhalla, and what of the white Christ. So peace, ye impatient spirits!”

Therewith he left the fortress with a joyful step, and with a strange smile on his lips, which seemed to speak both of his strong bright trust and of his deep sorrow. Wladimir and Philip abstained from any question, and from any attempt to follow him.

In the meanwhile Malgherita was looking forward with sorrowful longing to Thiodolf’s visit, for which Pietro had prepared her on awaking. It was true,—she felt sure,—that he brought no tidings of Tristan; and though she had often blamed herself for cherishing so vain and groundless a hope, yet its overthrow was a new arrow to her heart. But, on the other hand, the joyous past awoke again with the thought of Thiodolf, as she ever felt that all comfort which she could yet receive would reach her only under the protection of his shield.

As he entered she went towards him softly weeping, and, like a sister with an elder brother who holds the place of father, she laid her head on his bosom. Pietro, whose own grief was stirred up by his gentle wife’s sorrow, leant his drooping head on his friend’s shoulder; and Thiodolf, with moistened eyes, but earnest and joyous strength, supported his two beloved friends, and pressed them closely to his heart.

“Malgherita, thy father yet lives: his ghost has never appeared to thee!”

These were the first words that he spoke, and, with the solemn soothing of an organ’s tones, they thrilled through Malghe-

rita's breast. She lifted up her little head, as a flower in the cool morning when the first beam of the sun falls upon its cup weighed down with dew. Thiodolf spoke on, and told how the great baron had delivered him, and he himself had afterwards been so fortunate as to repay the great gift with a like return after the fearful recognition. As no combat had since taken place, it was certain that the disappearance of the noble knight was not caused by any mischance that had befallen him, but rather that he had left the army in displeasure at the first signs of peace; for it seemed as if his noble and much-injured spirit could only find healing in the tumult of war.

"Without doubt," added Thiodolf, "he is once more mysteriously wandering through the turmoil of this huge city. And should he again appear to you, be not terrified, noble lady; but know that you see before you your living father, who, in spite of all his dark curses, cannot yet forsake his child, and so remains near you, that he may soon see, with joyful, forgiving eyes, both himself and you freed from the effects of his malediction."

"Amen!" said Malgherita; and she led their friend into the room where, before the last expedition, they had often sat together in confiding talk. "You bring me quite another gift than I had hoped for, my glorious friend; but not the less a gift of endless refreshment and strength, more than my poor guilt-laden life could have dared to expect."

Thiodolf no longer listened to her words. His eyes, his whole soul, were engrossed by a picture that hung near the one before sent from Isolde to her sister. Like the first, this one was also in two parts, and, without doubt, must be the work of the same delicate master hand. On the one side was seen the corpse of a young warrior in northern garb, by whose bier Isolde stood mourning, as she let fall a branch of myrtle on the blood-stained, laurel-covered helmet; on the other appeared the pale princess Theodora, who, with outstretched arms, greeted the sad Isolde at the convent gate, and held towards her the dress of a nun. No words were written over these figures. But how did Thiodolf's bosom thrill when he recognized in the warrior's corpse his own features and his own armor! For him, then, had Isolde wept; on his head, as on one gloriously fallen, had she dropped with her own

hands the myrtle branch, and then the cloister gates had received the spotless mourner into their impenetrable enclosure. He knelt down before the picture, he stretched his hands towards it, and wept like a child. Malgherita related to him, that when Constantinople was mourning for his supposed death, the pretty mute had brought this picture; since then it appeared that Isolde's life must have silently passed away within the still walls of the cloister, without sight or sound.

Thiodolf calmly arose from his knees, wiped away his tears, looked lovingly at the picture, and said, as he smiled at it, "Praise be to the gods that I have not become Laomedon, and had decided never to become it. So may I feel myself not unworthy of thee, thou blessed form, for ever lost to me in this life."

Pietro and Malgherita looked at him with surprise, and would have asked for an explanation of these words; but Thiodolf prevented them, saying, "My children, it is a solemn though beautiful secret; a kind of refining fire, if you will have it so. It is passed, and I,—praise to the Almighty Father!—I have borne myself as a descendant of the old race of Asmundur. Also a wreath has been given me, over which my ancestors must rejoice, and shine the brighter in its reflection; even the great Odin himself, who came down from heaven into the land of men. The noblest maiden on earth, Isolde, has loved me! Truly, children, henceforth, in all my sorrows, you shall ever find me a far stronger and more joyous Thiodolf than heretofore!"

CHAPTER X.

THE young chief had asked his friends to go forth with him under the blue sky of the bright spring day; for his heart, full of a thousand feelings, and of new unknown hopes, longed restlessly for the breezes of spring, and for the joyous songs of the larks. Malgherita, accustomed, since she arrived there, to the narrow bounds of her little garden, walked timidly through the crowded streets by the side of her mighty friend; Pietro, on the other side of her, looked up with amazement at the heroic form, which appeared to shine in unearthly glory.

Thiodolf understood Malgherita's uneasiness, and led her to a shady walk which stretched along the sea shore and was little frequented, and where he himself could give full vent to his joyousness; for in the city, the low whispers of the multitude, of—"That is he! see the great victor of the Bulgarians, the defence and protection of our empire!" had sounded incessantly around him, and had disturbed the still solemnity of his inward existence. But here, beneath the budding trees, lighted up by sky and sea, words of lofty meaning sounded from his lips, and many northern legends, as was his wont when true joy sprang up in his knightly heart.

A turn of the walk suddenly brought the friends close to a monk, who was kneeling before a beautiful crucifix of marble, which shone under the shade of two tall cypress trees, and praying with such devotion and fervor, that even the chanting of Thiodolf's powerful voice did not seem to reach his ears. Malgherita, on the contrary, remarked the kneeler but too well, and started back from him in terror; for he was the old priest Jonas. Pietro, who also recognized him, could not but think of Castel-Franco, and of Malgherita's sad forebodings. He looked anxiously at his pale wife, and said:

"Take courage, Malgherita; if the dark figure of Jonas ap-

pears to us, our friend Thiodolf has risen upon us as a very bright star."

"I am not so frightened as thou thinkest, Pietro," answered Malgherita; "only a sad remembrance of Castel-Franco passed before my mind. But I feel as if the evil forebodings of old Jonas had vanished with that fearful night!"

Thiodolf, in his gay eagerness to repeat legends, hardly attended to these words, and continued to pour forth the adventures of some old hero of the north. Just then Philip met them; his face yet glowed with the morning's promise of happiness, and, bowing low before his chief, he said:

"O noble master! I pray you follow me at once to the great amphitheatre, which has stood in our city since the olden times. The renowned poet Romanus will there represent to-day, before the emperor, a tragedy, after the form and fashion of the ancient Greeks. He has often before delighted the emperor with like representations, assisted by excellent players. Wonderful things are expected to-day; for he himself is to act, as poets were wont to do in the days of our fathers, and he has worked carefully at this tragedy for a long time. All the people are pouring into the amphitheatre, and foremost our Væringers; for the play represents a northern legend, the life of Sigurd the serpent-slayer."

"Oh, Sigurd the serpent-slayer!" cried Thiodolf, with kindling joy; and he drew his friends with him towards the amphitheatre. In vain Malgherita would have resisted; a glance at the child-like glee in the face of Thiodolf hindered her from any opposition, and, all together, they entered the building, already swarming with thousands of spectators.

The stately amphitheatre, with only the bright vault of the sky of southern spring for its roof, its ascending rows of seats all filled with richly dressed eager spectators, resembled a vast half-expanded rose. Over the background of the yet partly concealed stage was seen the fertile Asiatic shore, on the other side of the Propontis, and a portion of the blue sea itself, filling the soul with lofty thoughts and lovely images. The sun, still high in the heavens, seemed well pleased to pour its rays on the festive crowds.

On all sides place was reverently yielded to Thiodolf and his

company, and he reached the foremost row of the amphitheatre, close to the orchestra, where the chorus had begun its solemn prelude. There they seated themselves; and the eyes of the young northern hero were fixed with longing upon the brilliant stage, where the great Sigurd, the serpent-slayer, whom he reckoned amongst his ancestors, would soon appear in the noble play.

Trumpets sounded, announcing the arrival of the imperial court. The loud, joyous noise ceased, and all rose from their seats in reverent silence, and all eyes were fixed on the centre of the amphitheatre, where, at the second blast of the trumpets, appeared the emperor, his daughter, and the young Zoe, surrounded by courtiers and guards. The emperor graciously greeted his subjects, as on all sides they bent low to him; but it could be seen that he purposely abstained from giving one kindly glance to that spot where shone the golden helmet of Thiodolf. The Væringar prince remained therefore proud and indifferent, without again bowing; and so soon as, at the third sounding of the trumpets, the imperial family had taken their seats, and every one sat down, he also, seated between Pietro and Malgherita, turned again to the stage, looking for the arrival of Sigurd with as much pleasure and unconcern as if there were no Greek emperor in the world.

The curtain, which yet concealed the proscenium, rolled down after the old Greek fashion, and vanished. A rocky valley was discovered, overshadowed with oaks and overgrown with firs, with slender blossoming hawthorns amongst them; and while the men of the south wondered at this strange scenery, and the skill of the painters and designers, the hearts of Thiodolf and all the Væringers beat high at the thoughts of home, and their eyes filled with tears of ecstasy. The prologue of the tragedy began. Two gigantic figures came forth from a rocky fortress which was seen in the background; their buskins raised them to a strange height, and the skilful masks, which entirely covered their heads, gave them, as if by magic, a strange and monstrous reality, while their whole appearance and demeanor accorded with the fearful idea. They were the two brothers Fafner and Reigen, who had slain the wizard father Hreidmar, for the sake of his treasure; and who were now at strife between themselves, chiefly on ac-

count of the mysterious ring of Andwar ; which the poet seemed at pains to bring forward prominently, as the turning-point of the tragedy. Fafner seized the helmet of Reigen, placed it on his head, and brandished the fearful sword Hrotte. Then Reigen retreated in affright, and Fafner spoke :

“ Soon shalt thou, by magic arts,
 A form more fearful yet behold :
 A serpent's shape I take upon me
 To protect my precious gold.
 Gold ! thou chief of earthly treasures !
 All is lawful thee to save :
 Henceforth man will change his nature,
 And become thy very slave !”

He went back into the fortress, and Reigen remained in doubtful thought. Not long after, Fafner returned from the deserted castle, in the form of a dragon spitting fire. The trembling Reigen hid himself behind a rock ; but Fafner went about the stage in triumph, and gave scornful words to all who thought to gain from him some of his gold. The man and the dragon formed one wonderful whole, though without any repulsive distortion ; the Medusa-like face looked around in fearful beauty, and moved in the most skilful and natural manner. Almost all the spectators shuddered, as now Fafner came down into the orchestra, and vanished through the door which was called “ Charonic,” before the foremost seats of the amphitheatre. But Thiodolf's heart beat with a warrior's longing to try his strength against the dragon ; for the thought of stage and acting was fast passing from his mind before the living representation of the well-known northern legend ; and now Reigen came forth, with these words, which sounded mightily throughout the assembly, by the power skilfully imparted to his voice by the mask through which he spoke :

“ Daring fool ! and shall it be
 That gold become man's gathering-word,
 And that he who best preserves it
 Shall become his brother's lord ?
 Then will I against thee bring
 A higher force, thou scaly worm.
 Serpent ! Sigurd is upon thee !
 Reptile ! dread the hero-form !”

The concealing curtain was again raised, the prologue was ended. Thiodolf heard nothing that Pietro and Malgherita spoke to him of the skill of the poet, the designers, and the painters. His mind was full of the victory over the golden dragon ; and he fixed his ardent eyes on the stage to see whether Sigurd would soon appear, and whether he would be a true and worthy Sigurd, one from whom victory might be expected. At the worst, he purposed to help him.

Again the curtain rolled away, and left the proscenium free. Sigurd and Reigen were seen coming from afar, on the right ; and all the spectators gave a joyful exclamation at the sight of the richly adorned young hero. But Thiodolf muttered doubtfully to himself : “ The youth looks fair enough, and he is also tall and slender ; but I fear he will have no success. He might wield his arms very much better.”

The magic sword was now to be forged and sharpened for the occasion ; and, as it glowed in the fire, Reigen kindled in the breast of the young Sigurd a bold desire for the ring of Andwar. At the call of the mysterious smith, the magic forms of Brynhildur and Gudrun, surrounded by other prophetic apparitions, passed through the valley. The young Sigurd was fired—Thiodolf far more so : he lost all consciousness of self, when the noise of the dragon was heard behind the amphitheatre, till most of the spectators trembled at the fearful threatening sounds ; Sigurd and Reigen concealed themselves, and Fafner issued forth from the Charonic door amidst the deep, long-drawn notes of the trumpets. But hardly had he climbed, with a strange motion, the steps from the orchestra to the stage, when Thiodolf sprang after him with a mighty leap, Throng-piercer flashing in his right hand ; he reached the monster in the middle of the stage and struck him so that the Medusa-head broke asunder, cracked, and split, and a rapid stream of blood flowed from it. A wondrously lovely boy rose up out of the broken disguise, with a mien half terrified, half-threatening, still partly protected by the sheltering arm of the man whom the powerful blow had struck ; and while the noble child spoke his anger and displeasure, and blood streamed over

the strange magic figure, and Thiodolf with lowered sword, stood near, gradually recovering his recollection, the assembly remained for a long time silent and astonished, as if before a new and beautiful scene, unexpectedly prepared for them by the skill of the minstrel Romanus.

CHAPTER XI.

BUT by degrees there arose among the spectators a murmur of discontent. They looked up on all sides to the imperial seats; and when they saw that the emperor was about to leave the disturbed theatre with angry looks, the general anger was no longer concealed. With loud curses,—the Greeks had yet so much of their fathers' blood in them as to look upon the interruption of a tragedy as a sort of profanation,—all the spectators arose from their seats, and pressed into the orchestra to seize upon the daring offender, forgetful of his renown, to which they had just before paid homage, and mindful only of his present offence. Philip and the Væringers commanded quiet, and laid their hands on their swords to defend their chief; but, solitary and dispersed as they stood in the endless crowd of people, they could not stem its force, but only added to the tumult. Women and children shrieked distractedly in the press. Malgherita, protected by Pietro, seemed unmindful of the danger; but from the part of the amphitheatre where she stood she stretched forth her longing arms towards the child, as if grasping at some vision. Thiodolf had lifted it out of the dragon's skin and taken it in his arms, quieting and caressing it; while the wrathful multitude had poured into the orchestra, and were now pressing towards the steps which led to the stage.

Then for the first time, Thiodolf appeared aware of the tumult. "Hush, my darling," he said to the child "they shall do thee no harm."

He gave it to the minstrel Romanus, who had now, with a bleeding arm, risen out of the dragon's disguise; then went towards the steps of the orchestra, and cried out, as he waved his flashing sword above his head, "Is there any one here who would speak to me?"

All were for a moment silent, as if spell-bound. But the more distant soon renewed their upbraidings and curses, and pressed forward, venturing even to throw knives, and whatever else they had in their hands, upon the stage.

Then with overpowering force rose up in Thiodolf's breast the old dark strength of the berserker rage, which had so long slumbered within him. He blew a few threatening notes, which were repeated in many different accents by the Væringers scattered about the theatre, like so many foreboding echoes. A fearful outpouring of blood seemed about to begin, and irreconcilable Discord brandished her torch over town and country.

Suddenly the crowd gave way before a white figure, who glided round the amphitheatre and came into the orchestra. Wherever she drew near, the noise was hushed, and a low whisper, "See, there is the Secret Helper!" spread more and more on all sides; so that at length silence reigned over the whole theatre, only interrupted by an occasional war-cry of Thiodolf and the Væringers.

The white figure ascended the steps of the orchestra to the stage, took the child from the arms of the bleeding Romanus, and covered him soothingly with her veil; then she approached Thiodolf, in order also to allay his wrath. But, in the meanwhile, the multitude had broken forth with renewed fury, and Thiodolf, gnashing his teeth, and fearfully rolling his eyes, incited himself to yet wilder wrath by words of scorn. Then the Secret Helper placed herself between him and the people, raised her hand as if in warning, and exclaimed, "My life for his! I bid you all go back in peace and submission. Whoever dares to touch this consecrated head will be accursed and lost for time and for eternity!"

All bowed in deep reverence to these words of solemn warning. Thiodolf alone still foamed with the old berserker rage; and would have followed the retreating crowd through the orchestra, but the mysterious lady turned towards him, a little raised her veil, and said, "Thiodolf, hast thou then quite forgotten me?"

In gentle sorrow the northern hero sank upon his knees, breathing, in low accents, "O Isolde, O my heavenly lady Isolde!"

But, as a spectre of the night, there arose suddenly in the crowded orchestra a full armed gigantic knight. He extended one hand towards Pietro and Malgherita, the other towards Thiodolf and Isolde, and said, in a loud voice, "Thy father's curse is taken away! Peace and joy to all my children!"

The emperor had beheld these strange, almost incredible occurrences, motionless and petrified. He now sent Michael Androgenes and some heralds to bring to him all those who had taken part in what had happened, and to pacify the people more completely. This, however, was unnecessary; for the procession, led on by the Secret Helper, found on its way only bent heads and a deep reverential silence. In truth, since the holy lady had spoken to them, the multitude had become calm, and grave, and expectant, as if some great festival had been proclaimed. The tall, full-armed knight, whom all had seen before recognized as the great baron, clasped lovingly in his arms Pietro and Malgherita, who had well nigh sunk to the ground before him, and led them up to the throne of the emperor.

There, surrounded by the rest of the royal family, stood the pale Princess Theodora, who had just appeared amongst them. She spoke these words of reproof to her imperial father: "O thou who art obeyed by the East and honored by the West, because so has willed it God's holy counsel, wouldst thou then calmly have seen slaughtered before thine eyes the hero who has given peace to the limits of thine empire, and freed many thousands of thy subjects from miserable ruin and a hard captivity? Father, I know the cause of thy displeasure;—I dare not speak it out, for it would bring a blush to other cheeks."

A deep color flushed the pale face of the speaker, called up, as all felt, by another's shame and another's folly. She paused a moment, then raised again her head, and spoke with solemn earnestness:

"It was a great and glorious act of this young Væringier chief which called down thy wrath upon him; and therefore have I brought to him the dearest gift of his earthly life, which he had long, with bitter grief, bewailed as lost."

She took Isolde's hand, and led the noble maiden to Thiodolf, saying, "So soon, O Thiodolf, as the Lord has received thee into the number of His disciples, she is thine."

Then she related the former history of Thiodolf and Isolde, and how her royal sister, the Abbess Eudocia, had directed all from her retreat; training Isolde to humility, and keeping her in concealment, while yet denying her the veil she longed to take, Eudo-

cia's prophetic spirit revealing that in the world was cast the lot of the daughter of the great baron. At length, when Isolde was almost overwhelmed with sorrow by the news of Thiodolf's death, Eudocia had consoled the mourner by admitting her to the novitiate, but ever refused to let her take the vows. "This day," continued Theodora, "as I was with my sister, she suddenly, as if entranced, raised her eyes to the sun, saying, 'It is the hour: all mysteries will soon be solved. Hasten, both of you; oh! hasten. Pass over to the amphitheatre! Hasten, I repeat! the life of a hero is at stake, and yet more.' We did as she commanded, and all has come to pass as ye have seen."

"All mysteries will soon be solved," repeated the baron, solemnly coming forward. "The father's curse is well nigh loosed. Isolde, in presence of the emperor's court, before army and people, has ventured her life for love of a young hero, and the union of these two noble beings is determined. Now understand I the dark saying of Huldibert, which appeared in the old archives before the sudden flame had consumed the parchments and the castle. The Provençal castle may lie in ruins! my happy children and grandchildren will rebuild it more princely than ever; for assuredly, that noble child who lies in Isolde's arms is the lost Tristan of Pietro and Malgherita."

"O heaven, I had so hoped from the first moment!" cried Malgherita; and she stretched out her hands towards the boy, who, with a sweet smile, held out his to her from Isolde's arms.

The great baron came between them. "Not yet," he said—"not till Isolde is joined in holy marriage to her lover can the ban be fully taken off."

"Why, then, do we delay?" said the emperor. "Let us forthwith to St. Sophia's church, and there see the holy sacrament of baptism administered; for assuredly Thiodolf will now, with a willing and joyful heart, fulfil that condition of his marriage."

"For many years have I striven after it, my royal master," answered Thiodolf; "and oh, with what a happy heart would I draw near to it if it were granted me to know the blessed white Christ! But I will never dishonor His table by coming to it as a doubting guest—no, not even for Isolde's sake."

A look of the most ardent love fell, as he spoke, upon his beautiful bride, who looked up in joyful wonder at her knight, whilst the great baron pressed his hand with deep feeling, and the emperor looked away, somewhat ashamed. His eye fell upon the minstrel Romanus, and he asked him eagerly how he had come by the child, and whether he was really the son of Pietro and Malgherita.

His answer removed all doubts. Allured, as minstrels are wont to be, to the scene of great events, he wandered to the ruins of Castel-Franco the morning after its destruction, and had there found the little Tristan amidst the fallen walls, in the same dress in which his mother had last seen him, and in which he yet appeared to her mind's eye. "He smiled so brightly up at me from among the hot stones, and the ruins of tottering arches," continued Romanus, "that I gave him the name of Giocondo; and up to this day I have carried him about with me as a pleasant charge, a blessed mirror of life, which ever reflected, as from angel's eyes, the world and destiny. Now must I wander on alone; but I shall often come back to visit my beautiful Tristan Giocondo; and when he is fully grown, we shall hear of one another from afar—I mean, by the sounds of my lute, and the deeds of his knightly sword."

Pietro grasped his hand with emotion; while the emperor, who had long stood in deep thought, now suddenly clasped the Væring-er chief to his heart before all the people, in the noble victory of repentance. Thiodolf sank on his knees, kissing the hand of his royal friend; and on all sides resounded the loud rejoicing cry of the quickly-changing people, through whose ranks had spread confused tidings of that which had passed before the imperial throne. The fair Zoe drew near to the northern hero, and, unperceived by all, whispered in his ear, while her cheeks glowed, "So help me God, as I with my whole heart rejoice in your happiness, dear Thiodolf."

CHAPTER XII.

WLADIMIR, far removed from all festivities and rejoicings, in gloomy displeasure that Wlasta was not yet found, had heard nothing of the splendid repast which the emperor that very evening gave in honor of the reunited. The rejoicings extended over the city and the Væringer fortress, and for that reason both city and fortress became hateful to the wrathful Bulgarian prince; and without inquiring what was the occasion of the rejoicing, he sprang upon his horse, galloped beyond the gates, then threw himself down on the grass in a luxuriant grove, and gave his horse liberty to range in the pastures around. All the night through he by turns poured forth angry words to the stars, and sang verses from his native love-songs, wetting the flowers with his hot tears. Towards morning a sleep of exhaustion closed his burning eyes, and strange dreams disported themselves before his spirit.

The melody of a little Bulgarian air on a lute mixed more and more distinctly with his dreams. It fell on his ear with all the soft sweetness which seems to belong to Sclavonian songs. He feared to awake fully, lest those beloved sounds of his country should die away in the light of the first rays of the sun; but at length he heard the clang of armor near him, and he sprang up. It was Thiodolf, who, as if wandering for pleasure, passed near, and by his side a tall, wondrously lovely maiden, who bore in her arms a smiling child. He said to his companion, "It is as if Philomel had gained the power of speech, and still retained her pure enchanting melody." Then he gave a kindly smiling glance to Wladimir, and with his companion vanished amongst the trees.

Wladimir, as if spell-bound, gazed around, for the soft tones of the lute yet sounded in Bulgarian measures through the grove; and now his noble horse trotted up to him with a low, glad neighing, and in the dark shade of the boughs bent his knees, as in former happy times he had been taught to bend before Wlasta.

“O merciful heaven!” exclaimed Wladimir, “I must find her now or never. For if again we are carried far apart, to whom could I go but to the fearful divinities of madness?”

But the dreadful words were not yet fully spoken, when Wlasta glided from the thicket, the lute in her hand, and shining in the beams of morning, and of love blessed with happiness. At the same moment Thiodolf and Isolde again appeared, and led their friends trembling with joy to each other; while Tristan Giocondo wove a chain of flowers which he wound with childish grace around the re-united lovers.

Afterwards, in calmer moments, time was found to relate how, by the power which Isolde’s calm majesty gave her over Glykomedon, Wlasta had been delivered and freed, and how in all after-trials she refused to part from her dear benefactress until the present moment, which had brought to pass so many reconciliations.

Wladimir looked joyfully in Thiodolf’s eyes, saying: “Thou didst once tell me, my noble victor, that it no less concerned thee than me to find Wlasta. Now I think that I understand thee. Is it not true we have both found, and I may say, Joy to thee?”

“Yes, I have found much,” answered Thiodolf, “unspeakably much! But that which is eternal is yet wanting. Oh, who will show me the way to the white Christ! For one who has not Him, what has he in the whole world?”

Isolde raised her eyes and heart to heaven in silent, solemn prayer, and little Tristan folded his tiny hands with sweet unconscious devotion.

Now that Thiodolf had restored to the Bulgarian prince the happiness of love, he endeavored to do the same with Philip; but this was a much harder and more serious task. Still, the endeavors of the hero to exalt in every way his young armor-bearer in the eyes of the emperor and the fair Zoe were not without success. Often Philip felt with trembling happiness that the look of his beloved were fixed upon him with joyful emotion when the relation of one of his glorious combats poured from Thiodolf’s lips; the emperor likewise took more and more pleasure in the discourses which the Væringier chief directed to the same object and was well satisfied to connect the thought of Philip’s illustri

ous and powerful race with that of Zoe's distance from the throne.

At the marriage-feast of Wladimir he was made a knight, and then a solemn tournament was appointed. Thiodolf and Philip kept without the lists as mere spectators, for neither of them wore the gilt spurs. But an imperial herald then solemnly commanded the two young chiefs to ride in, and knightly to strive with the knights for the golden girdle which the blooming Zoe held in her fair hand as the prize of the victor. The emperor's commands were obeyed; and the warriors of the tournament looked upon it as a high honor to receive in their ranks two so renowned heroes.

Thiodolf and Philip easily won the victory to themselves; for Wladimir, generally so skilled in warlike pursuits, knew not this manner and fashion of combating. When at length the two came together, Thiodolf let himself be thrown from his saddle; and Philip, with unspeakable delight, received the prize from Zoe's hand, and, according to the laws of the tournament, a kiss from her lovely lips. Isolde greeted her vanquished champion with a kindly smile, well understanding what noble courtesy had this time won the victory from him. Perchance even Zoe had divined the same; but that the great Thiodolf should have given up so much to his companion-in-arms, made her heart beat higher for Philip.

While the princely northern chief was thus laying the foundation of his friend's happiness, his own happiness yet remained veiled from him by a dark cloud; for that Sun, from whose Light all other light was reflected, arose not yet upon his spirit. Days came and went, and more and more did the faithful father Jonas instruct him, but in vain. True, that love and longing increased in the breast of the scholar, as did also the clearness with which he understood all the commandments of the Lord; but the insight into the nature of the Son of God and of His Incarnation was yet wanting; and both Jonas and Thiodolf had far too reverent thoughts of Him to venture on such incomplete foundation to raise the solemn edifice of a baptism for time and for eternity.

The pale Princess Theodora came forward to assist the holy priest Jonas in his work. The royal nun Eudocia—she it was

who had always been represented in Isolde's paintings, though the likeness to her sister misled Thiodolf—the royal nun Eudocia, herself invisible to every man, put into the heart and mouth of her beloved sister what she should say to lead the young chief to behold the light—in vain! It seemed as if his mind ever remained powerless and closed to this holiest and most essential point.

Tristan Giocondo, the while, was kept under the care of Isolde and also of Romanus; for he had determined not to leave the beautiful boy till he could lay him in the arms of his true parents; he often visited the child, teaching him many fair lays, and other knowledge beseeming his condition. Isolde also took him daily to Malgherita, who, with sorrowful longing, gazed on him from afar, hardly venturing even to draw near him with her looks, lest she should bring down the fulfilment of the curse. Even Pietro, to spare the mother's heart, denied himself the caresses of his child; whilst it was touching to see how the boy vainly stretched out his little hands to his parents, whom he could reach only with loving words.

The great baron, whose stern mind had been subdued by so many trials into the softness of a bright summer's evening after a day of storms, looked down at such moments with deep emotion, saying: "Patience, dear children. We are not yet quite purified, and God must hold us very dear as He so carefully and thoroughly purges us."

One evening, in the dusk, Thiodolf was returning from Father Jonas. His whole soul was troubled; and as his way led by the church of St. Sophia, and the solemn tones of the organ were pealing from the lighted building, hot tears rushed into his eyes. He sat down at the foot of a lofty cross of metal, drew his mantle over his head, and wept bitterly.

His tears relieved him; a soft, warm glow seemed to reach his heart, and, in the midst of his deep consuming sorrow, a blessed hope arose within him, and a feeling unknown till then.

Then some one pressed him gently and kindly to his bosom. He let fall the mantle from his head and looked up; Bertram stood before him. The evening sky was already looking down

upon them both with all its glittering stars. The sounds from St. Sophia yet poured forth their lofty melody.

“Why dost thou weep, beloved hero?” asked Bertram.

“Because I cannot find the white Christ,” answered Thiodolf.

“Patience, resignation, hope!” said Bertram; and again clasping the Væringier chief in his arms, he wept heartily with him.

Then the tones of the organ were hushed, and the voices of women without accompaniment raised a soft, heart-stirring hymn. It was again the song of the sea of Tiberias, and the King in the white garment. Thiodolf’s tears flowed more abundantly and more gently; he stretched out his hand towards the church and sighed, “O blessed Sophia, help me!”

“On whom dost thou call?” asked Bertram. “Dost thou know on whom thou callest?”

“On St. Sophia, to which this church, so unspeakably dear to me, is consecrated,” answered Thiodolf.

“There is no St. Sophia in the sense in which thou meanest it,” said Bertram earnestly and solemnly.

“In what other sense then?”

“Thou knowest what ‘Sophia’ means in the Greek tongue?”

“Wisdom.”

“Well, then, the eternal Wisdom, whom the Father, in His original blessedness, has looked upon and loved, before the creation of the world,—became man, and died on the cross for love of us,—He it is to whom this church belongs. And thus her name signifies our blessed Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

At these simple words, the scales fell from the eyes of Thiodolf’s soul. Joyfully he fell on his knees before the cross, folded his hands with ardent devotion, and only brought forth these broken words: “Light! light! it rises for me! O Thou holy Wisdom made man, let me praise Thee! Light!”

The nuns sang the while from St. Sophia’s church:

“Man, whene’er thine eye is wet
Thinking of eternal wo,
He is gently calling thee
From Tiberias’ tranquil sea,
Clothed in raiment white as snow,”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE old priest Jonas had before him a large open book, and earnestly read in it, although the hour was late. Just then some one knocked at the door of his cell, and, opening it himself, he saw with great amazement the young Væringer chief standing before him, together with his companion Bertram.

“Dear, reverend sir,” said Thiodolf, with tears of joy in his eyes, “here is one who desires to receive from you the sacrament of Holy Baptism.”

Jonas looked awhile at his guests in astonishment. At length he said, “Thiodolf, my dear son, how hast thou so suddenly attained to the knowledge of the holy mystery? For I can never believe of thee that thou wouldst present thyself at the table of the Lord only half converted by some passing ecstasy.”

“God forbid, dear father,” said Thiodolf; and he related all that had happened to him in the last hours.

The priest Jonas looked with wonder into Bertram’s eyes, and said, “You must be a priest? or, perchance, even a saint?”

“I am no priest,” answered Bertram, “I am no saint; but an honest, industrious man I may be; and to such our heavenly Father often grants a happy success. You must not so greatly wonder that my simple words should have brought the young warrior to a knowledge of our blessed Saviour. Your teaching and the Princess Theodora’s have long been silently working in his strong spirit. Only the last fructifying rain-drops were needed, and they were given by my words on the meaning of St. Sophia’s church,—by chance, in so far as anything can be by chance in such holy and all-important things.”

“No, thou art right,” said Jonas. “To speak here of chance is little less than a denial of God. When wilt thou be baptized, my dear son Thiodolf? The imperial family have designed for thee a very pompous baptism.”

“But I a very simple one,” answered the young northern hero. “I am athirst for the water of life; Bertram will be my sponsor. And He, who from the cross stretches forth His arms to us in ever-present love, has provided that water should everywhere be ready.”

The master bent his head to the scholar in joyful consent, and the holy rite was secretly and solemnly completed; the new Christian, according to his earnest prayer, retaining the glorious name of Thiodolf.

In the bright early morning of the next day, the three men stood before the chamber of the great baron; and when he came forth to them, Thiodolf solemnly asked the hand of Isolde, praying as a Christian that it might be granted him to lead the maiden to the altar. The old hero, with tears of joy, embraced his renowned son-in-law, and led him to Isolde; whose heavenly countenance, lighted up by humility and love to its full angelic beauty gave her lover a foretaste of the joys of paradise.

He knelt down, and extended his arms towards her; then she gave him her hand, saying with earnest gentleness, “Thou must kneel before God, not before His creature, thou newly baptized disciple of the Lord.” And she raised him.

On the next day the delighted emperor appointed the wedding-feast of the princely betrothed, which was to be preceded by the conferring of knighthood on Thiodolf and his friend Philip. The sound of the trumpet called all the troops to arms; and the bells of St. Sophia announced the glad festival to the citizens and their wives. The streets were crowded with people—there were no loud acclamations, but all bowed in deep humility before her whom they had been accustomed to revere in silence as the Secret Helper, and before the mighty chief, the deliverer of the land, the lion who had bent his powerful neck to the yoke of the Lamb who has borne the sins of the whole world. When the procession had entered the holy building, one of the chief lords of the empire placed himself at the altar with a golden sword in his hand; and, keeping the most precious till the last, called first on the young Philip to receive the honor of knighthood. At a sign from the emperor the young Zoe girded on his sword. Then the solemn word was spoken to Thiodolf; and as he approached the

altar, the emperor suddenly stepped forward, took the golden sword from the hand of the state-officer into his own, and said aloud, so that the whole assembly could hear it, "It befits an emperor's hand alone to confer knighthood on such a hero, and that hand gains thereby undying honor."

With what feelings Thiodolf knelt down to receive the sacred dignity—his blessed Saviour shining in his soul, the love of Isolde in his heart, and such wreaths of honor alighting on his brow—thou mayest thyself judge, dear reader; for if thou be right-minded, thou canst feel it!

When the ceremony was completed, the great baron drew near, fastened on the gilt spurs, and girded his son-in-law with the sword of his ancestor Huldibert. "Thou must not yet put away from thee thy good sword Throng-piercer," said he afterwards. "A hero such as thou can give work enough to two brave swords."

The priest Jonas, with holy joy, united Isolde and Thiodolf; and immediately afterwards the great baron took his grandson from the minstrel Romanus, who had till then carried him, and laid him, with his blessing, in the arms of Malgherita. Then father, mother, and child caressed each other with a heavenly delight.

As the procession was returning from the church to the imperial palace, there came suddenly a man from out of the crowd, dressed in strange, and bright, and gorgeous attire, who drew near to Thiodolf in his glory, and bent low, with his hands folded on his breast, saying, "Uncle Nefiolf and Aunt Gunhilda send greeting. When I set sail from Iceland, they were of joyful mind, and so also was the faithful wolf."

Thiodolf recognized Prince Achmet, whom he had sent into the north, and a flush of joy colored his cheeks at the recollection of home; but there was a slight hue of shame mixed with it, for the spectators smiled; and the emperor, who led the bridegroom, heard every word, and said with a kindly nod, "This must come from one of Thiodolf's mad deeds of yore. Come with me, good stranger-guest; you shall relate all fully to us in the palace."

And now, when Achmet began to relate the whole of the fear

ful events on the African shore, and then made known his journey to Iceland, acknowledging, with shame, that afterwards he had thought of escaping all more distant expeditions, and of taking Laura by force from the cloister, but had been repeatedly solemnly warned away by the repentant lady ; finally, declaring his world-famous name, and announcing that he craved to receive holy Baptism, to do penance in a religious order of knighthood ; —then what before had appeared but a sprig, placed jestingly in Thiodolf's laurel wreath, shot forth into a fresh, brightly blooming branch ; and Isolde whispered in his ear, " O my hero ! if thy glory grows thus brighter and brighter, how then shall Isolde yet venture to look up to thee ? "

The emperor bade the noble Icelfander ask for a free boon from him. Then he asked for the happiness of his brother-in-arms, Philip ; and with a gentle beating of her heart, Zoe extended her fair hand and plighted her troth to the young hero. Romanus sang to his lute :—

“ Now after many wanderings strange and sad,
True love hath met, and sorrow hath found rest,
The deepest wounds are heal'd by kisses sweet,
And children long estranged by parents blest.

Then, 'mid the wreath of myrtle and of laurel
One olive-leaf let now the minstrel twine ;
'Tis he, who like the gentle dove of yore,
Brought to your hearts a pledge of peace divine ”

CHAPTER XIV.

SOME happy months of re-union had passed away, when Isolde, though with her angelic gentleness undiminished, began at times to sink into deep thought, which seemed so to sever her from the outer world, that she often heard neither the questions nor the entreaties of her friends; only the appearance of Thiodolf ever broke the spell, so that he long remained in ignorance, till at length Malgherita anxiously informed him of it.

Isolde, questioned by him, answered with a sweet dreamy smile, "Be not uneasy, beloved; the good people speak well of thee."

"The good people!" repeated Thiodolf; "the elfin sprites from Iceland?"

"Yes; so it is," said Isolde. "But wilt thou allow me to be silent? I think it were better. For who would build their wishes and plans on what those childish visions of the night may tell us? But if thou biddest me speak, my noble lord, thou must truly hear everything."

Thiodolf closed her lips with a kiss, and asked no more.

Soon after this, Wladimir and Wlasta returned home to the land which they were henceforth to govern under the protection of the Greek emperor. Thiodolf and Isolde accompanied them part of the way. And now when the Bulgarian prince, together with his wife, had given the last farewell greeting, and their swift Tartar horses had borne them rapidly down a hill where a wood hid them from sight, Thiodolf turned the two white horses of the chariot wherein Isolde was seated, to take their homeward way; but suddenly tears streamed from the eyes of the fair wife, and she sighed: "Oh, happy are Wladimir and Wlasta, who returned to their beloved home!"

Thiodolf, amazed, looked at her.

"It must all be spoken out," said she, after a pause; "and I

feel now how greatly I erred in concealing from my hero any thought that lived in my heart. Harken ! for many past nights dainty little creatures hover around me in my dreams ; they sing wondrous songs in thy beautiful northern tongue, which is dearer to me than any language in the world—I learnt it from thee ;—and they draw aside a veil, as of clouds, from my eyes, so that the snowy island of Iceland becomes visible to me, with her fiery Hecla—a flaming ruby set in a pure crystal. At first I understood not rightly the words of the song, or I forgot them on awaking ; but, by degrees, more and more of them remained in my memory, and now I know well that they call us to Iceland, and promise me golden tablets with mystic images, which I shall find in the grass, if I can retain the verses of the riddle when I awake, and can solve them. All prophecies, say the elves, are now fulfilled, and they chant :

‘ When the two sisters dwell by the same hearth’

and again :

‘ When the two swords the same stout arm
Shall wield’

And then I see Malgherita and myself happily living by the same hearth in this our dwelling ;—and thou, when thou wieldest Throng-piercer in thy right hand, and the ancient blade of Huldibert in thy left,—O Thiodolf, the longing after thy home will consume my heart !”

The young hero looked up to heaven with a thankful glance ; then he tenderly embraced Isolde, saying, “ And thou didst conceal from me this wish, the burning wish of my own soul ?”

“ I saw thy glorious course as chief of the Væringers,” answered Isolde, “ and I bade all other feelings keep silence.”

“ Oh !” exclaimed Thiodolf, “ thou didst not fully know the northern heart. Didst thou deem that we come into foreign lands to sojourn in them ? Our hearth, the well-beloved hearth of our home, draws all our hearts with magnetic power ; and he who is not exiled, like the great Helmfrid, by an adverse destiny, returns, and lays down all the wreaths which he may have won on strange

seas, on foreign shores, upon the holy bosom of his dear fatherland!"

Isolde joyfully embraced her eager lover, and, like the steeds of the sun, their white horses flew before the shining chariot.

CONCLUSION.

EACH one had long before felt that it must at length come to this, and now without resistance they all submitted to the solemn parting. The emperor took leave of his young hero with a blessing; the eyes of Philip and Zoe glistened with eager gratitude; the pale princess Theodora laid her hands in prayer upon the heads of Thiodolf and Isolde.

The great baron also took his departure from Constantinople, and returned with Pietro and Malgherita to the fertile plains of Tuscany. He built up Castel-Franco anew, and the castle in protecting strength and splendor shone for long centuries far over sea and land. He saw the restored happiness of his children, he saw the noble Tristan Giocondo grow and flourish; for Fate seemed to have saved him from the flames by the minstrel's hands, and led him back to his parents by the most wonderful ways, in order to form a hero of him who should shine with a peculiar and unwonted brightness. Perchance his history may come into the mind of him who has written this tale, and if so, he will give it forth to you, dear reader, should you take pleasure therein.

Far north, like dazzling twin stars, Thiodolf and Isolde shone in their radiance. A new sun arose on the life of Nefiof and Gunhilda when the noble pair entered their hall, a new sun of joy and brightness over the whole island. But they brought also to their countrymen the brighter light of faith by their deeds and example, and soon all the strong and true-hearted Icelanders knelt before Him whom Thiodolf in the dawn of knowledge had called the white Christ, and to whom he now, as his eternal Saviour, clung as to the Giver of all good in this life and in that which is to come.

Bertram and Romanus, gaily traversing all lands, and bearing

greetings and tidings, drew yet closer the bands of love and joy from Tuscany to Iceland, and from Iceland to Tuscany; and each time when minstrel or merchant drew near, there was held a joyous festival, in which were lost all thoughts of separation and distance.





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