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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ULF VAN YERN, AND OTHER BALLADS ***

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**ULF VAN YERN
AND
OTHER BALLADS**

BY
GEORGE BORROW

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ULF VAN YERN

p. 5

It was youthful Ulf Van Yern
Goes before the King to stand:
"To avenge my father's death
Lend me warriors of thy band."

"Of my kemps I'll lend thee them
Who to follow thee consent;
Ask'st thou Vidrik Verlandson
Thou wilt further thy intent.

"I will lend thee of my men,
Thou shalt have the very flower;
Vidrik, and stark Diderik,
Many kemps have felt their power.

"They are heroes strong and bold
Who have battles often won;
Feared are they in every land
Where their names' renown has gone."

In walked he, the good Dane King,
Glittering like the morning star:
"Which of ye, my Danish swains,
Will attend my friend to war?"

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Stalked the King along the floor,
Bore a gold cup in his hand:
"Which of ye, my courtmen, will,
Follow Wolf with shield and brand?"

To their mouths their hats they held,
None to answer him made haste,
Save bold Vidrik Verlandson,
Of them all he made a jest.

It was Vidrik Verlandson
Of his comrades made a sport:
"Sure 'tis but to guzzle mead
We are gathered here at court."

Wrathful Diderik straight became,
Frantic at that word he grew;
Off he smote two warriors' heads,
At the King's foot them he threw.

Then spake Vidrik Verlandson,
His whole thought on honor lies:
"We'll dispatch our messenger
And not go in stealthy guise."

It was youthful Hammergray
Hurried from the city gate;
Every one on him that looked
Lost his voice and colour straight.

Hark away, young Hammergray,
Gold is glittering on thy breast;
Ne'er was found or hawk or hound
Could with Hammer's speed contest.

Pearls upon his bosom shone,
Folks thereat astounded gaze:
Fowl was none beneath the sun
Could with youthful Hammer race.

Swift into the King's high hill
Bounded youthful Hammergray:
He was nimble at the tongue,
And could speak in gallant way.

"King of Brattens Vendel, hail!
And the rest that fill your hall;
Ulf Van Yern to-morrow comes
To avenge his father's fall."

"Better had he be at home
Tending sheep beneath the height,
Better than a message send
That he thither comes to fight.

"Better had he crawl at home
Like a worm the rock beneath,
Than the war-like struggle dare
Where his father sank in death.

"He at home had better stay,
Crouch and shake the bush below;
One blow only stood his sire,
He'll not stand me half a blow."

"King of Brattens Vendel, hear,
Keep your tongue behind your tooth;
Quickly grows the young whelp up,
Full of threatening fangs his mouth."

"In the world no warrior wight
Lives for whom I need to care,
Save 'tis Vidrik Verlandson,
And I trow he'll not be there."

Answered then the Hammergray,
Answered to the Monarch's fright:
"It is Vidrik Verlandson
Will our army lead in fight."

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Rose a Brattens Vendel kemp,
And he shouted lustily:
"Well, full well, I Vidrik know,
Offspring of a blacksmith he.

"Once was I at Birtingsborg
As the kempions drank their fill,
There he played a play which lives
In my mind, and ever will.

"Fifteen kempes to death he smote,
And he deemed it but as game;
Nigh at hand I gazing stood,
Ashy pale my cheeks became."

"Listen now, young Hammergray,
Strongly I entreat of thee,
If of Vidrik aught thou know,
Not to keep it hid from me."

"Sick in bed if Vidrik lay,
Nor could sword nor buckler yield,
Many a Danish swain you'd find
Would await you in the field."

Loudly answered then the King,
Through his veins rushed courage warm:
"I'll to-morrow, if I live,
Meet ye in the battle's storm."

From beside the King's right hand
Rose a kemp, a stalwart one:
"What care we for such like foes?
Vidrik's but a blacksmith's son."

It was the young Hammergray,
At that word his wrath boiled o'er;
Straight he smote the kempion dead,
Dead he tumbled on the floor.

Said the Monarch with a cry,
While with rage his cheek grew white:
"Why hast thou my bravest kemp
Smit to death before my sight?"

Thereto answered Hammergray,
As the King he fiercely eyed:
"I could ne'er with patience hear
Verland's valiant son decried."

Straight away rushed Hammergray,
Soon he stood by Vidrik knight:
"Whet your spears, and sharp your swords,
For the King is bent on fight."

All the mirky night they rode
O'er the dusky heathery down,
Still a light like that of day
From their polished weapons shone.

Over Birting's moor they rode,
And through Birting's swamp in haste;
Full seven hundred were the kempes,
All in hard cuirasses cas'd.

Towards Birting on they rode,
Birting's city they rode through;
Then they formed them in a ring,
And made Vidrik chief anew.

On the down their flag they pitched,
Therein you a lion may spy;
Now must many an innocent man
Bid to life a long good-bye!

Long they fought with sword and bow,
Each essayed his best to do;
From their brows burst ruddy sweat,
From their bucklers fire out flew.

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It was then the Vendel King,
From his helm a glance he cast:
"Say, who leads that band to-day,
That my people fall so fast?"

Straight replied the little page,
To the King rode next of all:
"Sir, 'tis Vidrik Verlandson,
Sits upon his courser tall."

Answered one of the King's kemps,
Who had been in many fields:
"Yes, 'tis Vidrik Verlandson,
Mimmering ^[13] in his hand he wields."

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Thereto made the King reply,
As another glance he throws:
"Gainst the shield I ill shall fight
Which the tongs and hammer shows.

"Gainst the shield I ill shall fight
Which the tongs and hammer bears,
This day I am doomed to die,
For fierce Vidrik no one spares.

"Heathen wight, and Christian knight,
I would fight with glad and fain;
Only not with Verland's son,
For from him I scathe must gain."

Ha! Hurrah! the Vendel King
In his steed the rowels drove;
Desperate he at Vidrik went,
Desperate he to fell him strove.

Bravely done, thou Vendel King,
Fast and hard thy strokes are plied
E'en to his good saddle bow
Vidrik stoops his helm of pride.

p. 14

"I've from thee borne eighteen blows,
They are, Sir, nor more nor fewer,
For thy kingly honor now
But one blow from me endure."

"If thou eighteen blows hast borne
Be they fewer or be they more,
I'll the self-same number take,
Gift of love can break their power."

Forth a silken thread he drew
Tied it round his helm of gold:
"My heart's dear shall never hear
Blow of blacksmith laid me cold."

Vidrik spake to Mimmering:
"Show thou'rt yet for something good;
I can say for fifteen years
I more fiercely have not hew'd."

Grasped he then the hilt so hard
From his nails that blood outstarted,
On the Monarch's helm he hew'd,
To the navel him he parted.

p. 15

Shouted Vidrik Verlandson,
Standing on the verdant height:
"Be there one of all your host
Who has further wish to fight?"

Now the Brattens Vendel King
Lies out pouring blood like water:
Vengeance now has Ulf Van Yern,
Vengeance for his father's slaughter.

It was youthful Hammergray
Glanced around the bloody field:
"So like mice in their first sleep
Hushed the foemen lie, and still'd."

Gladly back with Ulf Van Yern
Rode the Dane King's chivalry;
For his sire avenged he thanked
Vidrik oft and fervently.

THE CHOSEN KNIGHT

p. 16

Sir Oluf rode forth over hill and lea
Full seven mile broad and seven mile wide,
But no one living discovered he
Who a joust with him dare ride.

He saw, whilst forward glancing,
A gallant knight advancing,
Black was his courser, his helm was lac'd,
He came with bounding haste.

Upon his spurs all gory
Twelve gilded birdies bore he;
Each time with the rowel he pricked his horse
The birdies sang with all their force.

Twelve gilt wheels on his bridle
He bore, nor were they idle;
Each time through them the breezes blew,
How quickly around the little wheels flew.

He carried before his breast
A long lance, placed in rest;
Far sharper than diamond was that lance,
It laid Sir Oluf in deadly trance.

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Aloft on his helm he show'd
A chaplet of red glare;
Three maidens in proof of their love bestow'd,
The youngest was so fair.

Sir Oluf enquired of the knight,
An he were come down from the realms of light:
"Art thou the Christ, for if thou be,
I'll willingly bend before thee the knee?"

"I am not the Christ of power,
Thou need'st not before me cower;
An unknown knight thou see'st in me,
Sent forth by three maids of high degree."

"If thou be a chosen knight
Whom maidens three have sent this way,
Then for love of those damsels bright,
Thou shalt joust with me to-day."

The first course they together rode
Of their coursers trial made they,
The second course they together rode
Their best manhood well display'd they.

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The third joust they together rode
Neither one the other humbled,
But the fourth joust they together rode
Dead to the green earth they tumbled.

Now on the wold the heroes lie,
With their blood the grass is red;
In the chamber high sit the maids and sigh,
But the youngest soon is dead.

SIR SWERKEL

p. 19

There's a dance in the hall of Sir Swerkel the Childe,
There dances fair Kirstine, her hair hanging wild.

There dance the good King and his nobles so gay,
Fair Kirstine before them she warbles a lay.

His hand to the maiden Sir Swerkel stretched free:
"Come hither and dance, little Kirstine, with me."

Her finger he pressed, and moved up to her near:
"Sweet Kirstine, I pray thee become my heart's dear."

Her finger he pressed, on her sandal trod he:
"Fair Kirstine, with pity my agonies see!"

p. 20

They danced to the left, and they danced to the right,
And her troth the fair damsel bestowed on the knight.

Upon him Sir Swerkel his red mantle throws,
And to the high hall to his mother he goes.

"Hail, hail as thou sittest here, dear mother mine!
I come from betrothing the little Kirstine."

"Our Lady forbid, and our Lady forbend,
Relations like ye to betroth should pretend.

"In wedlock united ye never must be,
For brother and sister, believe me, are ye."

"Now tell me, I pray thee, O dear mother mine!
What time thou didst bring forth the little Kirstine."

"The time that thou wast on thy journey to Rome,
I bore the sweet flowret that's now in full bloom.

p. 21

"Whilst thou to the sepulchre holy wast gone,
I bore the fair mirror thy love that hast won.

"In the court of the Queen she was reared up with care,
And scarlet and sable accustomed to wear."

"Now give me thy counsel, O dear mother mine,
How I may forget her, the little Kirstine?"

"Go chase thou the hart, and go chase thou the hind,
And thou wilt her image soon chase from thy mind.

"Go chase thou the hart, and go chase thou the roe,
And thou thy love-longing wilt quickly forego."

He chased the proud hart, and he chased the swift hind,
But he never could chase the fair maid from his mind.

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He chased the tall hart, and he chased the sleek roe,
But the longing of love from his mind would not go.

So the knight from the country was driven at last,
And into a cloister the maiden was cast.

No little bird shaped from the far land its flight
Than enquiry she made for her dear betrothed knight.

A bird ne'er so little across the sea stray'd
But he enquired after his dear betrothed maid.

FINN AND THE DAMSEL OR THE TRIAL OF WITS.

p. 23

"What's rifer than leaves?" Finn cried.
"Dew is more rife," the damsel replied.

"Hotter than fire?" Finn cried.
"The face of a kind-hearted man," she replied,

"When chance to his hut the stranger doth guide,
And unable he is for his guest to provide."

"Swifter than wind?" Finn cried.
"The vigour of woman," the damsel replied.

"Sweeter than honey?" Finn cried.
"The words of affection," the damsel replied.

"Ranker than bane?" Finn cried.
"A foeman's abuse," the damsel replied.

"More black than the crow?" Finn cried.
"Death is yet blacker," the damsel replied.

"More sharp than the sword?" Finn cried.
"Woman's sense at a pinch," the damsel replied.

"What's best of all gems?" Finn cried.
"A knife or a dirk," the damsel replied.

"Softer than down?" Finn cried.
"Love's palm on your cheek," the damsel replied.

"A ship for all cargoes?" Finn cried.
"The tongs of the smith," the damsel replied.

"Whiter than snow?" Finn cried.
"Truth is more white," the damsel replied.

"How many trees are there?" Finn cried.
"The green and the sere make two," she replied.

"What's reddest of red?" Finn cried.
"The flush of the freeman when praised," she replied.
"Or when praise to his merit is meanly denied."

"Than the radish more brittle?" Finn cried.
"The nature of woman," the damsel replied.

"What never grows old nor betied?"
"The friendship of man," the damsel replied.

"What does woman love best?" Finn cried.
"A fair or a dance," the damsel replied.

"What's best for your colour?" Finn cried.
"Cool air and good sleep," the damsel replied.

"How many steeds are there?" Finn cried,
"But two, a horse and a mare," she replied.

"What's best of all food?" Finn cried,
"Nought better than milk," the damsel replied.

"What adorns a man most?" Finn cried,
"High deeds, humble words," the damsel replied.

"The worst of all fare?" Finn cried.
"Strong drink, if it be too freely supplied,
Or the prate of a fool," the damsel replied.

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EPIGRAMS BY CAROLAN

p. 26

On Friars

Would'st thou on good terms with friars live,
Ever be humble and admiring;
All they ask of thee freely give,
And in return be nought requiring.

On a surly Butler, who had refused him admission to the cellar

O Dermot Flynn it grieveth me
Thou keepest not Hell's portal;
As long as thou should'st porter be,
Thou would'st admit no mortal.

Lines

How deadly the blow I received

p. 27

When of thee, O my darling, bereaved!
No more up the hill I shall bound,
No strength in my poor foot is found;
No joy o'er my visage shall break
'Till from out the cold earth I awake.
Of the corn like the very top grain,
Or the pine 'mongst the shrubs of the plain,
Or the moon 'mongst the starlets above,
Went thou amongst women, my love!

* * * * *

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Footnote:

[13] Vidrik's sword.

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