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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TALE OF BRYNILD, AND KING VALDEMAR AND HIS SISTER: TWO BALLADS ***

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THE TALE OF BRYNILD AND KING VALDEMAR AND HIS SISTER TWO BALLADS

BY
GEORGE BORROW

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THE TALE OF BRYNILD

p. 5

Sivard he a colt has got,
The swiftest 'neath the sun;
Proud Brynild from the Hill of Glass
In open day he won.

Unto her did of knights and swains
The very flower ride;
Not one of them the maid to win
Could climb the mountain's side.

The hill it was both steep and smooth;
Upon its lofty head
Her sire had set her, knight nor swain
He swore with her should wed.

Soon to the Danish monarch's court
A messenger repaired,

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To know if there was any one
To try the adventure dared.

'Twas talked about, and Sivard then
His purpose soon made known;
Said he: "I'll try upon my colt
To bring Brynilda down."

He rode away, the way was far,
The path was of the worst;
He saw the shining Glass Hill, where
The maid her durance curs'd.

And he away proud Brynild bore,
Nor deemed the adventure hard;
To bold Sir Nielus her he gave
To show him his regard.

Proud Brynild and proud Signelil
Those maids of beauteous mien,
Down to the river's side they went
Their silken robes to clean.

"Now do thou hear, thou proud Brynild,
What now I say to thee,
Where didst thou get the bright gold ring
I on thy finger see?"

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"How did I get the bright gold ring
Which on my hand you see?
That gave me Sivard Snareswayne,
When he betrothed me."

"And though young Sivard gave thee that
When he his love declar'd,
He gives thee to Sir Nielus now
In proof of his regard."

No sooner than did Brynild hear,
The haughty hearted may,
Than to the chamber high she went,
Where sick of rage she lay.

It was the proud Brynild there
Fell sick, and moaning lay;
And her the proud Sir Nielus then
Attended every day.

"Now hark to me, thou Brynild fair,
My mind is ill at ease;
Know'st thou of any medicine
Can cure thy sad disease?"

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"If there be aught this world within
Can make thee cease to moan,
That thou shalt have, e'en if it cost
All, all the gold I own."

"I know of nought within this world
Can do my sickness good,
Except of Sivard Snareswayne
It be the hated blood.

"And there is nothing in this world
Which can assuage my pain,
Except of Sivard Snareswayne
The head I do obtain."

"To draw of Sivard Snareswayne
The blood I have no might;
His neck is hard as burnished steel,
No sword thereon will bite."

"O hark, Sir Nielus, hark to me,
My well beloved lord,
Borrow of him his Adelring,
His famous trusty sword.

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"Tell him thou needest it so oft
When thou dost wage a fight,

But soon as 'tis within thy hand
Hew off his head outright."

It was the bold Sir Nielus then
His mantle puts he on;
To Sivard, his companion true,
To the high hall he's gone.

"Now hear, O Sivard Snareswayne,
Thy sword unto me lend,
For I unto the field of fight
Full soon my course must bend."

"My trusty faulchion Adelring
I'll freely lend to thee;
No man be sure shall thee o'ercome,
However strong he be.

"My trusty faulchion Adelring
To thee I'll freely yield,
But, oh! beware thee of the tears
Beneath the hilt conceal'd.

"Beware thee of those frightful tears,
They all are bloody red;
If down thy fingers they should run
Thou wert that moment dead."

Upstood the bold Sir Nielus then,
Drew out the sword amain;
One blow and off the head is hewn
Of Sivard Snareswayne.

Beneath his mantle then he takes
The head, distilling blood,
And hurrying to the chamber high
Before Brynilda stood.

"Behold the head, the bloody head,
Thou didst so crave to gain;
For thee I've done a felon deed
Which gives my heart such pain."

"O lay aside the bloody head,
It fills my heart with fright;
And come to me, my dearest lord,
Beneath the linen white."

"I crave thee, woman, not to think
I came for sport and play;
Thou wast the wicked cause that I
From honour went astray."

It was the bold Sir Nielus then
His faulchion he drew out;
It was the beauteous Brynild whom
He all to pieces smote.

"Now have I slain my comrade dear,
And eke my lovely may,
Yet still I am resolved in mind
A third, a third to slay."

So then against the hard stone floor
He placed the trusty glaive;
To his heart's root the point in went,
And him his death wound gave.

'Twere better that this maid had died
Within her mother's womb,
Than that these princely men through her
To such an end should come.

Now will I rede, each honest man
Well to deliberate ever;
Unequaled woman's cunning is,
Though guiles of men be clever.

She laughs when 'tis her wish to laugh,
And weeps when she will weep;

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Whene'er she wants thy heart to move
Fair words on thee she'll heap.

Be she sick, or be she well,
In woman ne'er confide;
In murder red, by woman led,
His hands Sir Nielus dyed.

KING VALDEMAR AND HIS SISTER

p. 13

See, see, with Queen Sophy sits Valdemar bold.
About little Kirsten much parlance they hold.

"Now hark, my good Lord! I have this to propose,
That thou shalt give Kirsten to Buris for spouse.

A sister thou hast, I a brave brother own,
A wedding we'll have ere this good year be flown."

"It never shall happen, as long as I live,
That I to a horse-thief my sister will give.

My sister's a princess so fair and so bright,
But Buris is liker a groom than a knight."

Then pale as a corpse grew Sophia to see;
"My noble lord, wherefore despisest thou me?"

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The Queen struck with fury her hand on the board:
"Be sure that I vengeance will have for that word."

King Valdemar now to the war-field should wend,
Behind stays Sir Buris the land to defend.

Forth, forth from the land the bold King his course bent,
So many a beautiful knight with him went.

Him followed so many a chivalrous band;
He disposed of his sister, the fair mirror's hand.

To a prince rich and fine and of valour approved,
He gave little Kirsten, his sister beloved.

With Buris Sophia sits over the board,
And much brooded she on King Valdemar's word.

"Sir Buris, my brother, list thou to my say:
Beguile the King's sister whilst he is away."

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Sir Buris he cast on his sister his eyes:
"O why my dear sister dost talk in this guise?"

To do such an act I will never consent,
To make her my wife is my wish and intent."

The Queen with her hand struck the table with force:
"Just, just as I bid thee direct thou thy course."

His mantle of azure Sir Buris puts on,
And unto the princess Sir Buris is gone.

With prayers late and early the maiden he tired,
But could not obtain from her what he desired.

"Sir Buris, why seekest thou me to betray?
To my brother for this thou must answer some day."

With ghastly white cheek did Sir Buris depart,
The maiden he loved from the depths of his heart.

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Sir Buris flung on him his scarlet array,
And unto Sophia with speed took his way:

"The princess so firm and determined I find,
No knight in this world can e'er conquer her mind."

"A pretty man, thou, to take love-work in hand,
If the powerful Runes thou dost not understand."

"To the paths of fidelity I will return,

No wish do I feel your Rune-magic to learn.

King Valdemar left his domain to my care,
Shall I in return his dear sister ensnare?"

"O I will for thee the Rune-characters trace,
And thou them shalt cast in convenient place."

"Sir Buris has cast the Rune-letters, alas,
On the bridge over which little Kirsten should pass.

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Little Kirsten with anguish was filled, and with care,
Must spite of herself to Sir Buris repair.

She knocked with her hand on the thick oaken door:
"Sir Buris, arise, let me into thy bower."

Upstood then Sir Buris, in scarlet array'd,
And straight he admitted the beautiful maid.

The whole night she lay in Sir Buris' embrace,
All to her own sorrow and daily distress.

Now on towards summer and autumn it drew,
So stout in the waist little Kirsten she grew.

Her true waiting maid little Kirsten address'd:
"To the chamber of stone now convey me in haste.

And there unto me do thou bring the mid-wife
But let not the Queen know thereof for thy life."

p. 18

To her little foot-swain little Kirsten did say:
"Fetch hither Sir Buris, withouten delay."

They met on the lofty hall's high balcony,
Together discoursed they so sorrowfully.

They gave then each other a tender caress,
And swooned to the earth from of grief the excess.

The year has revolved, and home now from the fray,
King Valdemar cometh triumphant and gay.

In, in through the portal King Valdemar strode,
Sophia received him in complaisant mode.

About and around him King Valdemar stared:
"Say! where is my sister, and how has she fared?"

Then sly 'neath her scarlet laughed Sophy the Queen:
"It is full three months now since thy sister I've seen."

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Sophia exclaim'd: "She is not to be taught,
My advice and monition she holdeth at naught."

"O why dost thou thus of my sister complain?
In honour she liv'd without ever a stain."

"The chamber of stone she has long made her home,
There she of a little child light has become."

Then the heart of the monarch was smitten with grief:
"To thy words, O Sophia, I yield no belief."

"The blessed Lord's truth and no lie have I told,
She invited me e'en her child-birth to behold."

To five of his good knights spake sternly the King:
"Depart, and my sister straight home to me bring."

p. 20

The knights rode away as King Valdemar said,
Much rather, much rather, would they have been dead.

They struck on the door 'neath their mantle of skin:
"Sweet princess Kirstina, arise, let us in."

To the chamber straight came the true serving lass:
"We crave thy leave into the chamber to pass."

"O sirs, ye may enter as free as the morn,
For nobody here any baby has borne."

Then in sorrowful mood good Sir Peter replied:
"God grant that thy words I may see verified."

"Arise, little Kirsten, thyself quick array,
For thou to thy brother this night must away.

"Array thyself quick, for in hurry we are,
Thy brother the King has returned from the war."

"Alack, I dare venture my gold coronet,
That I shall my death by this night-journey get.

"My daughter now take, and in linen enfold,
The face of her mother no more she'll behold.

"Assist ye my daughter to Christentie's breast,
I fear that her luck will not be of the best.

"Let the name that ye give her be proud Ingerlill,
My fortune intends for me nothing but ill."

Little Kirsten her faithful maid servant address'd:
"Now fetch to me hither, I pray, my gilt chest."

The chest she unlocked where lay stored all her gear,
And distributed that midst her servants so dear.

And most to her maid she thought fit to award,
For she was to be her child's teacher and guard.

The gold, the red gold, she has given her so free,
That tender and kind to her child she might be.

"Every lady can well imagine how fit
At present I am on my courser to sit.

"And each man, I am sure, can imagine how ill
A journey nocturnal agree with me will."

On the saddle they placed her, with hearts full of care,
Glittered like the spun gold her beautiful hair.

And when they arrived at the lofty castelle,
Down, down from her horse little Kirstenlill fell.

At the window the Queen stood and laughed with delight:
"Come hither and view of your sister the plight."

To lift her from the ground little Knud was not slow:
"In the name of Lord Jesus the whole truth avow."

They helped her the stairs of the hall to ascend:
"Now thee to the powerful Christ we commend."

In the doorway she crossed herself thrice on the breast:
"To Christ I commend me, the mighty and blest."

Then in through the door little Kirsten she wends,
And his white hand to her the bold monarch tends.

Then unto her brother she gives her fair hand:
"I joy much to see thee returned to the land."

Much favour and friendship to her he display'd
And that Queen Sophia so furious made.

The king to the brim filled a beaker with wine:
"I beg of thee drink to me, dear sister mine!"

"Now hear, little Kirsten, what I to thee say,
Thou shalt sing before me some pretty love-lay."

"I never in all my life learnt a love-lay,
But I'll sing another as well as I may."

"O thou with thy dancing, and eke with thy voice,
The hearts of my guests shalt this evening rejoice."

To sing then a song little Kirsten began,
To the tune danced so many a bold knightly man.

The King himself sprang 'mid the dancers' gay band,
And his sister he took by the lilly-fair hand.

He out and in with her eagerly danced,
But nothing amiss in her movements he glanced.

So often the King proved the voice of the maid,

And still to her gait more attention he paid.

And the King measured her by the girdle with care,
But still he of nothing amiss was aware.

"O Sophia, may thee shame and evil betide,
My dear little Kirsten thou'st foully belied."

"It is the Lord's truth that I've told, and no lie,
She has brought forth a daughter in secrecy."

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The Queen has yet worse little Kirsten distrest,
Her two lovely breasts she tore out from her vest.

And, craving her ruin, with hand resolute
She pressed out the milk before Valdemar's foot.

She pressed out the milk 'fore the King on the floor:
"My King and my husband, canst doubt any more?"

Then black as the earth grew King Valdemar's face,
And Kirstenlil swooned 'neath the load of disgrace.

"I intended to wed thee but full speedily,
Now thou shalt this evening with agony die.

"To a mighty lord I'd resolv'd thee to espouse,
Now this very night thy young life thou shalt lose.

"The death the most cruel and painful of all,
This night thou shalt suffer in this very hall."

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Little Kirsten she fell 'fore the King on her knee:
"Dear brother! I pray shew some pity to me."

"Thy kneeling, O Kirsten, will profit thee nought,
The basest and vilest of sins thou hast wrought.

'Tis folly to hope I shall mercy display,
Thou injured me hast in such infamous way.

I promised thy hand, for of this nought I knew,
To the son of a king 'cross the Haf's water blue."

He turned to the foot-swain who stood at his side:
"Fetch hither five horse-whips," King Valdemar cried.

Little Kirsten she fell down upon her bare knee:
"Now mighty Lord God! look with mercy on me."

"For four whips or five whips thou needest not send,
One will be quite enough to bring me to my end."

p. 27

The King in his hand the horse-scourges has ta'en,
His bosom with sorrow was filled, and with pain.

"Rise, rise Queen Sophia! and beg for me now,
For brought me to this have thy brother and thou."

"Little worthy were I of the title of Queen,
Were I to essay such a harlot to screen."

"I'll punish her so, though I love her full dear,
That all shall thereof with astonishment hear."

He lashed her so long, and he lashed her so sore,
That grovelling she lay in a stream of red gore.

She crept for defence 'neath Sophia's array,
With her foot she with vehemence spurned her away.

"O 'neath your red scarlet my poor body hide,
For the sake of the Christ who for us sinners died.

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I let fall so many a big briny tear,
God's mercy upon me! my fate has been drear.

O brother, O brother, your cruel hand stay,
For a moment, that soul-gifts distribute I may.

I give to thyself all my castles so grand,
Because that my life thou dost hold in thy hand.

To my daughter so dear my red gold I bequeath,
For she shall cause vengeance be ta'en for my death.

I give to Queen Sophy my silver-cased knife,
Because she it was who betrayed my young life.

O Buris! God give thee misery smart,
Enveloped with care the most black is my heart.

And now I've my testament made to my mind,
Dear brother, prove towards me forgiving and kind.

I to Christ give my soul, may he shew it good grace,
There's no one, I trow, cares for me in this place."

p. 29

She bade all good night that around her she spied.
And all for the damsel so piteously cried.

For her wept every dame, for her wept every maid,
All wept save Sophia, that vile wicked jade.

Then yielded the roselet her innocent sprite,
To God she commended it as it took flight.

O then was King Vald'mar with sorrow opprest,
And wildly his heart 'gan to knock in his breast.

"What a hard hearted wretch thou, O Sophy, must be,
That thou her distress without pity could see.

Shame upon thee, thou basest of all womankind,
Thou now hast obtained the great wish of thy mind.

Alack! well a day, my dear sister is dead;
Now where shall we bury the rose-flower red?"

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"In Riber street, Sir, let thy flower repose,
That o'er her may tread every day my horse-shoes."

"O never shalt thou have the joy, that thy horse
Shall tread o'er the ground which concealth her corse.

To Vestervig's cloister her corse shall be sent,
O'er her shall be placed a red brick monument."

He caused her be buried with grandeur and state,
All the days of his life the King sighed for her fate.

"Now I will retire to a chamber of gloom,
A chamber which fire nor light shall illumine.

There ne'er shall the blest sun on me cast its ray,
Till I've through repentance my sins wiped away."

To his page the King spake with so serious an air:
"Command thou Sir Buris to me to repair.

p. 31

"Hark, hark thou, Sir Knight, what I now say to thee,
How hast thou been found in thy duty to me?

I left thee a vine-yard for thee to watch o'er,
Therein hast thou done me an injury sore.

The loveliest vine in the vineyard that stood,
That hast thou destroyed to thy own little good."

Sir Buris he fell on his knee 'fore the King:
"My dear lord and master, O pardon this thing."

"No, thou too shalt suffer both torment and shame,
To a sharp shameful death through thy treachery she came."

"The cruellest death ye for me can invent,
To thou for the beautiful maid I'm content."

"Let the eyes of the horse-thief be torn from his head,
Because he the beautiful damsel betray'd."

p. 32

They've torn from the sockets Sir Buris's eyes,
In spite of Queen Sophy's entreaties and cries.

Sir Buris' right hand, and Sir Buris' left foot,
King Valdemar caused to be hewn off to boot.

From the Castle the knight they led forth on the green,
In mockery and scoff of Sophia the Queen.

"Behold now thy brother, that lord great and fine,

Who fain as a prince and a monarch would shine!"

The Dane-king a fetter has caused to be made,
On Buris in Vestervig cloister 'twas laid.

For eleven long years there was Sir Buris confin'd,
Each day to her grave went the knight lame and blind.

Each day that he lived of the King did he crave
That beside her when dead they might lay him in grave.

To the King he was forced to give land and domain,
Ere to rest in the cloister the boon he could gain.

He expired just as the twelfth year was begun—
The King never smiled Queen Sophia upon.

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MIRROR OF CINTRA

p. 34

Translated from the original Portuguese on a marble slab in the garden of Don Juan De Castro, at Cintra.

Tiny fields in charming order,
Which the jagged forests border;
Sheltered valleys downward wending,
'Midst the rocks to heaven ascending;
Silvery fountains turbid never,
Foliage dense which bloometh ever;
Ceaseless Zephyrs gently playing,
Satyrs, fawns by thousands straying;
Nymphs, with fair bewitching faces,
Form of Cintra's clime the graces.

1840.

THE HARP

p. 35

From Garonwy Owen

The harp to every one is dear
Who hateth vice, and all things evil;
Hail to its gentle voice so clear,
Its gentle voice affrights the Devil!

The Devil can not the Minstrel quell—
He by the Minstrel is confounded;
From Saul was cast the spirit fell,
When David's harp melodious sounded.

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