Title: Dry Fish and Wet: Tales from a Norwegian Seaport

Author: Anthon Bernhard Elias Nilsen
Translator: W. J. Alexander Worster

Release date: April 22, 2011 [EBook #35918]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Bryan Ness and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net (This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive/American Libraries.)

Transcriber's note

Obvious typographer's errors have been corrected, but the author's spelling has otherwise been retained. A list of word corrections can be found after the book.

DRY FISH AND WET

Translated from the Norwegian
by W. Worster, M.A.

DRY FISH AND WET

Tales from a Norwegian Seaport

BY

ELIAS KRÆMMER

GYLDENDAL
11 HANOVER SQUARE, LONDON, W. 1
COPENHAGEN · CHRISTIANIA
1922

CONTENTS

I
THE TOWN

[Pg 1]

The last census showed a population of 19,991 inhabitants, but if anyone asked "Holm at the Corner" how big the place was, he would say "between twenty and thirty thousand"—a figure he considered reasonable enough, counting the annual increment in the families he knew.

The town had its own traditions. Natives could speak with pride of the days, now long passed, when the firms of C. B. Taline and Veuve Erik Strom had great cargoes of coffee coming direct from Rio, while Danish vessels by the dozen lay alongside the warehouses discharging corn, and unwieldy Dutchmen took in baulks large enough to cut up into arm-chair sections—ay, there was proper timber in those days, not like the thin weedy sticks that come down the river now!

And the place had other memories, apart from trade and commerce. There was a whole gallery of clerics whose brilliant names cast a glow of distinction long after they themselves were dead and gone; old men remembered them, and the town could feel itself, as it were, related to episcopal [Pg 2] sees all over the country. Great trading houses of old standing came to ruin, fortunes were shattered, and crisis after crisis came and went, but every such period merely added a fresh chapter to the history of the town, making new stories for fathers to tell their sons. In course of time, a whole collection of such stories had grown up about these merchant princes, for trade was, after all, the chief interest of the place and so remained. When the old men got together, talk would invariably turn upon such matters as Nils Berg's grand speculations in the Crimean War, or the disastrous failure of Balle & Co.; while the younger ones, who were in the swim, enlisted further shareholders in their factories and ship-owning concerns. It was a town with plenty of grit in it, no lack of young stock to carry on the work.

True, there were times when it seemed to languish, to be dwindling away, when periods of crisis had swept away what appeared to be its chief support; but a breathing space was all that was needed, and soon the old spirit was awake once more, and life went on as bravely as before.

And so it went on for generation after generation, while the river flowed, broad and smooth as ever, down the valley, pouring its ice-water into the fjord each spring. Up the hillsides on either hand the roads turned up and curved among thicket and bush, and the higher one climbed the clearer showed the town below with its rows of houses and its churches.

Those who were born in the town and had spent their youth there, but whom fate had later moved to other parts of the country, made it a practice, when they came home, to climb the [Pg 3] hillside and look out over the town, as it lay there rich in memories. And the longer one had been away, the stronger they seemed to grow; for there is a strange power in such memories of a little, old town.

II
KNUT G. HOLM

[Pg 4]

Knut G. Holm had had his ups and downs; no one knew exactly how he stood. Failure and crisis had raged about him, and many a time public opinion had given him but a short while to keep above water himself, but he always managed to get through somehow, though there were times

when he had not credit for five shillings, when the commercial travellers gave his corner premises the stealthy go-by, in the confident belief that he would put his shutters up next day. But he never did. And at last it grew to a proverb, that Knut G. Holm was like a cat; you might throw him out of a top-floor window, but he would always land on his feet in the end!

In the little office behind the shop there was always a little gathering before dinner-time, between one and two, to hear Holm holding forth; for he was a man with an unusual gift of speech, and whatever might happen in the place, he was always the first to get hold of it.

Dealer Vagle was a fool to pay £1600 for that dairy farm—Knut Holm had no hesitation in saying as much; nor was he afraid to make public his opinion that Jorgensen the hatter was not such a fool as he looked in selling the property referred to. Everyone knew Holm's "gossip-shop," as the [Pg 5] office was generally called, but no one took offence at his extravagant talk, for all knew he meant no harm, but was really one of the kindliest of men.

He was always terribly busy, for he had a hand in everything, from the Silicate Products Company, of which he was a director, to the machine shops, of which he was chairman, and which paid a steady 20 per cent. per annum.

Knut Holm was no longer a youth, he was nearing fifty-seven; but to judge from his fair-haired, rotund figure as one met him in the street, always with his coat unbuttoned and his silk hat at a rakish angle, one would have set him down as ten years younger.

There was a peculiar briskness in his gait as he walked up the street in business hours, stopping to speak with every soul he met, and yet with such haste that the person last addressed would generally be left staring open-mouthed, without having had the chance of uttering a syllable.

Holm had long been thinking of getting in a lady clerk, a reliable person who could look after the office and keep the books up to date. Peder Clasen and Garner had both been with him for many years, but both felt more at home outside in the shop, and never troubled about bookkeeping more than strictly necessary, and hardly that, with the result that the books were generally half a year behind. Nothing had come of the lady-clerk idea, however, until one day Dr. Blok looked in and asked if Holm could find any use for a young lady he knew, and could safely recommend, a Miss Betty Rantzau. Her mother taught singing; had come to the town some six months before; [Pg 6] and the daughter was a willing and well-educated girl; it would be a good action to find her something to do. Clasen and Garner, not to speak of Holm himself, awaited her arrival with considerable interest. She was tall and slender, with a wealth of fair hair, and pretty teeth that showed when she smiled. She offered her hand with frank kindliness to Clasen as she came in. "So we are to work together," she said. "Very kind of you, I'm sure," stammered Clasen in confusion. "Mr. Holm is in the office; will you please to go in?"

Soon after, she was duly installed on the high stool in the office, with Holm himself sitting opposite, at the other side of the desk. She managed the old daybook with surprising ease; Holm glanced at her from time to time as she worked. He found it difficult to open conversation; it was queer to have a woman about the place like this, and at such close quarters. He felt himself obliged to be a little careful of his words,—a thing he was altogether unaccustomed to in the office.

Next day, the usual meeting in the "gossip-shop" was of unusually brief duration, for as Vindt, the stockbroker, declared when he came out, "Damme, but it's spoiled the whole thing, having a blessed woman in there listening to every word you say." Whereto Holm replied that it was "sort of comfortable to have a pleasant young face to look at, instead of a wrinkled old pumpkin like yours, Vindt!" Vindt growled, and took his departure hastily.

And it was not many days before Holm was chatting away easily to Betty, as she worked at her books, pretending to listen attentively the while to all his stories. [Pg 7]

"I'm not disturbing you, I hope?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Holm. It's very nice of you, I'm sure, to talk to me." She slipped down from her chair, and stroked the back of the big ledger with her slender white hands.

"I've walked a deuce of a way to-day"—he sat down on the sofa and wiped his forehead—"went right out to the cemetery, to lay a wreath on C. H. Pettersen and Company's grave. You've heard of C. Henrik Pettersen, I dare say? Grocery and provision stores over the square there; had it for years and years. First-rate man he was; my best friend."

"Good friends are very precious, Mr. Holm."

"Why, yes, they are, mostly. And C. H. Pettersen and Co. was an uncommon firm, I must say, both for quality and weight. I know there were some mischief-making folk used to say he sold margarine as dairy butter, but that was just pure malice, for the quality was so good I'll swear they couldn't tell the difference. And when they're both alike, what does it matter what you call them?"

"Has he been dead long?"

"Eleven years it is to-day since he handed in his final balance-sheet; I go out every year to lay a wreath on his grave, out of sheer gratitude and affection for his memory."

"You don't often meet with friendship like that."

"You're right there. Ah, one needs to have friends; when you haven't, it's only too easy to get low-spirited—especially now, since I've had this bilious trouble."

"Oh, that must be horrid."

"Horrid, yes, it's the very devil. Only fancy, a man like me, that used to eat and drink whatever I [Pg 8] pleased—as far as I could get it, that is—and now that I can get whatever I've a fancy to, I have to live on brown bread and weak tea. You'd think Providence might have managed things better than that, now, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, but I'm sure, if you're careful, you'll soon be all right again. And as long as you're properly looked after——"

"Ah, that's just the trouble, I must say. I've been used to something very different. I dare say you know I've been married twice——"

"Twice? Oh yes, I fancy I did hear about it."

"So you can understand it's a great deal to miss."

"Yes, indeed. Let me see; wasn't your first wife English?"

"Maggie—yes; oh, a charming creature, Miss Rantzau; I wish you could have seen her. The loveliest brown eyes, and hair as black as a raven's wing, and a complexion of milk and roses. And the sweetest disposition; good inside and out she was. Too good, I suppose, for this world as well as for me."

"Your first wife did not live very long?"

"We were only married a year: hardly enough to count, really. It's just a beautiful memory——"

"And how did you come to meet her, Mr. Holm?"

"It was in Birmingham—I was over there on business. I dare say you've noticed I put in an English word now and again in talking; it's all from the time of my first marriage."

"Yes, I have noticed you use foreign words now and again."

"It's all from those days with Maggie. Oh, you should have heard her say: 'I love you, darling.' [Pg 9] Lord save us, what a lovely creature she was! I declare I love England myself now, all for Maggie's sake."

"And your son, the engineer, she was his mother?"

"Yes, to be sure. Poor Maggie, it cost her life, that little bit of business."

"And your second wife?"

"She was a Widow Gronlund from Arendal. Ah, that was a queer story. There I was, you see, with little William, Maggie's boy, sorrowful and downcast as a wet umbrella. Of course you'd understand I'd no wish really to go and get married again all at once; I wrote to Skipper Gronlund of Arendal—he was a cousin of mine—and asked if he and his wife would take the boy and look after him. They were willing enough, the more by reason they'd only one child of their own Little Marie, a girl of the same age."

"So they took the boy?"

"Yes. He was there for four years, and then I began to feel the want of him and went up to Arendal to see him. But what do you think happened then? Just as I got to Arendal there came a wire saying Gronlund's ship had gone to the bottom, and that was the end of Gronlund!"

"And then you married her?"

"Exactly. What else could I do? Amalie, Mrs. Gronlund that is, wouldn't give up the boy, and I couldn't tear him away by force, could I? Very well, I said, what must be must, man is but dust, and so we got married."

"Mrs. Gronlund was not altogether young, I suppose?" [Pg 10]

"Nothing much to look at, more's the pity, but an excellent housekeeper and a good-hearted soul."

"And so it turned out happily after all?"

"Ay, that it did, but it didn't last long, worse luck. Amalie still kept longing for her Gronlund, and she got kidney disease and went off to join him—and there I was left once again all on my own, and this time with Maggie's boy and Amalie's girl."

"But you were glad to have the children, surely?"

"Well, yes, at times. But I can't help calling to mind the words of the prophet, Children are a blessing of the Lord, but a trial and a tribulation to man. It's true, it's true.... Well, William was going in for engineering, you see, and he was away in Germany at his studies—studying how to spend money, as far as I could see, with a crowd of mighty intelligent artist people he'd got in with. And what do you suppose he's doing now?"

Betty was working at her books again, writing away with all her might in the big ledger, while Holm went on with his story.

"He wants to be a painter—an artist, you'd say, and daubs away great slabs of picture stuff as big as this floor—but Lord save and help us, I wouldn't have the messy things hung up here. I told him he'd much better go into the shop and get an honest living in a decent fashion like his father before him—but no! Too common, if you please, too materialistic. And that's bad enough, but there's worse to it yet. Would you believe it, Miss Betty, he and those artist friends of his have turned Marie's head the same wry fashion, and make her believe she's cut out for an artistic [Pg 11] career herself—a born opera singer, they say; and now she carols away up there till people think there's a dentist in the house. Oh, it's the deuce of a mess, I do assure you!"

Betty looked up from her book. "You must have the gift of good humour, Mr. Holm."

"Well, I hope so, I'm sure. Shouldn't like to be one of your doleful sort."

"A kind and hard-working man you've always been, I'm sure. A perfect model of a man."

"Perfect model—me? Lord preserve us, I wouldn't be that for worlds. Can't imagine anything more uninteresting than the perfect model type. No—I've just tried all along to be an ordinary decent man, that finds life one of the best things going. And when things happened to turn particularly nasty—no money, no credit, and that sort of thing—why, I'd just say to myself, 'Come along, my lad, only get to grips with it, and you'll pull through all right.' And then I could always console myself with the thought that when things were looking black, they couldn't get much blacker, so they'd have to brighten up before long."

"Yes, it takes sorrows as well as joys to make a life."

"That's true. But we make them both for ourselves mostly. If you only knew what fun I've got out of life at times; have to hammer out a bit of something lively now and then, you know! Look at us now, for instance, just sitting here talking. Isn't that heaps better than sitting solemnly like two mummies on their blessed pyramids?" And he swung round on his high stool till the screw [Pg 12] creaked again.

"Yes, indeed, it's very nice, I'm sure." Betty began putting her books away, Holm walking up and down meanwhile with short, rapid steps. Upstairs, someone was singing to the piano.

"Nice sort of evening we're going to have, by the look of things. House full of blessed amateurs with fiddles and tambourines. Serve them right if they were packed off to a reformatory, the whole——"

"Oh, but surely, Mr. Holm, you needn't be so hard on them. Young people must have a little entertainment now and then—especially when they've a father who can afford it," she added a little wistfully.

"Afford it—h'm. As to that ... if they keep on the way they're going now, I'm not sure I shan't have to give them a bit of a lesson...." He crossed over to the desk, and, spreading out his elbows, looked quizzically at Betty.

"What do you think now—is Knut G. Holm too old to marry again?"

"Really, I'm sure I couldn't say," answered the girl, with a merry laugh. And, slipping past him, she took her jacket and hat.

"Good-night, Mr. Holm."

"Good-night, Miss Betty. I hope I haven't kept you too long with all my talk, but it's such a comfort to feel that there's one place in the house where there's somebody sensible to talk to."

He stood for some time looking after her.

"Not bad—not bad at all. Nice figure—trifle over slender in the upper works, perhaps; looks a bit worried at times; finds it hard to make ends meet, perhaps, poor thing. H'm. But she's a good [Pg 13] worker, and that's a fact. Yes, I think this arrangement was a good idea."

Garner came in with the cash-box. "We've shut up outside, Mr. Holm. Was there anything more you wanted this evening?"

"No—no thanks. H'm, I say, that row and goings on upstairs, can you hear it out in the shop?"

"About the same as in here. But it's really beautiful music, Mr. Holm. I slipped out into the passage upstairs a little while back, and they were singing a quartette, but Miss Marie was taking the bass, and going so hard I'm sure they could hear her right up at the fire station."

"I've no doubt they could, Garner. But I'll give them music of another sort, and then—we'll see!" He flung the cash-box into the safe with a clang, and Garner judged it best to disappear without delay.

Outside in the shop he confided to Clasen that the old man was in a roaring paddy about the music upstairs; and the pair of them fell to speculating as to what would happen when he came up.

"Oh, nothing," said Clasen. "Those youngsters they always manage to get round him in the end."

"Might get sick of the whole business and give up the shop—or make it over to us, what?" added Garner, "as his successors," and he waxed enthusiastic over the idea as they strolled along to Syversen's Hotel for a little extra in the way of supper.

Holm was walking up and down by himself in the office, while the music upstairs went on, until the globe on the safe rattled with the sound. He was in a thoroughly bad temper for once. "There! Just as everything was going nicely—and a balance-sheet worth framing! Ha-ha! and only the [Pg 14] other day that miserable worm of a bank manager, Hermansen, wouldn't take my paper for £400. Lord, but I'd like to show that fellow one day; make him understand he was a trifle out in his reckoning with the firm of Knut G. Holm. Do a neat little deal to the tune of a few thousand, cash down—something to make him scratch his silly pate. I can just imagine him saying to himself: 'Remarkable man that Knut Holm. Never really had much faith in him before, but now....' Yes, that's what he said a few years back, I remember; hadn't much faith in the business. Well, I must say, things *were* looking pretty bad at that time. But I'd always reckoned on William's coming into the business; new style, Holm and Son. And now there's an end of all that. No, it doesn't pay to go building castles in the air; it's just card houses that come tumbling down with a crash. Here have I been toiling and moiling all these years, morning till night, building up the business step by step to what it is now. Had to knuckle to that swine of a Hermansen ugh—ugrh—isch! Lying awake at night trying to work out some way of getting over to-morrow, with the bills falling due—and now there's that pack of wastrels sitting up there. 'Poor old man'—that's their style—'quite a decent old chap in many ways, no doubt, but no idea of culture, no sense of lofty ideals; spent his life standing behind a counter and that's about all he's fit for.' Oh, I know the tune when they get on that topic! I've marked it often enough when I'm with them and their precious friends. They'll eat and drink at my expense, and then slap me on the shoulder in their superior way, thinking all [Pg 15] the time I'm just an old drudge of a cab horse, and lucky to have the chance of encouraging real Art! Oh, I'll talk to them! It'll be a real treat to give them a proper lesson for once. They shall have it this evening. So on, old boy!"

When Holm walked into the big drawing-room upstairs he was greeted with acclamation. "Hurrah for Mæcenas! hurrah for the patron of Art! Hurrah!"

"Here, Frantz, you're a poet; get up and make a speech in honour of my noble sire."

Frantz Pettersen, a podgy little man with a big fair moustache, lifted his glass.

"Friends and brothers in Art, in the eternal realm of beauty! the halls wherein we live and move are bright and lofty, it is true, and our outlook is wide, unbounded. But let us not therefore forget the simple home of our youthful days, though it be never as poor and dry."

"Dry—what do you mean? It's not dry here, I hope?"

"My mistake. Dark, I should have said. Poor and dark.... Well, my friend, this noble fatherly soul, who a moment ago entered upon us like a vision from another world—a visitor from the lower regions, so to speak (Hear!)—him we acclaim, by all the gods of ancient myth, by the deities of the upper and the nether world—steady, boys—not to speak of this. And you, my fortunate young friend, whose lot it is to claim this exalted soul by the worthy name of father, rejoice with me at his presence among us in this hour. Do not your hearts beat high with thankfulness to the providence that has spared him to you so long? What says the poet (now what does he say, I [Pg 16] wonder? Let me see). 'My father was a——' something or other. Anyhow, never mind. To come to the point, we, er—raise our glasses now in honour of this revered paterfamilias whose toil and thingummy in this materialistic world have crowned the work of his accomplished children. *Skaal!*"

The speech was received with general acclamation.

Holm was taken by surprise, and hardly knew what to say. He could hardly open the campaign at such a moment with a sermon; mechanically he took the glass offered him. But hardly had he touched it with his lips than he asked in astonishment:

"When—where on earth did you get hold of that Madeira? Let me look at the bottle. I thought as much. Tar and feather me, if they haven't gone and snaffled my '52 Madeira! Six bottles that I'd been keeping for my jubilee in the business—all gone, I suppose. Nice children, I must say!"

He sat down in an arm-chair, fanning himself with a handkerchief.

"These golden drops from the cellars of our revered friend and patron——" began Frantz sententiously.

"Oh, stop that nonsense, do," growled Holm. And, snatching up a bottle of the old Madeira, he took it into the dining-room and hid it behind the sofa.

"Dearest, darling papa, you're not going to be bad-tempered now, are you?" whispered Marie, throwing her arms around his neck.

"I'm not bad-tempered—I'm angry."

"Oh, but you mustn't. Why, what is there to be angry about?"

Holm was dumbfounded. Nothing to be angry about indeed. He ought perhaps to say thank you [Pg 17] to these young rascals for allowing him to stay up with them?

"Shall I sing to you, papa?"

"Sing! no, thank you. I'd rather not."

"But what's the matter? What's it all about?"

"What's the matter—good heavens, why, my '52 Madeira, isn't that enough?"

"Oh, is that all? I'm sure it couldn't have been put to better use. You ought to have heard Frantz Pettersen making up things on the spur of the moment; it was simply lovely."

She had clambered up on his knee, with her arms round his neck; the others were still in the drawing-room.

"Lovely, was it, little one?" said Holm in a somewhat gentler voice.

"Yes, papa—oh, I don't know when I've enjoyed myself so much as this evening. And only fancy, Hilmar Strom, the composer—there, you can see, the tall thin man in glasses—he said I had a beautiful voice—beautiful!"

"Don't you believe it, my child."

"What—when a great artist like that says so? Oh, I was so happy—and now you come and...." She stood up and put her handkerchief to her eyes. Just then William came in.

"Hullo, what's the matter? What are you crying for?"

"Papa—papa says I'm not to believe what Hilmar Strom said—that I'd a beautiful voice. Ugh—it's always like that at home—it's *miserable*." She leaned over in a corner of the sofa, hiding her face [Pg 18] in her hands.

"Yes, you're right. Oh, we shall have pleasant memories of home to go out into the world with." And William stalked off in dudgeon.

Holm sat there like a criminal, at a loss what to make of it all. Oh, these young folk! They always seemed to manage to turn the tables on him somehow. He couldn't even get properly angry now.

And Marie—he was always helpless where she was concerned. He was sorry now he had not brought her up differently. But he had never said an unkind word to her—how could he, to a sweet little thing like that? Only last year she had nursed him herself for three weeks, when he was at death's door with inflammation of the lungs; that girl, that girl! He went over to the sofa and put his arms round her.

"There, there, little one, it's not so bad as all that."

"Hu—hu—hu—I didn't know—I didn't know about the old Madeira. It was me—hu—hu—that brought it up."

"Well, well, never mind about the Madeira, child. We can get some more; only don't cry now."

She turned towards him.

"Then you're not angry with me any more, papa?" "No, no, child. There—now go in and enjoy yourself again."

"Oh, but it's so horrid, papa—I'm sure the others must have noticed us."

Just then William came in and reported that the scene had made a painful impression on the guests; Strom, the composer, and Berg, the sculptor, were for going off at once, and were only [Pg 19] with difficulty persuaded to stay.

Holm did not know what to say to this; the transition from accuser to accused was too sudden.

"Couldn't you make us some punch, father; it would sort of set things right again if you were to come marching in yourself with a big bowl of punch."

"Punch? H'm—well—I could, of course, but then ..."

"Oh yes, that lovely punch, papa, you know, with champagne and hock and curaçao in—and all the rest of it."

"Well, I suppose I must. Now that I have once got into all this—this artist business, why ..." And off he went for the key of the cellar.

No sooner was he out of the room than William burst out laughing.

"Oh, Marie, you are the most irresistible little devil that ever lived." And he waltzed her round and round.

"Well, it wanted some doing to-day, William, I can tell you. I was half afraid I shouldn't manage it after all. As it was, I had to cry before he'd come round."

"First-rate. Woman's tears are the finest weapon ever invented—and punch on top of all—bravo! Come along, we must go and prepare the rest of the band for what's coming."

Out in the kitchen, Holm was busy over a punch bowl, solemnly stirring the brew and dropping in

slices of lemon one by one.

"I am an old fool, I know, to let them get round me as they do. H'm. And the longer I leave it, the worse it will be. We shall have to come to a proper understanding some time; it can't go on like this...." [Pg 20]

"Papa, are you nearly ready?"

"Coming, coming, dear, in a minute. Open the door, there's a good girl."

The entry of the host with a bowl of punch was the signal for a general demonstration of delight. Frantz Pettersen promptly sat down at the piano and started off, the rest of the party accompanying with anything they could lay hands on. One had a pair of fire tongs, one beat a brass tray, one rang a couple of glasses against each other, and so on. The words were something like this:

"Our host he is a lasting joy,
A perfect Pa for girl and boy,
A perfect Pa, hurray, hurrah,
Hurrah, hurrip, hurroo!

He stands with head so meekly bowed,
Withal a man of whom we're proud,
We're proud of you, hurrah, hurroo,
Hurrah, hurrip, hurray!

All honour to the grocery trade
Whereby his fortune it was made,
And a nice one too, hurrah, hurroo,
Hurrah, hurrip, hurray!

It must have been a decent pile
For his cellar's stocked in splendid style,
Put it away, hurrah, hurray,
Hurrah, hurrip, hurroo! [Pg 21]

Though somebody must have made, we fear, a
Sad mistake with that Madeira,
Maderiah, hurray, hurrah,
Hurrah, hurrip, hurroo!

But now he casts all care away
And gladly joins our circle gay.
Our circle gay, hurrah, hurray,
Hurrah, hurrip, hurroo!

The flowing bowl he brings us here,
So drink his health with a hearty cheer,
Hip, hip, hurrah, hurrip,
Hurrah, hurrip, hurra-a-ay!"

Holm did not know whether to laugh or cry at this exhibition, but chose the former; after all, it might be worth while to see how far they would go. He made speech after speech, and the company shouted in delight. Graarud, the literary critic of the *People's Guardian*, declared that Knut Holm was a credit to the merchant citizens of his country, and as fine a specimen of the type as was to be found.

Listad, another literary man, who edited a paper himself, was making love to Marie, but with little apparent success. He was a cadaverous-looking personage, but an idealist, and earnest in the cause of universal peace.

The speeches grew more and more exalted in tone as the evening went on. Pettersen invited the company to drink to the "coming dawn of Art in the land—a dawn that would soon appear when once the daughter of the house raised her melodious voice to ring o'er hill and dale." This was too much for Holm; he slipped into the hall and, putting on an overcoat, went out to get some fresh air. [Pg 22]

It was a fine, starlight, frosty night, the river flowed broad and smooth and dark between the piers, the gas lamps on either side shedding long streaks of light across the silent water.

He swung round the corner, but—heavens, who was that sitting so quietly on the steps in front of the shop? He went up, and found a twelve-year-old boy leaning against the wall.

"Why, little man, what's the matter? What are you sitting out here for in the cold?"

The lad rose hurriedly to his feet and made as if to run away.

"No, here, wait a bit, son; there's nothing to be afraid of." Holm took the boy's hand, and looked into a pale childish face with deep dark eyes, and framed in a tangle of fair hair.

"I was only listening," he sobbed.... "The music upstairs there...."

"You're fond of music, then?"

"Yes; I always go out in the evening, when nobody can see, and sit outside where I know there's somebody that plays. And Holm's up there, they've got the loveliest piano."

"Would you like to learn to play yourself?"

The boy looked up at him in astonishment.

"Me?"

"Yes, you. If you're so fond of music, wouldn't you like to learn to play?"

"I've got to help mother at home, because father's dead. And when I'm big enough I'm going to be a sailor. Please, I must go home now."

"Mother getting anxious about you, eh?" [Pg 23]

"No, she knows where I go of an evening; she doesn't mind."

"Well, what's your name, anyhow?"

"Hans Martinsen."

"Here you are, then, Hans, here's two shillings for you."

"Oh, er—that for me! I could go to heaps of concerts.... Thank you ever so much."

He clasped the outstretched hand in both his little fists, and looked up with beaming eyes.

"And now look here, little Hans. At eleven o'clock to-morrow morning you come round and ask for me. Here in the shop."

"But, are you—are you Mr. Holm, then?" He loosed the hand.

"Well, and what then? That's nothing to be afraid of, is it, little Hans? But now, listen to me. I want you to come round here to-morrow morning, as I said. And perhaps then we'll have some real nice music for you. And you can bring your mother too if you like."

"Music—to-morrow—oh, that will be lovely. And won't mother be pleased!"

"And now run along home, like a good boy, and get warm. You've been sitting here in the cold too long already. Good-night."

"Good-night, good-night!"

Holm watched the little figure hurrying with swift little legs across the bridge, till it disappeared into the dark on the farther side.

He stood for some time deep in thought. The dawn of Art—what was it Pettersen had said? What if he, Holm, the despised materialist, were to be the first to discover the dawn here! It was a [Pg 24] strange coincidence, anyway. "And such strange, deep eyes the little fellow had; it went to my heart when his little hands took hold of mine.... Ay, little lad, you're one of God's flowers, I can see. And you shan't be left to perish of cold in this world as long as my name's Knut Holm."

[Pg 25]

III
BRAMSEN

On the morning after the party, Holm sent down for Paal Abrahamsen or "Bramsen" as he was generally called. Holm and Bramsen had known each other from childhood; they had gone to the same poor school, and had grown up together. After their confirmation, Bramsen had gone to sea, while Holm had got a place in a shop, and commenced his mercantile career. But he never forgot his old friend, and when in course of time he had established a business of his own, he made Bramsen his warehouseman and clerk on the quay, where he now held a position of trust as Holm's right-hand man. He was a short, bandy-legged man, with a humorous face set in a frame of shaggy whiskers, and a remarkably mobile play of feature. Agile as a cat, he could walk on his hands as easily as others on their feet, and, despite his fifty-five years, he turned out regularly on Contrition Day to compete with the boys for prizes in the park; and he was a hard man to beat!

"Paal he can never be serious," complained Andrine, his wife, who was something of a melancholy character herself, and constantly endeavouring to drag him along to various meetings and assemblies which Paal as regularly evaded on some pretext or other.

Holm's relations with his old comrade and subordinate were of a curious character. Down at the [Pg 26] quay, when they were alone, they addressed each other in familiar terms, as equals; but in public, Bramsen was always the respectful employee, observing all formalities towards his

master.

When the message came down from the office that Mr. Holm would be coming down to the waterside at 7.30 in the morning to see him, Bramsen turned thoughtful.

They had held a similar conference once, some years before, when the firm of Knut G. Holm looked like going to ruin—Heaven send it was not something of the same sort now!

Holm looked irritable and out of sorts. "Bramsen," he said, "I'm sick and tired of the whole blessed business."

Bramsen scratched his chin meditatively, and laid his head on one side. "H'm," he observed after a pause. "More trouble with that there guinea-pig up at the bank, fussing about bills and that sort?"

"No, no, nothing to do with that. We're all right as far as money goes."

"All right, eh? But you're put out about something, that's plain to see. Liver out of order, perhaps?"

"Oh no!"

"Why, then, there's nothing else that I can see."

"It's those wretched youngsters of mine."

"Ho, is that all?"

"All! As if it wasn't enough! I tell you they're going stark mad, the pair of them."

"Seems to me they've been that way a long time now."

"Oh, it's all very well to talk like that. But really, it's getting beyond all bearing. William's taken it into his head to go and be a painter." [Pg 27]

"Well, and not a bad thing, either, as long as he does the work decently, with plenty of driers and not too much oil in the mixing. Look at Erlandsen up the river, he's made a good thing out of it."

"Oh, not that sort of painting. It's an artist, I mean. Painting pictures and things."

"Pictures!" Bramsen looked dumbfounded. "Painting pictures? Well, blister me if I ever heard the like. Wait a bit, though—there was Olsen, the verger; he'd a boy, I remember, a slip of a fellow with gold spectacles and consumption, he used to mess about with that sort of thing. But he never made a living out of it—didn't live long, anyway."

"But that's not the worst of it, Bramsen. There's Marie—she wants to be a singer."

Bramsen almost fell off the sugar-box on which he was seated.

"Singer—what! Singing for money, d'you mean? Going round with a hat?"

"Something very much like it, anyway—only it'll be my money that goes into the hat. What are we to do about it, eh?"

"H'm ... Couldn't you pack the boy off to sea? And the young lady—send her to a school to do needlework and such like?"

"Oh, what's the good of talking like that? No, my dear man, young people nowadays don't let themselves be sent anywhere that way. There's the pair of them, they simply laugh at us."

Holm walked back to the office deep in thought. On his return, he found Hans Martinsen, and Berg, the organist, awaiting him. [Pg 28]

Bramsen remained seated on his sugar-box and murmured to himself: "Well, it's a nice apple-pie for Knut Holm, that it is. Lord, but they children can be the very devil."

A little later, Garner came down to the quay, and found Bramsen still meditating on his box.

"What's wrong with the old man to-day, Bramsen? He looks as if he was going in for the deaf-and-dumb school; there's no getting a word out of him."

Bramsen sat for quite a while without answering. Then at last he said solemnly:

"It's my humble opinion, and that's none so humble after all, that there's a deal of what you might call contrapasts in this here world."

"Meaning to say?"

"It's plain enough. Folk that's got a retipation, they does all they can to lose it, and they that hasn't, why—there's no understanding them till they've got one."

Garner was still in the dark as to whither all this wisdom tended, and began absently slitting up a coffee-sack.

"Look you, Garner," Bramsen went on. "It's this way with the women: they've each their station here in life, as by the Lord appointed. Some gets married, and some goes school-teaching, or out

in service, and such-like—and all that sort, they stick to their retipation; but the woman that goes about singing for money in a hat, her retipation's like a broken window—it's out and gone to bits and done with."

Garner laughed and looked inquiringly at the other.

"*Now*, do you understand, Garner, what's the trouble with Holm?" [Pg 29]

"Oh, so that's what you're getting at, is it? Miss Holm wants to go on the stage."

"Singing, my boy; singing for money, and if so be that was to happen to any daughter of mine, I'd give her a dose of something to make her lose her voice—ay, if it was rat poison, I would."

It was a regular thing for Garner and Bramsen to have a comfortable chat down at the waterside, when the old sailor would generally relate some of his experiences at sea. These yarns especially delighted Garner, who came of a peasant stock himself, and knew nothing of the sea or foreign parts until he came to the town. He tried now to open up the subject again.

"Ever been in the Arctic, Bramsen?"

"Have I? Why, I should think so. I was up that way in '76, on a whaling trip with Svend Foya."

It was a habit of Bramsen's at the beginning of a story to make some attempt at a literary style, but he invariably dropped it as he went on.

"Dangerous business, isn't it?"

"Why, that's as you take it or as you make it. If one of the brutes gets your boat with a flick of his tail, there's an end of you, of course. I remember once we were after a big fellow; had a shot at him and got in just aft of the spout-holes. And then, take my word for it, he led us a dance. Off he went, full-speed ahead, and us full speed astern, but blister me if he didn't win the tug-of-war and sail off with us at nineteen knots, till we were cutting along like a torpedo boat. He wasn't winded, ye see, for his blowpipe was intact, and his gear below-decks sound and ship-shape. But [Pg 30] at last we got him fairly run down, and settled him with a straight one through the heart."

"A whale's heart must be pretty big?"

"Why, yes, he's what you might call a large-hearted beast. About the size of a middling chest o' drawers or a chiffonier."

"Rough on a whale, then, if he got heart disease," laughed Garner.

"Why, as to that, I suppose it would be in proportion, as you might say. But he's built pretty well to scale in the other parts as well, with his main arteries about as big round as a chimney."

"I wonder you didn't go up with Nansen to the Pole."

"And what for, I'd like to know? Messing about among a lot of nasty Eskimos; no, thankye, I'd a better use for my time." And Bramsen went on again with his whaling yarns for a spell, until Garner found it was time to get back to the shop.

Outside the store shed sat a row of urchins fishing from the edge of the quay. Bramsen was a popular character among the waterside boys; he would chat and fish with them at off-times, or help them in the manufacture of a patent "knock-out" bait, from a recipe of his own, the chief ingredients being flour and spirits. There was always a shout of delight when the small fish appeared at the surface, belly upwards. But to-day the knock-out drops appeared to fail of their effect, whether because the fish had grown used to French brandy, or for some other reason. Bramsen soon left the boys to their own devices, and went back into the shed. Here, to his astonishment, he found Amanda, his daughter and only child, weeping in a corner. [Pg 31]

Amanda was about fifteen, a lanky slip of a girl, with her hair in a thick plait down her back, twinkling dark brown eyes, and a bright, pleasant face.

"Saints and sea-serpents—you here, child? What's amiss now?"

"Mother—mother wants us to go to meeting this evening, and you promised we should go to the theatre and see *Monkey Tricks*, and they say it's the funniest piece."

Bramsen grew suddenly thoughtful. What if the child were to go getting ideas into her head, like Miss Holm, and want to go about singing with a hat—h'm, perhaps after all it might be as well to take her to the meeting with Andrine.

But the mere suggestion sent Amanda off into a fresh burst of tears.

"There, there, child, I'll take you to the theatre, then, but on one condition."

Amanda looked up expectantly. "Yes?"

"You're never to think of singing for money yourself, or going on the stage, or anything like that. You understand?"

The girl had no idea of what was in his mind, and answered mechanically, "No, father—and you'll take me to see *Monkey Tricks* after all?"

"All right! but don't let your mother know, that's all."

Amanda was out of the door like an arrow, and hurried home at full speed. That evening she and her father sat up in the gallery, thoroughly enjoying themselves. Bramsen, it must be confessed, had taken the title literally, and waited expectantly all through the piece for the monkey to [Pg 32] appear, and was disappointed in consequence, but seeing Amanda so delighted with the play as it was, he said nothing about it. Had he been alone he would have demanded his money back; after all, it was rank swindling to advertise a piece as Monkey Tricks, when there wasn't a monkey.

Meanwhile, Andrine had gone to the meeting, and waited patiently for the others to appear—they had promised to come on after. Here, however, she was disappointed, as usual.

When the backsliders came home, they found her deploring the vanity of this world, the imperfections of our mortal life, and the weakness of human clay against the powers of evil.

Bramsen and Amanda let her go on, as they always did, exchanging glances the while; occasionally, when her back was turned, Bramsen would make the most ludicrous faces, until Amanda had to go out into the kitchen and laugh.

Bramsen was fond of his wife; she was indeed so good-hearted and unselfish that no one could help it; while Amanda, for her part, respected her mother as the only one who could keep her in order. And indeed it was needed, "with a father that never so much as thought of punishing the child."

Bramsen himself had never been thrashed in his life, except by his comrades as a boy, and had always conscientiously paid back in full. He had had no experience of the chastening rod, and could not conceive that anything of the sort was needed for Amanda. Consequently, the relation between father and daughter was of the nature of an alliance as between friends, and as the [Pg 33] years went on, the pair of them were constantly combining forces to outwit Andrine.

Bramsen had no idea of the value of money, or its proper use and application, wherefore Andrine had, in course of time, taken over charge of the family finances, and kept the savings-bank book, —a treasure which Bramsen himself was allowed to view on rare occasions, and then only from the outside, its contents being quite literally a closed book to him. Amanda and he would often put their heads together and fall to guessing how much there might be in the book, "taking it roughly like," but the riddle remained unsolved.

Every month Bramsen brought home his pay and delivered it dutifully into Andrine's hands; he made no mention, however, of the ten-shilling rise that had been given him, but spent the money on little extras and outings for himself and Amanda, whom he found it hard to refuse at any time.

A month before, it had been her great wish to have an album "to write poetry in"; all the other girls in her class had one, and she simply couldn't be the only one without. Bramsen could not understand what pleasure there was to be got out of such an article; much better to get a song book with printed words and have done with it. But Amanda scorned the suggestion, and the album was duly bought. She had got two entries in it already, one from Verger Klemmeken of Strandvik, an old friend of her father's, who wrote in big straggling letters:

"Whene'er these humble lines you see,
I pray that you'll remember me."

[Pg 34]

and one from Miss Tobiesen, an old lady at the infirmary, who had been engaged seven times, and therefore judged it appropriate to quote:

"'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all."

Amanda then insisted that her father should contribute something, but Bramsen declared in the first place that the album was much too fine a thing for his clumsy fist, and furthermore, that he couldn't hit on anything to write. Amanda, however, gave him no peace till he consented, and at last, after much effort, the worthy man achieved the following gem:

"I, Amanda's only father,
Love her very much but rather
Fear she causes lots of bother
To her wise and loving mother."

This elegant composition was unfortunately not appreciated by Amanda, who, to tell the truth, was highly displeased. Fancy writing such a thing in her book—why, the whole class would laugh at her. Bramsen was obliged to scratch it out, but in so doing, scratched a hole in the paper, leaving no alternative but to take out the page altogether, much to Amanda's disgust.

Bramsen's highest ambition in life was to be master of a steamboat; not one of the big vessels that go as far as China, say, or Copenhagen—that, he realised, was out of the question, in view of his large contempt for examinations, mate's certificates and book-learning generally. The goal of his desire, the aim of all his dearest dreams, was a tugboat, a smart little devil of a craft with a proper wheel-house amidships and booms and hawsers aft.

A grand life it would be, to go fussing about up and down the fjord, meeting old acquaintances [Pg 35] among the fishermen and pilots—yo, heave ho, my lads! He had often suggested to Andrine that the contents of the savings-bank book might be devoted to the purchase of a tug, but Andrine

would cross herself piously, and urge him to combat all temptation and evil inspirations of the sort. Bramsen could not see anything desperately evil in the idea himself; he found it more depressing to think that he should spend the remainder of his days in the stuffy atmosphere of the warehouse on the quay. Was it reasonable, now, for a man like himself to be planted, like a geranium in a flower-pot, among sugar-boxes, flour-sacks, and store-keeping trash?

"Ay, life's a queer old tangle sometimes," murmured Bramsen to himself, "and we've got to make the best of it, I suppose." And he cast a longing glance through the doorway of the shed, at Johnsen, of the tug *Rap*, steaming down the fjord with his tow.

[Pg 36]

IV
HERMANSEN OF THE BANK

Hermansen was manager of the local bank. He and Knut Holm had never been friends, and though outwardly their relations were to all seeming amicable enough, the attitude of each toward the other was really one of armed neutrality.

The banker was in all things cold, precise and dignified, with a military stiffness of bearing, and devoid of all softer sentiment or feeling.

Entrenched behind his counter at the bank, he would glance frigidly at any bill presented, and if the security appeared to him insufficient, he would hand it back with the remark: "We have no money to-day," though the coffers might be full to bursting.

He was an old bachelor, and Holm was wont to declare that if Hermansen, at the Creation, had been set in Adam's place in the Garden of Eden and found himself alone with Eve, he would have declined to discount any promissory notes of hers, and our planet in consequence have been as uninhabited as the moon.

Hermansen was really quite a good-looking man; his tall, slender figure in tight-fitting coat, his iron-grey hair brushed a little forward on either side of his clean-shaven face, the narrow, close-set lips, combined to give him an appearance of distinction fitted for a member of the diplomatic corps.

[Pg 37]

He was a smart man of business, not only in the affairs of the bank, but also for his own account. Whenever an opportunity occurred of making money, whether by purchase of real property, bankrupt stock or other means, he was always ready to step in at the most favourable moment. He was generally considered one of the richest men in the town, and could afford to speculate at long sight; he was too wise, however, to give any grounds for the suspicion that he took undue advantage of his position. But, as Holm would say, "he's a devilish sharp nose, all the same; he can smell a coming failure years before the man himself has ever thought of it." And it was Holm's great ambition to get the better of him and make the banker burn his fingers in a way he should remember. But it was no easy matter, and up to now all his attempts in that direction had recoiled upon himself.

There was that affair of the building site behind the Town Hall, for instance; Holm's temper went up to boiling point even now whenever he thought of it.

Hermansen, he knew, had had an eye on the place for years, and Holm was sure that by snapping it up himself he would be able to make a few hundred pounds by selling it again to his rival. Accordingly, when the site was put up for auction, he bought it in himself under the very nose of the banker, and gladly paid five hundred for it, though he knew four hundred would have been nearer the mark.

On the day following the sale he encountered Hermansen in the street.

[Pg 38]

"Ah, Mr. Holm, so you were left with that site yesterday?"

Aha, thought Holm, he's working up to it already.

"Why, yes, I thought I'd take it. Fine bit of ground, you know, splendid situation—but I'm open to sell, at a reasonable advance, of course."

"Thanks very much—but I'm not a buyer myself. By the way, I suppose you know there's a condition attached to the building: no windows to overlook the Town Hall. That means the frontage will have to be in the little back street behind, on the shady side. H'm, lowers the value of the property, of course. Still, taking it all round, I should say it was quite a fair deal."

Holm stood looking helplessly after him; he had had no idea of any such condition attached, and the thought of his oversight made him furious for months after. The site lay there vacant to this day, a piece of waste ground, with a big open ditch running through it. Vindt, the stockbroker, had named it "Holm's Canal," after a larger and more celebrated piece of water with which Knut Holm had nothing to do. And some ill-disposed person had written to the local paper, complaining of the "stink" which arose from the water in question.

Holm found the office considerably pleasanter and more comfortable since Miss Betty's installation. An outward and visible sign of the change was the vase of fresh flowers which she placed on the desk each morning, showing that even a dusty office might be made to look cheerful and nice.

Already the two of them chatted together as if they had known each other for years, and the relations between master and employee grew more and more cordial. [Pg 39]

Holm, of course, was always the one to open conversation; he talked, indeed, at times to such an extent that Betty was obliged to beg him to stop, as she could not get on with her work. This generally led to a pause of a quarter of an hour or so, during which Holm would sit watching her over his glasses while she entered up from daybook to ledger with a certain careless ease. Wonderful, thought Holm to himself, how attractive a fair-haired girl can look when she's dark eyebrows and eyelashes, and those blue eyes. Pity she always keeps her mouth tight shut, and hides her lovely teeth.

He sat lost in contemplation, watching her so intently that she flushed right up to her fair head.

"There's the telephone, Mr. Holm," she said desperately, at last, by way of diverting his attention.

"Thanks very much, but I never use the telephone myself. I don't care to stand there like a fool talking down a tube, and likely as not with half a dozen people listening all over the place. No, thank you, I don't think my special brand of eloquence is suited to the telephone service."

Holm always refused to speak to people on the telephone, possibly because he knew that he often said a good deal without reflection and did not care to have witnesses to it, afterwards. Anyhow, he regarded the telephone as one of the plagues of modern times. "If the devil had offered a prize," he would say, "for the best instrument of bother and annoyance to mankind, that fellow Edison should have got it."

The telephone rang, and Betty went to answer it. [Pg 40]

"It's Nilson, the broker, wants to speak to you."

"Ask what it is."

"He says the big Spanish ship that came in the other day with a cargo of salt for Hoeg's is to be sold by auction for bottoming, and he thinks it's to be had at a bargain."

"Right! thanks very much. I'll think about it."

Holm brightened up at the prospect of a deal, and forgot all about Betty, blue eyes, dark lashes, fair hair and all.

"Garner, get hold of Bramsen sharp as ever you can, and tell him to go on board that Spaniard at Hoeg's wharf, and have a thorough look round."

A few minutes later Bramsen himself appeared, breathless with haste.

"I've been on board already, Mr. Holm, pretty near every evening. They've a nigger cook that plays all sorts of dance tunes on a bit of a clay warbler he's got; it's really worth hearing...."

"Yes, yes, but the vessel herself. Is she any good, do you know?"

"Well, not much, I take it, though it doesn't show, perhaps. I talked to the carpenter, and he said her bottom was as full of holes as a rusty sieve; it's only the paint that keeps her afloat. He showed me a queer thing too, that carpenter; I've never seen anything like it."

"What sort of a thing?"

"It was a magic cow, he said, got it in Pensacola. You just wind it up, and it walks along the deck, and lowers its head and says, 'Moo-oh!'"

"What about the upper works?"

"Well, I didn't see the works. But the upper part's just brown hide, stuffed, I suppose." [Pg 41]

"Nonsense, man; it's the ship I mean."

"Oh yes—well, she's smart enough to look at, with lashings of paint and gilding and brass fittings everywhere—the Spanish owner's no fool, I'll be bound. Bottoming, indeed; I don't believe a word of it."

"What do you mean?"

"Mean! why,"—Bramsen lowered his voice—"it's just a fake, if you ask me, to make folk think they've got an easy bargain."

"Anyone else been on board looking round?"

"Yes. Skipper Heil was there all day yesterday."

"Heil? Wasn't he skipper of Hermansen's *Valkyrie*?"

"That's it! And I'm pretty sure 'twas Hermansen sent him down to look."

"Bramsen, listen to me. Not a word to a soul of what you know about the ship; you've got to be dumb as a doorpost. If anyone asks, you can tell them in confidence that I sent you to look over her, and not a word more, you understand?"

"Right you are, Mr. Holm. But you're not thinking of going in for the business yourself?"

"You leave that to me."

"Very good, Mr. Holm."

When Bramsen was gone, Holm strode up and down the office deep in thought.

"I wonder, now, if we couldn't manage to nail old Hermansen there. H'm. It's risky, but I must have a try at it all the same."

He put on his hat, and continued his sentry-go up and down, with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. Already he saw in his mind's eye the Spaniard hauled up to the repair shops, and plate after plate taken out of her bottom, till only the superstructure remained. And finally, he himself, as representative of the concern, would go up to the bank and present a bill for the repairs—a bill running into three—four—five figures! [Pg 42]

He fairly tingled at the thought of that bill. Seven-sixteenth-inch plates, re-riveting, frame-pieces and all the various items Lloyds could hit upon as needful.

It was no easy matter to work out a plan of operations on the spur of the moment. But there was no time to be lost. It was Wednesday already, and the ship was to be put up for auction on the Friday.

First of all, he must go on board himself, openly, as a prospective buyer. This, he knew, would be at once reported to Hermansen, who would have his intelligence department at work.

On Thursday afternoon, then, Holm boarded the Spaniard accordingly, and went over the vessel thoroughly in the hope that Hermansen would get a report that he, Holm, was keenly interested.

Early Friday morning he went down again, and was climbing up the ladder on the port side, but on glancing over the bulwarks he perceived the clean-shaven face of the banker, who was just coming on board from the opposite side.

Holm's first impulse was to bundle off again quickly, but in stepping down, he managed to tread on Bramsen's fingers, eliciting a howl which brought the whole crew hurrying along to see what was the matter. There was nothing for it now but to go on board, which he did, nodding in the friendliest fashion to Hermansen as he came up. [Pg 43]

"We're competitors, then, it seems," said the banker politely.

"I think not," said Holm seriously. "She's very badly built, and I don't feel like going in for it myself."

"Yes? I dare say," answered the banker, with a sidelong glance at Holm, who appeared to be scrutinising the upper rigging.

"The fore and aft bulkheads are shaky too," said Holm, well knowing that these were as good as could be. Indeed, had the rest been up to the same standard, the vessel would have been worth buying.

Hermansen walked forward, and Holm went aft. On completing the round, they came face to face once more.

"Bottom's not up to much, from what I hear," remarked Holm casually, as he climbed over the rail on his way down.

"Very possible—very possible." There was a slight vibration in the banker's voice as he spoke, and Holm judged that things were going to be as he wished.

The auction was fixed for one o'clock, and Holm was there punctually to the moment. Hermansen was nowhere to be seen. "Funny," thought Holm to himself. "I hope to goodness he hasn't smelt a rat."

The conditions of sale were read; the bidding to be understood as in agreement therewith.

At last the banker appeared, and sat down unobtrusively in a corner. His presence always made itself felt in any gathering, as imparting a certain solemnity to the occasion. Holm, who had been chatting gaily with the magistrate and Advocate Schneider, sat down quietly. [Pg 44]

"Well, gentlemen, to business. The frigate, *Don Almariva*, is offered for sale to the highest bidder, subject to the conditions just read. What offers?"

"2000," said Holm. A long pause followed.

"2000 offered, 2000. Any advance on 2000.... Come, gentlemen...."

Holm began to feel uneasy.

"2050." It was the banker's sonorous voice.

"2200," snapped out Holm, on the instant.

"2250," from the corner, a little more promptly than before.

"2400," Holm was there again at once.

Matters were getting critical now: Holm sat looking steadily in front of him, not daring to look round. The minutes were uncomfortably long, he felt as if he were on a switchback, or in the throes of approaching sea-sickness.

"2400—two thousand four hundred pounds offered, gentlemen. Any advance on 2400? 2400, going——"

Holm was on the verge of apoplexy now. What if he should have to present that bill for repairs to himself, after all?

Skipper Heil moved over to Hermansen and whispered in his ear. All were turned towards the pair—all save Holm, who sat as before, stiff as a statue in his place, looking rigidly before him.

The auctioneer stood with his hammer raised, his eyes on the banker in his corner.

"Going—going——"

"2500," said the banker. At last!

Holm gave a start as if something had pricked him behind, and looked across with a curious [Pg 45]
expression at Hermansen, who sat as impassive as ever.

The hammer fell. Holm went across to the banker, raised his hat and bowed. "Congratulations, my dear sir; the vessel's yours. A little faulty in the bottom, as I mentioned before, but still, taking it all round, *I should say it was quite a fair deal*!"

Holm went out into the street, and, meeting Bramsen, who had been present out of curiosity, took him by the shoulders and shook him. "Bramsen, my boy, I've got him this time. Hermansen's let himself in for it with a vengeance!"

"Lord, Mr. Holm, but you gave me a fright before it was over. I don't believe I've ever been in such a tremble all my sinful life—unless it was the time I jumped across old Weismann's bull."

"Weismann's bull? What was that?"

"Why, it was one day I was standing outside the warehouse as innocent as a babe unborn, filling up a herring barrel, and before I knew where I was there was a great beast of a bull rushing down on me at full gallop. They'd been taking him down to the slaughter-house, and he'd broke away. Well, I couldn't get into the barrel, seeing it was more than half full as it was, and there wasn't time to get across to the sheds; the brute's horns were right on top of me, like a huge great pitchfork, and I reckoned Paal Abrahamsen's days were numbered. And then suddenly I got a revelation. I took a one—two—three, hop and a jump, and just as the beast thought he'd got me on the nail, up I went with an elegant somersault and landed clean astride of him, as neat as a—as an equidestrian statue."

"But how did you get down again?" [Pg 46]

"Why, that was as easy as winking, seeing he flung me off and down Mrs. Brekke's cellar stairs, so I felt it a fortnight after."

On his way down to the office, Holm met a number of people who were all anxious to know who had bought the Spaniard. Holm was at no pains to uphold *Don Almariva's* reputation. When Nilsen the broker came up to congratulate him on his supposed purchase, he exclaimed: "Not me, my lad! Why, she's full of holes as a rusty sieve." And he walked off, singing:

> "He needs be something more than bold,
> Who'd fill his purse with Spanish gold."

Altogether, it was a red-letter day for Knut Holm. And on entering the office he confided to Betty that he had paid Banker Hermansen in full for that matter of the building site. He told her, also, how he and the banker had been secretly at war for years past, confessing frankly that up to now the honours had been with the other side.

It was Hermansen who had hindered his election to the Town Council, and possibly afterwards to parliament; all along he had barred his way—until now. And to-day, at last, the wind had changed, he had gained his first victory; now perhaps the banker's fortunes would begin to wane, in the town and farther afield—for he was a man of some influence in the country generally.

Holm stood at first bent slightly over the desk, but as he talked, and his enthusiasm increased, he drew himself up, a figure of such power and energy that Betty felt the banker would need to be well equipped indeed to outdo him. She grew more and more interested as he went on, following [Pg 47]
him with her eyes, until he came over to her and said: "I don't mind telling you, Miss Betty, it's not only Banker Hermansen, but the whole pack of them in the town here, that shrugged their shoulders and laughed behind my back at everything I did.

"Yes, and I've felt it, too, you may be sure, though I didn't show it. I've been cheerful and easy-going all along, and, thanks to that, I can say I've done two things at least: I've pleased my

friends and vexed my enemies!

"And then the children upstairs, they've never really understood me; just looked on me as a sort of automatic machine for laying golden eggs. Lord, but I'd like to put their nose out of joint one day, the whole lot of them—make them take off their hats and look up to see where Knut G. Holm had got to."

He tried to take her hand, but she drew it back sharply, and with a blush retreated behind the shelter of her books.

"You think I'm a queer sort, don't you?"

"Not that, Mr. Holm. I was thinking you're a strong man. I've always longed to meet men that were not afraid to face the real hard things of life."

"You're right in that; one doesn't often find a man who's ready to risk anything really for his own convictions. It's easy enough to get into one's shell and rub along comfortably in flannel and carpet slippers, to shout with the crowd and agree politely to all that's said, be generally amiable and popular accordingly—but it's too cramped and stifling for me. I must have room to breathe, if I have to get out in the cold to do it." [Pg 48]

He strode through into the shop, and she heard him talking to Garner about having the whole of the premises altered now, lighter and brighter, with big plate-glass windows, and the floor sunk to make it loftier.

Betty sat for a long while thinking deeply over what Holm had said. Several times she turned to her books, but only to fall back into the same train of thought; somehow it was impossible to work to-day.

A strange man, he was, indeed, and she did not quite like his being so confidential towards her. But an honest heart, of that she felt sure, and a man one could not help liking and helping as far as one could. Holm came into the office a little while after, and found it empty. Betty had gone. He stood awhile by her desk, then picked up the glass with the yellow roses in, and smelt them.

"Women, women"—he looked at the roses—"these little trifles are the weapons that count. H'm. Now would it be so strange after all if I did marry again? There's not much comfort to be looked for upstairs as things are now—and she's a clever girl as well as pretty. The youngsters, of course, would make no end of fuss, but I'd have to put up with that."

Just then William came in, smoking a cigarette.

"Wanted to speak to you, father."

"Right you are, my boy! speak away!"

"Well, it's like this. Marie and I, we can't go on as we have been doing lately."

Holm turned quickly. "You mean to say you're going to turn over a new leaf?"

"I mean, we must get away from here. Marie's budding talent will never thrive here, and I—I shall grow stale if I don't get away soon. We want to travel." [Pg 49]

"I see—well, travel along with you then; don't mind me."

"We want to go to Paris. Mrs. Rantzau, who is herself a distinguished artist, says it's the only thing for us, to go to Paris and complete our education. There is no hope of developing one's talents in a place like this—they simply wither and die."

"Ah, that would be a pity."

"Father, you must let us go. Don't you think yourself, you ought to make some little sacrifice for your only son?"

"You think I haven't done enough? Wasn't it for your sake I married your foster-mother? Haven't I thrown away hundreds of pounds on your miserable education as you call it, and your fantastic inventions in the engineering line that never came to anything? I could ill spare the money at the time, I can assure you."

"Oh, now I suppose we're to have the old story over again, with the £150."

"It won't do you any harm to hear it again. Where would you have been, or I and the lot of us, in 1875, if Knut G. Holm hadn't got that £150 from C. Henrik Pettersen. Down and under, and that with a vengeance."

"It was very good of Pettersen, I'm sure."

"Pettersen it was; it couldn't have been anyone else. The money was sent anonymously, as you know, the very morning I was thinking of putting up the shutters and giving up for good. Just the money, and a slip of paper, no business heading, only 'Herewith £150, a gift from one who wishes you well.' That was all, no signature, only a cross, or an 'x' or whatever it was, at the foot." [Pg 50]

"Only an 'x'?"

"That was absolutely all. I puzzled my brains to think out who the good soul could be, but could

never bring it round to anyone but C. Henrik Pettersen, my old friend. Though it wasn't like him, and that's the truth."

"You mean he was close-fisted generally?"

"He was a business man, my boy, if ever there was one. But we knew each other better than most. I was in the know about his dairy butter at fifty per cent. profit—though the Lord knows I wouldn't say a word against him now he's dead and gone."

"But didn't you ask him straight out if it was he that sent the money?"

"I should think I did. But he was one of those people that won't say more than they want to. I could never make him out myself. He used to just sit there and smile and never say a word, but got me on to talk instead."

"Well, I suppose it couldn't be anyone else?"

"It was him sure enough. He was an old bachelor, and an eccentric sort of fellow, with nobody to leave his money to, so it wasn't altogether strange he should send me that little bit of all he'd made, in return for all the yarns I'd told to brighten him up. Anyway, things took a turn for the better after that, and I pulled round all right, so I've nothing to worry about now, in spite of all you've cost me."

"It wasn't so much, I'm sure. And if only that aerial torpedo of mine had gone right, I'd have paid you back with interest." [Pg 51]

"But it went wrong—and so did you, my good sir; and if you talk about sacrifice, why, I think it was sacrifice enough, after I'd thrown away £200 on the wretched thing, to come out myself to the parade ground and see the thing go awry."

"By an unfortunate accident."

"A very fortunate accident, if you ask me, that it didn't come down where we stood, or it might have done for a whole crowd of innocent folk that were simple enough to come out and look."

"I don't know, I'm sure, what you want to drag up that old story again for."

"Because I want you to keep to earth in future. Stay at home—on the mat, if you like it that way."

"Will you help us to go to Paris, or will you not?"

"Honestly, then, I should call it throwing money away to do anything of the sort."

"But if you knew that people who really know something about art considered it absolutely necessary for our future, for the development of our talents as artists, then would you let us go?"

"Competent judges to decide, you mean?"

"If you will, we've both of us faith enough in our calling, and in our future as artists."

"Well, that sounds reasonable enough, I admit."

"You will not accept Mrs. Rantzau's decision alone? She is well known, not only as a teacher of singing herself, but her husband had a great reputation as an author and art critic, so she's heard and seen a great deal. And she said the other day that the little seascape of mine up in the Art Society's place was excellent; the sky in particular was finely drawn, she said." [Pg 52]

"I've no doubt she's a very clever woman. I haven't the honour of her acquaintance myself, but I must say I think a great deal of her daughter, in the office here."

"Oh, Betty's just the opposite of her mother—she's no idea of art whatever."

"No, poor child, I dare say she's had quite enough both of poverty and humbug."

"Really, father, I don't think you're justified in saying things like that."

"That may be, my son. But if you two young people are set on making artists of yourselves, why, do. And if you can give me a reasonable guarantee that it's any good trying, why, I won't stand in your way."

"I think we can, then."

And William went up to tell Marie what had passed. Holm sat for a while occupied with his own thoughts, and came at last to the conclusion that the children were "artist-mad," and got it badly. He must manage to get hold of this Mrs. Rantzau, and see if she could not be persuaded to use her influence to get these ideas out of their heads—especially now, since her daughter was in the office.

There was a gentle tap at the door. It was little Hans, who stood timidly looking up at him.

"Well, Hans, lad, and how's the music getting on? I hope you've made friends with your teacher?"

He drew the boy over to a seat beside him on the sofa. Hans carefully placed his cap over one knee, for his trousers were torn, and he did not want it to be seen. [Pg 53]

"Have you been for your lesson every day?"

"Yes, till the day before yesterday, but then I hurt my hand chopping wood for mother, so I've got to wait a few days till it's well." And he held out one thin little hand, showing two fingers badly bruised and raw.

"Poor little man! I must tell Bramsen to lend you a hand with the chopping."

"And, please, I was to bring you this letter from Mr. Bess; he asked me to take it up to you myself. It's the bill for my lessons, I think," he added quickly, "and he wants the money because of the rent." Hans was well acquainted with such things from his own home life, and having heard the organist and his wife talking about the rent falling due, he at once took it for granted that the case was as urgent then as when his own mother lay awake at nights wondering how to meet a similar payment.

Holm took the letter and read:

> "In accordance with your request, I have been giving lessons for some time to little Hans Martinsen, whose gift for music is really surprising. Though I do not consider myself fully qualified to judge the precise value of his talent, I would say, as my personal opinion, that the child shows quite unusual promise. And I am convinced that with skilful and attentive tuition, he could in time become a player of mark.
>
> "I am an old man now, and am not otherwise competent to train such talent as it should be trained, but as a lover of music myself, I beg you to assist the child; you will find your reward, I'm sure. If I could afford it, I would gladly contribute as far as I was able, but as you know I am not in a position to do so. I will not, however, accept any payment for the lessons given, but should be glad to feel that I have made some little offering myself towards his future."

[Pg 54]

Holm read the letter through once more.

"Little man, we must send you to Christiania to study there. I'll arrange it all, and you shall have the best teacher that's to be had."

Hans sat twirling his cap, and made no answer.

"Well, Hans, aren't you glad? Wouldn't you like to go on with your music?"

"Yes, but I can't. I can't go away and leave mother; there'll be nobody to help her then."

"Don't worry about that, my boy; your mother shall go with you. No more washing; all she'll need to do will be just to look after you."

"But—how? Mother couldn't go away like that!"

"We'll manage that all right. It's very simple. I'll lend your mother the money, do you see, and then, when you've learnt enough and can play properly yourself, you can pay it back—if you want to, that is."

"Oh—oh, how good you are! May I run home and tell mother, now?"

"Yes, run along and tell her as quickly as you like. Only understand, not a word to anyone else about it. I'll come round this evening, anyway, and fix it all up."

Hans, in his delight, forgot all about hiding the hole in his trousers; he grasped his friend's hands and looked at him with glistening eyes.

"Is it really true—that I'm to go to Christiania?" [Pg 55]

"True as ever could be, little lad, and now off you go—I'll come along soon."

Holm took the organist's letter and read it through once again.

"Noble old fellow—so you'd sacrifice your hard-earned money and give your trouble for nothing? Not if I know it; you shan't be a loser there. And as for Hans, I'll see to his education myself. He shall go to Paris instead of those madcap youngsters with their parties. My '52 Madeira too! But we'll soon put a stop to that."

[Pg 56]

V
MRS. RANTZAU'S STORY

She was a teacher of singing, and had only recently settled in the town. Holm had never seen her, but now that her daughter was working in his office, and Marie had begun taking lessons with Mrs. Rantzau herself, he felt it his duty to call.

Moreover, he had some secret hope that it might be possible here to find an ally in his plan for combating Marie's artistic craze. In addition to which, she was Betty's mother....

The place was four storeys up, and Holm, tired after his climb, sat down at the top of the stairs for a moment before ringing the bell.

Tra-la-la-la-la-la—he could hear a woman's voice singing scales inside, the same thing over and over again. A little after came another voice, which he took to be Mrs. Rantzau's.

"Mouth wide open, please; that's it—now breathe!"

Holm rang the bell and Mrs. Rantzau opened the door.

He stood dumbfounded for a moment, staring at her.

"Heavens alive—it can't be—Bianca, is it really you?"

She turned pale, came close to him and whispered: [Pg 57]

"For Heaven's sake, not a word." Then, taking him by the arm, she thrust him gently into a room adjoining.

He heard the young lady take her departure, and a moment later Mrs. Rantzau stood before him.

She was still a magnificently handsome woman. The dark eyes were deep and clear as ever, the black hair waved freely over the forehead, albeit with a thread of silver here and there. Her figure was slender and well-poised, her whole appearance eloquent of energy and life.

"If you knew how I have dreaded this moment, Mr. Holm," she began, then suddenly stopped.

"H'm—yes. It's a good many years now since last we met, Bianca—beg pardon, Mrs. Rantzau, I mean."

"Fifteen—yes, it's fifteen years ago. And much has happened since then. I didn't know really whether to go and call on you myself, and ask you not to say anything about the way we met, and how I was living then. But then again, I thought you must have forgotten me ages ago."

"Forgotten! Not if I live to be a hundred."

"And then, too, I thought it might be awkward for Betty if I tried to renew our old acquaintance; you might be offended, and not care to keep her on at the office...."

"But—my dear lady—however could you imagine such a thing?"

"Oh, I know how good and kind you were when I knew you before—but people change sometimes. And you can understand, I'm sure, Mr. Holm, that my position here, my connection with my [Pg 58] pupils, would be ruined if the past were known. Not that I've anything to be ashamed of, thank God, but you know yourself, in a little town like this, how people would look at a woman—or even a man, for that matter—whose life has been so—so unusual as mine."

"Dear lady, I understand, of course, but I should never have thought of mentioning a word of our relations in the past."

"Thanks, thanks! Oh, I can see now you have not changed. Kind and thoughtful as ever; you were good to me, Mr. Holm—not like the others." Her voice trembled a little, and she grasped his hand.

Holm flushed slightly, murmured a few polite words, and thought—of Betty.

Mrs. Rantzau continued: "I should like you to understand, to realise yourself the position I was placed in then. Will you let me tell you the whole story—if you've time?"

"Indeed I've time—you took up quite a considerable amount of my time before, you know," he added kindly.

"Ah, I see you're the same as ever, Mr. Holm, always bright and cheerful over things."

"Why, yes, I'm glad to say. It would be a pity not to."

"Well, let me begin. My life hasn't been a path of roses—far from it; it's been mostly thorns. If only I could write, I might make quite an exciting story of it all. I'm forty-two now, started life as a parson's daughter up in the north, was married to a poet, and lived with him in Paris; my child was born, and I was left a widow then. I had to keep myself and Betty by the work of my hands; [Pg 59] sang at concerts, and accompanied in Hamburg, lived as a countess in Westphalia——"

"What—a countess?"

"Well, very nearly. But I'll tell you about that later. I taught French in Copenhagen, and painting in Gothenburg, was housekeeper to a lawyer in a little Norwegian town, nearly married him but not quite, and ended up here teaching singing. So you see I've been a good many things in my time."

"But tell me—tell me all about it," exclaimed Holm eagerly.

"Mr. Holm, you know the darkest part of all my life; it is only fair that you should know the rest. I've nothing to be ashamed of, for after all I have managed to earn a livelihood for myself and Betty. I was seventeen when I left home, and they said I was quite good-looking——"

"You're equal to anything on the market now, as we say in business——"

"Well, I came straight from the wilds of the Nordland to Christiania, and they called me 'the Nordland sun.' I was the most sought after at all the dances, and perhaps one of the most brilliant, for I came to the gay life of the capital with the freshness of a novice. It was not long before I became engaged to a young writer—a poet, he was——"

"The devil you did! Beg pardon, I'm sure, but to tell the truth I've no faith in that sort of people, as Banker Hermansen would say."

"We were both of us young and inexperienced; he dreamed of gaining world-wide fame by his pen, and I used to weep over his passionate love poems. I was eighteen and he twenty-two, and I [Pg 60] promised to follow him to the end of the world, for better or worse.

"Then one fine day we landed in Paris, without caring a jot for our people, our friends, or our own country. We were married there at the Swedish Church, and there I was, a poet's wife, with my people at home trying to forget the black sheep of the family.

"A few years passed. But every day saw the breaking of one of the golden threads in our web of illusion, and when Betty was born we were in desperate straits.

"Poor old Thor, he used to sit up late at night writing stuff for the papers at home, all about magnificent functions he'd never been to at all, and warming his frozen fingers over a few bits of coal in the stove."

"And he might have made quite a decent living in an office," put in Holm sympathetically.

"Unfortunately, he imagined he was a genius, and gradually, as things got worse and worse, the struggle for a bare existence made him bitter, till he hated the world, and looked upon himself as a martyr condemned to suffering.

"Then he took to staying out late of an evening, and wrote less and less. By the time we had been there a year, the poet's wife was washing lace to keep the home together. In the autumn of the second year, he went down with pneumonia, and a week after the 'Nordland sun' was a widow. I couldn't go home, for I'd cut myself adrift from them completely when I married. There was nothing for it but to struggle along as best I could by myself, unknown and friendless in the great city. But, thank Heaven, I've always had my health and a cheerful temper, and little Betty was [Pg 61] such a darling."

"Yes, she's a wonderful girl."

"She and I have fought our way together, Mr. Holm, and a hard fight it has been at times, believe me.

"Well, we got along somehow in Paris, for a few years, doing needlework, or giving music lessons at fifty centimes an hour. It was a cheerless existence mostly, as you can imagine, and if it hadn't been for the child I should have broken down long before.

"Then at last I got the offer of a place as accompanist at a concert hall in Hamburg, with a salary of a hundred marks a month for three hours' work every evening and two rehearsals a week. This was splendid, and I was in the highest spirits when I left Paris. Besides, it was a little nearer home, and I used to be desperately home-sick at times, though I knew it was hopeless to think of going back.

"Imagine my feelings, then, when I got to the place and found it was a common music hall; though very decent, really, for a place of that sort."

"It was a beautiful place—at least, I thought so, when I saw you there."

"Well, there I sat, night after night, accompanying all sorts of more or less third-rate artistes. It used to make me wild, I remember, when they sang false, or were awkward in their gestures; I used to look at them in a way they would remember. And really, I managed to make them respect me after a time, though I was only twenty-five myself.

"Then, besides my evenings there, I gradually worked up a little connection giving music and singing lessons outside, till I was making enough to live fairly comfortably. [Pg 62]

"But one day the whole staff went on strike, and left at a moment's notice, and there we were. The manager—you remember him, I dare say, Sonnenthal; man with a black waxed moustache and a big diamond pin—he came running in to me and said I must sing myself; it would never do to close down altogether in the height of the season. He thought he would get at least a couple of other turns, and if I would help it would get us over the difficulty.

"I told him I couldn't think of it—said I had no talent for that sort of thing; but he insisted, and offered me fifty marks a night if I would.

"Fifty marks was a fabulous sum to me for one night, then, after living on a franc and a half a day in Paris, and it meant so much for Betty. I began to think it over.

"And really I felt sure myself that I could do better than these half-civilised cabaret singers, from Lord knows where, that I'd been playing to for so long. But the parson's daughter found it hard to come down to performing like that.

"Then Sonnenthal offered me sixty marks. He thought, of course, it was only a question of money. It was too good to refuse, and I agreed.

"He got out new posters, with big lettering:

'SIGNORA BIANCA
THE WORLD-RENOWNED SINGER FROM MILAN NOW APPEARING.'

"I remember how furious I was when the dresser came in to make me up, and I flung her paints and powders across the room. Sonnenthal came round and wanted me to go on in short skirts, [Pg 63] but I told him in so many words that I was going to do it my own way or not at all; and, knowing how he was situated, of course he had to give in.

"I think he was impressed by the way I stood up to him. A little Roumanian girl, a pale, dark-eyed creature, who was simply terrified of Sonnenthal, like all the rest of them, came in to me afterwards and threw her arms round my neck and thanked me for having given him a lesson at last.

"It was with very mixed feelings that I went on that night for my first performance. The audience, of course, was composed of all sorts, and the performers were often interrupted by shouting, not always of applause.

"The house was full—it was packed. Sonnenthal knew how to advertise a thing.

"I gave them 'A Mountain Maid' to start with, a touching little thing, and I put enough feeling into it to move a stone, but not a hand was raised to applaud. Then I tried 'Solveig's Song' from *Peer Gynt*—that too was received with chilling silence.

"When I came off after the first two, I could see the others smiling maliciously: there's plenty of jealousy in that line of business. But it set my blood boiling, and I felt that irresistible impulse to go in and do something desperate, as I always do when anything gets in my way.

"I rushed on again, and gave the word to the orchestra for 'The Hungarian Gipsy,' a thing all trills and yodelling and such-like trick work—a show piece.

"I put all I knew into it this time, and yodelled away till the audience left their beer-glasses [Pg 64] untouched on the tables—and that's saying a good deal with a crowd like that.

"When I finished, the hall rang with a thunder of applause—everyone shouting and cheering. I had to come before the curtain again and again. But I wouldn't give them an encore that time. I thought it best to have something in reserve, and not make myself cheap like the others.

"As I came off the last time, I couldn't help saying half aloud what I thought of my respected audience—*clowns*!

"But I'd found out how to handle them now, and I gave them the stuff they wanted, and plenty of it. I knew the sort of thing well enough. For years they'd sat listening to the same type of short-skirted, rouged and powdered womenfolk, with the same more or less risky songs, the same antiquated kick-ups and the same cheap favour in their eyes. I took care myself always to appear as a lady, chose first-rate songs, and, as my salary increased—for I drew Sonnenthal gradually up the scale as I wished—I was able to dress in a style that astonished them.

"Do you remember when I sang 'The Carnival of Venice'?"

"Do I not! Saints alive, but you were a wonder to see. Every evening, all the month I was there, I came just to sit and look at you."

"Listen, you mean?"

"Well, perhaps that's what I ought to say. Anyhow, I know I strewed flowers enough at your feet that winter, though they cost me a mark apiece."

"Yes, you were kind, I know. But do you remember the dress I wore for that carnival thing? The [Pg 65] bodice all white roses, and red and yellow for the skirt—it was a success—a sensation! 'Flowers in spring' ah!"

She rose to her feet, and took a step forward, singing as she moved.

"When I came to that part, they all wanted to join in, but I had only to hold out my hand, so, and all was quiet in a moment, you remember?"

"Yes, indeed, you had a wonderful power over the sterner sex; I felt it myself, I know. I swear I've never been more completely head over ears before or since."

"Oh, nonsense, Mr. Holm," she protested, with a hearty laugh, "we're past that sort of thing now, both of us. But you were good to me then, and I shall never forget it. I had enough and to spare in the way of offers and attentions, not to speak of making people furious because I always refused their invitation to champagne suppers behind the scenes."

"That was just what gave you the position and influence you had, I think."

"Yes, I think it was. I know that all the time I was there, yours was the only invitation I ever accepted, because you were a fellow-countryman, and so kind and considerate as well.

"I remember as if it were yesterday that dinner at the 'Pforte.' There was a pheasant, with big tail-feathers large as life, do you remember? And when we got to the coffee, you wanted to hear the story of my life——"

"And you were silent as an Egyptian mummy."

"My parents were still living then, Mr. Holm, and I wished at least to spare them the sorrow of learning that their daughter was performing on the music-hall stage. Well, but I must go on. [Pg 66]

"Fortunately, you were the only fellow-countryman I ever came in contact with while I was there; and, of course, I kept my nationality a secret as far as possible.

"When the summer came, I was so sick and tired of the life and the half-civilised surroundings, that I threw it up, and went to Copenhagen. I had saved enough by that time to keep me more or less comfortable for a while at least. But there was one little adventure I must tell about, before I left."

"This is getting quite exciting," said Holm, changing his seat and placing himself directly opposite her. "Go on. I'm curious to know."

"Well, I was as near as could be to becoming a Countess."

"Were you, though! How did it happen?"

"It's not altogether exceptional, you know, in the profession. But my little affair there is soon told. One of my most devoted admirers was a tall middle-aged man, well built, handsome, with dark hair and a big moustache. He looked like a military man. He was always most elegantly dressed, in a black frock-coat, with the red ribbon of some Order in his buttonhole.

"One evening, when I'd just finished dressing for the 'Carnival of Venice' thing, a card was brought in, bearing the name of Count—well, never mind his name. It was the Count that did it, I'm afraid.

"I invariably used to return cards brought in that way, and take no notice. But this time I suppose my vanity got the better of me for once, and I let him come in. [Pg 67]

"He made me a most respectful bow, and handed me a magnificent bouquet tied with ribbon in the Italian colours. I was supposed to be from Milan, you know. He spoke excellent French, and seemed altogether a gentleman of the first water—or blood, I suppose one would say.

"He told me about his home, his estates and his family affairs in the most simple and natural manner. I could not help liking him a little from the first. He was in Hamburg on business—some lawsuit or other—and dropping into the place one evening to pass the time, he could not help noticing me particularly.

"He was not sparing of his compliments, I must say; he praised me up to the skies, as an artist, of course. My voice had astonished, delighted, enchanted him, he told me so at once. And ended up by advising me to try the opera stage—offered to help me himself in every way possible, which, he said, might mean something, as he had many influential friends in that quarter. I told him, however, quite frankly, that I was perfectly aware myself as to the qualifications needed for operatic work, and had sense enough to realise that I could never succeed in that way. He was evidently surprised at my attitude, but I simply thanked him for his kindness, and got rid of him then for the time being. But he came again regularly every evening, bringing me flowers, and at last he made a formal proposal in the most charming manner, laying his title, estates and all the rest of it at my feet.

"It was tempting, of course, but thank goodness I had always had a pretty fair share of common sense, especially as I got older. I told him I regretted I did not know him sufficiently well to take so serious a step, but promised to think it over." [Pg 68]

"That was a plucky thing to do. There are not many who would have taken it like that."

"It was just plain common sense. The Count was a little huffy, though, and hinted that he had expected me to say yes on the spot.

"This happened about a week before my engagement was up, and I had already, as I told you, decided to go to Copenhagen for a bit.

"I must confess that there were moments when I was weak enough to think seriously of accepting the Count, but, fortunately, chance came to my help. There was an old Catholic priest at the house where I was staying, and I told him all about it. He undertook to make inquiries about the Count, and a few days after he had found out everything there was to know. He *was* a Count right enough——"

"No, really? I hadn't expected that."

"Well, he was—but as poor as a church mouse! He had been an officer in the army, and inherited an ancient title and a castle with heavily encumbered estates from his father, but squandered all there was left in his youth; now he was a sort of travelling inspector for an insurance company, and lived for the rest by his wits."

"And that was the end of the Count?"

"Yes, of course; but, you see, I was very near becoming a Countess."

"And then you went to Copenhagen?"

"Yes, and after that my story's simple enough. I stayed there some years, teaching music and painting, managed to get along comfortably enough. Betty started going to school, and we were as happy as could be." [Pg 69]

"But how did you manage to escape further offers all that time in Copenhagen?

"Oh, you seem to imagine I had nothing else to think of but getting married. No, indeed, when one's gone through as much as I have, one thinks twice before venturing a second time. Well, as the years went on, and being in Denmark and more in touch with my own country, I began to long for home again. I thought surely all would be forgotten by now, and I should be able to make a living there. But it was not so easy after all. I got a step nearer when I was offered a post as teacher at a school in Gothenburg; I stayed there five long years. I had already sent Betty to board with a decent family in Norway, that she might not grow up altogether a foreigner, and now I was only waiting for the chance of coming home myself.

"My parents were dead. I had no relatives or friends to come back to, and yet for all that I was longing to be there again.

"At last the day came; I shall never forget the moment when we sighted the first glimpse of land. It seemed as if all my years of exile had been a dream. I felt myself full of life and strength and happiness, and I vowed to make a new career for myself in my own country.

"I got a place as housekeeper to an old lawyer in a little town on the coast, and lived there very comfortably for a year; but it was too narrow, too confined, so I moved to here—and here I am, doing what I can to make life tolerable. I've my health and strength, plenty of energy, and I'm very happy. And there you have it all, Mr. Holm—the life story of Emilie Rantzau. You can't say it's been an easy one altogether." [Pg 70]

"No indeed, and I admire you for the way you have fought through so many handicaps and trials."

"Thank Heaven, I've never lost my strength of will, and now at last things seem to be getting brighter. Betty's so happy here, and delighted with her place at the office."

"Not more than I am to have her, I assure you. It's been like constant sunshine about the place since she came."

"Well, then, Mr. Holm, I hope you will keep my secret as if it were your own. I have nothing to be ashamed of in my past, but all the same I should not like it to be known here as things are now."

"You need have no fear of that, my dear lady, I assure you. I only hope you may be happy here, and feel yourself in every sense at home now you have come back—and I'm sure you deserve it after the long struggle you have had. But I must say it has not left its mark on you, for you're charming enough to turn the head of more than one respectable citizen in this little town."

"It's very kind of you to say so, but I think there's no fear of that. By the way, I'm your daughter's music-mistress, too. She seems very intelligent."

"H'm, as to that ... to tell the truth, I wanted to speak to you about her. I really don't know what to do with the child lately, the way she goes on."

"Really—oh, but surely——" [Pg 71]

"I'll tell you all about it, if I may?"

"Yes, do."

"Well, it's like this. My excellent son and heir, you must know, was a decent enough lad to begin with. But then he somehow got in with a whole crowd of muddle-headed youths that call themselves artists, poets and acrobats of that sort. H'm ... you see, I'm a plain man myself, and to my mind the whole thing's nothing better than sheer downright laziness. They simply won't trouble to go in for any steady solid work in life, but go on living on this artistic humbug, as long as they can find anyone to provide for them."

"Like yourself, you mean?"

"Exactly. I've done a good deal in that line—up to now. Well, these young beauties have given the lad the idea that he's the making of a great artist, a budding Rubens at the least, whereas I'm convinced he couldn't even turn out a presentable signboard. And as for the girl, she's the coming Patti of her day, nothing less.

"I've raged about it, been as cross and discouraging as could be, but precious little difference it makes. No, they must be off to Paris, if you please, the pair of them, on their own. And that's where I want you, if you will, to help me stop their little game. Marie, I know, looks up to you like a sort of Providence."

"But really, Mr. Holm, she *has* talent, you know."

"Talent be hanged. I don't care if she has. What you've got to do is to tell her she's got a voice like a sore-throated sheep—that's what I want. And as for the boy, you can help me to cure him

too, if you only will. You've had some experience, you know, in getting round the men; an old hand like you could easily manage him, I'm sure." [Pg 72]

"Really, Mr. Holm, that was a pretty compliment, I must say."

"It was honestly meant, anyhow; you needn't be angry. Let's be frank with one another. We're old friends, you know, after all, Bianca."

"Holm, for Heaven's sake, *never*, never let that name pass your lips again. Promise me!" she said, with a glance of earnest entreaty.

"Forgive me, forgive me. May the devil cut out my sinful tongue if ever I utter it again. It's the most infernal nuisance, that tongue of mine, always getting me into trouble one way or another, like an alarm clock, you know, that goes off the moment you come near it."

"I'll do my best, Mr. Holm, to make your daughter give up her idea of making a career in that way. As a matter of fact, I should have said the same thing even if you had not asked me."

"Thanks, thanks. And the boy—how are we to manage about him?"

"We must think it over, each in our own way, and see what can be done. There must be some way of putting a stop to their running wild like that, especially with two hardened old diplomatists like you and myself working together."

"I'm sure we can; and now I'll say good-bye. For the present, at any rate, all we can do is to wait the course of events, as the grocer said when his wife ran off with the apprentice!"

[Pg 73]

VI
"REBECCA AND THE CAMELS"

On the day after Holm had been up to Mrs. Rantzau, William and Marie came into the office. Each wore an air of serious importance, and Holm at once suspected something in the wind.

"Father, we want to read you something. It's from an article in the paper."

"Right you are, my boy—go ahead!"

"It's about that picture of mine, the big one of 'Rebecca and the Camels,' that's on exhibition now in Christiania."

"What's she doing with the camels?"

"Giving them water."

"Oh, I see. Watering the camelias; yes, go on."

"Father, I don't think it's nice of you always to be making fun of William," put in Marie.

"Making fun? Not a bit of it, my dear offspring, I'm highly interested."

"Don't you want to hear what the papers say about my work?"

"That's just what I'm waiting for, if you'll only begin."

William opened the paper and read out solemnly:

> [Pg 74]
> "This large canvas, 'Rebecca and the Camels,' is the work of that promising young painter, William Holm.
>
> "The most surprising feature of the picture, at a first glance, is the courage and self-confidence displayed by this young artist in handling so lofty a theme.
>
> "Naturally, some of the details are not altogether happy in their execution, but, taken as a whole, one cannot but admit that it is a real work of art, and the country may be congratulated on adding a fresh name to the roll of its talented artists.
>
> "With the further study which, we understand, he is shortly about to undertake in Paris, William Holm should have a great future before him."

"Very nice, my son, very pretty indeed. And I suppose it's your pet particular friend, Listad, who wrote it? Does credit to his imagination, I'm sure."

"It was written by a critic of ability and understanding."

"It would be, of course."

"And after that you surely can't have any objection to our going to Paris?"

"We should like to go at once, papa," added Marie.

"I dare say you would. But I think we ought to have a little more conclusive proof of your talent first. Well, I will make you an offer. William, you can send your picture to Copenhagen, and have it exhibited there anonymously: then we will abide by what the critics say. If it's good, why, I give in; if it's slated, then you agree to start work in the office here with me forthwith, and leave your paint-pots till your leisure, to amuse yourself and your friends apart from your work with me. [Pg 75]

"And you, Marie, you can tell your music-mistress, Mrs. Rantzau, that you are seriously thinking of going to the opera, and ask her candid opinion of your prospects. If she advises you to do so, well and good, you shall go to Paris; if not, then you stay at home and begin to learn house-keeping like any other young woman. Isn't that fair?"

"Yes, that's fair enough," said William. "I'm not afraid of what the Copenhagen critics will say."

"And I know Mrs. Rantzau will tell me I ought to go on."

As soon as they had gone, Holm stole off quietly to Mrs. Rantzau and told her all that had passed.

The young people started on their packing at once, Marie in particular was busily occupied in completing her wardrobe. A new travelling-dress was ordered, and various purchases made.

"Don't you think it would be better to wait until we have heard the decision of the authorities," suggested Holm.

"Oh, but I shall hear from Mrs. Rantzau to-morrow," said Marie. "And it doesn't really matter, does it, if you don't get the answer till after I've gone?"

"H'm, I think I'd rather have it settled first, if it's all the same to you."

A week passed, however, and every day Marie had to try over again with Mrs. Rantzau; strange how particular she was now!

William had sent off his picture to Copenhagen, and was all anxiety to learn what had been said about it. The dealer had been instructed to send him press cuttings as soon as they appeared. [Pg 76]

On Saturday morning, when Holm went up into the drawing-room, he found the pair very subdued. William was in the smoking-room, which was in darkness, looking out of the window, and Marie lay on the sofa in tears.

On the table lay an open letter from Mrs. Rantzau, as follows:

> "My dear Miss Holm,—I have for the past week carefully and conscientiously tested your voice in order to give my verdict without hesitation as to your chances of making a career as a singer.
>
> "I regret that as a result I can only advise you most seriously to relinquish the idea.
>
> "You have certainly a pleasing voice, but its compass is only slight, and would never be sufficiently powerful for concert work.
>
> "By all means continue your training, you will find it worth while, and your voice might be a source of pleasure to your home circle and friends. I am sure you will be a thousand times happier in that way than in entering upon a career which could only lead to disappointment.—Sincerely yours,
>
> "Emilie Rantzau."

Holm read the letter, and went over to Marie.

"Don't cry, my child; you shall go to Paris all right, but we'll go together this time, for a holiday."

"Oh, I'm so miserable—hu, hu!"

"It won't be for long." And Holm sat comforting her as well as he could, until at last she went out of her own accord to lay the table for supper—a thing she had not troubled to do for a long time. [Pg 77]

"Aha," thought Holm, "things are looking up a bit."

It was not a particularly cheerful meal, however, and William went off to his own room as soon as it was over.

A few days later a bundle of newspapers arrived by post from Copenhagen. William took the parcel with a trembling hand, and hurried off to his room to read them.

Not a word about "Rebecca and the Camels," beyond the dealer's advertisement of the exhibition. Ah, yes, here was something at last. And he read through the following, from one of the morning papers:

> "Norwegian Camels"
>
> "A decidedly humorous work of art has been on exhibition here the last few days.
>
> "We have rarely seen visitors to the gallery so amused as were the groups that gathered before the large-sized canvas indicated as representing 'Rebecca and the Camels.'

"The young lady with the water-jug appears to be suffering from a pronounced gumboil, and is evidently utterly bored with her task of acting as barmaid to the camels; which latter, be it stated, are certainly but distantly related, if at all, to the honourable family of that name as represented in our Zoological Gardens.

"Indeed, we have it on good authority that a formal protest will shortly be lodged by the family in question against the unrightful adoption of a distinguished name [Pg 78] by these monstrosities; the dromedaries, too, albeit less directly concerned, are anxious to disclaim any relationship.

"As for the setting, it must be admitted that the sky is undoubtedly as blue as anyone could wish, while cactus and cabbage grow luxuriantly about the hoofs of the so-called camels.

"Such unfettered and original humour is rare in Norwegian art; we are more accustomed to works of serious and mystic significance from that quarter. Presumably, the painting in question represents a new school, and we can only congratulate the country on the possession of so promising a young artist."

William turned very pale as he read. Then, taking up the bundle of papers, he thrust the whole collection into the stove, and began nervously walking up and down.

An hour later he went downstairs to the office, and took his seat at the desk, opposite Miss Rantzau.

Just then Holm entered from the shop. He made no remarks, but put on his coat and went down to the waterside, where he found Bramsen sitting in a corner, looking troubled and unhappy.

"Why, what's the matter, Bramsen?"

"Oh, Lord, everything's going contrariwise, it seems."

"Why, what's happened?"

"Well, there's Andrine gone and joined the Salvation Army, with a hat like *that*!" And he made a descriptive motion of his hands to his ears.

"The devil she has!"

"Ay, you may well say that. Downhill's better than up, as the man said when he fell over the cliff. [Pg 79] But," and he sighed, "it never rains but it pours. Amande's gone and got laid up too."

"Amande? Poor child! What's wrong with her?"

"Doctor says she's got tulips or something in her ears."

"Polypi, I suppose you mean."

"Well, something of that sort, anyway."

"Sorry to hear that, Bramsen. And I'd just come down to tell you how splendid I was feeling myself; haven't been so happy for years. What do you think! William's started work at the office, and Marie's given up the singing business. Isn't that a surprise?"

"Ay, that it is. Never have thought it—as the old maid said when a young man kissed her on the stairs. I'm glad to hear it, though—they've been pretty average troublesome up to now."

"I should say so. Well, let's hope Andrine will come to her senses as well, after a bit."

"She must have got it pretty badly, I tell you, Knut. Why, only this morning if she didn't hand me over the savings-bank book, said she'd given up all thoughts of worldly mammon for good." And Bramsen drew out the book from his pocket.

"What do you say to that, £130, 16s. 2d. She must have been a wonder to put by all that."

"You're right there, Bramsen; she must be a born manager."

"And now I'm going to try a steamboat. There's one I know of that's for sale, the *Patriot*, and I believe it's a bargain."

"Don't you go doing anything foolish now, Bramsen; you're comfortably off as you are, and if you [Pg 80] want more wages, why, you've only got to say so."

"No, thanks, Knut. I'm earning well enough, and doing first-rate all round. But it's the freedom I want, to set out on my own again."

"Well, you could take a run down the fjord on one of the coasting steamers any time you like."

"Ah, but it's not the same. Look at that fellow Johnsen now, with the *Rap* hauling away with all sorts of craft, for all he drinks like a fish. Only last year he went on board so properly overloaded, he fell down the hold and smashed a couple of ribs."

"And you want to go and do likewise? You're a long sight better off where you are, if you ask me, Bramsen."

"Well, I'll think it over, Knut. As long as I've got all this worldly mammon in my inside pocket, I feel like doing things with it. And there's no knowing but Andrine might get converted back again any day and want it back—and where'd I be then?"

"H'm. I hope you'll have her back again the same as ever, before long."

"Why, as to that, I hope so too, and that's the truth. But that's the more reason not to lose the chance now she's taken that way. I've thought of trying a share in a vessel too. There's Olsen, skipper of the *Baron Holberg*. You must know Olsen, I'm sure—fellow with a red beard—Baron Olsen, they call him. He offered me a fourth share in the brig for £65."

Bramsen livened up after a while, and the two friends were soon chatting away in their usual cheery fashion.

"What would you say to me marrying again, Bramsen?" [Pg 81]

Bramsen sat without moving for a while, then took out his clasp-knife and began whittling at a splinter of wood.

"Well, what do you say?

"I'd say it's a risky thing to do."

"It generally is, I suppose, but it's always turned out all right up to now."

"You've had a deal of truck with the womenfolk in your time, Knut. Got a way of managing them somehow. Seems to me you start off with being sort of friendly with them in a general way, and then they get to running after you and want to marry you straight away. Ay, you've a sort of way of your own with the women for sure. Me being a simple sort of an individual, it's the other way round—why, I had to ask Andrine three times before she'd have me. Would you believe it, she was as near as could be to taking John Isaksen, that's built like a telegraph post, and never a tooth in his mouth, so he was that afraid of crusts they called him Crusty John."

"Well, women are queer cattle, you're right in that."

"Ay, that they are. Like a bit of clockwork inside, all odd bits of wheels and screws and things, little and big, some turning this way and some that. And the mainspring, as you might say, that's love, and that's why there's some goes too fast, by reason of the mainspring being stronger than it should, and others taking it easy like, and going slow...."

"And some that stop altogether."

"Why, yes, till they get a new mainspring and start going again. If not, why, they're done for, that's all." [Pg 82]

"You've a neat way of putting it, Bramsen. Like a parable."

"And then they're mostly cased up smart and fine, and we wear them mostly near our hearts——"

"Bravo! Right again!"

"Well, now, begging your pardon, Knut, might I be so bold as to ask if it's a widow you've got your eye on this time?"

"No, indeed, my dear fellow, it's not."

"Good for you, Knut. I've never cared much for second-hand goods myself, there's always something wrong with them somewhere, and they soon go to bits."

"You're not far out either. I like them new myself."

"But I was going to tell you, I'd a rare time of it here the other day. You've maybe heard about me gammoning the youngsters down here—ay, and others too for that matter, simple folk like Garner, for instance—that I could talk Chinese through having picked up the lingo the five years I was on board the *Albatros* in the China Seas?"

And, by way of illustration, Bramsen showed his eyes round sideways, screwed up his mouth and uttered the following syllables: "Hi—ho—fang—chu—ka—me—lang—poh—poh—ku!"

Holm laughed till he had to sit down on a barrel. Bramsen was in his element now; Andrine and the Salvation Army, Amanda and her tulips, were forgotten.

"Well, the day before yesterday, while I was stacking fish up in the loft, in comes an old gentleman, sort of learned and reverend looking he was. [Pg 83]

"'Mr. Paal Abrahamsen?' says he, and looks at me solemn-like through a pair of blue spectacles.

"'That's me, your Highness,' says I, for I judged he must be something pretty high. Then he puts down his stick, a mighty fine one with a silver top, and opens a big book.

"Aha, thinks I to myself, it'll be the census, that's it. For you know there's been all this business about taking people's census ever since New Year. Well, if he wanted my census, I was agreeable, so I started away polite as could be:

"'Surname and Christian names, married or single, and so on, that's what you'll be wanting,' says

"'No, my friend,' says he, 'I only called to inquire—you speak Chinese, I understand. Several years in the country, were you not?'

"Well, I reckoned he couldn't be a Chinaman himself. I gave a squint up under his spectacles to see if his eyes were slantywise, but they were all right.

"'H'm,' says I, 'I know a little, but it's nothing much. Not worth counting, really.'

"'Don't be afraid, my good man. It was just a few simple words and phrases in the language I'd very much like to ask about. My name is'—well, it was Professor something or other—Birk or Cork or Stork or something—'from Christiania,' he said.

"'Well,' thinks I to myself, 'it doesn't look as if he knew much more than I do myself. I may bluff him yet.' And we squatted down on a barrel apiece, with an empty sugar-box between us for a table.

"'Mr. Abrahamsen,' says he, 'if you'd kindly repeat a sentence, anything you like, in Chinese.' And [Pg 84] he takes up a grand gold pencil-case and starts to write in the book.

"'Aha,' thought I, 'now we're sitting to the hardest part,' as the miller said when he got to the eighth commandment. Anyhow, here goes. And I rattles off, solemn-like: 'Me—hoh—puh—fih—chu—lang—ra—ta—ta—poh—uh—ee—lee—shung—la—uh—uh—uh!' And down it all goes in his book like winking.

"'Very good, very good. And now, what does it mean?'

"'What it means——' Well, that was a nasty one, as you can imagine. Funny thing, but I'd never thought about that. 'Mean—why—well, it means—H'm. Why, it's as much as to say—well, it's a sort of—sort of national anthem, as you might call it. *Sons of China's Ancient Land.* Not quite that exactly, but something like it, you understand. Chinese is—well, it's different, you know.'

"He looked at me pretty sharply under his glasses, but I stood my ground and never winked a muscle. And then, bless me if he wasn't mean enough to ask me to say it all over again.

"Well, I could have stood on my head in the dark easier than remember what it was I'd said before. So I puts on an air, superior-like, and says to him:

"'Wait a bit, it's your turn now. Let's see if you can manage it first.'

"'Well, my good sir, to begin with, *Sons of Norway's Ancient Land* is a sort of national anthem if you like, but I hardly think it's been translated into Chinese. And in the second place, the word for *sons* is "Yung-li," not "Me-hoh," as you said.'

"'Beg pardon, Professor, but there's different dialectrics out there, same as here: some talks [Pg 85] northland and some westland fashion, not to speak of shorthand, and it's all as different as light and dark.'

"Well, as luck would have it, that set him laughing, and he shuts up the big book and tucks away the pencil in his waistcoat pocket. And he thanks me most politely for the information.

"'You're very welcome, I'm sure,' says I. 'Ah—dec—oh—oh—shung—la—la—poh!'

"But if we ever get another of that learned sort along, why, I'm going to tell them Paal Abrahamsen's dead and gone, poor lad, and can't talk Chinese any more. I never was much good at these examinations."

[Pg 86]

VII
HOLM & SON

There was a marked change in the office now. Every day, when Holm came in, he would find William seated at his desk, opposite Miss Betty. Early and late, William was always there, working away to all appearance like a steam engine. This in itself was excellent, of course, but, on the other hand, it destroyed all chance of a comfortable chat with Betty *tête-à-tête*. And every day Holm felt more and more convinced that Betty and he were made for one another. Or at least that Betty was made for him.

"You must get the hang of the outside business too, my son," he observed one day. "Down at the waterside, for instance, there's a lot needs looking after there."

"Yes, father," said William respectfully, "but I want to get thoroughly into the bookkeeping first, and Miss Rantzau is helping me."

There was nothing to be said to this, of course, but it was annoying, to say the least. And Holm senior, thinking matters over in his leisure hours, would say to himself:

"Knut, my boy, you've been a considerable fool. You should have sent the youngsters off to Paris as they wanted, then you could have fixed things up here in your own fashion while they were away." [Pg 87]

The thought that William might enter the lists against him as a rival for Betty's favour never occurred to him, however, until one day when Broker Vindt came round and found his friend Holm standing behind the counter in the shop, with William in possession of the inner office.

Vindt was the generally recognised and accredited jester of the town; there was nothing he would not find a way of poking fun at, and even Banker Hermansen had smilingly to submit to his witticisms.

Vindt was an old bachelor, a dried-up, lanky figure of a man, with a broad-brimmed felt hat set on his smooth black wig and a little florid face with a sharp nose.

"Beg pardon, Holm," he began, "would you mind asking if the senior partner's disengaged for a moment?"

"Oh, go to the devil!"

"Well, I was thinking of taking a holiday somewhere—and I dare say he'd put me up. Better than nothing, as the parson said when he found a button in the offertory box. You might say the same, you know; be thankful he's keeping you on at all."

"It's a good thing, if you ask me, to see young people doing something nowadays."

"Ah, my boy, it all depends *what* they're doing! Apropos, the other young person in there, is she to be taken into partnership as well? Deuced pretty girl that, Holm."

"Vindt, you're incorrigible. Come upstairs and have a glass of wine. I've got some fine '52 Madeira...." [Pg 88]

"Started as early as that, did you? No, thanks all the same. I think I'll wait till the little Donna inside there's moved upstairs for good, then perhaps we may get a look in at the office again some day."

And Vindt strode out of the shop. Crossing the square, he met Hermansen, who had just come from the repair shops, where the Spaniard was being overhauled. The only part of her hull that could be considered sound consisted of a few plates at the after end. Wherefore Vindt naturally offered his congratulations, "All's well that ends well, eh, what?"

The banker swallowed the pill without wincing, and merely observed:

"Yes, it's an unsatisfactory business, patching up old wrecks. Apropos, Vindt, how's the gout getting on? Going anywhere for a cure this summer?"

"Can't afford it, I'm afraid. Bills for repairing wrecks, you know, are apt to be a bit heavy when they come in."

Hermansen gave it up after that, but he was considerably annoyed when he returned to the bank, as Petersen, the cashier, could see from the way he flung down his gloves and hat—it was rarely the banker showed so much irritation.

Meantime, Holm was thinking over what Vindt had said. "Wait till the little Donna's moved upstairs for good...." Now what on earth did he mean by that? Vindt could not possibly have any idea that he, Knut Holm, was contemplating marriage. William and Betty, then? Nonsense—the idea was preposterous; it certainly could never have entered his head, far less Vindt's. Still, it was certainly queer, the way the boy stuck to the office and never stirred out.... [Pg 89]

In days past it had been impossible to keep him at the desk for an hour on end; now, he hung over the books as if he were nailed to the stool.

"Anyhow, we'll make an end of it some way or other. I'm not going to sit here and be made a fool of."

And Holm went into the inner office. By a rare chance, William had gone out, and he found Betty alone.

The girl had her mother's irresistible charm. Not so handsome, true, but of a gentler type, thought Holm to himself as he looked at the fresh young face.

And that fair curling hair of hers went splendidly with the dark eyebrows.

"You're working too hard; you mustn't overdo it, you know," he said kindly.

"Not the least bit, really; I like it. I've quite fallen in love with the big ledger here, it's such a nice comfortable old-fashioned thing."

"So you like old-fashioned things? Perhaps you would include me in the category of old?"

"You, Mr. Holm! Of course not. Why, you're just in the prime of life."

"Well, yes, I hope so. But what would you say, now, if a man—in the prime of life—were to say to you, My dear Miss Betty, will you come and help to brighten up my home? You're too good to

wear yourself out with working in an office, when you might be filling a man's life with comfort and content."

Betty got down from her stool and stood looking at him in astonishment.

"Really, Mr. Holm, I don't know what you mean!" [Pg 90]

"Oh, I know I'm much older than you, Miss Betty, but my heart's as young as ever, and I can offer you a good home and devoted affection, better, perhaps, than you would find elsewhere."

He placed himself opposite her and endeavoured to meet her eyes, but she took refuge behind the ledger, and would not look up.

"I've seen ups and downs in my time, Miss Betty, and learned a good deal of life; you won't find me such a poor support to lean on."

"Oh, please, Mr. Holm, please don't say any more. I—I must go home now, mama will be waiting...." She broke off, and began hurriedly and nervously putting on her things.

Holm put out his hand and held hers a moment or two, then she ran out, and soon her light, firm step had passed out of hearing.

Holm was annoyed.

"H'm, you're out of practice, that's what it is. Getting old. Shouldn't have sprung it on her suddenly like that. Never flurry a turtle dove; slips out of the ark if you do, and never comes back. But you don't see Knut Holm giving up the game for a little thing like that; no, we must get our old friend Bianca to lend a hand. She's sensible enough to know a good son-in-law when she sees one."

Next morning, when Betty arrived at the office, Holm went along to call on Mrs. Rantzau; it was to her he must now look for help.

Mrs. Rantzau grew very serious when Holm enlightened her as to his feelings for Betty. She pointed out at once the great difference in their ages, and was very doubtful on that head. [Pg 91] Nevertheless, she undertook to speak to Betty herself.

She could not but admit that the offer was a tempting one and that Betty's future would be assured—which to a woman in her position was important enough. She would in any case give the matter her most earnest consideration.

Holm took all this to mean that Mrs. Rantzau herself was not disinclined to approve of the idea, but that it would take time to get it settled.

He felt more cheerful now, and hoped for victory in the end. Mrs. Rantzau, he was convinced, would use her utmost influence with her daughter, though of course they would think it looked better not to accept at once!

On returning to the office he fancied Betty was more than usually friendly, and came to the conclusion that she had perhaps begun to think more seriously over the matter.

In order to prepare the children in any case, he thought it best to take William into his confidence, without further delay, as to his intention of marrying again. William was accordingly asked to come upstairs.

When they entered the drawing-room Holm locked the door, and motioned William to a seat on the sofa beside him.

"But what on earth are you making all this mystery about, old man?" said William.

"Old, did you say? You might be thankful, my boy, if you were as youthful as I am."

"Why, what's the matter now?"

"I want to speak to you seriously, my son. For seventeen years now I have been a lone, lone man...." [Pg 92]

"Seventeen years?"

"That's what I said. It's seventeen years now since Mrs. Gronlund died. But what is time? A mere trifle. Anyhow, I'm getting tired of this lonely life."

"Very natural, I'm sure."

"And I have therefore resolved to marry again."

"Have you, though? Good idea."

"Yes; don't you think so? And I have decided to take a wife who is first of all a good-hearted and domesticated woman, but at the same time one who will be able to brighten up the home."

"Excellent! I quite agree. A sound and healthy man of your type should certainly marry as soon as opportunity occurs. And I don't mind saying that the life we two have led here all these years hasn't exactly been an ideal existence."

"Perhaps not—though you might have been worse off. However, now that I am about to bring home a bride for the third——"

"And last time?"

"—I cannot but feel a certain emotion in saying to you, my son, as I do now: look up to her as a mother, love her as she deserves, for she is a woman in a thousand."

"I'm sure, father, you could not have made a better choice. Mrs. Rantzau is, I believe, an excellent woman."

"Mrs. Rantzau! What on earth are you talking about?"

"Why, isn't it her you mean? Both Marie and I have noticed you've been visiting her pretty often of late." [Pg 93]

"Me—to marry a woman that age!"

"But she must be much younger than you!"

"Oh—that's different. Men can marry at any age and keep on marrying."

"But who is the favoured one, then?"

"The favoured one, as you are pleased to call her, is Miss Betty——"

"Betty! *You* marry Betty Rantzau?"

"Yes; don't you think it's a good idea? Suit us all round."

"Oh, it's ridiculous, impossible!"

"And why, may I ask?"

"Well, to begin with, Betty won't have you, and, besides——"

"Well...?"

"Betty belongs to me!"

Holm jumped up from the sofa, and stood facing William, who sat quietly and calmly as ever.

"William—I should never have expected this of you. H'm, I've borne with a good deal, one way and another, and had a lot of low-down tricks played on me in my time, but this...."

"Betty's the only woman I've ever cared for, father; from the first time I set eyes on her I've...."

"A passing fancy, nothing more. A few weeks' holiday in Paris, and you'll have forgotten all about it."

"There you're mistaken. I'm serious for once."

"And I'm serious too. And this time I'm not going to give in."

Holm turned sharply on his heel and went down to the office. He had expected to find Betty there, but she was out. On the desk lay a note, in her writing, asking to be excused for leaving the office; she was not feeling well, and had gone home. [Pg 94]

He strode up and down in great agitation. Knut Holm was thoroughly angry now.

His own son as a rival! Was there ever such a ridiculous state of things? If Vindt got any inkling of the situation, there would be no end to the gossip he would make of it—it would be impossible to remain in the place.

Give way at once, and submit? No, that was not Knut Holm's way. And indeed, the very thought made him feel miserable at heart, for he had grown really fond of Betty.

Well, let her choose for herself, that was the best way. She and her mother could work it out together, and see which looked most like business.

He went down to the waterside to hunt up Bramsen; in times of real difficulty, when he felt uncertain how to act, it was always helpful to spend an hour listening to Bramsen's honest and genial talk.

Up in the loft he found Bramsen, lying at his ease on a couple of coffee-bags, studying a telegram.

"Hullo, Bramsen, what are you up to now?"

Bramsen half rose, and sat holding one hand to his forehead, waving the telegram in the other.

"Well, if this isn't the queerest...."

"There's a deal of queer things about just lately. What's happening now?"

"Why, you know I told you how I'd got all that worldly out of Andrine, when she joined the Salvation Army?"

"Well, has she come to her senses again?" [Pg 95]

"Getting on that way, anyhow. It was just as I thought. When she got up this morning she began sort of throwing out hints that I'd better let her have the bank-book again after all."

"Aha, that looks like coming round."

"Well, you can guess I'd been expecting something of the sort, and so I started in a little speculation while there was time."

"Not trying steamboats, I hope?"

"No, no. But I got wind of a good thing in another way altogether. You know Johnsen I told you about?"

"Bramsen, don't tell me you've got mixed up in any sort of deal with that drunken old fool?"

"Drunk? He's as right as can be now. Turned teetotal, and made some money too. Any amount. Well, last week he came along to me and said he and Baron Olsen had gone shares and bought up a boat that was lying at Strandvik—*Erik* was the name. They'd got her dirt cheap, but they'd let me come in for a third share, and be managing owner, with Johnsen as skipper. Well, I agreed. The *Erik* went off last week, and now here comes a telegram from some place called Havre; but it's a queer sort of message. I can't make head or tail of it myself. Here, see what it says: 'Drink dock yesterday.—JOHNSEN.' Drunk in dock, if you ask me—and him a teetot'lar and all!"

Holm took the telegram and read it over, but could make nothing of it. "Drink dock yesterday" was all it said.

"Well, it's something to do with drink, anyway, by the look of it—whether he means he got drunk in dock, or drank the dock dry to be out of temptation, he's probably got delirium tremens by this time, and drunk the ship as well." [Pg 96]

"Holm—you don't think he's gone off the rails again—honestly?" Bramsen jumped up from his couch and stood aghast.

"Well, whatever did you want to be such a fool for, Bramsen? Managing owner indeed—why, you've no more idea of managing than those coffee-bags."

"Ho, haven't I? And me been round the Horn and Cape of Good Hope as well, and nearly eaten by crocodiles in Bahia, dead of yellow fever, and all but burned in Rio, an ear with frostbite in the Arctic, been shooting monkeys in Mozambique."

"Monkey yourself, if you ask me."

"That may be; but, anyhow, you can't say I don't know anything about shipping. Your smart shipowners sitting all day in their offices and looking out places on the map, you suppose they know more about it than me that's been thirty years navigating on my own all over the torrential globe. I'm not good enough to manage a bit of a ship myself, eh? I'm a plain man, I know, but I'm no fool for all that, and I don't see what call you've got to go throwing wet blankets on all my deals and doings anyhow."

Bramsen was thoroughly offended now, and Holm found it difficult to bring him round.

"It's not that, Bramsen; you know I don't mean it that way. But I do think it's foolish of you to entrust your property to an irresponsible fellow like Johnsen."

"Well, what's a man to do when everything's going by the board all round? Ay, it's other little matters that's the trouble as well. I don't mind telling you, Knut, but, flay and fester me, you must swear you won't say a word to a soul." [Pg 97]

"You know I can keep a secret, Bramsen."

"Well, it's this way. Armanda's only just been confirmed, and, would you believe it, if the girl hasn't gone and got engaged already, with Johnsen's son; Carljohan's his name, and a devilish smart lad too. I know he failed for his mate's certificate this year, but after all that doesn't go for much, for he can walk on his hands as easy as his feet, and he's as nimble as a squirrel up aloft."

"But have you given your consent?"

"Consent?" Bramsen stared in astonishment. "Consent? They never asked for it, and I never asked myself—how should I? I'd never have done anything but ask for consent all the times I was engaged, and then, what about you? Have you asked anyone's consent?"

"No, but...."

"Well, there you are! Anyhow, we had a sort of celebration party up at home one evening when Andrine was gone to meeting. Take my word for it, but old Johnsen was a bit sore that night; and wishing he'd never gone in for teetotalling! But the rest of us had a fine uproarious time of it, and I tried my hand with young Carljohan at one or two little wrestling tricks. Aha, he's a good one, but he'll need to learn a bit more before he can get over me. There's a dodge or two I learned from a Mulatto on the coast of Brazil many years ago...."

"But what's all this got to do with the boat?"

"Why, you see, Armanda says Carljohan must get a berth as skipper, so we must use the chance,

[Pg 98]

while her mother's all Salvationing, to get hold of a share in a vessel, put in old Johnsen as skipper at first, and let the youngster take it on after.... See?"

"Oho! Women again, Bramsen, what?"

"Ay, they do us every time, and that's the truth. But we can't get on without them all the same. Like pepper in the soup—gets you in the throat now and again, but it gives you an appetite."

Bramsen had by now almost forgotten the telegram; he grew serious again, however, as it caught his eye.

"'Drink dock yesterday—drink dock....'" he scratched his whiskers and muttered curses at Johnsen and his telegram.

Holm sat looking at the thing.

"Bramsen," he said at last, "I've got it. Don't you see what it is?"

"No, I'm blest if I do."

"It's come through a bit wrong, that's all, mutilated in transit. '*Erik*' it ought to be. '*Erik* dock yesterday'—that is—he's got there all right and docked yesterday."

Bramsen turned a somersault over the coffee-bags, slapped his thighs and stood doubled up with laughter.

"Well, to be sure! A nice lot they telegraph people must be over there! And I was certain sure he'd gone on the drink and sold us all up this time—ha, ha, ha!"

While Holm and Bramsen were thus consoling each other down at the quay, Mrs. Rantzau and Betty were sitting quietly in the little parlour now that the pupils had gone.

Betty was crying, with her arms round her mother's neck, while her mother pressed the girl closely to her, patting her hair tenderly.

"Don't cry, Betty, my child; you know we've always had each other, good times and bad. Ah, my dear, it's a sad childhood you had, but I could do no more. You must do as your heart tells you, my child." [Pg 99]

"Oh, mother, and we were so happy together, and everything going so well."

"We'll manage somehow, Betty dear; you've never known me give up yet, have you, child?"

"No—but it's so cruel to think of you having to work and slave all the time—and we might have lived in luxury the two of us—but I can't, mother, I can't."

"Never think of it, Betty dear; I am well and strong, and we'll get along all right. And if you don't care to stay on at the office there after what's happened, why, there must be other places you could get."

"Yes, I know—but it was so nice there, and I was just getting into things so well. And—and—Mr. William was so nice and kind."

She fell to crying once more, but Mrs. Rantzau sat up sharply.

"William—was he nice to you, you say?"

"Yes, so kind and friendly, and he told me about things—— Oh, he's a good man, I know."

"Told you about what things, Betty?"

"About his life, and how he'd wanted to be an artist, and was studying for it and all that—but then he thought it was his duty to help his old father with the business."

Betty grew calmer after a while, and told her mother a great deal of what had passed between Holm and herself, and what William had said.

Emilie Rantzau lay awake till late that night thinking over what Betty had said. It was difficult to get a clear idea of the situation, for the various scenes seemed contradictory. Had William honourable intentions regarding Betty?—that was the main thing. [Pg 100]

But she had met with so many disappointments in life, that it almost seemed as if Fate were purposely deluding her with visions that were never to be realised. Again and again she had seen the future opening before her in happiness and prosperity, only to find the prospect vanish like a mirage, leaving her alone as before in the desert of life.

VIII

[Pg 101]

MALLA TRAP

Forty years earlier the corner premises occupied by the firm of Knut G. Holm had belonged to Melchior Trap, who had his business there. Melchior Trap was one of the great traders of the place in his day, and a man looked up to by all.

He was supposed to have made a fortune in the Crimean War, but lost most of it later, though enough remained for him to leave his daughter and only child, Malla Trap, a comfortable income after his death.

Knut Holm, as a lad of fifteen, had entered the service of Melchior Trap, starting in the shop, and gradually working his way up, until, when the old man died, he was able to take over the business himself.

Malla Trap was then a friend of old standing; some, indeed, of the older generation declared that Holm in his young days had been in love with his master's daughter, but that the old patrician would not hear of the match.

However this might be, Malla Trap was a regular visitor at the Holms', and as far back as the children could remember, Aunt Trap had always come round to dinner every Sunday, where a special place was laid for her at table.

She was now about sixty, tall, thin, and with greyish hair that hung in two heavy curls on either side of her forehead. [Pg 102]

But Malla Trap was no ordinary old maid with black crochet mittens and knitting-needle, sitting roasting apples over a stove in an over-heated room.

No; on a fine winter's day, with clean, smooth ice across the fjord, one might see Malla Trap's slender figure skimming along on skates as gaily as any girl of seventeen.

She had a splendid constitution and physique—weakness was a thing unknown to her. And she had carefully hardened herself from youth up, for she had a dread of becoming old and invalid.

As an instance of her prowess of endurance it was stated as a reliable fact that she had set out one bitterly cold morning to skate across the fjord, and, falling through a patch of thin ice a couple of miles out, had not only managed to extricate herself, but instead of making at once for home, continued on her way to Strandvik. There, arriving at the house of her old friend Prois, she declared she was frozen so stiff that anyone might have broken her across the middle like a sugar-stick.

A slight cold was the sole effect of her bath, which otherwise seemed to have been merely refreshing!

She had always had leisure and means to arrange her mode of life as she pleased, and had made the most of her opportunities in that direction. Her whole existence was conducted in a casual, easy-going fashion, not tied down to habit, rule and order.

Her idea of charity, and manner of exercising the same, were no less eccentric.

One Christmas, for instance, she had presented each of the old derelicts at the Seamen's Home with a pair of ski, declaring that with a little practice they would soon learn to use them, and that the exercise would give them a new lease of life. The poor old gouty invalids were hard put to it to hobble along on their feet with the aid of sticks, and had certainly never dreamed of running about on ski. [Pg 103]

When Pastor Arff, who was extremely stout, complained of heartburn, she gave him a skiff, with oars complete, on the express condition that he should get up at six every morning and row a couple of miles up and down the river.

"I assure you, my dear Pastor, you'll feel as lively as a fish if you do!"

She would go to meetings in the afternoon, and sit among the earnest sisterhood, taking an interested part in discussions as to mission work among the heathen, and then go on in the evening to see the latest and riskiest pieces at the theatre, which she thoroughly enjoyed. It was a known fact that she had tried to enliven the work of the local soup-kitchen by introducing raisins as an ingredient in the pea-soup, but the old ladies on the committee had put their foot down—that was going too far. Malla Trap urged them to try it—it was delicious, she declared—but without avail.

The townsfolk were so used to her eccentricities that no one ever took much notice of them, for all knew she was a thoroughly good soul, who in her unobtrusive way had brought happiness to many a home in distress. It was not always by direct gifts that she effected this; her confident and encouraging manner gave new hope and strength to many who were sinking under the burden of their struggle. Her tall, erect figure came like a breath of the fresh north-west wind, sweeping clouds from the sky. [Pg 104]

Not many knew that it was Malla Trap who had given Bertelsen the idea of starting a paper shop when the firm in which he was cashier failed, and he found himself thrown out, with a wife and children to look after, and no means of support.

The scene would probably have been something like this:

"Now, my dear man, it's no good giving up like that."

"But what am I to do?—there's nowhere to turn—only the workhouse. That's what it'll be—the workhouse."

"Nonsense, Bertelsen! pull yourself together, do. Look here! I've an idea. There's that shop in the square, next to Holm; it's vacant, and you could get it cheap. Start a little business there with paper, cardboard, wall-papers and that sort of thing. It'll be a success—it *must*!"

He looked up a little—paper—business—his thoughts took a definite direction. Hope began to dawn, and Malla Trap had accomplished a piece of the finest missionary work a human soul ever can—she had made a sunny thought to grow in a tortured and despairing mind.

Her best friend was Miss Strom, a woman of considerable wit and education, and daughter of the late governor of the province.

When the pair of them were together, Beate Strom would lecture at length, pointing out to Malla Trap the necessity of paying some regard to public opinion; it really would not do to go on acting in that independent fashion.

"It's no good, my dear," Malla Trap would say. "If I can't do things my own way, which is at least honest and decent enough, why, I might as well give up altogether." [Pg 105]

"Not at all," said Beate Strom earnestly; "one must consider what people say."

"Nonsense, Beate! You're far too well brought up, my dear, that's the trouble."

And when Malla Trap gave a supper-party, with lobster mayonnaise and black pudding, Beate Strom gave her up as hopeless. There was a limit, she declared, to the extent to which innovations should be permitted.

But Malla Trap simply pleaded that they were her favourite dishes—and why shouldn't she? Was she to sit and eat plain bread and cheese when she felt like lobster mayonnaise and could get it? No, thank you!

As already mentioned, Miss Trap was a regular visitor at Holm's, and had her own place at table.

The children were fond of her, and she of them. Whenever anything went wrong, or they were in trouble, both William and Marie would go to Aunt Trap for advice.

After his last conversation with his father, William was at a loss what to make of the affair. It was natural, therefore, he should confide in Aunt Trap.

He told her that he could not be certain himself as to the state of Betty's feelings towards him, but was almost sure she was favourably inclined at least.

Malla Trap asked him earnestly if it were not after all only a passing fancy on his part; she was very sceptical as to the nature of men's tender feelings.

William, of course, declared emphatically that it was true and enduring love, and that he would be blighted for ever if he could not make Betty his wife. [Pg 106]

At last Malla Trap believed him, and promised to do what she could to put matters right.

She decided first of all to go and talk to Mrs. Rantzau, with whom she had some slight acquaintance; but on the way she encountered Mrs. Rantzau herself walking with Hermansen, and from the manner in which the pair appeared absorbed in each other's society, Malla Trap judged it best to postpone the call for the present. Immediately after, Vindt, her cousin, came strolling along, and stopped to speak.

"Well, Mrs. Mallaprop, how's things with you?"

"Very well, thanks, rude boy."

Vindt stood a moment pointing with his stick to the pair that had just passed.

"What do you say to that, my lanky cousin—pretty bit of goods the banker's got hold of there. Who is she?"

"Mrs. Rantzau, the music teacher."

"Oho! So that's the lady, is it! Well, I must say, she looks quite smart."

"When are you coming to see me?"

"My dear child, think of your reputation! What would the world say if I were to go visiting a love-lorn female without a chaperon in the world?"

"Don't talk nonsense. Come home and have dinner. I've a nice piece of fish."

"And apple sauce, what? No, thank you; I was ill for a fortnight last time I sampled your new-fangled menus. But I mustn't take up your valuable time. *Addio, cara mia!*"

And Vindt strode off, in time to see Hermansen and Mrs. Rantzau disappear round the corner. He [Pg 107]

began to wonder what it could mean.

Banker Hermansen running off in business hours with a lady all dressed up—this was something altogether unprecedented, and enough to set others beside Vindt agape. Hermansen, a man devoid of all tender feeling, whose heart was popularly supposed to be made of rhinoceros hide—surely he could not be going that way like any other mortal?

Vindt was so occupied with the phenomenon that he walked full tilt into Listad and the schoolmaster, the former of whom buttonholed at once and began delivering a long harangue about the new Ministry and the political situation.

"... Such a state of things, my dear sir, is more than gloomy; it is desperate. And the *fons et origo* of the whole trouble lies in the fact that...."

"That there's too many amateurs poking their fingers into the business as it is, and an ungodly mess they're making of it, instead of sticking to their work and doing something useful."

Listad thought he had never met a ruder fellow than this unceremonious broker; never encountered a citizen with a more callous disregard to higher political aims, and the needs of the country.

"But what—what is to become of a nation if its individual units allow themselves to be swallowed up in mere material strivings, deaf to the call of lofty ideals, blind to the moral welfare of the land, and of humanity at large? I ask you, how will such a people fare?"

"First-rate, if you ask me," said Vindt, and walked off.

Meantime Malla Trap had come to the conclusion that she might as well take up the business in hand with Holm himself at once; it would have to be done sooner or later. [Pg 108]

She went up to the drawing-room, and told the maid to go down and ask if Mr. Holm could spare a few minutes.

Holm was somewhat surprised at the message; Malla Trap did not often come round like this of her own accord in the middle of the week.

"Well, my dear Miss Trap, is there anything special the matter since we have the pleasure of seeing you to-day? Or were you feeling lonely, perhaps?"

"Lonely enough I am at times, Knut Holm."

"Why, yes, I suppose—when one is all by oneself—er—one feels that way now and then. I know myself I often feel the want of company, someone to confide in——"

"Ah, but you've memories, Knut Holm, happy memories."

"That's true—but even then—it's apt to be dull all the same in the long-run, with nothing but memories."

"I hear you are thinking of marrying again."

"And who's been kind enough to tell you that?"

"Oh, I had it from a reliable source. But honestly, Knut Holm, I think you will do well to reflect before you do."

"I've put in quite enough reflection over it already, my dear Malla Trap, worked it out all round. I know it means a lot of extra expense and bother, with new arrangements and all that, but seeing I can't reasonably expect to live more than another twenty years or so, I fancy there'll be enough to manage it."

"So that's what you call working it out, is it? Working out sums of money! I thought you were a man of loftier ideals than that." [Pg 109]

"I was, in my younger days, Malla Trap. Do you remember the time when we two were fond of each other?"

"I don't think I've forgotten it."

"We were as good as engaged, weren't we?"

"I had your promise, Knut Holm, and I trusted you. I waited and waited, but you never came."

"Yes, it was a pity, I know. But, you see, your father was so furious when he heard about it, and treated me in such a manner, that I simply couldn't put up with it. And then, afterwards, there were those affairs with Maggie and Mrs. Gronlund—but I'm sure I don't know what we want to go dragging up all that for. We've got along quietly and comfortably now together these many years; let bygones be bygones, say I."

"Oh, I've forgiven you everything long ago. But I haven't forgotten, and I've my own reasons for reminding you of it all to-day for the first and last time. So go on."

Holm walked up and down restlessly, wondering what Malla Trap could have in mind. It did not occur to him for the moment that she might be acting on William's behalf, or he might have been less frank. As it was, he went on with a touch of forced gaiety:

"Well, well, my dear Malla Trap, if you must have the old story set out in detail, don't mind me. I'll tell you all about it. I had to marry Maggie, you see; as a gentleman I could do nothing else. And as for Mrs. Gronlund, why, seeing she wouldn't give up the boy, I had to take her as well. Altogether, you see, it's been the boy's fault all along. If it hadn't been for him, you and I might have fixed things up after all." [Pg 110]

"Best as it was, I dare say. But I ask you now, for the sake of our old friendship, do not make another woman unhappy."

"But, my dear soul, Maggie and Mrs. Gronlund were as happy as could be. I really think I've a sort of gift for making women happy, when I love them."

"Ha, ha! Excuse my laughing, but really, Knut Holm, I can't help it. You loved me once, or so you said, at least."

"Oh, we were only children then."

"But I can't say you ever made me happy in that way."

"I assure you, Malla Trap, I've been more sorry than you know about that business."

"Oh, I don't think you ever troubled much to think what a forsaken woman feels, what misery it means to her."

"Well, honestly, I don't find it easy to put myself in her place, as it were—no, I can't say—— It must be very unpleasant, of course.... H'm. But you seem to have got along pretty comfortably all the same, as far as one can see."

"As far as one can see, yes." Her voice was earnest now. "Has it never occurred to you to think why Malla Trap grew into the eccentric, half-foolish creature people turn to smile at now? Do you know what it means to lose one's whole objective in life? Ah, no, you wouldn't understand; no one else, perhaps, could understand how a woman's life can be made empty, aimless, a mere chaos of existence—though, Heaven be thanked, there have been little rays of sun-light here and there. And when the whole poor comedy is ended, why, I hope there may be some few that will spare a kindly thought for Malla Trap." [Pg 111]

"If I knew how I could help you, Malla Trap, I'd do it gladly. But, honestly, I can't see what you're driving at just now."

"I want your son to be happy, that's all."

"Oh—so that's where the trouble lies, is it? Very sensible of him, I'm sure, to get you on his side, but if you'll excuse my saying so, Malla Trap, you'd better leave things alone."

He strode up and down, and the casual, easy-going air he had assumed gave way to a more serious expression. At last he stopped, and stood facing her.

"There are critical moments in every man's life," he began, "and, and—I reckon I've had my share. I've been on the verge of bankruptcy...."

"In 1875, yes."

"Why—how did you know?"

"Oh, I knew how matters stood then, well enough."

"There wasn't a soul that knew it except C. Henrik Pettersen."

"You think so, do you?"

"There was Hermansen at the bank, he had some idea, I dare say, but nobody else."

"I knew." She drew off her gloves and smoothed them out on the table. Holm stood still, looking earnestly at her.

"Was it—was it you, then, that sent me the hundred and fifty pounds?"

"You've guessed it at last, then? Yes, it was I. I knew you were in desperate straits, that you would be ruined if you did not get help from somewhere."

"After I'd treated you so badly?"

"A woman's heart's a strange thing."

"But why did you never tell me before to-day?" [Pg 112]

"I should never have told you at all, if it hadn't been for William's sake. I'm proud of the boy; he's been good to me, and a homeless old woman's grateful for a little kindness. Well, now you know it—and now I ask you again to give up Betty Rantzau; there'll be nothing but trouble come of it, if you go on. And they're fond of each other, I may as well tell you that at once."

"That boy—that boy! It's as I said before; he's been the trouble all along."

"This time, at least, it's for your own good."

"That remains to be seen. But I can't get over that business of the hundred and fifty pounds."

"Say no more about it, Knut Holm."

"And that artful old rascal of a Pettersen; to think I should have wasted a wreath on his grave every blessed year since he died. Eleven wreaths at four shillings a time—true, I left out the ribbon last time, that was so much saved. But he shouldn't have had a single flower out of me, if I'd known."

"Then it's agreed that you let William marry Betty?

"I never said anything of the sort. But the hundred and fifty—my head's all going round. How am I to pay you back again? Really, I'm sorry—you must excuse me...."

And he strode out of the room. Miss Trap sat smoothing out her gloves on the table. Thinking matters over, she came to the conclusion that Holm would give in, but the way did not seem quite clear as yet.

A little later William looked in.

"Has he gone?"

"Just this minute." [Pg 113]

"What did he say? Did you manage it, Auntie Trap?"

"He's obstinate, my boy, but I think we shall get him round all right. Your father only wanted to try you, William. He's a strange man, is Knut Holm."

"Do you think that was all it was?"

"Yes, I should say so. He could hardly find a better way of making you serious about it, than by playing the part of a rival."

"Oh, we must have Betty up—we've settled it all between us, now." And before Miss Trap could say a word, he was gone. Two minutes later he came back, leading Betty by the hand.

"This is Auntie Trap—yes, you must call her Auntie now, for it's she that's managed it all. Though it was really only a sort of trial father got up, so Auntie says—he's a wonder, the old man, what?"

"May I call you Auntie as well, Miss Trap? I've never had an aunt myself, and it's nice. Mother and I have always been alone."

"I know, my child. Call me Auntie by all means, and God bless you both. It's all to be for the best. I'm sure father was only wanting to try you. I know Knut Holm of old; he's his own queer ideas at times, but his heart's in the right place."

And she put her arm round Betty's neck and kissed her.

"Lovely it must be for you two young people on the threshold of the promised land. But remember, as you look towards it, that it only comes once in a lifetime—just this one moment, when the mists have cleared away, and the future is bright before you. I wish you happiness, children."

She walked out, erect as ever, but with her wise eyes, as it were, veiled. William and Betty watched her a little way up the street. [Pg 114]

They stood hand in hand by the window, looking out over the river; Betty laid her head on his shoulder. Never before had the river and the hillside seemed so beautiful as to-day.

There came into Betty's mind the memories of her childhood, like dark shadows gliding by. The high-walled courtyard in Hamburg and the rooms in a narrow street in Copenhagen stood out clearest of all. She shivered a little, and put her arms round her lover's neck.

"Come, William, let us go and tell mother. She will be so happy."

[Pg 115]

IX
CLAPHAM JUNCTION

Everyone knows the great railway station at Clapham Junction just outside London, where so many lines meet and cross, and where trains start for so many different parts.

Our little town, too, had its junction of ways just outside, where the high road branches out into three, each in a different direction. It was the accepted meeting-place for all secretly engaged couples, being a convenient spot that could be reached, accidentally as it were, by two people happening to come along by different routes.

It was Vindt, the humorist, who had christened it Clapham Junction, and he was the first to ferret

out the fact that Banker Hermansen and Mrs. Rantzau had been walking together along the road by the shore several mornings in succession.

Vindt went round to the bank on some pretext of business, but really to see if the banker was in a softer mood than usual. After all, the man was no more than human!

But no; there he stood behind the counter, stiff and coldly polite as ever. Nice sort of man for a lover, thought Vindt.

What could the banker and Mrs. Rantzau have in common?

It was not easy to imagine. Some said he was fascinated by her voice, others laid the blame on her black eyes; the fact remained that the pair were more and more frequently together. Vindt had not been down to Holm's for a long time now; he hated the sight of women in business, and that Holm should have been one of the first to introduce a petticoat within the private sanctum among good cigars and vintage port—it was unpardonable. In the present state of things, however, he felt desperately in need of someone to talk to. This affair of Hermansen's was so unparalleled a marvel that he simply must open his mind to someone about it. [Pg 116]

He thrust his head in at the doorway, and discovered Holm standing behind the counter.

"All alone, old stick-in-the-mud?"

"Not a soul in the place. Come in. Haven't seen you for ages."

"You've been otherwise engaged. Fair charmer inside there now?" He pointed inquiringly towards the office.

"No, I'm all alone. Come inside, and have a glass of '48 port."

Vindt carefully laid down his heavy, ivory-handled cane, hung his coat and neck wrap over a chair, and stood with his hands in his pockets, facing him.

"Well, and what's the trouble now?" said Holm, struggling with a refractory cork.

"Holm, what do you say: could you imagine me in love?"

"No."

"Well, could you imagine old Hermansen on his knees whispering tender nothings to a woman?"

"What on earth...? Look here. Where have you been to lunch to-day?" [Pg 117]

"I haven't been anywhere to lunch. But I'll tell you where I have been: I've been out to Clapham Junction, and seen our banker friend and the Sea Lady...."

"And who?"

"High C Lady; nightingale; your little Donna's mother—Rantzau, isn't it?"

"Hermansen and Mrs. Rantzau?" Holm looked at him earnestly.

"Aha, had an eye on her yourself, what? Well, you've had some experience of widows, so you're not a new hand at the business."

"What's all this nonsense you've got hold of to-day, Vindt?"

"Why, I'm sorry to crush the budding flower of love within your heart, but so it is. You've always come off second-best with Hermansen—and now he's snapped up Mrs. Rantzau under your nose. A marriage has been arranged—etc. etc."

Holm's face was flushed—no doubt with his efforts to open the bottle.

"Come along!" said Vindt. "What about that little drink? I'm sure I want something to console me."

Holm could not get the cork out. He sat down, and was unusually silent.

Vindt began to feel conscience-stricken. Surely Holm had not been in earnest, then?

"Holm! You don't mean to say you're—you're...."

"Hurt, you mean? No, no, my boy—but I've been had all the same.... Well, never mind. What with the Spaniard, and now the widow, I should say he'd soon find he'd got his 'hands full.'" [Pg 118]

"Well, here's to the happy pair!"

"Oh, by all means. But can you tell me, Vindt, how he managed it? I'd give five bob to have heard him in the act. Hermansen proposing...."

"Oh, that's easy enough. This is the style." Vindt buttoned up his coat, put his stick under his arm and held his hands behind his back.

"Honoured Madam, allow me to draw upon your indulgence to the extent of craving your protection. I am not altogether a worthless document, have never before been discounted for anyone's account, but have lain untouched as a sole bill of exchange in my portfolio. Having

ascertained that you had established yourself here, I ventured, honoured Madam, to apply to you, with a view to learn how far you might be disposed to open a joint account, free of all commission, to our mutual advantage."

"Bravo, Vindt! I'll take my oath it's the first time in his life he's ever done anything free of all commission—poor devil, I declare I'm almost sorry for him myself."

They talked over the affair of the engagement for some time, and Holm grew so thoroughly cheerful after a while that Vindt was convinced his heart was not involved.

"Holm, will you do me a favour?" Vindt judged that Holm was now in the best of tempers, and proposed to utilise the opportunity. He was anxious to lay hands on a couple of hundred pounds. It was worth trying at any rate.

"Well, what is it?"

"Give me your signature on the back of a piece of paper, that's all. A couple of hundred." [Pg 119]

"My dear Vindt, I should be sorry to lose an old friend like you."

"Lose an old friend?"

"Why, yes. You see, I've had some experience of backing bills. Take a couple of instances out of many. You remember young Lieberg? Smart, well-got-up young fellow, with a taste for the good things of life, but a trifle thin in the wearing parts. I backed a bill for him, and we were first-rate friends. At the first renewal I had to remind him, with all respect, of the paper's existence, and he was mortally offended—although I offered to lend him interest and payment. And in the end I had to pay up myself. Well, I thought after that he'd look on me as his best friend. Whereas now, when I meet him in the street, he cuts me dead. That's what you get for it!

"Then there was Kautz, the shipowner. He went bankrupt, as you know, and let me in for £800, but in spite of that I signed, and helped him to come to an arrangement. A very nice little piece of business it turned out for him, for the year after he was a richer man than he'd ever been before, and he gave a thundering big party, invited all the town—excepting me!"

"My dear Holm, if it ever should happen to me, I'd take care you were invited too."

"Very good of you, I'm sure. But I'll tell you another little story. Consul Pram was a big man, with a big position, as you know, but a jovial soul, and easy to get on with. I've a liking for men of that sort. Well, it was in 1875, when things were at their worst all round, for shipping and trade and everything else we get our living by. I don't believe there was a business in the town that wasn't [Pg 120] eternally worried about how things were to turn out.

"Then one day Pram came up to me. 'Puh,' said he, 'it's hot,' and sat down, puffing. It was midsummer and pretty warm.

"'You're right there,' said I, putting away my balance-sheet. I'd just tacked £200 on to the valuation of the premises to make it come out.

"'Times are pretty bad,' said he.

"'Not for a nabob like you, surely,' said I, feeling a bit anxious all the same. There was a matter of £150 between us. And I'd no idea where to rake up any funds beyond.

"'I'm not sure if I'll pull through myself,' said he.

"'Nonsense, Consul—with your credit——'

"'Still....'

"'Hermansen at the bank will let you have all you want. *You're* safe enough.'

"'I've lost courage altogether now. It's hopeless to keep going any longer in this place.'

"'But Lord save us, man, *you* mustn't go under. If you did, there'd be more than myself would have to go too.'

"'Well, you'll have to keep me out then, Holm, that's all.'

"Only fancy me backing a bill for a man like Pram when I was barely hanging on by my eyelids myself.

"Well, it was then the wonderful thing happened. Just in the middle of the day, after Pram had gone, came a letter enclosing £150—anonymous! I've never felt so glad in all my life, Vindt—it was like a message from Providence telling me to keep up my pluck—and Consul Pram as well!

"That afternoon I went round to his office, and backed a bill for £500. And next day Pram told me, [Pg 121] laughingly, that he had got the bank to discount it, and Hermansen had said, 'Shouldn't have too much to do with that Holm if I were you, Pram. Not first-rate paper, really. But of course I'd take anything with *your* name on!'

"Some time after I backed another bill for Pram, and helped him in various little ways, for the man was almost out of his senses with worry; I'm sure he'd have gone smash if he'd been left to himself. I met his wife, too, about that time, with the boy. She is a woman of commanding

presence, as you know, and handsome, to look at, anyway. She gave me her hand most cordially, and said, 'My sincerest thanks, Mr. Holm, for all you have done for us. *I shall never, never forget it.*'

"Six months after, the trouble was over, and young Pram was getting up a sledge party, inviting all the young people in the town. Marie's name was on the list. 'No, leave her out,' said his mother. 'He's quite a common person really, is that Holm.'

"And later, I understand, young Pram complained to the bank manager that his father had had dealings some time back with Knut G. Holm—bill transactions, but in future he would not hear of anything of the sort.

"The bank manager had good sense enough to answer that there was hardly any danger now in having dealings with Knut G. Holm!

"Well, my dear Vindt, you can see for yourself that all this doesn't incline one to further obligations. There are one or two honourable exceptions, of course, but as a general rule, I must say, gratitude is a delightful quality, but forgetfulness is far more commonly met with!

"Still, I've never said no to a friend. One must run the risk of losing both friend and money, and if by some miracle both can be kept, why, so much the better. Now, where's your bill?" [Pg 122]

Holm took the document, scrutinised it closely, and said:

"But, my dear man, this isn't for you at all?"

"I didn't say it was."

"Syvertsen—Syvertsen—what's he got to do with it?"

"Well, you see, he's a young man reading for the Church, and consequently in need of cash. So I argued it out like this: an old sinner like myself ought to keep on good terms with the clergy; wherefore I undertook to act as first signatory in the present instance, making myself responsible for the interest. Now I want you to sign as second, guaranteeing the repayments; in consideration of which, you might reasonably demand the services of a priest, free of charge, at your third wedding."

When Vindt had left, Holm fell to pondering over various little circumstances that he had not particularly noticed before. It occurred to him now, that for the last fortnight he had had a message from Mrs. Rantzau almost every day, asking him to come and see her at nine o'clock precisely, on important business!

And, thinking over this, he called to mind that he had on nearly every occasion encountered Hermansen at the same time. It could mean but one thing, she had been using him to bring the banker up to the scratch. Well—much good might it do her! "She'll get a fine husband—oh, a remarkably fine husband," muttered Holm to himself with a sly chuckle.

He walked over to the window and looked across at the bank. It seemed in some curious way to have grown smaller; the great gilt letters, "BANK," above the entrance, were no longer impressive. [Pg 123]

Strange, how quiet it was in the shop to-day! Not a sound but Garner counting over the cash, putting the ten-shilling notes in bundles of ten, and the small silver coins in paper rolls.

Miss Rantzau was away, and had not even sent a message.

"Have you seen anything of my son to-day, Garner?"

Garner laughed and showed his teeth. "He—he—no. Isn't he down at the quay, then? No, I don't know...."

Holm perceived that there was something in the wind, and refrained from further inquiries.

A little later the maid came in: would Mr. Holm please come upstairs, there was a lady to see him.

It was Mrs. Rantzau. She was all in black and looked very handsome indeed. Holm could not help admiring her magnificent figure, and thought to himself that Hermansen certainly seemed to have made a better bargain here than recently with the Spaniard.

"I dare say you are surprised to see me here now," Mrs. Rantzau began. "But exceptional circumstances...." she flushed, and broke off in some confusion.

"Heard the news, my dear lady. Congratulations! You've found an excellent husband, a thorough ——" he checked himself, hesitating between compliment and sincerity.

"You know my past, Holm, and you will not wonder at my seeking a safe haven after my troubled life—and I hope and believe he will never have reason to regret." [Pg 124]

"Indeed not, my dear lady; he's a very lucky man if you ask me. And at his age, too——"

"I don't think he's any older than yourself, Holm," put in Mrs. Rantzau, with a smile.

"Well, perhaps not—but he looks it, anyway."

"There was one thing more, Mr. Holm. My daughter's future is more to me even than my own, and it is chiefly on her account that I have come."

"Aha, I thought as much. So you're in the plot as well, of course?"

"The plot?"

"Yes, it *is* a plot. First there's William turns as contrary as a rusty lock, then they set Miss Trap on to me, and now it's you!"

"Well—I came to tell you that the two young people love each other. Be good to them, Holm, and you will make your son and my daughter happy together."

"And by doing so I become a sort of relation of—of Banker Hermansen?"

"Well, is there anything wrong in that?"

"Hermansen and I as a sort of—well, what should we be? Can't be each other's half-uncles—twins-in-law. Bless my soul, it's really almost comical!"

"It's a serious matter to me, Holm. My child's future...." There were tears in her eyes as she spoke.

"My dear lady, for Heaven's sake don't let's turn serious. I simply can't stand that sort of wedding-day solemnity, weeping on one another's necks as if it were a funeral. It simply comes to this: I've been had. Well, the only thing to do is to put the best face on it one can."

She held out her hand. "Thanks, Holm. Thanks. I can assure you I shall never forget all your kindness. You are a good man, Holm." [Pg 125]

"Thanks for the unsolicited testimonial. Well, I dare say I might be worse. And when it comes to getting out one's final balance-sheet, it's as well to have a little on the credit side here and there."

He walked across to the window and stood for some time without speaking.

"Have you seen William to-day?" he said at last.

"Yes, he came round to see us, and walked back here with me. I expect he's in the office now."

"Well, we'd better have him up, and get the matter settled out of hand at once."

As he was moving towards the door, Bramsen looked in.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Holm," he began, then stopped and stood looking from one to the other. "Er—h'm. Hopes I don't intrude?"

"Not a bit, Bramsen; come in! What's the trouble?"

"Why, 'twas just a bit of a private matter, if...."

Holm went over to him. "Anything wrong, Bramsen?"

"Andrine's come home and chucked the Salvationing business for good and all."

"Why, so much the better."

"Ay, but there's the book...."

"What book?"

"The savings-bank book—she wants it back. And now there's nothing in it, for when I bought the ship, d'you see...."

"We must talk it over later, Bramsen. I'm busy just now."

"Busy, eh? I see," said Bramsen, looking sideways at Mrs. Rantzau. And, lowering his voice, he whispered slyly, "*That's a fine one you've got there!*" and retired. [Pg 126]

"Bramsen," Holm called after him, "tell William to come up, will you? You'll find him in the office."

William came in directly after, went up to his father and took his hand.

"Thank you, father," he said. "I didn't understand at first, but Miss Trap told me all about it. That you only wanted to try us——"

"Eh? Try you? Yes—yes, of course.... Yes, my son; it was—er—it was the only way I could see to make a sensible man of you, and get that artistic nonsense out of your head. Good idea, don't you think? Competition's a good thing all round—checks abnormal fluctuations of the market, you know."

"Father, I'm the happiest man on earth."

"Your respected mother-in-law, I've had the pleasure of meeting her before...."

"Have you, though?"

"Yes—abroad. It's many years ago now," put in Mrs. Rantzau hastily.

"And now, William, you'd better go off and fetch Betty, I think," said Holm. "And we'll have a little party this evening. I hope you will come too!"

"Thank you so much, Mr. Holm; I hope I can. But I must just speak to Alfred first."

"Alfred?"

"My fiancé, Banker Hermansen."

"Oh yes, yes, of course. I really didn't know he had a Christian name—he's always been just Banker Hermansen."

Holm came down into the shop, muttering to himself, "Alfred—Alfred...." until he had to go into his inner office where he could laugh unobserved. Of all the extraordinary things.... [Pg 127]

He thought of Bianca in the old days, and called to mind the "Carnival of Venice," the little supper at Pfortes—and in the midst of it all loomed the stiff, upright figure and solemn, clean-shaven face of Banker Hermansen.

He had never dreamed of such a marvel, still less expected to meet with it as a reality.

That same afternoon came a card from Hermansen: would be glad if Mr. Holm could find time to come round some time during the day—a private matter. "And if you would not mind coming in by the side door, you will find me alone in the office."

Holm had once before been invited to call upon the banker "privately"—in 1879, when he had been called upon to show his balance-sheet.

The mere thought of it gave him cold shivers even now. A devilish business! And the nasty mean way all his valuations were cut down....

He went in by the side entrance, and noticed how empty and deserted the place looked. The long counter and all the green-covered desks stood as if yawning wearily in the afternoon sun. It was almost uncanny to find everything so quiet.

The banker did not seem to notice his entry at first, but sat intent upon some papers at the big oak table.

"Good afternoon, Banker!"

"Ah, there you are! Forgive my troubling you to come round, Mr. Holm, but...."

He broke off, uncertain how to proceed. The two ancient antagonists exchanged glances.

For the first time in his life Holm felt himself master of the situation towards Hermansen; this time it was the banker himself who had to show his balance. [Pg 128]

"Well, Mr. Holm, I dare say you have heard...."

But Holm ignored the opening. "No, no, my friend," he thought to himself, "you can play your miserable hand alone, *I'm* not going to help you out."

"I have committed the indiscretion of—er—becoming engaged," said the banker, with a faint smile.

"Hearty congratulations, my dear Banker," said Holm, offering his hand.

There was a pause, the banker evidently waiting for Holm, with his customary fluency, to break the ice. Here, however, he was disappointed; Holm merely set his teeth and fell to polishing his silk hat on one sleeve. The banker tried again.

"Mrs. Rantzau, my fiancée, has informed me that we shall be—er—in a sort of way related." He smiled invitingly, and thought: he must come round after that.

Holm was a little in doubt how best to proceed now; he was not averse to prolonging the other's awkwardness.

"Highly honoured, I'm sure. Yes, my son has been so fortunate as to gain the hand of—er—your fiancée's daughter. A charming young lady, charming. Takes after her mother." He checked himself; he had said more than he wished.

A long pause.

The banker shifted some books on the table, then suddenly he slipped up to Holm, laid one hand on his shoulder and said:

"We haven't always got on as well as we might together, Holm; circumstances have sometimes been against our friendly co-operation; but don't you think, now, we might forget all that and try to start on a more friendly footing? We're both old enough now to be glad of peace and amity, and our new relations ought to bring us closer together—what do you say?" [Pg 129]

Holm was quite taken aback; he had never seen the banker in this mood before; the man was positively getting sentimental. He had unbuttoned his coat, and his voice was quite gentle.

"It shan't be my fault if we don't, Hermansen. I'm willing to let bygones be bygones. Time cures all sorrows—patches up a doubtful balance-sheet, as you might say——"

"My dear Holm, pray don't mention it."

"Well, well, it might have been worse—as the auditor said. You're in luck's way, though, Hermansen. I've had the honour of some slight acquaintance with your fiancée in former days."

"No, really! Where did you meet her?"

"Oh, it was some years ago—we met at the house of some mutual friends—abroad. A noble woman, Hermansen, a woman of splendid character."

"One might almost think you'd been my competitor there, Holm, what?" said the banker, with a laugh.

"Why, I won't say but I might have been inclined.... But the lady—er—showed better taste, worse luck," answered Holm, with a bow.

"Thanks for the compliment! You're quite a diplomatist, Holm—I haven't seen you in that rôle before."

Holm put his head on one side and looked at the banker with a quizzical expression.

"Haven't you—though? Not in the little matter of the Spanish frigate?"

"Ah, yes—you had me there, I'm afraid. Very neatly done, though, very neat. There'll be a nice little profit on the repairs, I'm sure—but it's all in the family now."

The conversation was becoming more genial in tone, and when the cigars were lit the two old antagonists were chatting away like the best of friends. [Pg 130]

Holm invited the banker to a "little family party" the same evening, to celebrate the double event. Hermansen accepted with thanks, and the pair separated with a cordial shake of the hand.

Holm walked back to the office with his hat at a more than usually rakish angle, as was his way when in high spirits. He swung his stick cheerfully, and felt a comforting sense of superiority in all directions. There was no one to oppose him now.

"Hello, you're looking unusually perky to-day! What's it all about?" This was from Vindt, who was sure to be quick on the scent of anything new.

"I've just come from my so-called brother-in-law, Hermansen, that's all, my boy."

"Oho! Distinguished brother-in-law, what?"

"Well, I'm quite satisfied with him myself. And—er—h'm—he'll be my boy's father-in-law too, you know, in a way."

Vindt stood a moment sniffing at the stump of his cigar, then, thrusting one finger into the buttonhole of Holm's coat, he said solemnly:

"Mrs. Emilie Rantzau and daughter: Knut G. Holm and son and Banker Hermansen, Knight of the Order of Vasa, etcetera. H'm. That's the worst of these cheap smokes; they stick when you've got half-way. So long, old stick-in-the-mud!"

"Queer old stick," said Holm to himself as the other walked away. "Getting quite crabby of late. But he ought to have married himself long ago."

And Holm went home to make arrangements for a thoroughly festive evening.

[Pg 131]

X
THE SHIP COMES HOME

It was Sunday. Bramsen and Andrine had had a settling up, the day before, of various matters outstanding, and the savings-bank book had been handed over, with its "Cr. balance 19s. 6½d."—being all that remained from the interregnum period of Bramsen's term of office as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Andrine opened the book and stood aghast.

"But—but, sakes alive, Paal, where's all the money gone?"

"The money—why—the money—h'm...." And in his embarrassment he looked appealingly at Amanda, who nudged him encouragingly in the ribs and whispered:

"Go on—it's all right. Tell her straight out."

"Why, you see, Andrine, it's like this. When you handed over charge of all this worldly mammon, that's naught but vanity and vexation of spirits and so on, and a clog upon the soul...."

"Oh, leave out all that and say what you've done with the money." Andrine was quivering with impatience.

"Well—I—I bought the ship."

"Ship—what ship?"

"The *Erik*, 216 ton register, B. I. to 1901, 12½ ft. with full cargo...."

"Overhauled last year," prompted Amanda. [Pg 132]

"Heavens! Fool that I was not to have known what you'd be up to. And now here we are as penniless as Adam and Eve."

Andrine held her apron to her eyes, weeping "buckets and hosepipes" as Bramsen later put it to Holm.

Bramsen and Amanda were alarmed at the way she took it, and endeavoured to console her as best they could. Neither said a word as yet about Amanda's engagement; it was plain that to mention it now would bring on a seizure at least.

"Oh—oh—oh, how could I be such a fool!" sobbed Andrine.

"Well, now, to tell the truth, Andrine, I'd never have thought it of you myself, to take up with the like of that nonsense. But seeing we've got you back again now, safe and sound, why, best say no more about it."

"What—whatever did you want to go buying ships for, Bramsen?"

"Why, you see, it was mostly because of Carljohan...." Bramsen in his eagerness had said too much, and Amanda judged it best to disappear into the kitchen for a while.

"Carljohan who?" Andrine stopped crying and looked up sharply.

"Why, Johnsen's son."

"What's he got to do with it?"

"Why, he's a deal to do with it, now he and Amanda's fixed things up together."

"Amanda! That child! And you let them!" Andrine drew herself up impressively, and Bramsen cowered.

"Don't you forget, Andrine," he said, "we weren't so very old, you and I, when we got spliced [Pg 133] together; and he's a first-rate lad. There isn't a knot or a twist he doesn't know, and you should see him up aloft—a cat's not in it. And wrestling too—mark my words, he'll make his way in the world, and I'm sorry for the man that comes athwart him."

"Oh yes, you can talk! But seems to me you've been doing your best to ruin us all while I've been away."

"We're not ruined yet, my girl, nor likely to be, I hope. Just wait and see." And Bramsen patted his wife on the cheek.

Andrine calmed down after a while, and when Amanda came in with steaming coffee and hot cakes, the three sat down in peace and amity, and were soon discussing the excellent qualities of Carljohan and the ship.

"It's been pretty rough these last few days—we'll soon see what she's good for," said Bramsen, thinking of the ship.

"If only they come home safe and sound," sighed Amanda, thinking of Carljohan.

And so, on Sunday morning, behold the three of them walking down to church; neither Bramsen nor Amanda thought of playing truant to-day, so thankful were they to feel that Andrine had "come round" and all was well.

And Bramsen was, to tell the truth, relieved to have got it over. With the bank-book once more in Andrine's care, he felt the responsibility lifted from his shoulders. The reins of government were once more in Andrine's hands, and he had his ten shillings extra per month unbeknown to her as before.

Amanda had always chosen their place in church up in the gallery close to the pulpit. From here [Pg 134] one could see the parson turning the leaves of his sermon, and so calculate roughly how far he was from the end. Furthermore, there was the loveliest view over the harbour and the fjord through one of the big windows.

There had been a number of wrecks during the recent gales, and Amanda could not keep her thoughts from Carljohan and his ship. The voice of the parson, and the singing rang in her ears like the rush of waters; she sat staring blankly at her hymn-book, open at No. 106, though there

had been three since that.

Once or twice she woke, to hear her father's voice trailing behind the rest in a hymn, sounding all through the church, till people turned to look. Amanda flushed with embarrassment, but Bramsen went on all unconscious, plodding through each verse in his own time, regardless of the rest.

But always she fell back upon her own thoughts, of the ship and Carljohan; it was a wonder to her how Mother Christiansen, whose husband was also on board, could sit there so calmly, as if there was nothing to fear. And she with all those children to think of!

The sermon now—but Carljohan was out on the North Sea and terrible weather. Great seas breaking over the bows, till the fo'c'stle was almost hidden.

And up in the rigging was Carljohan shortening sail—oh, how the vessel pitched and rolled, till the yards almost touched the water.

If he should lose his hold—if he should be swept away—Amanda gasped at the thought, and clutched her father's hand.

"What is it, Amanda? Are you ill?" whispered Bramsen anxiously.

"No, no; only keep still. I'll be all right directly." [Pg 135]

The organ pealed and the sound of the hymn filled the church.

Amanda could not sing a note; she was certain now that something had happened to Carljohan. Her tears flowed in streams, and she was hard put to it to hide them behind handkerchief and book.

She could hear Mother Christiansen's cracked voice just behind, and tried in vain to join in herself.

Already she glanced out of the big window beyond the choir. On the farther side of the harbour lay a vessel at anchor.

But—it had not been there before! Surely ... yes, it was a vessel just in—its flag still flying!—Heavens, it was the *Erik*!

She stood up to make sure. Yes, it was she. It was she! There was the big white figure-head—there was no mistake.

And Amanda joined in the singing with her masterful voice, till those near at hand looked at her in wonder. Bramsen himself stopped singing for a moment to listen. Then he took up the verse again and sang on bravely as before.

[Pg 136]

XI
THE CONCERT

There was to be an evening concert at the Assembly Rooms. The local papers for the previous day had leading articles about "Hans Martinsen, the boy musician who has been studying in Christiania, and is now appearing for the first time in public in his native town. Critics from all quarters are unanimously agreed as to his remarkable talent, and already prophesy a brilliant future, though his powers, at this early stage, have naturally not yet attained their full development. It is to be hoped that the music-loving section of our community will be numerously represented, that the promising young artist may receive the support and encouragement he deserves."

The fine hall was splendidly illuminated. The great windows fronting the street shed a glow of light over the crowd of staring idlers outside.

Malla Trap crossed the road, making towards the entrance, but meeting a group of young girls who were admiring the illuminations, she stopped to speak to them.

"Well, children, going to the concert?"

"No—o," answered one or two regretfully, curtsying as they spoke. They knew Miss Trap as a sister at the poor school, which most of them had attended.

"Well, come along, and I'll get you in."

The girls followed delightedly, and Malla Trap took tickets for them all. [Pg 137]

Across the bridge came Hans Martinsen, with his mother. On reaching the entrance he had to stop and look round, everyone was nodding and waving to him in kindly greeting.

"Good-day, Hans!" came in a fresh young voice behind him. He turned, and saw a girl smiling and nodding. "I'm coming in to hear you play." And she waved a big yellow ticket.

"Why, surely—is it you, Amanda? How are you getting on?"

"Splendid, thanks. This is Carljohan; he's just come back from a voyage."

"And your father and mother? Give them my love, won't you?"

"Thanks, I will. Oh, but Hans"—she came close to him and whispered—"Dear Hans, *do* play 'The Little Fisher-Maid' to please me—will you?"

"I'm not sure if I can, Amanda."

"Oh, of course you can. Why, you played it hundreds of times at old Clemmetsen's."

"Well, I'll see.... But I must go in now. Good-bye."

The great hall was filled to overflowing. All the musical element was present as a matter of course, and in addition a number of those who never went to concerts as a rule, as for instance the Mayor and Broker Vindt, who took seats at the back. Up in the gallery were a number of Hans' old schoolfellows, all greatly excited at the event.

Suddenly the buzz of talk was hushed, and all eyes were turned towards a group coming up the centre of the hall.

It was Banker Hermansen, still and solemn, with Mrs. Rantzau, fresh and smiling, at his side. [Pg 138] Behind them walked William Holm and Miss Rantzau, evidently somewhat embarrassed by the general scrutiny.

Holm senior, who was also one of the party, lagged behind a little, stopping to exchange a word with the Mayor and his friend.

Mrs. Rantzau found her place in one of the upper rows, and stood looking down for Holm, beckoning with a smile when she caught his eye. She let her gaze wander over the assembly, and something like a murmur of applause went up. Mrs. Rantzau was undeniably a splendid woman, and was at her best that evening.

"Get along up to the front with you, old fossil," said Vindt, with a friendly nudge, and Holm walked up, nodding genially to acquaintances all round.

"Fine figure of a woman, what?" whispered the Mayor, glancing towards Mrs. Rantzau.

"H'm," said Vindt. "Handsome enough to look at, but a bit of a handful to look after, if you ask me. Like the cakes in a cookshop window—I like 'em, but they don't agree with me!"

There was silence in the hall as the first notes rang out. All were watching the young performer; a little anxiously perhaps, as if in fear lest he should break down. And all felt that in some degree the honour of the town was here at stake, for the boy was one of their own.

But the little figure at the piano sat calm and free from nervousness; he was in another world, where he felt himself at home. The watching eyes and listening ears did not trouble him; he [Pg 139] seemed gazing inwardly at a starry sky far above them all.

The music swelled and sank, now wild and furious as the north-east wind raging over the rocky coast in autumn, then gentle as the evening breeze of a summer's day.

Eyes glistened now with fervour, hearts beat proudly. All present seemed to share in his happiness, to have some part in the triumph of his genius.

The applause was hearty and unanimous.

"Bravo, Hans!" came a deep voice from the gallery. All turned to see who had spoken. Ah, there—it was Bramsen, standing up with both hands outstretched and clapping thunderously.

Amanda flushed with embarrassment, and nudged her father to make him stop. But he snapped out impatiently, "You leave me alone!" and went on clapping.

Among the numerous extras was a "Ballad theme with variations," which the more exacting critics considered somewhat out of place. One there was, however, who thought otherwise, and that was Amanda. The soft, swaying rhythm of "The Little Fisher-Maid" filled her with delight, and she clapped as enthusiastically as her father had done.

"Father, I think I've learned something from that concert this evening," said William, as they walked home.

"Well, my boy, and what was that?"

"Why, that genius is like pure gold; if Nature hasn't put it there it's no use trying to make it."

"You're right, my son. And sensible people don't try. It's no good setting up to do the work of your [Pg 140]

Creator. What do you say, Banker?"

"Eh, what's that?" Hermansen was walking arm in arm with Mrs. Rantzau, and the pair of them were evidently oblivious of all but each other.

"I say, the best thing we can do in this life's to live like sensible people."

"*Errors and omissions excepted*," answered the banker, and he pressed his fiancée's hand long and tenderly.

XII
OLD NICK

[Pg 141]

"This where Petter Nekkelsen lives?"

The speaker was an awkward-looking lad, acting as postman in Strandvik for the first time.

"No, you muddlehead." Old Lawyer Nickelsen held out his hand for the letters. "This is where Peder, comma, N. Nickelsen, full stop, lives. And a nice lot of louts they've got going around, that can't learn to call folk by their proper names!"

Thor Smith, the magistrate's clerk, was of the same opinion, but liked a touch of honest dialect occasionally; he was not unwilling on occasion to contradict Old Nick.

"Honest dialect, indeed! Rank impertinence, I call it! But wait a bit, young fellow; in a few years' time you'll be wishing these understrappers at the North Pole, or some other cool place."

The two men filled their pipes, and took up their position on the veranda of Lawyer Nickelsen's house, continuing their discussion as to the merits of natural simplicity, concerning which they held diametrically opposite views.

The lawyer was a bachelor of sixty-seven, and kept what he called a home for young men of decent behaviour and tolerable manners. In particular he had, ever since he first came to the place forty-three years earlier, kept open house for the magistrate's clerks successively, taking them under his paternal care and protection from their first entering on their duties in the town.

[Pg 142]

Smith and Nickelsen sat on the veranda, but somehow the discussion fell curiously flat. Smith was unusually absent and uncommunicative, to such a degree that Nickelsen at last asked him point blank what was the matter.

"Oh, nothing. H'm. I say, Nickelsen, that fellow Prois—he's an intolerable old curmudgeon."

"Oho, so that's the trouble! Won't have you for a son-in-law, what?"

"Oh, don't talk nonsense."

Smith stepped aside, and scraped out the tobacco from the pipe he had just filled, but Old Nick's searching glance perceived that he had flushed up to the roots of his hair.

"My dear Smith, I agree with you that Tulla Prois is a charming girl. A pity, though, they couldn't find another name to give her. They were making songs about it last winter."

"Oh, don't drag in that silly stuff, Nickelsen, for Heaven's sake. I can't see anything funny in it myself."

Old Nick laid down his pipe and put on his glasses, and sat watching the other with an expression only half serious. He found himself hard put to it not to laugh. At last, finding nothing more suitable to say, he ventured in a tone of unnatural innocence: "Smith, what do you say to a drink?"

Old Nick was irresistible. Smith could not help laughing himself. "Oh, you incorrigible old joker," he said, giving the other a dig in the ribs.

The ice once broken, and under the influence of a glass of good Madeira—Old Nick invariably had "something special" in that line—Smith opened his heart, and revealed Tulla Prois in the leading rôle of Angel, etcetera, Papa Prois being cast for the part of hard-hearted father, or "intolerable old curmudgeon"—which amounted to much the same thing.

[Pg 143]

"I met him yesterday, just come back from Christiania, with a whole armful of parcels he could hardly carry. I went up as politely as could be, and offered to lend a hand, and what d'you think he said?"

Old Nick shook his head and tried to look interested.

"Shouted out at the top of his voice so all the street could hear him, 'No, I'm damned if you do!' Nice sort of father-in-law that, eh?"

"There's a dance on at the Seamen's Union to-morrow, Smith. You're going, I suppose?"

Smith brightened up at once. "Yes, of course, we must go; you must come along too, Nickelsen. But—but—isn't old Prois chairman of the committee?"

"Quite so—and for that very reason all the more chance of your meeting your—young lady, I was going to say."

"Then you'll come?"

"Me? Go to a dance, with my gout and all? Well, I don't know, perhaps I might. Get myself up spick and span, and have my corns cut specially for the occasion—I might pass in a crowd, what?"

The dance took place, and on the following day Old Nick sat pondering and trying to remember what had happened after twelve o'clock, his memory being somewhat defective.

No—it was no good. He could not remember a thing. He had a vague recollection of talking to Tulla Prois, and saying a whole lot of extravagantly affectionate things, but beyond that all was confusion. [Pg 144]

"Only hope I didn't make a scene, that's all. H'm—Puh—weakness of mine—infernal nuisance. And I don't seem to get any better—oh, well, what's the odds after all!"

The final note of resignation in his monologue revived his inexhaustible natural good spirits, and with a contented smile he sat down to indite the following letter to Smith, who was, he knew, in court that day:

> "Dear Smith,—For various reasons I find myself unable to recollect anything of last night's happenings. And being in consequence much troubled in mind lest something scandalous may have taken place, and my position of unimpeachable respectability in the town undermined, you are hereby invited to dine with me to-day, in order that we can discuss the matter and, if necessary, find some means of meeting the situation.—Yours,
>
> "Old Nick."

Old Martha, Nickelsen's housekeeper, shuffled along to the court-house, with strict injunctions to bring back an answer, and returned half an hour later with a scrap of paper from Smith, on which were scribbled the following lines in pencil:

> "My dear old Friend,—Ten minutes ago I said to a man convicted of illicit dealing in spirits, 'You are *in culpa*, my good man, and you may as well confess it first as last.' But at the same moment it struck me fairly to the heart that I might say the very same thing to myself.
>
> "Yes, I am *in culpa*—— To think that dance should have proved the occasion of my downfall! So beautiful she was—and so gracious towards me, that my heart beat in quiet delight—until that old shark—that bottle-nosed shark, her father.... Ugh! [Pg 145]
>
> "He got me on to talking politics, and I, fool that I was, I took the bait, declared myself a Republican, Jacobin, Anarchist, showed myself a thousand times worse than I am, simply because the sight of his bottle-nosed caricature of a face turned me sour. Fool, fool that I was! I forgot he was her father, and now my hopes are simply done for. The old man was furious, said he couldn't forget me, and so on. So altogether I am utterly miserable, not to say desperate. For I know if I'm to lose Tulla Prois, then——
>
> "I shall come round to dinner. Thanks.—Yours,
>
> "Smith."

Old Nick sat quietly for a moment, then burst out laughing, and went out into the garden to hoist the flag, by way of celebrating—well, had anyone asked him, he would probably have answered "the morning after the night before."

It was nothing unusual, however, for Old Nick to hoist his flag, especially of late, since Schoolmaster Pedersen opposite had taken to hoisting "clean colours."[1] The first time Old Nick saw this, he at once ordered a huge white sheet with the Union mark in one corner. And every time the "clean colours" were hoisted, up went Old Nick's as well, and his flag being of uncommon dimensions, hid from the seaward side not only the opposition flag, but a good deal of the schoolmaster's house as well.

[1] "Clean Colours"—the Norwegian flag without the Union mark, *i.e.* as repudiating the Union with Sweden.

At dinner that evening Old Nick did his utmost to make things cheerful, but in vain; Smith was miserable, and miserable he remained. [Pg 146]

"You don't know what feeling is, Nickelsen—or else you've forgotten."

"Oh, my dear fellow, I only wish I had a mark for every time I've been in love."

"In love, you! You don't know what it is."

"Yes, my boy, and seriously, too. I'll tell you what happened to me one time at Kongsberg that way. I was clerk to old Lawyer Albrektsen, and lived a gay bachelor life up there. The local

chemist was a man named Walter, and had four daughters, one prettier than the others; but the eldest but one was a perfect picture of a girl, bright and cheery, and with a pink-and-white complexion, you never saw. Enough to turn the head of any son of Adam, I assure you. We went for walks and danced together, and were really fond of each other; in a word, the double barrel of our hearts was just on the point of going off—when an event occurred which severed once and for all the tender bonds that were about to unite Petrea Walter and yours truly.

"It was my birthday, the twentieth November, as you know, and I had a few friends coming round in the evening, as usual, to celebrate the occasion. The punch was made in the old style, with Armagnac and acid. Well, we got more and more lively as the evening went on, and one bowl after another was emptied. And then came the disaster; we ran out of acid. Punch without acid was not to be thought of—and there were no such things as lemons in those days. Well, the fellows all voted for going round to the chemist's and ringing him up for more. I tried all I knew [Pg 147] to keep them from it, but they couldn't hear a word, and at last off we all went to Master Walter's.

"We lowered down all the oil lamps in the street on our way—this incidentally, as illustrating the distressingly low degree of civilisation in Kongsberg in those days.

"When we got to the place, the first floor was all in darkness. There she lay asleep, up there, my beloved Petrea! All dark and silent everywhere, only a faint gleam from the lamp in the shop below shone out into the street. I begged my friends to keep quiet, while I tried as softly as could be to wake up the man in charge. But alas, fate willed it otherwise. Carl Henrik, my old friend, was by way of being a poet, and never lost a chance of improvising something. He stood up on the steps 'to make a speech,' but just as he was going to begin, the door opened, and there was old Walter himself in dressing-gown and slippers, with a candle in his hand. Carl Henrik made an elegant bow, and reeled off at once:

'Good Master Walter, we confess
It's wrong to wake you up like this,
But hear our plea, we pray you, first;
We're simply perishing with thirst,
And since you're there, and know the stuff,
Pray let us have it—*quantum suff*!'

"Old Walter was furious. 'What the devil!' he cried out. 'Is the fellow mad?'

"I dragged Carl Henrik down from the steps, and went myself, hat in hand, and begged his pardon; said we were awfully sorry, we thought it was the assistant on duty. 'Well, and what then —is anyone ill?' 'Why, no, sir, I'm glad to say, but it's my birthday to-day, that's all.'—'Yesterday, [Pg 148] you mean,' roars out Carl Henrik from below.—'It's my birthday, and I only wanted to ask if you'd let us have a little acid for the punch.'

"'I'll give you punch,' said the old man, and landed out at me, sending me headlong down the steps into the arms of the poet; Carl Henrik urging me to bear up bravely against what he called the blows of fate.

"I met Petrea out next day, but the moment she caught sight of me she slipped across the street into the flower shop opposite. I waited outside a full hour, but no sight of Petrea—she must have gone out the back way so as not to meet me. Well, that was the end of the first Punic war, my dear Smith, and I left Kongsberg with a wounded heart—though I'm bound to say it healed up again all right pretty soon."

Smith had brightened up considerably by now, but, try as he would, he could not admit that Old Nick's experience as related was analogous to the present situation.

"I tell you, Nickelsen, this is a serious affair; as a matter of fact, we're—we're secretly engaged, Tulla and I."

"Uf!" said Old Nick; he had nearly broken the neck of a bottle of old Pontet Canet he was opening. Old Nick drank a glass, sniffed at the wine, put on a serious air and said solemnly:

"It's getting cloudy."

Smith hung his head; he found the situation cloudy.

"What do you think I ought to do? Go up and beg old Prois's pardon?" asked Smith.

Old Nick sat for quite a while thinking deeply, holding the Pontet Canet up to the light. "H'm— [Pg 149] h'm." Then suddenly he jumped up, and slapped Smith on the back with a serviette.

"We can save the situation. I've got an idea. We'll get up a public banquet for old Prois. Yes, that's what I say. And we'll send out the invitations ourselves—you and I."

"But, my dear man, you can't give a public banquet without some sort of pretext, and what are we to tell people it's for? Old Prois he's warden of the Pilot's Guild, but he hasn't done anything notable in the town, that I'm aware of, up to now."

"Oh, we must find something or other. Let me see—he's on the Health Committee—no, that won't do."

"He lent a flag to the committee for the Constitution Day festivities," said Smith sarcastically.

"No, that's not enough. But wait a bit. He must have been on the Rates Committee twenty-five years now—yes, of course. That's the very thing. I'll be chairman, you can be secretary. Dinner at Naes's Hotel on Saturday next—make it a Saturday, so folk can have Sunday to sleep it off after."

Smith was very doubtful still.

"But suppose he thinks it's a hoax—then we'd be worse off than before."

"A hoax!" said Old Nick. "Well, so it is in a way, but nobody'll know except you and me. All the others will take it up as easy as winking. Only give them a decent dinner, man, and they'll be ready enough, all the lot of them; there's always room for a bit of a spread of that sort, and we've had nothing now for quite a while. No, all we've got to do now is to get out the invitations first of all. Hand me the pen and ink over there."

And the pair of them sat down and drew up the following in due form: [Pg 150]

"INVITATION

"A Public Banquet will be given on Saturday, the 17th October 1887, at 4 p.m., at Naes's Hotel, to celebrate the occasion of our esteemed fellow-citizen, Warden Prois, completing his twenty-fifth year of service on the Rates Committee. Menu will comprise three courses, plus dessert and one half-bottle of wine, coffee and liqueur, at 4s. per head.

"THE COMMITTEE.

"NICKELSEN, Chairman. "SMITH, Secretary."

As soon as Old Nick had finished the draft, a heated discussion took place as to the price to be fixed per head. Smith was of opinion that four shillings and three courses was too little, and would appear mean to the guest of honour. To this Old Nick retorted that they could not well go higher than four shillings if they were to get the "rank and file" to come at all—this category including such personages as Pettersen the watch-maker, Blomberg the tailor, and other esteemed fellow-citizens, who would gladly share in the honour, but were forced to consider the limitations of their purse.

Smith also objected to the word "committee" under the invitations. "We're not a committee," he urged.

"Aren't we, though," said Old Nick. "You and I—that's committee enough for anything. And besides, it's the proper thing on these occasions, makes it look more official like." And so it was agreed.

Old Nick then set out on a round to gather in recruits for the banquet. First of all the parson and the doctor must be got hold of; these two agreed at once without any difficulty, being comparatively new arrivals in the place, and taking Lawyer Nickelsen's recommendation as sufficient. [Pg 151]

Next came Halvor Berg, the biggest shipowner in the town, and known to all as a cautious and particular man, much sought after by the natives in all matters requiring assistance and advice. He was thus an influential man, and it was important to get him to subscribe, for the first thing people would ask was sure to be, whether Halvor Berg was coming.

Old Nick and Halvor Berg were good friends, so the reception in this case was good enough. They chatted comfortably for a while, more especially about Berg's boats, the *Seaflower*, *Ceres*, and so on, until Old Nick suddenly produced his list. "Oh, by the way, I want your name to this, Halvor. I ought by right to have taken it round to the old magistrate first, he's waiting for it, but it won't matter if you sign now while I'm here."

"Sign?" said Halvor Berg, and proceeded to study the document with great earnestness. Old Nick occupied himself meantime in surreptitiously setting the pointer of Halvor Berg's barometer down to hurricane level.

At last, having ploughed his way conscientiously through the invitation, Berg looked up, with a searching glance at Old Nick, who faced him without moving a muscle.

"H'm. H'mmm—look here, you know, Nickelsen, don't you think we could find some one else to give a banquet for instead of Prois?"

"Well, no, I can't see that we could. I don't know anyone else that's been on the Rates Committee for twenty-five years." [Pg 152]

"He'd have been more use to the place if he hadn't been on it at all," grumbled the other.

"Oh, well, if you don't feel inclined to join with the leading people in the town on such an occasion, why...." Old Nick began folding up the list, but very slowly.

"Of course I'll come in—only I can't see what he's done to deserve it, hang me if I can."

"Look here, Halvor Berg, you can surely understand that when the parson, the doctor and myself go in for a thing like this, we've some reason for it."

"All right, all right! Hand me the list, then."

And he wrote with big, sprawling letters "H. Berg," at the same time inquiring whether an after-dinner toddy was included in the four shillings.

On leaving Halvor Berg's, Old Nick regarded the matter as settled; when this cautious old card had put his name, the rest of them would soon follow after.

Sukkestad, the dealer, was inclined to hesitate, and could not make out what Prois had really done either, but since Halvor Berg was in it, why, he might as well put down his four shillings too.

Apothecary Peters, who had only been a week in the place, was most grateful for the honour done him in inviting him to be present, and insisted on paying down his four shillings on the spot—at which Old Nick was incautious enough to remark that it was not wise to skin your beast before you'd killed him—Old Prois being the beast.

The rest followed as one man, and by the evening the list counted over sixty names, from all classes of society. Even old Klementsen, who had been parish clerk for fifty years, without getting so much as a silver spoon for his trouble, set down his name with a smile, albeit with an inward gnashing of teeth. [Pg 153]

Thor Smith sat up in the magistrate's office, sweating over a taxation case. In the inner office was the old magistrate himself, with his wig awry, smoking his coarse-cut tobacco.

"Filthy hole of a place this is," soliloquised Smith. "Hang me if it isn't enough to make a man weep. I wonder how Old Nick's getting on with that list now? Oh, it's no good, I know; things never do go right." He glanced out of the window and up along the street, in case Old Nick might be coming along.

But—what on earth—a green tartan frock, and a toque with a white feather—she herself! He placed himself in the window, as if by accident—aha, she catches sight of him. And such a blush—and then she looks down. Won't she look up again? Yes, just once.

A smile of understanding, and she hurries away, as if from some deed of guilt. Thor Smith flattened his nose against the pane, staring after her as long as he could still see a thread of the green skirt, and for some time after.

He was awakened from his reverie by the magistrate himself, who came up behind and looked over his shoulder inquisitively.

"Well, and what are we looking out at, eh?"

"Oh, only those two funny old women over in the woollen shop; I never saw such queer things as they are."

"Nothing to look at in them that I can see," said the magistrate, who was by no means a woman-hater. And, taking his hat and stick, he bustled out. [Pg 154]

A moment later Old Nick entered, flushed and out of breath. "Old man in?"—"No."—"Good!" He flung himself down in a chair and handed the list across to Smith.

"Puh! Devil take it, but this is hard work. And all for you and your lady-love. You don't deserve it."

Smith took the list and began counting the names. "Seventy-two—why, that's splendid, Nickelsen; you're a trump."

"Yes; don't you think I deserve a medal for it, what? Oh, by the way, though, we must hurry up and get hold of Prois himself now, or we'll have somebody else telling him all about it beforehand."

The esteemed fellow-citizen was busy down at the waterside, with a big pile-driver repairing the landing-stage. The men hauled at the ropes, while he stood by, calling the time in approved sing-song: "And one ohoy, and two ohoy, and three...." he stopped short at sight of Smith and Nickelsen approaching. He looked by no means pleased as he handed over command to Pilot Iversen, and told him to carry on with the pile-driving.

Tulla Prois was in the kitchen, making fish-balls; but on seeing the three men enter in solemn procession, she ran off in a fright to the attic, hid herself in a corner and burst out crying violently; evidently the matter was to be decided now once and for all. "Oh, it's mean of Thor," she murmured. "Why couldn't he wait till father was in a better temper?"

Meanwhile, Old Prois was wondering what on earth the two men could want with him.

He did not even glance at Smith, but when they got inside, invited them both to sit down. [Pg 155]

Old Nick settled himself on a big birchwood sofa, with soft springs, into which he sank about half a foot deep. Above the sofa hung a picture of the "Cupid" (Captain Prois), with the port of Hull in the background, and all the seamen wearing stovepipe hats.

Old Nick cleared his throat a little, and started off with his introduction, pointing out the meritorious work of his host on the committee during the "considerable span of years" which he had devoted to the service of the community.

Prois sat dumbfounded, at a loss to understand what was coming.

At last, thinking he had sufficiently stimulated the other's curiosity, Old Nick came to the point:

"Consequently, and, I should add, chiefly at the instigation of my friend Smith, as secretary of the said committee, our fellow-citizens have empowered us to request the honour of your presence, my dear Warden, at a ceremonial banquet, to take place on Saturday next at 4 p.m., where we may hope to—er—find some suitable expression for our feelings—er, h'm—our appreciation of the fact that you have been for twenty-five years so closely associated with this important—this *most* important of our local institutions."

Old Prois flushed slightly, tried to look unmoved, coughed, and finally requested the pair to "take a seat"—which they had already taken—and then rushed out into the passage calling in a voice of thunder for "Tulla, Tulla!" Then out to the kitchen, to send the maid to find her.

Meantime Old Nick sat stuffing an embroidered antimacassar into his mouth, laughing till the cushioned sofa and the picture above shook in dismay. He made faces at Smith, who, however, was not in the mood to appreciate the humour of the situation, which fact seemed further to increase Old Nick's amusement. [Pg 156]

At last came a voice outside—"Where the deuce have you been, child? Hurry up and bring in some cakes and wine at once." Old Nick threw the antimacassar under the sofa, and his face resumed its most serious expression.

"Excuse my running off a moment, gentlemen, but I—er—you must allow me to offer you a glass of wine, with my best thanks for the invitation. I—er—really, it's too good of you, I must say. I'm sure I haven't done anything special for the place, but—well, since my esteemed fellow-citizens are good enough to think so, why...."

"I'm sure, Warden, your work has been most arduous and most valuable," said Smith, "and as secretary myself, you must allow me to judge." He spoke with some warmth, hearing Tulla approaching with the wine—and indeed the girl was trembling to such a degree that the glasses rang like a peal of bells.

Smith greeted her somewhat bashfully as she entered, but Old Nick chucked her under the chin in his superior paternal manner, and asked how she had got on at the dance. Thor Smith nudged his friend surreptitiously as a sign to him that the subject was one better left alone.

Old Prois poured out the wine, expressing his thanks for the honour anew, and drank a glass in the kindliest manner with Smith, the latter flushing with pleasure. Tulla stood over by the piano, intently occupied in putting her music in order, and wondering what on earth it all meant. [Pg 157]

Old Nick was suddenly seized with a fit of coughing, under cover of which he managed to empty his glass of Muscatel into a flower-pot by the window. Then, catching sight of a hen crossing the courtyard, he developed an enthusiastic interest in Black Minorcas and White Leghorns. Prois, it should be mentioned, was a keen fowl-fancier, and had a whole collection of prize medals from various exhibitions, of which he was particularly proud.

Naturally enough, then, Old Nick had to be shown the fowl-runs, though until that date his fondness for the tribe had been exclusively confined to the table. He and his host accordingly went out together.

This left Thor Smith and his Tulla alone, blessing the Black Minorcas and the White Leghorns impartially, and not forgetting Old Nick; while for the rest, they utilised the opportunity just as other sensible young people in love would, to wit, by settling down in the big sofa and exchanging kisses under the "Cupid," while the men down at the landing-stage chanted their "one ahoy, and two ahoy, and three...." The pile-driver had got to sixteen when they heard Old Nick's voice outside: "Yes, those white-cheeked Leghorns are splendid, really splendid."

And Thor Smith and his Tulla judged it best to wake up from love's young dream.

The Banquet was a magnificent success; Thor Smith's speech for the guest of honour's family being particularly notable for the warmth and earnestness with which it was delivered.

Dessert and the half-bottle of sherry having been disposed of, the general feeling, which had been somewhat dull at first, grew more jovial, and speeches were numerous. The coffee and liqueurs brought the diners to the stage of embraces and assurances of mutual affection. Even Rod and Hansen, the two shipbrokers, who in the ordinary way hated one another cordially whenever one closed a charter more than the other, might be seen drinking together, and assuring all concerned that never were business competitors on friendlier terms. Here's luck, Rod, and Cheer-oh, Hansen! [Pg 158]

Smith and Warden Prois became quite friendly, not to say intimate, in the course of the evening; they sat a little apart, in animated discussion of something or other, but apparently on the best of terms. And they finished up towards morning by drinking eternal brotherhood and embracing each other.

The guest of honour was escorted to his home by such members of the party as were still able to keep their feet; and Old Nick, in a farewell speech, expressed the wish that he, the Warden, might long retain the memory of that evening in his head, which charitable sentiment was greeted with delighted applause.

A week after that memorable occasion Thor Smith went round to the Warden's, and presented himself in due form as a suitor for the hand of Miss Tulla.

He had previously arranged with Old Nick, whom he had visited on the way down, that if all went as he wished, and the matter was settled at once, he would wave a handkerchief from the garden steps, so that Nickelsen, on the look-out at his corner window, would see, with a glass, the result of the suit.

Scarcely had Old Nick arrived at his post, glass in hand, when lo, not one, but two handkerchiefs [Pg 159] waved from the Warden's garden.

He walked up and down the room, rubbing his hands in keen gratification, but turned suddenly serious, and murmured to himself: "Ay, they're the lucky ones, that don't have to go through life alone. Well, thank Heaven, I've never been given to grieving over things myself, and that's a blessing, anyhow." He lit a cigar, and the passing cloud was wafted away as usual by his inherent good humour.

"Oh, I can't wait any longer; I must go round and be the first to offer congratulations." And off went Old Nick, hurrying down the street to the Warden's.

[Pg 160]

XIII
CILIA

"The one who eats most porridge, gets most meat," said Cilia Braaten, ladling out a large second helping for Abrahamsen, the mate, who innocently accepted.

"No more for me, thanks," said Soren Braaten. He knew his wife's economical trick of getting her guests to eat so much of the first course that they had little cargo space left for the second.

Cilia Braaten was a woman who could hold her own, and was regarded as one of the cleverest shipowners on the fjord, closing charters herself, with or without a broker.

Cecilia was her proper name, but she was invariably called Cilia for short.

Soren Braaten, her husband, was hardly ever referred to at all, his wife having charge of everything that mattered, including the chartering of the two vessels *Birkebeineren* and *Apollo*—and Heaven help Soren if he failed to obey orders and sail as instructed by Madam Cilia.

Soren was a kindly and genial soul, who would not hurt a fly as long as he was left to sail his *Birkebeineren* in peace. True, he would grumble once in a while, when his wife seemed more than usually unreasonable, and throw out hints that he knew what he was about, and could manage things by himself.

"Manage, indeed. A nice sort of managing it would be! What about that time when you fixed [Pg 161] *Birkebeineren* for a cargo of coals to the Limfjord, where there's only ten foot of water, and she draws nineteen? If I hadn't come and got you out of it, you'd have been stranded there now." And Cilia threw a glance of indignant superiority at Soren. The story of that Limfjord charter was her trump card, and never failed to quell Soren's faint attempts at retort.

Altogether, Cilia was unquestionably ruler of the roost, and managed things as she pleased, not only as regards Soren and the two ships, but also Malvina, the only daughter, who, like the rest, obeyed her without demur.

Soren had no reason to regret having given the administration of the household and the business into her care; for their fortunes throve steadily, and Cilia was, as mentioned, one of the smartest shipowners in the fjord. She invariably managed to get hold of the best freights going; the shipbrokers at Drammen seemed by tacit consent to give her the first refusal of anything good.

All, then, seemed well as could be wished with the family as a whole, and one would have thought Cilia herself must be content with things as they were. This, however, was by no means the case; Cilia had troubles enough, though, as so often happens, they were largely of her own making.

Soren's complete lack of tender feeling was one of the things that often worried her. It was particularly noticeable in his letters. He would write, for instance, in this style:

> "Madam Cilia Braaten,—Arrived here in London fourteen days out from the Sound. [Pg 162] All well, and now discharging cargo. Have drawn £120 from the agents here, which please find enclosed. I await instructions as to further movements, and beg to remain—Yours very truly,
>
> "S. Braaten."

Cilia flung the letter in a drawer and raged. Was this love? The simpleton—he should have been left to manage things for himself—and where would he have been then? This was all the thanks one got for all the toil and trouble. Why couldn't he write letters like Mrs. Pedersen got from her husband, who was skipper of the *Vestalinde*, commencing "My darling wife," and ending up with

"Ever your loving—" That was something like affection! A very different thing from Soren's "Yours very truly." Mrs. Cilia was bursting with indignation.

She pondered the matter for some time, seeking to find a way of making Soren a little more demonstrative. And next time she wrote, she put it to him delicately, as follows:

> "My dearest Husband,—I was very glad to receive your letter with the £120, but sorry you say nothing about how you are yourself. I often think affectionately of you, but there is a coolness about your letters which makes me quite unhappy to think of. You know I love you, and you know, too, how sorry I am to have to send you up into the Baltic so late in the year, but the freight was so good that I could not refuse it. Put on warm things, and see you have plenty of good food on board, and if you make a good voyage of it this time I hope to have another nice remittance from you before Christmas. And do let us agree for the future to sign our letters—'*Ever your loving*' [Pg 163]
>
> "Cilia Braaten."

The result of this appeal to Soren's tender feelings was not long delayed. It happened that Gudmunsen, skipper of the *Apollo*, while in Christiania with a cargo of coal, went on the spree there to such an all-obliterating extent that Mrs. Cilia received no accounts, and no freight money. She therefore wrote to Soren, who was in London, asking him to cable by return what was to be done with Gudmunsen. The reply came back as follows:

> "Chuck him out.—Ever your loving
>
> "Soren Braaten."

And thenceforward his letters and telegrams were invariably signed "Ever your loving."

When Soren came home late that autumn, Cilia thought he might fairly have a year ashore, as they had laid by a good deal, and could afford a rest. Soren grumbled a little, and suggested that it would be desperately dull hanging about on shore all the summer, but Cilia undertook to find him entertainment enough. "We've all that bit of ground down there to plant potatoes, then the house wants painting, and a new garden fence—oh yes, and we ought really to have another well dug round at the back, and——"

Soren had visions of Cilia standing over him and ordering him about at these various tasks, while he toiled in the sweat of his brow. Oh, a nice sort of rest it would be! No, give him his old place on board, where he could do as he pleased.

There was no help for it, however. Abrahamsen, the mate, was put in charge of *Birkebeineren* [Pg 164] that summer, and Soren had to stay at home.

Soren Braaten had never had any social position to speak of in Strandvik, and indeed he had no wish for anything of the sort. His comrades at the Seamen's Union were good enough company for him. It was different with Cilia, however; as their means increased, she began to feel more and more aggrieved at never being asked to parties at Holm Berg's or Prois's, and as for the Magistrate's folk, they never so much as gave her a glance when she passed them in the street. And only the other day she had met that impertinent upstart, Lawyer Nickelsen; if he hadn't dared to address her simply as "Celia!" Oh, but she would show them! And she went over her plan—it was to be carried out this summer, while Soren was at home. Soren was to be renamed, and appear henceforward as Soren Braathen—with an "h," Shipowner. Malvina was to be a lady, and, if possible, married off to some young man of standing. Then, surely, the family would be able to take the rank and position in society to which their comfortable means entitled them.

While Cilia was occupied with these reflections in the kitchen—it was the day *Birkebeineren* was to sail—Abrahamsen and Malvina were sitting in the summer-house in an attitude eloquent of itself. To be precise, they were holding each other's hands.

"It's none so easy for me, Malvina," the mate was saying, "as a common man, to ask your father and mother straight out—and there's no such desperate hurry as I can see till after this voyage."

With him Malvina agreed, and the loving couple separated, not without mutual assurances of [Pg 165] undying faith and affection for better or worse, whatever obstacles might be placed in their way.

Meantime, Soren Braaten had stolen down to the cellar, where he had a carefully hoarded stock of English bottled stout, with which he was wont to refresh himself at odd moments. Seated on a barrel, he was enjoying the blessing of life and liquor in deep draughts, without a care in the world. True, he had seen through the skylight Malvina and the mate in what might be construed as a compromising position, but trusting in this as in all else to Cilia's management, he took it for granted that she was a party to the affair.

Birkebeineren sailed, and Abrahamsen with her, leaving Soren at home to his fate. The potato-planting was shelved for the time being, as were the various other little jobs Cilia had mentioned; her one idea now was that he should appear as a gentleman of leisure, which Soren was unfeignedly content to do. In order, however, that he should not find the life too monotonous, she found him an occupation which to her idea was not incompatible with the dignity of a shipowner he was to look after Fagerlin. Fagerlin was the big brindled cow, and at present, being summertime, was allowed to take the air in the garden. Soren was accordingly charged to see that Fagerlin behaved herself, and did not eat up the carrots or the tiger lilies. Soren found the

work comparable to that of the local customs officer, consisting as it did for the most part in sitting on a bench and smoking, with back numbers of the *Shipping Gazette* to while away the time.

Cilia, however, was still constantly occupied in finding further means whereby the family might attain that position of importance and consideration in local society which, she was forced to admit, was lacking at present. [Pg 166]

In this she found an unexpected ally in the person of Lieutenant Heidt, the magistrate's son, an old acquaintance from the days when Cilia had been parlourmaid at the house. True, he had been but a little boy at the time, but they had never quite lost sight of each other, and had grown most intimate, especially of late, since Cilia had taken to lending him money, in secret.

Lt. Heidt was of opinion that Soren ought to go off to some health resort; it was customary among people of the better class, he declared, to suffer from gout, or insomnia, or some such fashionable ailment, necessitating a few weeks' cure at one of the recognised establishments every summer. "And they put it in the papers, you know, who's there; it would look quite nice, say, in the *Morning News*, to see Shipowner Braathen, of Strandvik, was recuperating at So-and-so."

Cilia found the suggestion excellent, and began hinting to Soren that he was suffering from sleeplessness and gout. Soren was astounded, and indeed was disposed to regard the insinuation of sleeplessness as a piece of sarcasm, in view of the fact that he regularly took a couple of hours' nap each day irrespective of his customary ten hours at night. His protests, however, were in vain; he must go to Sandefjord, whether he liked it or not.

A brand new trunk with a brass plate, inscribed with the name and title of "Shipowner S. Braathen, Strandvik," was procured for the occasion, and Soren was escorted in full procession down to the boat, and packed off to Sandefjord. Before leaving, he had been given careful instructions by his better half as to behaving in a manner suited to his station, and also furnished with a well-lined pocket-book. This last was so unlike Cilia that Soren wondered what on earth had come to her: open-handedness in money matters had never been a failing of hers—far from it. [Pg 167]

Lt. Heidt and Cilia had further discussed the question as to whether Malvina ought not to be sent to some *pension* abroad, or at least to stay with a clergyman's family, for instance, somewhere in the country. This plan, however, was upset by Malvina's opposition. She flatly refused to do anything of the sort; and as the girl had inherited a good half at least of her mother's obstinacy, Cilia realised that it was hopeless to persist.

During Soren's absence, Lt. Heidt suggested that it would be well to use the opportunity and refurnish the house completely, for, as he said, it would never do for people in such a position as the Braathens to have a "parlour" suite consisting of four birchwood chairs without springs and that horrible plaster-of-Paris angel that had knelt for the past twenty years on the embroidery-fringed bracket—it was enough to frighten decent people out of the house! Cilia entirely agreed, and only wondered how it was she herself had never perceived it before; this, of course, was the reason they had had no suitable society. But she would change all that. Malvina was highly indignant when she heard of the proposed resolution. The parlour was quite nice as it was, to her mind, and as for the angel, her father had given it to her when she was a child, and it did not harm anyone; on the contrary, she loved her angel, and would take care it came to no hurt. [Pg 168]

Lt. Heidt very kindly offered to go in to Christiania with Mrs. Cilia and help her choose the furniture; would indeed be delighted to assist in any way with the general rearrangement of the Braathen's *ménage*. Cilia gratefully accepted, and the pair went off accordingly to the capital, duly furnished with the requisite funds, which Cilia had drawn from the bank for the occasion. On the way, she begged her companion to take charge of the money and act as treasurer; she had heard that pickpockets devoted their attention more especially to ladies.

On arrival, Heidt suggested dining at a first-class restaurant which he himself frequented, and meeting on the way there two young gentlemen of his acquaintance, he introduced them to Mrs. Braathen, and invited them without further ceremony to join the party. They were frank, easy-mannered young fellows, and Cilia took a fancy to them, at once recognising them as belonging to "the quality."

And such a dinner they had! Oysters and champagne to start with, game of some sort, and claret—it was a banquet to eclipse even the betrothal feast at Prois's; to which last, it is true, she had not been invited—but he should repent it, the supercilious old sweep!

Heidt's friends, too, proved most entertaining company, especially the one who, it appeared, was a poet; he had a store of anecdotes to make one split one's sides with laughing, and Heidt himself was in high spirits. He drank with her, and said, "Your health, mother-in-law," and the others joined in with congratulations. Cilia could not help laughing, though she was inclined to consider it rather too much of a joke. Still, it was all done in such a jovial, irresistible fashion that she let it pass. [Pg 169]

After the coffee, the whole party set out to make purchases. First, glassware. Heidt thought it was a good idea to begin with glasses after dinner; one was more in the mood for it, he declared. An elegant service of cut-glass, with the monogram "S. & C. B." was ordered. Cilia hesitated a little at the delicate, slender-stemmed wine-glasses, which she declared would "go to smithereens" in a "twinkling" at the first washing-up, but was assured that this was the essence

of good taste in such matters, and finally gave in.

Then came the furniture for the "salon" as Heidt called it. But when Cilia found herself tentatively seated on a sofa with a hard, straight back reaching half-way up the wall, she could not help thinking that the old one at home was really more comfortable; a thing like this seemed made to sit upright in, and as for lying down——! The others, however, declared it elegant and "stylish," with which she felt she must agree, and the sofa was accordingly noted. Various so-called "easy-chairs," which to Cilia's mind were far from easy, were then added. A round settee with a pillar rising from the centre was to crown the whole. Cilia had never seen such an arrangement before, and was rather inclined to leave it out. But the dealer explained, "You place the article in the centre of the apartment, under a chandelier. A palm is set on the central pillar—and there you are!"

"Wouldn't a nice geranium do instead?" asked Cilia confidentially.

"Well—ah—oh, certainly, yes," said the man, and Cilia agreed.

"Then there are works of art," said Heidt. "No truly cultured home can be without them." And he [Pg 170] invited Cilia to contemplate a life-size terra-cotta Cupid. It was terribly expensive, and she did not really approve of "stark-naked boys" as a decorative motif, but Heidt and his friends agreed that it was a "triumph of plastic beauty," and a work of art such as no one in Strandvik had ever seen, far less possessed. And Cilia took the Cupid with the rest.

"Now we're all complete," said Heidt, "and I'll answer for it, a more recherché little interior than Shipowner Braathen's it will be hard to find." And Cilia saw in her mind's eye Lawyer Nickelsen and the Magistrate himself abashed and humbled before all this magnificence.

As for Prois and Holm Berg—poor things, they had never dreamt of anything like it.

When they got home, Cilia could not help feeling that it had been rather a costly outing—but what matter? The vessels were earning good money.

There was a letter from Soren, giving his impressions of Sandefjord.

> "Mrs. Cilia Braathen, my dear Wife,—I write this to let you know I have now had fourteen sulphur baths, kinder being thumped and hammered every morning from nine to ten, then breakfast, and about time too, seeing I have to drink five glasses of sulphur water and one of salts on an empty stomach.
>
> "In accordance with your instructions, I have duly informed the doctor here that I am in need of insomnia, which he assures me will improve with continued treatment.
>
> "There are any amount of people here on the same business, Danes and Swedes too, and all seem to be enjoying it like anything, which is more than I can understand. There's a band plays here all day, but the days seem to go very slowly all the same. Take care of yourself till I come back.—Ever your loving [Pg 171]
>
> "S. Braathen."

Malvina, too, had a letter from her father:

> "My dear Daughter,—Your letter was a great comfort to me in this place, which the same I would liken unto Sodom and Gomorrah, not only for the sulphur and brimstone but other things beside.
>
> "It was no surprise to me when you say you are in love with Abrahamsen, seeing I was watching you holding hands with him that day in the summer-house.
>
> "I give you my blessing and welcome, which please find herewith. He's not much of an expert, as you might say, in navigation, looking all ways round for the sun, but with God's help I dare say you'll be able to manage him. And as for your mother, you'll just have to square it with her the best you can, which is more than I ever could myself.
>
> "I am getting on famously here all round, all except the insomnia, which I haven't been able to manage up to now. I still get my night's rest and my afternoon nap, for all their nasty waters inside and out. But don't tell your mother I said so, but let her think I'm getting on that way.
>
> "Don't forget to write and let me know how she is and all that's doing.—Yours respectfully,
>
> "S. Braathen.
>
> "P.S.—What you say about Lieutenant Heidt has written you a love-letter, don't worry about that, but sufficient unto the day and so on. You can tell him you could never love anybody that hadn't got his mate's certificate, which I'm pretty sure he hasn't nor ever likely to be." [Pg 172]

Cilia had a desperately busy time unpacking all the things from Christiania, but, thanks to Lt. Heidt, who was always at hand ready to help, the work was soon got over.

The house was changed beyond all recognition. *Now* let the Prois's and Lawyer Nickelsen come,

and see what they'd say! Lt. Heidt came round every day now, and was so attentive to Malvina that Cilia felt all but sure of him already for a son-in-law, and reproved her daughter severely for being so "stand-offish" with him. But Malvina, remembering who was primarily responsible for the deposition of her plaster angel, and the substitution of a stark-naked boy, found it impossible to regard the culprit with anything but marked disfavour.

Never was Cupid looked upon so sourly by the fairer sex. Cilia, it is true, had gradually brought herself to look him straight in the face when she entered the room, instead of turning aside, but Malvina still flushed and averted her eyes. The angel at least was decent; no one need be ashamed of that!

At last everything was in order, and Cilia was able to look round proudly on an establishment fitted for persons of "quality." Hitherto it had always been her custom to go bareheaded within doors; now, however, she adopted a dainty white cap with a cluster of dark red auriculas on top, as befitted a lady of means and position.

When Soren came home, the first thing she did was to usher him into the drawing-room with a triumphant gesture. There! what did he think of that? [Pg 173]

Soren stood for a moment dumbfounded, and when at last Cilia invited him to sit down, he took out his handkerchief, spread it out carefully on the settee, and seated himself gingerly, glancing up now and again at the geranium, as if fearing it might fall on his head.

At the first opportunity he went off with Malvina to the wash-house, where the two had a long confabulation, the end of which was a solemn declaration on the part of Soren to the effect that his spouse must be "a trifle wrong in the upper works." And he swore that she had far more need of the Sandefjord waters than he had ever had.

Cilia, of course, must give a party to show off the establishment in its new finery. Invitations were sent out on printed cards a week beforehand, the list including Heidts, Prois's and Lawyer Nickelsen. Cilia had really half a mind to "leave out all that haughty lot," but if she did, where would the leaders of society be at all?

Soren was ordered to get himself a tail coat for the occasion. It was his duty as host, Cilia said. But for the first time in his life Soren refused to obey, and that so emphatically that his wife was startled. "If you and all the rest of them can't have me in my Sunday coat as it is, why, well and good—I'll go out fishing that day and you can have it all to yourselves." With which mutinous declaration Soren went out into the kitchen and confided to Malvina that he'd "had about enough of all this nonsense." Malvina cordially agreed, and did her best to keep him in that frame of mind.

Cilia pondered over the matter for some time; she had never before known Soren to disregard her injunctions in that fashion. But let him wait; she'd give him "Sunday coat" with a vengeance once the party was well over. [Pg 174]

The first thing Abrahamsen learned when he returned was news of the wonderful changes Cilia had made in the house. "Fitted up like a palace," said old Holm Berg. Then, too, of course, there were plenty of people to tell him of Malvina's engagement to Lt. Heidt, and how the latter had been round at the house "every blessed day all through the summer." Consequently, it was with heavy heart and ill-forebodings that the mate set out to call. Fortunately, however, he found Malvina alone in the front room, cleaning windows, and was able to arrange a meeting with her in the wash-house as soon as he had been in to deliver his report to Cilia. This was soon effected, Cilia being so occupied with preparations for the party that she even forgot to ask how much of the freight money was left.

Abrahamsen went down then to the wash-house, where doubts and fears were soon disposed of, despite the fact that the lovers' affectionate *tête-à-tête* was interrupted by a violent rattling in the tub, where Soren kept his bottled beer—the stout, alas, was gone long since.

The wash-house cellar was, as Soren put it, his "free port and patent breakwater" where he could anchor in safety whenever the waves of domestic strife ran over high.

A regular triple-alliance was now concluded between Soren, Abrahamsen and Malvina to meet the treacherous plottings of the two remaining powers: Cilia and Lt. Heidt. The Congress of the wash-house agreed to adopt and maintain an attitude of armed and watchful neutrality for the present, only proceeding to open hostilities in case of need, when concerted action would be taken according as circumstances might require. [Pg 175]

While this conference was taking place, Lt. Heidt, who had arrived meantime, was closeted with Cilia in long and earnest conversation, in the course of which he declared that his intentions towards Malvina were entirely honourable, and that it was his dearest wish to become a son-in-law of the house.

The Lieutenant was all for an immediate decision, the engagement then to be publicly declared on the following day at the party. Cilia, however, foresaw difficulties in effecting this: it would be necessary to prepare Malvina gradually for the honour and happiness in store for her. Finally, it was agreed that Cilia should use her utmost efforts, and tackle Malvina that same evening, get a satisfactory answer out of her if possible, and then fire off the news at dinner next day. The Lieutenant on his part was to hold himself in readiness for immediate action at the opportune moment. The pair then separated, with assurances of mutual esteem and affection.

Cilia was so overwhelmed that she was obliged to remain a full half-hour alone in the splendours of the newly furnished salon, meditating upon the wonderful good fortune that was about to fall upon the house. A real lieutenant, and the magistrate's son to boot—an alliance with the leading family in the town! Thus was the name of Braathen to be lifted from the potato-patch of vulgar insignificance to the gardens of rank and "quality."

Abrahamsen, stealing out by by the back way, was just in time to perceive Lt. Heidt taking leave [Pg 176] of Cilia, and noting the cordiality between the two, he realised that there was rough weather ahead before he could hope to lay alongside his dainty prize. He confided as much to his intimate friend, Thor Smith, the magistrate's clerk. The latter had an ancient grudge against young Heidt, who had at one time made some attempt at cutting him out with Tulla Prois, and that in the basest manner, which Smith had never forgiven him.

But he should pay for it—Smith would see to that!

When Abrahamsen had set forth the position in detail, Smith pressed his hand, and swore to aid him by all means in his power. Here at last was a chance of getting even with his rival.

That same evening Smith went round for a chat with Old Nick, as he often did. On reaching the house, however, the housekeeper informed him that Nickelsen was engaged in the office—Skipper Braaten was in there with him.

Smith pricked up his ears at this, and at once concluded that the consultation must have something to do with the matrimonial plans afoot in the skipper's household.

He waited, therefore, and a little while later Nickelsen entered, looking very thoughtful. His air, however, changed to one of cautious reserve when Smith greeted him with:

"Well, have you been through the Code of Matrimonial Law with Soren Braaten?"

"What makes you think so?" said Nickelsen.

"My dear old Nick, don't try that on with me. I've just heard about it from my particular friend Abrahamsen. And I don't mind telling you I'm out to put the brave Lieutenant's nose out of joint if I can."

"H'm—well, it's right enough. And as for the Lieutenant, why, 'twould be easy enough. But Cilia's [Pg 177] a different matter, now she's got her head puffed up with all this 'fashionable' nonsense. Old Soren has fairly got his blood up this time though; he wanted her declared unfit to act, and a legal guardian appointed—what do you say to that?"

"Look here, Nickelsen, what if you and I put our heads together and fixed it up ourselves for Malvina and Abrahamsen?"

"Good Lord above us, what are you thinking of? Do you want me to play *postillon d'amour* for all the loving couples in the town?"

"Well, it's a noble mission, you know, really. Just think how Tulla and I look up to you with—er—with affection and esteem—since that banquet affair."

"You can think yourself lucky it went off as well as it did," said Old Nick.

"Oh—this'll come off all right too, you'll see. Come along, let's set to work and draw up a plan of campaign. We're getting quite old hands at the game."

Old Nick was not without some scruples, but after further pressure he at last consented to give his support as far as he could.

As a result of mature deliberation the following scheme was drawn up, to be submitted to Soren Braaten and Abrahamsen for consideration:

1. Soren to arrange that Thor Smith and Abrahamsen be among the guests invited to the party.

2. Soren to say a few words of welcome to the guests at table, whereupon Lawyer Nickelsen would make a "flowing and eloquent" speech proposing the host and hostess.

3. Immediately after this the grand scene, wherein Soren Braaten, rising again, delivers a speech, [Pg 178] prepared beforehand by Nickelsen and Smith, announcing Malvina's engagement to Abrahamsen.

This surprise attack, the conspirators reckoned, could not fail to throw the enemy's forces into confusion.

Both, however, knowing Cilia's temper, her energy and force of character, were agreed that the plan had its weak points. She might, for instance, prefer to make a scene rather than surrender unconditionally. Nevertheless, both Smith and Old Nick thought she would probably give way; and having regard to the sound strategic principle that a purely defensive position is generally untenable, they thought best to urge the Triple Alliance to take the offensive at the earliest opportunity.

No sooner said than done. Soren and Abrahamsen were sent for, and lost no time in making their appearance; both had a feeling that great events were in the air.

Meantime, the enemy was not inactive. The Lieutenant, certain of victory, now that he had

secured so powerful an ally as Cilia, had already confided his intentions to his father. The magistrate, in his own mind, could not help thinking that a daughter of his former parlourmaid was hardly a match for his son, but on the other hand it might make a man of him. And the Braatens were said to be quite wealthy people. Malvina was the only child, so that from that point of view, no objection could be raised. Finally, he declared himself willing to give his consent, but, learning that the engagement was to be formally announced at dinner on the following day, he became serious, and went down quietly to his office to prepare a speech suited to the occasion. [Pg 179] His consent to the marriage was one thing, but he was resolved that it should not lead to overmuch intimacy between the two families. And this he was anxious to point out, with all possible delicacy, of course, but definitely enough to permit of no misunderstanding.

The party assembled at Old Nick's, including Thor Smith, Abrahamsen and Soren Braaten, were unanimous in declaring the proposed scheme admirable. The only hesitation was on the part of Soren, who, being himself cast for the leading part, naturally felt the risk. The others, however, insisted that no one else could do it, and he therefore agreed to sacrifice himself in a forlorn hope for the general good.

On being handed the speech, carefully written out by Old Nick himself, Soren scratched his head and looked thoroughly miserable. He had never made a speech in his life, and had no sort of confidence in his declamatory powers. There was no help for it, however, and with a sigh he thrust the paper into his waistcoat pocket.

Before leaving he was instructed to make known the details of the plan to Malvina, and charge her to be as amiable as possible to Heidt, in order to avoid any suspicion in the minds of the others as to the conspiracy afoot.

On reaching home, he sought out Malvina and explained the situation, whereafter the two in concert managed to get Cilia to invite Thor Smith and Abrahamsen at the eleventh hour; Cilia herself, as far as could be seen, had no suspicion of any covert motive underlying the request.

Nearly all that night Soren sat up in his bedroom brooding over the speech. "Gentlemen and—er—h'm—I should say ladies and gentlemen—er—I rise to this—I rise on this occasion ..." etc. Soren [Pg 180] toiled at the speech, sweating properly, and cursing at intervals, till nearly morning. And when at last he fell asleep, it was only to dream that Old Nick stood over him, tweaking his nose with the fire-tongs, while he strove in vain to get beyond the opening sentence of his oration.

He awoke, however, in excellent spirits, and ceased to worry about the speech at all, arguing to himself that it would come off all right once he got going. He ran up the flag with his own hands, and meeting Cilia in the kitchen as he came in, he chucked her under the chin with a cheerful: "Well, old lady, feeling fit?" Whereat Cilia was considerably taken aback, being all unused to such attentions.

There was great excitement in the town as to how the much-talked-of party would go off, and, long before the appointed hour, the garden fence was lined outside by the youth of the neighbourhood, awaiting the arrival of the guests.

"There's Holm Berg, boys, stovepipe and all—and here's the Lieutenant with his pig-sticker—and look at Old Nick in his white gloves, and walking like he was on stilts—hurraa—a—a!"

The house was brilliantly illuminated and looked very festive indeed; so overwhelming was the display that most of the natives stole away into odd corners where they could see as much as possible without being seen. Lt. Heidt was thoroughly at home, and helped to look after the guests, though this, indeed, was superfluous, Soren himself exhibiting so much sangfroid and confidence of manner that he might have been on board his own vessel and in sole command. He [Pg 181] shook hands with each as they arrived, and bade them welcome with smiling self-possession. Cilia hardly knew him in this new guise as master of the house, and a shiver of excitement thrilled her as she thought of the developments in store. She had, indeed, sufficient reason for anxiety, inasmuch as she had had a serious talk with Malvina just before the guests arrived, endeavouring to extract from her a promise to give a favourable answer to Lt. Heidt. But there was no getting anything definite out of Malvina; she demanded time to think it over.

The first slight stiffness among the guests soon disappeared, and, by the time dinner was served, most of them felt quite sufficiently at home to do full justice to an excellent repast.

There were to be no speeches until dessert, and now the fateful moment was near.

Malvina was in a corner with Lt. Heidt, the latter so tender and smiling that old Mrs. Berg nudged the parson's wife and whispered, "Look, I'm sure he's proposing now!" The lady addressed, however, was somewhat deaf, and looked up with an inquiring "Eh?" Mrs. Berg did not venture to repeat the observation out loud, and substituted a remark about "the jelly delicious, don't you think?"

Malvina turned pale and red alternately with emotion; there was no getting out of the corner, for Heidt barred the way. Now and again she cast a despairing glance at the Cupid, as if asking aid; but no, the figure only stared back with a silly smile—ridiculous creature!

Abrahamsen, in the passage adjoining, was watching the pair with ill-repressed impatience. The sight of the young lieutenant bending close and whispering confidentially to Malvina made him [Pg 182] tingle, and he clenched his fists. Abrahamsen was an ill man to jest with, and, as Soren was wont to say, he had a pair of fists as heavy as the flippers of a full-grown seal.

Coolest of all the conspirators was Old Nick, who walked about, smiling and content, enjoying his own observation of the entire menagerie, as he called it. Towards Cilia he was deference itself, and won her heart completely by addressing her as "Mrs. Braathen."

At last Soren tapped his glass; all eyes were at once turned towards him. He started off simply and easily; he had just one thing to say and that was, he thanked them all for their presence there this evening, and was very glad to see them under his humble roof. Your health! Cilia was quite proud of her husband for once, and not a little surprised; it was not a bit like Soren. Where on earth had he picked it up? She herself had previously asked Lt. Heidt, as a friend of the family, to say a few words of welcome, but Soren had managed it excellently already. Well, so much the better; it would show Lt. Heidt that even he was not indispensable.

Old Nick then rose, and proposed "our host and hostess" in a speech so fluent and cordial that even the parson's wife, who had scarcely heard a word of it, declared it was "perfectly charming."

All drank with Cilia, who curtsyed and nodded and smiled, and nodded again, until her head almost fell off; never in her dreams had she imagined such an exalted moment.

The regulation speeches were now over, and nothing more was expected beyond a few words from the parson, when, to Cilia's astonishment and the surprise of the guests, Soren again [Pg 183] stepped forward and raised his glass.

Cilia's first thought was that her husband had taken a drop too much, but his calm, easy manner disposed of that idea in a moment. She wondered what on earth was going to happen, and for the first time in her life the foundations of her despotic power seemed shaken.

There was a tense silence among the guests; what could he have to say? Old Nick stood beside him, chatting easily with Malvina as if nothing were amiss. Thor Smith was out in the passage with Abrahamsen. Justice Heidt, who had been waiting all the evening for the "declaration," drew a little nearer, in the belief that it was coming.

Soren drank off his own glass of sherry, and having reinforced it with Old Nick's and the parson's, which stood nearest on the table, he gave vent to a long sigh, or grunt, and commenced as follows:

"Ladies and Gentlemen: as mentioned, there's a thing we call a union, which means, well—a sort of union, you know" (loud applause from some of the younger men, who thought Soren was referring to the Union of Norway and Sweden), "and you can't have any sort of union without—h'm—respect and—h'm—affection on both sides." (Here the speaker directed a lowering glance at Lt. Heidt, who was moving towards the table.)

"There was a whole lot more I was supposed to say about this, but I've forgotten the rest. And, anyhow, it's a bit of a large order to expect an old skipper like me to rattle out all that stuff about garlands of roses and bonds of something—or—other." Old Nick gave a despairing glance at Thor [Pg 184] Smith, who shook his head sadly. "Well, anyhow, it's as well to take the bull by the horns, so here you are. Abrahamsen, you've had charge of the old *Birkebeineren* two voyages this year, and I hereby make no bones about giving you my girl Malvina, to sail her without deviation or any delay, as the apple of my heart, across the ocean of life, with all due care and seamanship, as set forth in the bills of lading. And seeing as that same ocean's given to foul weather and suchlike perils, dangers and accidents of the sea or other waters, you'll need to keep a sharp look-out and navigate according. And, well, the Lord be with you. Amen."

Cilia, who was nervous and unsettled enough beforehand, now lost her head completely, and as the guests crowded round to offer their congratulations, she sank into a chair holding a handkerchief to her eyes. And when Malvina came up to embrace her, she broke down completely.

Lt. Heidt turned sharply about in military fashion, and strode magnificently out into the hall. On the way he encountered Old Nick, who was rude enough to smile at him, and say, "Rather neat that, don't you think?"

Justice Heidt retired quietly, inwardly congratulating himself with the thought that it was just as well he had escaped closer connection with so plebeian a family!

When the guests had left, Soren sat down beside his wife and took her hand, endeavouring to comfort her as well as he could. Cilia still wept, however; as if all the tears she might have shed in her life, but never had, were bursting forth at once. So copious indeed was the flow, that Soren privately reckoned out it would have sufficed to water half the carrot patch at least. [Pg 185]

It was with strange thoughts that Cilia retired to rest. She was beginning to realise that she had been dethroned; her power within-doors and abroad was gone for ever; she had made a fool of herself with a vengeance. It was a bitter thing to feel. She went over in her mind the events of the summer: Soren's journey to Sandefjord, her own expedition to Christiania with Lt. Heidt, the party, and the new furniture—how could she ever have been so foolish, so insane!

Towards morning she grew calmer; she had decided what to do, and was herself again.

She rose before the others were stirring, and lit a big fire in the kitchen. Her sharp features showed firm and decided as she stood before the stove, stiffly upright, one hand fiercely clenching a crumpled roll of something white. This she presently threw into the flames with a

deep sigh—but a sigh of relief, as if in casting off a burden. It was her dainty indoor cap, with the auriculas, that was sacrificed; the thing hissed and spluttered, vanishing at last in sooty fragments up the chimney.

When Soren and Malvina came down, they found her on all fours in the parlour, hard at work packing up carpets and curtains, knick-knacks and chandeliers. They stood watching her for a while, but Cilia sharply ordered them to help—and willingly they did! Not a word was exchanged between the three; they simply went on packing and packing, closing up the cases and packing more, till they were ready to be carried out into the yard.

In the course of the morning Abrahamsen turned up, and lent a hand with the packing-cases. It [Pg 186] was almost as if it were a question of getting some evil influence out of the house as quickly as possible. All four worked together with perfect understanding, and not a word was said either of the engagement or of the party.

"What are we to do with that fellow there?" said Abrahamsen, pointing to the Cupid.

Soren scratched his chin thoughtfully for a while, and, as a result of his cogitations, suggested "making a fountain." He had seen dozens of suchlike figures in the course of his travels. You set them up in gardens, with a hole bored through and a tube let in. Why not stick it up on the pump outside; it would look fine then! But Malvina insisted on getting rid of the thing altogether; it had caused mischief enough as it was. Thus Abrahamsen had an inspiration. "Let's make Lawyer Nickelsen a present of it; he's got a couple of things much the same to look at. I dare say he'd be glad to have one more." The proposal was received with acclamation, Cilia herself offering no objection, but declaring they might do what they pleased with the thing.

Abrahamsen accordingly took the unfortunate Cupid, stuffed it into a sack, and marched off with it. Nickelsen was not a little surprised to receive a visit from the mischievous god, but on learning what was taking place in its former home, he consented to shelter the poor outcast. He also shook hands with Abrahamsen, and said:

"My dear Abrahamsen, I congratulate you—and I must say Cilia is wiser than I thought. It's not many people would have the sense and character to repair an error so resolutely as she has done."

There was general astonishment in Strandvik when Cilia's elegant new furniture was seen being [Pg 187] loaded on board a coasting-vessel down at the quay; still further wonder when it transpired that the entire consignment was destined for Christiania, to be sold by auction there.

Cilia went aboard calmly and quietly, paying no heed to gossip or impertinent questions. And indeed there were few who ventured to question her at all, for her manner was severe enough to keep even the most inquisitive at arm's length. As soon as the vessel had left, she had all the old furniture put back in its place. Malvina brought out her plaster angel, wiped it carefully, and set it up on the same old bracket again.

It was surprising how comfortable everything seemed at home now. Soren was so delighted he went about rubbing his hands, and even Cilia herself seemed gentler and more tractable than before. So much so, indeed, that Soren decided to give up his quarters in the wash-house, and drank his bottled beer on a settle in the kitchen, as if it were the most natural thing in the world; and Cilia made no protest, but set out glass and tray for him herself! Soren felt he was the happiest man in the world, and it was not many weeks before all was back in the old routine, Cilia devoting herself in earnest to the business of shipowning and chartering. Abrahamsen was transferred to the *Apollo*, and Soren went on board his old friend *Birkebeineren*, a skipper once more.

One thing Cilia found more astonishing than all else, and that was that both Lawyer Nickelsen and old Prois himself took to calling at the house now and then; nay, more—she and Malvina were actually asked to tea at the Prois's. Cilia was finding out that there were more things in [Pg 188] heaven and earth than were dreamt of in her philosophy.

Passing by Cilia's well-kept garden in the spring, one might see a number of wine-glasses, minus the stems, but engraved with the monogram "S. & C. B.," placed protectingly over tender seedling or cuttings planted out in the round or oblong borders—"all that's left of the days when mother went wrong in the upper works," said Soren Braaten.

[Pg 189]

XIV
A ROYAL VISIT

"Heard the news, Nickelsen?" cried Thor Smith, looking in at Nickelsen's door.

"No, what?"

"The King's coming."

"Don't talk nonsense—what d'you mean?"

"It's true, honour bright. The Council's all head over heels already, fixing up a committee for the arrangement."

"No, really? Why, that'll be first-rate. Just wanted something to brighten things up a bit; it's been very dull lately." Old Nick rubbed his hands gleefully. "Come along, let's walk down that way a bit and see if we can get hold of somebody in the know."

"Hallo, here's Holm Berg! I say, are you on this committee?"

"No, thank goodness, I managed to get out of it. Not but that there were plenty anxious to get in!"

"Who's on it, then, do you know?"

"Well, there's Heidt, of course, as Justice, but he was quite put out about it himself, and wished His Majesty I won't say where. You see, it means getting new uniform, for the gold braid's all worn off his old one."

"Well, and who else?"

"Oh, let's see; the parson, Governor Hansen, Watchmaker Rordam and Dr. Knap—oh yes, and Prois, of course, as Warden." [Pg 190]

"What, old Prois?"

"Yes, and he was quite cut up about it too. Said he was too old for such tomfoolery."

It was a busy time all round for the loyal citizens of Strandvik; and the worst of it was, they had only three days to make all arrangements. The royal party would arrive on Thursday at four o'clock and dine in the town. And to-day was Monday.

The committee held meetings morning and afternoon. A band was asked for by telegram from the naval station at Horten, and a special cook from Drammen; both, fortunately, promised to come.

A triumphal arch was set up at the Custom House, and Nachmann, the German wine merchant, sent up four cart-loads of bottles to the Town Hall, where the banquet was to be held. Nachmann was in high feather, and declared loyally that a Royal House was an excellent institution and an encouragement to trade and commerce.

But what was the King to drive in? Consul Jansen had a very respectable pair-horse carriage of his own, lined with grey silk, and suitable for most "special occasions," but unfortunately one of the horses was lame, and the other a confirmed runaway. What was to be done?

Lt. Heidt had just got a new mount, but so miserably emaciated a beast that one could almost see daylight through its ribs. There was no possibility of using such a bag of bones for such a purpose.

Finally, the choice fell upon Baker Ottosen's black mare, a famous beauty. But one mare's not a pair; there was nothing for it but to take Governor Hansen's old "Swift," so called from the fact of its never on any occasion exceeding the easiest amble. It was hoped that the close proximity of the mare would liven it up a little. [Pg 191]

For three whole days Aslaksen of the livery stables practised the pair up and down through the streets, to the great edification of the urchins, who ran after the carriage shouting and cheering.

Tar barrels and rockets were set ready in place out in the fjord, and all the candles in the stores were bought up for the purpose of illumination.

From early morning the committee was abroad, in full evening-dress, and desperately busy.

Old Justice Heidt stood in his shirt-sleeves and new gold-braided breeches making his most deferential bow to an old American clock: "May it please Your Majesty, in the person of the town's ..." he had to look up the paper and read through his speech once again.

Excitement increased as the day wore on. Stout peasant girls with red roses in their hats, and lanky youths with blue and green ties, and a bottle of spirits in their hinder pockets, began pouring into the town.

The committee was working feverishly. Everything was now practically ready, flags and bunting everywhere, and as many green wreaths as seven old women had been able to prepare in three days. All that remained was the great centre-piece, with the arms of the town, to be hung above the royal seat in the banqueting hall.

Watchmaker Rordam, who, in addition to having charge of all the time-pieces in the town, further acted as instrument maker, turner and decorator, had undertaken to paint the aforesaid piece. But at one o'clock he suddenly retired in dudgeon, and the arms of the town were nowhere. The cause of this disaster was Old Nick, who had come up during the morning to the hall to see how the decorations were getting on. Rordam was there just putting the finishing touches to his masterpiece. [Pg 192]

"Ah, Rordam, painting a picture, are you? Tell me, what it's supposed to be, exactly?"

"Eh?" said Rordam, with a frown. "Can't you see? Why, the town arms, of course—a bear holding

a pine tree on a blue ground, and a goddess with the scales of justice in red in the other corner."

"No, really?" said Old Nick. "Devil take me, if I didn't think it was Adam and Eve stealing apples in the Garden of Eden."

Rordam was furious, and swore he would not put up with such impertinence, he had not come there to be insulted. He had undertaken the work as a loyal citizen's contribution to the general good, without fee or remuneration of any sort, and if Lawyer Nickelsen thought he could paint a better coat-of-arms, why, let him take over the business, and welcome. And, tearing down his painting, the indignant watchmaker took himself off.

Old Nick likewise found it advisable to disappear, after a vain attempt to bring the injured painter to reason, assuring him that it was only a joke, no harm intended, etc. etc.

The committee was summoned in haste, and stood staring blankly at the empty space where the bear and the goddess of justice should have appeared.

Their anger was very naturally turned upon Old Nick.

"Really, I think he might have kept his remarks to himself," said Dr. Knap. "Old muddler that he is." [Pg 193]

"He never can keep a still tongue in his head," agreed Justice Heidt.

It was now past one o'clock: the King was to arrive at four, and there was no painting a new design in three hours. Hang up a big Norwegian flag? That, of course, could be done; but it would seem a very poor sort of decoration without the arms of the town. Then Governor Hansen had a bright idea: "Let's get up an impromptu lunch at once, and ask Rordam along, as if nothing was the matter."

"Do you think he'll come?" asked Justice Heidt.

"Sure enough—if we just let him know it's a special lunch for a small select party. Send the message in your own name, Justice, and I'll wager a bottle of Montebello he'll come."

Half an hour after, Rordam arrived, and was received by Justice Heidt, who clapped him on the shoulder and thanked him heartily for his splendid decoration of the hall.

"And I must say we are fortunate in having in so small a town an artist of taste like yourself. I am sure His Majesty will wish to thank you personally. By the way, that coat of arms, it will be ready in time, I hope? Dr. Knap was just saying it was a magnificent piece of work."

"Why—er—that is—I wasn't altogether pleased with it myself, so I took it down."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear fellow! I am sure it's excellent. Hang it up again and don't worry about that."

The shield was set in place again accordingly, and the committee unanimously expressed their admiration. The figure of the bear in particular was highly praised. "As lifelike as anything you'd see in a menagerie," said Warden Prois cautiously. "And the young lady too, I'm sure," said Dr. Knap, with a sly nudge to Heidt. Rordam was pacified, completely won over, and so gratified at the amiable condescension of the notables at lunch that he felt he could afford to despise a mere lawyer like that fellow Nickelsen. [Pg 194]

At half-past three precisely the committee members of Council and other leading personages went down to the quay where the Royal party was to land. The appearance of Warden Prois, with his gold-laced cap, ditto tunic, belt and dirk (all newly ordered for the occasion) was the signal for cheering from the assembled urchins. The demonstration, however, so annoyed the old man that he angrily ordered them to "keep quiet, you little devils," at which undignified utterance on the part of a person in authority, Justice Heidt frowned severely.

The four town constables were likewise dressed for the occasion with new trousers and white cotton gloves, and made a brave show.

"Boom—boom—boom!" came the salute from the fire-station, and Ottosen's black mare reared so violently that Aslaksen's silver-braided silk hat fell off. Worse was to come, however. As the band from Horten struck up, "Swift" became troublesome. At last the Warden himself had to spring to the heads of the frantic pair and hold them, or the whole equipage would have gone over the side into the water. His Majesty, no doubt from previous experience of provincial turn-outs, preferred to walk, and the party moved off, accompanied by a burst of cheering, towards the Town Hall; [Pg 195] Aslaksen, with his carriage and ill assorted pair, following shamefacedly in the rear.

At the upper end of the Royal table sat the Justice and other notables; the King's suite were distributed between the members of the committee. For the convenience of the latter, Heidt had had cards set round at each place, with the names of the guest seated next. Warden Prois, who had been introduced to his particular charge, but had not managed to catch the name, slipped away stealthily outside, put on his spectacles and endeavoured to read his card. "His Excellency ... M.—M.—Megesen—no, Pegestik—devil take me if I can make head or tail of it." At last he decided for "Negesuk" as the Excellency's name—Swedish names were always queer.

It was a very festive affair, and full justice was done to the fourteen courses and Nachmann's good wine. The official speeches were all delivered with laudable precision, excepting Governor

Hansen's. That worthy came to a standstill, and had to fumble in his waistcoat pocket for the written copy, consisting of two lines scrawled on a bit of paper, the crumpled appearance of which suggested that it had been liberally consulted already.

The talk flowed easily and without embarrassing restraint. Old Klementsen quietly pocketed a copy of the menu, to take home to his wife; it was only fair that she should have her share of the feast.

"Mr. Chamberlain Negesuk, may I have the honour?" Prois raised his glass courteously towards his neighbour, who drank with him and bowed in return, albeit with some stiffness of manner. This, however, the Warden attributed to their proximity to the Royal person.

"Ah—my name is Von Vegesak," said the courtier, with a bow. [Pg 196]

"The deuce it is," said Prois; "it doesn't look like it on the card." And he put on his glasses and turned the card about.

"Oh, but that's not my birth certificate, you know," answered Von Vegesak, with a smile.

"Well, anyhow, here's to you, Mr.—Mr.—Vegesak."

At one end of the Royal table sat Governor Hansen and Captain Palander, deep in conversation about—horses! Horses were the one theme in which Hansen was really interested, devoting especial attention to trotters, and once he got on to his favourite subject there was no stopping him.

"Curious thing," he observed, "I had a trotting horse a few years ago called Palander—ha, ha, ha! Yes, that was really its name. But I could never get any pace out of it on ordinary going; ice underfoot was the only thing to make it go."

"Very good claret this," murmured the King to Justice Heidt.

"Yes, Your Majesty; we have it from our worthy dealer here, Mr. Nachmann, a citizen of the town."

"Quite right, Your Majesty; a genuine brand and *premier one*." Nachmann rose to his feet and turned his moonlike countenance towards the King.

"Thanks for good wine, then, Nachmann," said His Majesty, raising his glass.

"Proudest moment in my life, Your Majesty. I'll take the liberty of laying down a few bottles in memory of the occasion—until Your Majesty honours us again. Most humble servant, Your Majesty."

And Nachmann bowed deeply, but with evident pride. How they would envy him now, P. A. Larsen, Lundgren, Carl Fleischer, and all the rest of them, who fancied nobody sold good wine but themselves! He would get the editor of the *Strandvik Gazette* to quote the Royal compliment to the firm of Nachmann & Co.—it was a credit to the town to have such a business in its midst. [Pg 197]

When Nachmann rose, there was a sudden silence; one could have heard a pin drop. But since His Majesty took the occurrence in such good part, the others could do so too. Nevertheless, Justice Heidt considered Nachmann's behaviour unjustifiable and a breach of etiquette. He cast a glance of stern reproof at the wine merchant, but the latter was so elated that he misunderstood its meaning, and, raising his glass, nodded pleasantly in return: "Your health, Justice!"

Old Klementsen, the parish clerk, who had hardly eaten at all for two days in order to get full value out of the banquet for his twelve shillings, had been shovelling away as hard as he could stuff, and drinking in proportion. He was now in high feather as a result, and his one idea now was to get up and make a speech in honour of Carl Johan, whom he had seen in 1840.

His neighbours with difficulty restrained him, tearing the tails of his coat in their efforts to keep him in his seat. Finally, they got him down into the police cells on the ground floor, when he delivered his loyal oration to the warder.

Up in the gallery sat the ladies of the town, perspiring in their Sunday best; it was almost hot enough up there to boil a lobster. All were thirsty too, and matters were not improved by the sight of their respective husbands and fathers in the hall below eating and drinking *ad libitum* of the best, while they themselves had neither bite nor sup. [Pg 198]

Miss Svane, headmistress of the girls' school, could not restrain her emotions, and declared warmly that "it was easy enough to be a loyal subject of His Majesty if that was how they did it!"

Cilia Braaten had never seen a King at meals before; she was gratified with the new experience, and had no thought for anything else until Miss Svane delivered her envious dictum. Then, however, she resolutely sent off a boy for six bottles of lemonade, in which the ladies drank to His Majesty's health—and, literally speaking, drank it warmly.

At last the time came for the Royal party to leave, and the departure took place amid an endless thunder of cheering. Rockets whizzed, the gun at the fire-station boomed in salute. But in the banqueting-hall the fun grew fast and furious.

Bowls of punch were brought in, and Schoolmaster Iversen made thirteen speeches, to which nobody listened at all. Skipper Abrahamsen jumped up on the table and made another for the

Norwegian play, in the course of which he managed to empty his glass of punch over Warden Prois's new uniform, at which that worthy, very naturally incensed, cursed the patriot emphatically for behaving like a monkey on a tightrope.

Even aged Klementsen had come to life again, and found his way upstairs from the cells, somewhat pale but resolute still. His appearance was greeted with a burst of cheering, and a party of enthusiasts chaired him round the hall, singing patriotic songs the while. The singing and shouting continued well on towards morning, and a street sweeper declared he had heard [Pg 199] them howling out "God save our gracious King" at half-past six—but his watch, no doubt, must have been fast!

Next day the *Strandvik Gazette* contained a poem entitled "A Royal Visit," from which the following verses concerning the banquet may be quoted:

"'Twas plain to see that Strandvik town
Lacked neither meat nor mirth,
The banquet might have brought renown
To any place on earth.
The dishes, numbering fourteen,
Were rich enough to make,
If such his daily fare had been,
The Royal tummy ache.
And healths were drunk and speeches very wittily were said,
And those who had no speech to make, they drank the wine instead.
But yet in spite of speeches gay
And wit and wine, I dare to say
His Majesty was glad to get away!"

[Pg 200]

XV
PETER OILAND

Peter Oiland, the new master at the girls' school in Strandvik, was a tall, thin man of about thirty. He had taken a theological degree, and his solemn, clean face gave him a somewhat clerical air; his manner, too, appeared calm and reserved.

"Not much fun to be got out of him, by his looks," said Old Nick, the first time he encountered Peter Oiland's lanky figure and serious countenance on his way up through the town.

It was not from any predilection of his own, however, that Peter Oiland had come to study theology, but a result of circumstances which left him no choice in the matter. His studies had been carried through at the expense of an old uncle, who was parish clerk at Sandefjord, and whose dearest wish it was to see the boy in Holy Orders. Only fancy; to be handing the cassock to a nephew of his own.

Peter, then, had taken his degree accordingly, and endeavoured conscientiously to suit himself as far as possible to the clerical rôle for which he was cast in life; how he succeeded we shall presently see.

His quiet and sober dignity of manner gained him the entry to the Sukkestads' house, where he was soon a frequent guest; not that he found himself particularly attracted by Sukkestad and his [Pg 201] wife, or their severely earnest circle of friends. The attraction, in fact, was Andrea, the daughter of the house and only child, for whom he entertained the tenderest feeling. Andrea was a buxom, pink-and-white beauty of eighteen summers. Her light blue eyes and little stumpy nose were quite charming in their way, while the plait of long, fair hair over the shoulders gave her an air of childish innocence.

In a word, Peter Oiland was desperately in love, while Andrea, who had never before been the object of such attentions, began to lie awake at nights wondering whether he "really meant it." The solution, however, came quite naturally.

Andrea played the piano, and sang touching little songs of the sentimental type, such as "When my eyes are closing," "The Last Rose of Summer," or "The Deserted Cottage"—which transported Peter Oiland to the eighth heaven at least. One evening, when she had finished one of her usual turns, he took her hand and thanked her warmly, pressing it also quite perceptibly—and Andrea, well, she somehow managed to press his quite perceptibly in return—by accident, of course. And then these hand-clasps were repeated, nay, became a regular thing, to such an extent that the pair would press each other's hands when seated on the sofa with Mamma Sukkestad between them. That good lady, however, did not notice, or affected not to notice, these evidences of tender passion taking place behind her back.

Thanks to his intimacy with Sukkestad, and also to his own reputation as a sober and earnest man, Peter Oiland was chosen, after only a couple of months' residence in the place, as one of the two representatives of the town to attend the mission meeting at Stavanger. Sukkestad himself [Pg 202]

was the other.

On the evening before their departure, he was invited to a party at the Sukkestads', together with the members of the Women's Union.

Peter Oiland had already succeeded in making himself a special favourite with Mrs. Sukkestad, and was on very confidential terms with her; relations, indeed, became quite intimate, when Andrea confided the secret of their mutual feelings to her mother.

After supper, preserved fruit and pastry were handed round, which Peter Oiland inwardly considered a somewhat insipid form of entertainment. He had often felt the lack of a glass of grog on his visits to the house, and this evening he deftly turned the conversation with Mrs. Sukkestad to the subject of "colds," from which he declared himself to be suffering considerably just lately. Mrs. Sukkestad recommended hot turpentine bandages on the chest and barley water internally. Oiland, however, hinted that the only thing he had ever known to do him any good was egg punch. Mrs. Sukkestad, who was one of those stout little homely persons always anxious to help, and with a fine store of household recipes ever available, set to work at once to find some means of getting him his favourite medicine, while Peter coughed distressingly, and screwed up his eyes behind his glasses.

"I tell you what," whispered Mrs. Sukkestad at last. "Sukkestad is an abstainer, you know, so we've never anything in the way of spirits in the house as a rule. But I've half a bottle of brandy out in the pantry that I got last spring when I was troubled with the toothache; I was going to use it for cleaning the windows, really, but if you think it would do your cold any good, I'd be only too pleased." [Pg 203]

"Thanks ever so much, it's awfully good of you," said Peter Oiland hoarsely.

"Well, then, be sure you don't let anyone know what it is. I'll put it in one of the decanters, and say it's gooseberry wine."

"Yes, yes, of course; I understand."

And, shortly after, Peter Oiland was comfortably seated in a corner with a lovely big glass of grog, enjoying himself thoroughly, and, to complete his satisfaction, Andrea sang:

"Thou art my one and only thought,
My one and only love...."

Peter drank deep of the joy of life, and eke of grog, and Andrea seemed more charming than ever.

Later in the evening he held forth to the ladies—among whom, as above mentioned, were all the members of the Women's Union—about the blacks of the South Sea Islands, and gave so lurid a description of the state of things there prevailing as to make his audience fairly shudder.

"And would you believe it, on one of the islands in the Pacific, a place called Kolamukka, belonging to Queen Rabagadale, they eat roast baby just as we do sucking pig, the only difference being that they don't serve them up with lemons in their mouths."

Sukkestad thought this was going rather too far, and broke in, "Oh, come now, Oiland; you're exaggerating, I'm sure. Thank goodness, all the poor heathens are not cannibals."

"Have to quote the worst examples, to make it properly interesting," said Oiland, which dictum was supported by Mrs. Writher, who declared that one could not paint these things too darkly; it [Pg 204] was hard enough as it was to make people realise the dreadful state of those benighted creatures.

When the guests had left, Mrs. Sukkestad felt some qualms of conscience at the thought of having "served intoxicating liquors" in her house. She lay awake for hours, debating with herself whether she ought to confess at once to her husband. The excuse about having a cold was—well, rather poor after all. Suppose Oiland had a weakness, a leaning towards drink, and she had led him astray! His cough, too, had vanished so quickly, it was suspicious. However, she decided to say nothing for the present.

It was a fine, bright, sunny day when Sukkestad and Peter Oiland, as delegates from Strandvik to the meeting at Stavanger, stepped on board the coasting steamer, which was already half full of delegates with white neckerchiefs and broad-brimmed felt hats.

The smoke-room was thick with the fumes of cheap tobacco and a hum of quiet talk from decent folk in black Sunday coats and well-polished leg boots. A swarthy little commercial traveller, with a bright red tie and waxed moustache, sat squeezed up in a corner puffing at a "special" cigar with a coloured waistband.

Peter Oiland gave a formal greeting to the company assembled as he entered; those nearest politely made way for him.

"It's a hard life, teaching," observed a stout little man with a florid, clean-shaven face and glistening black hair brushed forward over his ears. "Tells on the nerves."

"You find it so?" put in Peter Oiland. "Well, now, it all depends on how you take it—as the young [Pg 205] man said when he took a kiss in the dark."

There was a somewhat awkward silence; the company seemed rather in doubt as to the speaker's sympathy with their ideas.

Presently the sea began to make itself felt, and Peter Oiland found occasion to relate the anecdote of the old lady who had been in to Christiania for a new set of false teeth, and, being sea-sick on the way back, dropped them overboard; next day the local papers had an account of a big cod just caught, with false teeth in its mouth!

A smile—a very faint one—greeted the story, and the passengers relapsed into their customary seriousness, not without occasional glances between one and another: what sort of a fellow was this they had got on board?

"H'm!" thought Peter Oiland. "Have another try; wake them up a bit. Must be a queer sort of party if I can't."

Just then Sukkestad appeared in the doorway.

"This way, this way, if you please," shouted Peter gaily. "Gentlemen, my friend and colleague, Bukkestad—beg pardon, Sukkestad; slip of the tongue, you understand. Come along in, old man! Jolly evening we had at your place last night—first-rate fun."

Sukkestad did not know whether to laugh or cry, or take himself off and have done with it. The fellow must be mad!

The commercial, who had been hiding his face behind an old newspaper, burst out laughing, and hurried out on deck.

Peter Oiland settled his glasses on his nose, and went on:

"Smart lot of ladies you'd got hold of, too, Sukkestad; quite the up-to-date sort—eh, what? Ah, you're the man for the girls, no doubt about that." [Pg 206]

"Really, Mr. Oiland, I don't know what you mean. Party—girls—I never heard of such a thing."

Peter then fell to telling stories, in the course of which one after another of the delegates disappeared. When he came to the story of the clerk who handed the parson his cassock with the words: "Tch! steady, old hoss, till I get your harness on," the last one left the room; no one was left now but the little commercial, who had found his way back again, and was thoroughly enjoying it all. The sea was calm now, and the moon was up, so the pair seated themselves on deck. And in the course of the evening the delegates below, endeavouring to get to sleep in their respective berths, were entertained by a series of drinking-songs much favoured by the wilder youth of the universities, Peter Oiland singing one part and the commercial traveller the other.

The pair were so pleased with each other's company that the commercial, whose name was Klingenstein—"Goloshes and rubber goods," decided not to land at Arendal as he had intended, but to go on to Stavanger instead. Peter Oiland recommended this course, as offering, perhaps—who could say—an opportunity for getting into touch with the South Sea Islands, and selling goloshes to the heathen.

"As a matter of fact," Peter added, "I know a man in Stavanger who lived some years on one of the South Sea Islands, personal friend of Queen Nabagadale; useful man to know." There was then every reason to believe that Klingenstein might open up a new market in elastic stockings and such like.

The moon went down about midnight, and Peter Oiland thought he might as well do likewise. [Pg 207] Thoroughly pleased with himself and all the world, he went below and found his way to his cabin. The upper berth was occupied by a man in a big woollen nightcap. "Evening!" said Peter in the friendliest tone, as he sat down to take off his boot.

"Sir," said the gentleman in the nightcap, "permit me to observe that you might have a little consideration for people who wish to rest."

"Delighted, I'm sure," said Peter. "But what's the matter? Can't you get to sleep? Awful nuisance, insomnia, I know."

"Well, when people are so tactless as to sit up on deck just over one's head, stamping and shouting out ribald songs...."

But before his indignant fellow-passenger could finish his sentence, Peter Oiland was in his berth and snoring—snoring so emphatically, indeed, that he of the nightcap, after having listened to this new melody for three solid hours, got up in despair and went off to lie down on a sofa in the saloon.

Peter Oiland slept like a mummy till ten o'clock next morning, not even waking when the steamer touched at her two ports of call.

Coming on deck, he could not fail to perceive that the other delegates were somewhat cold and reserved in their manner towards him, while as for Sukkestad, he had retired to an obscure corner of the second-class quarters.

"Poor fellow, he's not used to travelling," thought Peter Oiland. "I must go and cheer him up a bit." And he went across to Sukkestad and asked if he didn't feel like something to eat.

Sukkestad was not inclined to be friendly at first, but Oiland took no heed; on the contrary, he took his reluctant colleague by the arm and dragged him off, willy nilly, to the dining-saloon. There was an excellent spread, hot and cold meats, and Peter Oiland's heart warmed at the sight. [Pg 208]

Klingenstein was already seated and hard at work on the viands, with serviette tucked under his chin; he rose, however, and bowed in fine style as Oiland made the introduction: "Mr. Krickke—beg pardon, Sukkestad—Mr. Vingentein—er, I should say, Klingenstein." The two new acquaintances looked at one another rather blankly for a moment, then both stared at Oiland, who, however, appeared entirely unconcerned, and fell to with excellent appetite upon a generous helping of steak and onions.

Oiland ordered a bottle of beer and a schnapps, whereat Sukkestad shook his head mournfully, and inquired whether he really thought that was good for his health. Oiland, however, declared it was good for sea-sickness, and he never felt easy on board ship without it.

Sukkestad grew thoughtful. What would happen when they got to Stavanger? He wished he could get out of it somehow, and go back home again.

At last the voyage was over, the two delegates went ashore and put up at the Hotel Norge.

The first thing Sukkestad noticed, on coming down into the hall, was the name "Plukkestad" written on the board against the number of his room. This was too much; he rubbed out the offending letters with his own hand, and wrote instead, with emphatic distinction, "C. A. Sukkestad." He strongly suspected Oiland of being the culprit; he had gone downstairs a few minutes before, but having no proof he preferred to say nothing about it. [Pg 209]

Sukkestad was now thoroughly ill at ease; his one constant thought was to find himself safely home again without any scandal. He saw little of Oiland the first day; the schoolmaster had hired a carriage and set off round the town to see the sights. In the evening, Oiland asked how the meeting had gone off that day, and if anyone had noticed his absence. Sukkestad answered emphatically, "No," inwardly hoping that Peter would not appear at the meetings still to come.

"Well, I think I've seen about all there is to see in this old place—Harbour, Cathedral, Town Hall, Mirror House, and statues of famous men—done it pretty thoroughly, I should say."

At the meeting on the following day Peter turned up, and astonished the assembly by delivering a long harangue on "The Civilising Influence of Missionary Work." Sukkestad nearly fainted.

Peter's speech produced a great effect, the listeners growing more and more interested as he went on. "Who is he—what's his name? You've got a regular speaker there, Sukkestad." Sukkestad was utterly at a loss, but vowed never again to expose himself to such surprises, either of one sort or the other.

At last the conference was ended, and the two delegates from Strandvik set out for home.

It was with great relief that Sukkestad found himself on board the steamer; Peter might do what he pleased now, for all he cared. As it turned out, however, Peter was amiability itself towards his travelling companion, though the latter did not seem to appreciate his attention, but endeavoured to keep to himself—a matter of some difficulty on board a small steamboat. An hour before they got in to Strandvik, Oiland came up to him and begged the favour of a "serious word" with him. Sukkestad wondered what on earth was coming, as the other took him by the arm and dragged him off to the forepart of the ship. [Pg 210]

"I have had the pleasure of being a frequent guest in your house," Peter began, buttonholing Sukkestad as if to make sure he did not escape.

"I shouldn't have thought it could be any pleasure to you," put in Sukkestad dryly.

"It has indeed, my dear fellow; and I have the more reason to say so, since your daughter Andrea ——"

"What?"

"Forgive my saying so, Mr. Sukkestad, but your daughter has made a deep impression on me."

"Really, Mr. Oiland, this...." Sukkestad trembled at what was to come.

"A deep impression on me. And I think I may venture to say that she herself——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Oiland. My daughter has no feelings in any matter before consulting her father's wishes."

"Oh, but she has, my dear father-in-law, I assure you."

"Father-in-law Mr. Oiland, this is most unseemly jesting." Sukkestad tried to break away, but Peter held him fast.

"But, my dear sir, what objection can you have to the match? We've always got on splendidly together, and I'm sure this present voyage, and our little adventures on the way, will always be among our most cherished memories—won't they, now?"

"Oh, this is too much! I would recommend you, Mr. Oiland——"

"Most kind of you. I was sure you would. And I'm quite an eligible suitor, really, you know. Got my degree—rather low on the list, I confess, but, anyhow.... I ought to tell you, though, that I don't propose to enter the Church." [Pg 211]

"Something to be thankful for at least," said Sukkestad.

"So glad you agree with me. Delighted, really. Well, my dear fellow, I can understand you're a little overwhelmed just at the moment, but we can settle the details when we're at home and at leisure. We're agreed on the essential point, so that's all right."

Oiland let go his hold, and Sukkestad hurried off to his cabin and began getting his things together in feverish haste. What, give his daughter, his only child, to a fellow like that? Never!

They got in without further event, and parted on the quay, Oiland shaking hands fervently with a hearty "Thanks for your pleasant company," while Sukkestad murmured absently: "Not at all, not at all."

Sukkestad had hardly got inside the house when Andrea came rushing up to him. "Oh, wasn't it a lovely speech of Oiland's? The parson's just been in and told us; simply splendid, he says it was."

"Well, my child, that's a matter of opinion."

"Oh, father, you're always so severe," said Andrea, turning away with tears in her eyes.

A quarter of an hour later Sukkestad and his wife were unpacking in the bedroom, and a serious conference took place between the two. He recounted Oiland's behaviour on the voyage. "And I do hope things haven't gone so far between them as he says," observed Sukkestad sternly, with a meaning glance at his wife. The latter turned away, wiping her eyes on a corner of her apron, and [Pg 212] sniffing the while. "Marie, you don't mean to say you've been a party to it yourself?"

"I—yes—no, that is—— Oh, don't be angry with me. I did think he was such a nice man, really I did."

"Well, we must see what can be done," said Sukkestad.

That evening it was decided that Andrea should be sent as a Warder to the Moravian Mission at Kristiansfeldt.

Andrea wept bitterly, but to no purpose; she had to go, whether she liked it or not.

Peter Oiland came several times to the house, but got no farther than the doorstep; the maid invariably greeted him with the words: "Mr. Sukkestad's compliments, sir, but he's not at home."

On the occasion of his last attempt before Andrea's departure, he had just got out of the gate when he heard the drawing-room window open, and Andrea's well-known voice singing:

"Thou are my one and only thought,
My one and only love...."

He stopped and looked up, but saw only the stern countenance of Papa Sukkestad hastily closing the window, and the music ceased abruptly.

It was quite enough for Peter, however, and he walked home gaily, confident now that all would go well.

Andrea went off without having spoken to Oiland, but the post was busy between Strandvik and Kristiansfeldt, for letters passed daily either way—while Mrs. Sukkestad went about complaining that Andrea never wrote home.

[Pg 213]

XVI
EMILIE RANTZAU

Old Marthe Pettersen, who had been housekeeper to Old Nick for nearly thirty years, had taken pneumonia and died a fortnight after Christmas; she had at least chosen a convenient time, having made all culinary preparations for the festival beforehand.

Old Nick was inconsolable, for Selma Rordam, whom he had got in as a temporary help, was hopelessly incapable; either the cod would be unsalted and insipid or she would serve it up in a liquor approaching brine, not to speak of throwing away the best parts, and boiling the roe to nothing. And last Sunday's joint of beef had been so tough that he had seriously considered sending it in to the Society for Preservation of Ancient Relics. His breakfast eggs were constantly hard boiled, despite his ironic inquiries as to whether she thought he wanted them for billiard balls. And as for sewing on buttons—for the past fourteen days he had been reduced to boring holes in the waist of his trousers and fastening them with bits of wood. Everything was going wrong all round.

"Very inconvenient, yes," said Nachmann, called in to discuss the situation. "But you'll see it'll come all right in time. Now you take my advice and advertise in the papers for someone; she's sure to come along: 'Wanted, an ideal woman, to restore domestic bliss.'" The pair sat down [Pg 214] accordingly to draft out an advertisement, each to write one out of his own head.

Nachmann's, when completed, ran as follows:

"MATRIMONIAL.

"Bachelor, middle-aged, no children, would like to make acquaintance of an educated lady of suitable age—widow not objected to. Must be accustomed to domestic duties and of bright and cheerful temperament. Private means not so essential as amiability. Reply to 'Earnest,' office of this paper."

Old Nick tore up this effusion, and inserted his own, which said:

"HOUSEKEEPER.

"Lady, middle-aged, thoroughly capable cook and housekeeper, wanted for elderly gentleman's house in seaport town. Remuneration by arrangement; ability and pleasant companionship most essential. Particulars to 'Cookery,' c/o this paper."

During the week that followed Old Nick was positively inundated with applications. There were cook-maids, hot and cold, with years of experience at first-class hotels; reliable women from outlying country districts; widows from small townships up and down the coast; while a "clergyman's daughter, aged twenty-three," who already considered herself middle-aged, gave Old Nick some food for thought.

Among all these various documents, some large, and small, and bold, others timidly small, was a little pink envelope addressed in a delicate hand. The letter contained, ran as follows: [Pg 215]

"DEAR SIR,—In reply to your advertisement in to-day's paper I venture to offer my services as housekeeper. I am a widow without encumbrance, age thirty-seven, with long experience of keeping house, and able to undertake any reasonable work desired.

"I am of a bright and cheerful temper, with many interests, musical, good reader, and would do my utmost to make your home pleasant and comfortable in every way.

"Trusting to be favoured with a reply, when further particulars can be forwarded.
—I beg to remain, yours very truly,

"EMILIE RANTZAU."

Old Nick sat for a long while staring thoughtfully before him.

"Widow, thirty-seven, long experience of keeping house, bright and cheerful temper.... I tell you what, Nachmann, this looks like what we want."

"Heavens, man, but she's musical—what do you want with that sort of thing in the house? No, no, my friend; the devil take that widow for his housekeeper—not you. She'd play you out of house and home in no time, my boy."

"Well, you know, really, I was getting a bit sick of old Marthe. Felt the lack of refined womanly influence now and again. And I must say this—what's her name—Emilie Rantzau rather appeals to me. There's something, I don't know what to call it, about her letter. Sort of ladylike, you know."

"Yes, and perfumed too, lovely, m-m-m. Patchouli!" said Nachmann, holding the envelope to Nickelsen's nose.

After some further deliberation Old Nick wrote to Mrs. Emilie Rantzau, and learned that she was [Pg 216] the widow of a Danish artist, had spent many years abroad, and wished now to find a position in some small town where she could live a quiet, retired life, occupied solely with her duties.

Her letters were so frank and sincere, that they made quite an impression on Old Nick, and he decided to engage her. She was to come on Saturday, and on the Friday before, Nickelsen did not go to his office at all, but stayed at home, going about dusting the rooms with an old handkerchief.

Thinking the place looked rather bare, he obtained a big palm and an indiarubber plant to brighten things up a little.

He was queerly nervous and ill at ease every day, with a feeling as if some misfortune were on the way. What would she be like, he wondered? If the experiment turned out a failure, there would be an end of his domestic peace. Perhaps after all he would have done better to stick to the Marthe type....

They were seated at dinner, and her fine dark eyes played over his face.

"No, you must let me make the salad. I promise you it shall be good." And she took the bowl, her soft, delicate hand just touching his as she did so.

Old Nick murmured something politely, and was conscious that he flushed up to the roots of his white mane.

"Queer sort of woman this." It was on the tip of his tongue to say it aloud, but he checked himself in time. The joint was served, and for the first time in his life he forgot to pick out the marrow. Fancy forgetting that! In old Marthe's time he invariably sent for toast, and a spoon to get it out with; now he sat attentively listening to Mrs. Rantzau's stories of the theatre in Copenhagen. [Pg 217]

"Very nice claret this of yours, Mr. Nickelsen. I know '78 is supposed to be the best—good body they say. Funny, isn't it, to talk of wine having a body."

She looked across at him with a smile, showing two rows of fine white teeth. Then, rising, she went over to the sideboard to show him that she too knew how to carve a joint. Old Nick took advantage of the opportunity to observe her more closely.

Dark, glistening hair, tied in what is called a Gordian knot at the back, with a tiny curl or so lower down, and a beautiful white neck. She was not tall, but her figure was well rounded, and the close-fitting dark dress showed it off to perfection.

Old Nick was so intent in studying her that he had not time to look away before she turned round and laughingly exclaimed:

"Well, are you afraid I shall spoil the joint?"

"No, indeed; I see you are an expert at carving."

In his confusion he upset the sauce tureen. But Mrs. Rantzau laughed heartily, holding his arm as she declared she must evidently have brought misfortune in her train.

Old Nick had been rather uneasy at the thought of what to say to her, but she made conversation so easily herself that he had only to put in an odd remark here and there: "Yes, of course, yes." "No, indeed." "Exactly."

In the evening Thor Smith, Nachmann and Warden Prois came round for their weekly game of cards. They were all remarkably punctual to-day: the clock had not struck seven before all three were in the hall, and all with unfeigned curiosity plainly on their faces.

"I'm dying to see how the old man gets on with this gay widow," said Thor Smith, touching up his [Pg 218] hair and tie before the glass—a nicety he had never troubled about on previous visits to Old Nick.

Red paper shades had been put on the lamps, and the table was fully laid with tea-urn, cups and saucers, cakes and little fringed serviettes.

Old Nick, in a black frock-coat, advanced ceremoniously towards them; he said very little, however, and seemed generally rather ill at ease.

"Rather a change this," thought Warden Prois. He was more accustomed to finding Old Nick on such occasions in dressing-gown and slippers, with his old rocking-chair drawn up, and his feet on the table. Then, when he heard his visitors arrive, he would send a gruff hail to the kitchen: "Marthe, you old slow-coach, hurry up with that hot water, or I'll...." But to-day he was as polished and precise as an old marquis.

Prois glanced over towards Nachmann, and Thor Smith in despair picked up an ancient album that he had seen at least a hundred times before; the only pictures in it were portraits of the former parson, and of Pepita, a dancer, who had adorned the stage some forty years earlier, when Old Nick was young.

Then Mrs. Rantzau came in. She wore a black velvet dress, with a little red silk handkerchief coquettishly stuck in the breast.

Old Nick introduced them. She was certainly handsome, as she greeted each of the guests with a kindly word and a smile.

Tea was served, and she handed a cup to Smith and one to Prois. Nachmann had retired to the farthest corner of the sofa, as if on his guard.

She held out a cup towards him. "Mr. Nachmann, a cup of tea now?" [Pg 219]

"Excuse me, I can drink most things made with water, including soda, potash and Apollinaris, but tea—no. It affects my nerves. Mr. Prois, now, is a confirmed tea-drinker; he'll have two cups at least, I'm sure."

Prois gave a furious glance at Nachmann, and struggled desperately with some sort of cake with currants in, and these he managed to spit out on the sly, hiding them in his waistcoat pocket.

At last the toddy and the cards appeared. Mrs. Rantzau sat close at hand, working at her embroidery, a large piece of canvas with a design representing Diana in the act of throwing a big spear at a retreating lion.

Nachmann, the only one who had retained his self-possession, was master of the situation.

"Now, what's that supposed to be, may I ask?"

"Oh, you can see, Mr. Nachmann. I'm sure it's plain enough."

"Well, now, honestly, my dear lady, I should say that Diana there is the very image of your charming self, and the terrified animal in the corner looks remarkably like our host. I do hope you'll be careful with that spear!"

Mrs. Rantzau was plainly offended, and gave him a sharp glance of reproof from her dark eyes.

"Ah, now you're angry, I can see. But really it was quite innocently meant."

Mrs. Rantzau rose and left the room hastily. There was an awkward pause, until Thor Smith took up the cards and began to shuffle.

"Water isn't hot," muttered Old Nick, clasping both hands about the jug.

"Only wait a little, old boy, and you'll find it hot enough, or I'm much mistaken. Ah, well, such is [Pg 220] life without a wife.... Here, I say, where's your head to-night, Nickelsen. Bless my soul, if you haven't given them the game!"

Old Nick complained of headache that evening, and the party broke up earlier than usual. So early, indeed, that Thor Smith had scarcely finished his first glass, or the first cataract, as he called it, whereas ordinarily the third would be reached and passed in the course of the evening's play.

The three friends walked home together, all very serious, and greatly troubled in mind as to Old Nick's future.

Prois in particular took a most gloomy view. "It's a dangerous age for that sort of thing; comes on suddenly, before you know where you are." He was thinking of his own experiences in that direction; it was only four years since he had been wild to marry that young governess at the Abrahamsens', the disaster, however, being fortunately averted by the intervention of Pedersen, the telegraphist, who cut in and won her before he, Prois, had screwed himself up to the question.

Old Nick hardly knew the place again when he came down to breakfast next morning, to find Mrs. Rantzau presiding at table in a pink morning-gown and dainty shoes. The walls were decorated with Chinese paper fans in flowery designs, and Japanese parasols; the sofas had been moved out at all angles about the room. A big palm waved above his writing-table, and all the papers on it were neatly arranged in two piles of equal size, one on either hand.

At sight of this his blood began to boil; his writing-table was sacred; no human hand but his own had touched it for the past forty years. Old Marthe herself, when dusting the room, had been as [Pg 221] shy of coming near it as if it had been a red-hot stove. Nevertheless, Old Nick found himself unable to say a word; Mrs. Rantzau's smile and her dark eyes threw him into utter confusion.

One day, happening to come in for some papers, he found her in the act of taking the documents of a case pending—"Strandvik Postal Authorities *v.* Holmestrand Town Council"—to clean the lamps with. But here he was obliged to put his foot down and protest. If he could not trust his papers to be left in safety on his table, why, he might as well move out of the house.

Mrs. Rantzau looked at him with great imploring eyes, and was so contrite; he must forgive her, she was so dreadfully stupid; she had no idea that papers could be so important.

Old Nick could not help smiling, and peace was restored, on condition that for the future only newspapers should be used for cleaning purposes. This naturally led to Old Nick's finding the one particular journal he wanted to read after dinner had been sacrificed.

She was undeniably handsome, however, especially in that pink morning-gown as she sat at the breakfast-table, while Old Nick revived his early memories and endeavoured to play the youthful cavalier.

Friends of the house were soon thoroughly convinced that Old Nick was done for; the widow had captivated him beyond recall. Thor Smith, thinking a warning might yet be in time, sent him anonymously the following lines:

"Be careful of taking a widow to wife,
 She'll lighten your purse and burden your life."

[Pg 222]

Nickelsen, however, recognised the writing, and promptly sent back a reply:

"Best thanks for your advice, my friend,
 'Twas really kind of you to send;
 But still, considering whence it came,
 I can manage without it all the same.
 So keep your triplets, one—two—three,
 A widow without is enough for me!"

A grand ball was to be held at the Town Hall, in aid of the Fund for National Defence. Old Nick had no intention of going himself, but Mrs. Rantzau pointed out that it was his duty, as a loyal and patriotic citizen, to attend. Accordingly, albeit not without considerable hesitation, he decided to go. She tied his dress-bow for him, and put a red rosebud with a tip of fern in his buttonhole. She herself, with Old Nick in attendance, sailed into the ballroom like a queen, with pearls in her hair, and her dark blue silk dress fitting like the corslet of a Valkyrie.

The company made way for her involuntarily, and she was placed at the upper end of the hall, between Mrs. Jansen and Mrs. Heidt. The last named lady, who was ceremonious and reserved by nature, besides being conscious of representing the aristocracy of the town, was chilliness itself towards this newly risen star. Mrs. Jansen, on the other hand, a kindly soul, felt obliged to show her some little attention, and introduced her to a number of those present.

Dr. Stromberg, a middle-aged bachelor, had the reputation of falling in love with every new specimen of the fair sex he encountered. True to his character, he at once attached himself to Mrs. Rantzau, whose conquest of Strandvik was thus begun.

Old Nick sat in a corner talking to Winter, the Customs Officer, his eyes incessantly following the [Pg 223] blue silk gown as it passed. His old heart was so restless and unruly, he began to wonder seriously if something had gone wrong with the internal mechanism. Cards, drinks, old friends, all were forgotten that evening he had no thought but for that figure in the blue silk dress that was ever before his eyes. He had experienced hallucinations before, when things seemed to dance round and round, but to-night, with nothing stronger than soda water—neat—it was past all comprehension.

In a circle of men, old and young, stood Emilie Rantzau, smiling and alert. She was sought after at every dance, until Mrs. Thor Smith, née Tulla Prois, observed indignantly that one might think the men had never seen a woman from another town before—and Heaven only knew what sort of a creature this one was. Mrs. Jansen herself began to be rather uneasy, when she saw her husband lead out the widow as his partner for the lancers—or "lunchers" as Cilia Braaten called it. And matters were not improved when the Consul started talking French with Mrs. Rantzau at supper, of which his wife did not understand a word.

"She's charming, my dear, a most interesting woman, and speaks French like an educated Parisienne," said Jansen to his wife.

Poor Mrs. Jansen was beginning to experience the pangs of jealousy, and determined to purchase a *French made Easy* the very next day.

"Bless my soul, if there isn't Justice Heidt asking the angelic widow for a dance," exclaimed Thor Smith, pulling Nachmann by the sleeve.

"Angelic widow's good," said Nachmann. "But there's angels and angels, you know. And they'd [Pg 224] have to be a bit on the dusky side to pair off with Old Nick, what?"

Mrs. Heidt got up and went into an adjoining room, sending her husband a glance as she passed which sobered him considerably for the moment. It was not long, however, before the brilliant dark eyes had made him forget both his dignity and his domestic obligations.

Old Nick was very taciturn that evening as he walked home with Mrs. Rantzau. She, however, laughed and joked, and told stories of "all those silly old men" with such wit and good humour that he was forced to admit it would have been a pity not to have gone to the ball. "Yes, a very jolly evening; very nice indeed, yes."

On the following day the "angelic widow" and her conquests at the ball were the general topic of conversation. The ladies, old and young, married and the reverse, agreed that she was detestable, and were sure there must be something "queer" about her. Mrs. Heidt and Mrs. Knap had a two hours' consultation together, at the end of which it was decided that no effort should be spared to check "that woman's" further encroachment upon local society.

All the men, with exception of Thor Smith and Nachmann, were enthusiastic in praise of the new arrival, and her popularity on that side was assured.

Emilie Rantzau, however, had her own plans, and let people talk as they pleased.

One day she astonished Mrs. Jansen by calling on her with a proposal that the ladies of the town should get up a bazaar in aid of the Seamen's Families Relief Fund. On another occasion she [Pg 225] went to Mrs. Heidt, and begged her to support the National Women's Movement; she also invited Governor Abrahamsen to help start a society for helping ex-convicts to turn over a new leaf. Even Klementsen was urged to help her in getting up a subscription for a new altar-piece.

In addition to these more or less philanthropic movements, she arranged excursions to the country round, the beauties of which, she declared, were not appreciated as they should be, and further, obtained the assistance of Consul Jansen in forming a Society for the Furtherance of the Tourist Traffic in Strandvik and Neighbourhood.

The Consul was delighted with the idea, and vowed he must have been blind not to have discovered earlier the natural beauties of the neighbourhood. He gave a grand champagne supper and proposed Mrs. Rantzau's health in a speech, concluding by comparing that lady to "a breath of ocean fresh and free." The toast was received with acclamation.

Altogether, the upper circles of Strandvik society were thrown into a state of unprecedented excitement and activity.

Mrs. Heidt, Mrs. Knap and Mrs. Abrahamsen vied with one another in their efforts to outdo Mrs. Rantzau; they would show her at least that they were as good as she.

It was a fight to the bitter end.

Societies were started, with "evenings" after, where Emilie Rantzau's plans were discussed.

Mrs. Heidt thought and thought till she grew giddy and had to have hot fomentations of an evening; the unusual mental effort had brought on insomnia. Sukkerstad hoped to find in Mrs. [Pg 226] Rantzau an ally to the cause of temperance, and paid her a ceremonial call, in company with Watchmaker Rordam, who, a short while back, had suddenly joined the Temperance Association, "Strandvik's Pride." And the pair of them explained to her, with all the eloquence at their command, how greatly her patronage would be appreciated by all.

Emilie Rantzau, however, hardly thought her own interests in the town would be greatly furthered by closer association with Sukkerstad and his circle; on the other hand, it was just as well to keep on good terms with all sections of local society. She therefore informed the deputation that she would think over the matter, and assured them meanwhile of her earnest sympathy with the good cause.

The same day she hurried up to Consul Jansen, switched on her eloquent dark eyes, and suggested that the Temperance Movement was one they ought to support, but that the best way of doing so would be to get up a little subscription, and raise enough for an excursion—a steamer trip for the afternoon, with tea and lemonade. "It would look well, you know, and all that—and get them off our hands for a bit," she added meaningly.

No one could refuse her, and in the course of one afternoon she managed to collect eight pounds, which she dispatched to Sukkerstad and Rordam for the purpose indicated. Sukkerstad was so enthusiastic in his appreciation that he determined to convene a meeting of the committee and propose a vote of thanks and an address.

All the members turned up, with the exception of Rordam, who, in his joy at the eight pounds, had given way to a sudden relapse, which rendered him incapable of further temperance work for [Pg 227] the time being.

After some discussion, the committee decided to purchase a portrait of Mrs. Rantzau from the photographer, and hang it up in their hall; this was voted preferable to the address.

Mrs. Heidt was beginning to lag behind; it was impossible to keep pace with a woman of such untiring energy and initiative as Mrs. Rantzau.

Four ladies were gathered one day in her drawing-room, to talk over what was to be done; they could not suffer themselves to be set aside like this. What they wanted was some grand idea, something to vanquish the enemy at a single blow, and show the rest of the town that Emilie Rantzau was not wanted.

It was Mrs. Knap who had the happy thought—the Peace Movement. The cause of universal peace was surely one which nobody in Strandvik could refuse to aid.

Mrs. Abrahamsen was more inclined to concentrate on a bazaar and lottery in aid of the proposed crematorium, which institution she regarded as most desirable from the humane, the sanitary and various other points of view.

Mrs. Knap protested energetically against the idea; she had recently had an accident with a box of matches, which had gone off suddenly and burnt her hand. She for her part would have nothing more to do with burning—for the present, at any rate.

Finally, after some heated argument, it was agreed that a grand harvest festival should be held, the proceeds to be devoted to the cause of universal peace.

Emilie Rantzau was to be kept out of it altogether; they would not have her help in the [Pg 228] arrangements, not a contribution—not so much as a bunch of flowers was to come from her; it was to be a festival "for ourselves and by ourselves." The old ladies were already triumphant; this intriguing minx, this person from nowhere, who had tried to force herself into society, should be made to feel their power and her own insignificance. The festival was to be held in the park on Sunday, from five to nine; there would be illuminations, coloured lanterns, fireworks and so on. Singing,—male and female choir,—lecture by a Professor from Christiania, recitation by a famous actor, solos by an amateur and an "amatrice"—it was a programme so magnificent that the whole town was amazed.

Meantime, Mrs. Rantzau sat quietly at home, in her pink morning-gown, pouring out coffee for Nickelsen. She was very quiet and gentle in manner—there was a curious atmosphere about the situation generally.

There lay the morning papers, white, uncrumpled, untouched. The coffee now seethed gently in little regular gasps, like a school-mistress out on a mountaineering expedition; the sun peeped in through the windows, casting gay gleams over Old Nick's white mop of hair and Emilie's raven locks.

"Why shouldn't I be happy the few years I've still to live? And who is to have my money when I'm gone?" Old Nick sat staring absently before him.

She bent over towards him, handing his cup; he felt her soft, curling tresses close to his cheek, and her hand just touched his own.

"Mrs. Rantzau!" he exclaimed, flushing as he spoke; his voice was unsteady.

"Why, how serious you are all of a sudden! You quite frightened me," she said, with a laugh, looking up at him innocently. [Pg 229]

"Mrs. Rantzau," he began again, "do you know that poem of Byronson, that—that begins:

"'When blushing blood,
In humble mood
Turns to the man whose mind is proved,
When timid, shy
She seeks....'"

"Lord bless me, old boy, spouting poetry so early in the morning! Did you think it was Constitution Day—or the day after?"

Old Nick looked round anything but amiably at Nachmann's unbeautiful face smiling in the doorway; Mrs. Rantzau left the room without a word.

A long and earnest conference ensued between the two men, after which they went out for a long walk together.

Emilie Rantzau felt now that her position was secure; it was only a question of time before she could appear as Mrs. Nickelsen. And inwardly she vowed vengeance on the women who had systematically excluded her from the Peace Festival; she pondered how best to get even with Mrs. Heidt and the rest.

It took a deal of thinking out, but at last she hit upon a way. Quickly she put on her things, and hurried round to her faithful supporter, Consul Jansen.

On Saturday evening, the *Strandvik News* appeared, and created an indescribable sensation throughout the town by printing immediately under the big announcement of the festival in the park, the following lines:

"N.B. *N.B.*

"After the conclusion of the festival, an impromptu dance for young people will take place in the Town Hall. Tickets, three shillings each. The surplus will be devoted to the Society for Tending Sick and Wounded in the Field. Mrs. Emma Jansen and Mrs. Emilie Rantzau have kindly consented to act as hostesses." [Pg 230]

Mrs. Heidt started up in a fury, and declared it was a disgraceful piece of trickery on the part of that Emilie Rantzau. She could forgive Mrs. Jansen, perhaps, as being too much of a simpleton herself to see through the artful meanness of the whole thing.

On Sunday evening, after the festival, all the young people and a number of the older ones flocked to the Town Hall, where Mrs. Rantzau received them with her most winning smile.

Mrs. Heidt, Mrs. Knap and Mrs. Abrahamsen went each to their several homes, boiling with indignation; they had not even been invited to look on.

Some few there were, perhaps, who failed to see any immediate connection between a Peace Festival and the Society for Tending Sick and Wounded in the Field, but all enjoyed themselves thoroughly, and that, after all, was the main thing.

Emilie Rantzau was the queen of the ball, and well aware of it. She felt she had vanquished her rivals now, and was left in victorious possession of the field. One thing, however, caused her some slight anxiety, and that was that Nickelsen did not put in an appearance, though he had promised to come on later—what could it mean?

Old Nick was sitting at home, deep in thought, and with him were Thor Smith, Nachmann and Warden Prois.

"You must see and get clear of this, Nickelsen," said Prois warmly, laying one hand on his shoulder. [Pg 231]

"Yes, I suppose I must. But the worst of it is, I've got fond of her, you see, and I've been hoping she'd brighten up the few years I've got left."

"I know, I know," said Prois. "I've been through exactly the same thing myself, a few years back, but, thanks to Providence, I got out of it all right."

"Don't blame it on Providence, Warden," put in Nachmann. "It was that telegraph fellow you had to thank for cutting you out."

"It's not a matter for joking," said Prois sharply; and Nachmann withdrew to a corner of the sofa, quite depressed by the seriousness of the situation.

Thor Smith could stand it no longer; this unwonted solemnity was too much for him. He slipped out into the hall, and, sitting down on an old leather trunk, laughed till he cried.

There was a long conference at Old Nick's that evening, and it was one o'clock before he faithfully promised to follow his friends' advice, and thrust out Emilie Rantzau from his house and heart.

How this was to be accomplished must be decided later; meantime the conspirators would take it in turn to dine with Old Nick and spend the rest of the day with him, to guard against any backsliding.

Old Nick agreed to it all, helplessly as a child.

How could they get her to go? The question was argued and discussed, but no one could hit upon any reasonable plan. At last they decided to call in Peter Oiland, who had lately been on terms of intimacy with Old Nick, and see what he could do.

Peter Oiland put on a serious face, and looked doubtfully over at Prois, whose mind was becoming almost unhinged by these everlasting conferences and endless discussions, while the seriousness of the situation forbade any over-hasty steps. [Pg 232]

"Well, we can't very well turn her out by force," said Peter Oiland. "The only thing to do is to try and get at the soft side of her: an appeal to the heart, you understand."

"H'm; her heart's like the drawers in my store," said Nachmann. "In and out according to what's wanted."

Peter Oiland determined nevertheless to make an attempt. He would say nothing for the present as to the details of his plan; he had an idea, and hoped it might succeed.

Meantime, Emilie Rantzau continued her triumphant progress; she was leading society in Strandvik. Her dresses, her manner, were a standing topic among the ladies of the town, who hated and admired her at once. She on her part was happy enough, but at a loss to understand why Nickelsen was so unpardonably tardy in making his declaration; still, it could only be a question of time; she felt safe enough.

One day there came a letter from Christiania, which in a flash threw Strandvik and its entire society into the background. It ran as follows:

> "My dear Emilie Rantzau,—Years, many years, have passed since we last met. Do you remember a fair young man whom you often saw at Mrs. Moller's, when you were a boarder there as a girl? But there were so many of us young students who were all more or less in love with you at that time, and I hardly dare suppose you would have any special recollection of my humble self. It would be only natural that you should have forgotten. But I have never, never forgotten Emilie Storm, as you were then. [Pg 233]
>
> "I was poor and unknown at the time, and poor, alas, I remained for many years, until at last I had no longer any hope of meeting you again, as I had dreamed—yet I have followed your career, and kept myself informed as to your circumstances. I learned of your husband's death, and that you are now obliged to earn your livelihood as housekeeper to an old bachelor in a little out-of-the-way place.
>
> "To think that you—you, Emilie, who have never for a single day been absent from my thoughts, should be wasting away your life among the yokels of an insignificant seaport town.
>
> "And I—I am alone and lonely now, back at home after many long years of toil in the great cities of Europe, and the fortune I have made is useless to me. For money cannot purchase happiness, or bring back the dreams of youth.
>
> "Emilie, shall we try to come together? Shall we renew our old acquaintance, and see if we can find that mutual sympathy which binds one life to another?
>
> "If you are willing, then let us meet. My name you need not know. I should prefer you to find me as I am now, not as the ardent youth I was when first we met, but as a man, sobered by trials and experience, who has nevertheless maintained the ideals of early days unscathed throughout the battle of life. You may reply to
>
> "Abraham Hertz.
>
> "Poste restante, Christiania."

She read the letter through a dozen times at least, and sat puzzling her brains to try and recollect a "fair young man," who had been one of her admirers at Mrs. Moller's. She could make nothing of it. She had been only seventeen at the time, and had had such a host of admirers before and since; it was too much to expect that she should recollect them all. [Pg 234]

But was it meant in earnest now, or was the whole thing a vulgar hoax?

This lawyer of hers was but a poor creature after all; red-nosed, almost a dotard—ugh! To think of getting away from it all and go to Christiania, perhaps Paris, Vienna, Rome—away! And then to be rich—rich! Poverty was a dreadful thing to face, dreadful even to think of. Was she to grow old, and ugly, and poor?

> "Mr. Abraham Hertz,—Your kind letter received. I set great store by old friends, and should therefore be glad to renew the acquaintance, but must confess that I am unwilling to enter upon a correspondence with one who remains anonymous. How can I be sure that I am not exposing myself to a mischievous practical joke?

"I should be glad of a photo, in order if possible to identify the 'fair young man.'

"E. R."

Two days later came a registered letter.

"Mrs. Emilie Rantzau,—How could you ever think I was joking? However, that you may no longer doubt for a moment the seriousness of my intentions, I enclose £50, with the request that you will come to Christiania as soon as possible. If you will put up at Mrs. Irving's *pension*, I will meet you there.

"Enclosed is a photo of the fair young man, but for Heaven's sake do not imagine that it resembles your admirer now, with his eight-and-forty years.—Au revoir. [Pg 235]

"A. H."

Emilie had never handled a £50 note before in her life. She spread it out on the table, smoothing it with her fingers so tenderly that Old Nick, had he seen her, would have been frantic with jealousy. She even kissed the portrait of His Majesty in the corners before hiding the note away in her breast.

Old Nick was utterly astonished when Mrs. Rantzau informed him that she found herself compelled to leave Strandvik, the air, unfortunately, did not agree with her. She seemed, too, remarkably cool in her manner towards him; her customary smile had faded somewhat, and her ardent eyes, that had been wont to focus themselves upon his own, seemed now to flicker vaguely in no particular direction.

Mrs. Rantzau's sudden departure occasioned much comment. Her most faithful admirer, Consul Jansen, turned up with a big bunch of flowers, and hoisted the flag in his garden at half-mast.

Old Nick, of course, went down to the quay to see her off. As a matter of fact, however, he was now beginning to find the situation rather humorous—a symptom which Thor Smith diagnosed as indicating that his old friend was well on the way at least to convalescence, if not to complete recovery.

Mrs. Rantzau stood on the upper deck in her dark blue dress, with the little toque coquettishly aslant on her head. She waved her handkerchief, and Consul Jansen cried: "*Adieu, au revoir!*"

"Merci, Monsieur le Consul; je regrette que vous soyez obligé de rester ici parmi ces dromadaires-ci." That was Emilie Rantzau's farewell to Strandvik. As for Old Nick, she did not even grant him so much as a nod. [Pg 236]

On the way home he encountered a procession of urchins, ragged, bare-legged and boisterous, waving Japanese fans and Chinese parasols—properties which he seemed to recognise.

"Here, you boys, where did you get those things from?"

"Mr. Nachmann gave us them. He threw them out of Nickelsen's window," cried the youngsters in chorus.

"H'm," grunted Old Nick. "Very funny...." and he stalked on his way.

Nachmann and Prois were busy moving the sofas back against the wall, and restoring the card-table to its former place.

"Here, what do you think you're doing?" shouted Nickelsen from the doorway.

"Salvage Corps, getting ready for a little party," said the Warden dryly.

That evening Old Nick's little circle of friends assembled at his house. Cards and the tray of glasses were laid out as in the old days. The host, in his old brown dressing-gown, sat with his slippered feet up on the table, and puffed at his long-stemmed pipe.

"Well, you may think yourself lucky to have got out of that as you did," said Nachmann, touching Old Nick's glass with his own.

"I can't think what made her go off like that, all of a sudden," said Old Nick, almost wistfully.

"You can thank Peter Oiland for that," said Thor Smith.

"Peter Oiland?"

"Yes, it was he that got her away. What about those letters you sent her, Oiland? What did you say in them?" [Pg 237]

"H'm," said Oiland, with a serious air. "My dear friends, it is ill jesting with affairs of the heart. Emilie Rantzau's secret is locked for ever in my breast." And he gazed reflectively into his glass as he stirred his grog.

"How did you manage to get them sent from Christiania?"

"Posted them myself when I was in with Sukkestad, my respected father-in-law to be, buying furniture."

"But the photo, and Mrs. Moller's, and all that?"

"Well, the photo was one Maria Sukkestad gave me last year of her beloved spouse—taken years ago, when they were engaged."

"Oh, Peter, you're a marvel! But suppose she'd recognised him?"

"I hardly think she could," said Oiland dryly.

"But how did you know about Mrs. Moller's?"

"She told Mrs. Jansen she'd stayed there, and I heard about it after. But all that was easy enough. The worst thing was, it came so expensive—£50 is a lot of money," and he sighed.

"£50?" said Nickelsen, looking up sharply. "What do you mean?"

Thor Smith rapped his glass, and said with mock solemnity:

"Our efforts in the cause of freedom having met with the success they deserve, we naturally look to you, as the intended victim, for reimbursement of all costs incurred in effecting your deliverance. And we hope after this you'll have the sense to know when you're well off, and not go running your head into a noose again, old man. Three cheers for Old Nick—hurrah!" [Pg 238]

It was a festive evening, culminating in a song written specially for the occasion:

"Our dear Old Nick is a queer old stick,
And a bachelor gay was he,
Till the widow's charms occasioned alarms,
In the rest of the Company.
This will never do, said we,
We must settle affairs with she,
So we played for Old Nick, and we won the trick,
And a bachelor still is he—
Give it with three times three—
A bachelor gay, and we hope he may
Continue so to be!"

[Pg 239]

XVII
THE *EVA MARIA*

"Close on seven-and-thirty years now since I came aboard as skipper of the *Eva Maria*, and you can understand, Nils Petter, it's a bit queer like for me to be handing her over now to anyone else," said old Bernt Jorgensen solemnly. His brother, Nils Petter, listened respectfully.

"Never a thing gone wrong. I've always been able to reckon out exactly what the four trips to Scotland and Holland each summer brought in; but then, as you know, Nils Petter, I didn't go dangling about on shore with the other skippers, throwing money away on whisky and such-like trash."

"No, you've always been a steady one," said Nils Petter quietly.

"Ay, steady it is, and steady it's got to be, and keep a proper account of everything. In winter, when I was at home with the mother, I'd always go through all expenses I'd had the summer past; that way I could keep an eye on every little thing."

"Ay, you've been careful enough about little things, that's true. I remember that tar bucket we threw overboard once. We never heard the last of it all that winter."

"It's just that very thing, Nils Petter, that I've got to thank for having a bit laid by, or anyhow, the *Eva Maria's* free of debt, and that's all I ask." Old Bernt was not anxious to go into details as to the nice little sum he had laid up with Van Hegel in Amsterdam, not to speak of the little private banking account that had been growing so steadily for years. [Pg 240]

"Not but that I've need enough to earn a little more," he went on; "but I've made up my mind now to give up the sea, though it's hard to leave the old *Eva Maria* that's served me so well."

Bernt Jorgensen had been very doubtful about handing over the vessel to Nils Petter's command. Nils was a good seaman enough, but with one serious failing: he invariably ran riot when he got ashore, and there was no holding him.

Still, Nils Petter was his only brother, and perhaps when he found himself skipper he would come to feel the responsibility of his position, and improve accordingly. Anyhow, one could but try it.

Nils Petter stood watching his brother attentively, as the latter solemnly concluded: "Well, you're skipper of the *Eva Maria* from now on, Nils Petter, and I hope and trust you'll bear in mind the duty you owe to God and your owners."

Nils Petter grasped his brother's hand and shook it so heartily that Bernt could feel it for days—it

was at any rate a reminder that Nils Petter had serious intentions of reforming.

But Nils Petter was the happy man! First of all, he had to go ashore and tell the good news to his old friend, Trina Thoresen, who, it may be noted, had been one of his former sweethearts. She had married Thoresen as the only means of avoiding a scandal, and murmured resignedly as she did so: "Ah, well, it can't be helped. Nils Petter can't marry us all, poor fellow!" [Pg 241]

Nils Petter's large, round face was one comprehensive smile, and his huge fists all but crushed the life out of Schoolmaster Pedersen, who was impudent enough to offer his hand in congratulation. "Skipper!" said Nils Petter. "Captain, you mean—he—he!" and he laughed till the houses echoed half-way up the street, and Mrs. Pedersen looked out of the window to see what all the noise was about.

Nils Petter was undoubtedly the most popular character in the town; he was intimate with every one, regardless of sex or social standing.

"A cheery, good-natured soul," was the general estimate of Nils Petter—somewhat too cheery, perhaps, at times; but never so much so that he abused his gigantic strength, of which wonderful stories were told. At any rate it took a great deal to move him to anger.

He was in constant difficulties about money, for as often as he had any to spare, he would give it away or lend it. Now and again, when especially hard up, he would apply to his "rich brother" as he called him, and never failed to receive assistance, together with a long sermon on the evils of extravagance, which he listened to most penitently, but the meaning of which he had never to this day been able to realise himself.

Well, now we shall see how he got on as officer in command of the *Eva Maria*, *vice* that careful old model of a skipper, Bernt Jorgensen. The vessel was fixed for Dundee, with a cargo of battens from Drammen, and Bernt had himself seen to everything in the matter of stores and provisions, etc., according to the old régime. Nils Petter certainly found the supplies of meat and drink on [Pg 242] board a trifle scanty—drink, especially so. Six bottles of fruit syrup—h'm. Nils Petter thought he might at least make a cautious suggestion. "Say, Brother Bernt, you're sure you haven't forgotten anything. Fresh meat, for instance, and a bottle or so of spirits?"

"Never has been spirits on board the *Eva Maria*," answered Bernt shortly. And Nils Petter was obliged to sail with fruit syrup instead.

Just outside Horten, however, they were becalmed, and the *Eva Maria* anchored up accordingly.

"D'you know this place at all, Ola?" said Nils Petter to his old friend Ola Simonsen, the boatswain, as they got the anchor down.

"Surely, Captain—know it? Why, I was here with the old *Desideria* serving my time."

"Right you are, then. We'll get out the boat and go on shore first for a look round."

It was late that night when they returned, Nils Petter at the oars, and Ola sleeping the sleep of the just in the bottom of the boat. Nils Petter was singing and laughing so he could be heard half a mile off. After considerable effort he managed to hoist the boatswain over the vessel's side, the whole crew laughing uproariously, including Nils Petter himself, who was quite pleased with the whole adventure, and cared not a jot for discipline and his dignity as skipper.

Ola Simonsen having been safely deposited on board, Nils Petter handed up a number of items in addition. One large joint of beef, six pork sausages, one ham, one case of tinned provisions, and one marked significantly, "Glass: with care."

Towards morning a light, northerly breeze sprang up, and they weighed anchor again. Nils [Pg 243] Petter, instead of pacing the after-part with his hands behind his back, as became the dignity of a captain, came forward and took up his post beside the windlass, sent the rest of the crew briskly about their business, and fell to singing with the full force of his lungs, till the agent on the quay went in for his glasses to see what was happening.

Nils Petter was the very opposite of his brother, who would make a whole voyage without saying a word to his crew except to give the necessary orders. Nils Petter, on the other hand, chatted with the men and lent a hand with the work like any ordinary seaman. Altogether, the relations between captain and crew were such as would have been thoroughly pleasant and cordial ashore.

There were beefsteaks for dinner as long as the beef lasted out, and Nils Petter shared in brotherly fashion with the rest—there was no distinction of rank on board in that respect; it was an ideal socialistic Utopia!

The case marked "Glass: with care" was opened, and each helped himself at will, till only the straw packing remained. It was a cheery, comfortable life on board, as all agreed, not least Nils Petter, who laughed and sang the whole day long. No one had ever dreamed of such a state of things on board the *Eva Maria*, least of all Bernt Jorgensen, who was fortunately in ignorance of the idyllic conditions now prevailing in his beloved ship.

The only occasion throughout the voyage when any real dissension arose between Nils Petter and his crew was when opening one of the tins brought on board at Horten. The contents defied identification despite the most careful scrutiny. The label certainly said "Russian Caviare," but [Pg 244] Nils Petter and the rest were none the wiser for that. A general council was accordingly held,

with as much solemnity as if the lives of all were in peril on the sea.

"I've a sort of idea the man in the shop said eat it raw," ventured Nils Petter.

Ola Simonsen was reckless enough to try.

"Ugh—pugh—urrrgh!" he spluttered. "Of all the...."

"Itsch—hitch—huh!" said Thoresen, the mate. "Better trying cooking it, I think." (This Thoresen, by the way, was the husband of Trina Thoresen, before mentioned, and a good friend of Nils Petter, who, in moments of exaltation would call him brother-in-law, which Thoresen never seemed to mind in the least.)

While the tin of caviare was under discussion, all on board, from the ship's boy to the captain, were assembled in the forecastle, intent on the matter in hand. So much so, indeed, that the *Eva Maria*, then left to her own devices, sailed slap into a schooner laden with coal, that was rude enough to get in her way.

Fortunately, no great damage was done beyond carrying away the schooner's jib-boom, and matters were settled amicably with the schooner's captain, whom Nils Petter presented with an odd spar he happened to have on deck and the six bottles of fruit syrup, which he was only too pleased to get rid of. And the *Eva Maria* continued her course in the same cheerful spirit as heretofore.

Nils Petter's first exploit on arriving at Dundee was to send the harbour-master headlong into the dock, whence he was with difficulty dragged out. He got off with a fine of £20, which was entered in the ship's accounts as "unforeseen expenses." [Pg 245]

Those on board found themselves comfortable enough, the skipper being for the most part ashore. This, however, was hardly fortunate for the owner, as Nils Petter's shore-going disbursements were by no means inconsiderable, including, as they did, little occasional extras, such as £2, 10s. for a plate-glass window in the bar of the "Duck and Acid-drop," through which aforesaid window Nils had propelled a young gentleman whom he accused of throwing orange-peel.

At last the *Eva Maria* was clear of Dundee, and after Nils Petter had provisioned her according to his lights—which ranged from fresh meat to ginger-beer and double stout—there remained of the freight money just on £7. This he considered was not worth sending home, and invested it therefore in a cask of good Scotch whisky, thinking to gladden his brother therewith on his return.

Nils Petter and the *Eva Maria* then proceeded without further adventure on their homeward way, arriving in the best of trim eight days after.

The first thing to do was to go up to the owners and report. Nils Petter was already in the boat, with the whisky, and Ola Simonsen at the oars.

"What the devil am I to say about the money?" muttered Nils Petter to himself, as he sat in the stern. For the first time since the voyage began he felt troubled and out of spirits.

"Fair good voyage it's been, Captain," said Ola, resting on his oars.

"Ay, fair good voyage is all very well, but the money, Ola, what about that?"

Ola lifted his cap and scratched his head. "Why, you haven't left it behind, then, Captain, or what?" [Pg 246]

"Why, it's like this, Ola; there's expenses, you know, on a voyage—oh, but it's no good trying that on; he knows all about it himself. H'm ... I wish to goodness I could think of something."

Nils Petter frowned, and looked across at the cask of whisky. Ola, noticing the direction of his glance, observed consolingly that it ought to be a welcome present. "Ay, if that was all," said Nils Petter, "but the beggar's a teetotaller."

They landed at the quay. Nils Petter and Ola got the cask ashore, and rolled it together over to Bernt Jorgensen's house. The owner was out in the garden, eating cherries with the parson, who had come to call.

At sight of the latter, Nils Petter gave Ola a nudge, and ordered him to take the cask round the back way, while he himself walked solemnly up to his brother and saluted.

"You've made a quick voyage," said Bernt Jorgensen, his voice trembling a little. "I'd been expecting to hear from you by letter before now, though." And he looked up sternly.

"Yes—yes, I suppose ... you're thinking of the freight," said Nils Petter, inwardly deciding that it might be just as well to get it over at once, especially now the parson was here.

"It was always my way to send home the freight money as soon as I'd drawn it," said Bernt Jorgensen quietly.

"Expenses come terribly heavy in Dundee just now," said Nils Petter. "And—and—well, it's hard to make ends meet anyhow these times."

Here an unexpected reinforcement came to his aid. The parson nodded, and observed that he heard the same thing on all sides; hard times for shipping trade just now. The parson, indeed, never heard anything else, as his parishioners invariably told him the same story, as a sort of delicate excuse for the smallness of their contribution. [Pg 247]

When the brothers were alone, Nils Petter had to come out with the truth, that all he had to show for the trip was one cask of whisky. "That I brought home, meaning all for the best, Bernt, and thinking £7 wasn't worth sending."

Bernt, however, was of a different opinion, and delivered a lengthy reprimand, ending up with the words, "The *Eva Maria's* never made a voyage like that before. Ah, Nils Petter, I'm afraid you're the prodigal son."

Nils Petter bowed his head humbly, but reflected inwardly that if all the prodigal sons had been as comfortably off on their travels as he had on that voyage, they wouldn't have been so badly off after all.

As for the cask of whisky, Nils Petter was ordered to drive in with it to Drammen and sell it there, which he did, after first privately drawing off six bottles and supplying the deficiency with water.

If Bernt Jorgensen had had his doubts the first time Nils Petter went on board the *Eva Maria* as skipper, his misgivings now were naturally increased a thousand-fold. Nils Petter, however, promised faithfully to reform, and send home a thumping remittance, if only he might be allowed to make one more voyage. And in the end, Bernt, with brotherly affection, let him have his way.

This time the charter was for Niewendiep, or "Nyndyp," as it was generally called, which port Bernt knew inside and out, as he said, so that Nils Petter could not palm off any fairy-tales about it. [Pg 248]

The voyage was as quick as the preceding one, and, less than four weeks from sailing, Nils Petter appeared once more rowing in to the quay. This time, however, he brought with him, not a cask of whisky, but "something altogether different"—in honour of which the *Eva Maria* was decked out with all the bunting on board.

Bernt Jorgensen had come down himself to the waterside on seeing the vessel so beflagged, as it had not been since the day of his own wedding, thirty years before. He stood shading his eyes with one hand, as he watched Nils Petter in the boat coming in. "What on earth was that he had got in the stern? Something all tied about with fluttering red ribbons."

"Hey, brother!" hailed Nils Petter joyfully, standing up in the boat. "Here's a remittance, if you like!" And he pointed to a buxom young woman who sat nodding and smiling at his side. Without undue ceremony he hoisted the lady by one arm up on to the quay, and the pair stood facing Bernt, who stared speechlessly from one to the other.

"Here's your brother-in-law, my dear," said Nils Petter in a dialect presumably meant for Dutch, nudging the fair one with his knee in a part where Hollanders are generally supposed to be well upholstered. The impetus sent her flying into the arms of Bernt, who extricated himself humidly.

"Her name's Jantjedina van Groot, my good and faithful wife," Nils Petter explained. Bernt Jorgensen, who had not yet recovered from his astonishment, only grunted again and again: "H'm —h'm——" and made haste towards home, followed by Nils Petter and his bride. [Pg 249]

This time nothing was said about the freight money, which was just as well for all concerned, seeing it had all been spent in the purchase of various household goods and extra provisions with which to celebrate the occasion. Nils Petter's new relations in Holland, too, had had to be treated in hospitable fashion—which was just as well for them, since he never called there again!

Bernt Jorgensen decided that it would be more economical to pension off Nils Petter, and get a skipper of the old school to take over the *Eva Maria*; after which there was rarely any trouble about the freight money.

"Ah, but expenses now aren't what they were in my time," Nils Petter would say.

Which, in one sense, was perfectly true.

[Pg 250]

XVIII
THE *HENRIK IBSEN*

"Well, and what are you doing with that brat of yours, *Birkebeineren*," asked Hansen the shipbroker, one day, meeting Soren Braaten in the street. "Got any freight yet?"

"No, worse luck. These wretched steamers take all there is. I can't see what's the good of steam anyway. We got along all right without it before, but it's all different now. Doesn't give a poor man time to breathe."

"Yes, the old windjammers are rather out of it now," Hansen agreed.

"Going to rack and ruin, as far as I can see. And what's the sense of all this hurry and skurry, when all's said and done. It's against nature, that's what I say. When I think how we used to get along in the old days. Why, I never heard but that the merchants over in England and Holland were pleased enough with the cargoes when they got there, whether we'd been a fortnight or a month on the way, and we made a decent living out of it and so did they. But now? As soon as a steamer comes along, it's all fuss and excitement and bother and complaint all round."

"You ought to see and get hold of a steamboat yourself, Soren; we mustn't be behindhand with [Pg 251] everything, you know. Why, up in Drammen now, they've seven or eight of them already."

"Thank you for nothing. Let them buy steamers that cares to; it won't be Soren Braaten, though."

And Soren walked homeward, inwardly anathematising the inventor of steam, who might have found a better use for his time than causing all that trouble to his fellow-men.

Cilia was in the kitchen when he came in; the first thing she asked was whether he had got a charter for *Birkebeineren*.

The vessel had been lying in Christiania now for nearly a month; such a thing had never happened before.

Remittances? Alas, these had so dwindled of late as to be almost microscopic. Things were looking gloomy all round.

Cilia sat by the fire looking thoughtfully into the blaze. She dropped her knitting, and stuck the odd needle into her hair, that was fastened in a coil at the back of her head. The wool rolled to the floor, but when Soren stooped to pick it up, she ordered him sharply to leave it alone. There was something in her voice that startled Soren. Ever since the battle royal of a few years back, she had been quiet and sensible, and things had gone on between them as smoothly as could be wished.

Suddenly she rose to her feet, and stood with one hand on her hip, the other holding the bench.

"Soren, it's no good; we can't go on like this any longer."

Soren gave a start; he could feel there was thunder in the air.

"We'll have to buy a steamer. Sailing-ships are out of date." [Pg 252]

"What's that you say, mother? We two old folks to go fussing about with steam? Nay, I'd rather stick to the old planks till they rot!"

But Cilia went on firmly, altogether unmoved. "We've a decent bit of money in the bank, and shares in other things besides, but the interest's not what it might be, and I don't see the sense of letting other people take all the profits that's to be made out of shipping, while we that's nearest at hand are left behind."

"I don't suppose they're overdone with profits, these here steamboats, when it comes to the point," grumbled Soren. And no more was said about the matter for that day.

But Cilia pondered and speculated still; she read the shipping papers and the shipbrokers' circulars as earnestly as she studied lesson and collect on Sundays.

She found a valuable ally, too, in her son-in-law, Skipper Abrahamsen, who was tired of the "old hulk," as he called *Birkebeineren*, and longed to be captain of a steamer himself. Fortunately, Soren never heard a word of this, or it would have been ill both for Cilia and Abrahamsen, for he could not bear to hear a word in dispraise of his beloved ship.

Malvina, of course, sided with her husband and her mother, and their united efforts were daily brought to bear upon Soren, till at last he grew so tired of hearing about "that steamboat of ours," that he fled out of the house, and went round to call on Warden Prois whenever the talk turned that way.

There was a little attic in the Braaten's house that had never been used for anything but a box- [Pg 253] room; this was now cleared in secret by Cilia and Malvina, and then the three conspirators held meetings and discussions. Abrahamsen and Cilia had quietly made inquiries of various shipbuilding concerns, and received a mass of estimates and plans.

Cilia studied the question of engines till her brain was going twelve knots easy. Compound and triple expansion, boiler plate, and cylinder stroke—her mind was busy with every detail; for Cilia was not one to do things by halves when once she started.

Abrahamsen was examined and cross-examined till the sweat poured off him; he, of course, had to appear more or less familiar with all these things, since he aspired to command a steamer.

Malvina sat silent, looking on with wide eyes and taking it all in; she was looking forward to a free passage on a real steamboat for herself.

Soren wondered a little what they could be up to in the attic, but, being comfortable enough below with a glass of grog and the *Shipping Gazette*, he let them stay there as long as they pleased. One evening, however, it struck him they were at it a good long time; it was past eleven, and no sign of their coming down yet. Accordingly, he stole up quietly in his stocking feet, and looked through the keyhole. What he saw did not improve his temper. On a table in the middle of

the room was the smartest little steamer one could imagine. Red bottom, sides black above, with a gold streak, the rudder and two masts sloping a little aft, flag at fore and maintop—a sight to see. Cilia, Malvina and Abrahamsen stood round examining the model with glee.

Soren was about to retire, but stumbled over an old trunk left outside, and fell head over heels into the room among the others. There was an awkward pause, until Cilia broke the silence by asking Soren: "What do you think of that—isn't she a beauty?" pointing to the model as she spoke. [Pg 254]

"Why, yes, she's a handsome boat enough," said Soren, rubbing his shins.

"Oh, father, we *must* have a steamer of our own," said Malvina, coming up and clinging to his shoulder.

"Why, child, what are you doing here? I thought you'd have had enough to do at home with the boy," he said softly.

"It's the steamer we wanted to see. Mother thinks we could manage all right with compound, but Abrahamsen says it'll have to be triplets."

"Triplets, forbid!" muttered Abrahamsen.

"Have it whatever way you please, for all I care," said Soren. And he stumped off downstairs.

But the pressure from all sides was too much. Soren had to give way at last, and sign a formal document inviting subscriptions for shares in "a modern, up-to-date steamship."

S. Braaten having entered his name for fifty shares at £50, it was hoped that the remainder would be subscribed by tradesfolk in the town. Cilia had laid stress on the importance of appealing to local patriotism, and the circular accordingly pointed out that "in neighbouring towns it has already been wisely recognised that the shipping of the future will be steam, and that the day of the sailing vessel is past; our town alone, though it has always occupied a leading position in the shipping world, is sadly behindhand in this respect, counting as yet not a single steamer. It is in order to meet this long-felt want"—etc.

The appeal to the citizens of Strandvik was not in vain. A few days later the necessary share capital was subscribed. [Pg 255]

Soren Braaten, however, was ill at ease; it had gone against the grain to sign a document declaring that the day of the sailing vessel was past, and he would have liked to add an explanatory note to the effect that he had signed under protest. There was no help for it, however; for peace and quietness' sake he had to give way.

At the preliminary general meeting, Soren was elected Managing Director of the Company, despite his most energetic protests.

It was a fine sunny day when the *Henrik Ibsen* was due to appear. The name had been chosen at the suggestion of Lawyer Nickelsen, who explained it as fitting for a trading vessel, from the fact that the poet in question was expert at moving in dark waters and foggy regions, and made a very good living out of it; he hoped that the steamer would do likewise.

Flags were in evidence all over the town, and the quay was crowded. Never had there been such excitement in Strandvik since the day of the Royal visit.

Almost every other man was a shareholder; even Klementsen the parish clerk and Pedersen the schoolmaster had, despite their widely differing political views, gone halves together in a share.

"From what I see in the papers about oil freights from New York and corn freights from the Black Sea, the vessel ought to pay at least twenty per cent," said Pedersen, with an air of superior wisdom. And he brought out a big sheet of paper covered with calculations in English pounds, shillings and pence, which had taken him all the afternoon to work out. [Pg 256]

Klementsen had to put on his spectacles and study the figures earnestly; which done, the two newly pledged shipowners solemnly declared "it looks like very good business."

Nachmann was also a shareholder, but had only taken up his holding on condition that he should be purveyor of wines to the ship, "a smart, round vessel like that must get things from a decent firm." He had been busy to-day with a whole cart-load of various wines for the dinner, which the shareholders were to have on board during the trial trip.

Away in the harbour lay the *Apollo*, *Eva Maria*, and *Birkebeineren*; they had had no charters this year. The old craft looked heavy and stout as they lay in the sweltering sun, with pitch oozing from their seams like black tears. It almost looked as if they were weeping at having to lie idle, instead of ploughing through the good salt waters off Lindemor or the Dogger.

Soren Braaten, rowing out over the fjord to meet the steamer, passed close by his old ship *Birkebeineren*. He cast a loving glance at the dear old piece of timber, and wished he had accepted any freight, however poor, so he had kept out of all this new-fangled business with engine-power and steam. He felt like a traitor to his class, and to all the old things he loved.

He passed the *Eva Maria*, and there was Bernt Jorgensen standing aft. Bernt had declined to take up shares in the steamer; on the contrary, he had argued earnestly against the project, declaring that Strandvik owed too much to the old sailing ships not to hold by them to the last.

"Aren't you coming on board the steamer?" cried Soren as he came within hail. [Pg 257]

"No, thankye, I've no mind for it. I'm better where I am," answered Bernt, and, crossing over, sat down on the half-deck.

He hoisted his flag with the rest, though he felt little inclined to; but it would look strange if the *Eva Maria* were the only one to refrain. But the bunting was only half-way up when the halliards broke, and the flag remained at half-mast.

Bernt felt it was something of an ill-omen. He went into his cabin, but through the porthole he could see the *Henrik Ibsen* come gliding into the harbour amid general salutation.

The steamer was bright with brass work and new paint; the great gilt letters of her name at the stern shone over the water. On the bridge stood Skipper Abrahamsen, with three gold bands on his cap, and all the crew were in uniform—blue jerseys, with the name worked in red.

Bernt Jorgensen looked round his own cabin; the worn, yellow-painted walls, the square of ragged canvas that did duty as a tablecloth, the sofa with its old cracked covering of American cloth—it was all poor enough, but would he change with the dandified newcomer over yonder?

He struck his fist on the table. "Let's see if he's as smart at earning money as you've been, *Eva Maria*. It'll take him all his time, I fancy."

The cheering sounded across the water, as he sat bowed over the table with his head in his arms, thinking of old times, from the day he first went to sea with Uncle Gjermundsen, on board the *Stjerna*. Three shirts, a pair of canvas breeches, a straw-stuffed mattress and a rug were all his [Pg 258] kit. But what a clipper she was in those days, with her twelve knots close hauled. And Uncle Gjermundsen was the man to get the best out of her too. No gold-braided cap for him, and not much of a man to look at, little, dry and crooked-backed as he was; but when he went overboard with a line that black November night to save the crew of an English brig on the reef and sinking, there was many an upstanding man might have been proud to know him. But he and his ship were gone now, and both the same way. He stood by his ship too long, last man on his own deck he would be, and so the rest were saved and he went down. But it was all in the papers about it, the speech that was made in his honour at the Seamen's Union, and the verse:

"He stood alone on the sinking wreck,
A sailor fearless and bold,
For he knew that the last to leave the deck,
Comes first when all is told."

And what lads they were on board the *Stjerna*, tarry and weather-stained, but the harder it blew the smarter they went about it. There was Nils Sturika, that Christmas Eve off Jomfruland, when the pilot was to come aboard. The whole ship was like a lump of ice, and the fore-rigging ready to go by the board, with the lee shrouds and backstays torn away. They had to make the signal, but the foretop halliards were gone. And then it was Nils Sturika went up the topgallant shrouds by his hands, with the flag in his teeth, and lashed it fast to the pole.

But they got the pilot, and made in to Risorbank just in time.

Nobody shouted hurrah for Nils, and a stiff nip of grog was what he got when he came down; [Pg 259] instead of a medal with ribbon and all that he'd maybe get nowadays.

Bernt Jorgensen was roused from his meditation by the sound of the salute on board the *Henrik Ibsen*. He rose and went up on deck to see what was going on. The shareholders, with wives and children, nephews and nieces and relatives generally, were making a tour of the vessel.

Cilia was down in the saloon, seated in state on a red plush sofa. She did not feel altogether comfortable, to tell the truth, having acquired a horror of showy furniture since her own escapade in that direction. But she was proud to feel that "we" had achieved the distinction of giving Strandvik its first steamer.

The trial trip was to take place while dinner was being served in the saloon.

The *Henrik Ibsen* steamed along the fjord, beflagged from deck to top, and greeted with cheers from all along the waterside; not a citizen of Strandvik but felt a thrill of pride in his citizenship that day.

The dinner was a most festive affair. The conversation ran gaily on the topic of freights and steamship traffic. Old Klementsen already saw in his mind's eye a whole fleet of Strandvik steamers putting out to sea with flags flying, and coming home laden deep with gold to the beloved little town.

Justice Heidt, guest of honour in his capacity as principal representative of local authority, made a speech, in which he referred to "Strandvik's first steamship, a tangible witness to the high degree of initiative among our business men. The vessel has been named after a great poet, and it is our hope that it will, like its famous namesake, add to our country's credit and renown in [Pg 260] distant lands. Good luck and prosperity to the *Henrik Ibsen*." The toast was received with hearty

cheers from all.

Someone proposed the health of Soren Braaten, as leader in the enterprise, and Cilia's too, as the guiding spirit of the undertaking; then the captain's health was drunk, and many more.

All were excited to a high pitch of enthusiasm. Old Klementsen, delighted to feel himself a shipowner, sat in a corner with a magnum of champagne before him, delivered an oration on the subject of time-charter on the China coast; he had read an article on the subject in a paper, and was greatly impressed by the same.

"Beautifully steady, isn't she?" said Cilia to her husband. Hardly had she spoken, however, when, "Brrr—drrrrum—drrrum—drrrum"—the passengers were thrown headlong in all directions, and Cilia herself was flung into the arms of Justice Heidt, the two striking their heads together with a force that made both dizzy for the moment.

Bottles, glasses and plates were scattered about, adding to the general confusion.

So violent was the shock that many thought the boiler had burst, and something approaching panic prevailed.

Schoolmaster Pedersen was screaming like a maniac. In his anxiety to see what was happening, he had thrust his head through one of the portholes, and could not get it back despite his utmost efforts. Everyone else was too much occupied to help him, and there he stood, unable to move.

The rest of the party hurried up on deck, all save Klementsen, who, having emptied his magnum, felt himself unable to get up the companion, and wisely refrained from making the attempt. [Pg 261]

The *Henrik Ibsen* had struck on a sunken reef. The excitement of the occasion, together with the generous good cheer, had had their effect on the crew, who had not paid much heed to their course, with the result that the vessel had taken her own, until brought up all standing by the unexpected obstacle.

The bow had run right on the shelf of rock, and things looked distinctly unpleasant, until Soren Braaten explained that "unfortunately" there was shallow water on all sides, when the company began to feel somewhat easier in their minds.

Cilia's head was treated with vinegar bandages, and Justice Heidt's nose bound up as if in sympathy with the damage inside. But the festive spirit among the shareholders generally was at a low ebb, and anyone taking advantage of the moment might have bought shares then at well below par.

Aha, there is a tug already, the *Storegut*; things looked brighter in a moment, perhaps they might get off at once. But then came the question, had she sprung a leak? No; sound as a bell. A proper sort of steamer this.

A hawser was passed from the tug, then full speed astern—Hurrah—she's moving! The Henrik Ibsen drew slowly off the reef and was soon clear once more. The passengers brightened up, and soon the steamer was on her way back to Strandvik, the tug standing by in case of need.

Nachmann's supply of champagne was inexhaustible, and Thor Smith got on his feet with another speech for "the splendid vessel which has stood the test so manfully to-day. The *Henrik Ibsen* was not built for picnic voyages over sunny seas; no, she had shown what she could do and borne it [Pg 262] magnificently." Cheers for the *Henrik Ibsen* and general acclamation.

Then the whole company joined in the song:

> "And what though I ran my ship aground,
> It was grand to sail the seas!"

At last the *Henrik Ibsen* set out on a real voyage in earnest, and Soren Braaten was glad enough; he felt in need of rest after all he had been through.

He told Cilia, indeed, that he would rather go sailing in the Arctic than have it all to do over again. No, this steamship business was a trial.

Hardly had Soren settled down to his well-earned rest, when, only four days after the vessel had sailed, came a telegram from Hull announcing her arrival and awaiting orders. That meant wiring off at once to the brokers in Drammen and Christiania asking for freights. The telegraph, indeed, was kept so busy, that old Anders the messenger declared the wretched steamboat gave more work than anyone had a right to expect. Now and again, at weddings and suchlike, it was only natural to have a few extra telegrams going and coming; but, then, he would take them round in bundles at a time, and be handsomely treated into the bargain. Whereas this—why, he'd hardly as much as got back from delivering one wire to Soren Braaten, when a new one came in, and off he'd have to go again. And a man couldn't even stroll round with them at his ordinary pace; it was always "urgent" or "express," or something of the sort, that sent him hurrying off as if the wind were at his heels.

And as for being handsomely treated! It was a thankless task if ever there was one. When Anders [Pg 263] appeared with his seventh wire in one day, Soren almost flew at him. "What, you there again with

more of those infernal telegram things!"

Soren Braaten had had more telegrams the last fortnight than in all his life before; and, worst of all, they were so briefly worded, it took him all his time to make out the sense. If things went on at this rate he would very soon be wanting another cure at Sandefjord, and this time in earnest.

There was never any rest, this steamer of his flew about at such a rate; just when you thought she was in England she'd be somewhere down the Mediterranean or the Black Sea. Soren said as much to his old friend Skipper Sorensen, who answered: "Better be careful, lad, or she'll run so fast one day she'll run away with all your money." And Soren was anxious about that very thing, for the remittance seemed to him rather small in comparison with the length of voyage involved.

Soren found himself at last hopelessly at sea both as to charters and accounts, and confided to Cilia one day that he was going to throw up the whole thing; as far as he was concerned, "the wretched boat can manage itself."

Cilia thought over the matter seriously. Her first idea was to take over the chartering herself, but when Soren began talking about freight from Wolgast to Salonica, and Rouen to Montechristi, her geography failed her.

Fixing the old *Apollo* or *Birkebeineren* for voyages in the Baltic or the North Sea was easy enough. Cilia knew the name of every port from Pitea to Vlaardingen, from London to Kirkwall, but outside the English Channel she was lost. [Pg 264]

The end of it was that Soren went in to Christiania and got a broker he knew there to take over the business, and glad he was to get rid of it. The week after, he went on board *Birkebeineren*, rigged her up, and sailed with a cargo of planks to Amsterdam. Even though he made little out of it beyond his keep, it was nicer than sitting at home in a state of eternal worry about the steamer.

"It pays better than the savings bank, anyway," said Cilia, when he grumbled.

"Maybe; but it's a wearisome business all the same, this steam chartering. And we've other things to think about but what pays best."

And off he went on board his own old-fashioned *Birkebeineren*.

[Pg 265]

XIX
NILS PETTER'S LEGACY

The news ran like wildfire through the town: Nils Petter Jorgensen had been left a million gylden by his wife's uncle in Holland. It was true as could be; Justice Heidt had had a letter from the Queen to say so.

"Jantje!" roared Nils Petter out into the wash-house, where his wife stood in a cloud of steam and soapsuds.

"What is it, husband?" Jantje appeared in the doorway, little, stout and smiling, with her sleeves rolled up and the perspiration thick on her forehead.

"Come into the parlour a minute."

"Oh, I haven't time now, husband. There's the washing to be done."

"Oh, bother the washing! We've done with all that now," said Nils Petter loftily. And, thrusting his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, he strode stiffly in, followed by Jantje.

"Jantje, sit down on the sofa. Ahem ... er ... an event has occurred ..."

"Have they made you captain, husband; you have got a ship? We can go to Holland together, is it not?" Jantje clapped her hands together, and looked at him expectantly. Poor Jantje had never seen her native land since the day she sailed away on board the *Eva Maria*, and still felt strange in Norway, speaking the language with difficulty as she did. [Pg 266]

"We're rich, Jantje; we're millionaires, that's what it is."

Jantje turned serious at once; her first thought was that Nils Petter must have taken a drop too much—a thing that rarely happened now since he had been married.

"Don't you think you'd better lie down a little, husband?" she said quietly, pointing to the bedroom.

"Oho, you think I've been drinking? Well, here's the letter from the Justice; you can see for yourself."

Jantje took the letter and studied it intently, but could not make out a word of what it said.

"Your Uncle Peter van Groot died in Java last year, and left millions of gylden, and no children ——"

"Praise the Lord!" exclaimed Jantje.

"And all those millions are ours now, seeing we're the nearest heirs since your mother and father died."

"Poor Uncle Pit—kind old Uncle Pit," sighed Jantje, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. Then, rising to her feet, she went on: "If that's all, husband, then I'll go and finish the washing."

"Washing, now? No, you don't, Jantje. Off with you at once and put on the finest you've got: your green dress and the coral brooch."

"But the things will be spoiled in the water, husband."

"Never mind; let them. Hurry up and get dressed now."

Jantje went off to dress, but not before she had slipped out into the wash-house, wrung out the wet things and hung them up to dry.

Nils Petter put on his best blue suit, a starched shirt with collar and cuffs, a black tie and stiff hat. [Pg 267]

Then Jantje appeared, wearing her green dress, her face all flushed and aglow with hurrying.

The pair sat for a moment looking at one another.

"Jantje!"

"Yes, husband?"

"What shall we do with it all?"

Such a question from Nils Petter was too much for Jantje all at once. She looked helplessly round the room as if seeking for somewhere to put it.

"It's a question what to do with any amount of capital these days. Shipowning's a risky business...." Nils Petter paced up and down thoughtfully.

Then Jantje had an inspiration. "Husband, there's the big clothes-chest, room for lots of money in that." And she hurried out into the passage and began dragging out the chest.

"No, no, Jantje; leave it alone. The money'll have to be put in the bank, of course. We can't keep it in the house."

There was a knock at the door. "Come in!" It was Watchmaker Rordam. "Congratulations, my boy. Grand piece of luck, what? Must be strange-like, to get all that heap of money at once."

"Well, ye-es," said Nils Petter; "it's a trouble to know what to do with one's capital, though; these savings banks pay such a miserable rate of interest." Jantje looked at him in surprise. Why, only a fortnight ago, when he had had to renew a bill at the bank, he had declared loudly against the "pack of Jews" for charging too high a rate.

"You won't forget your old friends, Nils Petter, I hope, now that you've come into a fortune," said Rordam. [Pg 268]

"Trust me for that, lad," said Nils Petter. "I haven't forgotten how you helped me out when I was near being sold up; I owe you something for that. Being thankless towards friends that lent a hand when times were hard is a bad mark in the register and the sign of an unseaworthy character, and it shan't be said of Nils Petter Jorgensen." And he gripped Rordam's hand emphatically.

"Well, now, what do you say to a drink?"

"Not for me, thanks," answered Rordam. "I've—I've given it up," he added, not without some reluctance.

"Don't mind if I have one?"

"No, indeed."

"Jantje, give me a drop of Hollands. It's a plaguy business thinking out how to invest big sums of money."

Rordam had never had any experience of that sort of business, but thought he would not mind a little trouble, given the occasion.

Nils Petter drank off his glass. Rordam stuck to his refusal bravely, which so won Nils Petter's admiration that he bought of the watchmaker a splendid clock, costing five pounds, an elegant piece of work with a marble face and gilt lions above. Furthermore, on leaving, Rordam was given a piece of paper with the following words:

"Mr. Watchmaker Rordam to receive £50—fifty pounds—when I get the legacy.

"N. P. Jorgensen."

This last was a gratuity, which Nils Petter felt he ought to give for old friendship's sake.

Rordam was delighted; at last he would be able to pay off the many little odd debts that had been worrying him for years past. [Pg 269]

Hardly had Rordam gone when Schoolmaster Pedersen came in, bringing a large oleander as a present for Jantje.

Nils Petter and the schoolmaster had never been very friendly, holding different political opinions; Nils Petter especially waxed furious whenever he saw Pedersen's anti-Swedish flag hoisted in the garden. A couple of years ago he had gone in and cut it down, but the matter was, fortunately, smoothed over, Pedersen being an easy-going man, while his wife and Jantje were very good friends.

"I just looked in, my dear Jorgensen, to see if you'd any use for a secretary. A man in your position, of course, will have any amount of writing and bookkeeping work, and you know I'd be glad to make a little extra myself."

Nils Petter was not much of a scholar. The few occasions when he had to use a pen caused him no little difficulty; his big, unaccustomed fingers gripped the pen-holder as if it were a crowbar.

"Why, I dare say I might.... And what would you want a year for that?"

"I'd leave that to you."

"Would £200 be enough?"

Pedersen jumped up in delight and almost embraced Nils Petter. "It's too much, Jorgensen, really."

"It won't be too much; there'll be a deal of work to do. But I forgot, one thing you'll have to do: get rid of that beastly flag of yours."

Pedersen turned serious. "The Norwegian flag is our national emblem, and that alone. As a true patriot, I must stand by my convictions. Norway...." [Pg 270]

Nils Petter broke in angrily. "Norway, Norway! There's a sight too much of that if you ask me. I've sailed with the good old Union flag round the Horn and the Cape of Good Hope as well, and it's been looked up to everywhere. You can take and sew in the Swedish colours again, if you want the place—not but what the old flag's handsome enough," he added in a somewhat gentler tone.

Pedersen thought this rather hard; but £200 a year was not to be sneezed at, and, after all, there were limits to what could be reasonably demanded of a patriot. He was accordingly appointed private secretary, on condition that the Union colours be included in his flag forthwith, and set off home rejoicing. And feeling that he could now afford a little jollification, he bought a joint of beef, a bottle of wine, and a bag of oranges for the children.

Later in the day Bernt Jorgensen came round; he, too, had heard of the wonderful legacy.

"You'll need to be careful now, with all that money, Nils Petter; a fortune's not a thing to be frittered away."

"Trust me for that, brother. And you shall have a share of it too, for you've been a good sort. I will say, though, a trifle on the saving side at times, but never mind that now. Look here, Bernt, would you care to sell the *Eva Maria*?"

Bernt Jorgensen was so astonished at this sudden changing front that he hardly knew what to say. Hitherto Nils Petter had always been deferential and respectful towards him; now, however, he seemed to be adopting an air of lordly condescension.

"Well, what do you say?" [Pg 271]

"Sell you the *Eva Maria*! Well, it'd mean a lot of money for you, Nils Petter."

"Oh, that's all right. I've got plenty."

Bernt Jorgensen would not decide all at once, but wanted time to think it over.

During the next few days Nils Petter was inundated with visitors, and Jantje was kept busy all the time making fresh coffee in her best green dress, which caused her not a little anxiety, lest it should be soiled. Nils Petter told her not to worry; she would get a new one. But it was not Jantje's way to be careless with things.

Various speculators came offering properties for sale in various parts of the country, producing such masses of documents that Pedersen, as secretary, had his work cut out to find room for them in the parlour.

By way of finding a ship for his friend Thoresen, Trina's husband, Nils Petter had purchased the brig *Cupid* from Governor Abrahamsen for £500, also the Sorgenfri estate, situated a little way out of the town. This latter property, with a fine two-storeyed house looking out on the fjord, ran him into something like £1200. In each case it was stipulated that "the purchase money shall be paid in cash as soon as my inheritance from Holland is made over."

N. P. Jorgensen and his secretary had both been up to view the Sorgenfri estate, and were very

pleased with it on the whole. They agreed, however, that some alterations would have to be made, such as laying out a park, with fish-pond, and building a skittle-alley, which last Nils Petter was especially keen on, having been greatly devoted to that form of sport in his youth.

Then came a number of letters addressed to "N. P. Jorgensen, Esquire," during this time. [Pg 272]

His old friend, Shipbroker Rothe of Arendal, was forming a company to acquire a big steamer for the China trade, which was to give at least 30 to 40 per cent. He wanted only £3000 to complete, and invited Nils Petter, for old acquaintance's sake, to take up shares to that amount.

"Good fellow, is old Rothe," said Nils Petter to his secretary. "I used to have a drink with him every evening when I was up there with the old *Spesfides* for repairs. We went in for our mates' certificate together, too. Write and say I'll take shares for the £3000; that'll put him right."

It was late in the evening most days before Nils Petter and his secretary had got through the day's correspondence, and Nils Petter, who was accustomed to turn in about eight or nine o'clock, was so tired and sleepy that he wanted to leave everything as it was; but Pedersen was zealous in his work, and declared it was the first essential of a business man to answer letters promptly.

There was no help for it; Nils Petter was obliged to sit up, wading through all sorts of documents, company prospectuses, particulars of house property, mines, steamships, etc. etc. Secretary Pedersen left nothing unconsidered. Nils Petter all but fell asleep in his chair. And when at last he got to bed he would lie tossing and talking in his sleep, till Jantje had to get up and put cold water bandages on his head. Every morning he shuddered at the thought of that day's burdens, especially when the postman came tramping up with bundles of letters and circulars, one bigger than another.

Jantje and Nils Petter sat drinking their coffee in the kitchen, one each side of the table in front of the hearth. This was the best time of the day, Nils Petter thought; he could take it easy as in the old days, sitting in his shirt sleeves, and caring nothing for letters and investments. [Pg 273]

Jantje, too, liked this way best; she was always uncomfortable when she had to put on her green dress.

The coffee-pot was puffing like a little steam-engine on the hob, and Jantje was cutting the new bread into good thick slices.

"Jantje!"

"Yes, husband; what is it?"

"Seems to me we were a good deal better off before we got all this money."

"Ay, that's true, that's true."

"And I don't somehow feel like moving up to Sorgenfri—it's nice and comfortable here."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, husband. I'm so glad. I'd never feel happy away from here."

Nils Petter and Jantje had one great regret—they had no children. They had often talked of adopting one. The question cropped up again now. Jantje had heard that Skipper Olsen's widow had just died, leaving a four-year-old boy with no one to look after him but the parish; they decided, therefore, to take him and bring him up as their own. Jantje busied herself making preparations, and Nils Petter, disregarding Pedersen's insistence, flatly refused to be bothered with letters just now; he too had things to do about the house, getting ready for the boy.

The news soon spread that little Rasper Olsen was to be adopted by Nils Petter. Had ever a poor orphan such a stroke of luck! They called him the millionaire boy. [Pg 274]

When at last Jantje came in, leading the little fellow by the hand, Nils Petter's delight knew no bounds; he laughed and sang, and lifted the pretty, chubby lad and held him out at arm's length.

The boy took to Jantje at once, and when he began to call her "Mama," she wept with joy, and had to run and find Nils Petter that he might hear it too. He tried to get the child to call him "Papa," but here he was disappointed; Rasper would not call him anything but "Nils Petter," as he had heard everybody else do.

The first night, one of the richest heirs in the country slept in a washing-basket, to the great delight of Nils Petter, who amused himself swinging basket and boy together over his head till the child fell asleep.

Nils Petter was getting altogether unreasonable, so at least his secretary thought. He declined altogether to go to the office now, and went out fishing in his boat instead. And Jantje put on her old house frock again and stood over wash-tub just as before.

"Extraordinary people," said Pedersen. "Really, it's a pity to see all this money thrown away on folk with no idea of how to use it."

And indeed Nils Petter and Jantje gradually were fast slipping back to their old way of life. All Pedersen's arguments and entreaties could not persuade them to move out to Sorgenfri and take up a position suited to their means. In vain the schoolmaster urged "the duties involved by possession of worldly wealth, responsibilities towards society in general," and so on; Nils Petter

cared not a jot for anything of the sort; he was going to live his own way, and the rest could go hang. [Pg 275]

One day Justice Heidt came round, and asked to speak to Nils Petter privately.

"There we are again," grumbled Nils Petter; "more about that wretched money, I'll be bound."

"I am sorry to say," began the Justice, "I have bad news for you about this legacy business—very bad news indeed."

"Well, I've had nothing but trouble about it from the start," said Nils Petter, "so a little more won't make much difference."

"The legacy in question proves to be considerably less than was at first understood—in fact, I may say the amount is altogether insignificant."

"Well, it'll be something anyway, I suppose?" Nils Petter felt he ought to have a little at least for all his trouble.

"I have a cheque here for 760 gylden, and that, I am sorry to say, is all there is."

"Well, to tell the truth, Justice, I'm not sorry to hear it. I've been that pestered and worried with this legacy business, I'll be glad to see the last of it."

Nils Petter went round to the bank and changed his cheque; it came to 1140 crowns. Of this Pedersen received 200 for his secretarial work, Rordam another 200, the remainder was put in the bank as a separate account for little Rasper. Nils Petter and Jantje were glad to be rid of Sorgenfri, the brig, and the postman. The last named, it is true, still brought an occasional letter for "N. P. Jorgensen, Esquire," but Nils Petter never bothered to look at them.

And when Nils Petter set little Rasper on his shoulders and asked: "Which would you rather have, a million or a thrashing?" the boy invariably answered, "Thrashing," at which Nils Petter would laugh till it could be heard half-way down the street. [Pg 276]

[Pg 277]

XX
THE ADMIRAL

Some people seem to have the privilege of being as rude and ill-mannered as they please. They are generally to be found among those whose superior share of this world's goods enables them to lord it over the little circle in which they move.

They may be compared to bumble-bees that rarely sting, and only upon provocation. Ordinarily, they are very harmless, and for my part I much prefer a bumble-bee to the dainty and delicate mosquitoes that look so innocent, as they smilingly perforate the epidermis of a fellow-creature with a thousand little stabs.

"The Admiral" was a big bumble-bee. As a young officer in the navy he had been a reckless blade, and, having gained the rank of lieutenant, was obliged to leave the service for some piece of insubordination. He then entered the navy of a minor eastern power, where his dominant qualities of impudence and unscrupulousness were appreciated to such a degree that he rose to the rank of Admiral. Hence the title. It was stated that he "flogged niggers and shot down cannibals," without the formality of trial by jury—or indeed any formality at all.

Thanks to the Admiral's zeal, the two gunboats which constituted the navy in question were kept in excellent order, but as the four guns of the combined fleet enabled him to command the capital, including the government, he became a trifle over-bearing. [Pg 278]

One day, when the King came on board to pay a visit of inspection, with his two wives, the Admiral declared that he would keep the younger lady for himself, a wife being one of the items lacking in the inventory on board. The King, as a good husband, naturally declined to entertain the idea. Had it been the elder of the two, the matter might perhaps have been discussed, but as the Admiral stubbornly insisted on taking the younger, the parties exchanged words, and, ultimately, blows. This stage having been reached, the Admiral took his sovereign by the scruff of the neck, and his queen by the stern, and heaved the pair of them overboard. Fortunately the gunboat was not far off shore, and their majesties, who could swim like fishes, made straight for land. But the waters thereabouts are infested with sharks, and they were forced to put on full speed to escape with their lives.

The Admiral and the younger consort stood on the deck of the gunboat, watching the august swimmers with interest through a glass.

The King, having scrambled ashore, stalked solemnly up to his palm-shack palace, clenched his fist and shook it violently at the Admiral, vociferating "schandalous." This was a word he had learned from a German Jew, who traded in glass beads, and adorned his notepaper and visiting-cards with the inscription:

"By Royal Warrant to His Majesty the King of Zumba-Lumba."

Now the King knew nothing of revolution, not even the name, and there was not a bolshevik to be found in all his dominions. Nevertheless, he felt instinctively that the Admiral's behaviour was an outrage against the supreme authority vested in himself by right divine. [Pg 279]

But what could he do against the Admiral and his four guns? Of the four hundred warriors that composed his army, only about half were armed with muskets of an ancient type, procured by the Admiral himself in days gone by. And the ammunition amounted to practically nil, the Admiral having been far-sighted enough to store most of the cartridges on board the gunboats, serving out a small allowance now and then to the King and his army, wherewith to keep lions and tigers at a respectful distance from the huts of the capital.

The King thought over the matter for quite a while, and at last sent for one of his numerous brothers-in-law. Here, as in other kingdoms, the family relationship was a most useful factor, providing a kind of mutual insurance in support of the throne.

His Majesty's kinsman, then, was appointed Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, and instructed to proceed, in that capacity, to the neighbouring territory of Hampa-Denga, and inform the British Resident there that His Majesty the King of Zumba-Lumba wished to place himself under British protectorate at once.

One morning, a few days later, the Admiral lay in his hammock on deck, H.M.'s late consort in another hammock at his side, fanning him with a palm-branch. He was in the best of spirits, refreshed alike by his morning bath and an excellent breakfast. The parrots were chattering noisily in the great fragrant agaves on shore, birds of paradise rocked on the topmost crests of the palms, with impertinent young monkeys vainly trying to tweak their tails. The ex-queen chewed betel and smiled at him, and he, in return, tickled the soles of her feet till she screamed. It was a perfect little idyll; a very paradise. [Pg 280]

Neither of the pair noticed anything unusual until suddenly a young English officer appeared on deck.

He had come, it appeared, to deliver a dispatch to the Officer Commanding the Fleet. And this is how it ran:

> "Sir,—Pursuant to negotiations with His Majesty the King of Zumba-Lumba, I have the honour to inform you that His Majesty has this day placed himself under British protectorate.
>
> "Accordingly, the Zumba-Lumba navy will henceforward be under the Administration of the Governor at Hampa-Denga and the naval station there.
>
> "The bearer of this, Sub-Lieutenant Algernon Smith, is deputed to take over for the present the command of the Zumba-Lumba Fleet.—I have the honour to be, Sir, your obedient servant,
>
> "C. W. Melville St. Patrick, C.B., R.N.
>
> "H.B.M.S. *Cyclope*, 6th February 1873."

The Admiral's first impulse was to take this young spark by the collar and throw him overboard, as he had done a day or so before with His Majesty and his wife. But on glancing over the side, he perceived, under shelter of a small island, the white painted hull of H.M.S. *Cyclope*, and thought better of it; instead, he turned to the bearer of the letter, and, with kindly condescension, invited him to come below and have a drink. [Pg 281]

Whereupon they descended to the cabin, where the Admiral initiated his young colleague into the maritime affairs of the Zumba-Lumba.

Then the Admiral packed up his things.

He regretted that he had not a visiting-card, not even a photograph to give his successor, but handed over instead the younger wife of his late master as a trifling souvenir.

On reaching the deck, to his indescribable annoyance he perceived the King, with his brother-in-law, his four hundred warriors, and the elder wife, standing on the shore, slapping their stomachs, the superlative expression of mischievous delight in those parts.

The foregoing brief narrative is to be taken as a truthful and dispassionate account of the manner in which the Admiral attained his title and dignity.

The remainder of his doings during his sojourn abroad, before he returned to settle down in his native town on the coast, is soon told.

The Admiral was not a man to be long idle, and, as a sailor, he could always find a way. He captained vessels for Chinese and Japanese owners, both sail and steam. He started a fleet of tugs at Tientsin, and obtained a concession for dredging the harbour of Shanghai, with a host of other things, making a very considerable fortune out of the whole.

Then he turned his steps towards home, and purchased the house of his fathers on the hill just above the Custom House.

He dismantled the old place almost entirely of its furniture, and had it fitted up according to his own ideas, as a sort of bungalow.

There were weapons all over the place; spears, bows and arrows, pistols and guns of all sorts. [Pg 282] Pot-bellied idols smirked in every corner; lion and tiger skins were spread on the floor. But the drawing-room on the ground floor and the office in the side wing, that had been his father's in the old days, he left untouched. He even went so far as to have the successive layers of wallpaper, that in course of years had been hung one over another, carefully removed one by one until he came to the identical one that had adorned the place when he was a little lad and his mother and father were still alive. Then he went about all over the town, trying to buy up the old pieces of furniture that had been sold and scattered about thirty or forty years before. He went far up into one of the outlying villages to get hold of one particular birchwood cabinet which he had learned was to be found there. He also managed to unearth his father's old writing-desk, and had it set up in its old place in the "office." And at last he really succeeded in restoring the two rooms almost completely to their former state. Then and not till then was he satisfied, and began, as it were, to live his life over again.

The Admiral was now a man about sixty. A giant of a man to look at, with hands and arms of an athlete and well proportioned.

He had a big, curved nose, a trifle over large, perhaps. And the eyes that shone out from beneath the great bushy brows were not of the sort that give way. His whole face bore the stamp of unscrupulous firmness, softened a little, however, by the heavy whiskers generally affected by naval officers in those days, and which in his case were now perfectly white.

When the Admiral came home he brought with him a little girl twelve years old. A queer little [Pg 283] creature she was, with somewhat darker skin than we are accustomed to see, and brilliant black eyes.

"My daughter," said the Admiral, and that was all the information to be obtained from that quarter.

It was generally surmised that she must be the offspring of his alliance with the young Queen of Zumba-Lumba, who had, as we know, been on board the gunboat; *ergo*, she was of royal blood. And the whole town accordingly styled her simply "The Princess."

As to whether he had contracted other alliances elsewhere none could say, for the old servant, or lady companion, whom he had brought with him from abroad, was dumb as a door-post when the talk turned in that direction.

She was English and somewhat over fifty. Miss Jenkins was her name, but the Admiral invariably called her "Missa." Missa was the only person who ever ventured to oppose him. Now and then the pair of them might be heard arguing hotly, always in English, till at last he would shout at her: "Mind your own business, please!" This was his stock phrase for terminating an argument when he did not care to discuss the matter further.

The Princess was to be confirmed. And there was a great to-do in view of the event.

The parson, naturally enough, requested the usual particulars—parents' names, place of birth, date, certificate of vaccination, etc. The whole town was curious now, and great excitement prevailed; at last the mystery would be solved. The parson had to go down to the Admiral himself, and inform him, as politely as possible, that the law required compliance with certain formalities; an especially important point was that the names of both father and mother should be correctly [Pg 284] stated.

"She has no mother," the Admiral categorically declared.

"But, my dear Admiral, she must have had a mother. In the ordinary course of nature...."

"The course of nature's extraordinary where she comes from."

"But you must have been married, surely?"

The Admiral glared, and his bushy brows contracted.

"Who?"

"You."

"I?" The Admiral chuckled.

"Yes," said the parson, lowering his voice a little; he was beginning to feel a trifle uncomfortable.

"Oh, in the tropics, you know, there are no such formalities."

"But surely that's immoral?"

"We don't know the word in those parts." And the Admiral rose to his feet.

The parson plucked up courage and said quietly: "But you yourself were a Christian, Admiral, were you not?"

"Mind your own business, please," answered the Admiral, at the same time opening the door

politely, that the parson might slip out. The latter also availed himself of the chance; he was not without a certain uneasy feeling that if he failed to do so now, his exit might take a less peaceable form.

How the question was finally settled the writer cannot say; the fact remains that the town was no wiser than before.

The Princess was confirmed, and received into the best society of the town, as one of themselves. [Pg 285]
She was slender and finely built, with a pretty face and charming eyes. The only thing that marked her as different from the other girls was the yellowish-brown of her skin, and even this seemed to be growing fainter as the years went by.

As to her antecedents, she herself never referred to the subject, and no one was ever indelicate enough to ask her.

Altogether, then, matters were going very well indeed, both for the Admiral and the Princess. He began to feel at home in his old town, and did not regret having settled down there.

And the townsfolk, for the most part, gradually got used to the rough old fellow and his ways, though there were still a few who declared they could not "abide" him.

Consul Endresen, for instance, and Henry B. Karsten the ship-chandler were not accustomed to be treated with such utter disregard by a so-called "Admiral."

Admiral indeed! Ha, ha! The whole thing was a farce. The old humbug; he was no more an admiral than Ferryman Arne. They turned up their noses at him, but kept their distance all the same, with an instinctive feeling that he might literally go so far as to take them by the scruff of the neck if he felt like it.

The two firms were old-established and respected in the place, having occupied a leading position in the commercial life of the town for generations, by reason of their wealth, superior education and incontestable ability. And in consequence neither felt at home elsewhere than in their native place, where they were used to play first fiddle generally. There was no competition between the two; they were wise enough to realise that any such conflicting element might easily [Pg 286]
destroy the lead their fathers had established.

But they would not suffer any outsider to intrude on their domains, whether in business or in social life; here they shared in common an undisputed supremacy.

The young Karstens and Endresens were brought up according to the principles of their respective dynasties, and were sent abroad for their commercial education, that they might be properly fitted for the distinguished position they would be called to fill.

Skipper Hansen and Blacksmith Olsen's offspring found it was no easy matter to compete with them.

Wealth, however, was the only thing they really respected at heart, the old as well as the younger generation.

They would devote themselves several times a week to calculating how much the other notables might be worth, and were ill pleased that anyone should be better off than themselves.

It was even said that old Karsten took to his bed out of sheer envy on hearing that someone else had made a heap of money.

Endresen was wilier and rarely showed his feelings, but it was a well-known fact that he would be irritable and unreasonable when he heard of others making a successful deal. The clerks in his office said so.

Then came the sudden appearance of the Admiral in their midst. At first they did not understand this brutal and domineering force. The old Karstens themselves had been accounted proud and haughty enough—though perhaps not exactly brutal; but they were, as we have said, of a privileged caste. But this so-called Admiral, what was he? A scion of the town, it is true, inasmuch as he was a son of the old shipbroker who had formerly occupied the house now purchased by the [Pg 287]
newcomer. But he, the father, that is, had been no more than a "measly broker," who had just managed to scrape some sort of a livelihood together by fixing contracts for the vessels owned by Endresens and selling coal to the Karstens' factories.

The Admiral himself, however, was evidently rich, a man of unbounded wealth, indeed, and enough to buy up Endresen's and Karsten's together. His Income Tax Return spoke plainly in plain figures; no farce about that! The fact was there, and could not be ignored; an abominable thing, but none the less true. There was nothing for it but to give him his title of Admiral, and with a serious face. Had it been some poor devil without means, they would have jeered him out of the place.

When the Admiral came striding up the main street, a stout, imposing figure, even Henry B. Karsten himself had to make way. He would wave one hand in salutation and say "Morning!" in English, using the same form of greeting to all, with the sole exception of Arne the Ferryman, who was always honoured with a shake of the hand.

But the Princess fluttered about the place like a dainty little butterfly. Old Missa looked after her as well as she could, and never lost sight of her if she could help it. But the Princess seemed to

have wings! She would manage somehow or other to vanish in a moment: *presto!* gone! And there was Missa left behind in despair.

She would soon come fluttering back again, however, smiling and irresistible as ever, and throw her arms round Missa's neck and beg to be forgiven.

The Admiral grumbled and swore he would "put the youngster in irons" if she did not keep to the house; but the youngster only laughed, perched herself on the Admiral's knee, and pulled his long white whiskers; and then he might fall to dreaming ... dreaming of distant lands, of moonlight nights beneath the palms and agaves, long and long ago. [Pg 288]

He fussed and grumbled and stamped about the house, calling Missa a lumbering old mud-barge that couldn't keep a proper look-out; but the Princess fluttered on as before, entirely undismayed.

There was to be a grand festival in the town, a charity entertainment in aid of the Children's Home.

All the young people of the town were to assist. There was to be a theatrical performance, and an exhibition of dancing on the stage. Young Endresen and Karsten junior, of course, took a leading part in the arrangements; "for a charitable object," they could do no less. It was generally understood, however, that the real object of both young gentlemen was to see something of the Princess.

The two heirs-apparent waged a violent struggle for the Princess's favour. True, they had been duly instructed by their respective fathers, as these by their respective fathers before them, in the principle that "the house of Endresen" or "the house of Karsten" expected every son to do his duty—*i.e.* not to marry beneath his rank, and also, to "consolidate the standing of the firm," as it was conveniently put. As regards the question of rank, this was, in the present instance, a somewhat debatable one, but the question of consolidation was plain as could be wished. Here was a considerable fortune to be gained for the town, and thus for one of the two firms. It was certainly worth a struggle.

The Admiral had grumbled and stormed for a whole week before consenting to the Princess participating in the affair. [Pg 289]

The Princess was to dance—a dance she had composed herself.

There was great excitement; the local theatre was crammed. The leading notabilities of the place had booked up all the stalls at more than twice the usual prices. Everyone who could get about at all was present. Even old Endresen, who generally affected to despise all such theatrical tomfoolery, had found a seat in the front row, and confided to his next-door neighbour that he had seen "Pepita" dance in Paris—had even thrown her a bouquet—"but I was very young, then, I must say," he added, with a smile.

Old folk in the town still told the story of how Endresen, as a young man, had led a gay life in Paris; a life so gay, and so expensive, that the Endresen senior of the period had promptly ordered him to come back home at once. "And he's turned out a real good man for all that," they would hasten to add.

The theatrical performance went off quite successfully, but without arousing any great amount of enthusiasm. There was applause, of course, and the principal actors had to appear before the curtain; the leading lady was duly praised for her interpretation. But it was the Princess all were waiting for.

At last the curtain rose. The scenery was ordinary enough: a "woodland scene," with the usual trees and a pale moon painted on the background. It was the standard setting, as used for classical tragedy, vaudeville and, in fact, almost anything.

Enter the Princess, daintily as if on wings. She wore a long white robe, that moved in graceful waves about her slender figure; diamonds shone and glittered in her hair. No one present had ever seen such stones, and young Endresen swore they were genuine. She wore a row of pearls too round her neck, and heavy gold rings about her bare ankles. [Pg 290]

The spectators seemed literally to hold their breath with every nerve on the strain. The little figure up there was like a vision; her feet hardly touched the floor.

First, she glided softly across the stage, her white robe rising and falling like the gentle swell of the sea on a summer's day, then faster and faster. She whirled round, bent right down to the ground, and fell in a heap, only to spring up again in a moment and whirl round again at a furious pace.

The public was simply spell-bound. No one had ever seen, ever dreamed of such a sight.

Her great black eyes shone towards them, while that queer smile played about her mouth; she seemed to move in a world of her own. The dusty old scenery faded into nothingness; they saw but the girl herself, and sat staring, enchanted, hypnotised.

Gone! It was over. The curtain fell, and a silence as in church reigned for some seconds after; the spectators were getting their breath again, so to speak. Then something unusual happened. Old Endresen rose to his feet, clapped his hands and cried: "Encore, encore!"

Forgotten were his seventy years, his dignity, everything; he was young again, young and

infatuated as he had been in Paris half a century before, when he joined in the cry of the thousands shouting, "*Vive Pepita, vive l'Espagne!*" [Pg 291]

At last the general enthusiasm found vent in shouts of applause like the roar of a bursting dam. Handkerchiefs were waved; all rose to their feet.

Then once more she glided in across the stage.

Again an outburst of delighted applause.

One young man in particular seemed intent on outdoing all the rest—a fair-haired little fellow with a snub nose and pince-nez.

He sat in the stage box, and his shrill voice could be heard all over the theatre as he cried in unmistakable west coast dialect: "Bravo, bravissimo! Bravo, bravissimo!"

All looked at him and laughed. It was Doffen Eriksen, or Doffen, simply, as he was generally called. He came from Mandal originally, but had been several years in the town, first as head clerk at Eriksen's, and later with other local firms. His natural tendency to continual opposition, and lack of respect for his superiors, indeed for all recognised authority, prevented him from ever keeping a situation long.

He had recently gone over to the Socialist party, but at the very first meeting had abused his new comrades with emphasis: thieves, scoundrels and political mugwumps were among the expressions he used. The last in particular aroused their indignation, and after a few weeks he was excluded from the party. He was now a free-lance, with no regular employment.

Then it happened that the Admiral advertised for an assistant to help in the office. The Admiral used his office chiefly as a place where he could give way to bad language as often as he pleased; he felt he ought to keep himself in training, and arguing with Missa was too milk and watery for his taste. [Pg 292]

The work in the office consisted for the most part of keeping the accounts of a couple of small vessels which he owned, together with the cutting out of coupons and cashier work. The Admiral himself never condescended to take up a pen; one had coolies to do that sort of thing, he would say.

His two skippers were rated and bullied every time they came home from a voyage, but they were so used to the treatment that they never noticed it.

It was worse, however, for the clerk, who had to endure the same thing day after day.

During the last year or so, the Admiral had had four or five different specimens in the office, but they always made haste to better themselves at the earliest opportunity, or simply "got the sack." They were all either "a pack of fools that couldn't think for themselves," or "a lot of impertinent donkeys that fancied they knew everything."

And when, after one of his usual outbursts, the unfortunate in question found it too much, and gave notice to leave, the Admiral's standard answer was "All right! then I'll have to get another idiot from somewhere."

Doffen applied for the post, referring to his previous experience, and stated that he had been "simply thrown out of various situations, not through any lack of ability, but because the principals were so many blockheads, who could not bear to hear a free and independent man express his frank opinion." He was at present disengaged, on the market, and perfectly willing to undertake any kind of work whatever, "even to playing croquet." The Admiral read the application through; it was the only one he had received in answer to his advertisement. [Pg 293]

He grunted once or twice as he read. Missa laid down her needlework and prepared for a direct attack.

The opening seemed to take his fancy, but when he came to the part about playing croquet, he exclaimed:

"What the devil does the fellow mean? Playing croquet?"

"Who?"

"Oh, the new slave I'm getting for the office."

"Well, why not. He might play with Baby."

"Oh go to...." The Admiral got up and put the application into the fire.

Next day Doffen, as the sole applicant, was accorded the post. He sat down at the high desk, on one of those scaffold-like office stools with a big wooden screw in the middle. It was a matter of some difficulty to climb up, Doffen being small of stature, but with the aid of some acrobatic backwork, he soon learned to manage it.

Opposite his place was the Admiral's seat. He loved to sit there, in the very spot where his father had sat, year after year, as far back as he could remember.

It was not often the Admiral showed any evidence of gentler feeling, but it happened at times,

when very old folk chanced to come into the office. They would stand still for a long time, looking round in wonder, and finally exclaim:

"Why, if it's not exactly as it used to be in your father's time!" and then the Admiral would jump down from his stool and slap the speaker on the shoulder.

During the first few days Doffen had not seen much of the Admiral, who had hardly looked in at the office at all. He wanted to get some idea of the "new slave's" manner and behaviour before he sat down. [Pg 294]

On the day after the performance, the Admiral walked in and took his seat. Silence for a few minutes.

At last Doffen thought he ought to say something, and observed with the utmost coolness:

"Your daughter danced very nicely last night."

"H'm." The Admiral only grunted, and looked out of the window. Doffen imagined he had not heard.

"I was saying, Admiral, your daughter gave a deuced fine performance last night." Doffen raised his voice a little, thinking the Admiral must be hard of hearing.

"And what the devil's that got to do with you?" Doffen slammed down the lid of his desk with a bang.

"To do with me? Why, I paid for my ticket, anyway."

"I didn't ask her to dance for you, my lad, and devil take me but it shall be the last time."

"What's that to do with me?" retorted Doffen coldly.

The Admiral began to feel in his element; here at last was a man who could stand up to him.

"Can't you see she's like a young palm? Haven't you got a spice of feeling in you, man?"

"That's my business, Admiral."

The Admiral stopped short. He was on the point of bringing out his own favourite retort: "Mind your own business," and here was this fellow taking the very words out of his mouth. He went out of the room without a word. [Pg 295]

Several times after that the Admiral launched his attacks at the new clerk, but invariably got as good as he gave. More than that, Doffen would even take the offensive himself.

"What do you think you're doing with these two hulks of yours, Admiral, eh?"

"Hulks?"

"Yes, these two old wooden arks. The skippers go floundering about like hunted cockroaches at sea, and the ships themselves go pottering from pillar to post; it's high time you got some system into the business."

"You mind your own business, please," said the Admiral, rapping on the desk. But at that the other let himself go in his barbarous dialect, like a gramophone:

"It is my business, and as long as I'm stuck here on this spindle-shanked contrivance of a stool I'll say what I think. Take me for a dumb beast, do you? Not me! It'll take more than you know to stop me talking. We're used to rough weather where I come from."

And Doffen went on in the same strain long after the Admiral had got out of the room. The Admiral himself, however, listened with delight from the other side of the door, as Doffen thumped his desk again and again, still in the full torrent of speech. It was worth while going to the office now. No more sitting glowering at a servile, stooping-shouldered little scrap of a man, who scribbled away for dear life and shrank in terror every time he entered. Now he would generally find the room in a thick haze of tobacco smoke so that he himself could scarcely breathe. Doffen's pipe was rarely out of his mouth. Several times the Admiral had invited him, in well-chosen words, to take his beastly pipe to a hotter place, but only to be met with the retort that it might be as well, seeing there was never a box of matches here when a man wanted a light. The Admiral came more and more often to the office now. Here at least he could be sure of getting a fair go at any time, for Doffen was always open for a game. [Pg 296]

After a while a tone of jovial roughness grew up between the two of them, and authority was relegated to the background, exactly as Doffen wished.

Altogether there was every prospect of an idyllic understanding between the two parties, until one day Doffen fell in love, over head and ears in love beyond recall.

The Princess had captivated him completely. If she chanced to come into the office for a stamp, or to deliver a letter, his heart would start hammering like a riveting machine.

His brain was so confused he hardly knew what he was doing. He would lie awake at nights in a torment of hatred against the Endresen and Karsten boys, who were rivals for her favour. And, after all, who was better fitted than he? Had he not got the Admiral's papers into proper order?

Had he not managed to knock the old porpoise himself into shape, till he was grown docile and tractable as a tame rabbit?

The Princess smiled on Doffen as she smiled on everyone, and each of course fancied himself specially favoured. Even old Consul Endresen brightened up at the sight of her, and was always ready to stop for a chat; he would draw himself up and endeavour to play the gallant cavalier. He [Pg 297] had been a widower now for many years, and it was commonly believed that he was not unwilling to enter once more into the bonds of holy matrimony, should a favourable opportunity occur.

The Admiral growled fiercely whenever Baby was out, and Missa wept and wrung her hands over the young ladies of the present day—particularly in this barbarous country.

Paying attentions? It was one continual paying of attentions all day long. The young men of the place were sick with longing when she was not to be seen, and Doffen suffered most, having occasion to see her every day. To make matters worse, she had taken to coming into the office more frequently of late, and would perch herself up on her father's high stool. There she would sit and gossip with him for half an hour at a time. Six times a week at least Doffen was in the seventh heaven of delight. She asked him questions about everything under the sun, consulting him on every imaginable subject. And then she would thank him with one of those wonderful smiles, and a look from those dark eyes of hers—oh, it was beyond all bearing.

Doffen pondered long and deep, seeking some way of coming to the point.

He must not let the others get there before him, and he decided on a *coup de main*, which, as he had read in the life of Napoleon, was the proper way to win a battle. He would go directly to the Admiral himself.

One morning, then, the Admiral came into the office, looked long and attentively at Doffen, and finally said:

"What's the matter with you, man? You're getting to look like a plucked goose, for all the sign of [Pg 298] life in you!" And he jumped up on his stool.

"It's a dog's life being a man," declared Doffen sententiously.

"You find it easier, no doubt, to be a monkey," said the Admiral.

"Well, anyway, I'd be a sort of relative of yours," said Doffen. "And it's as well to be on good terms with the devil, they say."

The Admiral laughed. This was a bad sign.

Ugh! So Doffen was going to be funny, and make jokes. That sort of polite conversation was a thing the Admiral detested; it was blank tomfoolery; soup without salt.

No; what he enjoyed was proper high temper on both sides like a couple of flints striking sparks. Anything short of that made life a washy, milk-and-watery dreariness. And most people, according to his opinion, were just a set of slack-kneed molly-coddles that sheered off at the first encounter. Devil take their measly souls! When he did happen to meet with a fellow-citizen who could get into a proper towering passion, he felt like falling on his neck out of sheer gratitude and admiration. Here, at last, was a *man*! Women he placed in a separate category: they were "fellow-creatures," just as rabbits, for instance, whose chief business in life was to have young ones.

Doffen, then, ought to have realised that the moment was not opportune for a *coup de main*. He had, however, only the day before, seen the Princess out for a long walk with young Endresen, and he felt he must act promptly, so he went on:

"You could make a happy man of me, Admiral!" [Pg 299]

"You're happy enough as it is, man."

"No, not quite. There's one thing wanting."

"And what's that?"

"Your daughter——"

"Hey? Are you off your head?"

"Your daughter," repeated Doffen. "I'd be a good husband to her, and a proper son-in-law to you."

"I'll give you son-in-law!" roared the Admiral, and, picking up the big Directory, he sent it full at Doffen's chest; the latter, taken by surprise, came tumbling down from his stool, and fell against the wood-box in the corner.

"You miserable nincompoop!" snorted the Admiral, as he rushed out of the room.

Doffen lay in the corner by the wood-box, groaning pitifully. The noise had been heard all over the house, and the Princess came rushing in to see what was the matter.

"Are you ill, Eriksen?" she asked, taking his hand.

"Oh, I think I must be dying," he said, touching his chest.

"No, no," said she. "It's not so bad as all that."

"And if so, I shall have died for you."

"Let me help you up on the sofa, now, and I'll fetch you a glass of water."

With her support he limped across to the sofa.

"Better now?" she asked, handing him the glass of water.

"Oh, I'm so fond of you," said he, and tried to take her hand.

"Oh, do stop that nonsense!" said she, with a laugh.

"Stop? How can I stop when I love you as deeply as ... as ..." he paused, unable to find a sufficiently powerful expression, then suddenly the inspiration came, and, raising himself on his elbow, he went on—"as deeply as is possible *in this line of business*!" [Pg 300]

"Oh no, really; you can talk about this another time, you know. Come along now, Eriksen, pull yourself together and be a man."

"Then it's not a final refusal—not a harsh and cruel 'no' such as your father flung at me just now—with that heavy book? Say it's not that!"

But she was gone.

Doffen lay back on the sofa once more, closed his eyes, and thought of her. At last he fell asleep, and lay there, never noticing when the Admiral peeped in through the door, "to see if the carcass was still alive." The sound of Doffen's snoring, however, reassured him, and he went away again, contented and relieved.

The Princess sat in her room, highly amused with the thought of her latest admirer. What a funny creature he was! She rather liked him really, for all that; he was always so willing and kind, and if one's ardent worshippers themselves agree to be reduced to the status of "just friends," why, it may be very handy at times to have them in reserve. No, she would not quarrel with Eriksen, because of this, not at all.

But, to tell the truth, it was getting quite a nuisance with all these admirers. Everyone of them was always wanting to meet her and go for a walk with her, and talk of love! Oh, she was so utterly weary of them all. These simpletons who imagined she was going to settle down and stay in this little place all her life!

Heavens alive, what an existence! No, thank you, not if she knew it! [Pg 301]

It was annoying, in this frame of mind, to recollect that she promised Endresen junior to meet him at twelve o'clock by the big pond in the park. Still, a promise was a promise; she would have to go.

And lo, he came up with a huge bouquet of pale yellow roses, her favourite flower, as he knew, tied round with a piece of thin red ribbon.

"When the roses are faded, you can take the ribbon and bind me with it," he said.

"When the roses have faded? Oh, but that won't be for a long time yet—thank goodness." And she laughed.

"Well, so much the better; you can tie me up at once."

"But suppose I don't want to?"

"Then I'll die, Baby. Go off and shoot myself, or drown myself."

"Drown yourself? Oh, do it now. I'll bet anything you wouldn't dare."

"I assure you I mean it," he said, placing one hand on his heart.

"Well, now, let me see what sort of a man you are, Endresen. Walk round the edge of the pond here five times——"

"And what then?"

"Then—oh, then you shall have——"

"Yes?"

"—My sincere admiration, let us say. That'll do to go on with." And she smiled mischievously.

He jumped up on to the narrow stone edging of the pond and began balancing his way carefully along, the Princess walking by his side, counting the rounds. One—two—three—four times round. [Pg 302]
"One more, and you've done it," she said encouragingly.

"And then I've won your hand, haven't I?" he cried.

"Once more round, and—we'll think about it. Now, last lap!"

He stepped cautiously along, and was nearing the end of the fifth round, when all of a sudden she

jumped up and gave him a push that sent him into the water up to his waist.

"No, that's not fair, Baby. I won."

She danced up and down, clapping her hands and laughing delightedly.

"Adieu, Endresen! my sincere admiration. It was splendid! But I don't think I'll walk home with you now, or people might think you'd been drowning yourself for my sake." And she ran off. Coming through the town she encountered old Consul Endresen, who stopped, as usual, to talk to her.

"You're looking younger than ever, Consul," said the Princess.

"Am I, though? Oh, you know how to get at an old man's heart, little sunbeam that you are! Looking younger than ever, eh—and I'm sixty-seven to-day," which, by the way, was three years less than the truth.

"To-day? Oh, then I must wish you many happy returns—and here, let me give you these flowers."

He stopped in surprise.

"But, my dearest child, you don't mean it, surely? These flowers, these charming roses, they were for somebody else now, I'm sure."

"Not a bit of it—they're for you."

"Why, then, since you are pleased to command, I bow—and many thanks." And, bowing deeply, he took her hand and kissed it. [Pg 303]

The Princess hurried homeward, laughing at the face of young Endresen when his father appeared with the flowers.

While all this was going on, Karsten junior was sitting deep in thought as to whether he ought not to propose to the Princess himself. He had sounded his father on the subject, and the latter had made no positive objection to the match. True, it was not altogether *comme il faut*, but still, it might be passed over—though he certainly considered the old man intolerable.

Karsten junior was not much of a speaker, and determined, therefore, to write instead. But he found this, too, a ticklish business. He had never "operated in that market" before, and was altogether unacquainted with the article known as love. The opening phrase of the contemplated letter was a stumbling-block to begin with. Should he write "Miss," or "Miss Baby," or "Dear Miss Baby"—or even straight out, "Dear Baby"—but no, he must do the thing correctly in due form. The house of Karsten was an old-established firm, and he must make this evident.

He decided at last for "Miss" simply.

"Referring to our conversation of 7th inst., I hereby beg to inform you ..." etc.

He wrote on his sister's ivory paper, put the letter neatly in an envelope, and sent it off.

The Princess laughed when she got the letter. She read it aloud to herself, and exclaimed with conviction: "What a fool!"

Altogether it had been a day of amusing experiences for the Princess, but there was more to come. Yet another letter arrived, that filled her with unbounded astonishment. It ran as follows: [Pg 304]

> "My dear little Friend,—Do not be startled at receiving these lines from an old man. George Sand was once asked when a woman ceased to love, and she answered, Never. But if I were asked now, when a man ceases to love, I should answer, for my own part, I no longer love, I only admire and worship. You will, I am sure, have realised, little friend, that it is you I worship, your talents, your beauty, your goodness of heart and brilliant spirit. What can I offer you? A faithful protector, a good home, in peace and harmony.
>
> "Think this over now, think well and wisely, and keep what I have said a secret between ourselves. Whatever you may do, whichever way your life may turn, your happiness will be my greatest wish.—Affectionately yours,
>
> "C. Endresen, Sen."

This time she did not laugh, but took a match and burned the letter in the stove.

"This must be the end," she murmured to herself. "I won't stay here any longer with all these ridiculous men." She thought and pondered for several days until the Admiral came in one day and said he was going away for a week or so on business. In a moment her plan was made. She said nothing to him of what was in her mind; he would never have understood, and it would have made no end of trouble all round.

But she would take Missa into her confidence. Missa had been a mother to her from the moment she realised she was living in this world; she would tell her all.

"Missa," she said, throwing her arms round her neck, "I can't stand this any longer." [Pg 305]

"There, there now; what is it, child?"

"I can't bear to live in this dreadful place. I must get away somehow."

"Oh dear, dear! it's just what I think. A dreadful place."

"Yes, there you are. And we'll go away, Missa, you and I, out into the beautiful wide world."

"But for Heaven's sake, what about your father?"

"Father mustn't know about it. We'll just go off by ourselves—run away, Missa dear."

"Run away! God bless me no, child! The Admiral...."

The Princess begged and prayed, using all her powers of persuasion and caresses, until Missa was gradually stripped of all arguments to the contrary, and finally rose to her feet.

"But, Baby dear, how shall we make our living?"

But at that the Princess jumped up and began dancing wildly around.

"Missa, I'll dance—dance for all the world; make them wild with delight, till they throw themselves at my feet. Missa, don't you understand, can't you imagine ... oh, Missa, if you only knew.... But you shall see, you shall see for yourself...."

She sank down on the sofa, sobbing violently.

Next day the Princess went down to the office.

Doffen was now completely himself again after the Admiral's very effective "refusal."

He beamed like the sun when the Princess came in, made her a deep bow and said: "At your service, Miss—at your service, he, he!"

"Ah, so you're still alive, Eriksen?"

"Alive! The sight of you would have wakened me from the dead!" [Pg 306]

"Eriksen, will you do me a favour?"

"Will I? Anything, Miss, anything a man can do."

"I want a thousand pounds."

Eriksen slid down from his stool.

"*A thousand—pounds!* Heaven preserve us! A thousand! I haven't more than seven-and-six on me.

"But father has."

"The Admiral! Yes, of course, he has; and more. But that's not mine. Da—" he checked himself, recollecting it was not the Admiral to whom he was speaking—"dear me, you wouldn't have me steal his money?"

"Oh, all you need do is to let me have the key."

"No, no, my dear young lady, no. It would never do.

"But it's only drawing a little in advance—on my inheritance, Eriksen, you know. That's all it is."

He stood reflecting quite a while.

"But—what on earth do you want all that money for?"

She took his hand, and he trembled with emotion.

"Eriksen, you're my friend, aren't you?"

"Heaven knows I am, Miss."

"Well, I'm going out into the wide world—to dance."

"But, heavens alive—that makes it worse than ever! The Admiral, he surely isn't going off dancing as well?"

"No; Missa's coming with me. We leave to-morrow, for Paris, Eriksen—London—New York—oh, ever so far!"

"But—but then, I shall never see you again." [Pg 307]

"Indeed you shall, Eriksen; I'll send you tickets, a whole box all to yourself, for my performance in Paris. Just fancy, a box at the theatre all to yourself. And you must pay me a thousand pounds for it now."

"But the Admiral—the Admiral! I might just as well give myself up and go to jail."

"Don't talk nonsense, Eriksen! Are you my friend or are you not?"

The Princess got her thousand. And Eriksen duly entered in his cash book:

"By cash advanced to Miss Baby on account, as per receipt number 325, £1000."

And the Princess on her part solemnly signed for the money:

> "Received cash in advance on account of expected inheritance, £1000—one thousand pounds."

Doffen spent the evening helping Missa and the Princess with their packing.

She promised to write and let him know how she got on, and gave him a photo of herself at parting, with the inscription: "To my true friend Doffen, from Baby."

Doffen kept it near his heart.

Missa gave him her photo too, but that he quietly put away in a back pocket.

Next morning he went down to the quay to see them off. The Princess stood at the stern of the ship, and waved to him. He was proud to think that he was the only one she waved to, he was the one to receive her farewell smile. And so the Princess set out into the wide world. [Pg 308]

When the Admiral returned he found the following letter awaiting him:

> "Dear Father,—Missa and I have decided to go for a little trip to Paris, possibly also London, New York, San Francisco, etc. We couldn't stand it any longer, living in that old town of yours.
>
> "I have drawn £1000 from Eriksen; I hope you won't mind. I don't think we could really manage with less.
>
> "And, please, don't be nastier than usual to Eriksen about it. I made him do it.
>
> "So long, then, for the present, and take care of yourself. You shall hear from us when we get there.—Your own
>
> "Baby."

The Admiral grunted, got up and walked twice up and down the room; then, muttering to himself, "All right," he put the letter in the stove.

When the Admiral came down to the office, Doffen was inclined to be somewhat shaky about the knees. He pulled himself together, however, and, bearing in mind the example of Napoleon, took the offensive at once.

"Your daughter's gone away, Admiral!"

"Oh, go to——"

"Thanks. I don't think I will. I'm very comfortable where I am."

"You're a fool."

"There's bigger fools about."

"Why didn't you give her two thousand?" [Pg 309]

"She'd have had five thousand."

"You've no idea what it costs to go travelling about. A miserable stay-at-home like you."

At this Doffen grew angry in earnest, and slammed down the lid of his desk, making the ink-stands fairly dance.

"Well, of all the.... First of all I do my very utmost to save you from being ruined by your illegitimate offspring, then I manage to get her away in a decent, respectable manner—you ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourself, if you ask me."

The Admiral looked round as if in search of something.

"What the devil have you done with that Directory?" he said at last.

"Oho! Perhaps you'd like to be had up for another attempted manslaughter, what?"

"Not a bit of it. But there's a reward for extermination of rats and other mischievous beasts."

Here the discussion was interrupted by the entrance of Ferryman Arne, who just looked in to ask if the Admiral hadn't an old pair of breeches to give away, as the seat was all out of the ones he was wearing. The Admiral never refused. He went to a wardrobe, routed out an old pair and gave them to Arne. The latter examined them carefully, front and back, but instead of saying thank you, he rudely declared that if the Admiral wanted to give a poor man something to wear, he might at least give him something that wasn't falling to bits already.

This led to a most satisfactory battle-royal between Arne and the Admiral, each trying to outdo the other in lurid pigeon-English—a tongue which both of them spoke fluently, Arne having been twelve years in the China Seas. [Pg 310]

And in the end the Admiral presented Arne with two brand-new pairs of trousers and a pound in

cash.

The years passed by. Doffen stayed on in the office, and became indispensable as time went on. He and the Admiral made a pair. And whenever the conversation languished towards the milk-and-watery, Ferryman Arne would come and lend a hand.

The Princess roamed far and wide about the world. She sent home newspapers, wherein they read that she was performing at this or that great city, with thousands of admirers at her tiny feet.

The Admiral read it all without the slightest token of surprise, his only comment being: "All right, that's her business." But when one day he received a card bearing the inscription, "Countess Montfalca," surmounted by a coronet, he spat, and remarked to Doffen:

"Well, after all, there's nothing surprising in that, seeing her mother was a queen."

XXI
DIRRIK

[Pg 311]

The first time I met him was in 1867, on board the schooner *Jenny* of Svelvik. The skipper was an uncle of mine, and had taken me along as odd boy for a summer cruise. And Ole Didriksen, or Dirrik, as we called him, was first hand on board.

We had taken in a cargo of pit props at Drammen, and came down the fjord with a light northerly breeze. A little way out the wind dropped altogether and the *Jenny* lay drifting idly under a blazing sun.

Dirrik sounded the well, and declared that "the old swine was leaking like a sieve."—"Nonsense!" said the skipper. "Why, it's not more than three years since her last overhaul."—"Maybe," said Dirrik, "but she's powerful old."—"Old she may be—built in '32—and I won't say but she's a trifle groggy about the ribs; still, she's good for this bit of a run. And summer weather and all."

Dirrik tried again. "Twenty-two inches," he said, and looked inquiringly at the skipper. "Well, then, you two men get the boat and go ashore for a few sacks of caulking. There's plenty of ant-heaps up in the wood there."

[Pg 312]

I was ready to burst with pride at finding myself thus bracketed with Dirrik as a "man." I felt myself a sailor already, and would not have bartered the title for that of a Consul-General or Secretary of State.

But the ant-heaps puzzled me. I could see no connection between ant-heaps in a wood on shore and the caulking of a leaky schooner. However, the first duty of man at sea is to obey the orders of the supreme power on board, *i.e.* the skipper; I curbed my curiosity, then, for the time, and waited till we were a few lengths away from the ship.

"Ant-heaps?" said Dirrik. "Why, 'tis the only way to do with a leaky old tub like that. We dig 'em up, d'ye see, pine needles and all, and drag a caseful round her sides and down towards her keel, and she sucks it all up in her seams, ants and needles and bits of twigs, and the whole boiling, and that's the finest caulking you can get!"

"Queer sort of caulking," I said.

"There's queerer things than that, lad, when a vessel gets that old. It's the same like with human beings. Some of them keeps sound and fit, and others go rotten and mouldy and drink like hogs—but they often live the longest for all that!"

"Do you think we'll ever get her across to England, Dirrik?"

"Get her across? Why, what are you thinking of? She's never had so much as a copper nail put in these last thirty years, but she'll sail for all that. Run all heeled over on one side, she will, and squirming and screeching like a sea-serpent."

"She looks a bit cranky, anyway," I ventured.

"Warped and gaping. But still she'll do the trip for all that."

[Pg 313]

We reached the shore, and Dirrik ordered me up into the wood to fill the sacks, while he just ran up to old Iversen, the pilot, for a moment.

I managed, not without some difficulty, to get the boat loaded up, but it was a full half-hour before Dirrik appeared.

At last he came strolling down, in company with a pretty, buxom girl. "This is my young lady, an' her name's Margine," said Dirrik, and pointing to me: "Our new hand on board."—"Well, see you

make a nice trip," said Margine, "and come back again soon."

We caulked the *Jenny* as per instructions, and got her taut as a bottle. "Ants, they trundles off sharp, all they know, into the holes for safety," Dirrik explained, "and take along the pine needles with 'em."

A fresh northerly wind took us well out into the North Sea; then, a few days later, we lay becalmed on the Dogger. An English fishing vessel sent a boat aboard of us, trading fresh cod for a couple of bottles of gin. Looking through the skylight I saw the old man quietly making up the two bottles from one, by the simple process of adding water to fill up. Rank swindling it seemed to me, but he explained afterwards that it was "our way of keeping down drunkenness, my boy."

Eight days out from Drammen we put in to Seaham Harbour. Half our cargo under deck was sodden through, for we'd three feet of water in the hold all the voyage, despite the patent caulking.

"Get it worse going home," said Dirrik. "We're taking small coal to Drobak."

A few hours later we were getting in our cargo, and soon the *Jenny* was loaded almost to the waterline with smalls. We were just about to batten down the hatches, when the skipper came along and told us to wait, there was some Government stuff still to come. [Pg 314]

Down the quay trundled a heavy railway waggon with two pieces of cannon, and before we had properly time to wonder at the sight, the crane had taken hold, the guns swung high in the air above the quay, and—one, two, three—down they came into the main hatchway all among the coals.

The schooner gave a sort of gasp as the crane let go, and I thought for a moment we had broken her back. She went several inches lower in the water, till the chain bolts were awash, and the scuppers clear by no more than a hair's breadth.

"This looks dangerous," I said to the skipper cautiously, as he stood by the side.

"Why, what are you afraid of?"

"My life," was all I found to answer.

"And a lot to be afraid of in that!" said he, spitting several yards out into the dock. "The guns are for the fort at Oskarsborg, and it isn't every voyage I can make fifteen pounds over a couple of fellows like that."

We set off on our homeward voyage. Fortunately, our protecting ants still kept to their places in the leaks, or there would have been an end of us, and the guns as well. The skipper was ill, and stuck to his berth the whole way home. The night before we left Seaham Harbour he had been to a crab-supper ashore at the ship-chandler's, and what with stewed crabs and ginger beer, the feast had "upset all his innards," as he put it.

We got into trouble rounding the Ness. Dirrik was at the helm, and hailed the skipper to ask if we hadn't better shorten sail.

"Nonsense!" said the old man. "It's summer weather—keep all standing till she's clear." The [Pg 315] rigging sang, and the water was flung in showers over the deck.

Dirrik ran her up into the wind as well as he could, but was afraid of going about. Then: Crack! from aloft, and crack! went the jibboom, and the flying jib was off and away to leeward like a bat. The skipper thrust up his head to take in the situation.

"Got her clear?" he asked. "Ay," says Dirrik calmly, "clear enough, and all we've got to do now is pull in the rags that's left, and paddle home as best we can."

We were not a pretty sight when we made Drobak, but the guns were landed safely, and that was the main thing.

After that, I saw no more of Dirrik till I met him at the Seaman's School in Piperviken in 1872.

There were three of us chums there: Rudolf, a great big giant of eighteen, with fair curly hair and smiling blue eyes. A good fellow was Rudolf, but uncommonly powerful and always ready to get to hand grips with anyone if they contradicted him.

Dirrik was fifteen years our senior at least. He had been twenty years at sea already, and reckoned the pair of us as "boys."

Dirrik had never got beyond the rank of "first-hand" on board; it was always this miserable exam that stood in his way. It was his highest ambition to pass for mate, and then perhaps some day, with luck, get a skipper's berth on some antiquated hulk along the coast. But Dirrik was unfortunate. It counted for nothing here that he had been several times round the Horn, and [Pg 316] received a silver knife from the Dutch Government for going overboard in a gale, with a line round his waist, to rescue three Dutchmen whose boat was capsizing on the Dogger.

It was as much as he could do to write. I can still see his rugged fingers, misshapen after years of

rough work at sea, gripping the penholder convulsively, as if it had been a marlin-spike, and screwing his mouth up, now to one side, now to the other, as he painfully scrawled some entry in the "log."

"No need to look as if you were going to have a tooth out," said Rudolf.

"I'd rather be lying out on Jan Mayen, shooting seal in forty degrees of frost," said Dirrik, wiping his brow.

"Devil take me, but I've half a mind to ship for the Arctic myself next spring," said Rudolf.

"Got to get through with this first," I said.

"Ay, that's true," said Dirrik. "I've been up four times now, and if I don't pass this time, my girl won't wait any longer."

"Girl?" said Rudolf, with sudden interest.

"Margine Iversen's her name. We've been promised now eleven years, and we *must* get married this spring."

"Must, eh?" said I.

"He's been drawing in advance, what!" said Rudolf, nudging me in the ribs.

"No more of that, lads," said Dirrik. "Womenfolk, they've their own art of navigation, and I know more about it than you've any call to do at your age."

Just then Captain Wille, the principal of the school, came up.

"Well, boys, how goes it?" [Pg 317]

"Nicely, thank ye, Captain," answered Dirrik. "But this 'ere blamed azimuth's a hard nut to crack." Dirrik wiped the sweat from his brow with a blue-checked handkerchief, and blew his nose with startling violence. "You won't need a foghorn next time you get on board," said Wille slyly.

"I say, though, Captain," said Rudolf, "we must get old Dirrik through somehow. If he doesn't pass this time, he'll be all adrift."

"Oho!" said the Captain, smiling all over his kindly face. "And how's that?"

"Why, he's got to get married this spring, whether he wants to or no."

"But he doesn't need that certificate to get married."

"Ay, but I do, though, Captain," said Dirrik earnestly. "For look you, navigation's badly needed in these waters, and I'll sure come to grief without."

"Why, then, we must do what we can to get you through," said Wille. And, seating himself beside Dirrik, he began to explain the mysteries of sine, cosine and tangent.

Dirrik sat with all his mental nerves strained taut as the topmast shrouds in a storm. But the more he listened to Wille's explanations the more incomprehensible he seemed to find the noble art and science of navigation.

Presently Lt. Knap, the second master, came up, and relieved Captain Wille at his task. Knap was quite young in those days, an excitable fellow with a sharp nose that gave him an air of self-importance. But a splendid teacher, that he was. I can still hear his voice, after vain attempts to ram something into Dirrik's thick head: "But, damnation take it, man, I don't believe you understand a word!" [Pg 318]

No, Dirrik didn't understand a word, or, at any rate, very little. One thing he did know, however, and that was, if a man can take his meridian and mark out his course on the chart, he can find his way anywhere on the high seas.

"All this rigmarole about azimuths and amplitudes and zeniths and moons and influence and tides, it's just invented to plague the life out of honest, seafaring folk." This heartfelt plaint of Dirrik's was received with loud applause by the rest of the school. Knap himself was as delighted as the rest, and sang out over our heads: "Well, you can be sure I'd be only too glad to leave out half of it, for it is all a man can do to knock the rest of it into your heads."

Skipper Sartz, the third master, was a very old and very slow, but a thorough-going old salt, who would rather spin us a yarn at any time than bother about navigation. We learned very little of that from him, and he was generally regarded more as a comrade than as a master. Rudolf supplied him with tobacco, free of charge, to smoke in lesson-time, so there was no very strict discipline during those hours. It was a trick of Rudolf's, I remember, when Sartz was going through lessons with him, to get hold of a ruler in his left hand and draw it gently up and down the tutor's back. Sartz would think it was me, and swing round suddenly to let off a volley, ending up as a rule with a recommendation to us generally to "give over these etcetera etcetera tricks, and try and behave as young gentlemen should."

At last the great day came when Dirrik was to go up for his exam. K. G. Smith—he's an admiral now—was the examiner. All of us, teachers included, were fond of Dirrik, and would have been [Pg 319]

sorry to see him fail again.

"Well, if I do get through this time," said Dirrik, smiling all over his cheery face, "I'll stand treat all round so the mess won't forget it for a week."

And really I think he would rather have faced a four week's gale of the winter-north-Atlantic type, or undertaken to assassinate the Emperor of China, than march up to that examination table.

When the time came for the viva voce, Rudolf and I could stand it no longer, we had to go in and listen.

Never before or since have I seen such depths of despair on any human face. Poor Dirrik mopped his brow, and blew his nose, and we sat there, with serious faces, feeling as if we were watching some dear departed about to be lowered into the grave. I can safely say I have never experienced a more solemn or trying ceremony, not even when I, myself, was launched into the state of holy matrimony before the altar.

The examiner sat bending over his work, entering something or other—of particular importance, to judge by the gravity of his looks.

We heard only the scratching of his pen on the paper.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a curious hissing sound:

"Fssst—fssst!" and then, a moment later, from the direction of the stove: "Sssss!"

It was Rudolf, who had squirted out a jet of tobacco juice between his teeth over on to the stove in the corner. Both the censors looked up, and the examiner laid down his pen, flashing a fiery glance at Rudolf from under his bushy brows.

"Pig!" said I, loud enough for the examiner to hear, and was rewarded with a nod of approval. [Pg 320]

This saved the situation, for if the old man had lost his temper, it would have been all up with Dirrik's exam.

Rudolf sat staring before him, entirely unconcerned.

At last they began. I can still see the examiner's close-cropped hair and bushy eyebrows.

"Well, sir, can you tell me why a compass needle invariably points towards the north?"

Dirrik had not understood a syllable, but felt he ought in common decency to make pretence of thinking it out for a bit, then he said:

"Beg pardon, Captain, but would you mind reading out the question once again?"

A faint, almost imperceptible smile passed over the Captain's face. The two old skippers, Olsen and Wleugel, sat solemn as owls. Dirrik looked at the examiner, then at the censor, and finally his glance rested on us, with an expression of helpless resignation. Rudolf nodded, and whispered "Cheer up," but Dirrik neither saw nor heard.

"Compass," he murmured—"Compass needle—points—points...."

"Well," said the examiner, "*why* does it always point to the north?"

And suddenly Dirrik's face lit up with a flash of blessed inspiration:

"Why," he said cheerfully, "I suppose it's *just a habit it's got*."

This time the examiner could not help laughing, and the censors themselves seemed to thaw a little.

"H'm," said the examiner. "Yes ... well, and suppose your compass needle happened to forget that [Pg 321] little habit it's got, as may happen, for instance, when a vessel's loaded with iron—what would you do?" Evidently he was in a good humour now.

"Sail by the sun and the watch," answered Dirrik promptly. He was wide awake now, and drew out as he spoke a big silver watch with a double case.

"I've sailed by this fellow here from the Newfoundland Bank to Barrow in twelve days—it was with the barque *Himalaya*, of Holmestrand."

"When was that?" asked the examiner.

"Seven years ago come Christmas it was."

Dirrik felt himself now master of the situation, and ran on gaily, as one thoroughly at ease.

"It was blinding snow on the Banks that time. The skipper was down with inflammation of the lungs, and lay in his bunk delirious; we'd shipped some heavy seas, and got four stanchions broken, and the mate with four of his ribs bashed in, so he couldn't move. And as for the crew, the less said about them the better. We'd three niggers aboard and an Irishman, and a couple of drunken gentlemen that'd never been to sea before.

"Well, I had to sail and navigate and all. It was a gale that went on day after day, till you'd think the devil himself was hard at it with a bellows. But, luckily, I'd this old watch of mine, and she's

better than any of your chronometers, for it's a sixteen-ruby watch——"

"Sixteen ruby—what's that?" asked the examiner with interest.

Dirrik was proud as a peacock at the question; fancy the examiner having to ask *him*!

"Why, it's this way. If you look inside an ordinary watch, you'll find it's either five rubies or ten, but it's very rarely you come across one with sixteen, and the more rubies you've got in a watch, [Pg 322] the better she goes. Well, anyway, when the watch came round to noon midday, I'd take the run and check off our course, and that way I got to windward of her deviations and magnetic variations and all the tricks there are to a compass mostly. Then, of course, I'd to look to the log, and mark off each day's run on the chart."

"Not so bad, not so bad," said the examiner, nodding to the skippers.

"No, we did none so badly, and that's the truth. For we got into Barrow at high water twelve days' sail from the Banks. The Insurance Company wanted to give me a gold watch, but I said, 'No, thank you, if t'was all the same, I'd rather have it in cash,' so they sent me what they call a testimonial, and £15. And that was doing the handsome thing, for it was no more than my duty after all. As for the crowd of rapscallions we'd aboard, I gave them a pound a-piece for themselves—the poor devils had done what they could, though it was little enough."

"Have you ever taken the sun's altitude with a sextant?"

"Surely," said Dirrik. "Meridian and latitude and all the rest of it."

"Well ..." the examiner turned to the censors. "I think that ought to be enough...?" And the pair of them nodded approval.

"Right! That will do." Dirrik was dismissed with a gesture, and, making his bow to each in turn, he hurried out as fast as he could.

Next day one of the censors, Skipper Wleugel, came down to the school and informed us that Dirrik had passed, albeit with lowest possible marks.

Followed cheers for Dirrik, and cheers for the examiner, and cheers for Knap—the last-named [Pg 323] happening to come out just at that moment, to see what all the noise was about. That evening Dirrik invited Rudolf and myself to the feast he had promised—great slabs of steak and heaps of onions, with beer and snaps *ad lib.*, and toddy and black cigars to top off with.

And going home that night we knocked the stuffing out of five young students from the Academy, on the grounds that they lacked the higher education Dirrik now possessed. Altogether, it was a most successful evening.

Dirrik went back home after that and married his Margine. Three months later he was the father of a bouncing boy, who was christened Sinus Knap Didriksen, in pious memory of his father's studies in the art of navigation and his teacher in the same.

PRINTED BY
MORRISON AND GIBB LTD.
EDINBURGH

The human interest of the book is great and the evidence of the power of well-directed emotion is remarkable.

THE GARLAND

By SIGRID UNDSET

Crown 8vo *Cloth* 7s. 6d. net

A masterly historical novel of fourteenth-century Norway.

Kristin, the heroine, is the daughter of a lord of the manor in Gudbrandsdal, she is singled out as a child for a dangerous and romantic destiny. The story of her early betrothal and of the wild love romance that breaks it is told in "The Garland" in scenes of intense dramatic effect, and the characters of the heroine, her lovers, and her parents are developed with extraordinary power. The mediæval setting is marked by a picturesque realism, and the atmosphere of the time, with its strong passions and superstitious terrors, is reproduced in a most convincing way.

THE LONG JOURNEY
FIRE AND ICE

By JOHANNES V. JENSEN
Translated by A. G. CHATER

Crown 8vo *Cloth* 7s. 6d. net

Johannes V. Jensen, whose work is new to English readers, was born in 1873 in Himmerland, the district of North Jutland which is richest in memories of the past. He has been recognised for the last thirty years as an independent force in Danish literature, where his production marks a revolt against the French influences prevalent at the close of the nineteenth century and a return to old Scandinavian motives, with a strong leaning towards the English school of imaginative writing. His work is full of a primitive force, which is combined with a power of lyrical description probably unsurpassed at the present day.

In "The Long Journey" Johannes V. Jensen tells the story of the white man, in a series of romances or "myths," of which the first are now presented in English.

"Fire and Ice" is a story of adventure—the greatest adventure in the history of mankind—telling with vivid realism and much underlying humour how the white man became white and acquired the powers of self-reliance which made him master of the world.

The story opens in the lost Paradise, where man steals fire from Heaven. Armed with it he challenges Nature and goes through the Ice Age, which sets the boundary between the white man and the savage. When the thaw comes there are two races on earth, and their first encounter brings the clash of drama.

DOWNSTREAM

By SIGFRID SIWERTZ
Translated by E. CLASSEN

Crown 8vo *Cloth* 7s. 6d. net

This is the story of a family of brothers and sisters, the Selambs, neglected in childhood and left to grow up under chance influences. "Selambshof," the decayed family home, is in the neighbourhood of Stockholm, and the growth of the capital gives it an enhanced value which is not without its influence on the destinies of the family. The author has traced the adventures and development of these highly individualised Selambs in a way that makes this one of the most absorbing novels produced in recent years.

Sigfrid Siwertz has rapidly come to the front among Swedish novelists, and this, his most important work to date, has firmly established him in the first rank.

Transcriber's corrections

p. 74: what the critics say. If[It] it's good, why, I give in; if
p. 90: like that; no, we must get our[out] old friend Bianca to
p. 122: better. Now, where's your[you] bill?"
p. 136: "Mrs. Emilie Rantzau and daughter[daugher]: Knut G. Holm
p. 156: on at the dance. Thor Smith nudged his friend surreptitiously[surreptitously]
p. 191: From early morning the committee was[were] abroad,
p. 199: Lacked neither meat nor[not] mirth,
p. 260: this respect, counting as yet[get] not a single steamer. It

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DRY FISH AND WET: TALES FROM A NORWEGIAN SEAPORT ***

this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™

collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.