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Bernhard Severin Ingemann**

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KING ERIC

AND

THE OUTLAWS.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
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KING ERIC

AND

THE OUTLAWS;

OR,

THE THRONE, THE CHURCH, AND THE PEOPLE,

IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY.

BY

INGEMANN

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH BY

JANE FRANCES CHAPMAN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, & LONGMANS,

PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1843.

CHAPTER I.

When the king reached Kallundborg castle, and beheld the drawbridge raised, and the well fortified castle in a complete state of defence, a flush of anger crossed his cheek, his hand involuntarily clenched the hilt of his sword, and for an instant he was near forgetting his promise, and drawing it out of the scabbard. Count Henrik reined in his war horse impatiently before the outermost fortification, awaiting an answer to the message he had shouted, in the king's name, to the nearest warder. "Matchless presumption!" exclaimed the king; "know they I am here myself? and do they still tarry with an answer, when they have but to be silent and to obey?"

"They take their time, my liege!" answered Count Henrik. "It is unparalleled impudence.--If you command, the trumpet shall be instantly sounded for storm; the sword burns in my hand."

"Not yet!" answered the king, and took his hand from the hilt of his sword.

At this moment a trumpet sounded from the outer rampart, and a tall warrior in armour, with closed visor, stepped forth on the battlement.

"The castle opens not to any armed man!" he shouted in a rough tone, which however appeared assumed and tremulous; "it will be defended to the last, against every attack; this is our noble junker's strict order and behest."

"Madman!" exclaimed Eric; and Count Henrik seemed about to give an impetuous reply.

"Not a word more!" continued the king, with a stern nod.--"We stoop not to further parley with rebels and traitors.--You will beleaguer the castle on all sides, and get all in readiness for a storm; until twenty-four hours are over, no spear must be thrown--if the rebels dare to enact their impudent threats against the town, we shall have to think but of saving it and quenching the flames. If aught chances here, I must know it instantly; you will not fail to find me at the Franciscan monastery." So saying, the king turned his horse's head, and rode with a great part of his train into the large monastery, close to the castle. Here stood the guardian and all the fraternity with their shaven heads uncovered, in two rows before the stone steps in the yard of the monastery. The aged guardian, in common with the rest of his fraternity, wore an ashen grey cloak with a cowl at the back, and a thick cord round the waist. Despite the winter cold, they were all without shoes and stockings, with wooden sandals under their bare feet. They received the king with manifest signs of alarm and uneasiness.

"Be easy, ye pious men," said the king, in a mild voice, as he sprang from his horse, and acknowledged their greeting and the guardian's pious address in a friendly manner; "I come to you as your friend and protector. If it please God and our Lady, no evil shall happen to your monastery or our good and loyal town. It is not your fault that our brother the junker hath appointed a madman to be his commandant; for we trust in the Lord and the mighty Saint Christopher, that our dear brother hath not himself lost his wits. I will await him here, until he can receive the news of my coming, and give explanation in person of this matter. If there is danger astir, I will share it with you; at present I wish but to see whether your guest-house and refectory can stand this unexpected visitation; meanwhile it shall be recompensed beforehand to the monastery."

"Noble sovereign," answered the guardian, "destroy not by any worldly compensation the pleasure which you now bestow on us, in our fear and trembling: poverty is, as you know, the first rule of our holy order. If you will vouchsafe to share the indigence of the penitent, gracious king, doubt not then our willingness to give, and share without recompence; and tempt us not to accept what the holy Franciscus himself hath strictly forbid us to touch."

"Well, the rule is surely not so strictly kept here," said the king, with a good-natured smile, as he entered into the large guest-house of the monastery, and saw the door standing open to the refectory, where a table, with fasting fare, was spread for the monks, but a larger, with flasks of wine and dishes of substantial meat, was prepared for the entertainment of the distinguished worldly guests. "Here, however, we shall not come to suffer want," continued the king; "here we find not frugal fare alone, but God's gifts, almost to superfluity."

"What we are able to offer your grace hath been sent hither by the burghers.--Where the Lord's anointed enters he brings a blessing with him,"--answered the guardian, making a genuflection with his hands crossed over his breast.

"Blessing?" replied the king, a dark cloud suddenly passing over his brow.--"Hum! even though he be given over to the Devil and the destruction of the fleshy venerable father?" he asked with bitterness, and in a low voice, as he drew the guardian aside and gazed at him, with a sharp,

searching look.

The aged monk turned pale at these words of the king, and involuntarily crossed himself, as he heaved a deep sigh. "The holy church proclaims to us absolution even for deadly sins, and justification through grace and conversion," said he, folding his lean hands. "Its curse falls only in reality on the head of the profligate and ungodly."

"But when the archbishop, the prince of the Danish church, out of revenge and hate, hath proclaimed thy sovereign to be such an one?"

"Were you such *in truth*, my liege and sovereign, alas! I must then echo the dreadful sentence within my heart, though it should break in doing so, and were your wrath even to crush me," answered the old man, with deep solemnity, again pressing his folded hands upon his breast; "but the Lord preserve my soul from taking part in the counsels of the revengeful and the judgments of the unrighteous! The church's might and authority are certainly great, noble king," he continued, "but vengeance and judgment are the Lord's, even as grace for the penitent belongeth unto him; power is given us to build up, but not to pull down; we can do nothing against the truth, but all for the truth. If even a bishop himself should err in our true believing church, and abuse the church's authority against God's word, no priest or Christian hath leave to consent unto him, saith the holy Augustine."

"Right, pious father! that is also my creed and my comfort, and what the learned Master Peter also hath told me. You have then no fear that I bring with me a curse or evil spirits over this threshold?"

"No assuredly!" answered the guardian solemnly, with uplifted hand and look,--"I know my noble liege is not profane and ungodly, a despiser of penitence and pious works, or one whom in the power of the word it is permitted to give over to the destruction of the flesh, for the soul's eternal salvation. I know, therefore, that the Prince of Darkness can have no power over your dear-bought soul; and that no sinful curse can destroy the peace of God in your heart, or wipe off the holy ointment from your crowned head."

A mild emotion was visible in the king's countenance at these words of the guardian. "Give me your blessing, pious father!" he said, in a subdued tone; "you have spoken words which penetrate my inmost soul."

"The reconciled and all-merciful God preserve your life and crown, and above all the precious peace of your soul!" prayed the guardian, and laid his shrivelled hand on the head of the king, who bent to receive the blessing, "in so far as you are *yourself* placable and merciful," he added with emphasis, and a piercing gaze.

"Hum, placable?" repeated the king, hastily, raising his head; "even towards rebels and traitors?"

"They assuredly need mercy most," answered the guardian. "Be not wroth, my liege," he continued, gently and impressively; "there is a holy word, which at this moment strangely trembles on my lips: 'If thy brother sin against thee,' it is written, 'then chastise him; but if he repents, then forgive him!'"

"But when he does *not* repent?" asked the king, gazing on the guardian with an excited look.

"Then pray for him till he does, that thy mother's son may not be a castaway; and for the sake of thine own peace!" whispered the ecclesiastic.--"A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and quarrels are as bars before a palace."

"But strong cities may fall, and the palaces of rebels may be forced," exclaimed the king, suddenly assuming a stern tone, and the mild emotion expressed in his countenance became clouded. "The wise king Solomon hath also taught me to count more on a faithful friend than a false brother. Did not a prophet once say to his people, in a traitorous and corrupted time like ours--'Put not your trust in any brother, for every brother will certainly deceive?' I could wish that holy man were wrong. But enough of this," said Eric, hastily breaking off the solemn converse. "Let us now think a little of worldly things, and not despise the care of the body. We have ridden a long way today, to be shut out of our own castle here." So saying, the king went with hasty strides into the refectory; the guardian followed him with a sorrowful aspect, and the rejoicing of the brethren, over the king's piety and mildness, seemed somewhat diminished.

Kallundborg castle was now regularly beleaguered, and the warlike and experienced Count Henrik of Mecklenborg neglected none of the necessary preparations for a storm, as far as he was able with so small a force, and without engines for storming. Meanwhile, ere the sun went down, he saw his force augmented, as Drost Aagé with his hundred horsemen galloped into the town, and joined him without the castle walls. As soon as the Drost had provided for the wants of his troops, and had consulted with Count Henrik, he repaired to the monastery of grey friars, where he was instantly admitted to the king in the library.

Here sat Eric in a thoughtful mood, in the guardian's great arm-chair, before an oaken table, on which lay a large annotated Bible as well as the writings of St. Augustine and other fathers of the church, open before him. He held a manuscript of Master Petrus de Dacia's in his hand, in

which he was diligently making marks and dashes with his pen, and seemed employed in comparing it with the passages at which the writings of the fathers were opened. By the side of these spiritual writings, however, lay also three worldly books in handsome red velvet binding, which the king had brought with him. It was the famous chivalrous poem *Ivain and Tristan*, in Hartman von Awe's and Gottfried von Strasborg's version, as well as the adventurous history of Florez and Blanzefflor, which was the favourite poem of all enamoured knights and ladies.

When Drost Aagé crossed the threshold, the king pushed aside the table and hastily started up. "Aagé, my dear Aagé! do I see thee again, at last!" he joyfully exclaimed, and went forward to meet him with open arms, but stopped in dismay, as he looked more narrowly at the young Drost. "Is it thyself?" he continued; "how thou art changed! Truly thou hast been in murderous hands. Those accursed outlaws!" he said passionately, as he stamped on the floor; "why have I not rooted them out of the earth?"

"Think no more of that, my noble liege," said Aagé. "I am now well again, and at your service."

"Come, rest thee; thou hast exerted thyself above thy strength. Master Peter hath then brought thee a letter and a message?"

"All is done as you commanded, my liege, though I fear it is a step----"

"Leave me to care for that, Aagé--met ye with opposition?"

"Holbeck castle is in your possession; it cost not a drop of blood, but caused great joy at the castle."

"Good; and the junker?"

"I saw him not; it is said, though, he was there, but escaped."

"A bad sign, Aagé! A loyal vassal would have staid, and have called thee strictly to give account of thy authority. He asked then, not even once, the ground of my wrath? He ventured not an indignant remonstrance touching injustice and violent measures?"

"He kept quite out of sight; he must have conceived suspicions."

"Hum! no prince flies thus from his castle, when he knows himself to be innocent. How then can I doubt? The contumacy here, and his shameless expressions to Bruncké----"

"What hath already chanced may however still be but an unhappy misunderstanding, my liege," observed Aagé; "and the traitorous Bruncké none can trust."

"Well, let Christopher speak for himself, if he is able. By all the holy men, I would willingly give the half of my life could I say with truth, 'I have a brother.' Yet, the Lord and our holy Lady be thanked, I have still a faithful friend, and my beloved Ingeborg, and a loyal and loving people. What have I to complain of?" So saying, the king laid his arm confidingly on Aagé's shoulder, and a repressed tear glistened in his ardent blue eye. "Since we met last, my dear Aagé," he continued in a firm and calm tone, "I have become an excommunicated man like thee; but it no longer terrifies me. I have long thought--now I am convinced--that no one can condemn us save the Almighty and righteous God: but *he* will not condemn us; for, seest thou, he is merciful. He who believes in salvation and mercy, Aagé, will be saved, despite all the bishops and prelates in the world."

"Sin not, my noble liege!" exclaimed Aagé, with cautious sadness. "I have also found peace for my soul, and a defence against the evil spirits to whom I was given over; but it was not in defiance, it was in love and hope, my liege."

"Such a hope I have also, my Aagé; and love!--thou knowest but little what that is--thou that hast no Ingeborg! *My* love truly is as great as Sir Tristran's or the valiant Florez's. I shall not fear to break a lance for my Ingeborg with the pope himself and the whole priesthood--if it come to the worst."

"For Heaven's sake, my beloved liege, ponder----"

"I *have* pondered much, Aagé; and first on what was most important," exclaimed the king seriously, interrupting his anxious friend. "The matter of our salvation is too important to be decided by an authoritative word from the bishop or pope. Shall they presume to say to thee and me, 'Thou art accursed!--thou art given over to the Evil One?' No, truly! Where is it written that any human being hath such power? I always hoped--now I am assured--that the heavenly grace and mercy I believe in, alone can save me and all of us--come, I will prove it to thee; Master Petrus hath written it out for me; the church's holy fathers witness to it, and what is more, God's own unchangeable word. Yet it is too long to enter upon now; but, trust me, Aagé, no archbishop, not even the pope in Rome, can condemn us--if the church casts out believers, it is our church no longer, not the real and true one. Could the devil shut against us every stone-built church in the world, *one* church would still stand open to us, which no devil can shut; and lo! it is every where; where two believing souls are met together in the Lord's name.--See how wise I am grown, Aagé: it would be deemed heresy in Rome, and they would doom me to the stake did they know it; but I

am wise enough also to be silent about it. Thou only shalt know it, and my Ingeborg, and whoever holds my immortal soul as dear as thou dost."

Aagé was silent, and looked at him in surprise.

"I feel secure also about state and kingdom," continued the king. "With God's help I shall defy both ban and interdict, both rebels and outlaws, without any one injuring a hair of my head, or that of my people's."

"But a letter, craving pardon of the holy father, will certainly be necessary, my liege! In the matter of the archbishop, reconciliation and clemency must in a great measure supersede justice."

"No, Aagé; I ask but justice; I ask no mercy of man, and in this matter none need expect mercy from me--let the pope judge between me and Grand! the mystery of unrighteousness shall be brought to light as surely as there is justice under the sun. If I am myself wrong in any thing, which well may chance, it is time enough to think of penitence and penance when doom is pronounced."

"But the dispensation?" said Aagé.

"That *I* will *dispense* with in case of need; what hath been granted to a hundred others cannot be denied the King of Denmark.--Should it be denied, it is unjust; but an injustice to which *I will not* submit. Yet, seat thyself, Aagé; not a word more of these vexatious affairs,--my soul is weary of them. Come," he continued, gaily; "now thou shalt hear a love poem: my dear Ingeborg hath herself written it out for me. Duchess Euphemia hath sent it to her from Norway; it will soon be read, both in Norwegian and Swedish. Here thou shalt see what a chivalrous lover can go through, and how fortune and our Lord are ever with all true and constant lovers." The king now sat down before the table, and read, in an animated tone, out of the adventures of Florez and Blanzeflor, which, however, were already known to Aagé.

"Tristan I prefer, it is true," said the king; "and our own old love-songs seem far more beautiful to me; but this book I especially like to have in my hand. Think! she has copied every word with her own lovely fingers."

Meanwhile evening drew on. The vesper bell rang, and the king went with Aagé to the church of the monastery, where he joined in the devotions of the Franciscans and the people, which however were not as calm and undisturbed as usual.

As the night drew on the anxiety increased in the town with every hour. A general stillness prevailed; lights glimmered in all the houses; no one seemed any where to slumber. Around the beleaguered castle no sound was heard save the steps and clashing arms of the sentinels. Here and there a watch-fire gleamed in the cold winter's night, around which silent warriors, wrapped in ample mantles, were standing in groups; without the monastery Drost Aagé's horsemen were on guard. The Drost and Count Henrik rode up and down around the castle walls, where the faint clashing of weapons and the moving of heavy machines of defence were heard.

By Aagé's counsel sentinels were also posted on the public quay south-east of the castle, and on the ancient sea-tower at the north-western extremity of the town, where there was also a landing-place, together with a now deserted and decayed fortification: this spot he deemed especially important whenever it might be desirable to cut off all possible communication with the castle. At midnight Aagé himself stood in the clear still starlight beside the solitary tower, at Count Henrik's side, and looked out on the bay, while they considered from what quarter the castle wall might best be mounted. While thus employed, Aagé observed a little fishing-boat, which lay half hidden under the mouldering rampart of the sea-tower; and just as he was going to draw Count Henrik's attention to it he saw a head, with a shaggy cap and a large scar resembling a hare-lip between the nose and mouth, peer forth from behind a half-fallen pillar close beside him. The prying head, however, instantly withdrew behind the pillar, and Aagé thought he recognised the notorious robber and incendiary, the Lolland deserter, Olé Ark, who had often been pursued, and who it was believed had been concerned in the archbishop's flight. Without any long deliberation he nodded to Count Henrik, and drew his sword; but at the same instant the fellow sprang out of his hiding-place, and fled down towards the rampart to the boat.

"Stop him!" shouted Aagé to the farthest sentinel, who stood with his lance in his hand, and his back leaning against the rampart, gazing out on a distant vessel, without observing the fugitive.

Just as the Drost's voice reached the ear of the sentinel, and he was about to turn round, he felt the stab of a dagger in his back, and fell to the earth with a groan of anguish, while the deserter rushed past him with the weapon glittering in his hand, and sprang into the boat.

The fugitive had already placed his oars, and was preparing to push off from shore, but then first perceived that in his haste he had forgot to loosen the rope which moored the boat to the rampart. While he now, with desperate exertion, struck once or twice in vain with his dagger on the rope, Aagé and Count Henrik stood directly opposite him with their drawn swords. Count Henrik hastily grasped the half-severed rope, and drew the boat towards him. The dagger of the despairing fugitive was raised gleaming in the air, but fell with the hand of the robber into the

sea before a stroke of the Drost's sword, and, with a fearful howl, the wounded deserter fell back in the boat.

At Count Henrik's call several men-at-arms hastened to the spot from the guard at the sea-tower, and presently bore the captive thither, after having, by the Drost's order, wrapped a cloth round his mutilated arm, to prevent his bleeding to death. The wounded sentinel was also carried to the tower; and while a message was sent to fetch a surgeon, the captured robber's garments, and all that he had about him, were narrowly searched. Besides a letter of absolution, a rosary, and a number of costly church ornaments, which appeared to be stolen property, a quantity of pitch and sulphur and other combustible matter was found on his person; and a key and a private letter were discovered carefully secreted in the lining of his cap. For the present no confession could be expected from the criminal, who had fallen into a swoon. The Drost took possession of the key and the letter, and repaired, with Count Henrik, to the nearest watch-fire. Here he opened the letter, and read it in a low tone.

"To no one!"--thus ran the letter.--"Obey and be silent, or thou diest! Dare the utmost! Spare not the town! Hide or burn the papers, if needful! Keep the trapdoor in readiness! Let his victory prove his downfall! I answer for the consequences. The bearer may be employed for the whole.... Burn this private letter instantly. From no one."

Drost Aagé had jointly with the king and Prince Christopher learnt what was then the still rare art of writing, from a canon, under the superintendence of Drost Hessel, and to his dismay he thought he recognised the stiff hand of the prince through the disguised character of the writing. He hastily folded up the letter, and turned deadly pale.

"Now what runes^[1] read ye there, Sir Drost?" asked Count Henrik.--"You do not feel well, I think."

"This private letter was surely to have been brought the commandant," exclaimed Aagé, eagerly, and the blood again rushed into his cheek. "It is from no one, and to no one; yet I think I understand it."

"Let us see, Sir Drost--It is not surely any private love letter?--the fellow was a spy and traitor."

"If my noble liege's peace of mind be dear to you," answered Aagé anxiously, and seized his hand, "let this unhallowed secret be mine alone! yet this much will I confide to you: it seems to concern the king's unhappy domestic relations; but I entreat you to be silent, even about this conjecture of mine. There is no proof against any one, only a suspicion--an unhappy one--but the aim of the writer shall be defeated: the letter must be destroyed."--So saying, he thrust his hand into his bosom, and threw the letter into the fire.

"You are cautious, Drost," said Count Henrick, knitting his brow. "I ask not to be initiated into your dark state secrets--as Drost you must know best what should here be concealed or made public. I ask only, as a man-at-arms and beleaguer, if the letter, which you have here somewhat hastily destroyed, was to have been brought into the castle, must there not be a private entrance hereabouts? Could it be found, it were of moment to us: without storming engines, it will be a hard spring enough for us to get over the circular wall."

"You are right; there *must* be a secret entrance here," exclaimed Aagé suddenly, with sparkling eyes. "I have a conjecture,--a thought strikes me, there is a tradition of a secret entrance from the sea-tower. The captive must show it me. I will be myself the bearer of the letter,--not such as when it caught the flames, and as it is now before the eye of the Omniscient, but rewritten, as a reconciling spirit dictates to my soul."

"Good! I follow you with a troop."

"No, count! that is impossible. The king's pride is aroused; he despises stratagem; he will and must through the gate, or over the stormed walls, and both of us cannot here be spared. If the secret passage is found, it will assuredly be difficult enough for one, alone and unarmed, to pass through it."

"Then let the adventure alone, Drost; for one it is too daring."

"I will dare it nevertheless," said Aagé determinedly, after a moment's deliberation; "but no one shall follow me, and no one must know it--not even the king. If I am not here again to-morrow at noon, then let the king know that I am probably a prisoner at the castle, or am about something by which I may serve him, and all of you, better even than were I at the head of the stormers--I count on your leading the attack, as agreed on. If it succeeds, then promise me but one thing, brave Count! let not the king set his foot but where the ground hath been tried and found safe; and should you see my shoulder scarf wave on any spot, then conclude all is not right, and let not the king approach such a place."

"Ha! ha!" said Count Henrik, in a loud voice, and clapping Aagé on the shoulder, "that was the secret, then, you would keep to yourself? You might just as well have let me read the letter, my mysterious Sir Drost! We may expect pitfalls then, and such sort of foxes' tricks? Well, when one has a hint of such things they are of no importance. Ha! the high-born junker! he is a base traitor

truly, to seek after the life of his king and brother, and *such* a king and brother!"

"In the name of the Lord above, who says so. Sir Count?" exclaimed Aagé, in consternation and in a low tone: "you shout as loud as though you meant to awake heaven and earth with what none may hear. Let not those unhappy words ever pass your lips again. I tell you once more, it is but a conjecture, a fearful suspicion: it would rend the king's heart if it came to his ears--the mere report might call forth bloody scenes, and bring down the greatest misery on the country and the royal house."

"I approve your caution in this matter, noble Drost," said Count Henrik gravely, and in a subdued tone, as he looked around, with a sharp glance; "be easy, no one can here have heard us. There you have my hand: where one word may cause such great misfortune, it shall assuredly never pass my lips. But drive that rash adventure out of thy head; it may cost you your life,--and to what end?"

"The saving of a more precious life," said Aagé. "I must have certainty in this matter: if I am to guard the king's feet from secret snares, I must discover them first myself. God be with you! Farewell! He who hath been for two years excommunicated," he continued in a voice of emotion, "hath learnt to defy robbers and devils."

The watch-fire lit up his pale enthusiastic countenance, and a mild light seemed to beam from his dark blue eyes, as he raised them towards the starry heaven. "Follow me not!" he added. "I trust in the protection of Heaven, and the power of good spirits--then must earthly curses be dumb, and evil spirits fall into the bottomless pit."--So saying, he earnestly pressed Count Henrik's hand, and returned with hasty steps to the tower. Count Henrik shook his head, and gazed after him with a look of sympathy, but followed him not.

CHAP. II.

The ancient sea-tower was situated at some distance from the castle, in the most deserted quarter of the town, next the sea shore. It was a round watch-tower, built of freestone, with loopholes in the wall, and a sentry-walk above, between the rampart-like battlements. Below were two vaulted stone chambers, of which one was used as a guard-room in war time, and the other as a depository for the bodies of the drowned, until their burial. The tower was now chiefly used for hanging out lights at night, in stormy and bad weather, to guide sailors into the entrance of the bay.

In the guard-room Drost Aagé found the wounded sentinel at the point of death.

A monk, who had been sent for from the monastery, was engaged in administering to him the last sacrament. On a table lay a paper, on which the pious Franciscan had just written the last testament of the dying man. An oil lamp hung upon the dirty wall, and lit up the stone vault and the solemn scene of death. With a sympathizing look at the dying man-at-arms Aagé quitted the guard-room, almost unnoticed, and opened the door to what was called "the corpse chamber," from which, according to tradition, there had been, in Esbern Snare's time, a descent to a subterranean passage, and where Aagé conjectured he should discover the supposed secret entrance to the castle.

Into this murky chamber, which had the reputation of being haunted, the captive murderer had been brought. Through the aid of the surgeon he had been restored to consciousness, and had his wound dressed; but he talked and raved wildly. He had been bound to the bench appropriated to the bodies of the drowned, which served him as a couch, and all had deserted him with horror and aversion.

When Drost Aagé entered this chamber, the light of a yellow horn lantern, which hung from the roof, fell on the murderer's swollen blue visage with the hare-lip scar and ugly projecting teeth: he laughed horribly, and ground his teeth like a chained wild beast. "Comest thou hither, thou excommunicated hound!" he muttered, thrusting forth his tongue from his foaming jaws; "then thou art also dead and damned--that's some small comfort, though among devils--Now are the fishes gnawing at my fist, at the bottom of the sea, while I lie a corpse here in hell's antechamber--that was thy doing, thou pale ghost, with St. George's sword! I feared thou hadst come off free, for thy stupid piety's sake, and thy hound-like faithfulness."

"Why so?" asked Aagé, strangely affected by having half entered into the dark imaginings of the madman--"How couldst thou think an excommunicated man could 'scape damnation?"

"Seest thou, comrade?" whispered the bound robber, gazing wildly around him, "the same holy man who gave thee over to the Evil One, gave me a passport to heaven's kingdom. It lies there in

my jerkin; Satan's barber cut it off from me just now; and the letter was a lie,—like all virtue and piety in the world. If that holy man could give me a false warrant for salvation, he might also have made a false reckoning with thy soul. It pleaseth me, however, to see he is apt in some things," he continued, with a horrible laugh. "I ever thought so: those black fellows can curse far better than they can bless. But who did thy business for thee? The hand that should have done it is gone to the Devil—Ha! there bites a hungry fish at my fingers' ends."

"From whom was the private letter? and to whom shouldst thou have brought it?" asked Aagé, suddenly in a stern voice, and in a tone of overawing authority: "confess the truth, and it shall fare better with thee, wretch, than thou hast deserved!"

"What! though I should break the most solemn oath I ever swore?" muttered the robber. "No, stern sir! let the Devil take his own, and Olé Ark's sinful soul too, if the worst come to the worst! I have sent many an accursed heretic and excommunicated man to hell, and truly also many an honest fellow to heaven; but if I am now myself about to go to the Devil, it shall be as a right-believing Christian; and none shall say of me I broke my sworn oath, even to the living Satan."

"Tell me the way thou shouldst have gone, is it here?" continued Aagé, looking around the large murky stone chamber.

"The way to my master's den?" muttered the robber with a grin—"Wouldst ferret *that* out, comrade? Take care thou dost not burn thyself in it!"

"It is here, then," said Aagé to himself, looking around him, with still greater attention—"And here is the key; is it not so?" So saying, he produced the old rusty key which had been found on the robber's person together with the private letter.

"Right, comrade, the key to hell!" returned the raving murderer, with a horrid laugh.

Aagé now examined the whole vault, but discovered no trace of any cellar or descent. The floor was paved with large flags. He stamped on several places, and at last perceived a hollow sound, and the clang of metal under the stone floor. He took the lantern from the iron hook in the arch of the roof, and placed it on the floor. On doing so he discovered a large loose stone, which might be raised, and his conjecture was confirmed. The loose stone concealed a fast-locked iron trap-door, which, however, seemed too small to admit of the descent of any person. He tried the key, and it fitted. He opened the trap-door; the raw damp air of the vault rose up to him from a pitch-dark abyss, into which a ladder led down to an uncertain depth.

While this examination was carrying on the insane murderer lay on the corpse bench, and grinned with horrible contortions. Aagé stood thoughtfully by the opening, pondering over his daring enterprise. It now struck him, for the first time, that, if undisguised, he must undoubtedly be recognised and his plan frustrated. His eye fell on the blood-stained jerkin, which had been stript from off the robber's person, in order to bind him, "Well," he said, "we exchange garments; there, thou hast my mantle and hat; I take thy jerkin and cap."

"Good exchange enough," muttered Olé Ark; "if my luck goes with my jerkin, he goeth down to fame and honour. Ha! loose my body, Satan, and let me follow him into the pit."

It was not without repugnance that Aagé clad himself in the soiled, stained dress of the vagabond, which, however, answered his purpose, and rendered him almost incognisable. He then took the lamp in his hand, and prepared to descend through the narrow aperture in the floor; but the scorn and defiance of the bound robber now changed into a piteous lament.

"Mercy! mercy!" he cried, "take not the last glimpse of light from me! Now comes the Devil himself to rend me to pieces—Ha! let me not lie a corpse here in the dark—Mercy! mercy!" he howled, and pulled and tore at the cords which bound him.

"Pray to thy God and Judge for mercy," said Aagé; "I cannot help thee." He then squeezed himself through the narrow opening, with the lantern in his hand, and pulled the trap-door after him, that he might not hear the howls of the madman; but was nearly falling down head foremost from the ladder, on hearing, to his dismay, that the trap-door, which had a spring-lock, fell and closed over his head. He felt now as though he were entombed alive. He had forgotten to take the key with him; and the faint howling of the robber soon seemed lost in triumphant laughter above the grave which had closed over him.

Aagé grew dizzy, but recovered himself, and clung fast to the slippery steps of the ladder, while he continued to descend. At last he stood at the bottom: the descent was steep and deep, but it led to a narrow vaulted passage, which was so low as hardly to admit of his walking upright. The air was foul and suffocating, and he often trod on sprawling toads and other reptiles. He held up the lantern before him, but beheld nothing save the long narrow passage, to which he could discern no end; its direction, however, convinced him that it must undoubtedly lead to the castle. He went forward with hasty steps, and looked anxiously at the light in the lamp, which gleamed fainter and fainter. The air seemed not to contain sufficient nourishment for life and flame. He had hardly proceeded more than a hundred paces ere what he feared took place—the light went out in the lantern, and he stood in the dark. He felt a degree of alarm and a want of power and courage, which was quite foreign to his nature; at the same time he heard a hollow clang far behind, as if the iron trap-door had been again opened and clapped to. He involuntarily

quicken his steps, but slipped every moment on slimy reptiles, and was often forced to pause in order to take breath, while the air he inhaled seemed to lame every limb and to contract his lungs. He was nearly sinking down in a state of insensibility; but he now thought he heard a sound as of stealthy steps behind him, and his increased apprehension inspired him with renewed strength. "Is any one there?" he shouted, and turned round; but no one answered, and there was suddenly a deathlike stillness again.

It was so dark that he could not see his own hand before his eyes. In order not to awaken suspicion by his bold enterprise he had taken off his sword in the corpse-chamber, and was entirely defenceless. In his childhood, Aagé had not been wholly free from the dread of supernatural beings; and, according to the creed of the age, the idea of the influence of a mighty world of spirits on human life was closely connected with religious belief. Aagé nowise doubted the possibility of the appearance of evil as well as of good spirits; but this idea never disquieted him in open day, when he knew he was on a lawful errand, and had his sword with its cross-hilt at his side. "Is it honourable and chivalrous to steal along thus?" he said to himself. "Why took I not my good sword with me? It was hard, though, to take the light from him above there--he lies now in the pains of hell on yonder bench, and curses me;--or hath he got loose, and is he lurking after me in the dark?" He now thought he heard again distinctly, at every stride he took, the same sound, as of stealthy footsteps behind him; but each time he turned round all was still as before. This consciousness of the presence of an unknown being in the dark passage put him into a state of fearful apprehension, and recalled those images of horror to his imagination, which he felt himself least able to combat. "Is he now dead above there?--is it his maniac spirit which persecutes thee?" he whispered to himself; and the form of the frantic murderer appeared to his imagination far more terrific than when he beheld it actually stretched on the corpse-bench; "or is it thou, old Pallé!" he exclaimed, almost with an outcry of terror. The scene of the murder in Finnerup barn, which had haunted him in his childhood, and the image of the aged and insane regicide he had himself slain on the body of the murdered king, were again vividly present to his imagination. His hair stood on end; it seemed to him as if he was now actually about to fight with demons and evil spirits in the dark pit of the grave,--a fancy which had often disquieted him in dreams, and which lately had been the dominant plague of his fevered imagination. At last his terror increased to such a degree that he could no longer control it; he turned suddenly round, and rushed with all his might with clenched hands towards the place where he again thought he distinguished the stealthy footsteps. He then distinctly heard a clanking sword strike against the wall close beside his ear. "Ha! a human being after all! Wretched murderer! is it thou?" he shouted, quite recovering his courage at the discovery of a real and bodily pursuer, and sprang forward towards the unseen deadly foe, while he struck aside the sword, which seemed to be wielded by a left and powerless arm. The sword flew clanging forward in the dark passage; but at the same moment Aagé felt his neck clutched almost to suffocation by a pair of convulsively strained arms, dripping wet.

"Ha! ha! have I pounced on thee at last, hell-hound?" suddenly roared a wild rough voice in his ear, and Aagé recognised the tones of the wounded robber. "I have long enough lain a corpse--now thou mayst take my place, comrade!" This terrific voice presently rose into the howl of a wild beast, and Aagé felt the madman's tusks in his forehead; he struck desperately around him, and strove with all his might to free himself from the suffocating grasp of the monster, but in vain; and he was long compelled to combat and wrestle with him ere he succeeded in throwing him to the ground, and was even then still forced to struggle with the robber, whose howls were growing weaker and weaker, without, however, being able to free his neck from his convulsive grasp. At last the clutching arms loosened from round his neck, and his frantic adversary lay silent and apparently dead, or in a swoon, under his knee.

"The Lord have mercy on his sinful soul," sighed Aagé, rising half breathless. His opponent now made a sudden movement as if to rise, but fell back, with a rattling in his throat; and Aagé perceived, for the first time, that he was in all probability wading in the blood of the wounded murderer. He hastened on with rapid strides. Once or twice he stopped out of breath, and fancied he again heard the murderer stealing after him. At last he hit against something hard, and discovered by feeling that it was a large door of metal. He shook it with all his might, but it appeared to be locked on the other side, and immovable. He thundered at it with his iron-shod heels, and each stroke rung hollow through the vault. After the lapse of some time a little shutter opened in the door, and the light of a dark lantern, and a swarthy warrior-like visage, appeared. "Who is there? and from whom?" asked the man-at-arms.

"No one, from no one," answered Aagé, suddenly calling to mind the mysterious expression in the private letter.

"Right! thou knowest the watchword," was the answer; "and one only?--without arms?"

"As thou seest--but open quick!--there is no time to lose."

"Come, give time! The guard must first know of it." The shutter closed again, and Aagé heard the sound of a horn, which was answered at some distance: soon after the iron door opened, and a strong-built steel-clad warrior stepped out and advanced towards him into the passage, with a light in the one hand and a drawn sword in the other. He eyed the disguised Drost from head to foot, by the light of the lantern, and started back a couple of paces. "Faugh! how thou look'st, thou bloodhound!" he said, with disgust. "'Tis hard for an honest fellow to let such guests in, when the king himself must stand without."

"I have had a hard joust on the road, brave countryman." said Aagé; "but haste thee!"

"Come, come; give time, thou scoundrel! The bandage over thy eyes first."

"What! bandage! and foul words to me!"

"Of course, loggerhead! Thou mightest be a spy and traitor, as thou art a bloodhound and accursed robber; thou lookest fit for all such trades. The bandage over the eyes instantly, thou hound! or I kick thee back into thy fox-hole."

It was with difficulty that Aagé subdued his ire, and recollected that he was not Drost here, nor able to justify himself; he bore this rough usage in silence, allowed his eyes to be bandaged, and was thus led through the iron gate. He heard it bolted and barred after him. Soon afterwards he heard the sound of chains and pullies, as if a drawbridge was being lowered, and he perceived he was led upon a swinging bridge.

"Go straight forward, scoundrel! or thou fallest into the moat," muttered his companion close behind him. A cold shudder came over him; but he was silent, and went straight onward.

"Ay, truly thou hast had better luck than I wished thee," it was muttered behind him; "but thou hast another bridge to cross; that is ten times worse; here thou art quit of *me*."

Aagé heard his warlike companion re-cross the bridge, which was immediately afterwards raised. He conjectured that he was within the outermost rampart of the castle, towards the north-west, which lay between the sea-tower and the circular wall, for he had paid close attention to the direction in which he had proceeded. He had now two new companions, who were as little sparing as the former in contemptuous expressions respecting his cut-throat appearance and supposed marauding trade. Aagé suffered himself to be led onward by them without answering a word to their threats and scoffs, which secretly rejoiced him, as a token of their dispositions and honourable feelings. At last a horn was again sounded; it was answered as before at some distance. A drawbridge was again lowered, and Aagé perceived he was directly under the castle wall; for he heard a noise above his head like the moving of balista and other warlike machines. He felt an unfriendly poke in the back, and stood as before on a rocking-bridge.

"Straight on, fellow, or thou fallest into the moat!" said a warning voice behind him. "Goest thou a hair's breadth aside thou art a dead man!" He commended his soul to God, and went on. His guides allowed him to proceed alone for some time, and appeared to rejoice over his deadly peril. Meanwhile, as he perceived the rocking under his feet had ceased, he knew they had passed over the inner castle moat, and were within the circular wall. At last he was led up a staircase; but the bandage was not yet removed from his eyes. It was not till he had been led in many circuitous directions, as if through a labyrinth of passages and stairs, that he was freed from the bandage over his eyes, and found himself in an apartment of the castle which was not unknown to him, and where he was ordered to await the commandant.

It was still night. One of the men-at-arms who had last followed him remained standing at the door with a lantern and a drawn sword, and apparently watching him with fear and abhorrence.

"Who dost thou take me for?" asked Aagé.

"For one of the junker's secret emissaries," was the answer. "Surely, good tidings thou bringest not, since thou comest pale and bloody from the secret passage. Hark! now they are taking the burning stones from the furnace. Kallundborg town will presently be in flames."

"The Lord forbid!" cried Aagé: "call the commandant instantly! I have strict prohibition from the junker."

"Thou lookest not as if thou hadst," said the man, starting.--"I will run then. Thou wilt do no mischief meanwhile?" The man hastily departed, and took the lantern with him. Aagé looked out at the window, and saw with alarm that burning stones were carried on gridirons across the yard to the balista on the walls.

"Stop, fellows!" said a rough voice in the castle yard. "There is a protest from the junker: not a shot must be fired as yet."

"A noble fellow at heart, after all!" said Aagé to himself, believing he had heard the commandant's voice. The door opened soon afterwards; a tall warrior, with a stern grave countenance, and armed from head to foot, entered the apartment with a light in his hand. When he beheld Aagé's blood-stained face and figure he retreated a step, and placed the light on the table, while he hastily laid his hand on his large battle sword. "What fellow art thou?" he asked, in a stern and rough voice. "Doth the junker send pale corpses to plague me? Answer, fellow? Who art thou? Tell me thy watchwords, or I cut thee down on the spot!"

"No one, from no one," answered Aagé; and the commandant took his hand from the hilt of his sword.

"Speak, thou messenger of ill! If thou bringest me a prohibition from the junker, it is, of course, against mercy and delay? Is the town to burn? Is the Franciscan monastery first to be

fired? There sleeps the king to-night."

"The town is to be spared," answered Aagé. "The castle is to be opened to the king at sunrise--the papers are to be given up, and the door of the pit nailed fast."

"Dost thou rave, fellow?" cried the commandant, in amazement. "Darest *thou* speak what *I* hardly dare think? Would the junker recall by thy mouth that which he commanded me with his own, on pain of death? Who then is to be punished for all that hath here been done, and stand in the gap between us and the king's anger?"

"You should fly the king's as well as the junker's wrath, and carry your secret and your knowledge of a weighty transaction with you into exile."

"And stand branded a perjurer and traitor before all the world? No, fellow! were that even the junker's command, I obey it not. What I have sworn I must keep; but the responsibility is the junker's. I have sold him my life--but my honour, as a warrior, is my own. Show me black and white for what thou sayest, or I will cause thee to be hanged as a spy and traitor!"

"Now, in the Lord's name!" said Aagé, as he suddenly threw off the robber's cap and dress, and stood in his well-known knightly attire before the commandant, "I cannot, I will not deceive a man of honour like you. I am Drost Aagé; I announce to you the will of my liege and sovereign, not that of the junker; you may now deal with me as you can answer to God and your own conscience: but if the royal house and your fatherland be dearer to you than your own pride and an imaginary fealty, you will follow my counsel, and make the great sacrifice I ask of you."

"Sir Drost!" answered the commandant, bowing with haughty coldness; "you have ventured on a daring game. You are now my prisoner; how I shall act depends not on me. Oaths and vows are more binding than man's pleasure and man's will. I am an old-fashioned warrior, do you see--Your subtle state policy and artificial virtues I understand not--the law I acknowledge says, obey that which is commanded thee by thy lawful superior, and let him who commanded it answer for the consequences."

"But when you see the most destructive, the most fearful consequences before your eyes; when your superior hath broken his oath of fealty, and abused his rights----"

"That concerns not me. I keep steady to him to whom I swore allegiance; but *he* must answer for what is done here, be it good or evil."

"But when you swore an ungodly oath, and fealty to a rebel?"

"Then must I keep the oath I swore to him, though, by way of thanks, he should cause me to be hung for it, or go to hell. There is no choice here: had I even entered the devil's service, Sir Drost, I must endure to the end, however fearful that end may be!"

"Your pride blinds your eyes to truth and justice, noble sir!" exclaimed Aagé gazing on the tall steel-clad chieftain with a species of admiration; "but hear me, I conjure you by the living Lord!"

"You must excuse me. Sir Drost!" interrupted the chief, with cold calmness. "My time is short, I have perhaps not many hours to live; I expect thanks neither from the king nor the junker, and perhaps but little honour on this side the prison and the grave; but all things according to order. You are now going to the tower, and I to the battlement--to-morrow you perhaps will sit at the king's right hand, while I lie on the wheel: but so long as we are at our posts, each must do his duty, and, as I said, all things according to order." So saying, he stamped on the floor, and three men-at-arms entered.

"Take this knight instantly to the prison tower"--ordered the commandant, nodding to the two nearest him.

"And thou, Bent!" he said, addressing himself to the third, "let the stones be heated again: it was a false protest--off with thee!"

The two men instantly seized Aagé, and led him towards a secret door, which they opened in the wall. Aagé turned round once more, and called to the chief, in the highest state of anxiety and alarm. "Think upon your immortal soul, in what you do! remember, you should obey God rather than sinful men." More he could not say, for the private door was closed behind him.

The third man-at-arms still lingered, as if he expected the stern command he had received would be recalled; but the imperturbable chief glanced menacingly at him. "The stones are to be heated, I tell thee. Art thou deaf, fellow? Off with thee! Obedience or death, while I command here!"

The man-at-arms turned quickly round, and departed gloomy and silent through the door, beside which he stood.

The commandant strode hastily once or twice up and down the floor, with his hand upon his broad forehead. At last he stopped at a prie-dieu, and bent his knee, while his eye rested on the open prayer book. "Ye servants," he muttered, and folded his hands, "obey your masters

according to the flesh, in *all* things;" he then rose, signed a cross over his broad steel-clad breast, and went in silence and with hasty steps out of the door.

CHAP. III.

It was near daybreak. The alarm and anxiety had ceased, with which the inhabitants of Kallundborg had seen the night draw on. The peace and stillness which had prevailed the whole night seemed to have lulled the burghers, as well as the men-at-arms, into security. The lights were extinguished in most of the houses. The men-at-arms nodded over the expiring watch fires, and reposed on their mantles, in quiet groups, while some paced up and down on guard, beside the piled-up lances. Even the gay and vigilant Count Henrik was weary of the strained attention which he now deemed unnecessary: he had sat down to rest, under an image of the Madonna, without the Franciscan monastery, where a light was always burning. He had lately inspected the sentries, and found every thing in good order. He felt wearied, but kept off sleep, and his eyes open, while his gaze dwelt on the waning and half-hidden stars. His soul dreamed of warlike honours and proud victories, by the side of the Danish monarch, and of the admiration of the ladies of Mecklenborg when he should return with merited laurels and tokens of royal favour to his fatherland. While engaged in these reveries, which led him through half a life in a few minutes, he was suddenly disturbed by the working of the balista, and a fearful alarm of fire from the monastery. He started up, and beheld, with dismay, that burning stones were flying from the loopholes and walls of the castle, in different directions, and a high flame shot up from the storehouse of the monastery. In an instant he was actively exerting himself in the rescue of the town and monastery. Engines for extinguishing the flames were every where at hand. There was a fearful tumult in the town; but the alarm was however greater than the misfortune seemed likely to prove. Some single houses, it is true, were fired; but the greater part were protected by the snow, although the roofs were of straw. Many glowing stones from the balista missed their mark, many cooled ere they fell. The storehouse of the monastery instantly caught fire: it was necessary to sacrifice it, and partly to pull it down; but not a single stone fell on the principal building, nor on the guest-house, where the king had established himself.

Meanwhile the king was instantly astir; none were more zealous and active than he and Count Henrik; they rode constantly through the streets, and were always first on the spot where any house was fired.

The king was highly exasperated--he often cast a glance of menace at the castle. He halted without the burning monastery, by the count's side, just as another discharge from the balista took place, and a large burning stone fell down between their horses, and rolled hissing into the snow.

"My liege!" exclaimed Count Henrik, "the burghers may put out the flames, but we can do more; let us sally forth and storm instantly."

"Not yet," answered the king, shaking his head. "Look," he continued, pointing to the flame-lit copper roof of the principal building of the monastery; "when the sun stands highest, and the tower shadow falls yonder, then will it be time; then will my patience have reached its limits--its uttermost bounds."

As soon as it was daylight the firing from the balista through the loopholes, ceased; but the parapets upon the outer wall were observed to be filled with men-at-arms. The towers of the wall were also perceived to be strongly garrisoned, and a numerous array of lances and battle-axes glittered over the battlements in the grey dawn of morning. The wall before the gate in particular was strongly manned, as well as the tower above the gate, where they seemed most to apprehend an attack. The great iron portcullis between the gate and the outward wall was drawn up by strong iron rings. There was great alarm and tumult at the castle and its garrison: a desperate storm and revenge for the night's disturbance was apparently apprehended. The fire meanwhile had been put out, as well in the monastery as in the town. The pious Franciscans rang to mattins, as usual, and the king did not neglect to share in their devotion.

"But--what is become of Aagé?--Where is the Drost?" he asked Count Henrik, as he again vaulted on his horse, without the church of the monastery, in order to inspect the hastily prepared storming machines with his general. "I saw him not the whole night, nor even just now at mattins; it is not his wont, however, to sleep when I watch or pray--least of all when danger is impending."

"I have not seen him since midnight," answered Count Henrik, endeavouring to hide his embarrassment and uneasiness; "After our adventure beside the sea-tower, I saw him last by yonder watch-fire," added the count, assuming a gay air. "It was a fine night; all around was so still and peaceful. He must have got love fancies or some kind of visionary notions into his head."

He went towards the tower, without desiring my company, and bade me not expect him before noon."

"Strange!" said the king, "Aagé upon a light love adventure, and at this time! It cannot be. Humph! what became of the spy you captured? Hath he been examined? Hath he confessed?"

"He hath disappeared, my liege! 'tis a strange and almost incomprehensible tale. I was myself at the sea-tower, two hours after midnight, the man-at-arms was dead, but the devil had carried off his murderer: that, they swore roundly, was the fact. He had lain bound in the corpse-chamber of the drowned; no egress was possible; at midnight he was heard to cry and howl, that the devil was carrying him off. No one dared to enter the chamber, and when I came neither robber or Drost was to be seen."

"How! the Drost!" interrupted the king; "what hath all this to do with Aagé? He lay not in the chamber with the murderer."

"True--excuse me, your grace," answered Count Henrik, clearing his throat. "I speak at random, I perceive: that comes from the night-watch."

"Truly, count! we must be broad awake to-day, especially since Aagé is not here," answered the king hastily, and rode down towards the tower. "I will find out what is meant by that devil's story."

Count Henrik followed the king. The report of the disappearance of the bound murderer, had already collected a crowd of curious persons, who crossed themselves on hearing the terrific tale, which they repeated one to another, with still more marvellous and more terrible circumstances. Place was respectfully made for the king, who heard with wonder from the guard the same tale as that current in the crowd, with the alarming addition, that the Drost had entered at midnight into the chamber of the raving murderer, and that all traces of him had likewise disappeared. Various opinions were however entertained of the affair, and some thought it was not the Drost, but the devil, who, in the Drost's form, had entered the chamber of the dying murderer, to carry him off in person.

"Tush!" said the king, "lead me to that accursed corpse-chamber! There must be some trick in this." He hastily entered the murky stone chamber, and looked around it on all sides with anxious attention. There was no furniture except the bench appropriated to the bodies of the drowned, which was streaked with blood, and on which hung some rent and half-decayed rope. From the high iron grating in the wall, which was hardly large enough to admit a sparrow, fell a faint light, which glimmered on a plumed hat lying in a corner. "What see I here?" exclaimed the king in astonishment. "The Drost's hat and plume; and there is his green mantle also. Plundered, murdered, great God!--Yet no! a robber would surely have made off with the booty. The captured murderer was certainly sorely wounded?"

"To the death of the body, most gracious liege, according to the surgeon's opinion," answered an aged monk, who, with a curious crowd of the lower class, had thronged together with the men-at-arms, into the tower after the king. "Ah, yes," continued the solemn Franciscan, in a tone of devout exhortation, "it was a fearful end. Here we see manifestly how the ungodly are punished. This blood crieth not unto heaven, like the innocent Abel's, but it crieth unto hardened sinners upon earth, from the road to the bottomless pit, that they may behold the traces of the damned with fear and trembling. My pious hearers, men may now-a-days delay *temporal* death, by means of surgeons and apothecaries, with St. Cosmo's and St. Damian's help; but *eternal* death they never can: when the term is out, lo! then cometh he who hath the bond, and fetches that which is his own, without respect of persons. Here hath been given a sign, to the terror and warning of many in our ungodly time: Sancta Maria! ora pronobis!"

"It is thou then, monk, who puttest those vagaries into the people's head?" interrupted the king at last, with impetuous impatience. "Believest thou, in truth, that the Evil One hath carried off yon murderer, both body and soul?"

"St. Franciscus preserve me from doubting it!" answered the monk, crossing himself. "He who can carry off the souls of the ungodly can doubtless annihilate their sinful bodies. Lo! he hath but left these blood-drops behind, as a witness of the power which is given him, and also, though *he* willed it not, to the honour of the all-righteous Judge. The truth is so manifest in our sight, it were blindness and heretical presumption to doubt."

"And, my Drost, my faithful Aagé, believest thou the same of him?"

"Be not wroth, my liege?" answered the Franciscan with frankness, and laying his meagre hand on his breast, "my conscience forbids me to witness falsely on the brink of the grave, to please or flatter the great and mighty, or to conceal the wondrous things which have taken place in our sight, for the conversion of hardened sinners, with fear and trembling. The noble Drost hath also disappeared in an incomprehensible manner, and seeing that we know he had fallen under the awful ban of the church, and was given over by our most venerable archbishop to the destruction of the flesh, and the power of the great enemy of souls!"

"Silence, presumptuous monk! thou knowest not what thou sayest!" exclaimed the king, in the greatest wrath, darting a lightning glance at the pale trembling monk; "let the prince of darkness

take that which is his! I will not quarrel either with him or thee for that; but this I know, no devil shall injure a hair of my faithful Drost Aagé's head, whether he be dead or alive. There must have been a murder here, a foul misdeed," he continued, "a shameless treachery. So help me God, and all the holy men, it shall be discovered, and sternly avenged! Hence, monk! hie thee to thy cell, and pray the Lord to enlighten thy understanding. Thy intentions are good--it were sin to be wroth with thee. Go hence, good people; ye stand in our way. Hither, my true men; the floor must be broken up; the tower must be pulled down. If the Drost be not found, one stone shall not remain upon another."

At the king's stern command the monk and all the idle spectators departed. The spearmen came with spears and boat-hooks, and whatever was at hand, and began to break up the stone floor. It was not long ere they discovered the loose stone in the corner by the little iron trap-door, which was hardly discernible in the faint glimmer of daylight from the grating. "Look, look!" was the cry; "a trap-door! a pitfall!"

"Ha! the murderer's pit! Here we have it!" exclaimed the king. "Torches here, quick! I will go below, myself.

"Let that be my business, my liege," said Count Henrik. "Here is assuredly the secret entrance to the castle," he added in a low voice; "perhaps it might be used for our attack."

"No, Count! a king's path lies not through a fox's den"--interrupted the king, proudly: "bring me but my faithful Aagé!"

Torches were quickly brought, and the passage was searched. The king however suffered himself to be withheld from descending. Count Henrik hastened forward with eagerness and curiosity, holding a torch in his hand, and accompanied by three men-at-arms. The torches were often nearly extinguished by the subterranean air; they found however and recognised the robber's body, which was immediately borne off by two of the men, while Count Henrik and the third pursued the search. At last they reached the great iron gate, which they vainly attempted to burst open. Within, the sounding of horns and the clash of numerous weapons were heard, and Count Henrik considered it advisable to hasten back.

The king had meanwhile obtained information of every circumstance respecting the Drost's nocturnal visit to the tower, and was in some degree tranquillised by the sight of the robber's body, when Count Henrik returned and acquainted him with what he had discovered. "The daring Drost is assuredly alive, if not quite in safety, my liege," said the Count, as he ascended from the secret passage, quite spent and breathless. "As the murderer was found dead and alone, he cannot have mastered the brave Drost; but it is plain they have had a hard struggle together. Here is the Drost's sword; it was found close to the body. There is actually a secret passage to the castle; but it is strongly guarded, and we were near falling into the enemy's hand."

"Well, now we know where Aagé is," said the king; "he meant well; but 'tis an arch trick he hath played us. Ere the sun goes down he shall be free, by God's assistance," he added. "Woe to the traitors, should they injure a hair of his head!"

The king left the tower, and the preparations for storming were continued with increased zeal.

Towards noon the king, mounted on his white steed, stationed himself without the eastern rampart of the castle: he was stern and silent. He often looked with uneasy expectation and rising indignation towards the gate of the town, where, in a few moments, his brother the junker would appear, did he purpose taking any measures to effect a reconciliation. Some horsemen, who were placed on the look-out on the hill by St. George's hospital, returned at the time appointed, at full gallop, and announced that the expected party was not to be seen on the road.

"Now then, in the name of the righteous God," exclaimed the king in a low voice, but greatly incensed, "I have no longer a brother; the measure is full--Let them sound to storm, Count Henrik; let the trumpets thunder forth my wrath!"

Hardly was the command uttered ere the trumpets sounded to storm. The sun stood highest in the heaven, and the tower shadow fell upon the roof of the monastery. The whole force was instantly in activity. The attack was made according to the plan concerted with the Drost, from three sides at once; but on two sides feignedly, in order to mislead the enemy, while the principal assault, in which the whole force of the troop combined by degrees, was directed against the eastern wall, by the tower gate.

The outermost drawbridge was speedily pulled down by the boat-hooks of the brave boatmen and seamen. With the aid of all the fire ladders belonging to the town, the outer wall was quickly mounted. No leader was here present, and the junker's Zealand peasants, as well as the Samsöers, fought unwillingly against their countrymen. A brave resistance was indeed made against the German Count Henrik, but wherever the king himself appeared, the weapons dropped from the hands of the Danish defenders of the wall, while they fell at his feet and implored mercy. The outer wall came thus speedily into the power of the king, who was himself one of the first who mounted it; but the most vigorous defence was made from the tower, over the fortified gate. Within was heard a powerful voice of command, and from the loopholes and battlements rained a thick shower of stones and javelins. Count Henrik saw the danger, and hastened to form a roof of

shields for the king's protection, while it was vainly attempted to tear down the great portcullis which served as a sort of raised iron drawbridge over the moat, between the outer wall and the gate.

"Fire the gate!" commanded the king, with wrathful impetuosity.

"Fire! fire, here!" was echoed from mouth to mouth, and crowds soon flocked from the town, with torches of pitch, with fire and splintered tar-barrels, which they threw in over the portcullis. The gate and the tower were soon shrouded in smoke and flame, amid the shouts of the besiegers.

CHAP. IV.

During this eager and hazardous attack, on the eastern side of the castle, the captive Drost Aagé stood before the iron-grated loophole in the square upper tower, which rose from the middle of the principal western wing of the castle. Far below, perpendicularly from the prison grating, the great wooden staircase projected into the castle court, from which, through a balcony, was the entrance into the vestibule of the upper story. The prison tower was separated from the besieged gate by the two principal wings to the north and south of the circular court, by the ladies' apartment, and the knights' hall. From his high prison grating Aagé was thus enabled to witness the combat and strenuous efforts, as well of the assailants as of the besieged. He had succeeded in climbing up into the recess in the wall within the grating, whence he looked out with steadfast gaze and throbbing heart over the castle yard towards the tower gate. Here he knew the principal attack was to be made. He had for some time heard the din of the fight, and perceived how all the forces combined to assault and defend this one point. He now beheld the dense pillar of smoke rising without the gate, and observed at the same time, through the loopholes of the tower, that the garrison were putting their largest machines of defence in motion in order to crush the besiegers with stones and beams, ere they could succeed in firing the gate. "Must I stand passive here, while the king is in battle and danger?" exclaimed Aagé, as he shook the iron gate in wrath. He had nearly fallen down backwards into his prison, as a fragment of the ancient wall loosened and fell in before him, together with a part of the grating. "A hint!" he exclaimed in surprise; "thanks be to thee, my good angel! thou art, then, more powerful than the Evil One." He instantly conceived the design of availing himself of this accident to make a venturesome flight from the tower, in the hope of hastening to the assistance of the besiegers, and perhaps of opening the gate to them. He bound his shoulder scarf to that part of the grating which remained firm, and made preparations for letting himself down to a lower shelf of the tower wall; but at this moment he heard a voice, which constrained him to draw back, and filled him with dismay. He had leaned his head against a pillar of the tower, which being raised the whole height of the building conducted the sound to his ear from an unfathomable depth. Directly under him, where the high wooden staircase projected, was a deep vault with a well, concealed under the uppermost landing, which led through the balcony to the great vestibule of the castle. This vault, with its deep well, was, in cases of emergency, the last defence of the castle, and might prove a frightful grave for every besieger who was not aware of the contrivance, as in the landing of the stairs was a concealed trap-door, which could suddenly be let down from within to plunge the entering foe and the supposed victor into the abyss. This contrivance for the defence of the castle had been recently planned by the junker: neither the king nor the Drost knew of it; and as a secret and extreme defence, it had even been kept concealed from most of the inmates of the castle. The existence of such a stratagem had been already suspected by Aagé, from the contents of the private letter he had seized and destroyed; but the distant voice which reached his ear from beneath now flashed conviction like lightning across his mind.

"There shalt thou stand!" sounded the stern voice of the commandant, in a low and hollow tone. "If the gate falls, and they throng in hither, then mark--the moment thou hearest a footstep on the stair, let down the door!"

A faint voice replied; but Aagé heard not the answer.

"Whatever blood flows here comes on the junker's head!" said the commandant's voice again; "he must answer for it here and yonder--We are but the instruments of death in his hand--Enquire not! think not! be silent and obey or thou art perjured and damned eternally!"

Aagé stood as if petrified with terror: from some single words which were added, the whole fearful contrivance became clear to him: even the voice of the stern chief appeared to him to tremble while issuing the terrible mandate.

All was again hushed in the hidden abyss, while the clash of arms and the din of battle at the castle gate increased, and overpowered every other sound. A high flame presently shot up through the pillar of smoke above the gate, and a shout of dismay was heard from the burning

tower, the defenders of which were now forced to fly to escape perishing in the flames. Without resounded the victorious shouts of the besiegers, while the rattling of iron chains, and a hollow clanging noise announced that the outer portcullis between the wall and the gate was pulled down; to this a still louder crash succeeded; the besiegers burst the burning gate.

An overwhelming dread seized the listening captive: almost without knowing on what he was about to venture, he swung himself out of the loosened prison grating, and let himself down by his shoulder scarf so low towards the tower wall that he was able to take his stand on a projecting buttress; but hardly had he succeeded in doing this, ere another fragment of the prison wall loosened, together with the iron grating to which his scarf was bound; it flew past his head and dashed against the iron railing of the balcony below, where his scarf remained hanging. He himself lost his balance, and was forced to let go his hold; but he snatched involuntarily, as if with the instinct of self-preservation, at the projecting buttress on which his foot had just rested, and thus continued to cling, while he succeeded in resting one foot on the corner of the sloping porch above the staircase entrance. He stood thus directly over the stair, yet still at such a height above it as to involve the certainty of sustaining a serious injury in case of falling. He had ascertained that the trap-door of the well was immediately under his feet, and that the first footstep upon it would be the signal for its falling, and opening its deep and certain grave. It was hardly possible for Aagé to continue his hold long in this hanging position. Amid the universal tumult no one perceived him. He now heard the crash caused by the bursting of the gates, and the victorious shout, "The castle is won! Long live young king Eric!" The king had already entered the castle as a victor through the flaming gate. Aagé could not turn his head round and look down into the yard without losing his balance; but he heard, and instantly recognised the king's and Count Henrik's voices far below him.

"Beware, my liege! here is a pitfall!" he shouted with all his might; but his voice was too faint; he was exhausted by his desperate exertions, and no one appeared to hear him amid the universal clashing of weapons, and the noisy shouts of victory. He was, besides, hidden by the pillar of the tower from those who were nearest to the upper story of the building. "Farewell, sweet Margaretha! farewell, love and life!" he gasped; "I must below." His fall and death, at this moment, appeared to be the only means of saving the king's life. "Long live my king!" he shouted, and let go his hold of the buttress. All seemed to grow dark before him; he fancied he was falling an unfathomable depth; but beyond this he was unconscious of what was passing around him.

"Aagé, Aagé's voice!" cried the king, who, excited by the fight and the storm, stood at the head of his victorious troop of knights at the foot of the high wooden staircase. He had heard Aagé's voice, but where he knew not; some of the furthest men-at-arms had seen him fall down from the porch on the landing of the stairs, but the general noise and tumult overpowered their shouts of alarm. The king had already set his foot on the first step of the stair.

"Back, my liege! treachery!" shouted Count Henrik suddenly. "Yonder hangs the Drost's shoulder scarf; there is certainly a pitfall here."

The long red scarf hung just above their heads from the iron railing of the balcony.

"As I live, my faithful Aagé; I heard him bemoan himself above there," said the king eagerly, without heeding the warning, and hastened up the stair; but Count Henrik rushed after him and seized his arm ere he reached the uppermost landing. They both stopped as in amazement, and at the same moment uttered a cry of horror on seeing the unhappy Drost lie deadly pale and bleeding at the top of the staircase.

"Dead! dead!" cried the king, and was hastening up to him; but Count Henrik still detained him, while he himself sprang forward, and tramped on every step of the hollow stair. Aagé opened his eyes, and recognised the king. "Back from the grave, my liege!" he called with a faint voice, as he rolled himself forward to the king's feet, and clasped his knees. "Aagé! great Heavens! what is this?" exclaimed the king, and raised him in his arms. At the same instant the door of the hall of the upper story opened, and a tall, steel-clad knight, disarmed, and with an uncovered and hoary head, stepped across the balcony, and took his stand on the uppermost landing of the stair. "You stand beside a grave, King Eric!" he said in a terrific voice; "I had prepared it for you; but a higher power presides here; now shall it open, and swallow me up before your eyes." He stamped with all his might on the rocking and creaking trap-door under his feet. "Ha! why tarriest thou, slave?" he shouted in a voice of thunder. "Away with the bolt; draw it quick."

"No, no, in the name of a merciful Heaven!" said a beseeching voice from the castle cellar far beneath him; "I cannot; I would sooner be perjured and eternally damned."

"What is all this?" asked the king in the greatest amazement. "Doth that man rave? Who is he?"

"The commandant of the castle, my liege," answered Count Henrik, who stood with his drawn sword before the king, and with the one foot on the trap-door.

"Bind that madman," commanded the king to the knights nearest him, without withdrawing his gaze from the signs of returning life in Aagé's face. He bore him himself in his arms, with Count Henrik's assistance, over the creaking trap-door, and over the balcony, into the upper hall. As

soon as Count Henrik had seen the Drost and the king in safety he hastened back to the shouting men-at-arms, to secure and guard all the entrances, and prevent any disorder from the disarming of the garrison. It was not till the king saw that Aagé's consciousness was returning, and that his limbs, however bruised, still were not seriously injured, that he looked towards the knights who surrounded him, and assisted in tending the Drost. At the door of the antechamber stood the tall commandant of the castle, with his arms tied behind his back, between two halberdiers; he gazed before him, mute and pale, as a marble statue. "Had I *such* a master to die for!" he muttered in a deep and hardly audible voice, and a tear rolled down between the furrows of the aged warrior's haughty and unmoved countenance.

Count Henrik soon re-entered the hall with hasty steps. "My liege," he said aloud, "the margrave is without the gate; the highborn junker is with him. They entreat your grace to withhold your stern sentence and wrath, and hear what the prince hath to say in his defence."

"Let him step hither instantly," commanded the king, and the sternness of his countenance seemed mingled with profound sorrow. "The hour of judgment is come," he added; "but I condemn no one unheard."

Count Henrik bowed in silence and departed. A deathlike stillness prevailed in the chamber. Drost Aagé reposed, pale and bleeding, on a bench, with his head leaning on the king's breast, and appeared as yet not to have fully recovered his consciousness after his shattering and stunning fall. His temples had been chafed with wine; at a signal from the king he was carried into the ladies' apartment, that he might repose in quiet, and be more carefully tended. As he was borne off the king pressed his feeble hand, and looked on him with affection and sadness. Aagé gazed fixedly and anxiously upon the king. "Remember you are to pass sentence on a brother," he whispered in a faint voice. He would have said more, but the king motioned to him to be silent, and turned from him as he hastily passed his hand over his high and glowing forehead.

A deep stillness once more prevailed around. The king's knights had ranged themselves in solemn silence at his side: they yet stood with their drawn swords in their hands, and the halberdiers were stationed with their long spears by the door guarding the gloomy chief, who looked like one petrified. Footsteps were soon heard on the hollow stair, where the trap-door had already been secured. Count Henrik opened the door, and remained standing on the balcony. He bowed coldly as Junker Christopher and the Margrave of Brandenburg entered, followed by their knightly train. The margrave's wonted gaiety and light-heartedness had vanished. He seemed exhausted from violent exertion, and in an anxious and uneasy mood. When the tall Junker Christopher uncovered his black locks, which floated wild and tangled around his shoulders, and advanced towards the king, his feet appeared to totter, while, however, there was a cold and forced smile on his long, large-featured visage.

"My royal brother hath visited me in a peculiar fashion," he said in a tone of bitterness, as he greeted Eric with a stiff and formal bow. "I lament that I was not informed of your gracious visit, that I might have received my royal liege in a fitting manner, and have prevented the senseless acts of my vassals as well as the deeds of violence, of which I perceive traces here."

"I am wont, even when unannounced, to find the castles of my vassals and servants open as well to my ambassadors as to me," answered the king with stern vehemence. "The contumacy I have here met with is high treason; the gate of a fortress hath been shut against me in my own kingdom: where this happens, fief and goods are forfeited, be the criminal who he may! I perceive, also, that my life has been basely and treacherously sought after: it is a Judas act and miscreant deed; it stirs up my inmost soul;" he continued in a voice of emotion, and with a doubtful glance at the prince's sullen countenance. "It is bitter and dreadful to me to think that my own brother could have shared these crimes--So, however, it seems to mortal eyes; but if ye can justify yourself, Prince Christopher of Denmark, speak! and with a single word remove from my heart the heaviest weight that ever oppressed it! Are you guilty or not?"

"Who accuses me?" exclaimed the junker haughtily, and with vehemence. "Who dares to mark me out for contumacy and treason? Where is my accuser? Where is my commandant? His is the responsibility for what hath happened. Where is he?"

"Here!" said a powerful and hollow voice from the door of the apartment close behind him. It seemed as though the prince shrunk at the sound, while he turned and gazed on the aged warrior with a wild and haggard look.

"Crush me, if you will, Prince Christopher," continued the chief; "I am prepared for death; my life is yours, but not my honour--Here stands your aged loyal servant, the only one who was true to you here at the castle. Therefore do I now stand bound as a miscreant and traitor; but I swear by the most high God, in the sight of the king and of Danish chivalry, I have but fulfilled my duty--I obeyed the command of that master to whom I swore fealty and obedience. No one can serve two masters; every one must account to his own. I have mine; but that he commanded, he must himself answer for."

"Dost thou rave?" shouted the prince, foaming with rage. "Did I order thee to defend the castle against other than my foes?"

"True, sir junker! against your foes," repeated the warrior, "whether they were great or small,

whether they wore helmet or crown--that was your stern behest; and if you named not the king, assuredly it was him you meant, so help me St. George and the merciful God, in my last hour!"

"Liar! calumniator! mad, presumptuous rebel and traitor!" shouted the prince, as if in a transport of rage, and rushing menacingly towards the bound commandant. "Darest thou thus to pervert my commands? Wouldst thou read in my soul, and make my thoughts traitors to my king? Nay, now I see it; I penetrate thy plan, traitor! Thou wouldst set strife and enmity between me and my royal brother! thou wouldst waken rebellion and civil war in the country--thou art a kinsman of Marsk Stig; thou art a secret friend of the outlawed regicides."

The king started and gazed on the prisoner with a searching look; the proud chief seemed to have lost his self-possession; he stared upon the junker with fixed and strained eyes, but no word passed his lips.

"See you, my liege, the traitor is struck dumb;" continued the junker, turning once more with a look of proud triumph to the prisoner. "Canst thou deny the traitor's blood in thy veins, wretch? Canst thou deny thou art a friend of the outlaws?"

"I am proud of my birth," said the commandant, regaining his self-possession by a desperate effort. "My unfortunate friends I disown not either, even though they be outlawed and accursed in this world; but the charge you ground thereon, I deny and despise."

"Take him to the prison tower, my men!" called the junker hastily in a proud authoritative tone; "I am his master and judge, by the laws of the country. The crime he would roll on his master's head, shall assuredly fall on his own, and crush him."

Some knights of the prince's train had already approached the prisoner to lead him away; but they lingered, and cast a timid and inquiring look at the king.

"Haste not!" ordered the king with vehemence; "so long as I am present myself, no one commands beside me."

The junker's knights drew back respectfully at these words. The captive had raised his eyes towards the ceiling of the apartment, and seemed to be internally preparing himself for death.

"You deny, then, all participation in what here hath happened. Junker Christopher?" continued the king in a thoughtful and gloomy mood, while his searching gaze still dwelt on the wild and passionate countenance of the junker. "I ask you not to swear by your salvation--With a brother's salvation I would not even redeem my crown or life; but I demand your knightly and princely word, in confirmation of your testimony. This chief's birth, and his friendship for my deadly foes, I ask not of: it is now question of the present rebellious and traitorous transaction. Can you confidently affirm, on your knightly and princely word, that your commandant hath in this matter acted according to his own arbitration, and against your order?"

"Yes, by my knightly and princely honour!" cried the prince with a glowing and fierce countenance, and bit his lips in wrath.

"Those words you will repent at the last judgment day, junker!" said the commandant in his ear with a deep and hollow voice, as if from the grave, and gazing on him with a deathlike stare.

"Silence, mad liar!" interrupted the junker. "I will show you, my royal brother and liege," he continued in a raised voice, and turned from the thunder-stricken captive, "I will show you that I can maintain discipline in my castle--none shall go unpunished, who have dared to insult you in my name, and abuse the power you have entrusted to me by contumacy and treason--I demand instant justice and sentence on this criminal, according to the jurisdiction of the castle and law of the land."

"I cannot deny you the power of judging and passing sentence upon your servants." answered the king. "Whatever may have been your commandant's transgression, he must answer for it! He shall instantly be brought before the castle tribunal, and be sentenced according to law; but if he be pronounced guilty in the absence of proof, and from the want of explanations, which can be known to none but yourself, it shall be left to you to award the sentence. Junker Christopher! if your conscience can answer for it before God and men!"

"Well, then! he is doomed; he shall assuredly lie on the wheel ere the sun rise again," muttered the junker: "you have heard the king's command: obey! take the captive to the justice court!" He addressed these words with an authoritative air to his knights, and they instantly led off the prisoner, who cast a proud and contemptuous look at his master, and pointed menacingly towards heaven.

The king had thrown himself into a chair, thoughtful and silent, with his hand before his brow; a severe conflict seemed passing in his inmost soul. He now rose up suddenly, and cast a stern and penetrating glance at his brother: "Pass sentence, and execute it on thy servant in my name, as thou wouldst be judged thyself in the sight of the all-knowing and righteous God!" he said in a low tone of admonition. "I invest thee, also, with my highest prerogative--that of mercy. If he *be* mad--if his blood can be spared, without breach of law--by all the holy men! I ask it not in pledge of the truth of thy declaration. The word of honour of a knight and prince needs no bloody

confirmation--There is my hand, brother Christopher," he added, and his voice trembled; "I will believe thee, whether thy servant be found innocent or guilty." The junker gave Eric his hand, in gloomy silence, and with an averted countenance; there was, for a moment, a general and anxious silence.

"Let the musicians strike up. Sir Junker! now there is surely peace and good understanding again, my royal friends!" said Margrave Waldemar, hastily breaking silence, in his gay, volatile tone; "it rejoiceth me that I have contributed towards it, even though I have foundered my best horse in the cause: now we will forget the whole vexatious affair, and let the junker's good wine wash away all remains of misunderstanding."

"You are right, Waldemar!" exclaimed Junker Christopher, with a gay mien, and looked boldly round the hall; "I ought not to forget I am host here, although my honoured guests have taken me somewhat by surprise." He then opened the door himself into the knights' hall, and besought the king to enter: he himself followed with the Margrave, Count Henrik, and the whole numerous train of knights.

The king continued silent and thoughtful. He seemed to put a restraint on himself to conceal his mistrust of his brother. Margrave Waldemar was evidently desirous to cheer the king, and place the intercourse between the brothers on a more easy footing. The quarrel as yet was only but slightly accommodated; but Junker Christopher seemed carefully to shun all closer explanation; he merely ventured on a passing comment on the beleaguering of Holbek castle by the Drost, as if it was but a rumour which he had heard, and as if he trusted, at all events, it was only a precipitate act of the Drost and a misunderstanding of the will of his royal brother. He evaded the grave answer which hovered on the king's lips, and employed himself zealously and courteously in attending to the wants of his guests. The door of the large dining hall was presently thrown open, where a table of refreshments always stood ready for the junker and his followers, when they were on a visit at the castle. From the gallery, in the great hall above, sounded the joyous tones of hunting horns and trumpets, and Kallundborg castle, which lately rung with the clash of weapons and din of war, soon re-echoed with the ringing of goblets and the mirth of festivity.

It was nearly evening ere the royal party were assembled at table. As soon as the junker had seated his guests, and a lively and easy conversation had in some degree commenced, he departed, with a hasty excuse, and remained absent above half an hour. He returned gloomy and pale, but appeared afterwards in high spirits, excited by the wine and the company at table. To the king's inquiry as to what had so long deprived his guests of his company, he answered in a low tone, "I have been attending the court of justice, my liege! I would not let the judges wait for my explanation; matters of life and death it is ever best to get out of hand, ere we come to the drinking table."

The king became again silent and thoughtful, but the junker frequently drained his goblet, and Margrave Waldemar sought, by many a merry jest, to disperse the dark thoughts which frequently seemed to disturb the festivities in honour of a reconciliation; which, however, appeared rather to be forced than the effect of mutual good understanding.

The king purposed not to pass the night at the castle, where he had met with such hostile reception; but as it grew dark and late it was difficult for him to reject his brother's repeated invitation, without again betraying a distrust he wished he could wholly drive from his mind. As the junker at last, with a cheerful air, once more earnestly urged his invitation, while he drained the last goblets of wine with the king, to a speedy and happy union with the lovely Princess Ingeborg, and to a brotherly understanding, the cloud on Eric's brow vanished, and the last remains of mistrust seemed to be banished from his kindly heart. He pressed his brother's hand warmly, and drained his cup to the bottom: "Well, Christopher! I remain," he continued, in a confidential tone and half aside. "All shall be forgotten as in old times, when the good Drost Peter settled our childish disputes, and our mother Agnes joined our hands together." The king now appeared perfectly happy and satisfied; Christopher often laughed loudly. This cheerful tone soon pervaded the whole assemblage.

After the repast the king seated himself with his brother at a backgammon board; he only shook the dice, however, while he ordered the state of his faithful Aagé to be inquired into, and waited in vain for a word of frankness and confidence from Christopher. The junker was especially courteous and attentive, but he still seemed desirous, by indifferent talk, to ward off all approaches to serious conversation. At this moment an officer of justice entered, and put a sheet of parchment into his hand: he became suddenly silent, and changed colour. The attendant hastily departed.

"What was that? my brother!" asked the king. "The death doom of my presumptuous servant, according to the verdict of the court of justice of this castle, and to the law of the land," answered the junker, without looking at him; "will you confirm it? Upon life and death you yourself determine?"

"As the friend and kinsman of the outlaws, he was doubtless my foe; but how guilty he is thou must know best," answered the king, with stern solemnity; "thou hast my authority for it: in my name to confirm the doom, or to pardon, as justice or moderation prompt thee. None save thou and the all-seeing God can know with certainty whether thy command could have been thus

misinterpreted--If there be the least doubt, then----"

"No, there is no doubt here," exclaimed the junker impetuously, with a dark and gloomy countenance, and a wild and frightful glance, as he rose from the backgammon table, and departed with hasty strides.

The king looked long after him, with a serious and thoughtful gaze. He started up suddenly once or twice, and put his hand to his brow. "No!" he said, "it is impossible--I have his knightly and princely word of honour." The margrave now approached gaily and courteously, and took the vacant seat near the king at the table, where he soon succeeded in introducing a lively and amusing conversation.

CHAP. V.

The Drost had been brought from the ladies' apartment to a remote and quiet chamber, in the knights' story. Although he had sustained no serious injury in his heavy fall, he was, however, shattered in every limb, and unable to move. After a restorative bath, he had been carried to his couch and had fallen asleep; but the harrowing anxiety which he had endured so agitated his mind that it was impossible for him to sleep soundly. At one time he dreamed he was wrestling with corpses in dark graves, at another that he hovered over unfathomable abysses; but the idea of the king's danger, and the pitfall under the staircase, seemed to work most powerfully upon his imagination, and he frequently exclaimed in his disturbed slumber, "Beware, my liege! Now opens the grave under thy feet. Believe him not, believe him not, he is a traitor!"

It was late in the evening. A lamp burned on the table in Aagé's chamber, and an aged, withered crone sat by his bed, muttering constantly to herself with toothless gums and shaking head. The door presently opened, and the king entered the darkened chamber, accompanied by Count Henrik and Junker Christopher. The nurse instantly withdrew, half in alarm, and with oft-repeated curtesy, without, however, allowing herself to be interrupted in her mutterings, and unconscious monologue. Junker Christopher and Count Henrik remained standing at the entrance, where they conversed together in a low tone and at intervals, of the chase and their horses, and of the large antlers of the stag over the door, while the king approached the Drost's couch, and drew the lamp forward on the table that he might have a full view of his features. Aagé appeared for a moment to be sleeping soundly; but as the king stood by his couch, and with sympathising sorrow bent over his handsome though pallid face, the Drost suddenly opened his eyes and stared wildly before him. "Is it thou, my liege?" he whispered; "art thou still living in this murderous den? Beware! Believe him not!"

"Recollect thyself, my Aagé, thou dreamest," said the king. "Thy pious wish is fulfilled; I and my brother are reconciled. Look! there he stands. He also wishes to see thee. The whole was a misunderstanding--the desperate plan of a rebel--one of the outlaws' race and friends. Be calm, my Aagé; I am now a peaceful guest here with my brother--We have drunk to reconciliation and brotherly fellowship together--I have done him injustice also in the affair with Bruncké. I will give him back both Holbek and Kallunborg. He is now to accompany me on the expedition against the dukes."

"Noble, generous, kingly soul!" exclaimed Aagé, seemingly quite roused from his dreaming state. "Hath a word, hath a cup of wine effaced such enmity and wrath? Now the Lord and our blessed Lady be praised! Love healeth all wounds, and mercy is a precious virtue. *How* great is now thy love and clemency, my liege!" he continued, again somewhat wildly, and as if half dreaming; "doth it extend even unto the outlaws and their unhappy race--even unto Marsk Stig's kindred and children?"

"Ha! breathe not that accursed name, Aagé," interrupted the king, with stern vehemence; "*so* far my clemency will never extend--Now sleep well, my faithful Aagé," he added, with his former mildness and affection. "Think not on what it is best to forget--they tell me thou art already out of danger, and can, perhaps, follow me to-morrow, or in a few days."

"Where sleeps my liege to-night?" asked Aagé, in an anxious voice, and again gazing wildly around him.

"Close by thee, here in the knights' story; only be thou calm and sleep in peace. I sleep under a brother's roof."

"Come, my royal brother," interrupted Christopher, hastily approaching the couch, "speak no more with that sick dreamer, he is in a fair way to infect you with his feverish phantasies."

"Good night, my Aagé," said the king, pressing the Drost's hand as he departed. "I will keep

that I promised him," he said to the junker. "I will sleep near him, here in the knights' story."

"As you command, my royal brother," answered the junker, with a cold and bitter smile; and they left the sick chamber.

Count Henrik had also given his hand to Aagé, and was about to follow the king; but the Drost detained him for a moment, in a state of painful anxiety. "Look, look!" he whispered, "there goes the murdered King Eric with Junker Abel^[2]; *they* once were brothers! and, hark! a flood roars beneath this castle. It is surely the bloody Slie,--take heed!--take heed, that no misfortune happens here!"

"You have perturbed dreams, Drost Aagé," said Count Henrik, letting go Aagé's fevered hand. "Sleep ye but in quiet; I watch." He then hastened after the king and the junker; but first glanced out of the window, and saw with secret horror, by the deepening star-light, a high, black scaffold in the back court of the castle, without the knights' story. He hastily drew the curtain before the window and departed; whereupon the old nurse (still shaking and muttering) re-entered the Drost's chamber. She was attired in the homely dress of a country burgher's wife; her eyes were large and sunken, and her pale, emaciated visage greatly resembled that of a corpse. With a distaff and a rosary in her hand, she resumed her station by the Drost's couch before the lamp, which she drew aside, that it might not shine in the face of the patient. All was now soon quiet in this wing of the castle, which only comprised the sleeping apartments of the knights. Aagé lay long listening in anxiety. In the unusual stillness of the evening, however, a distant sound as of lutes and mirthful songs reached his ear.

"What is that?" he asked, raising his head with pain and difficulty.

"There is merriment in the knights' hall, noble sir! yes in troth! that there is," answered the nurse; "our stern junker hath caused minstrels and jugglers to be fetched from the town. There is no lack either of mead or sweet wine, that knoweth the precious Lord in heaven! He drinks to friendship with his brother, they say. Alack yes!" she added, "the great can be merry, doubtless, and leave care to the fiddle; ay! ay! when they quarrel among themselves, it all falls on the small! yes, in troth! does it--all falls on the small. My departed husband was, by my troth, doomed to death, in the great Marsk Stig's feud--alack yes! by my troth was he, he was but a poor man, I must tell ye: *he* had neither knightly nor princely honour to swear himself free with, like the high-born junker; no, by my troth! had he not, that was the whole mishap. There sits now our old commandant in the tower--ay! ay! he will hardly see sun or moon more; they say he is to be executed to-night; alack yes! and yesterday he was master here at the castle; yes, in troth! was he so, but so goeth it in the world; alack yes."

"Executed?" repeated Aagé; "the Lord have mercy on his soul; the king is strict and hasty: ha! but knew he?----"

"He doubtless knew, what we all know, that his high-born brother hath borne false witness," sighed the old woman; "but what care the great about cutting off an insignificant head, when they would save their own? The law must have its course--yes, in troth! that it must, *one* head doubtless must fall, after such a commotion and uproar, but the junker's is placed too high, I trow! 'What should great lords keep servants for, if they could not wash themselves clean in their blood?' said my departed husband, when he was executed; yes, in troth! said he so, the blessed soul--But see now if ye can get to sleep, noble young sir! that is assuredly best for you. I talk mayhap rather too much: 'tis my bosom sin, they say--yes, by my troth! one talks too little, and another too much; was there no such thing as talk, no poor man would talk himself over to the evil one, and no high-born rogue would talk himself from the gallows."

"I must speak with the king," burst forth Aagé, with eagerness, and vainly strove to rise, but his strength entirely forsook him, and he fell back in a swoon. The old nurse thought he slept, and indeed he soon appeared to have fallen into a kind of slumber. The nurse looked at him several times, with the lamp in her hand, and nodded, as she continued to chatter to herself; "Ay! ay! a good honest face, in troth!" she muttered. "But who is honest in this sinful world? he consorts with the great,--ay! ay! and those good folk one should never believe--no in troth, one should never believe. He would have spoken with the king--yes, forsooth! when it is question of saving a poor devil's life, and telling the king that his brother is a rogue and traitor; then such a fine courtier fellow swoons or falls asleep, till it is too late. Wake up, Sir Knight! wake up!" She shook him in vain; "Alack! I verily believe it is death's sleep,--well then he is excused: after such a fall and being battered into a pudding, there can doubtless be no great life in him--he draws breath though, I believe! yes, in troth he does! Youth is strong, perhaps nature will help herself--Hark! now they follow the king to bed," she continued, and listened: "he will surely sleep close by here, ay! ay! This is his favourite servant, this same Drost. Weil, the Lord keep his hand over the king! he means well by us all; yes, in troth he does--alack yes! even though he should doom many a poor devil to death--but indeed that's his business--it is therefore he is king. He upholds law and justice, yes in troth! and makes, besides, no difference between high and low. Should he now have doomed to death his own brother according to the flesh? That would have been too hard--yes, in troth, would it; he is after all but a man, and who is just in all things in this sinful world? Ay, ay! but the junker--alack, yes! The Lord preserve us from him--if we get *him* for a king, it will be a bad look-out--yes, in troth will it! alack, yes!" Thus she muttered to herself, and nodded beside the lamp until she fell asleep in the arm-chair. It might be somewhat past midnight, when Drost Aagé awoke, strengthened in body, and refreshed by the deep sleep, caused by exhaustion,

which seemed to have given a favourable turn to his illness. He was still, however, in a feverish state; he looked around him with surprise, and appeared not to know where was. The pale sleeping nurse, beside the lamp, seemed to him, as the light faintly lit up her emaciated visage, like a sitting corpse. He half arose and stared fixedly at her; he remarked signs of strong agitation in her deathlike face; her toothless gums mumbled, but without any sound; it appeared as though she wished to speak, but had not the power to utter a word. It seemed to him, as if he now beheld what he had often heard and read of in ancient sagas and poems of olden time. The dark vaulted chamber in his imagination was a subterranean prophet's cave, and the old mumbling crone a dead prophetess, on whose tongue Runic letters had been laid to cause her to prophesy.^[3] He tried to rise and the attempt succeeded; his shattered limbs were strengthened and pliant. He wrapped the white woollen coverlet around him, and soon stood listening on the floor, and gazing on the old woman's visage. "Whom talkest thou with?--corpse! what dost mumble of in thy grave?" he whispered, and she moved her mouth still faster. "Murder, murder!" she exclaimed, at length, in audible words. "Hark, hark! now his head falls before the axe."

At the same instant Aagé actually heard with dismay a sound outside the window, as of the stroke of an axe; he rushed forward, and pulled aside the curtain. The light of a number of torches glared on him from the back court of the castle. He saw with horror, a body of men-at-arms surrounding a scaffold, on which stood an executioner with a bloody head in his hand. A cold shudder came over Aagé; he knew not, as yet, whether he waked or dreamed; he stood speechless, as if rooted to the spot, and gazed on the horrid sight; a low chant fell on his ear, and he beheld a crowd of Franciscan monks advance under the scaffold with a black coffin. Among the spectators he recognised Junker Christopher's dark countenance, strongly lit up by a torch. The bloody head fell from the executioner's hand, and it seemed to him, to his inexpressible horror, to be the king's; he staggered back and overturned the table with the lamp. The old woman waked in affright, and shrieked loudly; but Aagé rushed out of the chamber, into the dark passage, in indescribable consternation. "Murdered!--the king murdered!" was the cry of his inmost soul; but no word passed his lips; he went on, like a sleep-walker, with staring eyes, not knowing whither he was going. "Here he was to sleep--here close by me,"--he thought, and stopped at a side door. He had already extended his hand to open it, when he saw a light, and heard footsteps at a distance in the passage. The door beside which he stood, was enclosed between two pillars projecting from the wall--he stopped behind one of the pillars, and kept his eye on the light in the passage. It approached slowly, and often stopped; at last it came so near that he could see, it was carried by a tall figure in a dark mantle. The light fell only on the lower part of the shrouded form; his walk was tottering and hesitating; a large sword glittered under his mantle. The figure came nearer and nearer; but with stealthy and almost noiseless steps. At last it advanced close to the pillar, behind which Aagé stood, and paused again. The light was now; raised, while the shrouded bearer looked around him on all sides, and the light fell on a long and wildly glaring visage--it was Junker Christopher.

"Ha! fratricide! regicide!" shouted Aagé, in a frenzy, and rushed out upon him.

With a cry of alarm the junker let fall the light, and sprang backward. "Murder! help! a madman!" he shouted, and drew his sword.

Amid this noise the door between the pillars opened, and Count Henrik stepped forth with a light. "What is the matter here?" he asked eagerly, but in a low tone. "Who dares to wake the king?"

"The king! the king!" exclaimed Aagé, with inexpressible joy, "he lives?--the Lord be praised! it was then but a dreadful dream! but saw I not the junker here?"

"Yes, assuredly, thou saw'st him, madman!" cried the junker, returning his sword into the sheath. "Had you not come out. Count Henrik, I should have cut that mad fellow down on the spot. He fell upon me here, with a wild incoherent speech, as I was stealing softly to my chamber that I might not wake the king. If I see aright, it is the chivalrous Sir Drost, who is walking in his sleep, or would play the ghost. One would think my castle was turned into a madhouse."

"A *singular* adventure, noble Junker," said Count Henrik, gazing with a penetrating look on his perturbed countenance. "Our good Drost is sick, as you know, and hath disquiet fevered dreams," he added in a light courtier-like tone. "He must in his phantasies have taken you for a murderer and traitor; but you must excuse him; his loyalty and devotion for your royal brother are alone to blame for it."

"You come from an execution, Sir Junker!" said Aagé, whose self-possession was now fully restored; "it was, I presume, your unhappy commandant, who so ill underwood your order and will?"

"Right!" answered the prince; "he hath got his well-merited wages--the presumptuous madman! but madness spreads here, I perceive."

"Your highness's imagination hath surely also been at work," continued Aagé, "since my dreams could scare you thus. I beseech you meanwhile graciously to pardon me for stopping you just beside *this* door. It was, perhaps, however, a lucky chance; you might easily have made a mistake between your own and the king's sleeping chamber."

"Go to thy couch, madman!" replied the junker, with gloomy harshness, and with his hand on his sword. "You dream as yet it seems to me, and might deserve to be wakened by my good sword--One should bind and shut up a visionary and dreamer like you when one would have a quiet night:" so saying, he hastily snatched his candle, which Count Henrik had taken up from the floor and lighted, and the junker went with rapid strides through the next side door into his own sleeping apartment.

"I have a fearful suspicion," whispered Aagé to Count Henrik; "but I was ill and over-excited--I may be wrong: it is too dreadful to think of--Let it not disturb the king's peace."

"What you mean, Drost, I am also loth to think of," answered the count, "though after what hath here happened, almost every thing is possible. Come, let us stay here together to-night."

They then both entered the door between the pillars, and all was soon perfectly quiet at the castle.

The next morning early the king and his men rode out of the burnt and dilapidated gate of Kallundborg castle. Count Henrik, Margrave Waldemar, and Junker Christopher accompanied him on horseback, together with his fifty knights, and a numerous troop of lancers. Drost Aagé followed slowly behind in a litter, borne by two horses. He was far from recovered from the effects of his dangerous fall, but was not to be kept back.

The king and his brother rode in silence through the town, at some distance from their train. "Thou hast surely wished to take from me the desire of being oftener thy guest at Kallundborg, Christopher!" said the king in a gloomy, dissatisfied mood, as they rode slowly up the hill to St. George's hospital, and looked back on the castle and town. "I have used thy fair castle gate badly it is true; some broken pates, too, I have left behind me; but neither didst *thou* prepare me any fair spectacle at my mattins."

"What! the criminal on the wheel?" muttered Christopher. "Hath his head said good morning to you from the stake? The fault was not mine: that unpleasant sight would have been kept from your eyes, but you yourself chose your sleeping apartment with that unsightly prospect. To say truth, my royal brother," he added in an upbraiding tone, "you seemed to me to require *proof* that there was no manner of doubt in this case."

"That word then sounded ill to thee," answered the king. "Understood'st thou me not? There might be a doubt of the criminal's sanity, but not of his miscreant deed; there might be a doubt of the ambiguity of thy commands to him, without there being the slightest doubt of thy meaning, as thou didst explain it to me on thy knightly word. Only on that ground did I make over to thee my privilege of pardon, together with the power of confirming the sentence: there was no need, either, to hasten with the execution of the bloody doom."

"It was needful to decide the matter ere you left the castle," replied Christopher eagerly. "I, for my part, had no ground for doubt. I have shown I feared not to witness the fall of the traitor's head, as your Drost can affirm, if he hath come to his senses."

"He is now quite collected," answered the king. "I know he walked in his sleep last night, and gave thee a start by my door."

"Ay, indeed! hath he told you of that pleasant adventure!" said the junker, starting and changing colour. "Had he been in his right senses, I would have demanded that he be declared infamous for the audacious outrage."

"As I have heard the circumstance, he is excused: thy alarm he hath also accounted for to me."

"How mean ye?" asked Christopher, in the greatest anxiety.

"Truly, it is not good to return to one's couch with such a bloody spectacle before one's eyes," said the king, with not unsympathising glance at the junker pale and agitated countenance. "Be not ashamed of it, Christopher! mayhap it does thy heart honour--Thou wert sick at heart, and greatly moved by the sight of thine aged servant's execution Aagé supposed. I see myself how it hath taken hold on thee. It is the first death-warrant thou hast sealed--I know by experience such acts excite peculiar and painful feelings."

As the king said these words the junker's countenance seemed suddenly to brighten, and he again breathed more freely. "In truth, my royal brother," he said, hastily while a deep crimson flush succeeded to his former paleness, "the stupid fellow was a brave man, notwithstanding! It was not the most agreeable duty you put upon me. I was in some sort a party concerned; but I was perfectly right; no one could know my criminal servant as well as I; and the sentence was passed according to law and justice, by impartial men. Your Drost is an excellent knight," he added, "but somewhat disposed to be visionary: he is devoted to you, however, and I have nought against him, on account of his foolish dreamings."

Count Henrick and Margrave Waldemar now approached the royal brothers, and the conversation turned on indifferent topics. The procession proceeded on the road to Korsóer, from whence the king intended to cross the Belts, in order to join the Marsk, and the forces which were to march against the turbulent dukes of Slesvig.

At the famous sea-fight of Grönsund, the young King Eric had gained a decided victory over these haughty princes, who frequently sought to withdraw their allegiance to the Danish crown, and since the regicide of Eric Glipping had secretly, as well as openly, made common cause with the foes of the country and the outlawed regicides. By this victory the king had indeed gained a high reputation with the dukes as well as with the neighbouring northern powers, and the princes of north Germany; but the quarrel with the archbishop and the Romish see, and still more the king's excommunication at Sjöborg, had given all his foes courage, and renewed their hopes of shaking his throne, and frustrating his bold projects. It was feared, not without reason, that the young high-spirited King of Denmark, who now appeared as though he would defy ban and interdict, might possibly have a desire to regain the influence and power won by the great Waldemar the Victorious in Germany. That monarch's chivalrous character, and the lustre his conquests had shed on the Danish name, seemed early to have inspired his bold descendant with the wish to tread in the paths of his renowned ancestor, and a glorious reputation like that of Waldemar the Victorious was assuredly the secret wish of Eric's heart, though he lived in a time and under circumstances which demanded no ordinary degree of power and wisdom, in a sovereign, even to save the country from downfall, and preserve his own life and crown.

The renewed demands of the dukes, and the revival of long-accommodated differences, but, especially, tidings of the outlaws having again found protection and shelter in Slesvig, had in a great measure induced the king to take up arms; and since the archbishop's flight, he had become much more precipitate than formerly, and more inclined to carry every thing through by the strong hand. The people well knew but cheerfully tolerated Eric's youthful and often impetuous eagerness, and his liking for chivalrous pomp. His firmness of purpose was indeed often called obstinacy; and it was admitted he was not altogether free from an excessive love of show, but from his childhood he had been the people's darling, and such he continued to remain.

This breach with the dukes appeared to many to be rash and inconsiderate; but the king's wrath was deemed justifiable, and the public mind was calmed by the belief that with all his impetuosity he had too much love for his people, and possessed too much sound policy not to spare the blood of his warriors, and the scanty revenues of his country, could he, sword in hand, honourably negotiate. The calm, thoughtful Drost Aagé contributed not a little to restrain the king's vehemence, and now that Eric's older and more experienced counsellors, the aged Jon Little and Drost Hessel were absent, the greater number and most peaceably minded of the people rejoiced to see Drost Aagé in the king's train. The Drost's suffering state, and the perilous adventure which had caused it, which was daily exaggerated by rumour, with the most marvellous additions, attracted towards him the sympathy and admiration of the lower classes. Those especially who had before shunned him as an excommunicated man, now mourned over his misfortune, since the king himself shared the same fate. The energetic and warlike Count Henrik of Mecklenborg, with his bold commanding glance, also found favour with the people, who looked up to him with confidence. He and Aagé were often received with animated shouts of acclamation, while a dumb and almost timorous courtesy was, on the contrary, shown to the gloomy Junker Christopher; and the foreign Margrave Waldemar, who always rode by the junker's side, was looked on as a half suspicious guest, whose presence might well be dispensed with. Wherever the procession passed, the young chivalrous monarch himself was received with the most loyal demonstrations of the people's affection, which had been more than ever called forth by the knowledge of the ecclesiastical persecution he then endured. Even the much dreaded lightnings of excommunication seemed transformed into a halo of martyrdom around the head of Eric, the avenger of his father, and the defender of the throne; especially as the greater and most estimable part of the Danish clergy boldly declared his cause to be just and honourable.

The sorrow and displeasure which it was known had been caused the king by his brother the junker's suspicious conduct had still more increased the sympathy of the people for him.

"For Eric, the youthful king!" was the general salutation, when all hats and caps waved in the air in his honour. "Away with the red hat from Rome! Away with all traitors! King Eric! and none other!" often resounded as he rode through the crowded street. "Long live Princess Ingeborg! Long live the king's true love!" also shouted many a merry bachelor. Where this salutation greeted the king, his own greeting became doubly kind and gracious. "Thanks, good people! thanks!" he answered cheerfully, and waved his hand; "if the Lord and our blessed Lady will it so, you shall see her here as your queen in the summer!"

CHAP. VI.

On Sommersted heath, in the province of Haddersleben, a bloody battle seemed likely to take place between Eric and his haughty kinsmen, the Dukes of Slesvig and Langeland, in whose army it was asserted many of the regicides were enlisted; notwithstanding it had been stipulated by treaty the preceding year, that these exiled criminals should be no less outlawed by these

princes, than by the king, and his brother. When the dukes beheld the forces, at the head of which the incensed king, attended by his fifty chosen knights, was marching against them, they appeared to hesitate, and the swords of the one party seemed to keep those of the other in the sheath. Through the Drost's mediation a truce was negotiated; according to which all hostilities were to cease, the dukes' troops were to lay down their arms, and no outlaws suffered to continue in their service; all claims also on the part of the dukes were to be suspended, until formal terms could be agreed upon. For this purpose an amicable interview between these princes and their royal liege was proposed to take place at Wordingborg castle.

The Drost and privy council rarely succeeded in persuading the king to a reconciliation, or to enter into a formal treaty of peace with any opponent who had protected his father's murderers. The only person who, under such circumstances, had been occasionally successful in acting as mediator, was Eric's sagacious and kindhearted stepfather, Count Gerhard, who ever stood in a friendly and almost fatherly relation to the young monarch.

The present peace also with Norway was only a truce, occasionally renewed for single years or months; for the outlaws had constantly met with protection from the Norwegian King Eric, and Duke Hako; and according to his promise given to these fugitives, the Norwegian king was unable to conclude a permanent peace with Denmark, unless his Danish guests should be again admitted into their native land. Many of these deadly foes to the royal house of Denmark had, indeed, fallen in their unsuccessful expedition against Denmark; some had been seized and maltreated by the populace, or captured by the king's commanders, and executed for robbery and incendiarism. This had been the fate of Arved Bengtson, one of the wildest and fiercest of the regicides, who with ten of his comrades had fallen into the hands of the stern Tulé Ebbeson, and the whole of the eleven had been mercilessly beheaded. But each time the number of their chiefs was thus diminished, the revenge and defiance of those who were left increased. From their connection with foreign powers, with Archbishop Grand, and with the papal see, these exiled noblemen were the most dangerous enemies of the country. So long as one of them was living the king considered himself under the necessity of being constantly prepared for war, and the mention of an outlaw was almost sufficient to make him gird on his armour.

After the conclusion of the truce with the Dukes of Slesvig, the king visited his royal manors in Jutland and in the Isles; but he disbanded his troops only so far as to admit of their being assembled again in a few days at the Marsk's summons. The young king sought, as much as it was possible, to atone for whatever injustice had been committed during the government of his unhappy father. Even his bitterest enemies were forced to acknowledge his disinterested zeal in the administration of justice; but despite the respect and affection of which Eric received the most gratifying proofs from his people, his personal safety was, nevertheless, often endangered, as the condition of the country was in general in a very unsettled state. The outlaws belonged to most noble families in Denmark, and had not a few kinsmen, friends, and secret adherents, who endeavoured to protect them from the indignation of the people, whenever they secretly or openly dared to venture back to their father-land, for the purpose of exciting disturbance or seeking opportunities for revenge. All the discontented in the country, all restless spirits, and those who were at war with law and authority, all criminals and burgher politicians, who feared or hated kingly rule, joined themselves to these martyrs in the cause of liberty, and foes of despotism as they were denominated. Some powerful prelates, the archbishop's friends, were on their side, although the clergy in general were devoted to the king. Meanwhile the most sincere patriots could not deny that the discontented had often real grievances to complain of, and that the lawful rights of citizenship were frequently infringed. The king's friends and devoted subjects often went too far in their zeal for his security; and state functionaries not unfrequently exercised violence and injustice in his name, where they suspected any one of siding with the outlaws. Among the discontented in the country, and the secret partisans of the outlaws, such proceedings served as a pretext and excuse for similar conduct towards the king's servants and friends; what especially disquieted all lovers of their country, was the dread of a general closing of the churches, in case the king did not yield in the affair of the archbishop. An apprehension also prevailed of civil war and dangerous conspiracies of the outlaws, and other disturbers of the peace; particularly if any open breach should take place between the king and his brother, the junker.

During the first chilly days of spring, the roads to Wordingborg were unusually thronged on occasion of the important treaty of peace just concluded with the Dukes of Slesvig. The splendid festivities and tournaments which were the delight of the chivalrous king, were now in preparation to celebrate the event. Many knights and nobles from Jutland and the Isles journeyed to Wordingborg, to display their splendour before the king and the court, as well as to share in the expected festivities in honour of the peace, which however was regarded by the king's friends rather in the light of a victory.

A party of three knights, with a numerous train of squires and attendants, rode one evening amid storm and hail through the forest near Suséa, and approached the great forest monastery of St. Peter. The accommodations for travellers were but scarce and simple. The public inns established in the time of King Eric Glipping were few and generally despised; travellers of high degree, therefore, often took shelter in monasteries, which were occasionally put to much cost and inconvenience by these sometimes forcibly-imposed visitations. The monasteries had been, in fact, exempted by a royal decree, from the ancient obligation of giving free entertainment to travellers; they were even forbidden to receive wayfaring guests, where there was any public inn

in the neighbourhood; but the prohibition was hardly ever observed even by the clergy themselves, as it was contrary to the rules of the monasteries.

The knights and their train seemed nowise inclined to pass by without visiting the rich "Forest Monastery" (as it was called) which now, with its high, white and notched gable ends, and its shining copper roof, came in sight above the forest in the fitful light of the stormy evening. The party drew near the great oak avenue within the domain of the monastery, and the attendants pointed, gladly, to the smoking chimneys: but the two foremost knights had shrouded themselves in their mantles, and drawn their large travelling hoods over their eyes. They seemed, notwithstanding the increasing storm, so absorbed in their own thoughts that they cared but little about the road, or the inviting hearth of the monastery. They were the same tall, silent knights, who had so mysteriously visited Prince Christopher at Holbek Castle, the night on which it was garrisoned by Drost Aagé. The little hump-backed man in the red cloak, who was then their companion, was not now seen in their train; but they were accompanied by Prince Christopher's gentleman of the bedchamber, the fat short-necked Sir Pallé, who frequently lamented over the weather, and seemed as weary of the journey as of his taciturn and unsociable travelling companions.

"This way! up the monastery avenue, sir knights!" he called, impatiently. "You would not surely go farther in this infernal tempest? It is a good way yet to Nestved, and to that dog-hole of an inn, the road every way is long. We stand in need of a good supper, and a good night's rest--I know Pater, head-cook."

"*I* know the *abbot*," answered the taller of the two grave knights, with a haughty mien. "At all events, I know myself and my squires, and what a wayfaring man may demand."

"For the Lord's sake! let us not play the braggart, excellent Sir Brock!" said Pallé, rather in alarm, and drawing his bridle. "If we proceed with violence and bragging, the pious monks may shut the door in our faces, and make the king our enemy to boot; one should, by my troth, seek a shelter by fair means when one slinks past law and ordinance."

"Bah! Here one may make light of secular law and royal ordinance," answered Sir Brock, scornfully. "St. Bent's rules no king can shake."

"Let us only not attack the rules of the monastery, worthy knights!" sighed Sir Pallé, slapping his empty stomach, "or we may have to put up with fasting fare this evening, and learn of St. Bent to knock out the flesh tooth."

"If that tooth had been knocked out in the monastery there would scarcely be so many butchers in Nestved," remarked the other knight; "keep easy, Sir Pallé; I promise you a fat roast for this evening--Every Sunday the Nestved butchers are forced to pay their tribute in good roasts and sausages."

"The Abbot understands that," said Sir Brock, with a nod. "That is a fellow who knows how to uphold his rights both with high and low--trust me, Sir Papæ, the Nestved burghers may well provide him wine for his roast--the whole town hath to thank the monastery and the rich abbot for its rise. Truly, these are burgher and grocer times we live in--we now see villages and towns where before we saw lordly castles, and domains, and mark, now, if the grocers' houses will not at last shoot up over both lordly castles and monasteries. It passes the comprehension, both of king and statesmen, how to keep the people under finger and thumb; but it is well enough understood by *him* yonder."

"You know the abbot then, Sir Brock?" resumed Pallé, inquisitively, and with a look of curiosity. "He must be a mighty prelate; they say, he was a good friend of Archbishop Grand's. You have surely no errand to him? You know more of him, perhaps, than I do of Pater, head-cook; for that is but a slight acquaintance. On second thoughts, Sir Knight, would it not be better in these troublous and suspicious times, to pass by the monastery and put up with the dog-hole of an inn?--unless you really have any errand here--you have perhaps known the abbot long. Sir Brock? You are even perhaps of his kindred?"

"Excellent! Go on! if you have more queries, or any more scruples, let me have all out at once, and have done with it," said the tall Sir Brock, with an air of contempt. "To speak plainly, my good Sir Pallé, you seem somewhat inquisitive. You have asked me of more during this journey, than I would answer my confessor in a whole year."

"And you are as mysterious and cautious as though you took me for a tell-tale, and a man not to be counted on," answered Pallé, in a tone of annoyance. "If the high-born junker hath trusted me to bring you a private letter, you may well suppose I am among his most confidential friends."

"A confidant is wont, however, to know what tidings he brings," remarked the tall knight.

"You think, perhaps, I know them not," returned Pallé, assuming an air of consequence. "It will rejoice the noble junker to see you and your friends at Wordingborg, in order to come to a closer and mutual understanding.--Is it not so?"

"Ha, indeed! my sly Sir Pallé; you understand then, the noble art of opening wax seals?--another time you must do it more dexterously, or, at least, be able to hold your tongue about it."

The high-born junker hath known his messenger, and hath not entrusted you with a greater secret than he might suffer to be cried in the streets through every town."

The other knight laughed scornfully. Pallé was silent, wroth, and crest fallen. The party now halted, drew bridle before the gate of the monastery, and knocked loudly at it. The porter put forth his shaven head from a shutter, and inquired in a peevish tone, who it was, and what was wanted so late.

"Wayfaring and christian men," was the answer. "If you are a pious man of God, Father Porter, sin not by asking forbidden questions, but unlock the gate instantly, in St. Bent's and St. Peter's name!"

"In nomine St. Benedict! Anianensis et St. Petri Apostoli," answered the clerical porter, and instantly withdrew the great iron bolt which secured the gate.

"See ye," said Sir Niels Brock, "St. Bent and St. Peter are more powerful here than kings and worldly despots."

Although the most important household matters were managed by the monks themselves, according to monastic rule, the travellers, on their entering the monastery, were instantly received by a whole crowd of attendant lay-brothers and conversers, who took off their mantles, and eagerly waited on them with handbasons and whatever they required. Father Porter had allowed himself to be replaced at his post by a lay-brother, that he might not miss the evening devotion and the evening meal that accompanied it. After an announcement to the Abbot, he followed the three knights to the refectory, while a lay-brother attended to the wants of the train.

CHAP. VII.

In the high-vaulted refectory, the small arched windows of which looked out into the garden of the monastery, and were darkened by a row of lime-trees, sat the heavy-built abbot Johan in his laced leathern arm-chair, with a lamp before him, at the supper-table, holding a kind of instructive discourse for the edification of the humbly-listening brethren of the order and the pupils of the monastery. Nearest him sat eleven monks in black cloaks, among whom Peter Porter took his place as the twelfth. The same number of little boys, who were educating as monks, and wore black benedictine mantles, as well as the brethren of the order, took the lowest place at the table, and eagerly partook of the repast, while, however, they seemed to listen very attentively to the abbot's discourse. On the entrance of the travellers the dignified prelate half rose from his seat, with a look of annoyance, and bade them welcome in St. Peter's and St. Bent's name, but almost without vouchsafing them a glance, and in a tone which betrayed that it was only in compliance with the rules of his order that he received such self-invited guests. However, when the two tall knights approached him nearer, with a reverent and courteous salutation, and the lamp on the table lit up Sir Niels Brock's martial visage, the abbot's proud bearing and repulsive looks suddenly changed. He signed a blessing over the knight and his companions, and, with courteous condescension, besought them to be seated, while he hastily, with a side-wink of the eye, laid his finger on his mouth, and continued to address them as strangers.

Besides the twelve brethren of the order and the monkishly-clad children, there sat a person at the table, also in a black benedictine mantle, but without the hood and complete dress of the order. He had hastily risen on the entrance of the travellers, and appeared about to withdraw; but, on hearing Sir Niels Brock's powerful voice, he turned round to the newly-arrived guests, and nodded familiarly to Brock. It now appeared that this person bore not the tonsure, and was even adorned with a warrior-like beard; his forehead and eye-brows were hidden by his yellowish red and combed down hair.

Brock started, and greeted him with surprise, but in silence.

"A guest from the world who hath sought safety in the dress of our holy order and the sanctuary of the monastery," said the abbot. "I can, therefore, only present him to you without mention of his name, as I also have received you in the holy Bent's and St. Peter's name, without asking of your name in the world, or the object of your journey."

"Your hospitality and high mindedness are well known throughout the country, pious sir," said Brock, with another obeisance. "We are not, it is true, among the persecuted. The object of our journey also is no secret; but we equally acknowledge, with thanks and reverence, the shelter these holy walls afford from storms of *all* kinds."

"From the hour in which, by God's grace, I received the bishop's mitre and the holy crosier," resumed the abbot, with the air of a prince of the church, but with stooping head, and a kind of

studied rhetorical tone, "be it said without all vain self-commendation, and to the honour of the Most High!--from the time St. Peter and his holy heir set me a ruler over these souls, and over this asylum of the pious and oppressed, I have striven according to my poor ability in the spirit of St. Benedict of Nurcia, and with the pious will of St. Benedict of Anianes before mine eyes, to give succour and protection to all travellers and pilgrims, and all outlawed and persecuted persons, against the wild turbulence of nature, as well as against human ferocity and the violence and persecution of an ungodly world. You just now interrupted me in a godly discourse, my guests! I spoke of the Church's might and authority, which is now so scandalously assaulted by the blind children of this world in our ungodly times. I was inculcating the duties of our holy order on the children, and for the edification of my dependents, on occasion of the crying deeds of violence and injustice we daily hear of and see before our eyes. You have also surely heard how shamelessly and treacherously the king's men have dealt with the outlawed Count Jacob's men in Halland, and what an outrageous and arbitrary act the royal vassal, Jonas Fries, hath lately perpetrated here, on the boundary of my abbey's consecrated ground and territory?"

"What I have heard is almost past belief, pious Father Abbot," answered Brock; "but the matter is related very differently by the friends of freedom and those of despotism. Rumour hath indeed possibly exaggerated the stern vassal's despotic act."

"My fugitive guest, who sits there, can bear testimony to the truth," said the abbot. "The unhappy victim to the lawlessness and barbarity of that royal vassal was his good friend and comrade."

"It is as true as that I stand here," began the warrior-like personage in the monk's cloak, and rose from his seat. His accent sounded half-Norwegian; the combed-down hair slipped aside for an instant from his brow, and over his wild fiery eye a pair of bristly meeting eye-brows and a large red scar were visible. "Thus are law and justice now upheld in Denmark," he continued. "I had come down hither in reliance on truce and treaty, but truth and justice are no longer recognised, where the friends of freedom are outlawed. My comrade had saved my life, and freed me from a degrading captivity; he was, like myself, in the service of the Norwegian king. Three days since he was taken captive at my side in broad day-light, by Sir Jonas Fries himself, and dragged to his castle.--I escaped to the sanctuary of the abbey; but when I yesterday, with the pious abbot's men, would have liberated my unhappy comrade, we found him hanged, without law or sentence, on Jonas Fries's closed castle gate."

"Ha, indeed! the more madly they act the sooner they will have to account for it," exclaimed Brock, in a powerful martial tone, and striking his large battle sword against the flagged floor. "The master who hath such zealous servants may fare badly at last--that deed of violence shall prove a firebrand----"

"We meddle not here with worldly matters," interrupted the abbot hastily, with an admonitory wink, and a side glance at the attentive and startled monks, who all, however, sat silent with humbly drooping heads, and appeared to fear, rather than love, their despotic and mighty superior. "Worldly matters are to me and my dependents, but vehicles for spiritual things," continued the prelate with a devout air, "and I only permit any discourse concerning them when it may serve us for holy and edifying meditation, according to St. Benedict of Anianes' pious will and injunction. I now forbid all further talk on such subjects here. Refresh yourselves, my stranger guests! Pray a silent prayer, brother bed-maker, and discharge thy duty towards the strangers! Pray in silence, and retire to rest, children! Let every brother set about his evening work! You must not suppose, my unknown guests," he added, "that the conversers and lay brothers you have seen here, alone perform the bodily labour which is incumbent on us all--it is precisely in order to gain bodily strength for the performance of the stern duties of our order that I give, as you see, occasional dispensations with respect to the nourishment of the frail body with substantial meat."

The brethren of the order and the monkishly clad children now folded their hands, and muttered a prayer; they then departed, after they had all, with a deep and submissive inclination of the head, kissed the abbot's hand, which lay extended for the purpose on the arm of his chair, in which he remained sitting, and gazed on his guests with an attentive and searching glance. "You are welcome. Sir Niels Brock and Sir Johan Papæ," now commenced the abbot, in a confidential and condescending tone, with a side look at Sir Pallé. "This knight I know not, but I presume you bring none with you but your most confidential friends."

"The high-born Junker Christopher's gentleman of the bed-chamber, Sir Pallé, accompanies us to Wordingborg by his lord's command," said Brock, hastily, "although we cannot boast of knowing him intimately."

"Ay, indeed! You are welcome also, Sir Pallé," resumed the abbot, in a tone of haughty condescension, once more assuming the dignified mien of a prelate. "Your master, the junker, is now said deeply to repent his sin and cruelty against our most learned and God-fearing archbishop, and to feel a longing after peace and reconciliation with the holy church? With all his errors, he seems still, however, to be of a more tractable and pious mind than his hardened brother, and it may one day, perhaps, stand him in good stead, for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."

"Yes, my lord junker will now assuredly be converted, pious Sir Abbot," answered Pallé,

thrusting a large piece of meat into his mouth, by which he was hindered from continuing his speech.

"To judge from the build of Sir Pallé's person, *he* stands most in need of refreshment and rest," said Brock, with significance. "According to his assurance, there is now the best understanding between the junker and his brother."

"Ay, indeed! hum! well, then! It is good assuredly that brothers should be united, provided it be in that which is right," said the prelate, and broke off the conversation. Little was now said, and that only on indifferent topics. Sir Pallé's gormandising appetite perceptibly decreased at the cautious pause in the conversation, and at the sight of the fugitive in the monk's cloak, who had remained silently sitting at that end of the table which was least lighted up, and who kept his scrutinising eyes fixed upon him. As no one either ate or drank any more, the abbot folded his hands and muttered a Latin prayer; after which he rang a little silver hand-bell, and Pater master-of-the-household entered.

"This knight desires instantly to retire to rest," said the abbot, pointing to Pallé; "perhaps you will go with him as his contubernalis over yonder." As he said this, he winked at Sir Papæ, and the taciturn knight immediately accompanied Sir Pallé and the master of the household across the court yard of the monastery to the guesthouse, which was situated apart.

As soon as the abbot was alone with Brock and the disguised fugitive, he gave them a mysterious nod and arose. He took the lamp in his hand, and opened a private door in the refectory which led to a long vaulted passage. He went on before, and they followed him in silence through the passage, and up a winding stair to the library of the monastery and the prelate's private chamber; he opened all the doors himself, and locked them carefully behind him. Sir Pallé's indolence and love of good cheer seemed to be contending with curiosity and repressed alarm. "Whom take you yon sharp-eyed fugitive to be, Sir Papæ?" he asked his silent travelling companion, as soon as the monk had shown them to their sleeping apartment and departed.

"I care not who he is," said the knight sullenly, and took off his vest.

"It is assuredly one of the outlaws," continued Pallé, anxiously. "Truly it is strange to have sat at table, and now to sleep under the same roof with such a fellow. It might get wind one day, and waken suspicion."

"I will give you good counsel, Sir Pallé," answered the sullen knight. "Take your horse out of the stable again, and ride off at full speed, despite night and storm! Our company may also seem suspicious to you. A man like you, who holds his own peace and safety dearer than aught beside, should never devote himself to the service of any master in these troublous times. As far as I can judge you are as little fit for the junker's as the king's service, and least of all to be your own master, like me and other free men."

"The devil! Sir Papæ! what do you take me for?" said Pallé, bridling up and highly affronted; "think ye I am afraid for my skin? I would fain see the man who hath oftener risked life and blood in the service of my master, than I have, and yet as a free man dare snap my fingers at the world's rulers and tyrants. What my master, the junker, is about, he must know best himself, and answer for--it concerns not me--*his* head truly is placed too high to be imperilled. When it comes to the push, all falls on those beneath; yet when he calls you and Sir Niels his friends, and sends you greeting and courteous invitation, as his servant, I surely run no risk by companionship with you;--but an *outlaw!* think! perhaps even one of the regicides!--to have sat at table with him may cost us all dear."

"You are in a very unpleasant position, Sir Pallé," said the haughty partizan, with a contemptuous smile. "With the king, you stand not well, they say; and though you have already settled yourself comfortably in the junker's service, it may end badly enough, after all. If he gets but a hint how you keep the seal of his private letters----"

"It is a shameful falsehood, I deny it positively," answered Pallé, glowing crimson. "But for the Lord's and our dear lady's sake, excellent Sir Papæ! bring me not into trouble by such talk, and beseech Sir Niels also to be silent about it. I am in truth innocent as an unborn babe. I know not in the least what either you or the junker have in hand, and there was not a word about it in the letter; that is what you say yourself; for what know *I* of it?" he added hastily. "But whatever it may be," he continued, "I pray you only to consider that, after all, the king is a mighty man, and not to be jested with when he is wroth. Even my own master, the high-born junker, I would in all confidence here between us two, counsel ye to deal somewhat cautiously with. Too much confidence in the great answers not, either;--in our times one should in troth know how to obey the commands of one's master, and nevertheless use one's own understanding,--do you see? To speak plainly. Sir Papæ! since the commandant at Kallundborg was forced to lose his head, I have often had uneasy dreams."

"Now good night, my dear Pallé!" said the knight, clapping him compassionately on the shoulder. "I would not for a great deal be in your place. It must be grievous for an honest knight adventurer like you, who so faithfully strives to serve the great, not to be able to fathom his master's mind, any more than his own stomach." The knight then strode into his sleeping

apartment and shut the door after him with a scornful laugh.

"Another awkward scrape!" muttered Sir Pallé, striking his forehead. He threw himself into a chair and yawned. It seemed as though his body and soul were at war. He appeared to feel a desire to sleep, but could not rest. He threw himself once or twice on the couch, but soon rose again, panting and puffing with uneasiness. All was now quiet at the monastery; nothing was to be heard but the howling of the storm through the chimney and around the high gable ends of the roof. After some deliberation, Pallé wrapped himself in his mantle, and stole softly out of the door. He found the anti-chamber of the guest-house open, and slipped out into the court-yard of the monastery. He looked around him on all sides. It was dark and gloomy; there was not a light to be seen in any of the twelve cells; but, from the second story of the principal building a solitary lamp shone through the creaking boughs of the lime trees. The light came from an apartment which Pater, head-cook, had pointed out to him as the abbot's private chamber. Before it stood a remarkably tall, thick, lime tree, which was not yet in leaf. Sir Pallé stole forward under the tree, and endeavoured to climb up its trunk; the build of his figure rendered this very difficult for him to do; but he succeeded at last by dint of much exertion, in getting so high up in the tree, that at some distance he could peep in through the small lit-up window panes. He beheld the abbot and Sir Niels Brock very singularly occupied. A tall warlike form stood before them in ancient knightly armour. The abbot was in full costume; he placed a helmet (over which he appeared to be pronouncing a benedicté) upon the warrior's head. Brock seemed to be rubbing the eye-brows and beard of the armour-clad personage with an ointment. Pallé listened in vain, the storm prevented his hearing a single word of what was said; but he now saw that the abbot opened a cupboard, and produced a black book with silver clasps, which looked to him like a Testament. Sir Niels Brock, as well as the steel-clad warrior, laid their hands on the book and knelt. They remained in this position while the abbot fetched a silver chalice from the cupboard, and went through the same ceremonies as on the performance of low mass. He took a silver wine-flagon, filled the chalice, signed a benediction over it, and drank himself. He then opened a silver box, signed a cross, and a blessing likewise over it, and seemed to administer the sacrament to each of the kneeling knights.

"Gracious Heaven! He is surely giving them the sacrament!" whispered Pallé to himself, "what can all this mean?"

The abbot now stepped back, and appeared to be speaking with great emphasis and energetic enthusiasm. At last the knights arose and kissed the bishop's hand, and the dismayed spy recognised the powerful tones of Niels Brock, who clapped the steel clad warrior on the shoulder and said, in a loud tone, "Now, then! in the name of all the saints, have you courage, Kaggé! The devil himself could not know ye now, or injure a hair of your consecrated head."

On hearing the name of Kaggé, Sir Pallé became so alarmed, that he lost his balance. The branch broke on which he had placed his foot, and he was forced to let himself slide down the trunk of the lime-tree without being able to save the skin of his hands or his rich attire, in which great rents were torn. He fell with violence to the ground, and stunned by fear and pain, stole back again in this pitiable plight to his chamber.

Abbot Johan did not appear to his guests on the following morning, and when Brock and Papæ, during mattins, rode forth from the monastery with the worn-out and hapless Sir Pallé, the party had received an addition in the person of a stranger, mounted on a large well-fed horse from the abbot's stable, and clad in an old-fashioned suit of armour. His hair and brow were hidden by an ample helmet, fastened under the chin with a silver clasp. His meeting eye-brows and broad beard were shining, and coal-black; over his coat of mail he wore a large silver chain, in token of a knight's sacred vow. Sir Pallé hardly dared to turn his eyes on him. It was, indeed, impossible for him to recognize in this figure the fugitive guest at the monastery; but he was nevertheless convinced it was he, whom he now knew to be the outlawed regicide, Kaggé himself. Pallé looked as though he already felt the rope round his neck, at the thought of the dangerous company into which he was thrown. This new and mysterious travelling companion rode in silence between his two powerful friends. His glance was wild and restless; at first setting out he often looked behind on all sides, as if he feared to be recognised and pursued; but he soon, however, nodded confidentially to his companions, and presently fell into a deep reverie. His dark imaginings were occasionally interrupted by a wild and half-smothered laugh.

"I have met with a good friend and kinsman here in the monastery," said Brock, in a careless tone, to Pallé. "He is a merry fellow, as you doubtless perceive; and laughs at his own thoughts when there is a lack of mirth and wit in his companions. He hath a true love at Wordingborg whom he would surprise; but therefore he would rather be unknown, and you can surely be silent where one ill-timed word might prove dangerous to yourself."

"Yes, doubtless," answered Pallé, "silence is a virtue necessity teaches every wise man in our times; and here it is easy for me to be silent, since I know not even the name of your honourable friend and kinsman."

"That I will confide to you: he is called Johan Limbek, but gives himself out to be Ako Krummedigé, or Blackbeard, going on a pilgrimage to the holy land," continued Brock in a lowered tone; "but keep this to yourself. My kinsman is not to be jested with, do you see, and if you disturb his love adventure by unseasonable talk you must be prepared to break a sharp lance with him. He fights better than the devil himself. I would only just mention to you,--he hath

broken the neck of many a doughty knight, ere this, in love adventures."

"He will scarcely find a rival in me," answered Pallé, "although I am reputed to stand high in the favour of the fair."

"Assuredly," replied Sir Niels, and laughed. "Who knows not that rare ballad of Sir Pallé's wooing fair Gundelillé's driver lad?"

"Would that all dainty maidens and wooing were at the devil!" returned Pallé, angrily. "That dainty maiden will never more make a fool of any honest man, as surely as Marsk Stig's vagabond brood are caged for life at Wordingborg."

At these words the steel-clad traveller became attentive, and measured Sir Pallé with a scornful and angry look.

"See you," whispered Sir Niels, "my enamoured friend cannot even hear maidens and rivals spoken of without the blood instantly boiling within him. Beware, as I said before, Sir Pallé, that you do not meddle with his concerns." So saying, he turned, with a contemptuous look, from the perplexed gentleman of the bedchamber, and joined his two other companions, who seemed as little in a communicative mood as himself. Absorbed in gloomy reverie, and almost without another word being spoken, the travellers pursued the journey to Wordingborg.

CHAP. VIII.

When the two powerful and well-known knights, Niels Brock and Johan Papæ, with their outlawed friend between them, and the anxious Sir Pallé at their side, rode with their train through the gates of Wordingborg, there was so much bustle among the gathering crowd in the town that they were scarcely noticed. The king had arrived with his brother the junker and his numerous train of knights--Drost Aagé, Marsk Oluffsen, Count Henrik of Mecklenborg, and nearly all his most important councillors were with him. The castle was filled with princely guests and their splendid trains. Duke Valdemar of Slesvig, and his brother the gigantic Duke Eric of Langeland, had just made their entry into the castle, and there was much talk among the populace of the long legs of Duke Eric, of which none had ever seen the like.

"'Tis a devil of a fellow, yon long-shanks," said the sentinel at the castle gate to his comrade. "'Twas surely he who slew Drost Skelm in Nyborg just under the king's nose."

"No, comrade, he slew him in his bed; I know that better," answered the other man-at-arms. "I was myself among the king's spear-men at the Danish court: it will be just four years come next Lady-day; the heat was great, and they drank hard at court--the long-legged lord is fierce when he is hot in the head or drunk; and at that time, sure enough, he sided with the outlaws. Had the king been present, long-shanks would scarcely have ventured on so rough a jest--he was forced to flee from Nyborg the same night, and for three years he durst not show his face before the king. For all that he is a very able fellow," continued the man-at-arms; "and since he got a dressing at Grónsund he hath learned to take off his hat to our king. However fierce and mad he may be, he is nevertheless a hundred times honester than his wizened brother, the yellow scarecrow from Slesvig."

The talk now turned upon this generally unpopular prince. It was known that the ambitious and wily Duke Valdemar had aspired to the Danish crown, and been suspected of a secret understanding with Marsk Stig and the outlaws. Since the great sea-fight at Grónsund, his proud spirit had drooped, however; his last conspiracy and contumacy against his liege sovereign resembled the flaring up of a burnt-out and exhausted volcano. The duke's sallow, withered visage and long nose were the subjects of the coarse jests and biting comments of the populace, although his well-known acuteness, and sagacious state-policy still appeared to be dreaded.

The king's step-father, Count Gerhard of Holstein, or the one-eyed count, as he was called by the people, was, on the contrary, much lauded. Since his marriage with Queen Agnes he often sojourned at the castle of Nykiöping. He had on this day arrived from Falster, to act as counsellor and mediator in the treaty with the Dukes. Much reliance was placed on his uprightness and wisdom, and his frank and joyous deportment gained him general favour.

Every hour brought new arrivals to the town and castle, and among them were seen many venerable prelates and bishops known to be devoted to the king. Among others, the Bishops of Aarhus and Ribé, and the provincial Prior of the Dominicans, the venerable Master Olaus, who stood at the head of the Danish clergy's appeal to the pope against the enforcement of the interdict according to the constitution of Veilé. This estimable and truly patriotic prelate, with his mild, calm, aged face, and snowy ring of hair around his tonsure, was almost worshipped by the

people, and wherever he appeared it was whispered that it was he who would deliver the country from ban and interdict.

Every traveller who announced himself to the Marsk as the king's vassal, or belonging to Danish knighthood, was instantly assigned a place in the large upper story of the castle appropriated to the use of the knights. The spacious apartments in this side wing were, however, nearly all occupied, when Sir Niels Brock and Sir Johan Papæ announced themselves to the Marsk, with their unknown friend, whom they gave out to be Sir Ako Blackbeard of the renowned race of Krummedigé. He had returned home from a pilgrimage, it was said, and had vowed silence at the holy grave, and bound himself not to lay aside the armour of his ancestor until the knight's vow was fulfilled which he had there made to the Lord. Such vows were then not uncommon. They met with ready approbation, and carried with them a claim to special honour, and a species of religious reverence. As the king's vassals, and Danish knights of some consideration, the three travellers likewise were now admitted at the castle. Sir Pallé had separated from them as soon as possible, and announced their arrival to his master the junker, without, however, mentioning the suspicious guest they had brought with them. Disquieted by this secret, he went from one party to another, feeling, as it were, that he carried his life in his hand. He was seen, now among the king's, now among the junker's friends, where, with assumed eagerness, he adopted the prevailing tone of the company he was in. He presently, however, rejoined Brock and other haughty and independent knights, who spake freely and boldly both against the king and the junker, and whom he desired not to offend, nor to be despised by, for servile or timid conduct. He thus thought to secure his safety under all circumstances; but he considered no party as perfectly safe, and could not determine in what manner he might best avail himself of the important discovery he had made while in the great lime-tree in the court of the forest monastery.

Notwithstanding the stir which was necessarily caused by the presence of so many strangers in the castle and the town, a remarkable stillness prevailed, and a stern seriousness pervaded the assemblage at the castle. There were no public amusements. The king only appeared at mattins and mass, and at table, noon and evening, in the great upper hall, where were placed two long dining-tables--one for the king and his princely guests, as well as for the prelates and chief men of the state, and another for the Danish knights in general, and the guests who had joined them. Among them sat the mysterious personage from the forest monastery, between Sir Niels Brock and Sir Johan Papæ. According to his knight's vow, the pretended Sir Ako kept on his helmet as well as the old-fashioned armour, and his silence and solemn deportment were regarded with respect. At the same table sat the knights and courtiers of the duke's train, with the German professors of minstrelsy and other learned and foreign visitors. When the noontide repast was over, the company dispersed. Some remained in the spacious apartments of the castle, where they amused themselves with chess and backgammon, or listened to the German minstrels' lays and tales of chivalry; others went to the tennis-court, or the riding-house, and the great tilting-yard, where they whiled away the time with tennis, horse-racing, and martial exercises; some parties went a hawking in the chase, or rode through the town in order to show themselves in all their splendour to the ladies of the place. Many were interested in surveying the royal fleet which lay in the harbour, while others took the opportunity of bargaining with the Hanseatic merchants and skippers, or of making purchases of the famous Wordingborg cloth, which, next to that of Ypres and Ghent, was in especial demand, and bore as high a price as that of Bruges. In the evening the sound of lutes and love ditties was heard, as well in the castle as in the town, where the youthful knights were in search of acquaintance and love adventures.

The important negotiations with the dukes appeared for the first few days, entirely to occupy the king and his council. Through the mediation of Count Gerhard, a peace was soon concluded, and on the most honourable terms for the king. A herald then summoned the knights and guests together in the great knights' hall of the castle. Here the king was seated on a raised throne, between his brother the junker and Count Gerhard, surrounded by the dukes and all his vassals, as well as the state council, and the prelates present at the castle. The Drost read aloud the ratified treaty of peace, in which Duke Valdemar pledged himself that no injustice should be done to the king's peasants in the dukedom, and also scrupulously to perform his duties of vassalage to the Danish crown. On these terms the king consented to pardon him and his brother as well as every one who had sided with the duke in this feud, with the stern exception, however, that henceforth every knight and squire who had been proved to have taken part in his father's murder should be doomed to death wherever they should be found.

While this article of the treaty was read, the king looked around the assemblage with a severe and what seemed to many, a threatening glance. There were not a few present of the acknowledged friends and kinsmen of the outlaws, and in the train of the Duke of Slesvig were several persons unknown both to the Marsk and the Drost, who had excited suspicion by their mysterious and unruly deportment. This strict clause in the treaty appeared greatly to disappoint the expectations of the Duke's friends, and their confidence in this politic prince. He himself sat with downcast eyes, and vainly strove to assume an air of calm indifference.

The Drost finished the reading of the treaty, which excited great attention, and awakened interest of very different kinds, without a single sound being heard in the numerous and anxious assembly. The concluding article however seemed in some degree to soften the stern victor-like tone, which characterised the treaty. By a just recognition of the rights of his brave opponent, the king had invested Duke Eric of Langeland with the fiefs of Oe and of Alt, which he was entitled to

demand in right of his consort Sophia's inheritance. This article terminated the essential part of the treaty, and the assemblage broke up.

Count Gerhard still purposed remaining some days longer, and the Duke of Langeland, who was especially pleased with the king's uprightness, and with the whole treaty, also remained; but his brother the Duke of Slesvig immediately quitted the castle with his whole retinue. He left Wordingborg with his hat slouched low over his eyes, apparently depressed and humbled to a degree which he had never before manifested. He was escorted part of the way by Junker Christopher, who on this occasion seemed desirous to surpass the king in generous sympathy and attentions towards this fallen aspirant to the throne of Denmark, who owed his downfall to his own rancorous animosity and deluded ambition. Sir Niels Brock and Sir John Papæ, who appeared to seize every opportunity of approaching the junker without exciting remark, had joined his train.

It was not until late in the evening that Prince Christopher returned. He had sent Papæ with the rest of his train on before, and arrived a whole hour later in the town, accompanied by Brock. They rode slowly along the dusky road, and conversed in a low tone, and at intervals, together. They found the town lighted up with flambeaux and torches, on occasion of the ratification of the treaty. Songs and merry lutes resounded from several houses. At the castle, the knight's hall was illuminated; music and song was also to be heard there. Workmen were busied at the lists by the light of lanterns; and carpenters were employed in erecting railings and a high stand for the next day's tournament, in which the king himself intended taking a part.

"Ay! he will never tire of this child's play," muttered Junker Christopher, after he had rode past the lists and had seen these preparations; "he squanders more on such nonsense in a year, than both Samsøe and Kallundborg bring me in; he ruins the country with it, and will at last break his own neck in this foolery."

"His courtiers are too polite and obsequious for that," answered Brock--"there is assuredly not one among his strutting halberdiers, or knights of the round table, who would not willingly let himself be pushed out of his saddle ten times a day, to please his chivalrous master. Credit me, they have regularly exercised themselves in the art of kicking up their heels in the air, as soon as he touches them with his lance.

"They would be badly paid for such courtesy, did they venture on it," answered the junker. "After the most trifling tilt, a strict knights' council is held; and he pays almost more attention to those mock fights, regulated by all the foreign laws and rules of honour, than to the manners and morals of his subjects."

"Doth he also mix with stranger-knights and masters of arms on such occasions?" asked Brock. It is the first time of my attending this kind of entertainment.

"Oh yes!" muttered the junker, "when his vanity may be flattered, he despises no laurels. Hitherto he hath really passed for an invincible king Arthur."

"Perhaps he may meet with his overmatch, nevertheless," said Brock in a lowered tone, and looking cautiously around him. "I never fight for sport myself; but give heed to-morrow, high-born junker--Know you the ancient tradition of the puling enamoured demi-god Baldur, and the bold Hother?"^[4]

"How mean ye?" asked the junker, stalling.----

"I have a good friend,--I know of a foreign knight I would say--a master of his weapon, who in such courteous game might have a mind to play Hother."

"Ay! indeed!" muttered Christopher, looking uneasily around,--"you should caution your friend, though, against playing so dangerous a game; you should least of all speak to me, Sir Brock, of such friends and their wishes. What I have confided to you, in no wise warrants such presumptuous confidence. Whatever there may be between me and a certain mighty personage, matters will hardly be pushed so far as you and your bold friends think."

"Be pleased to understand me aright, high-born junker," interrupted Sir Niels hastily. "I speak but of a sport; I know they amuse themselves here at times with mumming, and such diversions."

"They may amuse themselves as they please, for aught I care," muttered the junker, gloomily; "but I will be out of the game. Half one's life is but a sorry piece of mumming, whether we play friend or foe. It will be seen who hath best enacted his part, when the child's play here is ended, and people think in earnest again in Denmark. He then spurred his horse, and rode into the court of the castle.

"After the junker and Brock had dismounted from their horses in the castle-yard, and as they were passing the maidens' tower, they heard the sound of a lute, and saw a knightly figure hastily conceal himself behind the pillars of the tower."

"Hath every one gone mad? Serenades here in the country, and that even ere the nightingale hath come!" muttered the junker with a scornful laugh, and wrapping himself in his mantle to keep out the cold wind. "Hum! as is the master so are his servants--are we not far advanced here

in courtesy, and gentle customs Sir Niels! Know ye ought of such gallantry in Jutland? All will now go on in as chivalrous a fashion as in Spain and Italy. That we may thank these vagabond minstrels for, with their ballads and their books of adventures, which my chivalrous brother even takes with him in his pocket, on his campaigns. In the knights' hall there, they are now talking, no doubt, of the beautiful Florez and Blantzefflor, and of the virtuous Tristan and King Arthur. All that is indispensable if one would pass for a courteous and courtly knight;--and without, here, wanders a fool to sing serenades in the moonlight, to the owls of Wordingborg tower."

"If that was a prison we passed. Sir Junker," observed his companion, "it might be easily explained without such players' tricks."

"Well possibly," said the junker nodding. "It was here the Drost took the liberty of caging Marsk Stig's raven brood instead of at Kallundborg. Even the pretty vagabond ladies we shall find have their adorers." The junker then ascended the stairs of the balcony.

CHAP. IX.

In the castle-yard, before the knights' hall, stood a crowd of curious grooms and kitchen maids, to hear the singing, and gaze at the king and the stranger-guests. Amid this gossiping and jesting throng, wandered a fat, silent personage, closely muffled in a cloak. The maidens crowded together, and giggled whenever he came near them, and the one joked the other about him as a well-known wooer of the whole fair sex. It was the generally self-satisfied and obsequious Sir Pallé, who now however looked most solemn and thoughtful. He had here for some time listened to the jests of the maidens and their talkative admiration of the king's handsome presence and his splendour, and of all the pomp they beheld. This seemed however but little to amuse him to-night; he yawned with a sigh, and went with undecided steps towards the maidens' tower; he now heard the sound of a lute in that part of the square, where fell a partial shadow, and the cold wind whistled in eddies around the pillars of the tower. He paused, and listened attentively; the sounds continued, and he thought he discerned a dark form standing under the tower window. He drew nearer with curiosity, and distinctly beheld a man with a knight's helmet, around whose person fluttered an ample mantle; while he gazed up at the grated window, and occasionally struck the cords of a lute with wild earnestness. Pallé leaned back in alarm against the wall, and thought he had recognised the mysterious guest of the forest monastery. The cold perspiration broke out on his forehead; but his curiosity overcame his fright, and he remained standing. He heard a whisper, which was answered from above, and a deep but low voice, now sung beneath:

"Oh list then, Agneté, thus sue I to thee!^[5]
Wilt thou be moved my true love to be?
Ho! ho! ho!
Wilt thou be moved my true love to be,
To morrow they lead here the dance so free?"

The deep voice ceased; the little window rattled behind the grating, and a sweet female voice sang from above--

"Oh yes, by my troth, that will I indeed,
O'er the sea so blue if thou'lt bear me with speed--
Ha! ha! ha!
O'er the sea so blue if thou'lt bear me with speed,
But not to its depths will I dive with thee,
Then to-morrow we'll lead the dance so free."

"Ha! Gundelille's voice, Ulrica Stig!" muttered Pallé; "ay, indeed, a love adventure then! and yonder outlawed hound on *my* preserve. This shall soon be put a stop to!" In his jealous eagerness he plucked up courage, and first stole a good way back from the tower; he then went briskly forward again, and growled forth a song, while he tramped hard, letting his long sword clatter after him on the stone pavement; but he had hardly swaggered ten paces from the tower ere the disguised figure rushed past him like lightning and threw him on the ground; he felt at the same time a stab in his right side. "Murder! help!" gasped Pallé, in a low voice. He dared not cry aloud and give the alarm lest the terrible fugitive should return and despatch him at once. "Alas! poor unoffending fellow I that am!" he moaned, "when I carry my head highest I even get run through the body. Those accursed women! they are only created to be my ruin--" He hastened to get upon his legs, and ran as hard as he could over the dusky part of the court-yard to his chamber in the knights' story, where in all secrecy he had his wound examined and bound up. His ample mantle had parried the thrust, and the wound seemed trifling; but it pained him

exceedingly, and the fright had so overpowered him that he was compelled to retire to his couch. To the many inquisitive questions put to him as to who it was that had wounded him, he dared not answer a word; and the more he thought of his mysterious rival the more alarmed he became. "The Drost!--send for the Drost!" he at last exclaimed in a low tone. "It is a state secret; no other may know it." Nobody attended much to this expression, which was regarded merely as one of his customary boasts of a knowledge of state affairs and secrets which it was known would never be entrusted to him. At last, however, his attendants were forced to humour him, and sent a messenger to summon the Drost.

Meanwhile the Lady Ulrica stood alone, and listened at the little grated window in the maidens' tower. On a work-table in the chamber stood a lamp, and a handsome fisher-maiden's costume, trimmed with pearls and silk ribbon, lay upon it. A sweet female voice was heard singing in the adjoining apartment; here sat her sister, the meek Margaretha, before the lamp, occupied in embroidering a large piece of tapestry for an altar-cloth. The edge or border consisted of skilfully worked foliage, with figures and scenes taken from life. There sprang hark and hind--here danced ladies and knights in miniature; but within the border hung the Saviour on the cross, and the Virgin Mary stood with St. John and St. Magdalen at the foot of the cross as Mater Dolorosa, represented as usual with a sword through the bosom. In the foreground knelt a knight in black armour, with his consort and two little maidens in mourning attire. In these figures she had portrayed her father, the mighty Marsk Stig, and her proud and unhappy mother Ingeborg, together with herself and her sister, as children. While Margaretha sat diligently occupied in this employment, and sang the ballad of Hagbarth and Signé, she noticed not what her capricious sister was about.^[6]

The distant sound of the festive din at the castle occasionally reached the lonely prison of the captive maidens; when this happened, Ulrica always became impatient, and wept at the thought of her exclusion from these festivities, and Margaretha found it a hard task to comfort her. Each time the sprightly little Karen came to supply their wants, Ulrica eagerly and inquisitively questioned her of all that passed, and the maiden was forced to give a description of all the stranger guests and knights. It was only when Margaretha heard Drost Aagé's name, and Karen's account of what she knew of his dangerous adventure at Kallundborg, that she forgot her work, her hands dropped into her lap, and she listened with attentive interest. What their attendant related of the king, of his condescension towards the lowest, and his just strictness towards the great and mighty, she also heard with a species of interest, although not without a melancholy and sometimes bitter smile when she thought of her own fate; but when Ulrica would be informed of the looks of each of the stranger knights, of the colour of their hair, beard, and clothes--how they sat at table, and with what they were served, Margaretha was near losing patience; she therefore was very glad when Ulrica, as now, took a fancy to shut herself up in the little tiring chamber, there to busy herself with her gay apparel, and gossip with their attendant Karen. Since the maiden had on the morning of this day mentioned the tournament which was in preparation, and the dance and masque which it was hoped would take place the next evening, Ulrica had become joyous again. When she was not whispering and gossiping with Karen, she sang quite gaily in the little tiring chamber to which she had taken a special fancy.

Ulrica had shut herself up this evening in her favourite retreat. She was again busied with her gay attire, and was humming a merry ballad about Carl of Risé and Lady Rigmor; but she now heard her sister's sweet melancholy song as she sat at her pious occupation, and the tears suddenly started to the eyes of the easily excited Ulrica; she rose in haste, as if scared by her own thoughts, and threw her decorations on the floor. She opened the door, and flew to embrace her meek sister with eager emotion.

"What is this, Ulrica? What ails thee, dearest sister?" asked Margaretha, with sympathising uneasiness, as she returned her ardent demonstrations of affection.

"Ah! I grew all on a sudden so anxious and sad," said Ulrica. "Thy song was so sweet and sorrowful, just like a lonely forsaken bird's in its cage, and I thought how it would be if thou wert left *quite* alone in this horrid tower, with no one whatever to care for thee and comfort thee as thou hast comforted me and spoken kindly to me every day."

"Thou art still with me, dear Ulrica, and truly I sit here with a cheerful heart at my precious tapestry. When the Lord wills it our prison doors will assuredly open for us, and ere that time we need not expect it. We will, however, never sorrow as those who have no hope."

"That is true indeed," said Ulrica, half offended, and wiping her eyes. "When thou canst but embroider and tell thy rosary, and the adventures of courteous knights, or sing the Drost's ballads, thou carest but little for the whole fair world without; but *I* can endure this life no longer: when I hear the sea dashing below at night I often wish that a merman would come and carry me off like Agneté. I would almost rather be at the bottom of the sea than in this wearisome prison-hole."

"Never make such foolish and ungodly wishes, dear sister," answered Margaretha, half alarmed, and involuntarily crossing herself. "It is better, however, to be in prison and innocent than at liberty and guilty, rememberest thou not what stands in holy writ about St. Peter in prison, and what he said?"

"I know all that well enough," interrupted Ulrica, pettishly; "but, nevertheless, there came an

angel and took him out."

"If the Lord and our Lady will it so, such an angel might be sent to us also," continued Margaretha. "It needs but an angel's thought in a kindly soul. I, too, should rejoice to see God's fair world again, when that might be with honour and without sin--but thou wert speaking of merman^[7] and evil spirits, and I heard before how wildly thou sang'st; it sounded to me like Agneté's answer to the merman--as though thou wert an unhappy deluded maiden like her. Ah, sweet sister! I know too well who thou art thinking of; but beware of him! he is assuredly just as false as the ocean foam, and as the hapless Agneté's bridegroom."

"I require not he should be one hair better," answered Ulrica, eagerly. "Truly it was that foolish fickle Agneté, and not her bridegroom, who was false and faithless. She broke her vow, and left her wedded husband and her little children, and would not return to them, however much he besought her--such goodness and piety *I* cannot understand; no, truly, *he* was far more good and honourable! I ever pitied him, poor wretch! So *very* frightful, either, he could not have been," she continued; "he had fair hair and sparkling eyes like Sir Kaggé. Just listen!" and she sang--

"His hair was as the pure gold bright,
His eyes they sparkled with joyous light."

"But it surely was no good sign," observed Margaretha, "when he entered into the church, and all the holy images turned to the wall. Alas, dearest sister, I could never look at Sir Kaggé's small sparkling snake-like eye, but it seemed as though all pious and godly images fled from my soul."

"Ah, thou art so unreasonable," exclaimed Ulrica impetuously; "so terribly unreasonable, that it is impossible longer to bear with thee. I shall run from thee as soon as I can--that I tell thee beforehand; but then," she added half sadly--"ah, then thou must not weep and mourn for me, Margaretha! Wilt thou promise me that? or--wilt thou come too?"

"What art thou thinking of, poor dear child! art thou ever dreaming of flight, and yet canst not find in thy heart to leave me? Make up thy mind to be patient, sweet Ulrica! After all, we *cannot* escape, and I *would not* if we could. With all his severity, the king is still good and just, every one here says so; he will surely one day come to know we are innocent, and will let us wander free out of his kingdom; that is the utmost we can hope for, after what hath happened; and this hope I do not give up."

"The king!" resumed Ulrica with vehemence, and with a proud toss of the head; "truly the king is a revengeful, an obstinate, and unjust tyrant. I would tell him so to his face, even were I certain he were my real brother, as people say; but he should beware," she continued, with a look of defiance, "it is neither chivalrous nor kingly, to keep ladies and noble knights' daughters, perhaps even a king's daughter, in prison. I know however of *one* knight in the world who hath courage to avenge us, and free me from this degradation."

"You terrify me, dear bewildered child! Art thou dreaming again of that fearful greatness, and thinking of ungodly revenge! This comes not of thyself--That dreadful Kaggé can surely never be here again?"

"If he *were* here, should I tell it to thee, that thou in thy conscientiousness might betray it to the zealous Sir Drost, and that I might see my only friend on the wheel to-morrow?--thus far extends not our sisterhood. A little while ago, I cared for thee, with my whole heart," she continued, in a voice of lamentation, "but *now* I cannot abide thee; thou dost hate and despise the only human being that cares for me, and thou mightest almost make me fear him did I not know him better--this is not good of thee, Margaretha." She burst into a flood of tears, held both her hands before her eyes, and pushed away her sorrowing and sympathising sister, with her pretty elbows.

"Weep not, be not naughty and wroth, dearest Ulrica," entreated Margaretha. "I hate no living soul in the world. Perhaps even Kaggé may be better than I think; but if he is here and thou canst send a message to him, then for heaven's sake, beseech him to fly, and not plot more mischief."

"No, no!" said Ulrica, impatiently, and stamping with her little feet, without, however, taking her hands from her eyes. "Who says he is here? Would he *were* here, and was going to help me hence! If I were once gone, thou wouldst miss me though, Margaretha! Then thou wouldst rue having made me so naughty and wroth and untoward to-night. Now thou mayst sit down at thine ease, and think how thou wilt be able to make me good again--I am going to my couch without even kissing thee, and bidding thee good night," so saying, she ran to her couch, sprang into it with her clothes and shoes on, and drew up the down quilt quite over her head.

Margaretha seated herself on the side of the couch, and spoke gently and soothingly to her. She would have taken the thick down quilt from her face, but the little self-willed maiden held it fast with both hands, and appeared to be strongly convulsed under it. Margaretha became alarmed and feared she was ill; at last she was nearly weeping herself; but Ulrica presently set up a loud laugh, and sprang from under the quilt. "Look! now! am good again!" she said, playfully, and hopped a graceful dancing step. "Come now, Margaretha, and thou shalt see all my

finery; for I will be present at the gay dance to-morrow, that I tell thee; and if thou dost not let me slip out of the door with little Karen, I jump out of the window and break my neck,--then thou wilt be quit of me. Come and thou shalt see all my fine things!" so saying, she threw her arms round her grave sister's neck, kissed her and skipped with her into the little tiring chamber.

CHAP. X.

Some of the company in the knights' hall were entertaining themselves with singing and lutes, but Junker Christopher had sat down to a grave game at chess with the Duke of Langeland. Sir Niels Brock, Sir Johan Papæ and their silent friend with the helmet, tried their fortune at dice and backgammon. Count Gerhard listened with the king, the Marsk, and the young knights, to the adventures and songs of the German minstrels. These foreign masters of song sought especially to entertain the king and his guests with lays composed in honour of all crowned heads, whom they lauded as their munificent patrons and protectors. At last they addressed themselves immediately to the king in a strain of somewhat exaggerated panegyric, particularly on his learning, and in the same metre and high-flown phrase in which the Minnesingers formerly sang the praises of their loves. Count Gerhard smiled, and the king at last became impatient. "No! this goes too far!" he exclaimed; "would you make me believe, Master Rumelant, that you are enamoured of me as though I were a fair maiden? No more of this! Sing to us, rather of the brave Nibélungen, and the hero Siégfred."

"As you command! most mighty prince! My generous and noble patron!" answered Master Rumelant, with a bow; but he had been thrown into such confusion by the king's displeasure at his flatteries, that he could recollect nothing perfectly, but jumbled different songs together. "Stop! let *me!*" interrupted Master Poppé, with his warrior-like voice, and he now began the bold and spirited German epic poem of the brave Nibélungen, in tones which rang through the hall. The lay gained great applause, but it was a long epic, which became wearisome by the monotony of the melody or recitative. When Poppé paused only for a moment to take breath, or recollect, Master Rumelant instantly took up the lay, and as soon as he made any mistake, or faltered, Master Poppé recommenced with renovated powers; and thus it seemed as though the poem would never be ended.

The king was, however, an attentive listener, and laughed once or twice right heartily at the naïve and vivid descriptions; but at last he grew tired, and cleared his throat several times. "Excellent! excellent! good sirs; thanks!" he said, interrupting the unwearied singers. "That is enough for one time. There is marrow and bone in your heroic lays, as well as in your warriors; they are almost as hard to despatch. Now we should like to hear a Danish song. We have, indeed, no such single heroic poem, unless it be our chronicles. In reality, they compose an epic which I trust will never be ended. Our war songs are but fragments of them, but they are therefore better suited for songs. They never flag, but go on briskly, and that I ought to like right well, since I am myself of a somewhat impetuous temper. We have, besides, no real master of the art as yet," he continued: "but our songs are national, and are sung both by knight and peasant. Where is the Drost?"

The Drost had been some time ago summoned from the hall, and no one knew where he was.

"Now Marsk Oluffsen! do *you* sing of our warriors and heroes!" said the king. "But have a care you split not the good arches here in our hall! I know your voice well."

"I would rather fight than sing songs for you, my liege!" answered the Marsk; "they say I sing like a growling bear, but if you desire it I will willingly growl you out a song." He then cleared his throat, and began in a bass voice as deep and hollow as from an abyss.

"It was young Ulf van Jern,
Unto the king went he,
My father's death for to avenge,
Your men will you lend me."^[8]

"Silence!" exclaimed the king, stamping vehemently on the floor.

The Marsk was silent, and stared at him in astonishment.

"What are ye thinking of, Sir Marsk! would you remind the king of his father's death?" whispered Count Henrik in his ear.

"By all the martyrs! who ever thought of that?" said the Marsk, and hastily withdrew. Soon after, the master of the household stepped forward, and summoned the king and his guests to the

supper-table, as he threw open the door of the dining-hall.

As was customary when the king was present, all the etiquettes of the table were observed according to chivalrous usage. Each knight had his appointed seat, with a small separate trencher and napkin. When the king went to take his place, he was wont to walk round the table of his knights, and at times to cast an observant glance over these small napkins, which were to lie whole and smoothly spread before the seats of the knights, with bread and trenchers, or plates, in a prescribed position. If a rent or a slit was found in the napkin, or if the bread lay reversed, it implied a charge touching the honour of the knight to whom the bread and napkin belonged, and the person thus accused was instantly obliged to leave the table, and remain shut out from the community of knights, until he should have justified himself. The day preceding a tournament there were generally a herald and two pursuivants, or under-heralds, present, at the king's table and that of his knights, to watch over the observance of these customs. This was the case on this evening.

When the king came to the middle of the knights' table, he stopped, on remarking three trenchers upon which the bread lay reversed; he started, and nodded to the herald.

"Who are to sit here?" asked the king with a stern look.

"The high-born knights, Sir Niels Brock and Sir Johan Papæ, my liege," answered the herald, with lowered staff and a precise deportment. "Also a certain Ako Krummedigé, whom no one knows. It is he to whom it hath been permitted to wear his helmet here in the hall, and keep silence towards every one, according to his knights' vow at the holy sepulchre."

"Who is their accuser?"

"An unknown knight, my liege! but he hath placed his covered shield as a pledge in the armoury; he will appear and give his name when it is demanded."

"Well! be watchful, herald! fulfil thy duty!" so saying, the king went to take his seat.

Shortly afterwards Sir Niels and Sir Papæ, with their mysterious friend, appeared, and were about to take their accustomed places. On seeing the reversed bread, however, they started; the knight of the helmet changed colour and drew back a step; but Brock and Papæ hastily replaced the bread in prescribed form, and took their seats with a look of haughty defiance; at the same moment the herald advanced with a drawn sword in his hand, directly opposite to them on the other side of the table; he slit, with the point of his sword, the three small napkins before them. "Sir Niels Brock, Sir Johan Papæ, and you who call yourself Sir Ako Krummedigé!" he said, solemnly, "In the name of Danish chivalry, I cut asunder, as I have done your table napkins, every tie of fellowship between you and knighthood. You are accused of treachery and treason; of a Judas deed and projected regicide; therefore you are ejected from the king's, and every honourable knight's society, until you have met your accuser and justified yourselves, if you are able to do so; in consideration of the gravity of the accusation, I demand of ye, besides, your weapons, and announce to you that you are put under knightly arrest."

The herald then beckoned, and the two pursuivants advanced to receive the swords of the prisoners, and lead them to their confinement. All the guests rose in astonishment, and the king's knights and halberdiers drew their swords.

"Confounded mummery!" muttered the tall knight, Brock, as he rose. "There, herald!" he called in a loud voice, and threw his glove on the table--"Take that to my accuser! wherever he meets me, my good sword shall prove him to be a liar and a fool--where is he? Dare he not name himself and look me in the face?"

"Here he stands!" said a voice from the door of the dining hall, and Drost Aagé stood there erect and calm on the threshold, with his hand on his sword, gazing with a searching look on the three accused knights.

"I laugh at the accusation of a dreamer and a visionary," cried Brock in a proud and scornful tone. "We meet. Sir Drost! I do but deposit my sword in the hands of these men that I may receive it to-morrow, acquitted by the king and knighthood, after washing out the blot here cast on mine and my friends' honour with the blood of the calumniator." He then delivered up his sword to the pursuivants.

Papæ had risen likewise; he also threw his glove with a contemptuous smile on the table--"There lies my pledge." he said, "and here is my answer to my accuser, whoever he may be, even though he should be given over to the devil, and the destruction of the flesh." So saying, he flung his large battle sword on the flagged floor at the herald's feet. They then both went with haughty and hasty strides out of the door, casting one or two flashing glances at the Drost, and with the pretended Ako Krummedigé between them. This silent and disguised knight had become as blanched in the face as his slit trencher-napkin. He had given up his sword to the pursuivants; no sound issued from his blue compressed lips--but his glance rolled with fearful wildness beneath his bushy and blackened eyebrows; his legs tottered under him, and he was forced to take hold of the strong Sir Niels to keep himself from sinking on the floor. The Drost himself followed these dangerous prisoners to see that the formalities of their imprisonment were legally and properly conducted.

This singular occurrence had excited great astonishment. The general silence was soon succeeded by a low whispering. The two daring knights were well known; every one was aware that they were suspected of having abetted the archbishop's flight. It was also known that they belonged to the discontented in the land;--of friends they had not a few; and they passed for brave, independent lovers of their country, who cared not to flatter royalty, but had strength and courage to maintain the liberties of the people, and their own rights in council against the mightiest. That they should have joined in treasonable conspiracies did not seem probable; and it was supposed the Drost had been too precipitate in making this singular charge. As the king's favourite, he was not free from the attacks of envy. "It is sad to think of the young Drost," whispered one of the junker's knights, "he is such a dreamer he scents treason everywhere, and makes the king to be hated, by his ill-timed zeal." Respecting the unknown knight with the helmet, and his guilt, there were many conjectures; he appeared in a suspicious light to most of the company--but that one of the outlaws should have dared to enter into the king's presence and sit at his table, seemed an act of such presumptuous daring, that none believed it to be possible. Meanwhile, all took their seats. Although the wine-flasks soon went round, the company appeared, however, unable to forget the unpleasant transaction which had clouded the king's countenance, as well as his step-father's; and, as it seemed, had also thrown Junker Christopher into an anxious and uneasy mood. It was not until all were seated, that Drost Aagé again entered the supper hall. He also was silent and depressed. He took his seat directly opposite the king and Junker Christopher. The three nearest knights rose to make room for him, according to the ancient usages of the table, and he sat down without saying a word respecting the accused and their crime. He seemed lost in reverie, and appeared not to notice the unusual flagging of the conversation around him; but his attention was in reality rivetted with affectionate sympathy on the deep emotion he thought he discovered in the king's countenance. The gloomy sternness before depicted in it seemed now to be lost in thoughtful sadness. Eric sat with his wine cup in his hand, and regarded with a kindly look his friend and step-father Count Gerhard; at last he nodded involuntarily, and turned towards his reconciled foe, Duke Eric of Langeland. "A health in honour of the negotiator of peace and of my reconciled kinsman!" he said, suddenly rising from his seat. All the knights stood up--and the king continued--"Even this feast in honour of peace hath been made gloomy to me by traitors; they shall have their deserts; to-morrow is the day for passing sentence; to-day we will not think on it. At *this* moment, I trust in the Lord and our blessed Lady that no secret traitor drains a cup in our hall. Long live Count Gerhard and Duke Eric!"

"Long life to them, and long live our noble king!" was echoed from mouth to mouth, with great and nearly universal enthusiasm, while the goblets rang, and the horn-players, on a signal from the herald, made their instruments resound through the hall.

Junker Christopher had also joined in the general shout of acclamation, and the king appeared especially to rejoice at hearing his brother's voice so animated on this occasion. His eye sought the junker's while he rung his glass against his; but Christopher's glance was cold, restless, and irresolute, while his cheek glowed, and he twisted the corner of his napkin with his left hand. A smothered sigh escaped the king's breast as he again resumed his seat. Aagé now observed, with great astonishment, that there was a large rent in Junker Christopher's napkin, which he was vainly striving to conceal with his hand. The king seemed to have made the same discovery at the same instant. He had suddenly changed colour, and his countenance expressed a fearful degree of wrath and grief; he made a movement as if he were about to start up, but instantly recovered himself by a strong internal effort; he set down his cup directly before him on the table, and, by pushing his own napkin from him, contrived to hide with it the rent in his brother's.

A look of affectionate admiration from Drost Aagé was repressed by a stern glance of the king's serious eye while he laid his finger on his lips. "Music!" he called, and gave a signal to the herald. The hall soon resounded with lively hunting horns. The gravity of the guests presently disappeared, and each talked gaily with his neighbour; the king himself appeared gay and in spirits, although Aagé, indeed, remarked that it cost him a desperate effort. When the castle chaplain, at the conclusion of the feast, was about to pronounce the blessing, all the knights had become so joyous and loud-tongued, that the herald was twice compelled to remind them of the etiquette of the table. When the repast was ended the king retired in haste to his private chamber, and beckoned gravely to Aagé to follow him. When Christopher rose, he threw his napkin, as if by accident, under the table; he then went out on the hall balcony, and whistled; soon afterwards the prince's large hunting-hound came bounding through the hall, with a crumpled napkin in his mouth.

The king had entered the private chamber with Aagé; he had thrown himself into a chair, and held his hand before his eyes. He remained a long time in this posture. Aagé stood in silence opposite to him, regarding him with a look of sorrowful sympathy. The king at last took his hand from his eyes, and he appeared to have wept. "Who hath dared to destroy love and confidence between brothers?" he exclaimed; "if it was you, Drost Aagé, it is the last time I call you my Drost."

"I it was not, my noble liege!" answered Aagé; "*who* it was I know not. May the Lord pardon that man among your true servants who so unwisely and rashly hath grieved you! It must have been done secretly, and without the herald's knowledge."

"I despise a secret accusation," continued the king; "it is unlawful; it is in a high degree deserving of chastisement; it shall--yet no--no examination can take place in this case. If he *is* a

traitor," he continued, and deep grief was again visible in his countenance, "were he capable! Be it as God wills--I injure not a hair of his head. Should I disgrace my father in his children? Should I doom my mother's son outlawed and dishonoured? Should I myself, Great God!----" He paused, and his hair seemed to stand on end with horror. "Look at me, Aagé," he resumed; "could *such* a thought be harboured here?" He laid his hand on his high and glowing forehead. "It burns within," he continued; "but no unseen Cain's mark burns there. My hand was sternly raised against him--love me he cannot--fear me he must. Well! let him tremble before his liege and sovereign until he learns to love his brother. Now, not a word more of this! It is perhaps only spite and slander. Who dares charge my left hand of treachery against the right? I know nothing as yet--I *will* know nothing--I have known enough of evil----" He began again after a thoughtful pause, and with a gloomy downcast look--"have I not had traitors around me since I was a child? Have I not seen my father murdered, and his shameless murderers in my presence? Have not their bloody hands been secretly and openly raised against my life from the hour in which I doomed them outlawed? yet have they not had the power to touch me," he continued with cheerfulness, and raised his head. "No assassin's dagger hath yet reached me, even though excommunicated and given over to the Evil One. I know it, Aagé; I have seen it--the hand of the righteous Lord was betwixt me and my deadly foes. No traitor and murderer--not even a soul murderer--no sinful archbishop or pope--not the arch-fiend himself--shall shake the crown upon this head." As he said these words he raised his hand and looked upwards with a glance of almost prophetic inspiration, and there was a nobleness and majesty in his countenance which seemed capable of humbling the most presumptuous foe.

"My liege!" exclaimed Aagé, with heartfelt joy, "the spirit which speaks through you at this hour is not alone the spirit of royalty and justice, but surely that of love also."

"Go to my brother, my faithful Aagé," interrupted the king hastily; "take him this----" He took a gold chain from his neck, to which hung an image of the Madonna. "Pray him to accept this jewel from his brother, as a memorial of this celebration of peace. Tell him our unhappy father wore this image to the day of his death." The king turned hastily away, and seemed desirous to hide the sorrowful emotion which had caused his voice to falter. Aagé stood with the chain in his hand, and was about to give vent to the warmth of his feelings; but the king turned suddenly, and said, in a stern voice, "Tomorrow a council of knights will be held. The accused shall be arraigned, and defend themselves if they can. All are equal here with respect to the law--be they friends or foes. Woe to the accuser who hath not ample proof, were he even my dearest friend! Go! and the Lord be with thee."

Aagé bowed in silence, with wounded feelings, and would have departed, but the king, on perceiving his emotion, stretched out his arms towards him, and pressed him to his heart, without saying a word more.

Aagé hastily departed with the chain. When the king was alone in his chamber, he put his hand into his vest, and drew forth a rosary, garnished with pearls and rubies. "Thy Christmas gift when we were children, my Ingeborg!" he said, with deep emotion. "What thou knewest I would ask for besides, thy angel joined me in prayer for at the throne of Grace.--Christopher! Christopher! may God forgive thee the thought thine eye betrayed!" He then imprinted a kiss on the rosary, replaced it in his vest, and sat down quietly before his table to attend to state affairs.

CHAP. XI.

Early the next morning a herald-pursuivant stood in Drost Aagé's sleeping apartment, with his large plumed hat in one hand, and a long, pointed sword in the other. The Drost hastened to put on his garments, while he listened with anxious attention to the information which was given him. The three accused knights had disappeared in the night, together with the men-at-arms, who had relieved guard at midnight before the door of the knights' story. Sir Niels Brock's and Sir Johan Papæ's horses had been taken out of the stable--none of their squires or servants were to be seen in the castle; but the large well-fed horse which the pretended Sir Ako Krummedigé had bestrode was still standing in the stable. The pursuivant who brought these tidings to the Drost delivered to him, at the same time, the sword which at the repast of the preceding evening he had received from the mysterious knight with the helmet, and drew the Drost's attention to a singular contrivance in it. The hilt was hollow, and contained a fluid, which, by means of a spring, might be imparted to the blade. A dog, whose skin had been scratched with this sword, had died in convulsions.

"Ha! a poisoned weapon!" exclaimed Aagé in alarm, returning the sword with a look of horror; "take it instantly before the judgment hall of the castle--Thou canst of course bear witness on oath from whom thou didst receive it?"

"That I shall find it hard to do. Sir Drost, seeing no one knows who he really is," answered the

pursuivant; "but that it was the dumb knight with the helmet--him they call Sir Krummedigé--I can take my oath upon. I should also announce, Sir Drost," he continued, "that the junker's gentleman of the bedchamber, Sir Pallé, died last night of his wound, although it was so trifling that we jeered him about it almost to the last. The surgeon swears he hath been wounded by a three-edged poisoned dagger."

"Our Lady be merciful unto us!" exclaimed Aagé. "His deadly terror was then but too well founded--We have had a poisoner then as our guest! Even now he may perhaps be among us!"

The Drost hastily left his chamber. Soon afterwards Marsk Oluffsen's rough voice was heard in the court of the castle, and ere it rang for mattins a knight, at the head of a troop of horse, rode at full gallop out of the castle gate. The Marsk himself, it was said, was gone to the chase. He dashed on with a number of hunters and hounds through the park. The Drost searched the whole castle. Ere mattins were ended, the Marsk and his huntsmen brought a bound captive to the tower. It was the mute knight with the helmet. His beard and eyebrows had changed colour, and it was soon known that he was one of the outlaws.

Amid the bustle caused at the castle by providing for the court, and attending on its numerous guests, much notice was not attracted towards these serious proceedings. The expected tournament and the knightly festivities occupied every one. The squires polished their master's arms and costly saddle-furniture; the prancing chargers were trained and tended; and the mild spring weather seemed to promise a bright day for the festivity. From the town and the neighbourhood crowds of gaily attired persons flocked to the castle. The splendidly accoutred knights careered eagerly and indefatigably with each other. All the castle windows which looked on the tilt-yard were already crowded with richly attired ladies, and most persons seemed to have forgotten both mattins and mass for the festival. It was whispered, indeed, that the tournament would not take place; but no one was disposed to believe this, as workmen began to bestir themselves, and preparations were still carried on, which kept expectation alive. Meanwhile the king was seen to ride as usual to mass with his princely guests, attended by his halberdiers. He was grave and thoughtful. Junker Christopher rode in gloomy silence by his side; he wore over his breast the large gold chain, with the image of the Madonna, which the king was wont to wear himself; and this token of distinction was regarded as a sign that all misunderstanding must have been removed between the brothers. The junker's eye meanwhile avoided the king's, and not one word was exchanged between them on the road to and from church.

After mass, the king instantly repaired to the knights' hall with all his men, and it was announced by the heralds that a knights' council, and a court of justice would be held. The tournament and the other festivities were in the meantime announced by the Marsk to be given up; and people now flocked to the knights' hall to see the king administer justice among his knights. He sat with an unusually stern and grave aspect on the raised ivory throne, and was surrounded by regal state and splendour. He first examined into the conduct of some young knights who were accused of minor faults and transgressions of the laws of chivalry. Those who either could not prove their innocence according to the established proceedings of temporal justice, or where doubt was entertained, relied on sword and lance, for redeeming their honour were sternly banished the castle; but those who acknowledged and repented a pardonable error, obtained permission by bold and knightly deeds, to regain their place and rank among the king's men.

The Drost now stepped forth in his own and in the name of the murdered Sir Pallé, with an accusation against the pretended Sir Ako Krummedigé, as the assassin of that slain knight, as well as against Sir Niels Brock and Sir Johan Papæ, as traitors and secret conspirators against state and crown, and he craved permission, in case the testimony he brought forward was not considered sufficient to establish his charge, to confirm it with sword and lance, to be judged by God, in a combat for life and death with the traitors. As the two knights so seriously accused, had escaped by unlawful flight, they were proclaimed to be suspected, and cited to appear and defend themselves before the expiration of six weeks and one day, if they would not be passed sentence upon as traitors; but the pretended Ako Krummedigé, whose real name was now discovered by sufficient evidence, was led before the tribunal. He was clad in the ancient armour in which he was attired on his first arrival; he wore also the helmet and shield he had brought with him from the monastery, and on which the famous armorial bearings of the noble family of the Hvides were noticed for the first time; but he had no sword by his side, and was surrounded by a strong guard. The glossy black was removed from his stiff beard, which now resembled the bristles of a boar; and from his bushy, meeting-eyebrows which were considered by the lower orders as a [\[9\]](#)"Wolfman's mark." and by which the outlawed Sir Kaggé was especially distinguished.

He was pale, and stared wildly around him. When he heard himself named and accused, and beheld the king in the large circle of attentive knights, he seemed to struggle against appearing cast down or humbled.

He raised his head, and stepped forward with a bold and haughty look, and even with the assumption of a degree of knightly dignity. "I greet thee, King Eric Ericson!" he said, in a loud voice. "I greet every brave knight who serves with honour here at court! Christ preserve every dear son of Denmark from the misfortune which brings me hither! But if there be brave and true Danish men here present, the man who became outlawed for Denmark's freedom and the honour of Danish chivalry will not lack weapons and defenders."

"Talk not of freedom and honour, *thou* who hast nought but effrontery and deeds of infamy to boast of!" began the king with calm and cold contempt. "Under the name of a pious and honourable man, thou hast crept into my hall among men of honour, and abused the sacred laws of chivalry, to hide deceit and treachery. Thy mask hath fallen off traitor! thy poisoned weapon hath betrayed thee--*Thou* wert chased from Denmark for a Judas deed; yet still thou hast dared to enter my presence. *One* assassination thou hast already perpetrated in my royal castle, and another thou hast meditated--Canst thou deny it? Hast thou a word to say in thy defence, miscreant?"

The prisoner bit his lips, and ground his teeth. "If I come not precisely from the holy sepulchre," he muttered, "I come, however, from the graves of kinsmen and friends, and from the corpses of murdered comrades. The fool whose mouth I have stopped, was a soulless lump of flesh, on whom I did but whet my dagger. What I purposed besides, is no concern of any one; but what I had promised, it was my fixed resolve to perform. Against tyrants no weapon is dishonourable, King Eric! and if an outlawed man hath neither rights nor safety, how then can you suppose he will let himself be bound by your pitiful laws?"

"Have ye considered the matter, my knights!" said the king; "then pronounce doom upon this audacious criminal, according to the laws of God and man!"

"He hath forfeited honour and life, according to the laws of the land," was the unanimous verdict. "According to strict justice, he hath even forfeited hand and eye." The herald pronounced the doom in a loud voice.

When Kaggé heard his death doom, his knees shook, and he looked around him with a rapid and searching glance, as if expecting to find defenders or protectors against the sentence, among the spectators, but there was a death-like stillness; no one moved tongue or hand in his defence. He seemed humbled, and now bent on one knee before the tribunal. "Bethink you, King Eric!" he said, in a supplicating tone, "I served in your royal father's castle, and he himself gave me the praise of being the best squire he had. His death was never my wish, I would have saved him had it been in my power; although he had broken his contract and had himself loosened the tie which bound Denmark's crown to his head."

"I remember well thou didst serve in my father's castle, for hire and for garments," answered the king; "but I know, and every man in Denmark knows, also, that thou wert in Finnerup barn, on that bloody St. Cecilia's eve, and thy sword was not the *last which* was plunged into the breast of thy unhappy master and king. As a faithless traitor and regicide thou wert however but outlawed while I was a minor, but now thou shalt suffer just punishment, as surely as I wear Denmark's crown!"

"Is there not a single free man here, who dares to speak a word for me?" cried the captive, springing up with a wild look. "Ha! slaves of a tyrant! I despise ye," he continued, looking frantically around him. "The deed for which I was outlawed, was the proudest ever achieved by Danish man. A tyrant's murder hath been an honoured deed so long as the world hath stood, wherever a spark of freedom was in the spirit of the people--Now there are nought but cowardly slaves in Denmark, and it shames me to call you countrymen. There you stand aghast! because a bold word is heard again in kingly hall--You have courage only for crawling in the dust before a revengeful despot, and to doom the last friend of freedom to the scaffold--Is it not enough for you to see my blood? Will you saw off my hands and feet? Will you pluck out my eyes, that no free man may see you blush? Will you deal thus with a descendant of Skialm--Hvide's noble race? I am a knight," he added proudly. "I demand but to be judged by the law of knighthood--That is recognised over all the world, but under this country's laws I stand no longer."

"Who dubbed thee a knight? asked the king, with a contemptuous look.

"The greatest knight in Denmark's kingdom," answered the captive, drawing himself up with a look of defiance. "The man whose shoe latchet no knight here was worthy to loose--The Marsk of Denmark's kingdom, Stig Anderson Hvide, and if your chivalrous bearing is aught else than empty boast and mockery, King Eric, you will suffer me to be judged with equity according to the law which is as the apple of your eye."

"Be it so, by all the holy men!" exclaimed the king with glowing cheeks; "according to the law of chivalry shall thy doom be executed, since thou dost thyself demand it, and thou shalt learn what it is to be doomed to dishonour. The knighthood which an outlawed regicide gave thee is truly but little honour worth, nevertheless thou shalt not take it with thee to thy dishonourable death. Thy hands and feet thou shalt keep, and thy false eyes also--but the honour thou boastest of, thou shalt lose according to law, for the sake of chivalry--and thy life for my father's sake alone."

At a signal from the king, the captive was now removed, and a council of the oldest knights met together to decide upon the mode of carrying the sentence into execution, according to the laws of chivalry.

Three hours afterwards, the captive was led in full knightly armour, and on horseback, to a high scaffold within the lists, under which the king himself appeared on horseback, surrounded by all his knights. The castle chaplain stood on the scaffold, at the head of a row of monks from

the Dominican monastery. The captive was led up hither, not indeed to suffer death, but, according to the laws of chivalry to be ejected from the community of knights in a manner the most degrading. There was a crowd assembled; all the windows of the castle, as well as the stands on the lists were thronged with curious spectators. From the window of the servants' hall, close by the maidens' tower, peeped forth a fair little inquisitive face which was remarked for its beauty and animation; it was the captive Lady Ulrica, who without knowing what was going forward, had persuaded the tractable Karen to take her with her, to see the great procession which was talked of. No one knew what was to happen. The whole transaction was hitherto unknown in Denmark, where the young King Eric was the first sovereign who endeavoured to introduce all the usages of chivalry, and the novelty and mystery of the proceeding, tended still more to heighten curiosity. Ulrica beheld the priests on the high scaffold, and a knight in full armour led upon it: his back was turned to the window, and she did not recognise him. A rough sour-visaged man in a red cloak, with an iron club in hand, now stepped forward, he looked like an executioner, but however carried neither sword nor axe. He tore the shield from the knight, and struck off his armour; after which he broke the shield and armour into pieces with his iron club, and cast the fragments at his feet.

"Gracious heaven! Is this an execution?" cried Ulrica in dismay. The knight was now led down from the scaffold. He turned his pale and terrible countenance towards her, and she recognised him. "Kaggé! righteous heaven!" she exclaimed with a shriek, and sank swooning in the arms of her attendants. They hastened to carry her back to the tower, and to the fostering care of her gentle sister.

The armorial bearings were taken from Kaggé's broken shield; they were now, together with the shield, fastened to the tail of a mare, and thus dragged in the mire through the streets of Wordingborg, followed by the scoffs of the herald, which were echoed by the enraged mob.

The disarmed knight was meanwhile led upon the dunghill near the stables of the castle; here his gold spurs were taken off, and on the same degrading spot the tail of the horse he rode last was docked. While the attention of the spectators was rivetted on these singular proceedings, the dishonoured knight made a vain attempt to escape. He was now bound with cords, and again led upon the scaffold--there he stood staring wildly around him and foaming with rage, while the priests chanted a requiem over him as over the dead. He looked around in a frenzy; when, however, he perceived that the sword of the executioner was not glittering over his head, he seemed not as yet to have abandoned all hope of life, and drew himself up in desperate defiance. The solemn death-chant, nevertheless, appeared to awe him, and to damp his resolution. Ere it was ended, he sank down in an attitude of prayer. The chanting ceased, and the castle chaplain presently stepped forward with the holy scriptures, and began to read with a loud voice the Psalmist's denunciations against traitors--"Let there be none to extend mercy unto him, let his posterity be cut off, and in the generation following let their name be blotted out. As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him; as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him----"

"Nay! silence with thy curses Priest! Whether they be scripture or not!" called the king with vehemence. "His soul must be judged by the merciful God. It is here question only of knightly honour."

But the chaplain had entered with such zeal into his text, that, without heeding the king's words, he still added, "When he shall be judged, let him be condemned, and let his prayer become sin----"

The kneeling knight started up at these words, and glared frantically at the priest, "Know then, every free man in Denmark! and judge if it were sin!" he shouted--"I prayed in this hour to the vanquisher of monsters, St. Magnus, and all the saints, that king Glipping's accursed race might be rooted out of the earth, as he was himself by this hand in Finnerup Barn."

"Thou didst declare the truth unto him priest!" said the king, suppressing with difficulty his exasperated feelings-- "yet--no more ecclesiastical cursing! his thoughts and prayers are for God to judge; this criminal stands here only before his earthly judges."

The priest was silent; the king now turned solemnly to the pursuivant-at-arms, and asked, "Say, what is this criminal's name?"

"Sir Aagé Kaggé, of the noble race and lineage of the high-born Hvides," answered the pursuivant-at-arms.

"That is not *his* name who here stands in our sight," cried the herald, "for in *him* I and Danish chivalry only recognise a traitor, a deceiver, and a false swearer."

The king thrice asked the name of the criminal. The herald-pursuivant named it each time, and each time the herald cried, "that is not HIS name!" with the same annulling addition. When the herald had proclaimed these words for the last time, he received from the hand of the pursuivant-at-arms an ewer with hot water; he then mounted the scaffold with it, and dashed the water over the head and shoulders of the dishonoured knight, with these words, "Thus I efface the sacred mark of knighthood from this corpse."

As soon as these words were uttered, the criminal was looked upon as dead, and treated as an

actual corpse. He was dragged by cords down from the scaffold, and tied on a bier. A pall was spread over him, and while the king and all his knights rode back to the castle, Kaggé, followed by a scoffing mob of the lowest class, was borne to the church, where the priests again prayed and chanted over him as over the dead. When the pall was at last removed, in order to lead him to actual death, he lay senseless on the bier, and it was doubted whether he ought in this state to be carried to the place of execution.

"Go hence and let him alone! The sun hath gone down, and he shall be unmolested here till to-morrow," said a powerful and authoritative voice, and the Commendator of the monastery of the Holy Ghost stepped solemnly forward in his white dress as master of the choir, with his double twelve-pointed silver cross on his breast. All recognised him, and bowed reverently with folded hands, and half-bended knees, to receive his blessing.

The provost and his attendants, who were to conduct the prisoner to the place of execution, seemed, however, somewhat doubtful and lingered. "*I* am responsible! Go hence all of you, and let the sinner lie here till to-morrow!" repeated the Commendator, "his soul shall have time to prepare for its separation from the sinful body. It is the duty of my holy office to care for the souls of the departing. In the name of the church and the holy spirit, I command the temporal authority here present to give way!"

Every one departed; the Commendator last quitted the church, and ordered the church door to be locked. By command of the provost, a strong guard of men-at-arms was stationed before it.

When the provost and his attendants early the following morning entered the church to lead the unknighthed captive (already dead in law) to execution, a real corpse was found bound to the bier. Some thought that the proceedings of the previous day were sufficient to kill him; others deemed it probable that he might have expired from dread when he came to himself in the night, and found himself alone and bound on the bier in the deserted church. The idea that terror had caused the death of the miscreant captive while lying in such wretched plight the whole night, in expectation of his death, now excited a species of compassion in the same mob who on the preceding day could not sufficiently taunt and scoff the detested assassin; and it was discovered that, after all, the king had been far too strict, and that even the pious Commendator himself had in a great degree augmented the sinner's punishment by caring for his soul in such sort; and allowing him the space of a whole night to die of terror, during his preparation for death. The face of the corpse was swollen, and already in such a state that none could recognise the outlawed knight, excepting from the bristly beard and meeting eyebrows. The body was instantly, and in all privacy, buried without the customary ritual of the church, and in unconsecrated ground. But hardly was the dead man interred, ere a low murmur was heard among the restless populace that it could scarcely have been the right corpse after all. The speedy change in the appearance of the body so early in the spring was deemed exceedingly suspicious, and it was rumoured that the beard and eye-brows were undoubtedly false. It was known that the outlawed Aagé Kaggé had been a kinsman of Archbishop Grand; and the Commendator of the order of the Holy Ghost, who from the monastery might have ingress to the church, was conjectured to have availed himself of his authority on this occasion, to save a kinsman of that mighty and dangerous prelate. This rumour, however, was instantly put down by the provost and his attendants, whom it might have caused seriously to be brought to account. It reached neither the ears of the King nor the Drost, and it was believed at court (as had been in legal form announced by the temporal authorities of the town) that the outlawed regicide had been found lifeless on the bier, and that the body had been buried in the morning, after lawful inspection.

The stern solemnity which pervaded the king's proceedings at this time at Wordingborg was remarked by all. The festivities which had been looked forward to with pleasure on occasion of the treaty with the Dukes, were wholly relinquished, and all the stranger nobles and knights soon left the castle. Junker Christopher had taken a cold and hasty farewell, and it was said had repaired to Kallundborg or Holbeck. Both these castles had been restored to him with full investiture of the fiefs. Ere his departure, he had announced that the maidens' tower was carelessly guarded, and that the fair prisoners were in communication with the household, and probably even with persons of more consideration. This information compelled the commandant to observe more strictness in guarding the captives. The obliging little Karen was replaced by a grave female attendant, and no one but herself and a monk skilled in medicine were admitted to the tower. The youngest of the captive maidens was ill, it was said, and not quite in her right mind. She imagined she had seen an execution, and that she herself was a princess who had an unfortunate prince for a lover. This gave rise to much gossip, and all manner of conjectures among the household at the castle. Drost Aagé was spoken of as the most zealous friend and advocate of the captive maidens, and it was supposed that by means of his influence their cause would soon be decided in their favour.

The king, with his state council and halberdiers, remained until past Easter at Wordingborg Castle, from whence were issued many royal mandates and ordinances. In these matters the Drost was, next to the king himself, especially occupied, and was seldom seen to join the other knights in their diversions within the lists or in the tennis court. He was, as usual, grave and pensive. Occasionally he was seen in the moonlight spring evenings to wander alone, as if lost in reverie, around the maidens' tower. Since the king's arrival at Wordingborg, Aagé had not seen the captive maidens; it appeared that he had heard the gossiping reports of his warm interest for them, and that he feared to injure their cause or their reputation by a visit.

CHAP. XII.

It was a fortnight after Easter. The trees of the chase were springing into leaf. Flocks of twittering starlings in whirling clouds hovered and sang above the towers of Wordingborg Castle. The cuckoo's note was heard in the beech groves, and the nightingale was come. The Marsk stood in the ante-chamber awaiting orders. An inquiry was made after the Drost. He had repaired to the maidens' tower with the judges of the court of justice of the castle, in order to be present at an examination of Marsk Stig's daughters. He had himself hastened this act of justice, in his firm conviction of their innocence; he hoped by his testimony to be instrumental towards their acquittal, and that the affair might, from the king's presence there, come to a speedy and happy termination. The Drost's longing to see the fair Margaretha again, had perhaps some share in the haste and zeal with which he followed the grave judges. But hardly had he entered the prison with these personages, and had met, and responded to, a tender and melancholy glance from the gentle Margaretha, ere Ulrica, who appeared to have been sitting quietly before her sister's tapestry frame, suddenly started up with a wild look and dishevelled hair, and rushed menacingly towards them. "Ye have murdered him, ye monsters,"--she cried--"Ye have murdered my true knight--are ye now come to drag me also to the scaffold? Look! here I am!--tarry not!--bring forward your chains!--bring forward your executioner! Lead me but to death! I despise life and all of ye! I knew Kaggé was here to avenge my degradation, and lead me out of this vile captivity. Me, you may murder also--the sooner the better. I ask no other freedom--call but your executioner, and put an end to my sorrow! I knew the king's life was in danger, and I was silent to save my friend and true knight--but my sister is innocent--none shall injure a hair of *her* head. She besought me to move him to flee, and cause no mishap--that I can witness on the gospels."

"Both were then, it seems, cognizant of the presence of the outlawed regicide and of his treasonable purpose," said the chief judge; "Sir Drost! the testimony we have here from the most guilty of the two, renders them both, at the least, state prisoners for their lifetime."

Drost Aagé appeared thunderstruck. "The unhappy lady must rave," he said, hastily recollecting himself. "She hath been ill, and not in her right mind, as we know--her confession and testimony are of no weight. Her knowledge of yon miscreant I have indeed observed; but it is impossible she could have been an accomplice in his crime, and still less her pious sister; that I will stake my life upon! Answer us! for the sake of the Lord in heaven, tell us the truth noble Lady Margaretha! Knew you Kaggé was here in disguise at the castle, and seeking after the king's life?"

"I knew it, Sir Drost," answered Margaretha calmly, with her hand on her heart. "But by the lips of the Holy Virgin, and the Spirit of holy truth, it lay not in my power, nor in my sister's, to hinder his coming. When I heard he was here, and what he meditated, it was night, and our prison door was locked. It was not possible for me to caution you and the king against him, had I even (which I trust in God I had) courage and strength and will to do so. In the morning it was affirmed he had escaped, and--I was silent, that I might not plunge an erring unhappy soul into still greater misery."

"A serious case! a very serious case!" said the judge. "We must examine into all the circumstances of the affair."

While the examination was continued the commandant of the castle entered, and summoned the Drost to the king. Aagé left the chamber with a deep sigh, and a sorrowing glance at the unhappy maidens, of whose acquittal and liberation from prison he now almost despaired. With feelings of deep emotion the Drost joined the Marsk in the ante-chamber, where he was to await the king's commands. They heard the king pacing with hasty steps up and down his private chamber.

"There are snakes in the grass, Drost!" said the Marsk. "Why did they not instantly cut off the heads of those hounds, without ceremony, and cast their high-born friend and protector into the tower. Now they have all 'scaped, the whole pack of them, and we have enough to do to be on our guard."

"Whom mean you, Sir Marsk?" asked Aagé absently. "You have received letters I know?"

"Yes, in abundance--Brock and Papæ got off for that once; they are scouring Jutland round, and stirring up the people about these priest-riots and the shutting of the churches, which all dread so much; just as if a church-door was a fortress gate with ramparts and towers, and had St. Paul himself for a porter. I thought truly, it was a bad business when those haughty nobles laid their heads together so often with the junker, and had slit napkins laid before their noses. I should have been right glad to have hewn the whole pack of them in pieces; but amid all our stupid ceremonies with trencher and napkin, and tattered clouts, we let fly the birds of prey, and

the junker into the bargain, although he got a rent to hide which made his ears glowing red."

"How, Sir Marsk!" exclaimed Aagé, a conjecture suddenly flashing across his mind. "You surely were not yourself his secret accuser?"

"You have hit it, Drost! I cared not much to keep the secret: had any one asked, my answer would have been ready, and my good sword with it, if required: proofs and such like frippery I had not, it is true--that was the worst of it; but, however, I had my conjectures and my own thoughts. I cannot abide that fellow, do you see--were he guiltless, and had he courage to defend his honour,--by the foul fiend! he would not have sat there as if upon thorns, and have hid that little rent. I was just going by the table, do you see? and saw how matters stood with those three mangy hounds. The junker's napkin lay so conveniently at hand, my blood was up, and it struck me the high-born junker would be the better for a little alarm."

"By your favour. Sir Marsk! it was a most rash proceeding; by acting thus, you have increased the misunderstanding between the king and his brother."

"So much the better; either keep with him or break with him--one or the other; nought comes of this truckling; but so far you are right--I should not have busied myself with those apish ceremonies, they better beseem all of *you*. I should rather have said it right out, and answered for it instantly with my hand on my neck!--but enough of this--Know ye Master Grand is here?"

"Grand! the Archbishop? Where?"

"At Copenhagen, and with a royal convoy. That was a piece of folly, also--*You* were, no doubt, one in council?"

"It was not deemed necessary," answered Aagé, repressing his annoyance at the Marsk's offensive bluntness. "The counsel you so flatteringly attribute to me was not mine either. The state council and the king himself considered it good policy. The cardinal demanded it, and offered his mediation. If the archbishop becomes manageable, and recalls the ban, he, of course, could not come hither without an assurance of personal safety."

"Do ye not yet know that fellow better?" answered the Marsk. "Ere *he* becomes tractable, heaven and earth will pass away. In this respect, the king is not far behind him--but if he *will* be at the archbishop--by Satan! he should not have given him a convoy, and allowed him to set foot again upon Danish ground, though the whole state-council should get a colic from fright. Now, Grand and that accursed red hat sit like a pair of popes at Axelhuus, and none dare injure a hair of their heads: there they may begin the game, and stir us up the whole country in a trice. The cardinal hath already confirmed that confounded constitution of Veilé, and the Bishop of Roskild now causes all his churches to be shut. The storm will and must burst soon, and then all depends on how wind and current drive."

"Great Heavens! is it possible?" exclaimed Aagé, in dismay. "Have you certain tidings, Sir Marsk? Doth the king know it?"

"I have brought him some doses on a fasting stomach in a couple of letters--that he hath swallowed them you may know from the clatter of his spurs and boot-heels--You brought him letters from Sweden, Drost! Love letters, doubtless, and fine ballads from his betrothed? Were there any tidings of a rational kind?"

"None of a very cheering description," answered Aagé, looking with uneasiness towards the king's door. "What the princess hath imparted I know not; but the excellent Master Petrus can effect nothing with the state-council touching the king's marriage."

"S'Death!" said the Marsk, rubbing his hands. "Then it will not be easy to get to talk with him to-day. These are knots which it will be hard even for *your* state-policy to loose, my wise Sir Drost! but if *I* know the king well, he will give all your fine wisdom to the devil, and keep him to me and his good sword."

"Against rebels we may use the sword, Marsk, but neither against bishop nor pope, and just as little against the king's future brother-in-law," answered Aagé. "We stand in need of discretion in this matter, and, above all, of the help of the Lord."

The door of the king's private chamber now opened, and the king himself looked out into the ante-chamber, and nodded. His countenance indicated passion and anxiety, and the Marsk, as well as the Drost, entered the chamber with a thoughtful aspect.

An hour afterwards Marsk Oluffsen departed with the Wordingborg troop of horse on his way to Jutland; and Drost Aagé set out, attended by twelve knights and squires, as ambassador to the Swedish court, with a letter which inspired him with secret anxiety for his king and country.

Among the twelve knights appointed to accompany Drost Aagé to Sweden, was Sir Pallé's brother-in-law, the brave knight, Helmer Blaa, who had made himself famous by gaining his bride by dint of arms, and vanquishing Sir Pallé and her six brothers, who had all fallen upon him at once. He was young, of a tall and well-proportioned figure, with sparkling brown eyes, and remarkably light and agile in his movements. He was a native of Fyen, of high birth; a great

friend of the Drost's, and devoted heart and soul to the king.

"He rides in the saddle so free--"

was wont to be carolled forth by the lower orders whenever they saw Helmer riding his handsome Arabian horse, which flew with him swift as the wind, and was the gift of royal favour to him on his marriage-day the preceding summer.

Drost Aagé rode for an hour in calm silence by the side of this gallant knight, on the road to Kiöge, from whence he was to embark for Skanór on the Swedish coast.

"Count Henrik goes with the king of course?" said Sir Helmer, at last breaking silence. "If one would visit a bishop's nest in these times, it must assuredly be with sword and coat of mail."

"Count Henrik stirs not from his side," answered Aagé--"that he hath promised me with word and hand--I now go hence unwillingly; Grand's thirst for revenge, and the boldness of the outlaws know no bounds."

"That accursed Kaggé! He made an end also of my fat seal of a brother-in-law--that lump of flesh, indeed, I accounted not much of; his miserable death, however, I have vowed to St. George to avenge, chiefly for my dear wife's sake. She had but that one brother left since I came to mishap with all the others; but it was done openly, and in honourable self-defence; she hath not even loved me the less either for that affair--but to fight by stealth, and with a poisoned weapon--faugh! 'Twas an accursed Italian trick--such was never before the usage here in the north. Are you quite certain the wretched assassin is dead and buried in good earnest, Sir Drost? The people have divers tales to tell. He who hath had no shame in his life would not die of shame, I should think--One hath seen ere this a cunning fox run from the trap and leave his tail behind him."

Aagé started. "I saw him not after death," he answered; "but his end was certainly announced by the provost and Commendator of the monastery. There can surely be no doubt of the truth."

"The Commendator is a holy man of God, doubtless," replied Helmer, with an incredulous smile; "one ought not, indeed, to suspect him of deceit and treason, even though he be a good friend of Master Grand's, and might have wished to save the dishonoured life of one of so high and holy a race. I first heard that unbelieving gossip when the body was thrown into the carrion pit, and consumed with unslacked lime; it doubtless showed great caution and good care for the public health; but they will have it it was a corpse from the hospital of the monastery, with beard and eyebrows of good Danish boar bristles."

"Can it be possible!" exclaimed Aagé. "Should he be alive and at liberty, he would then become a more pestilent foe than all the outlaws put together--Yon dishonoured miscreant is capable of any crime; he hath now hardly aught more to lose."

"Be that as it may," answered Helmer, "if Kaggé be above ground, so is my arm and my good sword also--the Lord be praised for it!--and wherever I meet him, I am his man."

"If the miscreant is alive, and falls into our hands, we can but bind his hands and wash our own of the matter," answered Aagé.

They now continued their journey in grave silence for another hour. Each time Aagé thought of the unfortunate daughters of Marsk Stig in the maidens' tower a sigh burst from his heart; and whenever he felt the king's important letter within his vest it seemed to him as if he was oppressed by the future fate of king and country.

"We received but scanty orders," resumed Helmer Blaa again, seemingly wearied by the long silence and the Drost's reverie. "We were to learn the rest from you, Drost; but you seem to have left tongue and speech at Wordingborg."

"You know what is of most importance," answered Aagé. "It concerns King Eric's highest happiness in this world. As matters stand now with the archbishop and pope, you may easily imagine there are great difficulties about the dispensation for his marriage; if we cannot prevail on King Birger and his state council to permit the marriage to take place ere St. John's Day, and that despite both pope and clergy, then--more should not be said," he added, in a lowered voice; "then I fear matters will stand badly, Sir Helmer."

"Not worse surely than with me when they threw hindrances in the way of my marriage!" answered Helmer. "How such difficulties may be got over our bold king knows full as well as I--" So saying, he gaily struck upon his clanking sword.

"That did very well with your brother-in-law, brave Helmer," said Aagé. "It concerned only half a dozen of our worst knights. HERE state and kingdom are in question. The king is of a hasty temper, you know; he is only but too ready to imitate your bold manner of wooing; but if he is to win his bride by war and battle, there will be a bloody bridal here in the summer, to as little pleasure for Denmark as for Sweden."

"There you may perhaps be in the right, Drost," answered Helmer. "There is a difference

between *my* brothers-in-law and the king's, I own; but if honour and our king's fortune in love are now at stake, assuredly no Danish knight will hesitate to become his bridegroom's man with sword and lance, however hard one might be put to it. This much we must allow to the Swede--he ever fights like a brave fellow. Swedish knighthood yields not to us in manhood; but when we sing,

'For Eric the youthful king!'

the heart of no Danish man will sink below his belt, I know, were the Swede ten times as strong, and had they ten Thorkild Knudsons in council and camp."

"Let us not talk too loud of these things," said Aagé, in a low voice, and allowing the other knights to pass by, while he and Helmer slackened their pace. "Honourable warfare is indeed ever to be preferred to a deceitful and shameful peace," he continued; "but the Lord and St. George forbid it should come to a breach now, just when love and good will seem in truth desirous to make us and our brave neighbours friends. Could these unhappy scruples be removed I should deem both Denmark and Sweden fortunate indeed. If a noble Swedish princess sits on the throne of Denmark's queens, and a Danish one on that of Sweden, we might then hope to see extinguished the last spark of ancient national hate and fraternal enmity. We may say what we please in our pride, and boast of Danish greatness in the days of Canute the Great and the Valdemars; Scandinavians were, however, brethren in the beginning; we have shared honour and fame with each other all over the world, among Longobards and Goths and Northmen; and we must combine together again, if aught great is to be achieved by the powers of the north."

"It may be so," answered Sir Helmer. "I am well nigh of your opinion, especially since it hath now come to something more than mere state policy and cold calculations with these betrothings of royal children. This one at first was but a politic scheme of Queen Agnes and Drost Hessel; in such plans there are seldom any truth and honesty. Strange enough it should turn out as it hath done; for every man, both here and in Sweden's land, knows that our young king is almost more enamoured than a Sir Tristan or Florez in the new books of chivalry; and the fair Princess Ingeborg--here they already call her our second Dagmar--although we have but heard she is pious and mild, and hath pretty blue eyes and beautiful golden hair, like Dagmar. I shall be well pleased to see her," he added. "No Swedish or Danish knights can ever commend her sufficiently, and she is, indeed, well nigh praised to the disparagement of our own lovely ladies--that vexes me I own."

"I saw her at Helsingborg, at the bridal of Count Gerhard and Queen Agnes," said Aagé, and his pensive eye sparkled. "She was then still almost a child; but she hath since ever seemed to me like one of God's holy angels, destined to diffuse the blessings of peace and love through this land and kingdom. There is but one female form in the world which I could compare with her, or perhaps even exalt above her in fair and noble presence," he added with emotion; but suddenly paused and cleared his throat with some embarrassment.

"Now, out with it, Drost Aagé; I am not jealous," said Sir Helmer, with a pleased and proud look. "You mean doubtless my fair young wife--It is worthy a true knight to admire the beauty of a young and fair woman in all reverence and honour. She hath well nigh the fairest presence of any woman here in the country; every one says so who sees her, both here and in Fyen; and I have nought against it. I know assuredly she holds me dearest of all, although I came to mishap, as you know, both with her uncle and those stiff-necked brothers. She is now at my castle, longing to have me back again; if it please the Lord and St. George, she shall soon hear a good report of me, if there is anything to be done in earnest."

Drost Aagé's usually pale cheek had become crimson. "You guessed wrong, however, this once Sir Helmer"--he said, with a smile; "the lady I thought of was another, without disparagement to your fair young wife. But, if we would reach Kjögé ere midnight, we must ride faster. In a steady trot, and at the long run, I think my Danish horse will be a match for your Arabian." He spurred his horse, and Sir Helmer hastened to redeem the honour of his favourite Arabian, while he shook his head at the Drost's want of discernment in the matter of female beauty.

CHAP. XIII.

When they reached Kjögé it was three hours past vespers, and after burgher bedtime. In this town, as yet, neither the great Franciscan nor Carmelite monasteries were erected, which afterwards became so celebrated. Here the travellers were forced to be content with one of the unpretending hostelries from the time of Eric Glipping, which were often stigmatised as dungeons and farthing taverns.

During the last two years the town had been frequently visited by the Hanseatic merchants, since the king had extended their trading privileges; and when these active traders went to or from the great fairs at Skanor or Falsterbo, or to the herring fishery, on the Swedish coast, they often ran their vessels into Kjögé bay, to wait for a favourable wind, and dispose of their wares to the burghers of Kjögé. The bay was now full of Hanseatic merchant vessels, and the numerous lights in the ships shone fair upon the shore. Drost Aagé, with his train, had much difficulty in getting a room in what was called the ale-house, near the harbour. In the large public room of the tavern, where the guests were wont to beguile the time until late at night, with drinking and dice, there was on the entrance of the Drost and his knights, much hubbub and loud-tongued talk among the guests, which, however, was suddenly hushed on the appearance of the richly-attired strangers, in whom the king's knights and halberdiers were instantly recognised. At the upper end of the long oaken table, which was fixed to the floor, sat a heavy-built, consequential-looking personage, with a sable-bordered cap and tunic; it was Berner Kopmand, from Rostock (so notorious for his wealth and pride) who had bid defiance to the king at Sjöberg. He lolled in his seat with an air of importance, and had laid one leg upon the table, that he might be more completely at his ease. His broad visage glowed from the effects of wine; he held a silver goblet in his hand, and had a large wine-flask before him. By his side sat his trusty friend and trading companion, Henrik Gullandsfar, from Wisbye, with a large purse in his hand, from which he threw some coins into the host's cap. Between them stood a backgammon board, on which the dice were swimming in ale and wine, and which Berner Kopmand kicked aside to make room for his ponderous foot. Here they sat, surrounded by a number of Hanseatic merchants, skippers and boatmen. All were armed, like themselves, with broad battle swords and sabres, and drank merrily to their own success. When the Drost and his knights entered, the two merchants remained sitting in their easy posture, without returning the greeting of the strangers, and whispers and murmurs of dissatisfaction were heard among the guests.

In the least lit-up part of the room sat two men with the cross of the order of the Holy Ghost on their black travelling mantles. The one drew his hood over his brow; he instantly arose, and with his ecclesiastical colleague presently disappeared in the throng of guests, who were flocking in and out. Sir Helmer had noticed the deparment of the monk; he hastily approached Aagé to whisper a word in his ear, but the Drost, who had instantly recognised the two arrogant Hanseatic merchants, had turned his whole attention upon their bearing, and was pondering within himself, how far it would be wise or necessary to meddle with them, or attach any significance to their former powerless menace.

"Short and sweet, my good friends!" now began the heavy Rostocker, with lispng tongue, while he struck the heel of his boot on the table to obtain a hearing, and seemed wrath at the pause in the talk. "The Lauenberg knight was forced to dangle from our new gallows, despite the cry of his high birth and lineage; and the high-born Duke Albert of Saxony was ready to choke with rage. It is therefore, he now protects and eggs on these high-born highwaymen. But we will no longer suffer ourselves to be plundered and pulled by the nose, unavenged, by knights and princes. We shall one day teach all these high and mighty lords, where the gold lies buried, the blessed bright gold which rules the world, and what the rich and combined Hanse-towns can do. We merchants and small folk, have now also learned something of the art of war, and the art of politics, and he who treads on our corns may beware of Lubek law, and the Rostock gallows--Hurra! freedom in trade! freedom in word and deed! To hell with all tyrants and aristocrats!" So saying, Berner Kopmand kicked the empty wine flask off the table, while he moved his foot to the floor, and rose reeling with the goblet at his lips.

The foreign merchants and skippers, shouted and drank. Henrik Gullandsfar shook his head, and pulled his drunken colleague by the sleeve, with a side glance at the Drost and the king's halberdiers.

"I give them to death and the devil! I can buy them up body and soul, and their forefathers into the bargain," growled the proud burgher magnate of Rostock--allowing himself, however, to be led out of the apartment, by the sober and more wary Gullandsfar. The other merchants and skippers now departed one after another, singing and whistling as they went. Aagé had instantly perceived that the conduct of the proud Hanseatics was meant as defiance and insult; but he had himself, as Drost, two years before, jointly with the state-council, confirmed the great privileges which were granted to these traders, and the law strictly forbade all violent and arbitrary proceedings towards them so long as they themselves refrained from committing any act of violence. Aagé remained silent, with a contemptuous smile, and warned to the incensed knights to keep quiet. But Sir Helmer's blood boiled.--he had sat upon thorns since his eye had caught the monk. As the Hanseatic sea-men left the inn, he thought he once more caught a glance, through the open door, of the same figure, among the tumultuous throng which was hastening to the vessels. He whispered a few hurried words in the Drost's ear, and rushed out of the apartment. Aagé looked gravely and thoughtfully after him. He gave a secret signal to two of the most discreet knights to follow him, and requested the others to remain. They now seated themselves at the almost deserted table. The humble and officious host hastened to serve them, and to remove the empty flasks and cans of ale. Their wrath which they had repressed with difficulty, had rendered the knights silent, and their humour was manifested only in taunting exclamations and jeers at the grocer-heroes, as they were designated. It was indeed allowed that the proud Berner Kopmand's inveteracy against the nobles of the land was not altogether unfounded. The knights' castles in Denmark, were not in fact robber-holds, as in Germany; foreign traders here enjoyed the greatest security, and had even greater privileges than the burghers of the country;

but the knights delighted in scoffing at the uncouth and awkward bearing of the armed grocers; even Drost Aagé with all his moderation, and in spite of all that he had himself effected for the security of trade and the extension of commerce, could not altogether suppress the feeling of aristocratic contempt, entertained by those in his own rank for this class of persons, whose growing prosperity and wealth were often united with a degree of insolence and envious pride, which excited and fostered this mutual bad-feeling.

The attention of Aagé and the knights was soon directed towards two singular strangers who still remained with them at table; the one was a young man of a good figure and remarkably animated countenance; he wore a dark red, and rather thread-bare lay mantle, but the black cap which covered his tonsure, and a canon's hat which lay by his side on the table, appeared to denote him an ecclesiastic. At one time he talked Latin, at another Icelandic and Danish, with his next neighbour, whom he addressed as master, and to whom he shewed marked respect. When the young clerk spoke Danish, he frequently pronounced the words wrong. At times he became enthusiastic, and recited as well from the ancient classics as from old northern poems. His neighbour was a little, deformed man, with a hump upon his back, a thin sharp visage, and an intelligent piercing eye; his head was sunk deep between his shoulders, and hardly reached above the table, but his arms were uncommonly long and thin; he occasionally put on and took off a pair of large spectacles set in lead, and had a number of singular instruments and boxes before him on the table. He wore a bright-red mantle, bordered with fur, over a lay-brother's blue dress, and his head was adorned with a scarlet cap, trimmed with gold lace and tassels. In this showy garb, which rendered the deformity of his person still more striking, he resembled one of those foreign mountebanks and quacks, who at the great fairs were wont to exhibit feats before the mob, and vend relics, amulets, and universal remedies against all ailments; this personage however, had an air of much greater distinction and pretension. It was the same little red-cloaked man, who, with Sir Niels Brock and Sir Johan Papæ, had paid the nightly visit to Junker Christopher, at Holbek castle. In his dying hour Sir Pallé had described him to the Drost, when in his alarm, he had made him the depository of his secrets. Aagé however had never before beheld this figure and did not remember Sir Pallé's confused description.

The little man sat with a flask of wine before him, which he appeared to be examining with close attention. "Bad!--adulterated!" he now said in Danish to the Icelander, also in a foreign and Icelandic accent, while he puckered up his sharp nose. "See you this sediment. Master Laurentius? In the light of art and science, truth will one day become manifest in small things as well as in great--Eureka!" he continued, with a self-satisfied smile, "What would my great master Roger have said, if such a flask of wine had been set before him? Even without these skilful, searching eyes--for which I am in some measure indebted to his great optical discovery--although I may justly claim the honour of the practical application--even without my wondrous spectacles, he would perhaps have discovered that which I need all this apparatus to detect. The nature of poisons is altogether unknown and occult, Master Laurentius!" he added, mysteriously, but so loud as to be heard by all. "Not only for the preservation of life and health, but much more for the sake of science and art, an intimate knowledge of the essence of things is of the highest importance to us. Here in the north, however, people care but little for such matters; they gulp down everything, like the dumb beasts, without possessing the wise instincts of animals, and without seeking by wisdom and art to find a remedy for the narrow limits of our physical nature. All learning here is expended in theological subtleties, and what are called godly things--which, however, they know nought of--poor fools! Our common-place scholars still chew the cud of mysticism, the useless learning of the schools, and the dry, worn-out Aristoteles. Ignorance of all that is true and useful, renders forgers and cheats quite safe here, and these overbearing merchants can enrich themselves at the expence of this ignorant people, as much as they choose. There you see one of their new coins! I have detected its composition! It contains more tin and lead than silver; the Danish king's image and superscription are here, it is true--the size is precisely that of the royal coinage; but four of those go to a silver mark, and this is of six times less value. What an enormous profit might not a single ship-load of such coins bring those fellows!"

Drost Aagé had become attentive, and found in the stranger's last assertion an important confirmation of a charge generally made against the Rostock merchants. The attention of the Drost and the knights did not appear to displease the intelligent little man--he seemed, indeed, not to heed them--but he now continued to converse in Danish with the young clerk, and though he appeared to speak in a whisper, he nevertheless enunciated every word in a singularly distinct, and perfectly audible tone. "Nothing is small in science and in nature," he continued, "the least may here lead to the greatest; in every blade of grass their lies a world. How long will men shut their eyes on the great and only true revelation of the Deity, through the miracles and holy writ of nature! Mark my young friend! the time will come when the colossus of ignorance, barbarism, and madness, which hath been erected on nature's grave, and worshipped for centuries--must fall. As is the course of temporal things, so is that of the spiritual world--Stagnation is death and rottenness. We have stood stationary with antiquity and tradition. The powerful ferment of life hath subsided--life hath lost its savour. What is it but senseless oriental adventures, and the childish dreams of our race, which have turned men's brains, and kept us at a distance from nature and the source of true wisdom for nearly thirteen centuries? The heathens were far above us. What are we in science and art compared with the Greeks and Egyptians?--and yet even they were erring. They also had their idols, their fancies and dreams of a Tartarus and Elysium, and withal, that madness now worshipped under the name of poetry."

"Stop, my learned master!" interrupted the young Icelander with eagerness. "Now you attack *my* sanctuary--let the world change its fashion as it may--let Time devour his own children, as in ancient fable! But what hath been beautiful in every age, none can destroy--it must re-appear, though under new forms. True, eternal poetry shall rescue and embalm all wherein was life or beauty, as well in our times as in those gone by. Its image and memorial no cold enlightening wisdom shall ever efface.

"Cattle die,
Wise men die,
Time itself dies too--
One thing I know
That never dies--
Judgment on the dead."

"Be it so!" answered the little sage with a scornful smile, "Judgment shall not die; the art of judging is the only one that is immortal; the poetry of all ages shall vanish as soon as the world understands itself and its own thoughts. When the kernel is found we may cast away the shell, or give it to children to play with. It was a true saying, though, of that old heathen bard--the judgment on the dead *is* eternal--but when this generation hath passed away a succeeding one will jeer at the achievements of their fathers, and what is now worshipped shall be the scorn of posterity. But one likes not to hear such things, Master Laurentius! The kernel of truth is unpalatable; it suits not the taste of the vulgar and uninitiated; and he who proffers it runs the risk of being stoned by the enemies of truth and the slaves of prejudice. What my great Master Roger was forced to confess is known to all the world; if he found not himself the philosopher's stone, he hath, however, shewn us where to seek for it, and what was hidden from his sharp gaze is not necessarily hid from that of his disciples." So saying, the little man rose with a look of proud importance; he departed with a slight salutation to Drost Aagé and the knights, in whose looks he was well satisfied to perceive the astonishment which his last mysterious remark, about the philosopher's stone especially, seemed to have excited.

The young clerk remained behind, and now addressed himself to Drost Aagé, whose rank and name were known to him. He introduced himself to the Drost as an Iceland theologian, jurist, and poet, who in his ardent zeal for knowledge and enlightenment, had quitted his easy office of priest of St. Olaf's church and pœnitentarius of the Archbishop of Nidaros,^[10] to visit foreign universities with his learned countryman and fellow-traveller Magister Thrand Fistlier, a disciple, as he asserted, of the renowned Roger Bacon, whose wonderful knowledge, and free and bold opinions, had drawn on him so shameful a persecution from his ecclesiastical brethren, and who, after many years' imprisonment, had died two years since in England.

The young Iceland clerk now purposed, under the protection of his learned friend, to visit the Danish court, where he hoped to find that the king would lend a favourable ear to his own and the ancient Icelandic poems; while his travelling companion intended to display his wondrous arts before the king, and to make known some very important discoveries in natural philosophy, which might prove of incalculable use and effect both in war and peace. The report of the young King Eric's especial regard for science, and the intrepidity with which he dared to oppose the usurpations of the court of Rome and the hierarchy, had induced the learned Master Thrand to seek freedom and protection in Denmark.

"You will doubtless both be welcome to the king," answered Aagé, looking narrowly at him, "he favours and protects all fair and useful sciences. Your travelling companion belongs not to the herd of common mountebanks, as far as I can judge: if he can prove what he affirmed, of the false coin brought hither into this country, his learning may be most important to us. But since you are a theologian and scholar, Master Laurentius, I would but ask you one question," continued Aagé, "Doth not your companion entertain some confused opinions on sacred subjects? His expressions struck me as being somewhat singular, although I, as a layman, understand not such matters. I well know, however, those who are called Leccar Brethren,--who will only believe in the Creator, but neither in God's Son, nor in the Holy Spirit, nor in an universal christian church,--are as little tolerated in this country as by any right-thinking monarch in Christendom; you must in nowise believe our king's unfortunate position in regard to the Archbishop of Lund and the papal court hath made any alteration in his opinions in what concerns the matter of his own and his people's salvation."

"From the errors of the Leccari I believe myself free." answered the young Icelander, with some embarrassment; "about my learned companion's theology, I must confess I have not greatly troubled myself; seeing that he is a worldly philosopher and not a theologian. Of the noble art of bardship he hath not either any conception; I admire him solely for his rare knowledge of the secrets of nature."

"If he errs in the one thing needful, and if the highest and most sacred truths, as well as all that is beautiful and noble, are in his estimation nothing but folly," observed Aagé, "I have but little confidence in his knowledge of less important matters; and I would not give much for all the rest of his learning."

"I thus judged once myself, of the sciences and arts that teach us but earthly things," answered the Icelander, "but while I was at the foreign universities a new light dawned upon me.

I am indeed far from calling (like my learned travelling companion) the revelation of deity in nature the only true one, by which, as you have rightly observed, he hath in his inconsiderate zeal, betrayed a highly erroneous opinion; but even the wisdom of the heathen in worldly concerns is in nowise to be despised, and I have never seen anything that hath more strengthened my faith in the Almighty power and wisdom of the Triune God, than the marvellous effects of the powers of nature, with which this singular man hath made me acquainted."

"What hath he shown you, then, of such great importance? Master Laurentius!" asked Aagé.

"I have seen effects of his art, which I should in common with the ignorant multitude, and my prejudiced colleagues, have taken to be witchcraft and the work of the devil," answered the Icelander eagerly, "had he not explained them to me by the powers of nature, and from the great misjudged Roger Bacon's 'Opus Majus,' of which he carries a rare and invaluable manuscript with him. Not to speak of his great knowledge of plants and animals, and the properties and composition of metals; what most hath captivated me is all that points to the soul's dominion over time and decay, over life and death, over the universe, and all passive powers in nature. He affirms that by his art alone, without supernatural aid, he is able to preserve youth, and prevent the infirmities of age; he knows the course of the heavens, and the influence of the stars on human life; he hath a number of artful glasses, by which he is almost able to see the invisible; but his greatest and most wondrous art is the preparation of an inextinguishable fire, with which he imitates the thunder and lightning of the heavens. He hath shewn me a specimen of it, which hath astonished me. With a single handful of that subtle combustible matter, he can produce such an amazing thunder-clap, that the strongest wall would be rent by it, and such a burst of consuming flame, that he who rightly understands its powers, would be able to destroy a whole army with it, and devastate castles and towns."

The knights stared in amazement at the Icelander, and some crossed themselves. "It is impossible! That no man can do! it cannot be done by natural means!--it must be done by witchcraft and devilry!" said the one to the other.

Drost Aagé was silent, and looked sharply and gravely at the Icelander. "I hold you neither for an unwise man, nor for one who would deal in falsehood and deceit, good Master Laurentius!" he at length began, "although what you tell us of your learned companion borders on the incredible--but are you not yourself deceived? You say you have but known this man of miracles a short time. In your admiration of his arts and his rare knowledge of the secrets of nature, you have concerned yourself but little about his principles and way of thinking, which, however, I consider to be the most important points in every man's character, whether he be scholar or layman. If he is not a juggler or braggart, I fear he is something worse. He would fain have us laymen believe he had found the philosopher's stone. Those who talk openly of such things are generally enthusiasts or impostors."

"That which is above our understanding, Sir Drost," answered the Icelander, "we are but too apt to misjudge as folly, or the invention of the evil-minded--but here our own self-conceit and vanity are to blame. That which the wisest men in the world have so long mused upon, cannot assuredly be an absurd imagination, and I doubt not the philosopher's stone will and must one day be found--if it be not found already. Perhaps we may meet at Skanor fair, Sir Drost!" he added, rising to depart, "My learned friend and travelling companion doth not visit princes and nobles only--the enlightenment of the ignorant vulgar is a more important object to him. I accompany him as amanuensis, partly from a present necessity, which I blush not to acknowledge, and in this lay mantle, that I may not give offence to my prejudiced colleagues; but I learn much in this way, and, as I said--I trust to return more rich in knowledge from these worldly bye-paths to the service of St. Olaf, and to my most venerable friend and protector at Nidaros, who probably may soon need support in the cause against his unruly canons."

The conversation was now broken off with the Iceland clerk, as Sir Helmer rushed almost breathless into the apartment. "It *was* Kaggé! Drost! there is no doubt of it," exclaimed Helmer, "but, by Satan!--he is already on board the Rostock vessel."

"Who? the dead Kaggé? dream ye, Helmer? Was it he ye meant before?"

"He, and none other--the base regicide! as surely as I have eyes and ears. He hath both his beard and eye-brows shaved; but I know his fox's face and screeching voice; the dull Rostocker mentioned his name himself in his drunkenness, out of defiance and pride. They insulted me in the ancient coarse fashion I will not name, and pushed off from shore with the outlaw before mine eyes."

"We must arrest them at Skanor tomorrow," answered Aagé, "if the criminal is on board the Rostock vessel, he hath now peace and respite of life under the Hanse flag and the Lubeck law; but whenever he sets foot on Danish ground he dies! Such pestilent ware no Hanseatic hath the privilege of unloading." They then retired to rest. The Iceland clerk had gone, and no more was seen of either him or the learned Thrand Fistlier. The account they had heard of this worker of wonders continued, however, till a late hour in the night, the theme of the knights' conversation at the drinking table.

CHAP. XIV.

Drost Aagé retired to rest in silence, but he vainly tried to sleep. He was uncertain whether he ought not instantly to have captured the two overbearing Hanseatics on the ground of their former menace at Sjöberg; here they were no longer ambassadors and privileged persons. If they had circulated false coin, and openly protected an outlaw upon Danish ground, they might with strict justice be called to account. The knowledge that the base Kaggé still lived also disquieted him; but what still more banished sleep from the Drost's eyes, was the idea of the mysterious Master Thrand, and his wondrous arts. That a human being possessed such a power over nature as to be able to imitate the thunder and lightning of the heavens, with all their terrific effects, appeared to him an amazing prodigy, and what the enthusiastic Master Laurentius had said of the still deeper views of his master--of the preservation of youth by a mysterious art, and of the philosopher's stone, as something actually existent in nature, had especially inspired the meditative and somewhat visionary Aagé with singular musings.

The countenance and mountebank deportment of the little deformed philosopher, had, indeed, awakened great doubts of his honesty, and what Aagé had comprehended of his expressions appeared to him strange and confused, as opposed to what he had been piously taught in childhood regarding the highest and eternal truths in which, despite his unhappy excommunication, he had been confirmed by his confessor, Master Petrus de Dacia, who had succeeded in making him at peace with himself and the church. But the Iceland clerk's ardent enthusiasm for Master Thrand and his worldly wisdom had not been without its effect; and Aagé was forced to confess there lay an acuteness and intelligence in the little mountebank's eye which he had never seen equalled in any of the pious and learned men he knew. Laurentius's open and ingenuous countenance bore witness also to the truth of his testimony as to what he had seen and admired in the disciple of the famous Roger Bacon; and the longer Aagé pondered on what he had heard, the more doubts and strange thoughts crowded upon his mind. Master Thrand's contempt of the age in which he lived, and the confidence with which he expressed himself respecting the only true revelation of nature with which he was, above all, conversant, had also excited a feeling of strange and painful uneasiness in Aagé's mind. The melancholy knight had often, when oppressed by the thought of his excommunication, sought peace and tranquillity in the contemplation of nature in lonely nights under a calm and starry sky, without, however, feeling able to dispense with the comfort and consolation of the church. He now stood, with his arms folded, in his sleeping chamber, gazing out on the gloomy heavens. "Were it possible!" said he to himself. "Am I wandering here with all my contemporaries in thick darkness? Know we neither our own nature nor that around us? Are all our purposes and energies but as the gropings of the blind, without aim or object? Will the time come when children will jeer at us as erring fools and insane dreamers, scared by what did not exist, and amused by empty juggling? Can this be? Can even that which is most high and sacred, which we have believed in and lived for with our fathers--for which thousands of inspired martyrs have died with a halo of glory around their beaming countenances--for which our pilgrims and Crusaders wend to Jerusalem, and renounce all the riches and treasures of this world--which was the spring of action in our ancestors' lives as our own, and made them heroes and conquerors in life and death--could all that be dreaming, deception, and ignorance? Could the existence and achievements of whole centuries have been a monstrous lie? No! No! If yonder fellow be not a liar and a cheat, there is neither truth, nor life, nor redemption, nor salvation." He shrank with horror from his own thoughts. A sound now reached his ears which, at this moment, almost struck him with dismay. He fancied he once more heard the voice of the mysterious stranger close beside him.

"Darest thou not yet face the naked truth? my dear Laurentius!" sounded the shrill voice of the philosopher, slowly and solemnly through the thin wooden partition of the adjoining chamber. "Dost thou dread to enter into the holy calling of a Leccar Brother, and priest of nature? Dost thou tremble at an initiation into the great church of the world, of which we are all originally priests; we who have eyes for truth, and courage to announce it, despite the repeated outcry of the fools of thirteen centuries! Look, I open unto thee the great sanctuary in the name of truth and science, and in the sight of that deity who dwells in the breast of the initiated. Cast off the miserable prejudices of thy time! Throw down the phantom thou callest the Church, and a saving faith, with the same strength with which thou hast rejected the senseless fables of heathenism! Cast off all that was not given thee when thou becamest a human being! Rid thyself of all exploded and worn out doctrines--cast off the whole puerile tissue of phantasms and visions of crude ages, which thou callest Revelation! Divest thyself of thy preconceptions regarding the essence of things, and of all the pomp and imagery thou callest poetry! Then gaze freely around thee, and tell me what remains!"

"Nothing! nothing! learned master!" answered the voice of the young Icelander, in a desponding tone.

"Yes, assuredly!" was the answer; "thou thyself remainest, and great eternal nature, and, if

thou wilt, a great and mighty deity, which is the soul and life of this nature of which thou art thyself a part--all truth, all wisdom lie slumbering and buried there. Wake it if thou canst! Call forth deity in thyself and in nature! Rule it by that mighty art! Ask boldly, and force it to respond!"

"That I am not able to do, my wise master!" said the voice of the young Icelander, within the partition; "but could I wake lifeless nature, and force her to solve the mysteries I gaze upon, would she answer aught else than what the dead have ever answered the living, what the dead Vola^[11] answered Odin in our ancient poems, what the spirit of Samuel answered Saul in the presence of the Witch of Endor:--'Thou shalt die! to-morrow thou shalt die!'"

"Well," resumed the philosopher, "were the answer not much more cheering, if it were but truth could a philosopher, a Leccar Brother, a priest of nature and truth demand or wish it otherwise? You *will* have flattery, you *will* all of you be cheated and deceived--therefore you cling so fast to that flattering lie, but hate and persecute truth as ungodliness, heresy, or devilry--therefore are popes and bishops, like the prophets and evangelists of old, still able to lead the whole human race blindfold round in an eternal circle of error from one age to another until they have their eyes opened, and see that they stand where their blind fathers stood, by the closed book of nature, which amid their dreaming they have forgotten to open through the lapse of ages. Look! there thou standest, my pupil! and art ready to despair, because all that fair jugglery hath vanished and been blown away by my breath as it were a spider's web, or bubbles of air! and thou seest nought but one enormous lifeless body which I call nature.--But look! the lifeless body wakes! 'Tis deity, and yet our slave,--obedient to the mightier manifestation of deity within us. Only through our means can nature's deity awake to consciousness and self-knowledge. In us, and in our will alone lives the only true God we should obey. Courage, Laurentius!--courage! Truth must make its way--the slumbering and disguised god of nature must be wakened and unveiled. It must open to us its vast recesses, it must restore to us what it hath robbed and hidden--the philosopher's stone must be found, even though its workings should seem to us eternal death and petrification."

All was again hushed in the adjoining chamber; Aagé had thrown open a window, and the cool night air streamed in upon him; the sky had become clear--Aagé raised his eyes towards the starry vault, he grasped the cross-hilt of his sword, a heavy load oppressed his heart, he bent his knee in silent devotion, and rose, feeling that his prayer was answered by the return of a calm and cheerful frame of mind. "To God be thanks and praise! I know better however," he said, with a feeling of consolation. "He, within there, is a liar and deceiver, as surely as *He* above is love itself! and He whom He sent unto us was the way, the truth, and the life!" Aagé was now about to betake himself to rest, but the voice of the learned Master Thrand again caught his ear. The young Icelander he heard no more. German was now spoken, but in a low whispering tone, and the talk seemed to be on worldly matters. Aagé tried not to overhear anything; it was repugnant to his feelings, and appeared to him dishonourable and unworthy, to become a concealed witness to the secrets of others. He thought of knocking to give notice of his presence and the thinness of the partition; but, at this moment, he heard the name of "Grand" mentioned, and he started. The whispering continued for a long time afterwards, and he caught words which caused him the greatest uneasiness. The talk was of the king and Junker Christopher, of the outlaws, of death, and downfall; but what it was he could neither hear nor comprehend, with any distinctness. At last all became silent. He conjectured that his foreign neighbour had left the inn, and towards morning Aagé fell asleep. When he was awakened at dawn by his squire, in order to embark in a Swedish vessel, he had dreamt the most marvellous things. He fancied he had beheld an entirely changed world; without monasteries and monks, without fortified castles, without the images of the Madonna and the saints, without kings and thrones, even without women and children, and with nothing but men, with keen staring eyes and diminutive and deformed bodies, like Master Thrand's. At last it seemed to him that the sun was burnt out and hung, like a great black coal, over his head; that the moon and all the stars were pulled down and used instead of stones, for fences and inclosures round small withered cabbage gardens. All trees and flowers were torn up and peeled into fibres; all birds and animals lay slaughtered and cut open; and the little hump-backed men sat, with great spectacles, examining the putrified carcasses. All that he beheld,--the whole subverted and disjointed world, seemed to him at last metamorphosed into one enormous mass of stone, and a terrific voice sounded over the petrified world, and cried "Behold! *This* is thy world! *this* is thy God! *this* is the philosopher's stone!" Amid his dismay at hearing this voice, Aagé awakened, just as his brisk squire knocked at his door, still so confused by his dream that he could not distinguish between what he had dreamed, and what he thought he had heard from behind the partition.

CHAP. XV.

At the fair of Skanor a great number of persons of all classes were assembled. It was thronged

with skippers and merchants from every part of the world, but especially from Hamburg, Lubeck, Rostock, Deventer, and Overysse. These last were chiefly dealers in spices. They brought hither the most costly groceries to market from Venice and Genoa: wares were here to be seen even from India, Persia, and Egypt, which these enterprising traders had brought down the Rhine, and with which they journeyed to northern lands. Here lay many English vessels laden with wine; but what especially struck the eye were the splendid assortments of cloths, of all colours, which waved like flags from the vessels in the harbour, and lay in large bales in the streets under tents or wooden sheds.

The situation of Skanor was advantageous for trade. The town extended quite to the shore of the coast of Scania, between Falsterbo and Malmoe. It lay to the north of Falsterbo, and was both larger and much more ancient than that town. Over the gate of the place was a stone with an inscription, in the ancient Scanian language, which bore witness to the antiquity of the town, and which afterwards ran thus in more modern rhyme:

"Lund and Skanor throve apace,
When Christ appeared to bring us grace."

The great fairs of the town were particularly famed, and, during fair-time, many persons crossed over from Zealand. On the whole the intercourse between Scania and the Danish provinces was far more frequent than in aftertime, when this beautiful province, which bore the closest affinity to Zealand, was dismembered from the kingdom. Amid the crowd of visitors at the fair were seen knights, monks, and burghers of towns, both from Zealand and Scania, among peasants, knights' ladies, and gaily-attired dairy and kitchen maids from the nearest lordly castles, as well as ragged beggars and pretty country maidens, in the national costumes of Scania and Halland. The fair was thronged with musicians and jugglers of all kinds. Rosaries and little images of saints were exposed for sale by the side of every description of worldly wares and foreign luxuries.

Over the two best stocked and most frequented booths at the fair, waved Henrik Gullandsfar's and Berner Kopmand's well-known flag and sign--a griffin and a dragon, with a bundle of lances tied together, and with the Lubeck charter in their claws, defending their treasures against a troop of robbers in knightly attire, and ridiculously caricatured. These great merchants who had their agents, or resident grocers' apprentices, in the town, did not attend the sale of their goods in person, but were present at the unloading of their ships, to watch that no toll was demanded, contrary to the privileges of trade. The sound of music and dancing was heard in the taverns, and all places of entertainment. German ale and wine were poured out in abundance for the rich guests at the fair, while the poorer were content with Scanian and Zealand ale. Towards evening many drunken persons were to be seen; here and there disputes and fights occurred, and the provost with the watchmen and armed constables of the town were often forced to interfere.

What attracted most attention at Skanor fair at this time was a booth hung with coloured lamps, close to the quay, where fireworks were exhibited, together with many new and curious sights, at which the spectators wondered and crossed themselves as though they beheld the delusions of the evil one. Here the learned Master Thrand had erected his optical theatre. He stood himself on a raised platform and harangued the mob on the excellence of his masterpieces, and their great superiority over all the relics, amulets, and false panacea with which people suffered themselves to be imposed upon by unlearned mountebanks and jugglers. He chiefly extolled his arts as being innocent, and grounded on the principles of nature; and invited the unprejudiced and sensible public to draw nearer, and attend to what he (rather, he said, for the sake of science and truth, than for worldly gain) was about to expound and exhibit. His admirer, the young Master Laurentius, who, in his red lay-mantle, was not suspected to be an ecclesiastic, zealously assisted him as an amanuensis, and collected from time to time in his hat, money from the spectators, but in a manner which showed that he was ashamed of this employment; to which, however, he had doubtless (though with another and more pious aim) been accustomed, when on the anniversaries of the dedication of St. Olaf's church at Nidaros, he had, as pœnitentarius, collected alms for the treasury of the church.

Close by the booth of the distinguished and learned mountebank stood a light, under the image of the Madonna, in a little stone-walled chapel, where was also an iron-bound poor-box nailed fast upon a block. No merchant or skipper went to or from his ship without first kneeling here and depositing a piece of money in the box for the poor, and for the treasury of the Holy Virgin. In the evening there stood by this chapel, which went by the name of the Quay Chapel, Sir Helmer Blaa, who, with the Drost's squire Canute of Fyen, and some young knights of Aagé's train, kept a sharp look out on every one who came up from the quay. The wind had been contrary all day, and the merchants were just come on shore. Berner Kopmand's Rostock vessel lay at anchor before them in the harbour. It had reached Skanor with a fair wind ere day-break. The indefatigable owner of the vessel had been on board the whole day superintending the unloading of the cargo, and ere it was dark, Sir Helmer thought he saw the outlawed fugitive on deck by his side. In case of the criminal's venturing to land preparations had been made for his seizure, with the knowledge of the provost; but the fugitive seemed not to purpose quitting his place of refuge. After vespers, however, Berner Kopmand and Henrik Gullandsfar landed with great parade, and a considerable train of armed seamen. They omitted not to cross themselves at the chapel, and to throw a loud-chinking offering into the poor-box, as they passed by the knights

with an air of proud defiance.

"How many false silver coins think ye are now in that box?" said Sir Helmer, aloud. The heavy Rostocker turned towards him with a look of rage; but Gullandsfar nudged his elbow with a grave look, and they passed on. Helmer and the other young knights followed them, and seemed to have a great desire to chastise their arrogance.

Drost Aagé had not neglected to attend Thrand Fistlier's performances, and the optic theatre with which he entertained the astonished visitors at the fair. He had bought of the artist some of his most remarkable and valuable inventions, and gained information of their application and use. He could not refuse his admiration to what he here saw of the famous discoveries of Roger Bacon, and observed the whole exhibition with attention. It consisted chiefly of small optical cases in which the powers of the magnifying glass were applied in a manner hitherto unknown in the North, and by which the artist excited great astonishment. What was seen in these boxes was not only the transformation of small animals into monsters, but even a figurative metamorphosis of the world in Master Thrand's own taste:--saints and martyrs, miraculous sights, and legendary pictures, processions of monks with the Host, the banners of the Madonna, and crucifixes, were represented in a ridiculous manner by the side of all the Grecian and Roman gods with their profanest love adventures. All this passed in dim caricature before the eyes of the spectators, and gave place at last to a number of dazzling allegorical figures, intended to represent Wisdom, Philosophy, Freedom, Burgher Commerce, Political Economy, The Study of Nature, and other subjects of the same kind. As soon as it grew sufficiently dark for the purpose, Master Thrand exhibited small burning wheels, stars, and suns with many-coloured rays, which flew with a clear light into the air, and suddenly exploded with a slight report.

The Drost considered this last exhibition both beautiful and remarkable; all these things, however, were but trifles compared with what Master Laurentius had related of the matchless and wondrous feats which this mountebank was capable of performing. The sight of the small stars and suns which flew up over the sea and burst in the calm evening sky, afforded endless amusement to the spectators, to whom it seemed an entirely novel and incomprehensible phenomenon; but the people's admiration of this dazzling diversion as well as the beautiful fantastic spectacle itself in its aërial theatre, threw Aagé into a singularly pensive mood.

This glimpse of a new and secret art, whose vast and hidden workings he had already heard mentioned, struck him as being the forerunner of that new era announced by the mysterious artist, in which all opinions and ideas should be reformed and enlarged, and all that was ancient should vanish like the mimic suns and stars now waning and disappearing over the sea. Aagé could not forget the strange conversations he had heard between the artist and his pupil, of the delusive dream in which the whole Christian world was wandering. In the learned Master Thrand's peculiar conception of the doctrine of the notorious Leccar Brethren he saw but a haughty and contumacious insanity, which, should it ever become dominant, would subvert all that was beautiful and true, and sacred upon earth; his own dream of the petrified world was still fearfully present to his recollection. The noise and joyousness of the crowd became almost painful to him. At last he sought relief and freedom from these distressing thoughts in the little chapel of the quay. He bent his knee before the painted wooden image of the Madonna, who was here represented as usual with the child in her arms, and the globe of the world with a cross upon it, like a ball and sceptre in the child's hand. Aagé had folded his hands in prayer, but as he turned his eyes on the image, it was suddenly illuminated by a ball of fire sent up from the artist's booth. The Madonna's image appeared to him in the vivid flash of light like a horribly grinning idol--at the same moment he heard a loud report in the air, resembling a clap of thunder, followed by shrieks of terror from women and children. The little chapel shook; the ancient worm-eaten image of the Virgin tottered, and fell down at his feet. He started up, and rushed out of the chapel. The joyousness of the people was changed to fear and wrath. Some women had fainted; the life of one had been seriously endangered; a Capuchin's beard had been singed by the explosion. "Witchcraft! Sorcery!" was re-echoed in the crowd. "Stone him!--Burn him! the accursed wizard! He is a heretic!" cried some. "He hath said he will draw off all worshippers from our Lady and the saints--he saith he will match his thunders against the Lord's himself.--Stone him! Burn him! Cast him upon the beach! Tear down the wizard's house!"

Amid all this commotion the enraged mob rushed upon the pyrotechnist's booth. The hapless little artist had hid himself with his amanuensis among some large boxes in an adjacent booth. Two of the enraged mob and a lay brother drew them forth from under the planks of the broken-down booth to give them up to the maltreatment of the mob. The provost and constables vainly strove to hinder these acts of violence. At last Drost Aagé stepped forth, and cried in an authoritative voice, "Stop there, countrymen! Peace here, in the king's name! Secure these jugglers, but injure not a hair of their heads. They shall be judged and punished according to the law of the land if they cannot give account of themselves. What they have shewn us was done by natural means, my friends! These people know more than we do of the powers of nature; but they abuse their wisdom by boasting and juggling, and by scoffing at sacred things."

As soon as they heard the name of the king, and recognised his and the nation's favourite, the enraged mob was pacified. Thrand Fistlier and his amanuensis were instantly seized by the constables and conducted to the quay, with all their effects; followed by a great throng of people. Drost Aagé followed them himself on board a royal vessel, which was to sail next day to Helsingborg, and the captain, with his armed seamen, received orders to protect the captives from all injury.

As soon as the captive mountebank heard he was in safety, but was to be taken as a prisoner to a fortress, he looked around him with a proud smile, "My noble persecuted master was right," he said. "The age is not sufficiently matured for us and our compeers. It is dangerous to be wise among fools; even the least glimpse of the light which is to appear is, as yet, too strong for these weak-sighted barbarians. It is not the first time a great genius hath appeared a century too soon!"

"Silence, wretched juggler!" said Aagé. "The great man whom thou dishonourest, by calling thy master, was a wise and pious monk, I have been told, but no juggler and self-appointed priest. Thank the holy Virgin and her Son, whom thou deniest, for thy life to-day! It is not for thy wisdom, but for thy folly, and the confusion thou wouldest spread among the people, that I have caused thee to be bound."

Ere Aagé quitted the vessel he took Master Laurentius aside, and gazed on him with a look of thoughtful interest. "You are too good to be this juggler's attendant and apprentice," he said; "your blind admiration for his knowledge of the perishing things of time, hath caused you to deny and dishonour your own holy calling, and the high vocation to which you are dedicated. St. Olaf, and the souls entrusted to you, you have deserted for this deformed artificer of hell-fire. From want and need you shall no longer be necessitated thus to degrade yourself. The captain of the vessel hath orders to care for your requirements; at Helsingborg he will provide you with suitable priest's attire, and money for your journey. To save your life, Master Laurentius, I have been forced to use you more hardly than I wished. When you arrive at Helsingborg, you are free and your own master; but your suspicious companion must, as a state prisoner, tarry the king's coming, and justify himself before him, if he can do so. It is known to me that he is a Leccar brother; as such it is forbidden to him to rove the country at large and mislead the people. I know, also, he wishes you to join his sect; but, I conjure you by that Almighty Lord and Master you have been near betraying--draw back, good Master Laurentius, and preserve your immortal soul! It hath assuredly a higher and a worthier calling, if your countenance and warm enthusiasm for what is beautiful and true have not deceived me. The Lord be with you! farewell!" Aagé quitted the ship without awaiting an answer from the deeply agitated youth, whose eyes were suffused with tears, and who vainly strove to reach him his fettered hand.

The Drost rowed back to Skanor. It was dark night, and there was a great stir and tumult on the quay. A quarrel and serious affray had arisen between the Drost's knights and the Hanseatic merchants, who had been chased from the inn and had taken flight towards the harbour. Berner Kopmand and Henrik Gullandsfar, with their armed seamen, laid furiously about them, but could not compete in the dexterous use of their weapons with Sir Helmer and the other incensed young knights, who were supported by the Skanor burghers. "Cut the forgers down! The cheats! The overbearing dogs!" they shouted. "They have brought false coin here to the fair--they have outlaws on board!" The affray was serious and bloody. The Hanseatics withdrew, fighting, to their boats. It was impossible for Aagé to restore peace. The foreign merchants and the greater part of their seamen at last escaped to their ships, under cover of the night. They instantly hoisted sail. It was not until they were in the open sea that the knights missed Sir Helmer and the Drost's most active squire, Canute of Fyen.

CHAP. XVI.

Drost Aagé was compelled to prosecute his journey early the next morning, without having been able to discover Sir Helmer and the squire. When Aagé and the royal halberdiers left Skanor, they were followed through the streets by a great crowd of persons. It appeared that the burghers had learned, or conjectured, the object of this showy procession.

The ballad, "For Eric the youthful king!" was as popular in Scania as in Denmark. "Long live king Eric and his true men!" shouted the crowd. "Bring him and Denmark a second Dagmar, good sirs!"

Aagé rejoiced at these tokens of the disposition of the brave Scanians; but he entertained little hope of a happy result from his embassy, and he was under great anxiety for the fate of the brave Sir Helmer and his own alert and trusty squire. Two of his other squires, and three of the young knights remained dangerously wounded at Skanor.

Sir Helmer, and his companions, had followed the bragging Rostocker and his seamen to their inn. They had unanimously resolved with their own hands to chastise and humble the overbearing Hanseatics. While at the inn the Drost's squire had displayed a false coin, with which one of the lower class had been imposed upon in Berner Kopmand's booth, and it was affirmed the Rostockers had brought with them whole chests of such money. It was conjectured, and with reason, that this false money was coined by the outlaws, who the preceding year had captured

some of the king's chief coiners. Complaints of false coin had frequently been made before, and now that it was heard the Rostockers imported them by bushels, the indignation instantly became great and general, and a fight soon commenced with the foreign merchants and skippers. When the Hanseatics were chased from the quay of Skanor, Sir Helmer had eagerly pursued the armed seamen, and had assisted in rolling into the sea some chests containing their bad money; at last, accompanied by the Drost's squire, the daring Canute, he had sprung after them into the boat to hinder their flight; but here they were overpowered by numbers, and dragged captive on board the Rostock vessel.

Sorely wounded, and with hands and feet fast bound, Helmer and his companion were thrown down into the ship's hold. Here they lay the whole night among a number of ale barrels, firkins of salt, and sacks of groceries, which had not been unladen. The vessel rolled heavily; the weather had become boisterous, and those on board seemed only busied in saving ship and goods. At length the weather grew calmer. The strong motion of the ship ceased; it glided slowly and almost imperceptibly forward, and all became quiet on deck. The wearied seamen appeared to sleep. Sir Helmer now perceived a faint light above his head. He thought it was daylight; but soon discovered it was the moon shining in upon him through a chink in the ship's hatches directly above him. He presently heard the voices of two men in the stillness of the night; and recognised the tones of Berner Kopmand and Henrik Gullandsfar. "I cannot sleep for wrath and wound-smarting," growled the Rostocker. "Lo! this is the free trade and security one has to expect when a greenhorn sits on the throne, and justice lies in the knights' lances. Pestilence and destruction on the whole pack of puffed-up aristocrats! The accursed sycophants and slaves of kings and tyrants! They would have it *seem* as if they protected the people and the burghers--pshaw! It is but for themselves and their high master they fight. Had I not spoken those bold words against their strutting knight-king at Sjöborg, nor had that piece of royal game of an outlaw on board, our money would surely have been as good ware as before. They are a vile robber pack, the whole set of them that call themselves knights and noble, as well here as in Germany--as long as there are thrones and knights' castles left, neither trade nor burghership can thrive. So soon as the sun rises those two jackanapes we laid hold of shall dangle at the yard-arm."

"Hearest thou, countryman?" whispered Helmer in the hold to his fellow-prisoner, "that concerns us two; a pleasant prospect! Could we but sink the ship and drown the braggart grocers we could go down to our home with some sort of pleasure."

"That would be truly but a sorry jest, and a slender satisfaction. Sir Helmer; still, it would be better than to let oneself be hanged by those rascals," answered the squire. "I have torn the skin off my left hand," he continued; "but it can slip well enough out of the knot. If I am allowed but half an hour for it our bonds shall be loosened. I have a good clasp knife in my pocket; yonder lies a good ship's auger, and an axe; many a hearty blow shall be dealt ere they get the halter round our necks."

"The Lord and St. George assist us!" whispered Helmer, breathing hard, "if I 'scape hence alive, and see my dear Anna again," he added, with a smothered sigh, "I promise St. George a new altar-table, and every bottle-nosed Hanseatic I meet a broken head!"

"'Tis a pious vow, noble sir!" whispered the squire, "you will see it will help us. Now my hand slides out of the knot; but it pinches hard."

"Hush!" whispered Helmer, rolling himself nearer to the chink in the hatches.

"I ever told you it was a bad business with that money-trading, and that coining with the outlaws," now said the smoother, toned voice of Henrik Gullandsfar above the knight's head. "No clear profit is ever got by such dealings; it lessens faith, and rarely pays in the long run, Master Berner! No! with *pure* gold and silver might we rule the world; and sober prudence would sway the gold sceptre--that I have ever said. With a little less eagerness we should, perhaps, have made a better market in Scania; but you will drive everything through with might, Master Berner!"

"Might against might! that was ever my word in the covenant: there may be something in what you say," answered the Rostocker, "of the gold and silver sceptre; it may just as well, however, be alloyed with a little copper or tin, when none perceive it; but with pure sharp steel it must be defended. Ere we can lay the sword in the balance against all the crowns and armorial bearings in the world, our proud plan is but a glittering castle in the air."

"Give time, Master Berner," resumed Gullandsfar; "the great Rome was not built in one day, yet she became the ruler of the world. Let us first rid the seas and the highways of petty robbers, and then we may let fly at the great in their castles and thrones. Let us first get possession of the sea! then shall it overflow the earth with our waves! It shall heap us up mountains of gold, and wash away every castle and throne that stands in our way. We Wisbye men lie very close to the King of Denmark; we must be cautious, even though as prudent merchants we give patriotism to death and the devil. You Rostockers are too hot-headed; one should not break too soon with authorities. The menace at Sjöberg was a stupid trick: I did but assent to it, and was silent for your sake. It never answers to bluster and threaten unless one can fight at the same time; and it answers just as little to fight, unless we know we are the strongest."

"Out upon your caution!" growled the Rostocker. "We have power already if we will but use it; we may have as many souls in our service as we can pay for."

"Men's souls are dear merchandise," observed Gullandsfar; "and besides it easily corrupts and spoils. How many marks of pure silver hath not that miserable fellow on the quarter deck yonder already cost you? And he is, after all, but a villanous outlaw and renegade from our high-born deadly foes. That pack no wise burgher should count on."

"Such a fellow is worth his weight in gold," said the Rostocker with a laugh. "Mark! those aristocratic vermin shall now devour each other. A dishonoured and death-doomed knight, without castle and lands, whose honour and name have been scalded off him may be the best king-killer one could have; he, yonder, is practised in the trade! He was in Finnerup barn. I will let him loose in the harbour! I will smuggle him in among our agents--there will soon be troubled waters to fish in. The crowned green-horn shall not have turned his back on us at Sjöberg for nothing. Mark! he shall have other things to think on than keeping his bridal in the summer."

"We are not authorised by the covenant to go so far as that, however, Master Berner," remarked Gullandsfar. "What yon dishonoured knight may have to avenge is his own concern; his and your secret trade concerns not the league; I would rather have nothing to do with that smuggling traffic. When the prosperity of the league, and a great and matchless plan like ours is in question, we should wisely set aside private revenge, and all petty personal views."

"Do you slink? Are you afraid, Master colleague?" growled Berner Kopmand, beginning to talk loud. "Let not that concern *you* my wise Master Henrik! You need not tell an old reckoner what is small and what is great. I can as well as you make a difference between what I undertake in the Hanse-towns' name, and what I risk in my own. If I reckon wrong, the loss is Berner Kopmand's. I know what that man can stand; and you are right--the covenant hath naught to do with it!"

"If it fails, it may however injure our trade and enterprises in great matters," replied Henrik Gullandsfar in a tone of calm calculation. "Consider the point well, Master Berner! All ports are now open to us; the king is proud and authoritative, but nevertheless he favours us far more than we could expect from his policy. Our 'prentices and agents are protected in the sea-ports--our trade is as free and untaxed here as any where--it hath not struck any one but the king himself that the road to salt and pepper, to ale and German cloth, as we heard from his own lips, is equally broad and convenient for all, and Danish corn and cattle will give a good return, and pay both wages and taxes. St. Nicolas and St. Hermes be thanked! the *navigation is ours. They are too dull and lazy to understand their own interests.* The peasant is content with small beer, and the citizen with skim milk, and they let us run off with the ale and the cream; but if you make good your threat, secretly or openly, and if anything a little too notorious chances here, in which the Hanse have lot or part, people's eyes may be opened, and our trading dominion is at an end here in the north."

"The eyes which might be most dangerous to us were they wide open, are just those I would have shut," muttered the Rostocker. "Greater service could none do the Hanse in these kingdoms and lands,--but silence! What is that? I heard something move under us. The captives are surely not loose?"

"The captives! Death and misfortune!" exclaimed Henrik. "Have they cast them into the hold? Then perhaps they now know more than any living soul must carry farther."

"It matters not, Master colleague," said the Rostocker with a scornful laugh, "they shall not carry it farther, however, than to the yard-arm! Now doth the sun rise red as pure gold--that sight they shall see for the last time. Ho! steersman!" he shouted, "how far are we?"

"If a breeze springs up, we shall reach Kallebo ere it rings to mass in Copenhagen, Master!" answered a hoarse voice at the helm.

"That's well! Then we will keep mattins and ship's law on our own ground, ere the Bishop takes Lubeck law out of our hands. Up! all hands! Ring the great bell!"

The sound of a brass bell instantly assembled all the seamen upon deck.

"Bring the prisoners up here, boatswain!" continued the captain of the vessel. "Sing out, fellows! Shout forth the poor sinners' vigil. Let the Danish scoundrels hear we are good Christians! and let their houndish souls go to hell amid song and clang!"

While the ship's crew with a fearful bellowing chaunted a sort of hymn on the departure of sinners from the world, and two sturdy fellows in tarry jackets coolly fastened two ropes to the yard-arm, the hatches of the ship's hold were opened and the boatswain went below with two armed men. Cries and tumult were heard in the hold; all became instantly quiet again, but neither the boatswain nor the two men returned.

"What is this?" exclaimed Berner Kopmand in dismay. "What is become of them? Those Danish hell-hounds must be loose! Down after them fellows! Bring them up here dead or alive! Hence! below! or ye shall be scourged at the mast!"

The whole ship's crew were in commotion; they flocked to the hatchway, but none seemed to

like to go below, despite the threats of the stern captain.

"The first who sets foot here below dies!" said Sir Helmer's voice from the hold. "Ere, I and my comrade will let our necks be twisted by your grocer hands, by St. Michael and his flaming sword! ye shall all of ye go with us to the bottom of the sea--Any moment I please every soul of us shall perish. We have bored a ground-leak--we loosen ye a plank with a single pull."

"That devil of a fellow!" cried the Rostocker, growing deadly pale, "he hath us all in his power. What are we to do?"

"We must treat with them," answered Gullandsfar. "Aside all men! Let me speak with that worthy knight. This is doubtless a little stratagem of war, noble Sir knight!" began Master Henrik, courteously; "but since we cannot search into the matter without peril of our lives we will submit to necessity, and acknowledge you have this once very craftily ensnared us. What have ye done to our three men, noble sir?"

"They have met with their deserts, and lie here stone dead," answered the knight. "Thus it shall fare with all of ye--if ye will fight with us fairly, three at once, we will encounter on dry boards; but if more come, the sea shall help us. Throw us our own good swords below instantly! or we will try who best can swim."

"You have won back your freedom with honour, noble sir!" answered Gullandsfar, "If ye would believe my word you might safely come here among us; we are peaceable people, and purpose not to measure our skill in arms with yours. Your swords shall instantly be returned to you; but upon one condition, noble knight--you must only use the sword in self-defence, and not to assault any of us as long as you are here on board; for this I demand your knightly word of Honour."

"That I promise on my faith and honour," cried Helmer,--and two swords were instantly thrown down to them.

"We will set you unscathed on shore at Copenhagen, noble sir," continued Henrik Gullandsfar, "provided you promise to be silent concerning what you perhaps may have heard and perceived, which might get us into disfavour in high places, or injure our trade and enterprises."

"I leave grocers and pettifoggers to wage war with the tongue," answered the knight haughtily. "What I have heard of your fine plans and projects I deem not worth wasting one word upon; but from this hour I defy you all to the death.--Until I set foot on shore you are unmolested; but from the moment we separate broken heads will be the consequence of our meeting."

"That is but natural," returned Gullandsfar. "We accept your proffer in the first instance; keep but quiet! In a few hours you will be on shore."

There was a murmur of dissatisfaction and uneasiness on board the vessel. Some of the boldest seamen grumbled at the shameful peace with the two captives. They blamed Henrik Gullandsfar for cowardice and treachery; but none cared to go down into the hold, and dare an encounter with the redoubted captives, who had both ship and crew in their power. At last, however, they submitted to necessity. Berner Kopmand had lost the use of his tongue, and the discreet Master Henrik had taken the command of the ship. He ordered every one to go quietly about their business, and was obeyed without any objections being made. The captain himself stood on the forecastle, with rolling eyes and crimson cheeks. He concealed with his large person a man in a black priestly mantle, who conversed with him in a low tone, and kept his back constantly turned towards the stern. A fresh breeze had sprung up. The wind was favourable, and ere noon the vessel glided into Kallebo strand, between the Isle of Amak and the green pastures of the village of Solbjerg, which occupied the whole of the western side where the suburb of Copenhagen, Vesterbro, was afterwards built. It was a fine spring day. The proud castle of Axelhuus^[12] rose towards the east in the sunshine, with its circular walls and its two round towers, and was mirrored in the surrounding waters. The castle lay apart from the town, without any bridge, and was only accessible by boats. Behind the castle island were two other small islands, almost covered with buildings, whither boats were constantly plying. The one was the abode of the stationary skippers, and on the other (Bremen Island) the warehouses of the Bremen merchants seemed to tower in emulation of the castle of Axelhuus itself. The Rostock vessel steered not to the great haven, from which the city afterwards derived its name, but ran into the Catsound, on both sides of which were seen a number of small houses of frame-work, the walls of which were plastered with clay, and the roofs thatched with straw and reeds; between the houses were cabbage gardens and orchards, with wooden fences, or thorn hedges; and in the neighbourhood of the quay was seen the little church of St. Clement.

FOOTNOTES

[Footnote 1](#): The word Runes is here used in its original signification,--that of mystery or secret. Each letter of the Runic alphabet was supposed to possess a mysterious and magical power. In the Scandinavian mythology, each Rune was originally dedicated to some deity; it also denoted some natural quality or object: their Asiatic origin is now proved beyond doubt. There is a remarkable poem in the elder Edda--the Song of Brynhildé, in which mention is made of several kinds of Runes. Among them may be classed numerous amulets of most of the Asiatic tribes, as well as of the Egyptians, Greeks, &c., on which these characters were cut or traced. The custom among sailors of marking their skins with letters and devices may clearly be traced to Runic origin, and the tattooing among savage tribes is evidently similarly derived. In Wilson's account of the Pelew Islands, King Abba Thulé is represented as tattooed with two crosses on the breast and two on one shoulder, with a snake, and these distinct northern Runes [Illustration of rune]. In the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, when superstition dragged her victims to the stake throughout all Christian Europe, the use of Runes became an especial object for the persecutions exercised by the authorities and clergy of Iceland,--the word Rune there signifying a mysterious and magical character. The songs of the Finns and Laps, which are supposed by them to possess magic powers, are still called Runes.--*Translator*. Vide *Professor Finn Magnussen's Notes to the Elder Edda*, vol. iii.

[Footnote 2](#): King Eric the Sixth of Denmark, surnamed Plough Penny, the son and successor of Valdemar the Victorious, was murdered by the command of his brother, Junker Abel, Duke of Slesvig, under circumstances of peculiar atrocity, on the 4th of August, 1250. Abel had frequently rebelled against his brother; but at last finding that his forces were unequal to the contest, he had recourse to stratagem, and made overtures of friendship to Eric, who gladly accepted them, and hesitated not to visit his brother at one of his palaces in Slesvig. After an apparently cordial reception, however, the duke contrived to turn the conversation on their former feuds, and reproached the king with having devastated his territories, saying, "Dost thou not remember how thou didst plunder my town of Slesvig, and compel my daughter to fly barefoot to a place of shelter? Thou shalt not do so twice." Eric was then seized and led to the river Slie, where he was placed in a boat, beheaded, and his body sunk by stones into the deepest part of the stream. In order to cover this crime, Duke Abel and twenty-four of his knights, according to the usage of those times, endeavoured to clear themselves of suspicion, by solemnly affirming that the king had met with his death by the upsetting of the boat, but two months afterwards the headless trunk floated to the river side, and the murder became known. The body was deposited in St. Benedict's church at Ringsted, where the Translator not long ago was shown one of the bones through an aperture of the walled-up niche.

[Footnote 3](#): The placing runes upon the tongue was employed in Runic magic to waken the dead priestess, and compel her to give a prophetic answer to the magician whose spells had aroused her from the sleep of death. In the song of Vegtam, in the Elder Edda, known to the English reader in our poet Gray's fine translation, "The Descent of Odin," the Scandinavian bard describes the magic power of runes traced on the ground towards the north, and repeated as incantations, in calling forth the prophetic response from the tomb.

Right against the eastern gate,
By the moss-grown pile he sate,
Where long of yore to sleep was laid
The dust of the prophetic maid;
Facing to the northern clime,
Thrice he traced the Runic rhyme;
Thrice pronounced in accents dread,
The thrilling verse that wakes the dead,
Till from out the hollow ground,
Slowly breathed a sullen sound."

Translator's Note.

[Footnote 4](#): Baldur, the son of Odin, was slain by Hother, a Danish warrior, his rival in the affections of Nanna, a Norwegian princess.

[Footnote 5](#): Fragment of an old Danish ballad entitled "Agneté and the Merman."

[Footnote 6](#): One of the most ancient and characteristic ballads of the north. It is the subject of one of M. Ohlenschlager's most popular tragedies.

[Footnote 7](#): The superstitious belief in the existence of mermen, prevailed in Denmark at no very remote period. It seems probable that the pirates or Vikings of the north availed themselves of this superstition, by assuming the disguise of mermen to scare the inhabitants from those coasts it was important they should possess. The adventures of some Scandinavian pirate and maiden probably gave rise to the curious old ballad of Agneté and the Merman. See the Danish "Kjæmpe Viser."--*Translator*.

[Footnote 8](#): Fragment of an heroic ballad.

[Footnote 9](#): Varulve (Manwolf) according to ancient superstition, a man who had been metamorphosed for a certain time into a wolf. The superstitions of the Scandinavians, as handed down in the Sagas and Kempe Vise (heroic ballads), partake so much of the character

of Eastern fable, that there can be little doubt of their Asiatic origin.--*Translator.*

[Footnote 10](#): Nidaros, the ancient name of Drontheim in Norway.

[Footnote 11](#): "Vola's qvad," or "The Song of the Prophetess," is one of the most imaginative poems in the Elder Edda. It opens with an account of the springing forth of creation from chaos, and after announcing death as the final doom of all physical nature, ends by foretelling the rise of a better and brighter world, from the ocean in which the first had been engulfed.--*Translator.*

[Footnote 12](#): The name of the ancient castle of Copenhagen, built by Bishop Absalon in the thirteenth century as a defence against pirates.

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