THE

NEAREST NEIGHBOUR

AND

OTHER STORIES

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Rosa Sutton,
With best wishes
for her birthday
April 29th 1884

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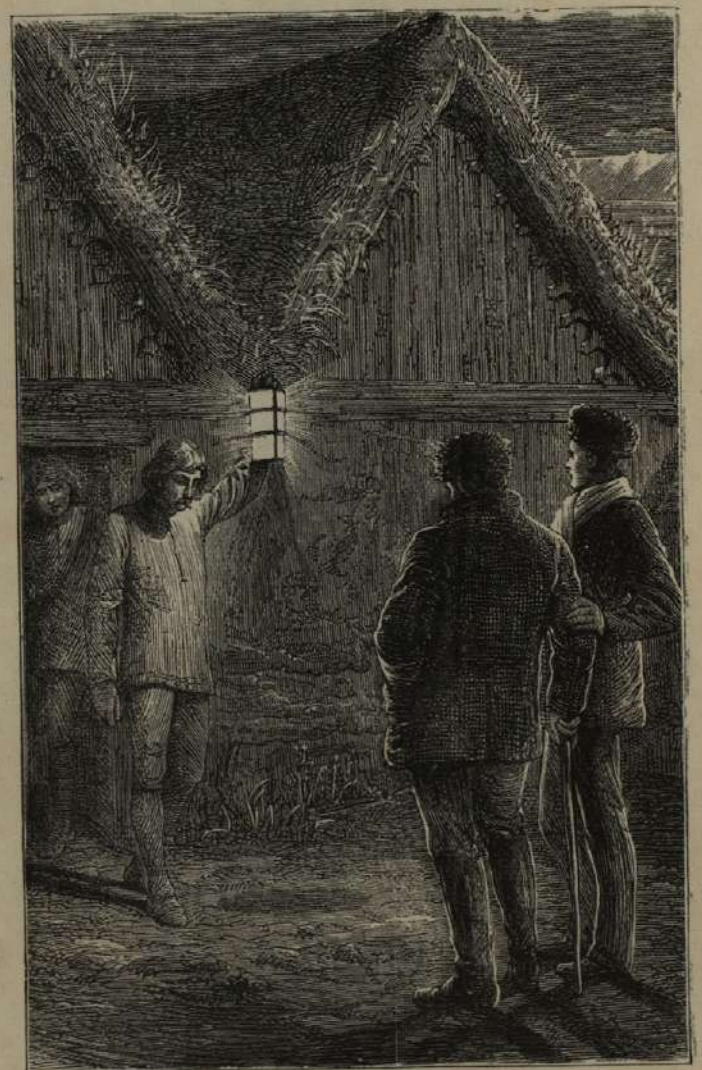

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THE

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And other Stories.

BY

FRANCES BROWNE,

AUTHOR OF "THE GRILL'S TRUST," ETC.

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THE NEAREST NEIGHBOUR.

CHAPTER I.

COUNT RANKENSTERN'S ESTATE.

THE numerous holms, or small islands, with which the Baltic Sea is studded, particularly along its winding and deeply-indented coasts, are well known to navigators, and not a little dreaded in times of fog and storm for their craggy shores and girdles of sunken rocks. Many of them have never been inhabited; the distance from the mainland and the poverty of the soil make them unfit for tillage; the want of harbours or shelter of any kind from the winds and waves of that wintry climate prevents the rise of fishing villages; yet these solitary isles are

owned and valued by landed proprietors on the neighbouring coasts, on account of the pasturage which they afford for sheep and cattle. One accustomed to the sight of the rich and flowery meadows, where hay is mown and dairies are provided for, beside our English rivers, would lightly esteem the stunted grass, mixed with heath and wild thyme, which the holms of the Baltic yield for herd and flock. But the cold, dry lands that lock in the Eastern Sea, as old mariners called it, are still poorer in pasturage; and as soon as the brief northern summer has fairly banished the snow and spread forth the green carpet, large flat-bottomed boats transport from the nearest mainland the small stunted cows and lean sheep, to hold high festival in the uninhabited islands, till the lengthening night and nipping frost command their return to stall and pen. When there is anything like dairy work to be done, two or three trusty and skilful hands generally accompany them; but if there is nothing of the kind expected, one single solitary shepherd is carried over with the flock, and left in charge for the season. His duties are to look after the four-footed creatures shut in by the sea, to gather them, in case of those sudden storms to which the Baltic summer is liable, safe under the roof of the wooden shed, one corner of which forms his own dwelling-place, and to make the provisions left with him last till the next boat comes with a supply, which, between the slow, deliberate ways of the north, and the necessity for all hands to make the most of the short summer in farm and fishery, does not

happen often during his sojourn. Among the hardy people of the Baltic shores those duties are thought so light and easy that persons unfit for ordinary labour, old men, youths, and even girls, are commonly employed as shepherds in the holms; but the utter solitude, and perhaps the uncertain coming of the boats, makes the office by no means coveted. Nobody will accept it who can live without it; and in former times, when serfdom prevailed over all the north, petty tyranny or unscrupulous selfishness sent many an unsuitable subject to keep sheep in the lonely holm, a remarkable instance of which is still remembered in the seaward villages of Farther Pomerania.

The province, a flat sandy country lying between the Oder and the Baltic, is properly the north-west corner of Germany, and, together with its southern half, Hither, or Inland Pomerania, once formed an independent German state ruled over by its own ducal sovereigns. That princely line has long ago gone the way of all earthly power and glory. Pomerania, inland and seaward, has been Prussian territory since the fifteenth year of the present century; but at the time of our tale the German dominion extended only to the Oder. The Baltic-bounded land formed part of the kingdom of Sweden, and the peculiar institution of the bad old times was there in full force. The peasants were bondmen to the lords of the soil, descending with the lands they cultivated from heir to heir, and transferred to any master who might happen to purchase the estate on which they were born. The Pomeranian peasant

could neither emigrate nor remove without the leave of his proprietor—could follow no work for himself or his family while the lord of the soil required his services, and was expected to be satisfied with whatever wages the latter or his steward thought proper to pay. Moreover, there were duty days, for which no wages were paid at all; there were dues which his lord had a right to exact out of his profits from any trade or business, the legacy left him by a rich relation, or the dowry brought him by a wealthy bride. For the apprenticeship of his son or the marriage of his daughter license had to be obtained and paid for, if the young people were thereby removed from his lord's estate; and when recruits were wanted for the king's army, the master of the land could march off any peasant who had incurred his displeasure, or make a stiff bargain with the man most anxious to stay at home.

On no estate were those seigneurial rights more strictly guarded and enforced than on that of Count Rankenstern—a large, but not very valuable property, consisting of small farms, interspersed with wastes of heath and brushwood, a small fishing hamlet or two, a considerable extent of sea-sand, and several grazing holms far out in the Baltic. The noble proprietor had never visited that domain from the day of his majority, and that was more than twenty years ago. His time and his thoughts were given up to the gaieties, the follies, and the state intrigues which then occupied and troubled the court of Stockholm. There the count spent his days and years, forgetful of

his stewardship in every sense, and particularly as regarded his half-cultivated lands in Pomerania; but never forgetting to draw from the same poor lands and the peasants on them all the revenue that he could possibly raise by the instrumentality of his agent, Mats Smeker.

Mats was a hard, keen-witted man, with a good deal of worldly shrewdness, little feeling, and less conscience. He had been born in the peasant class, but it was on the German side of the Oder, where the peasantry were free, and, according to a popular proverb, every man could hold his own and more; and having early emigrated to the Swedish province, and got into the service of Count Rankenstern, Mats had lost no opportunity to gain the good graces of his lord, and thus crept from one stage of power and trust to another, till he became sole agent and deputy-governor over the estate of the careless absentee. He had held that office for several years, and was likely to hold it longer. His policy was to keep his lord in good humour, and never give him an occasion to visit his estate or look into his own affairs, which Mats managed so as to satisfy his demands, and at the same time to enrich himself.

These two men were greedy of gain. With the one it was to spend on the follies and fashions of the Swedish capital; with the other it was to hoard and hide away in a strong box. But it made them both concur in oppressing the poor peasantry, and forget that there was One who would bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it was

good or whether it was evil. The count would not have tolerated the steward's gatherings and exactions on his own account, had he been apprised of them; but spending all his time in the distant capital, and occupied with court affairs and amusements, none of his peasants had an opportunity to let him know, even could they venture to do so; and thus between the lord and his agent the oppression of the poor tenants was grievous, and the ancient family estate of the Rankensterns was going to wreck and ruin. Mats found out so many rights for his lord and dues for himself, that the most thrifty and industrious peasant could save neither time nor capital to cultivate his farm, improve his stock, or provide properly for his children. Universal poverty was the consequence, every farthing being drained away, and nothing spent on the land; fertile farms relapsed to the heath and moor; poor families stole away from their miserable homes, and sought a livelihood in other parts of the province; even the fishing people on the beach grew fewer year by year. But the count remained with his courtly friends in Stockholm, and Mats Smeker lived in the lowest and poorest rooms of his shut-up castle, from which every servant had been dismissed, and every sign of cheer and comfort banished long ago, with a wife after his own heart—for she was said to be a keener screw than himself—and their only daughter Latchine, a plain, foolishly proud girl of about fifteen, whom their ill-gotten gatherings were to make an heiress, and in process of time insure her a high match.

That was the ambitious dream of the flinty pair. It left them no thought or fear of the curse pronounced against those that grind the faces of the poor; yet, long-enduring and cool of blood as the Pomeranian peasants were, and well accustomed to all the evils and hardships of serfdom, Mats Smeker would have run risks among them at times. Oppressive agents, and even lords, had been thrown into the Baltic from that same wild and lonely coast; and something similar might have happened to him, but for the only man who had any influence over the simple and much-suffering people, Jhans Linken, their old schoolmaster.

Jhans had taught at his own fireside, in the long winter-evenings, nearly every one who could either read or write in that district—and they were not many; for, as the good man often lamented, there was little time and less regard for learning. He continued to teach their children in the same homely fashion; and, to young and old, Jhans was a teacher in still better things than the use of book and pen.

In common with nearly the whole population of Pomerania, Count Rankenstern's peasants belonged to the Lutheran Church; but the nearest place of worship was a day's journey from them, the road was impassable during the greater part of the year, the great extent and wild character of the thinly-peopled parish would have made it impossible for the most devoted minister to visit or search out his scattered flock; and there was but little zeal for

religion in the land. So the poor inhabitants of that outlying corner would have been left in gross ignorance, but for Jhans Linken.

His own learning was not great, for he had been born in a humble condition, the son of a small tradesman in one of the inland villages; but he had the faith and experience of an aged Christian, an understanding enlightened by the wisdom that cometh down from above, and an intimate acquaintance with his Lutheran Bible. Out of these resources Jhans was able to act as a sort of pastor to the tillers of the soil and fishers of the sea, whom more dignified instructors had forgotten. They gathered round his hearth on winter Sunday-evenings, as their children did in those of the week, and listened while he read to them lessons from the Book of Life, and set forth the truths of the Gospel in their own rustic tongue; they knelt with him in earnest simple prayer, and their combined voices singing the grand old Swedish psalms—the same that Gustavus Adolphus and his army sang on the field of Lutzen—might be heard far through the stillness of the northern night.

Jhans could do little to help his poor neighbours, being himself both poor and old; but he was their comforter in times of trouble, their counsellor in days of difficulty, and, above all, the general peacemaker, when the wrath of the overwrought men blazed up at some worse than common transaction of Mats Smeker. Then it was the good man's habit to go out among them and talk

HOUSE ON THE SHORES OF THE BALTIC.

with the most exasperated, reminding them of Him that said, "Love your enemies, and pray for them that spitefully use you," and taught the same by His own dying example, when He prayed for His murderers, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." These friendly and faithful exhortations never failed with the honest though sorely tried peasants. Even Mats himself consented to be advised by the schoolmaster at times. He knew well from what perils Jhans had been his guard. Like many who have no fear of God, Mats had a considerable fear of man, and he valued old Linken's services accordingly—pretended a great respect for him, endeavoured to bind him to his interest by promises and professions that meant nothing, till one of his and his family's doings almost upset the good man's patience.

Jhans and his good wife Marthan never had any children; but in their old days they had taken into their home, and brought up as their own, the daughter of a poor neighbour, left without father or mother, kinsman or provision, in her early childhood. Eba Karlsen—in English, Elizabeth, the child of Karl—was now turned fifteen, and the prettiest girl in the parish. Nature had given her the fair ruddy face, the clear blue eyes, and the golden-yellow hair that form the beauty of the north; and, moreover, she had the inward beauty of a loving and gentle, yet truly noble spirit, as time and trial proved it. The pious pair by whom she had been brought up taught her by precept and example to fear God and keep His

commandments. She had learned that best of all lessons, and it gave to the poor peasant girl on the wild shore of the Baltic a strength and elevation of character rarely to be found among the highly-educated and accomplished daughters of rank and fashion.

Eba had accomplishments of her own which stood her in better stead than theirs would have done. The honest schoolmaster was not a little proud of her abilities in reading the few books which he possessed, singing the old psalm-tunes, and repeating the Lutheran catechism; and her skill and care in the business of sheep-keeping gained the entire approbation of Mats Smeker.

There was need in the poor home which had sheltered her helpless years for all the little earnings in money or kind that could be won from the stingy agent of Count Rankenstern. One of Smeker's many modes of profit-getting was the purchase of English sheep at the Stettin fairs, grazing them on the waste lands of his lord's estate—which under his management were always on the increase—and in due time disposing of them and their wool to the traders of the province. The schoolmaster's cottage, situated on the borders of the wide moors, gave Eba an opportunity of learning shepherd's work and ways, which were thought perfectly suitable for the daughters of her hardy race; and having more than common courage and activity, the young girl soon became mistress of her chosen calling. In the fierce heat of the short summer of Pomerania, in the keen frost of

its long winter, she tended Mats Smeker's treasured English sheep in pasture and fold. Neither boy nor man could surpass her in seeking out a stray lamb or gathering the scattered flock into shelter from sudden storm or snow-fall. It was said that most of the ewes came at her call; and Viking, the best and bravest of the sheep-dogs, would follow no lead but hers.

CHAPTER II.

EBA SENT TO ERKSHOLM.

FAIR to see, cheerful to meet, and trusty to depend on, Eba had the favour and friendship of all her neighbourhood, the blessing of the old, and the praise of the young. Even the hard, grasping agent had a good word for her, to eke out the slender remuneration he gave for her services; but it was not so with the agent's wife and daughter. The one grudged and the other envied the poor girl, without parents or portion, the admiration bestowed on her fair face and winning ways: they hated her for that alone; and, as sin will always excuse itself, endeavoured to find out faults that might seem sufficient

cause. They could find none to speak of in the conduct of the gentle, modest Eba; but, without any fault of her own, the smothered hatred got an occasion to burst out.

Among the primitive people of Northern Pomerania, Pentecost Day was regarded not only as a festival of the Church, but the beginning of their late-coming summer; and, according to ancient custom or superstition, it was held unlucky for young or old to be absent from the house of worship, or to go without new clothes of some description, however poor they might be. It was their rustic gala; and as the day approached, great was the getting ready of new garments in all the towns and villages,—with too many, it is to be feared, superseding the more needful preparation of the mind for such a sacred and solemn commemoration. It was great among the wild farms and fishing hamlets on the Baltic coast, considering the means of the poor and hard-pressed peasantry. Every one, especially of the young people, had saved something throughout the year for the purpose of improving their appearance at the church on Pentecost Day; and the schoolmaster's girl, as they called Eba, had saved best of all, for she got an entire new suit of Sunday clothes, which, besides being much wanted, seemed, according to the simple ideas of her people, the highest token of respect for the day.

It was not every peasant-girl that could boast of a green gown and a russet mantle, bought with her own earnings. Jhans Linken hoped it would not make the child vainglorious; but neither he nor

Marthan could help taking pride in their adopted daughter, as they stood in the midst of a crowd of friends and neighbours on the green plain outside the church of Brakenstadt, when the long service and the catechising of the young which always followed it were over, and the country people stood or sat in groups in the open air, exchanging friendly greetings, inquiries, and sometimes gossip, before they commenced the journey of many hours which lay between most of them and their homes.

"Ah, neighbours," said Dame Axel, the blacksmith's wife, who stood in little dread of the Smekers, because her husband was a free-born man, and could not be well spared on the Rankenstern lands, there being nobody of his trade within three Swedish miles, —"neighbours, she is a credit to your bringing up and your teaching. Not one of the young folks could come near her at the catechism—we all heard that. And don't she look a perfect beauty in those new clothes—all bought with her own money, too! Maybe you'll say it's not Christian of me," she continued, stepping close up to the Linkens, and pointing to where Latchine Smeker stood at some distance in all the glory of a new pelisse and a real silk handkerchief; "but if your girl had the fine things that saucy slut has got on, and looks next to a fright in them, wouldn't everybody take her for a princess?"

"I am sure they would not, neighbour," said Jhans. "Our girl has got fine things enough for her station. The Lord make her thankful, and keep her youth from vanity, which is the highway to sin."

But neither the honest schoolmaster nor the ready-tongued dame observed that Latchine's mother stood just behind them, and heard the whole conversation.

That Pentecost Day was worthy of its traditional place as the beginning of summer. The sky was without a cloud, the air was balmy, the trees were breaking into leaf, and the wild-flowers into bloom, with that sudden flush which comes over all nature in those northern lands, when the time of snow is fairly past, and the long bright days begun. The wild creatures of wood and field were rejoicing at the incoming of the genial season; the country people on their homeward ways were rejoicing too; but the Smeker family, though they had the best waggon to ride in, the finest garments on, and the largest hoard laid up for the future, rejoiced not, nor took note of the glorious sunshine and the budding trees. Mortified vanity and wrath and hatred had possession of their hearts. What the mother had heard Dame Axel say to the Linkens was fully reported to both father and daughter, and much commented and enlarged upon by every one of the three, till they all reached the height of indignation against poor Eba Karlsen. She was the cause of bringing their family into contempt among the peasants. Dame Axel would never have talked in that manner if it had not been put in her mind by the shepherd girl. She was always making errands to the blacksmith's house, and they saw the airs and graces she was taking on of late. Something must be done to bring down her pride, or every girl on the lands of Rankenstern

would forget her own station, and all the peasant families would lose their respect for the count's agent, his wife, and his daughter. Revenge on the blacksmith's wife would have been much to the mind of the amiable household; but it was out of the question, for the reasons which made the dame so free and fearless in the delivery of her opinion concerning Latchine; though Mats had an idea of coaxing a rival smith out of Stettin. But in the mean time the vengeance of the enitre family settled on the schoolmaster's girl.

Poor Eba knew nothing of the evil determined against her. She went home with the Linkens in a better-off neighbour's waggon, thankful for the happy day, and joyful in the prospect of the summer. It would be pleasant now on the sunny moorlands, following the sheep from pasture to pasture, or sitting in the shadow of the mossy rock or the blossomed thorn, with Viking by her side and the lambs sporting round her. It would be pleasant, when the long warm day was done, and the sun dipped into the Baltic, to fold the flock and come home to Jhans and Marthan, hear their kindly welcome, sit with them by the bright wood fire, share their cheerful supper and their evening prayer. There would be fine Sunday journeys to Brakenstadt church, and meetings of old friends and neighbours when work was done, and the long twilight fell soft and lovely upon land and sea. The simple, good girl was happy in those anticipations, which seemed likely to be realised: for the summer had come indeed, with its usual

bustle of life and labour. In moorland farm and fishing hamlet everybody was busy making the most of the long daylight and the genial weather—the only time when outdoor work could be done, and provision made for the rigorous winter.

Eba was busy too with her sheep and lambs—so busy, that she thought of nothing else, though at times it seemed to her that her master, Mats Smeker, was not as friendly as he had been; but, innocent of all offence to him and his, she thought it must be fancy, and said nothing about it to the old people, till one day, after the fishermen had brought home a report that all the holms were covered with grass, and the shepherds were preparing to go out with herd and flock. That evening Mats stopped Eba on her way home, and said, in a cool, quiet tone, "Get ready your things, my girl. I am going to send my English sheep to Erksholm the day after to-morrow, and you are to go with them."

"To Erksholm?" said Eba, with a look of blank amazement.

"Yes, to Erksholm. You will have a nice quiet time there all the summer, away from the gossiping wives and foolish people on these lands." And, with a wicked laugh at her consternation, the agent turned on his heel and walked away.

Consternation is the mildest term for poor Eba's state of mind on the hearing of that sentence. Erksholm was the loneliest and most remote of all the isles belonging to Count Rankenstern. It lay out in the Baltic, a good day's sail from the mainland; and

the only solid thing that could be seen from its shore across the waste of waters was a rocky reef, about half a league to the westward, where many a noble ship had gone to pieces. Northern superstition had lent its terrors to the solitary isle. The mermaid, so it was believed, had been heard singing there in nights when the moon was new; mermen, with fiery eyes, long red beards, and fishes' tails, had been seen swimming round it when storms were approaching; excited fancy could conjure up such sounds and sights amid the waves and mists of the Baltic. Jhans had taught her better than to believe every tale of the kind; but the prospect of spending the summer so far away from the kindly Linkens, from the sight of her neighbours' homes and faces, all alone by night and day, was terrible to poor Eba.

The consternation of Jhans and Marthan was not less than her own when she came home and told her tale. At first they could not think that Mats was in earnest, or really meant to send the young orphan to such an utter solitude in the midst of the wide sea; but when they went to inquire and remonstrate, Mats roundly told them that the girl was going with his English sheep: she was the only hand he could spare for Erksholm. Viking, the best of his dogs, should go with her. If his bark did not frighten the mermen and maids, he should think it strange. They were making a great fuss about nothing, and putting nonsense in the girl's head. But nobody need talk to him; he knew best how to employ his lord's vassals. And Dame Smeker added that she never heard such

a din made about a peasant girl in all her life—one would think the creature was somebody.

"The Lord pardon and change your evil natures, you unjust and hard-hearted pair!" said Jhans, as, taking his good wife by the arm, lest her honest indignation should break over all bounds, he walked out of the Smekers' home in the castle kitchen. It was plain to him and Marthan now that all remonstrance was useless: spite and selfishness had equally prompted the agent's plan. The grass on Erksholm was the best for his English sheep; and he knew that the pious, faithful girl whom he was sending into such dreary banishment from all the summer life and pleasures of her people would not suffer a lamb to be lost or an ewe to slip into the sea. Old as they were, the Linkens would have willingly accompanied their adopted daughter; but how was the poor home to be kept?—how was any provision to be made for the coming winter, if they did not stay and exert themselves in house and field? And though every one of their neighbours felt the hardship of the case, there was not a hand to spare from their summer labours.

"Thou must go, child," said the schoolmaster. "It is an unjust thing, but we cannot help it. Go, and fear not. The isle of the sea and the moorland pastures are alike under the All-seeing Eye; and though thou wilt be far from home and friends, always remember that God is thy nearest neighbour, and by far the best."

"I will try to remember it, and go, father," said

Eba, looking bravely up, though her heart was heavy and sunk within her; but she would not distress the kindly old pair by showing unwillingness or fear.

Her preparations were made with as much cheerfulness as she could assume. She helped to get the English sheep into the large flat-bottomed boat; the men said they could never have managed it without her. The creatures had wills of their own—like everything that came out of England—but they had a liking too for Eba Karlsen. Jhans prayed that the Father of orphans might watch over her, and lent her his own large Psalm-book to cheer the lonely days. The neighbours came down to the beach to see her embark, every one with some little present, and loud expressions of wrath against the Smekers. Dame Axel prophesied speedy judgments upon them; her husband flourished his hammer, and intimated that they had better keep out of his forge; and the fishermen one and all bade Eba not to fear or think herself forsaken, for they would call at the lonely home every time they went out after cod or herrings, and she should never want for fresh fish. So in a shower of good-byes, good wishes, and blessings the great boat was pushed off and out to sea with Eba and her woolly charges on board, and a calm, bright day around. They left the shore an hour after sunrise, and it was late in the afternoon when they grounded on the sands of Erksholm.

The little island was about three English miles in circumference, and rose like a green hill out of the sea, the southern side sloping gradually up from a

beach of smooth white sand, which there formed a natural landing-place, and ran like a belt all round the holm; and the northern side rising high and steep, a precipice of grey rock, broken by ledges and fissures, where the sea-fowls built their nests and brought up their young.

The large boat was grounded on the sandy beach, the poor frightened sheep were got out of it and driven up the southern slope, bleating loudly, as it seemed with joy, to find themselves on land again. And they had every prospect of a good pasture; for all the island was covered with thick coarse grass, which the summer had studded with wild flowers. Here and there grew thickets of the dwarf birch, juniper, and wild rose, where shade might be found from the noontide heat. In the centre of the holm a massive rock rose like a rampart against the northern storms, sheltering a little dell that lay, green and mossy, in its shadow. At the foot of the rock stood the wooden house, or shed, which in the usual manner was to accommodate Eba and her fleecy charge; and hard by a spring of fresh water bubbled up, clear and cool, and sent a small stream, through shade and sunshine, murmuring down to the sea.

In the end of the shed assigned for her own residence the shepherd girl made up her bed of straw and rough blankets, put carefully away the necessaries and provisions she had brought with her, and stored up the few simple specifics she had been accustomed to use for the health and well-being of her sheep. Then the two peasants who had brought her and

them to the holm, and helped in every arrangement —grey-haired men, with girls of their own at home— sat down with her to their evening meal on the mossy turf at the foot of the great rock. But they did not sit long, for the sun was wearing low, and they had to get back to the barley-sowing, at which there was not an hour to be lost now; and they knew that the long twilight would be succeeded by the first grey of the dawn at that season, and hoped to reach the mainland before sunrise. Many a blessing the honest men prayed on the lonely girl. It went to their kindly hearts to leave her there so desolate in the far outlying holm, and many a promise they made her that she should not be forsaken or forgotten. Eba kept a brave look; she would not appear childish or frightened at being left alone, but sent loving and cheerful messages to Jhans and Marthan; and the men pushed off their large boat and stood out to sea, declaring to each other that they had never seen such courage and spirit in one so young. They did not know that poor Eba stood on a rising ground and gazed after them till men and boat were alike lost in the distance, and then sat down on the grass and wept long and sore.

CHAPTER III.

A COMPANION FOR EBA.

THE utter solitude in which she was left had at last overcome poor Eba's resolution to keep a good heart, and make the best of her summer banishment from friends and home; but the faith and hope she had learned to build on in that humble cottage on the moor came to her help in the hour of trial. The saying of honest Jhans, "Remember that God is thy nearest neighbour, and by far the best," occurred to her mind all at once, as if the words had been spoken to her ears. She repeated them to herself over and over, as if they had been a charm against

fear and failure of heart; and such indeed they proved. Eba's courage gradually returned; she dried her eyes, commended herself in short and simple words to the care of that nearest and best Protector, smoothed down poor Viking's head—the faithful, intelligent dog had sat by her all the time, with drooping ears and a sad, serious look, as if he understood and shared her sorrow—then, as the shadows were lengthening, she rose and gathered together her sheep with his assistance, as she used to do on the moors, shut them safely in the fold, and retired to rest, with Viking for her guard in the opposite corner.

The shepherd girl slept soundly, and forgot her banishment, for she was weary with the toil and travel of the day; but it was strange to be woke up next morning by the screaming clamour of the sea-birds as they rose from their nests in the cliffs, and swept in flights over the island. They made poor Eba recollect where she was, and must spend the summer; but they also told her it was time to rise, as Jhans's cock used to do. So rise she did, with the brave resolution to do her duty, and make the best of her lonely sojourn. The morning has a restoring power for the young; their spirits answer to its freshness and vigour. When Eba had said her morning prayer, made her simple arrangements, and led out her flock—when she saw the sage old sheep fall to the fresh grass and the lambs frisking over it—when she climbed the cliffs and looked on the smooth expanse of the wide surrounding sea, as the

early mist rolled away before the climbing sun, Erksholm did not seem to her such a dreary place, after all. The solitary isle had its beauties—what corner of Nature's realm has not? There were wild flowers and plants not to be found on the mainland in its dells and thickets; there were strange birds building in the clefts of its rocks or feeding on the banks and shoals around; there were curious and beautiful shells to be gathered on the sandy beach which encircled the holm, where the great Baltic rippled like a lake in the calm summer days, but seldom covered it even at high water; for the tide rises but little in that landlocked sea.

Accustomed to the solitude of the moors, and able to entertain herself in a thousand ways, as sensible people of all ages can, Eba soon got reconciled to the lonely life of the holm. She missed the kindly old people in the moorland cottage when the evening fell, and the flock was folded, and she sat down by her fire of drift-wood, with no companion but her faithful dog; but all the day the shepherd girl was occupied in looking after her sheep, and rambles round the island, exploring its strange nooks and corners, admiring their wonders of seaweed and sea life, or sitting in the sultry hours in the shade of rock or bush, with her knitting and her psalm-book, as she used to do on the moors. Her friends and neighbours on the mainland did not forget her. Almost every week brought some of the fishing-boats on their outward or homeward way, and every boat brought kind messages and little gifts, not only from

Jhans and Marthan, but also from mindful acquaintances, young and old, and equally acceptable presents of fresh herrings and the like from the poor but liberal fishermen. Joyful it was for the lonely girl to see their honest faces, to hear their kindly greetings and the news they had to tell of remembered people and places.

So the summer wore away. It was an unusually warm and fine one, with less rain or chilling winds than most summers in that climate; but as it drew to the beginning of August—the time when Lammas floods come down upon the northern valleys of our own land—the days were darkened by that hot and heavy haze which foretells to experienced mariners the Lammas storms of the Baltic. All that week Eba had been looking out for her friends the fishermen, and also for the boat which ought to come from the mainland with the last supplies for herself and her flock, as their sojourn on the island could not be long now; but neither boat nor fisherman came, and the girl grew anxious and troubled. She had seen the same haze overhanging the moors at other Lammas-tides; but it did not look so strange and ominous as on the lonely holm, from which there was nothing to be seen but sea and sky.

One evening, when the misty curtain seemed to rise a little, and the descending sun shone through it fiery-red, she walked round the beach, in hopes of catching some distant glimpse of a coming sail, to a point which no foot but a fearless and active one

could attempt. Immediately below the northern cliffs, where the beach was narrowest, a tongue of sand ran out into the sea till it joined a chain of pointed rocks, some above and some below the water, extending all the way to that terrible reef, so famous for loss and wreck. The sand-bank and the pointed rocks were covered with seaweed, spreading in broad green strips, or growing in tangled masses. Seals and sea-birds fed and sported there. It was one of Eba's solitary amusements to watch their gambols, stepping from one mass of weeds to another, as she could find footing, along the sand-bank, and climbing a high rock at the end of it, which stood so close to the next that there was but a narrow chasm between them, through which the sea made a perpetual moaning. That chasm Eba could never venture to cross. There was no bottom to be seen, but the leaves and stalks of large marine plants waved about like living things beneath the water. The nearest rock had a smooth flat top: there she could stand and see any approaching sail miles away, and sometimes the outline of a great ship holding on its course, and keeping clear of the wrecking reef. There Eba stood that hazy evening, but no boat could she see—nothing was visible in all her range of vision but the ridgy rocks of the reef rising like the backs of great whales above the water, for it was low tide; but as she gazed a hollow booming sound came from that direction, and the sea began to heave and swell. All that she had heard from old fishermen about the Baltic storms rushed into Eba's mind, and at the

same time she observed that the haze was thickening, and the night falling fast. "God is my nearest neighbour," said the girl to herself, as she scrambled down the rock and along the sand-bank, involuntarily taking note of every safe foothold, and little thinking how true that trustful saying was to be proved.

Once safe out of that perilous passage, Eba hurried to the pasture land, and gathered together her flock. It was easily done that evening: the poor sheep were ready to run into the shelter of the fold with the fear and dread which animals are apt to show when any disturbance of the elements is near. Still all was quiet in sea and sky; and, hoping the night might pass as quietly as others had done, and trusting in the care of the Shepherd who neither slumbers nor sleeps, Eba retired to rest.

She had been asleep, but knew not how long, when a glare of intolerable light made her start up in terror. At first she thought the shed was on fire; but another moment showed her that it was the play of the forked lightning through window and crevice, while the din outside seemed sufficient to wake the dead. The roll of the thunder, the rush of the wind, and the roar of the sea, all mingled in that terrible tempest. The young girl stood for some minutes paralysed with fear, and only able to hide her face from the fierce flashes that lit up the room without intermission. She had heard storms on the moorlands, but nothing like this; and poor Viking seemed as terror-stricken as herself, for he crouched at her

feet, trembling in every limb, and at times uttering a low howl that was rather like a moan. That pitiful appeal brought Eba to herself. She stooped to smooth and cheer her only companion, and hide her face from the lightning in his shaggy coat—for the Pomeranian dog is warmly clad by nature—while Viking gave up moaning, and licked her hand, as if he would say, "We are true friends, and will live and die together." Just at that moment there came through the storm a heavy boom; it was not thunder: again and again it came, and Eba knew it was the firing of guns from some ship in distress upon the reef. There were people in greater peril than herself, and no succour for them or for her but that of the Hand that rules both wind and wave. She durst not open door or window to look out, lest the raging wind might enter and carry the crazy wooden building that sheltered her and her flock away. Protected as it was by the great rock, its beams and rafters quivered and creaked at every blast; but she could look above the power of the tempest, where only help was to be found; and kneeling there beside her poor dumb friend, Eba prayed earnestly for that ship and its people among the fearful rocks and waves, for herself all alone in the storm, and for those she had left in the moorland cottage, and might see no more.

Often did the young and pious girl repeat that prayer as the dark hours passed and the storm raged on. It gave strength and courage to her heart; she could wait patiently for the morning now, and hoped that some succour had come to the distressed ship;

for she heard the guns no more, the lightning flashes became less fierce and frequent, the thunder rolled away over the Baltic, and grew faint in the distance. The mingled roar of wind and sea was still terrible; but Eba was worn out, and, creeping back to her bed, she fell fast asleep, while Viking retired to his peculiar corner and followed her example.

It was broad day when she opened her eyes again; the sun was climbing the heavens, and scattering the heavy clouds with his brightness; the tempest had sunk to a gale, and the sea to a surging swell. With a thankful heart Eba rose and ventured out. The pasture ground was cold and wet for the poor sheep, as the rain had fallen in torrents; but she would climb the cliffs, and see if there was any trace of the ship. From the highest point which she could reach Eba strained her eyes in vain in the direction of the reef. There was no appearance of ship or sail, but drift-wood seemed to be floating about in unusual quantity, and—was it a sea-bird's scream that came up from the narrow chasm between the two rocks at the end of the sand-bank? Once again she heard it, and Eba knew that was no sea-bird, but the cry of a child—a poor young child drowning there among the tangled weeds! Not knowing what to think or do, but determined to save it if she could, the active girl darted down the cliff and along the beach. The sand-bank was dangerous footing in the best of weather, and it was terrible now; for the waves washed over it at intervals, making the masses of seaweed that covered it heave and sway, and the

sight and sound of the surging sea on either side struck terror to Eba's heart. But she could distinctly hear the cry now, and see between the rocks what at first sight appeared to be a bundle of wet clothes fastened to a floating spar, which in its turn had got fixed among the weeds, and was thus prevented from being carried out to sea by wave and wind. But at a second glance she caught sight of long fair hair and an innocent young face, white with fear, and wet with the salt sea-spray.

"Lord, help me to save it!" cried the brave girl; and then, with a shout to Viking, she sprang on the nearest mass of seaweed. For the first time the faithful dog hesitated to follow her; but from mass to mass Eba sprang, holding fast by the tangled stalks and swaying with them, slipping often, but still regaining her feet, till she reached her own rock of observation. It was safe footing, but rose so much above the water that she had to bend and stretch to her utmost to get hold of the child's clothes, which she saw was the only chance. Once—twice, Eba tried it, still repeating that brief prayer of hers, and shouting on Viking to come and help; but the third time the swell of the sea lifted the spar, the wet garments were in her grasp, and the faithful dog was at her side. "Help me, Viking!" she said; and Viking did help by plunging gallantly in between the rocks, and dragging with teeth and paws the long heavy spar near enough for Eba to cut away with the knife she always carried the rope and sail-cloth which bound the wet bundle to it, and take out of

their folds an almost drowned, but still living child. To carry it in one arm, while with the other she held on by the seaweed along the sand-bank, was no easy task. But Viking proved a noble assistant: half swimming and half wading by her side, he helped her to support the child, and caught her own garments more than once when she might have been swept away by the breaking waves, till the beach was fairly gained, and Eba hurried home with her prize.

The child was still living, though its eyes were closed, and it seemed cold as death; but she felt its heart beat faintly, and its breathing came in short, quick sobs. With kindly haste the girl removed its wet clothes, wrapped it in a few dry and warm garments she had much needed by this time for herself, laid it in her own bed, and got ready warm water and warm ewe's milk to bathe and refresh it. Her cares and endeavours were successful; the child revived under them, the warmth of life came back to its limbs, the hue of life to its face, and in an hour or so it was calmly sleeping off its terrors and dangers in the folds of Eba's blanket.

The young creature thus wonderfully preserved and saved from the storm and the sea, which had swallowed up the great ship and its strong men, was a beautiful boy, in the middle of his second year, as Eba guessed, with fair hair and a fair face, though somewhat of a foreign cast; and the small attempts which he made at speech had a foreign sound too. His clothes, now wet with the salt water and heavy with the sea-sand, had been rich and costly; loving

and careful hands had swathed many wrappers round his little form in the hour of dread and wreck, and bound it to the spar which, under Providence, proved an ark for his young life. As Eba shook out the wet garments and hung them up to dry, something dropped at her feet with a ringing sound. It was a shallow silver box, made in the form of a small book, with something like a crest on the lid. Gentlemen, and ladies too, of that generation, used the like as a snuff-box. But when Eba opened it, she found it to contain two papers, one printed and the other written, but both in a foreign language, which she could neither read nor understand. The faithful girl put them carefully back again, and put the box safely away. "Somebody may be found to read them yet," she said; "and who knows what use they may be to the child?" And then she finished her task, and went about her duties to the sheep.

The child slept for hours. Eba sat and watched by him, while Viking watched the flock. The sagacious dog seemed to know that there was now a charge in the house for her. A sad one it was for some time; the tossing on the wild waves, the exposure to the stormy night with all its terrors, had roughly shaken the sands of that young life. Out of his long sleep the child woke up with a start and a cry, and moaned and sobbed enough to break poor Eba's heart; for she could not help thinking he was lamenting for those that were lost to him in the deep sea; and still, with the broken words of a foreign tongue, she heard him cry, "Elsan! Elsan!" as if

calling for somebody of that name, which is a common one among the peasant women of Sweden. Eba took him in her arms, and tried to soothe him with all the nursery talk she could remember. It was not intelligible to him, but her gentle tones and kindly face spoke best to the poor little stranger. He nestled to her breast, laid his fair head upon it, and moaned himself to sleep again.

Eba's tears fell fast over his white face and long hair, out of which she had not been able to comb the sand. She thought of him as an orphan whose parents had been drowned, sent to her care from among the rocks and waves; and she prayed that the Father of orphans, who had watched over her friendless youth, might enable her to care for and bring up the stranger's child.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW LORD PUTS THE ESTATE IN ORDER.

It was growing late in the day by this time. Eba rose softly, to lay the child in the bed without waking him, when she heard Viking bark, and then the voices of men outside. The next moment the unlatched door of her lonely house was pushed open, and in stepped the two peasants who had brought her and her flock over sea to the holm. Before Eba could well speak for surprise and joy, they explained the cause of their coming. The storm of the preceding night had been no less terrible on the mainland than on the sea and the isles. It frightened all the country people. Weather-wise men predicted that the month would be a tempestuous

one; and Mats Smeker, having some compunctions regarding the poor girl, and fears for the safety of his English sheep, had sent them with a large boat, as soon as wind and wave permitted, to bring both girl and sheep back to the moors.

Great was the astonishment of the honest men when Eba told them her tale of peril and rescue, and showed them the child, now quietly sleeping in her bed. Much they praised her courage and charity, and more the mercy of God, that brought her and the drowning child safe out of the breakers; telling her at the same time that there was no other life saved out of the ship wrecked on the reef, fragments of which had been driven into every creek and bay along the coast; and all that could be learned concerning it was that its name was the *Gustavus*, a richly-laden merchantman, bound from Riga to Stockholm.

They stayed in the holm for the night, and early next morning, as the wind was fair, and the sea as calm as if a gale had never ruffled it, the sheep were got into the large boat, and Eba, with her faithful dog, her small belongings, and her new-found charge warmly wrapped in a blanket, and looking very much bewildered, but very much better, got in too, and saw with a joyful heart the lonely holm receding from her sight. They had a quick and pleasant passage, and arrived some hours before sunset. Jhans, Marthan, and several of the neighbours came down to the beach to see if all was well with Eba, the moment they heard of the boat being sighted. Mats Smeker was there to see if all was well with his sheep; and the general

wonder, talk, and speculation over the little foundling and his rescue from the raging sea may be imagined. Everybody praised Eba, till the good girl grew almost ashamed at being made so much of, and the Linkens grew positively proud of their adopted daughter.

"Thou hast brought us home an uncommon sea-bird," said Jhans, alluding to the general custom of the island shepherds, who brought home a tame sea-fowl when they returned with their flocks at the end of the summer; "but it is right welcome to its room and its share in our cottage. Thou hast done a good and a brave deed in thy young days, Eba. God be praised, that gave thee strength and courage to do it. He is a fair boy that thou hast saved, and doubtless come of an honourable family, though we may never be able to find out their name or dwelling-place."

"The best thing you can do is to send him to the foundling house in Stettin," said Mats. "I don't mind letting my men take him in the cart when they go to the Lammas fair, rather than see a poor family burdened with a foreigner's child, as I am sure it is."

"No, Master Smeker," said Jhans. "My girl has been privileged to save this child's life: it is hers, and it is ours, by a clear dispensation of Providence, and with us the boy shall remain. He that preserved him on the stormy sea, even like Moses in the ark of bul-rushes, will no doubt provide for him, or enable us to do so."

They took the child home accordingly; and in the comfort of the moorland cottage the rosy hue of health returned to his cheek, and strength and vigour

to his little frame. He grew familiar with his new friends and surroundings, gradually gave up calling upon Elsan, sat on the old people's knees, played with Viking, clung round Eba's neck. She was his guardian, his nurse, and almost his mother. Wherever she went with the sheep, over marsh and moor, the boy went with her, led by her hand as far as he could walk, carried in her arms or on her back when he could or would walk no more; and strong and active he grew with the fresh air of the open country in the last of the summer days, frolicked like a young lamb on the green turf, and came home rosy and ready for his little bed. The memory of all that he had known and lost slipped away from him—it is the blessed privilege of early childhood to forget; the few foreign words he could speak gradually gave place to Swedish ones. They were at a loss what name to give him; but one day, when Eba happened to mention that of Frederic, which was common in their part of Pomerania, the child answered to it, and thus they knew it was his own. Neither they nor one of their neighbours could make anything of the papers in the silver box. Mats Smeker said it was an outlandish tongue they were in, plainly showing that the boy belonged to some unreasonable race. It was his advice that the papers should be burned and the box sold; but Eba treasured box and all, with the full approbation of the Linkens; and that, together with the keeping of the child against his counsel, so offended the agent, that he talked of sending her back to the holm.

If Mats had any such intention, there was no time for him to execute it. The short summer of Pomerania went, and the long winter came, with its deep snow and rigorous frost. Eba's sea-bird, as all the country called little Frederic, grew and throve in spite of them. Whatever was his native land, the child had been accustomed to the seasons of the north. When the weather at all admitted, he went out with the shepherd girl in her duties about flock and fold; and when Jhans Linken's school was gathered round his fireside in the long evenings, he sat upon her knee, and made believe to learn lessons with the rest. The winter passed as others had done among the poor farms and fishing hamlets and in the humble home of the schoolmaster. It was neither worse nor better than former winters. The impoverished people on the Rankenstern lands had their usual share of hardships; but as it wore away, and the spring drew on, all the peasants remarked that Mats Smeker had got a new edge to his axe, as they proverbially designated a change of manner or policy. He was not more kind or considerate, but made himself more familiar with every man on the estate, inquired into their concerns, suggested improvements which they ought to make in their farms and cottages, and talked in high terms of lands that should be reclaimed and marshes that should be drained in the following summer.

By-and-by it became known that a surveyor from Stettin had gone quietly over the estate, and taken notes of everything; and at length Axel, the black-

smith, brought back from one of his expeditions to the said town for the purchase of iron and tools the startling intelligence, which he had from a well-informed Stockholm trader, that Count Rankenstern had sold his family inheritance, castle and all, to a rich banker in the capital to whom he was deeply indebted; that the new lord was shortly coming to take formal possession; and that Mats Smeker was trying hard to retain his place as agent, because the banker meant to live in his fine house at Stockholm all the winter, and come to the old castle only in the summer time.

"If I can only get speech of him, the very first time he comes here," said honest Axel, as he finished his report to the astonished neighbours gathered in his forge, "I'll do a free man's duty, and let the new lord of Rankenstern know how his lands have been ruined and his peasants oppressed. If his lordship has either conscience or common sense—and I hope all the great people are not without some of the two—he will inquire into the truth of my story, and send that false knave about his business."

"Save thyself trouble," said his neighbours—the ground-down people had lost hope of seeing any good—"save thyself trouble; one lord is like another; they all choose the agent that can wring most money out of poor men's toil. Thou wilt only get Smeker's hatred for thy pains."

"Whatever I get, his lordship shall hear the whole truth from me," replied the sturdy blacksmith; but as he spoke the hammer dropped from his hand with

perfect surprise; for a gentleman, equipped and mounted in a style rarely seen in that quarter, and followed by a servant in livery, rode up to the forge.

"Good-day, worthy countrymen," he said, in a courteous tone, which was yet slightly foreign to their ear. "Can any of you tell me the way to the castle of Rankenstern? I understand it is not far off."

"It is not, honourable master," said the blacksmith. "I will show you the way myself; and out of your goodness, as doubtless the matter is known to you, will you please to tell me and my good neighbours here when our new lord is coming to take possession?"

"I am your new lord," said the gentleman.

"Then, noble count," and the blacksmith stepped out, and almost laid his hand on the bridle, "whatever be your great rank or name, I pray you, for the sake of justice and charity—yea, for the sake of Him whose power is above all lords—to stay for a moment and hear from me and these honest men the villainies of that man Mats Smeker, who seeks to be your agent, that he may rob and tyrannise as he has done hitherto."

"I will stay and hear all you have to say, friend," said the gentleman, dismounting quickly.

"The blessing of Him that loveth righteousness come upon you, noble count!" And it seemed that Axel had arranged the long list of Smeker's evil doings in his memory, for he rehearsed them in plain, unvarnished language, without stop or hesitation; while his neighbours stood round and witnessed

to his recital by exclaiming from time to time, "It is true, most noble count—it is true!"

The gentleman sat on a rough bench placed against the wall, and listened calmly and patiently, till Axel came to the case of the shepherd girl banished all summer to the far and lonely holm. "It was enough to drive the young creature mad, but it did not; for she is a God-fearing maid, and the Lord was with her. Ay, noble count, and there, at the risk of her life, she saved a child—the only living thing that was saved out of the good ship *Gustavus*, wrecked in that terrible storm last Lammas-tide."

"Saved a child out of the wreck of the *Gustavus?*" said the gentleman, starting to his feet, as if under the impulse of feelings he could not control. "Worthy blacksmith, show me where that shepherd girl is to be found, and I will reward you."

"I want no reward," said the blacksmith; "what is more, I'll take none. I am a free man here, and undertook to tell your lordship the truth for the sake of my poor neighbours. If you wish to see the girl, and hear the whole story from herself, come along with me, and let your servant lead your horse; for the shortest way to her home lies across yonder marsh, which is fitter for feet than hoofs."

It was late in the afternoon of one of those mild sunny days that tell of the coming spring, though the reign of winter is not yet over. The door of the Linkens' cottage stood half open: Marthan was seated at one side of the hearth, busily knitting, Jhans

at the other, with little Frederic on his knee, prattling away in half-spoken Swedish; while Eba stood by, talking to the child and smoothing his fair hair.

"Oh, he is growing so clever," said the kindly girl. "Do you know, father, Frederic can repeat, with just a little help, the first verse of that beautiful psalm, 'The Lord is my shepherd'? Pentecost Day will soon come, and then we will take him to Brakenstadt church with us—won't we, mother? I will brush up his own pelisse till it looks beautiful, and we will get him a new hat."

"If we can, child. It is hard to get anything in these times," said Marthan; but Jhans motioned to them both as a shadow darkened the door, and in walked Axel, conducting a tall, handsome, serious-looking man, with a foreign cast of face, brown hair sprinkled with grey, and a style of dress which seemed in their eyes perfectly magnificent.

"Good-day, neighbours," said the blacksmith. "Here is the noble count, our new lord, come to hear from this good girl the truth of my story concerning Mats Smeker sending her out to Erksholm, and how she saved the child there."

Before Axel had well finished or Jhans could reply, the stranger had caught little Frederic in his arms, with some foreign words, to which the boy answered, "Papa, papa!" and clung round his neck. Nobody in the house could speak for some minutes. The new lord of Rankenstern held Eba's sea-bird clasped to his breast, and turned away to hide the large tears of joy that streamed down his manly face, while his lips

moved in thanksgiving, for which they could find no utterance.

At length he recovered himself in some degree, and sat down on the bench beside Jhans, still clasping the child; while the little creature looked from the richly-dressed lord to the poorly-clad schoolmaster, and cried at the top of his voice, "Two papas!"

"Two papas, indeed, my son; thou hast a good right to say so," said the new lord. "Good friends," he continued, "friends indeed have you been to me and mine. My abrupt conduct will not seem so strange when I tell you that this infant whom your noble daughter rescued from the stormy sea is my only child. I would have known my boy anywhere; but, independent of that, the circumstances of the case leave no doubt on my mind. I am, as you have probably heard, a banker in Stockholm, where my family have lived for three generations before me; but they came originally from Scotland—Frederic Sinclair is my name, and also that of my son—and, like some other Scotch families settled in Sweden, have always kept up a connection with their native country, and brought up their children to speak their native tongue. This boy was granted to his mother and me after many years of childless married life. I need not tell you how much we prized him, how much our friends and kindred prized him too, and most of all his maternal grandfather, a merchant of some note in Riga. He had never seen the child. Business considerations made it inconvenient for him to come or us to go; but we had a

faithful nurse, who had been in our service almost from her childhood, Elsan Lenope, the daughter of a Swede and a Scotchwoman, whose grandfather was living in Riga with my little Frederic's. She had long wished to visit him; and as we knew her to be as truly attached to the boy as ourselves, my wife and I agreed that, according to her own desire, she should take him with her. We heard of their safe arrival, of their happy visit, and their embarkation in the *Gustavus* to return home; but the next news was that the ship had been wrecked on the reef off Erksholm, and every living thing on board perished. My poor wife has never been herself since. What it will be to go home and break this joyful intelligence to her, and place her own Frederic in her arms once more! 'Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men.' Now, my noble girl," continued Mr. Sinclair, turning to Eba, "tell me how this marvellous rescue was effected by your hands."

Clearly and distinctly, but with somewhat abashed look—for it seemed like rehearsing her own exploits to the distinguished stranger—Eba related the tale of that sore struggle with the waves and the wild seaweed, and cut short his thanks and praises by placing the silver box in Mr. Sinclair's hand.

"I know this box well," he said. "It is one which poor Elsan inherited from her mother, and always carried about her, brave and faithful soul, to the last!" And tears filled the good man's

eyes as he glanced over the papers inside. "On this one she has written:—

"'Whoever may find this child, he is the son of Frederic Sinclair, banker, Stockholm. I have bound him to this spar, for the ship is going to pieces. May God have mercy on us!—ELSAN LENOPE.'

"The other is a prayer which her own mother composed in English shortly before her death, for the child she was leaving behind her, and Elsan, in like circumstances, sent it to the sea with mine. Oh, that she had lived to see this day! But God's will be done; for I know that she passed from the stormy sea to the better land."

There was not a dry eye in the cottage by this time. The sturdy blacksmith hid his face in a corner, and sobbed like a child; but little Frederic, who had been looking from one to the other, as though not sure what they were about to do with himself, suddenly jumped out of his father's arms, and running to the shepherd girl, scrambled up to her breast, and cried, as he clung there, "I won't leave my own Eba."

"You shall not leave her, my son," and the new lord of Rankenstern rose and took Eba by the hand. "You have saved the life of my only son, and I have no daughter—come and be my Frederic's elder sister, and I promise that you shall have schooling befitting the position, and a marriage portion as if you were my own child. For you, worthy Jhans," he said, turning to the schoolmaster, "who took my poor boy into your house, and showed a father's kindness to

the friendless infant, from henceforth you shall be my steward and agent instead of Mats Smeker, whose evil doings this honest blacksmith has made clear to me, though I had guessed something of them; and as you are not so young as you have been, and there will be work to do, choose any man you may think fit for an assistant, and he shall be properly paid."

"The Lord's mercy and goodness have followed me all my life," said Jhans, "and now they have become tenfold in my latter days. I thank you, my earthly lord, for this preferment, and also for what you promise to my adopted daughter, though neither she nor we expected the like, having done but the duty of Christians to your child. Nevertheless, since it is so, with your lordship's leave, I will choose for an assistant my good neighbour Axel; first, because he is honest, as you know; and secondly, because, being a free man, he will never be afraid to speak the truth."

"You could not make a better choice," said the new lord; "but while I own the estate all men upon it shall be free. It is so in the land of my fathers, and so it shall be here."

The joy which filled the homes and hamlets of Rankenstern when that declaration, and all that took place in the Linkens' cottage, were made public may be imagined. Man, woman, and child flew to congratulate the schoolmaster's family, and rejoice over the dismissal of Mats Smeker. The hated agent would have been turned out of the place with signal marks of contumely; but, at the earnest entreaties of Jhans Linken, they allowed him and his family to go in

peace, and none of them ever dared to appear in that part of the country again. Time proved that the joy of the peasants was not without reason. Under the management of the judicious Jhans and the upright Axel the lands of Rankenstern in a few years entirely changed their aspect. The homes grew comfortable, the farms grew cultivated, lands were reclaimed, waste places were rebuilt; men came to settle there from every part of the province, because there they would be free; the hamlets increased to villages; and when the new lord came to his castle every summer time, he and his family were welcomed by the shouts of an attached and grateful tenantry. The principal objects of attraction for the peasantry in these summer visits were Eba and the boy they used to call her sea-bird. He grew in a manner still under her care, a loving younger brother; and she, notwithstanding the advantages of a superior rank and education, had still the same kindly look and friendly tone for her old neighbours, and the same grateful affection for her early protectors the Linkens. Critical peasants thought that Jhans was not sufficiently proud of the distinction conferred on his adopted daughter, though the good man's aged face would light up when her name was mentioned; but he always put an end to their enlargements on her grand estate by saying that the Lord had shown signal favour to his poor Eba; but he hoped she would have grace enough to remember the time when she was a shepherd girl in Erksholm, and God was her nearest neighbour.

FOUND IN THE FAR NORTH.

OFF THE COAST OF ICELAND.

FOUND IN THE FAR NORTH.

CHAPTER I.

A GLANCE AT OLD TIMES.

EXACTLY a thousand years ago, Iceland was first peopled by strangers from Norway. Ingolfar Arnarson, with his family and retainers, led the way in the new colonisation. Many hardy Norsemen followed, some of them being earls and independent chiefs in the old country. For the first time there was a king in Norway; and King Harald ruling with a rough hand, these emigrants chafed under the tyranny, as they felt it, of the monarch, and sought refuge in the remote island of the north. The Icelanders retained the language and associations

of their native country, as in after ages the Pilgrim Fathers retained the faith and traditions of Old England when they settled in America. Iceland has through all these centuries been honourably known as a land of liberty and a land of letters; and in later times, since the light of the Reformation and of evangelical truth reached its distant shores, Iceland has had the higher honour of being a land where true religion has taken root and flourished. It is a very poor country, and the people have had many disadvantages; but where the gospel goes, it has a power to elevate and refine the minds of men, even when not aided, as it was in Iceland, by a taste for learning and a thirst for knowledge.

My family was of Danish origin, as many are in the eastern counties of England, and especially in my native Norfolk. Some took root there from old invading times, when the shire was known as the kingdom of East Anglia, and was subject by turns to Saxon or Dane. Others descended from trading men, whom the commerce of later generations brought from the shores of the Baltic to settle in its thriving towns. We, the Hansons of Southwood Hall, belonged to the latter lineage. It had been called Hall in old manorial right, but was only a plain country house.

One of our ancestors, a prosperous merchant in Copenhagen, had reason to remove from that city in the early part of the eighteenth century, when the wars of Sweden's Charles the Twelfth disquieted all the North. Having traded a good deal with Norwich, which

was then a place of greater note in foreign commerce than it is now, he established his home and his business there, continued to prosper on the foreign soil, and ultimately purchased the manor and manor-house of Southwood, a pleasant place on the banks of the Yare, which henceforth became the family seat. From one generation to another the eldest son inherited the manor and farms, and a younger son the city business, but their bond to the old country and kin remained unbroken; sons and daughters alike were educated in Copenhagen, and most of them married there.

Time and change, however, wore those cherished ties away. The Hansons were never a numerous race; their kindred in Denmark gradually died out. The only representatives of the Norfolk line at the time of my story were two brothers, my father and my uncle, both of whom were indeed graduates of the Copenhagen University; but the one had married a Norwich girl, my long-lost mother, whose early death he never ceased to lament; and the two had become English in pursuits and interests.

My father was occupied with county concerns and the improvement of his property; my uncle was engaged in the business of his firm and the civic affairs of Norwich. They were both grave but good-humoured men, with a robust northern look, though well advanced in years. They were also well inclined to help every good work in their neighbourhood, and had such a repute for high principles and consistent practice as made them many friends among the best men in business and society. The one continued a widower,

the other remained a bachelor; and being united brothers, they lived on together in Southwood Hall, which was near enough to Norwich for my uncle to attend to business, and which was presided over by my Aunt Hilda.

She was their younger sister, and still remarkably handsome, but had kept her single state notwithstanding many an eligible offer, and also kept things orderly and comfortable in the old manor-house, since my mother went to the home appointed for all living. Few gentlewomen of her day had received a better education, or made a more intelligent use of it; yet my Aunt Hilda retained the domestic habits of old Denmark, and was notable in all the mysteries of good housekeeping. As far as it was possible she had done a mother's part by my childhood; the household found in her a prudent and kindly mistress, the poor a liberal benefactor, and her brothers and friends a pleasant companion. Yet there was a sad look in her face at times, as if from the memory of some early sorrow, of which she never spoke.

I could not even guess at the subject, my opportunities of hearing family tales and recollections having been unusually limited, though the only son and nephew (named Christian from my father, and Ernest from my uncle), and from early days the motherless boy, whom his three seniors over-considered, and occasionally over-humoured. Most of my time hitherto was spent at school and college; for I got a liberal education, and afterwards went up to Cambridge; and most of my holidays were passed

at the houses of friends who had boys of their own, and therefore invited me, thinking, perhaps, I should find the old place and old people dull.

Thus I had come to be a sort of stranger at home, and the consequences were not beneficial to my youth. Always abroad, and associating only with companions of my own age, I had seldom a serious thought on any subject, and little regard for anything but the amusement of the passing hour, and the ability to outshine my many rivals in class-room or company. Good precepts and good examples were set before me in Southwood Hall; but the home influence was weakened by long and frequent absence, and by the lack of a mother's love and prayers to give it a hold on my heart. I was indeed preserved from the flagrant vices which too often disgrace college life, and especially in those times; but my mind was given up to the pleasures, the vanities, and the follies of the young man's world.

Nevertheless, the good people in Southwood got some intelligence of my college associates and diversions, which was not much to their minds. They were every one disposed to look leniently on the more venial faults of the young heir of the family, but they united in strong disapprobation of an intimacy I had recently formed with a fellow-student named Ashton Blount.

He was some years older than myself, born of a good Yorkshire family, and heir to a large estate. He had a frank manner and a generous disposition; but the impulse of the moment was his only rule of

conduct: his morals were loose, his habits those of a spendthrift, and his conversation apt to be coarse, and even profane. I made his acquaintance on the river, where Blount was always to be found; for his college time, when not worse employed, was spent with sail or oar; and his pretensions to nautical skill were so high and so often advanced that he got the title of Captain Blount. Of this he was rather proud; and, by way of proving his right to it, left college in the middle of the session to take the command of a yacht built for himself, and boasted that in it he would make the voyage round the world, and prepared himself by some months' cruising off the south and east coasts. I had been invited to accompany him in a trip to the Mediterranean. The impulsive young man had taken a sudden liking to me, for, as I afterwards learned, his friendships were more ardent than lasting; but relations less scrupulous than mine would have been unwilling to see a son or nephew the familiar associate of Captain Blount. My father took me seriously to task on the making of such an acquaintance, and extracted from me a promise to break it off, or at least avoid his company in future. It was partly on his account, and partly because I had planned a visit to their old ancestral land, which was pleasing to them all, that my over-kind relations agreed to my leaving home so soon after just returning from college in the triumph of a newly-taken degree, and setting forth on a tour through Denmark and Norway.

I had made all necessary arrangements for sailing on the following day in the packet from Yarmouth, our

nearest port, for it was within a few miles of Southwood. It was a warm evening in the end of August. The old people, as I called them, had retired to the summer-house—their invariable custom after dinner in the genial season. I was in the library, writing two or three leave-taking letters, till the daylight failed me; and then I sat in the deep bow-window, where the breeze came in laden with summer odours from lawn and garden, whiling away the soft twilight hour with one of the many dreams of youth. All at once I heard the door quietly opened, and as quietly closed again, and there was my Uncle Ernest.

"Christian," he said, sitting down by my side, "I have slipped away from my brother and sister to speak to you in private about a service I want you to do for me in the course of your tour."

"I will do anything in my power to serve you, uncle"—a reply that was from my heart.

"I know it, Christian; and what I want you to do is simply this. In Copenhagen, or any other town of our old country through which you may pass, make all the inquiries you can regarding the mother and sisters of Frederick Hersland, a student of great mark and promise in the Copenhagen University some twenty-five years ago."

From my earliest recollection I had heard the name of Frederick Hersland uttered in low whispers, and with sad, regretful looks, by my father and uncle, when they sat together by the evening fire, and there was nobody else in the room but myself, then supposed to be too young for observation; and it always

appeared to me that the low whispers and sad looks passed between them most frequently at the Christmas and New Year's time. The name had not been mentioned in my hearing for many a year; my increasing powers of taking note, and my absence in those winter holidays, might account for that. But I had often wished to know the history of its owner, and here was an opportunity too good to be lost.

"Uncle," I said, plunging boldly into the subject, "who was Frederick Hersland, and what did he do?"

"He was an early friend of your father and myself in our student days—the earliest and best we ever had—and he did a noble deed, and suffered by it, for principle and conscience sake. It is a sad thing for me to remember and speak of, Christian," said my uncle, "but you are old enough to hear the story. It may be a useful lesson to your youth, and will no doubt serve as a stimulus to the inquiries I wish you to make regarding his family.

"In our father's time we were more closely connected with the old country than we are now; indeed, our family life was spent as much in Denmark as in England. We had a town house in Copenhagen. Your father and I, then about your own age, studied at the university, and mixed with the best society of the Danish capital; and thus, among many other acquaintances, we became intimate with the Herslands. They were well descended. Their ancestors had owned a large estate in Norway, of which land they were natives; but conformity to the extravagant habits of the court in Struensee's time, and an expensive lawsuit, had

reduced the family, till the generation we knew had little means of life except the pension of their father, an officer of some distinction in the Danish army, but then old and disabled. The household, besides himself, consisted of his wife, a grey-haired lady; two daughters, well advanced in spinsterhood; and a son, Frederick, who counted years with me. Their manners were equal to their birth, polished and courtly, but somewhat reserved and distant—a frequent effect of misfortune on proud characters; and proud the Herslands were, in spite of poverty—father, mother, and daughters; in short, all but Frederick, and he was the flower and hope of the family.

"A young man of handsome person, graceful bearing, and attractive conversation, gifted in every walk of letters, he carried off many college prizes and honours, and was courted and sought after by men of rank far superior to his own. Yet, with all these uplifting causes, Frederick was modest and considerate, exemplary in his morals, and sincerely religious in principle and practice. It was a hard struggle for his family and himself to pay university expenses—harder than their pride or his delicacy would own; but our father, having at once a generous heart and a true love of letters, took the young man by the hand in a manner so private and friendly, that his acting as banker for the college time was neither known to others nor felt by the Herslands.

"We were not so familiar with the rest of the family, but Frederick was a constant visitor at our house in Copenhagen. He generally spent the vaca-

tion time with us in England, and at home or abroad was the chosen and close companion of my brother Christian and myself. His blameless life and devoted pursuit of learning would have recommended him to any parents as an associate for their sons; his noble and amiable qualities endeared him to us, though we little understood at the time the genuine piety which gave them value and stability. It is but truth to say that we loved Frederick Hersland as a brother, and have never ceased to lament his early fate, and our own unhappy share in the cause which led to it. My own share, I ought to say; for, Christian, it was by far the greatest. Take warning from the tale, my boy: it is well with the man whose youth leaves his riper years no legacy of regret and repentance.

"His books and his principles alike made Frederick a comparative stranger in places of public resort and amusement; but one evening, when our friendship had been of some years' standing, my brother and I persuaded him to accompany us to the university coffee-house, a notable haunt of students and men of letters, where, among other peculiar entertainments, they had one called 'The Trial of the Old Year,' always held in the middle of the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. It was a sort of farce on the process of Danish law, and gave considerable scope for wit, humour, and satire, of which the cleverest of the company generally availed themselves. There was no admission for the public, but all members of the coffee-house society had a right to bring a friend or two; and the same evening

in which we brought Frederick to hear the trial, a fellow-student brought with him a young nobleman, called Count Von Roeskilde. He had lived much in the gayest cities of the Continent, professed freethinking, and was rather free of speech. We noticed that many of the remarks he made in the intervals of general conversation with which the trial was varied were distasteful to our companion; and at length a profane and scurrilous jest on a sermon he had lately heard in the cathedral made Frederick remonstrate with him in an earnest but friendly manner. A more sensible or less conceited man might have felt himself in the wrong, or passed the matter quietly over; but Roeskilde, after a contemptuous and insulting reply, told Frederick he was ready to settle the affair with either sword or pistol.

"The society of Copenhagen was in my youth governed by French fashions and ideas of honour. The absurd and sinful practice of duelling was consequently in vogue in certain cases, which no gentleman could decline without disgrace. Every student in the room was ready to offer his services as one of Frederick's seconds. Christian and myself considered we had a special right to the office. But what was our chagrin, and what were the scornful manifestations of the entire company, when our friend, with a calm and serious look, laid the count's card on the table before him, and said, 'Either sword or pistol is a barbarous argument, unfit to settle such a question, and unfit for a Christian to use in such a case!'

"'Especially when a Christian happens to be afraid

of them,' said Roeskilde, with a laugh, in which all the company joined.

"'You are mistaken, count' (and Frederick looked him steadily in the face). 'It is not fear of you or your weapons, but fear of God, that prevents me.'

"What more he would have said was drowned in a general clamour of 'Turn out the coward! turn out the hypocrite!' and Frederick, seeing he had no other alternative, quietly left the room.

"The code of false honour had always prevailed among the students of our university, as it did to even more recent times in German universities. The whole body thought themselves disgraced by one of their number declining the challenge of an outsider; and those who envied young Hersland his hard-won distinctions took the opportunity to cast contempt and scorn upon him. We in particular felt affronted by the conduct of our friend, and thought our own honour required its public condemnation. My brother Christian was always the most prudent, and said little on the subject; but when Frederick held out his hand to me in the college court next morning, when all the classes were gathering in, I stepped back and told him, loud enough to be heard over the university, that I would never shake hands with a man who had acted as he did.

"I am ashamed to tell you that foolish and sinful act of mine; but, remember, the civilisation of the world, under Christian influence, has advanced since then, especially in this country: it was otherwise when I was a student in the Danish capital. At any

rate, my graceless words and action were the drop which made poor Frederick's cup of bitterness overflow. He was not at the university next day, nor any day after; and at last it was known that he had left Copenhagen privately, and gone—nobody knew where.

"It was said the young man had met with as much contumely at home as abroad. His father's ideas on the subject of duelling were those of an old soldier of that time rather than a Christian, and their family pride was so deeply wounded by the whole affair, that the Herslands soon after retired to their native Norway; but their place of abode I know not to this hour."

"And did you ever learn what became of Frederick, uncle?" I inquired.

"We did, Christian, but it was too late to revive the old friendship, and make amends for the evil said and done. Frederick first qualified himself for the pastoral office at an obscure old college in Holstein, and then joined the Danish mission in Greenland, where he fell a victim to the severity of the climate in less than two years;" and my uncle drew his hand across his eyes.

"Our poor friend's fate, and our own unlucky hand in it, made my brother and me think more seriously on the subject of religious principle and practice than we had ever done before. I think it also made our family gradually withdraw from Denmark to England, and there is a sad reason for never mentioning the story in the hearing of your Aunt Hilda. An attachment had existed between her and poor Hersland, but it was kept secret till the young

student could finish his college course and obtain an appointment under government, which the minister, a distant connection of his family, had promised him long ago. But all was to happen otherwise: and now, Christian, you may guess my reason for wishing you to inquire after Frederick's mother and sisters, for the old man must be gone by this time. It is, that if they should be in needy circumstances, which is too probable, I may assist or maintain them, for his memory's sake. I hope that as God has, by His grace, brought me to the knowledge and enjoyment of His truth, I may be allowed to make reparation for this sin of my youth."

CHAPTER II.

THE FORBIDDEN VOYAGE.

THE following evening found me on board the Yarmouth packet, with the only companion of my tour, Knud Veders. He was an honest, intelligent Dane, who had seen a good deal of the world as a sailor in sundry merchant ships, but one of them left him sick at Yarmouth. My family showed him kindness, as they were accustomed to do by all Danes in distress; and when he recovered Veders quitted the merchant marine service and entered mine, much delighted at the prospect of travelling in his native country, and greatly to the satisfaction of my seniors in Southwood; for besides his steady and trustworthy character, Veders had the

recommendation of being a few years older than myself.

The weather was fair, and the voyage quickly made, but the second day after my arrival in Copenhagen, before I had seen the sights of the city, or delivered one of the many letters of introduction with which my friends in England had favoured me, I was surprised to meet, on his way to the harbour, my Cambridge acquaintance, Captain Blount.

"Changed my mind and changed my course, my dear fellow," he said, in reply to my wondering inquiry how he happened to be in the Baltic instead of the Mediterranean. "The plague has got into every port from Malaga to Alexandria; at least they told me so at Falmouth, so I turned northward, and have had a glorious run. That *Sea Hawk* of mine is a first-rate yacht; Vernon and Summers are with me, and you had better come along too. I am going to sail round the coast of Norway and Lapland; we will picnic on the North Cape, the real Ultima Thule, and your best plan is to come with us. You'll see a splendid succession of coasts and islands, and I'll bring you back to Drontheim, from which respectable town, the nearest to the Pole, I understand, you can continue your tour southward, and visit all the old castles and Runic stones where your ancestors fought and sacrificed to Woden."

I had promised my good father to avoid the Captain's company. I knew that Vernon and Summers, two of his college friends, were young men of his own stamp, but I had never seen his boasted *Sea Hawk*.

A voyage round the coasts of Norway and Lapland, not to speak of the North Cape, was very much to my mind; and the thought which has helped so many a man into sin and danger—it will never be known—assisted me to overstep all my better resolutions; and after some more persuasion from Blount, I sent Veders to the hotel for my travelling requisites, and got on board of the yacht without delay.

The *Sea Hawk* was a beautiful little craft; it was well equipped and manned. Blount's two friends appeared delighted to see me. We were all in high spirits, and the wind being fair that afternoon, we left Copenhagen Harbour, got out of the Sound, and were soon running northward along the coast of Norway.

Isles and headlands disappeared as we bore on: there was a great deal of looking out for them at first, but by-and-by neither Blount nor anybody else took much note of them. There was a large allowance of champagne and stronger liquors on board. The captain set an example of not sparing them, which his two friends were well inclined to follow: indeed, young as they were, the trio were farther advanced in habits of intemperance than I had imagined.

That discovery made me inwardly regret that I had not kept my promise of avoiding such companionship, particularly when a thick fog, to which even summer days are subject in those latitudes, hid everything from our view, and Blount began to wonder why we had not sighted the mountains of

Lapland. "The captain is out of his reckoning," said Veders, in a whisper to me one morning, when the fog began to clear. "I know little about navigation, but I am sure we are bearing too far west." To hint anything of the kind to Blount was more than one of his crew could venture on, much less my honest servant; but it was to the relief of all on board that, as the mist rolled away from sea and sky, and the sun shone out once more, we saw right before us, on the edge of the horizon, a rugged outline of grey ridges and white peaks.

"What part of Lapland can that be? Does anybody know?" cried our captain, losing his self-confidence in pure astonishment.

"It is not Lapland at all, your honour," said Veders, after a long look at the strange coast; "that country is Iceland. I know it by the yökuls, as they call them—those great white peaks you see; they are mountains of solid ice. That before us is the north shore. I take it we are somewhere off the Skagafiord."

"The north shore of Iceland!" said Blount, with an oath, his usual mode of expressing surprise; "the fog, or something, has confused my reckoning. But never mind, we will all see the Geysers; that is worth going out of one's way for. Are you well acquainted with the coast, my good fellow?"

"Pretty well, your honour," said modest Veders.

"Very good; just take the helm for this time, and run us up the Skagafiord: it is a splendid bay, I am told, and opens on the best part of the island." And Captain Blount walked leisurely to luncheon.

The helm was in good hands, however. Veders, in his sailor days, had served on board one of those ships in which Danish merchants go every summer to Iceland, to buy and sell at the trading stations. Thus he had acquired some knowledge of the land and its people, could understand the dialect of ancient Norse, still spoken among them, and was qualified to steer Blount's *Sea Hawk* up the Skagafiord.

Never can I forget my first sight of that long arm of the northern Atlantic stretching far inland between two mighty mountain chains, where ridge rose above ridge and summit above summit; some rugged and grey, as if encased in ancient lava; some coldly white, with a mantle of perpetual snow; and high over all, now glistening in the sunlight, now veiled with misty clouds, the mountains of solid ice, from the sight of which, no doubt, some ancient mariner gave the land its name. The strange and savage grandeur of the scene overawed for the time the most thoughtless of our company, and might well have lifted more serious minds to the contemplation of His power who laid the foundations of the mountains and set fast the hills. Nor was it entirely wanting in wild, romantic beauty; the mountain chain on either hand was cleft by deep green valleys, through which broad bright streams—some in grand cascades, some in full but gentle flow—came sweeping down to the fiord.

We had sailed up it for some distance, for the breeze was fresh and fairly with us, but saw no sign of human life or habitation, no fishing-boat on the waters, no homestead on the land. "Not many

people hereabouts. I should rather like to see the Icelanders at home. Where do they hang out, my good fellow?" and our captain turned to Veders.

"I can't exactly say, your honour; my goings have been mostly on the salt water in these parts. I can find my way about some of the fiords; but as to the country, it's my opinion none but a born Icelander could find his way about it. Howsoever, there is Hialtadalr," said Veders, as a broad and beautiful valley, traversed by a fine river, opened on our right. "I know it leads straight to Holum, where they printed the Icelandic Bible long ago, though the place is many a mile off; but there are farms and houses along that river, I'll warrant."

CHAPTER III.

SHEEP-GATHERING.

It was a glorious summer afternoon; the days were still long in that northern land, and Blount resolved, as the yacht could not well go up stream, to moor it at a convenient spot hard by, in charge of the crew, while he, with his two friends, myself, and Veders, went up in the boat, which we could all row by turns, to see something of the country and the people, and come back before nightfall. Away we went, in the adventurous spirit of youth, and found no great difficulty in getting up the river: it was a beautiful stream, with a gradually-winding channel, and soft sloping banks overhung by wild shrubs and plants unknown to us. On either side the valley stretched away in a broad sweep of pasture land to

the foot of a giant mountain, clothed with heath below and snow above, and still beyond its height were loftier summits towering away till they were lost in the everlasting blue.

"I don't know where the farms and houses can be, Veders," said our captain, as we entered another bend of the river where a thick clump of birch and willow shut out the prospect. "What, in the name of wonder, is that?" he added, the next moment; for a sound of distant clamour, like nothing I had ever heard before, came on the quiet air.

"It's wild geese; I have heard them in the Lincoln fens often enough," said Summers.

"It's drovers; just the noise they make going past our house to Doncaster fair," said Vernon.

"No, your honours," said Veders, after leaning on his oar to listen for a minute, "it's a sheep-gathering: they have the like in different parts of Iceland towards the end of summer, when the flocks are brought down from the mountain pastures, and every man comes to claim his own at the gathering-place and take them home. If we row round this clump we shall soon see it."

We rowed round, the noise increasing every moment as we neared the scene of action, till the shouts and cries seemed to rend the very air. But as we emerged from the willow shade the whole case was visible. In a dell sheltered by a projecting shoulder of the mountain, and open to the now declining sun, was a circular space enclosed by a rough fence made of stones and clay, in which there were several openings.

That space was full of sheep, young and old, bleating in full chorus; and all round it was a crowd of men, rushing, running, swaying to and fro, every one seeming to have hold of a sheep which his neighbour wanted to take from him; and every one shouting in deep, strong Icelandic, at the top of his voice.

"Well, there is a scene, and a hearing too!" said Blount. "Come, my boys, this rowing is heavy work; let us moor the boat here under the willows, and go over to see the fun."

The boat was moored, and the captain and his two companions took some brandy from their flasks before starting. To say the truth, none of the three were quite sober when we got to the sheep-gathering.

The scene was not less singular near at hand than when viewed from a distance, but it was more intelligible: notwithstanding the clamour and apparent confusion, every man ultimately contrived to get his own sheep and lead them away to the open ground beyond the crowd, where every flock, large or small, was marshalled, under the charge of its guardian dog; where horses were grazing, tents were pitched, fires were lighted, and women were busy about them.

Among the sheep-owners, I could not have told one from another by his dress; they all wore the same cap, jacket, and trousers, of wadmel, the coarse blue cloth of the country, with strong, clumsy shoes; but most of them were fair-faced, tall, and muscular—men of the true Scandinavian type, to be found on all the western coast of the Baltic, and not uncommon in our own Eastern England.

I had scarcely well observed my surroundings, when it became evident to me that Blount and his friends were making themselves peculiarly obnoxious to the crowd. They did not understand a word of Icelandic, nor even of Danish, and the sheep-gatherers could not comprehend the foolish and insulting remarks they were making in English; but the Icelander, though slow in action, is keen to perceive, and the looks and gestures of the three young men were sufficient to show their meaning. We had all been allowed to come forward and witness the proceedings without any annoyance from curiosity or surprise, though our appearance must have been strange and new to those out-of-the-world people. Perhaps they were over-occupied with the sheep. But now that most of them had been transferred to the open ground, the men began to cast indignant looks on my companions, and make observations, which my intimate acquaintance with the kindred tongue of Denmark enabled me to know were anything but friendly.

"These gentlemen will get us into trouble, master," said honest Veders, coming close up to me. "When people come to Iceland, they had better keep their good manners in repair. Look at those men on your left, with the stout cudgels in their hands—what notice they are taking! Let us try to get the captain and his friends back to the boat."

I saw the wisdom of his suggestion, and would have tried, but at that moment a young woman, leading a snow-white ewe, evidently a favourite,

which a tall, powerful man had extricated for her from among the bleating crowd still within the fence, walked quietly past us.

The native costume, which the women of Iceland have worn, it is said, through the generations of a thousand years—the high white cap, with embroidered band and thin veil falling over the neck and shoulders; the tight-fitting jacket and skirt of dark blue cloth, both amply embroidered with gold and silver thread; the girdle studded with small plates of the same precious metals; and the half-moon-shaped mantle thrown loosely back in the heat of that summer day—showed to the best advantage her fine elastic figure, her fair rosy face, and abundant yellow hair.

She would have been a beautiful woman in any dress or in any country; but it was not the beauty of form and colour alone that made me forget for the moment that I was the companion of fools; it was the expression of her face, at once frank and modest, gentle and intelligent, that charmed my better sense, and told me of the beautiful mind within.

I was recalled to the fact of my companionship, however. Blount and his friends no sooner caught sight of her than they bustled up with all sorts of admiring exclamations; and either the sight of the strangers, or the unfamiliar sounds of the English tongue frightened the poor pet ewe. It made desperate efforts to break away. The young woman made equal efforts to retain it; she was evidently half frightened, too, and quickened her pace to reach

the open ground where they had the tents and fires; but the three crowded round, fairly intercepting her progress.

"For shame, Blount!" I cried, stepping in between the young woman and her persecutors, and giving the captain of the *Sea Hawk*, who had been the most forward, a considerable shove back. "For shame, all of you, to disgrace the character of English gentlemen in such a manner among foreigners!"

I think the three would have turned on me, but they had no time. The men with the stout cudgels, of whom Veders spoke, had seen the transaction, and came rushing down on them with such Icelandic shouts and application of their weapons as left the three no alternative but to run back to their boat, which they did at top speed, and hotly pursued; while the young woman, with a look of gratitude, and some words I could not understand, made good her retreat to the camping-ground, and the man who had extricated the ewe for her stepped up to me.

He had some resemblance to her, and seemed but a few years older. His dress was the common wadmel, and his hands, besides being smeared with tar and grease from the sheep, were manifestly accustomed to hard work; yet what was my astonishment when he began, in elegant Latin, thanking me for interfering in his sister's behalf, and inquiring from what country I and my companions had come.

It is rather an humbling confession for a Cambridge man; but I was not at all inclined to match my Latin with his, and therefore answered in Danish,

which Veders had told me most Icelanders understood, that I was heartily ashamed of the conduct of those with whom I was travelling, and sorry that I could not entirely prevent their intrusive impertinence; that they and I had come from England; but my hope was that he and his countrymen would not consider my companions a fair sample of the nationality, as the little sense they were possessed of had been overcome by a glass too much."

"O no," said the Icelander, in my native tongue; "we know the great English nation better than that. Silly and troublesome men are born in every country. I have a great respect for yours, from what I have heard and read of it; and, as you are a stranger here, and the evening is not far off, do me the favour to accompany me home to my house, where I can promise you good entertainment."

His offer was a strong temptation to me, but I had some little prudence. My travelling requisites were all on board the yacht which was anchored in the Skagafiord; I had very little money about me to pay my way through a strange country; and, after what had occurred, how could I expect that Blount would wait for me if I stayed to accept Iceland hospitalities? I therefore excused myself as well as possible without entering into particulars, which pride forbade, having a secret hope of bringing the captain and his friends to reason and better behaviour among the Iceland people, and thus getting an opportunity of further intimacy with my new acquaintance, whom I could not help complimenting on his facility in speaking two languages of such distant date and kin.

"For that," he said, "the credit is not due to me, but to my father, Sira Ingolf, who has instructed us all. He is pastor of the parish of Hialtadalr, and also holds the office of director of the high school at Reykjavik, by which you may know that he is a learned man, and held in much respect. I am sorry you cannot come home with me to-day, but any time you can come you shall be welcome. My name is Gudbrand Biörnson. I live at the farm of Strockrfell, three Danish miles up the valley, and must set out on my return immediately, to get the sheep home before dark, for my flock is a large one; but I will be proud to entertain an Englishman, if you will visit me. Tell your friends they will be welcome also. We know how to pass over faults in Iceland, and forgiveness of wrong is often the best influence for amendment. Farewell for the present. May you be blessed! as our people say; but let us shake hands as they do in England," and a powerful shake Gudbrand Biörnson gave me; but the next moment he was striding away after his men and sheep, who were already on the move, and I hastened down to the river-bank, where Veders had gone before me.

CHAPTER IV.

LEFT IN THE STRANGE LAND.

As I approached the willow clump where our boat had been moored, my faithful servant met me with a very disconcerted look.

"They are off, master, boat and all," he said. "The Iceland men must have frightened them out of their wits, for when I got down here they were rowing away as if for their lives. I shouted, and waved my handkerchief; but not one of them ever turned, and they must be far down the river by this time. We must walk to the Skagafiord, that's certain. It will be a long way if we follow the windings of the river; so I advise your honour to take the heidè—that is, what they call the high ground that slopes up to the

mountains yonder. I have walked it before, and it will lead us straight to the fiord if we keep the beaten track.

I could always trust to Veders' report, and rather wished to let Blount and his friends see that we could find our way without them. I therefore adopted his plan, and took the heidè. It was a broad steep bank of old and moss-covered lava, which rose between the grassy valley and the mountain-side, and proved what one can see in every part of Iceland — how ancient and extensive was the action of the subterraneous fire. A rough road, and not a very straight one, I found it. There were sharp curves up to the mountain and down to the valley. Our only safeguard against entirely losing the track was to keep the river in sight. It was going to the fiord, and by holding in the same direction we must go with it. But the days were shorter than we had reckoned on, and the sun went down before we had well taken the bearings of the wild way. The twilight that succeeded was heavy with threatening clouds, which Veders told me portended one of those sudden changes of weather that break up the Iceland summer. His prediction proved over true : as the night fell upon us in that lonely track, a keen cold wind came up the valley from the sea; then heavy rain came down and drenched us to the skin; and, what was worse, we could not see the river. There was a gleam of moonlight now and then, as the thick clouds were rent by the descending showers, or drifted by the blast, but it was hardly sufficient to show us the

nature of the ground before our feet, and many a time we had to stand still in the deep darkness.

Still, Veders thought we were in the right direction. I imagined I could hear the rush of the river, and we pushed on with good courage. I cannot say how long the time was on that dismal march; it must have been hours, for I never felt so wet and weary; and Veders, with all his seafaring experience, acknowledged that a worse night he had never been out in; when, at last, the rain ceased, the clouds cleared away, and the moon shone out as if in her harvest splendour above the English fields. We looked around. There was the lava-track, rugged and broken, before us; there was the grey mountain above, and the green valley below, with the river flowing through it; but the stream of Hialtadalr was on the right hand now, and we should have kept pace with it on the left. Our way was lost, by some unaccountable turn at one of the many curves in the lava-bank. We had gone up instead of down the valley, and thus marched inland, leaving the coast and the fiord we knew not how far behind us. Poor Veders stood for a minute speechless and paralysed at the discovery the moonlight made to him, and I could scarcely believe the evidence of my own eyes. In my then thoughtless and unreflecting state, it did not occur to me through how many perilous places we must have been providentially guided in the dark and stormy night; but, unable to comprehend how we could have so far mistaken our way, I climbed a ridge of the mountain-side that rose directly above us,

in order to get a wider prospect, and see if our case was really as bad as it seemed.

I think it best to leave the reader to make his own remarks, and to form his own conclusions from the incidents of my narrative, and prefer this to making formal reflections of a religious kind. I need not, for example, tell how my conscience was racking me all this time, and how I set down my mishaps to the sin of breaking my promise as to shunning Blount. I made no extenuation on account of the sudden and unexpected meeting with him. I knew I had done wrong in accepting his invitation; and, whatever might happen, this text stood painfully clear in my mind: "Be sure your sin will find you out." But to proceed.

Moonlight rarely affords one a distinct view of any landscape, but it showed me that the situation was exactly what it first appeared, and also that on the other side of the ridge, which was a narrow one, there lay a path much better than that we had traversed. A beaten track it seemed to me, leading straight in the direction of the fiord, but barred at its upper or inland end by an immense rock (so much the better—we could not go wrong again); and I could see in the side of the rock a deep cleft like a natural alcove. There we might find rest and shelter till daylight came, and then retrace our steps by that better path, and reach the fiord at last. I scrambled down the ridge, calling on Veders to follow me. He answered, and I caught the sound of his coming feet, and was stepping into the cleft, which the moonlight did not

enter, when a firm grasp was laid on my shoulder, and a voice said, in Danish, "Stop, stranger, stop, as you value your life!—there is nothing before you but fathomless water!" and at the same moment I heard a stone flung into the cleft, and falling with a dull, heavy splash.

Instinctively I stepped back, and saw standing close by me a man wrapped in a grey overcoat, with a stout staff in his hand, and a dark-coloured cap which half concealed his face.

"How came you here, friends?" he said, as Veders reached the spot, trembling all over. I think the poor fellow imagined he saw a ghost.

I had found words by this time, and began by thanking him for saving my life—for it was plain that another step into that chasm would have been my last—and then explained how we had lost our way to the Skagafiord, where it was our object to rejoin our English friends on board the *Sea Hawk*.

"Thank the good Providence that brought me to your side in time, as I do from my heart," said the kindly Icelander. "But, young man, you are a long day's journey from the Skagafiord. Indeed, it is marvellous to me how you traversed that wild track without a guide. But in such a night who could have guided you but He who guides the stars? To attempt returning now would be worse than folly. You and your companion must need rest and refreshment. If you take this path" (and he pointed to a narrow track which I had not before observed, leading round the base of the rock, and thence along

the slope of the mountain-ridge), "and keep it, without turning to the right hand or the left, it will bring you to a farm-house, where you will find both. I would conduct you myself, but my business is urgent, and you cannot miss the way. Good-night. May the Lord direct you, now and ever!" And he hurried up the mountain-side like one familiar with its wild and rugged ways.

We were sincerely thankful for the promised rest and refreshment, and carefully kept the path he had pointed out. It led us over the ridge and down to the valley, where, in a green spot hard by the river, which there had become narrow enough to be called a "bourn" in my native Norfolk, we saw what Veders said was a very good farm-house for that part of the world. It was the first Iceland dwelling I had seen, and even by the moonlight looked a curious place, standing in the midst of the green, with no out-buildings or inclosure of any kind. It covered a considerable space; the shape was long and low; the walls were moss-grown and massive, but looked more like turf than stone. The roof looked exactly similar. Indeed, it was covered with long grass, out of which there rose one rather stunted chimney. Along the front there were no less than seven wooden gables, painted a bright red, every one adorned with a weathercock and a pair of horns; and under the central gable was the only door I could see, evidently a strong and secure one, also painted a bright red, and supplied with a wooden knocker not unlike a mallet, but there was a coat-of-arms carved on it.

I was about to employ the knocker vigorously, though no light shone from the narrow windows, and the whole household were probably long asleep, when Veders stopped me with, "If you please, master, that is not the way in Iceland. They would not open the door, if you knocked till daybreak. Just let me go through the ceremony, for you have nothing like it in England."

Before I could ask him what the ceremony was, he had walked up to the nearest window, and commenced shouting, with the lungs of a Danish sailor, "Her si Gud!"—in English, "God be with you here!" And after the twentieth shout, a man's voice answered from far within, "Drottinn blessa thig!"—the Icelandic of "The Lord bless thee!"

Then there was a pause of some minutes, in which we stood silent, till the same voice inquired, still speaking, as it seemed, under bed-clothes, and in the native tongue, "What is the traveller's name?"

When that was satisfactorily answered, there came a succession of questions—How many were in our company? whence did we come? where were we going? and what did we require?

"Now," said Veders, as he finished his responses, "they will all get up and receive us properly, for I know they are well-bred people. But, master, you won't be offended: I should not like the Icelanders to think you no gentleman, because I know what you are at home—and abroad, for that matter. But gentility differs in different countries. The family here will call you very ill-bred if you don't kiss them every

one round—father and mother, children and attendants — and you know that is not the fashion in England."

While he spoke, I heard the bolts drawn within. The next moment the door was opened by a man with a lantern in his hand, and its light showed me the face of the acquaintance I made at the sheep-gathering—Gudbrand Biörnson. He recognised me at once, and I could not have had a warmer welcome from my nearest relation. Gudbrand shook my hand, kissed me, and thanked God that I had arrived safe at Strockrfell, with an earnestness that found an echo in my own heart. He paid the same attentions to Veders. Though now a province of the Danish monarchy, Iceland retains the equalising customs of her old republican days. The entire household welcomed us in a similar fashion. They had every one got up and dressed to receive the strangers. There was Gudbrand's only sister, the beautiful young woman who led the white ewe at the sheep-gathering; her name was Thora, a famous one in Iceland song and saga. There were Gudbrand's three brothers—Harold, Hans, and Erik—all younger than himself, but come to man's estate; and there were more than a dozen of men and women servants.

The greeting was rather a tedious business for a man weary, and unused to such formalities; but, after Veders' instructions, I trust the worthy family found no defect in my manners, and the honest Dane went through the whole ceremonial like a man determined to do his duty. When it was finished, they

conducted us through a long passage, with several doors on either side, to the gjestrum. The guest-room so named is the pride and glory of every Icelandic farm-house rich enough to afford the like. The "guest-chamber" of our English Bible, it is kept exclusively for state and for strangers, and all furnishings or wares too good for daily use are laid up there. The room into which we were shown was a curious combination of parlour, bedroom, and library. Its low ceiling was made of carved wood; its walls were incased with the same, forming a succession of cupboards like those of the housekeeper's room in an old English mansion. Its floor was covered with a Dutch carpet, laid over a thick layer of dry rushes. There were wooden coffers, curiously carved, in every corner; a bed made somewhat in the Norwegian fashion, like a large box without a lid; a German stove; and some of the most substantial chairs and tables I have ever seen. Dust was not allowed to enter there; the cupboards around the walls stood open to show the riches within—Dutch china, English pewter, silver plate made in times before the electro process was dreamed of; and one cupboard was filled with books, manuscripts, and old newspapers—the Biörnsons' entire library, with the Icelandic Bible occupying the carved shelf, or place of honour, among them; and, as I afterwards learned, the wooden coffers in each corner contained the Biörnsons' Sunday clothes.

In that quaint but comfortable apartment we were installed with all the honours due to distinguished

visitors. Iceland hospitality has been deservedly praised by many a traveller, but none of them ever met with greater kindness than we did from the family at Strockrfell. They made us exchange our wet clothes for dry ones of their own; they lighted the stove to warm us; they set up home-made candles, large enough to serve any church that wanted the like, in massive silver candlesticks, to chase the gloom, and let us know how much we were respected, that being a special sign; they brought us hot coffee and pepper-cakes, which are esteemed sovereign remedies for cold in the North; and, lastly, they set before us a substantial supper of boiled mutton, the feast-day fare of Iceland, followed by curds and cream.

All the family sat down with us, by way of encouragement to make ourselves at home, which was scarcely needed, for cold and hunger had completely subdued my modesty, and Veders said he was ashamed of himself for requiring so little pressing; but Gudbrand said grace for us before and after the meal, and Thora saw that we wanted for nothing.

We found no difficulty in conversing with them. They could every one speak Danish—even the servants understood it—and my surprise at Gudbrand's elegant Latin and good English, on the sheep-gathering ground, was much increased when I discovered that his sister and three brothers were quite his equals in the use of both languages; and Thora spoke my native tongue best of all. She thanked me in it for taking her part against the three ill-mannered

men, as she very properly called Blount and his two companions; and I took occasion to explain what, it appeared, Iceland etiquette would not have permitted any of them to inquire into till the following day, namely, the peculiar circumstances which brought me to their house at such an hour.

"That was our father, Sira Ingolf," said Thora, when I mentioned my meeting with the stranger by the rock, how he had prevented me from stepping into the fathomless water, and pointed out the path to Strockrfell. "I am sure it was nobody else. He left us when the rain began to cease, for he had a long way to go, over the mountain, to meet those out-living people who will come to worship at the house of prayer in the wilderness; then he will visit all the remote farms on that side of his parish, and come back in time to officiate in our church on Sunday. It was good for you that he chanced to be passing that way. Maybe he was sent to save your life. I have heard him say that the Director of all things pleases to send people on special errands at times. If you had not been a stranger, you would never have thought of stepping into the cleft. All the country know the deep pit and drowning water that lies there. They call it the Giant's Well; but wise men say it is the crater of a long-extinct volcano, and the great riven rock has slipped from the mountain-side and covered it in."

I was aware that the word "Sira" was generally prefixed by the Icelanders to the Christian names of their Lutheran clergy, just as "Father," its equiva-

lent, is to those of priests in Catholic countries; but I thought it singular that the pastor's own family should give him such a formal title, as it was plain to me that they had no other parent on earth, for I had neither seen nor heard of a mother. However, my acquaintance with the Biörnsons was too recent to venture on inquiring into that subject; and alas! for poor worn-out human nature, my strife with the rough road and the stormy night had left me little inclination for inquiries of any kind; my bed was all that I was fit for; and when the family at length bade me "good-night," every one with a blessing and an assurance that I was welcome to the house, the eider-down quilt soon covered all my cares, and I sank to sleep, thankful for the shelter of that friendly roof; while Veders sought his repose in the men's badstofa, or bedroom.

CHAPTER V.

THE STROCKRFELL FAMILY.

It was afternoon in the following day before either of us was astir. The long rest made my hardy servant all himself again, but the effects of my own exposure overnight did not pass away with sleep. Unacquainted with the Iceland climate and its rapid changes, I had come too lightly dressed on our expedition up the river; thus I had no defence against the storm on the heidè, and the result was one of those severe colds which the Northern people call "the first knock of death at a man's door." I was utterly unfit for setting forth to find the Skagafiord; and in the best of health it would have been a perilous journey that day. The

partial clearing of the weather, which enabled us to reach the farm-house, had proved but a pause in the succession of storms which swept over Hialtadalr. The rain came down like a second deluge; the river, that seemed so small, had swollen to a mighty flood, foaming far over the pasture lands, and mingling its roar with that of the blast, which blew strong and keen from the snow-covered mountains.

Veders had thought of borrowing a horse from our hospitable host, and riding to the fiord by himself, to inform Blount and his friends of my condition, and get some necessary things; but Gudbrand Biörnson would not hear of it.

"Nobody could venture down the valley in such weather," he said. "The torrents that come down from the heights on both sides are sufficient to sweep away horse and man. I hope your friends on board the *Sea Hawk* have anchored securely, for the gale is blowing straight out to the Greenland Sea; but as soon as it and the flood subside, some of us shall go down to the fiord with your man, to show him the way, and see how it fares with them. Do not be down-hearted about your sickness, Christian Hanson" (no titles except those of office or nobility are given to anybody in Iceland); "it is only one of our summer colds you have got. They are always most severe upon strangers; but Thora knows how to manage them. Thank God, there has been little sickness else among us of late years. You shall stay here, you and your man. There is plenty of room in this house; and everything we have is at your service, till

you are well and strong enough to set out on your travels again."

I tried to thank him. It was difficult to make proper acknowledgments for so much generosity. But Gudbrand cut me short by saying that all travellers had been made welcome at Strockrfell since his great-grandfather settled there; and he was proud to have an honest man from any country, and especially from England, under his roof.

Under his roof, accordingly, I and Veders remained. The Biörnsons showed us every kindness, and the storm raged on for two days more: on the third it subsided. On the fourth they said the torrents were spent, and the low grounds would be passable now. The same morning, my faithful Dane, accompanied by Gudbrand's next brother, Harold, rode down to the Skagafiord; but towards evening they returned, bringing me the intelligence that there was neither sign nor trace of the *Sea Hawk* to be seen; and not a fisherman on all the fiord from whom they could obtain news of Captain Blount or his yacht. Whether he had sailed away without me in revenge for my reproving his ill-manners at the sheep-gathering, or been driven out to sea by the storm, remained a mystery; but I had my suspicions regarding the fate of the *Sea Hawk* and her crew, which after a time proved to be but too well founded.

I have already illustrated in my narrative into how many troubles a man may plunge himself, and those connected with him, by a single step out of the path of duty.

By breaking the promise I made my good father, to avoid the company and converse of Captain Blount, I had come to find myself sick and solitary, without money, credit, or friends, in a strange country, and that, too, a corner of the world from which communication with the rest of it was both difficult and slow. Yet the judgment was tempered with one great mercy which had cast my lot for the time among the kindly inhabitants of Strockrfell. It was worth all my misadventures to have the privilege of knowing such a family.

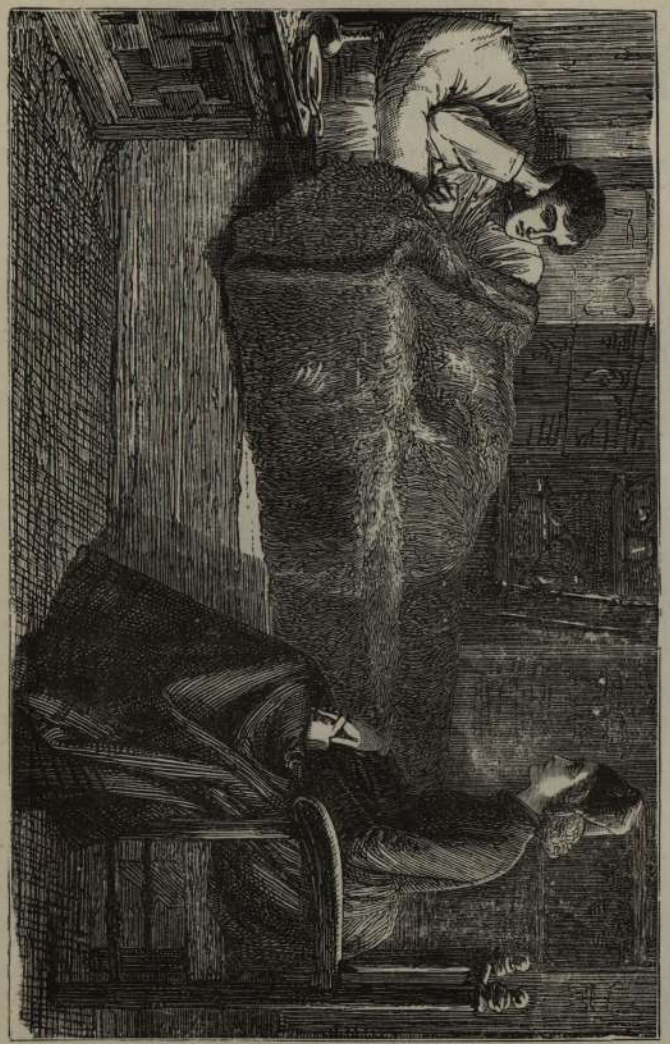
Though they wore the coarse cloth of the country, and shared with their servants the work of house and farm, the Biörnsons belonged to the gentle blood of Iceland. Their pedigree, set forth in good Latin, written on vellum, and handsomely framed and glazed, was one of the ornaments of the guest-room, and it showed a clear descent from Ingolf, the first of those Norwegian settlers who sought freedom and safety in the northern isle, when the Danish conqueror, Harold-the-Fair-haired, lorded it over their country, and thus founded the Icelandic nationality, in what one of their own writers has justly described as the battle-field of frost and fire. They were proud of their lineage, with an honest and honourable pride, for it kept them above low thoughts and actions; but of all their ancestors who had distinguished themselves by land and sea, and swayed the Althing, or ancient Parliament of their nation, the Biörnsons were most proud of one who had befriended the early preachers of Christianity, when Woden and Thor were worshipped in the land; of another, who had stood for the Protestant Reformation when its success was yet doubtful among his people; and of a third, who had encouraged and assisted Thorlakson, the worthy Bishop of Holum, to print and publish the Icelandic Bible. They were true descendants of those patriotic and pious forefathers. From my first coming among them I had remarked their devout habits of speech and thought; an acknowledgment of the Divine goodness was mingled with my first welcome to their house; and the Biörnsons would as soon have thought of beginning the day without breakfast, or closing it without supper, as without family prayer. While I lay in their gjestrum, breathing hard from an inflamed chest, and unable to quit my bed, I could hear, in the morning or evening silence, voice after voice take up the verse of psalm, epistle, and gospel, as appointed by the old Lutheran service-book, and then the solemn earnestness of one that read the prayer, to which all responded. Moreover, my own experience sufficiently proved that with them religion was not only professed, but practised. I was a stranger, and they took me in. From the moment they found that I was, as it were, left on their hands, in that forlorn condition, the entire household showed me more scrupulous respect and consideration. Gudbrand and his brothers never ceased assuring me how welcome I was to their house and home; but my deepest debt of gratitude was owed to their sister Thora.

She was the lady of the house, and the housekeeper too, after the fashion of gentlewomen in

England ages ago. From morning till night her time was occupied in directing and assisting the women-servants at all sorts of domestic work; and, as everything from clothes to candles was home-made at Strockrfell, there was no small amount of work to be done.

Thora had no accomplishment but that of singing, in a sweet, clear voice, her country's songs, and reciting her country's sagas; but her knowledge of home and foreign literature, and her general cultivation of mind, would have astonished many a young English lady, educated at a fashionable boarding-school, and quite above descending the kitchen stairs. More than that, she found the time, and had the heart, to nurse and care for a poor and luckless stranger like myself, as a sister might do by a dear and only brother. Oh! the Iceland moss she prepared for me in a dozen different ways; for I think that abundant lichen furnished the whole pharmacopœia of Hialtadalr. Oh! the hundred contrivances she found out to promote my comfort and cure by the simple means at her disposal, and the willing hand and kindly heart that gave every small attention a double value and a double charm, and cheered my spirit up from gloomy thoughts and forebodings of dying among strangers, far away from friends and kindred.

"I am a sad trouble to you," I said one morning, when she came into my room, according to the primitive and homely custom of Iceland ladies, to inquire how I had slept, and what she could do for me, and



IN THE GUEST-ROOM.

my case was at the worst. "Is there any doctor in this place to whom I could apply?"

"Well," said Thora, after a moment's recollection, "there was one at Holum in my father's time; but he went away southward when they removed the bishop's see to Reykjavik, and there has never been a doctor in our northern valleys since."

"Your father's time!" I said, seizing the opportunity to gratify my curiosity, which even sickness had not quelled. "I thought Sira Ingolf, the good pastor who saved me from stepping into the hidden pit, was your father?"

"O no," she said, sitting down near my couch, to tell the tale more confidentially. "Our father and mother died within a month of each other, in the same summer that Sira Ingolf came to Hialtadalr. You see, the parish had no pastor, because the parsonage was ruined, and the church damaged by a landslip from the mountain in the great earthquake time when Hekla had its last eruption. There was no public worship in the valley for many years, till my father and some more of our leading men wrote to the bishop in Reykjavik, and he sent Sira Ingolf here, for nobody else would come. I don't know where the Sira came from at first; but he is not an Icelander. I don't know what was his name, but he called himself Ingolf, for my father's sake. That name was his, and had been always in our family; and a great friendship grew up between them, though the time was short; for the Sira came in the beginning of summer, and my father died in

the end of it, before the grass was green on my mother's grave. He left us all very young. Gudbrand was but a child then, and I can scarcely remember either of our parents. But when my father knew that his time was come, he said to Sira Ingolf, who had lived with him like a brother, having no house of his own, 'I leave my young children to your care. Be a father to them when I am gone, for to you I entrust them and theirs next to their Father above;' and Sira Ingolf said, 'I accept the trust, and will fulfil it, with the help of God, and to the best of my ability.' So he lived in the house and managed everything, brought us all up, instructed us in learning and religion, and did a pastor's duty to the whole parish. Oh! how much he did to improve things and ways in Hialtadalr, you can't think, Christian Hanson; for you have lived in England, where people and places are all so rich and grand, as the books and newspapers tell us. He persuaded the farmers to cultivate crops they never thought of before; to make windows that would open and let the summer air into their houses; to build chimneys that would let out the smoke. That was nothing to what he did for the church. It was old, as well as damaged by the landslip. They used to sit on tubs and barrels to hear the sermon, and store up the hay and straw they had no room for in the corners. But Sira Ingolf made them ashamed of keeping the house of God in such a state, till all the men of the valley gathered with tools and timber, and everything needful to put it in fine repair; and now we have

whitewashed walls, and seats as good, I suppose, as any you have seen in England. He did a great deal, besides, to spread religion and learning among our people; brought books none of them had ever read all the way from Reykjavik, and held meetings every week in winter to read our Bible, for you see there is not another complete copy in the parish.

"When all that was done, and my brother Gudbrand had come to his twentieth birthday, seven years ago, Sira Ingolf said to him, 'You are a man now. Take charge of your father's house, your father's land, and your young brothers and sister, and I will go and get a pastor's house built for myself, and do a pastor's work, for it is enough for any man to mind.'

"Then my brother and we all clung round the Sira, and prayed him not to go from our house; for we had learned to love him as a father, and to call him so; and Gudbrand said, 'Stay with us, and be our father still. We will leave no burden of house or farm business on your shoulders. Your time shall be your own to fill your blessed office, for indeed it is enough for man to do; only stay with us, and do not make us orphans a second time.' So the Sira stayed, and that is why we speak of him as our father. The people of the parish think he ought to have the parsonage rebuilt, and get comfortably married; but we suppose he left somebody in his own country, wherever it may be, whom his heart goes back to, for we have seen him at his desk looking sadly on a lock of fair hair and a packet of old letters; and

always, when healths go round at the welcoming of the New Year, he drinks to some far-off friends, whom he will not name."

As Thora spoke I heard a bustle without. Somebody seemed to have arrived who was a welcome guest. Then a voice called her, and she left me, but in a short time returned with a joyful look, saying, "Here is Sira Ingolf come home to us again!" I looked up and saw a tall, handsome man, who, in spite of his Iceland garb, reminded me of my father, for his figure was erect and fine, though his hair was growing grey. But he had a foreign look that was not of my own England, and at a second glance I knew him to be the man to whom, under Providence, I owed my preservation from a watery grave beneath the riven rock. He saluted me with much courtesy and kindness, expressed a friendly regret for my misfortunes in having suffered so much by exposure to the storm, and being left behind by my friends in the *Sea Hawk*, adding, at the same time, that maybe they were not to blame, for the gale must have been terrible on the fiord. He would hear no acknowledgments for the service he had rendered me on the mountain path, but spoke so cheerfully and hopefully of my own state, that my spirits rose again, and, after some serious words, reminding me in whose hands were the issues of life and of death, he knelt down at my bedside and offered up a fervent and, I believe, effectual prayer for my recovery.

Certain it was that my health and strength were

gradually restored, and in the progress of restoration Sira Ingolf and I became familiar friends. He was not only a learned man, as his pupils, the Biörnsons, had proved to my satisfaction, but one who had seen the world, and been accustomed to good society in his younger days.

He spoke English almost as well as Danish, and made me less a stranger by the sound of my native tongue. His conversation, at once friendly and instructive, sensible and pious, gained my heart and my confidence too. I told him all the particulars of my past life, not concealing some that were little to my honour. He heard all, as a father might from a son, and rather gave counsel for the future than blame for the bygone days. At times I thought he made pointed inquiries (for a stranger) regarding the old home in Norfolk, and the old people I left there, my father, my Uncle Ernest, and my Aunt Hilda. But his principal theme was the necessity of true repentance and unfeigned faith in Christ, by which a man might be fortified against the fear of death at any age, and enabled to journey through this transitory and troubled life as became the heir of an eternal heritage.

I had formed resolutions of amendment in my sore sickness, as many a man has done in like circumstances; and the converse of Sira Ingolf not only confirmed them, but showed me the necessity of trusting in strength above my own, even in His whose grace is sufficient to keep the weakest from falling. Thus I learned, in that remote and strange

land, what my dear and loving relations in native England had endeavoured to teach me in vain, through the folly of youth and the temptations of an evil world; and the blessed lesson was graven on my mind by after association with the pious family and their gentle sister, to whose care and kindness I was so deeply indebted.

It had been my intention, as soon as health permitted, to set out for Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, and, properly speaking, its only town, from which I might find a passage to Copenhagen in some merchant-ship; but when it was possible for me to quit the hospitable house of Strockrfell, it was not possible to get a guide who could conduct me across the mountain chains which rose between Hialtadalr and the south country. It was the end of summer, for Iceland has no autumn, and every man, woman, and child in all the valleys and in all the farms were as busy as bees with the final preparations for winter. The dry peat had to be got out of the bogs and under cover, for fuel; the haystacks had to be thatched; the slender harvest had to be stored; house-roofs, doors, and windows had to be made secure against the expected storms; and as for the work that had to be done within the walls, I am not sufficiently master of the subject to specify it. Every hand was fully employed, and nobody could possibly be spared to conduct me. There were but few who could have done the business. Travelling is not a popular entertainment in the north of Iceland, and time was far too valuable now to be given for any price that I could offer.

"You must stay with us, Christian Hanson, till the summer comes again," said Gudbrand. "We will make a good Icelander of you, I hope, by that time. Thora will make you learn half our sagas by heart, my brothers and I will teach you the old tongue in which they were written a thousand years ago—for we speak it unaltered still—and maybe, in return, you will read the Danish books to us when we are all at work in the winter evenings."

The prospect of spending a winter in Hialtadalr was not what I had reckoned on, and yet it did not go much against my mind when Sira Ingolf made it clear that there was no other course open to me, when all the household professed themselves well pleased that the Englishman could not go away, and when Thora said she was sure my company would make the winter seem but half a one. I thanked them all round, as northern etiquette required, and willingly agreed to remain at Strockrfell.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEW YEAR'S MEETING.

THE postal arrangements of Iceland, at the time of my sojourn there, would scarcely have suited men of business in England. During the summer a post went and came once every month between Reykjavik and Holum, the most notable place in the north, where all communications had to be sent and called for; but throughout the long winter there were only two posts, and they went and came as the weather permitted. I had written to my father as soon as I possibly could, for it weighed heavily on my mind what trouble and anxiety my disobedient conduct might have caused him and the rest of my family, especially if any

serious disaster had happened to poor Blount and his yacht. Thora sent my letter to Holum by a trusty man who did all the carrying business of several parishes with two pack-horses, and was considered as a sort of post himself. I had proposed to avail myself of the services of this postman as a guide; but the distance was too great, the road too rough, and the weather too broken for me to undertake the journey in my enfeebled state of health. So I wrote again, explaining how the case stood, despatched my letter by the same safe hand, and rested on the comfortable assurance that there would be no uneasiness in Southwood Hall about me.

Then I set about making myself at home among the Biörnsons, which I hold it a man's duty to do among good and honest people. The thin clothes I had come on shore with were in a miserable condition by this time; and as no tailor's shop had ever been seen or heard of in Hialtadalr, I borrowed some from the young men of the house, that happened to fit me, and they could spare, and thus got dressed in good Iceland fashion, which has the advantage of very seldom changing. Thora managed the matter for me with her usual tact and sound sense; but when I mentioned that my means and expectations at home were sufficient for me to make ample returns for anything I had from her family—though their kindness to a stranger I could never repay—she said, with a slight flush, "Do not speak of that to my

brothers; different countries have different customs. It would be a shame, in Iceland, for a house like ours to accept of such returns, and they might misunderstand you." The making myself at home was not a difficult process; life in the far north, if slow-moving and rustic, is free from most of the conceits and vanities that make one fear one's neighbours. I learned the Biörnsons' ways. They were wise and sober ones. Their morning salutation (in English, God grant you a good day!), their psalm-singing before and after prayers; their grace, never omitted at the long table in the ample kitchen, where the entire household sat down to every meal, with Sira Ingolf at the head; myself, in the stranger's place, on his right hand, and all the rest seated according to age and position. I learned to help in their work also; no man could sit idle amidst such universal industry. It is true that the habits of my previous life had not made me an expert in building up peat or storing hay; but I succeeded wonderfully—at least the Biörnsons said so—after a few lessons from their worthy pastor, who was as busy as any of them in the preparations against winter. It would have done some of my learned acquaintances at the university good to have heard him discussing the Greek dramatists after thatching a stack, or the various schools of philosophy while his hands were still busy with the dry peat.

Sira Ingolf's example, as well as that of all around me, did myself some good, I believe. It showed me

how little the real dignity of man—the elevation of his intellect and moral character—depended on those outward circumstances which have such weight with the common mind in more advanced countries, as regards the appliances and means of life. It showed me, also, how the sense of Christian duty could overcome all the impediments of interest.

Urgent as the work of the season was, it came to a standstill on Saturday evening: the Sabbath rest was kept as unbroken and free from labour, of any kind, as in the most leisure time of the year; and, independent of higher considerations, the pause was a benefit to both the household and their business.

Every one was in his Sunday clothes betimes, and all walked together to the parish church, the only public institution in Hialtadalr. It stood about an English mile from Strockrfell, in the midst of its green churchyard, overshadowed by a great mountain, a solitary spot as one could see, but the gathering-place of all the dwellers in the thinly-peopled valley. Relations, friends, and acquaintances, whose houses were separated by many a mile, and whose work kept them fast at home in the week-days, met and exchanged greetings in its wooden porch. I know not how the interior looked in the days of the tubs and barrels; but when I worshipped there with the Biörnsons, the humblest chapel in England was not less indebted to architecture or ornament; and the handsomest of our churches, with the most fashion-

able preacher, had not a more devout or attentive congregation, nor a flock more attached to their pastor, for not one of them took his homeward way, when the service was over, without taking an affectionate leave of Sira Ingolf.

"It is old times with me again, master," said Veders, when I found him resting, in the Sabbath twilight, on a pile of drift-wood which he had been cleaving all the week. The honest fellow had become as much one of the household as myself, and I am sure they found him better worth his room. "It is old times with me again. When I sit in that church I think I am sitting in our old parish one, far away in Jutland; and when I am working all the week here, helping to get ready for the winter, it is just like what we used to do at home; and I don't think the Iceland winter can be worse than ours; at any rate, it is not far off now."

Veders' conjecture was well founded. Early in the same week—it was the beginning of October—we had the first snowfall; then what the Biörnsons called the early storms set in—days of roaring wind and driving sleet, followed by floods of rain and intervals of calm weather. Very short and very dark they were, with cold thick fog, which rolled down from the mountains like the waves of the distant sea; and then came another snowfall that covered all the heights with one smooth white mantle, and made the valley impassable with its deep drifts.

Winter was upon us; but all necessary work had

been done in time, and the labours of the Iceland year were ended. Like the first days of the world, ours had but two divisions—the morning and the evening. The former, which included the brief daylight, was given to domestic affairs and the feeding of the housed sheep and cattle, men and women doing their allotted part; but the latter was the pleasant social period, when the great lamp was lighted and hung up in the centre of the best badstofa—for there were two in that house. It was a large room at the end of the long passage which led straight to the entrance door. At once a sleeping chamber, as its name imports, and a family parlour, the beds were set against the walls like so many couches. Their owners generally sat upon them; but there were also two or three substantial chairs and settles in the room. There the entire family—master and man, mistress and maid—established themselves with every description of quiet evening work; and, by the general voice, some one known to be most proficient in the art of distinct and continuous reading was elected to fill the high chair, placed nearest to the lamp, and entertain them all with some favourite book of poetry or prose. The hours were long, for the lamp was lighted about four o'clock, and the sitting continued till midnight; but they passed with wonderful rapidity. While all the rest of the house was left in silence and darkness, and a fierce storm raged without, or keen frost bound the river in its chain, within that warm and cheerful

apartment there were eagerly listening ears, and earnestly interested faces, as the reader's voice went on from page to page of some old history, tale, or poem; and at every division of subject or matter there was an interval of questions and remarks, sometimes of friendly discussion concerning what they had heard, in which every sitter and worker took part.

The sitting always closed with family worship, conducted by Sira Ingolf. He read in his turn, or sat among the rest knitting gloves or stockings for himself, which all the men of that family could do, except when he had to prepare his sermons. Then he took his private lamp and retired to the guest-room, but generally rejoined us before the sitting was over. No doubt those evening readings helped to cultivate the understanding and intelligence of all the household. I was told the custom prevailed throughout the island, and had been handed down from remote times, when recitation supplied the place of books, and the seat beside the lamp was called "the chair of eloquence." Through them I formed some acquaintance with Icelandic annals and sagas, read by Gudbrand, his brothers, or his sister. They were always ready to translate any passage which my knowledge of Danish did not enable me to understand; but Thora was the most expert and willing of them all. Many of the books they read were in manuscript, and written by their own hands. There was not a member of the family who had not copied whole

A WINTER EVENING.

volumes belonging to their friends or acquaintances —a common case in Iceland, arising, as Sira Ingolf said, from the love of literature and the scarcity of books. Sometimes the choice of the company fell on me; and when I read to them in the few Danish books they had, Thora would bring her needlework and sit close beside me, saying she wanted to learn Danish better. But one evening she requested me to read the only English book in the house, and it proved to be a copy of Thomson's "Seasons." All the company were bent on hearing the Englishman read one of his own poets; so I set to work in "the chair of eloquence," reading in my best manner, and translating, too, for the benefit of the servants, who had no knowledge of the language. I am afraid Thomson got very little justice in the latter process, but I remember the part I read was "Spring;" and as it ended Thora lifted up her beautiful face in a flush of delight, exclaiming, "Oh, but England must be the fine country!" and her words were echoed from the one end of the room to the other.

Many a time in after years, when disposed to grumble at the fogs that rose from the Norfolk fens, or the east wind that came over the German Ocean, I have recollected that burst of admiration of our clime and country from the less fortunate but unmurmuring Icelanders. Their own climate, notwithstanding the extremes of cold produced by its northern latitude, has a remarkable resemblance to that of England, in the unexpected variations to which it is

subject. Between frequent storms and deep snow, severe frost and heavy fogs, there was scarcely such a thing as going out of doors for weeks together; but stores, live stock, and family being all under one roof, there was no inconvenience felt. However, as Christmas and the New Year drew on, the season took a sudden turn of mildness. There was still the same deep covering of snow on the mountains—the Biörnsons said it would remain on some of them till June, not speaking of the lofty summits, where a thaw never came. But from all the valley it melted away; the ice broke up on the river, and went its way also; a light mist veiled the short day, instead of the usual fog; and the long night was lighted by an increasing moon, and the starry armies of the North shining in all their splendour. The family told me that this extraordinarily fine weather was likely to be paid for by great severity in the latter half of the winter; but they availed themselves of it in the mean time by turning out the sheep and cattle every day, to get what slender remains of grass they could; and all the men took to catching fish and snaring wild-fowl, to help the Christmas fare.

The Icelanders are a sober and serious people. Christmas with them is a religious festival, dedicated to the contemplation of the great mystery it commemorates, rather than to merry-making or amusement. Every Sunday during Advent, Sira Ingolf catechised his congregation, old and young, after the service, that none might be ignorant regarding the

approaching solemnity. We went to church long before daylight on Christmas morning, yet the little temple was filled, for none would willingly be absent; and friends and acquaintances, as they met in the porch, said to each other, "Glory be to God that Christ was born this day!" At home there was a sober feast and serious talk. No work was done that could be avoided, and we went to church again in the evening, everybody giving thanks for the fine weather which enabled them to attend two services. The following week was a leisure one. Some of the Biörnsons' relations, who happened to live near enough, came to visit them, and were hospitably entertained; but instead of the evening readings and work in the badstofa, we all sat round the lamp and told tales. Curious illustrations of Iceland life or legend most of them were to me — some regarding great drifts of Polar ice, and Polar bears that came with them, into the northern fiords; some concerning the terrible eruptions of the ever-burning volcanoes of the land; and some rehearsing the exploits and adventures of its ancient heroes.

So the year came to a close. But as the light of its last day faded, they set up several candles, besides the lamp, in the badstofa; lighted up the great kitchen in the same manner, with the addition of a blazing fire of peat and driftwood, and every room in the house, till it looked like an illumination. It was an ancient custom, they said, to light the Old Year out and the New Year in. No one would think of going

to bed that night, for they had to welcome the year and give thanks for it, and remember their friends, and go to church before daybreak, to hold their New Year's service.

It was a glorious night, with a full moon, and a slight frost, for Iceland; but as the men came from gathering in the sheep and cattle, Veders said to me, "Master, I met a shepherd about an hour ago, who told me he had climbed one of the mountains here—I forget its name—in search of a stray sheep, and, looking seaward, where the sky was uncommonly clear, he saw a ship making straight for the Skaga-fiord."

"It might be true," said Gudbrand, who happened to be standing by, "though the finest weather seldom brings ships to our fiords at this season; but if you think there is any probability of getting news of your friends, you and I will ride down to-morrow after church time, which will be early enough."

I agreed; for a hope rose in my mind that it might be Blount's yacht, taking advantage of the propitious time to come in search of me; and the evening passed with talk and tale, like those before it, till the supper-table was spread, and we all stood up round it, according to a pious custom of the island, which prescribes the singing of an appropriate hymn by the whole company, standing, before and after every meal on festive occasions.

We had come to the last line, when sounds from without seemed to mingle with our voices; and as

the singing ceased, the benighted traveller's salutation of "Her se Gud!" came loud and plain through the nearest window.

"They are just in time for supper: what a good chance!" said Thora, as her brother gave the accustomed response, "Gud (or Drotinn) blessa thig!" in a true Iceland shout.

There was a minute or two of silence within and without, and then Gudbrand proceeded, in the same key, to demand the traveller's name. Two voices answered, one after another, with names which I cannot remember; and lastly, that of my own father said, "Ernest and Christian Hanson, two brothers."

I uttered an exclamation which made Gudbrand waive the rest of the ceremony, and open the outer door. The next moment my two nearest and dearest relations were clasping and weeping over me, strong-minded men though they were, as one who had been dead, and was alive again—had been lost, and was found.

As soon as they and I had regained sufficient composure, I introduced my father and uncle to the Biörnson family, by whom they were received with as much kindness as I had been; but when I came to Sira Ingolf, he stepped forward, and, taking each by the hand, said, "Do the friends of my youth not recollect Frederick Hersland?"

The three college friends, who had parted under such unhappy circumstances, and not seen each other for five and twenty years, while two of them believed

the other to have passed from this world, were brought together at length in an Iceland farmhouse; and the pious pastor, who had directed my steps to the straight and narrow way, was the friend whose loss I had so often heard lamented by our Christmas and New Year's fire. My father and uncle looked him in the face for a minute—they had come to the age when men are not thrown off their balance by finding a long-believed statement untrue—then the three shook hands, and embraced and bound up their broken friendship once more, and finally sat down at the Biörnsons' hospitable table, having first presented to the kindly family their travelling companions, the captain of the *Gamil Norge* and two able seamen, all three sturdy Norwegians, whom the Iceland people owned as their kindred race, and made them welcome accordingly.

When we were all fairly seated, the requisite explanations were given, and Sira Ingolf's came first. The report of his death in Greenland had arisen from that of a young missionary named Frederick Heretok, and nephew to the Bishop of Iceland. He had been friendly and kind to the young man in his last sickness. The rigours of the climate obliged him to quit the mission soon after, and as his own father was gone by that time, and his mother and sisters provided for in the house of a bachelor relation in their native Norway, he came to Iceland, learned the language, and finally accepted the pastoral charge of Hialtadalr, as the nearest field of usefulness, and

took the name of the Biörnsons' father, as Thora had told me.

"It kept my friend's memory alive among his young children," he said, "and it made me less a stranger in the parish than my own foreign name would have done. Moreover, it was poor Ingolf's last request, and I will never part with it now, though my old friends will know me by another."

Then my father told us how it happened that he and his brother had come to Strockrfell. He had received the letter which announced my safe arrival at Copenhagen; but when weeks passed away, and brought no further intelligence, he and the rest in Southwood Hall grew uneasy, as I had promised to write from every post-town on my way. Friends and bankers, to whom I had letters of introduction or credit, were applied to in vain; none of them could give any news of me, till at length a correspondent in Drontheim accidentally heard that two sailors, who had been picked up at sea by a vessel belonging to that port, and were the only survivors of the wreck of the *Sea Hawk*, which took place on the Fire Islands, a group of volcanic rocks off Reykjavik Bay, had spoken of a gentleman named Hanson and his servant Veders, whom their captain had left in Iceland. On the receipt of that intelligence my father resolved to proceed to Drontheim, and ascertain, if possible, the whole truth regarding his son. My uncle would not hear of his going alone, but made such business arrangements as enabled them to set

out together. They reached Drontheim without difficulty—the navigation of the Baltic being still open, for the early part of that winter was mild over all the North—sought out the two sailors, and, having learned from them such particulars as left no doubt in their minds that I and my servant were the men left behind, they gratefully accepted the offer of the captain of the *Gamil Norge*, a vessel long engaged in the Iceland trade, to carry them to the Skagafiord, with the bearings of which he was well acquainted. The vessel had come to anchor there at the fall of day. Soon after they learned from a fisherman that a stranger from England was staying with the Biörnsons, of Strockrfell; and when the moon rose high enough to give them light, the captain and two sailors, who had some knowledge of Hialtadalr, took them up the river in the ship's boat to the very spot where poor Blount landed, from which they made their way to the farmhouse, and found the missing man, whose folly had given them and himself so much trouble.

The talk round the Biörnsons' supper-table was that night so long continued, that the Danish clock in the corner struck twelve, and the New Year was with us, before anybody rose. Then all stood up, and an ancient silver goblet, one of the family heirlooms, was passed round, and every one drank a welcome to the New Year, and a health to the absent friend they most regarded; after which we all kissed each other in Iceland fashion, and said, "God grant you a good year!"

Sira Ingolf, as I must still call him, drank to my Aunt Hilda in that remembering cup; so did my father, my uncle, and myself. When the homely rite was finished, we shared with the Biörnsons in their family worship, and lifted up our hearts in gratitude to the Disposer of all things, as the true friend and devoted pastor gave thanks for the mercies of the bygone year, and for those in particular bestowed on some of the worshippers.

By my father's special desire, we took part in the New Year's service at Hialtadalr church. Household and visitors went to it as one family, by the light of the setting moon, and returned with the breaking day. The captain of the *Gamil Norge* was urgent that his passengers should return to the ship as soon as possible, and thus enable him to get back to Drontheim before the breaking up of the fine weather, which he foresaw would be followed by a time of storms.

"The captain is right, master," said Veders. "Cross the ice before it cracks, as they say in Jutland. You and I were not long on shore till we found out how soon the weather would change in these parts."

I saw the wisdom of his advice; so did my father and uncle; so did the Biörnsons, though they expressed their regret for having to part with us so soon. We took leave of the worthy family in the fashion of their country, which I had learned, and could, therefore, teach my elders, namely, to begin with the servants, and finish with the head of the house. They

would hear no acknowledgments for all the kindness they had shown me, but every one said how much they would miss me in the badstofa. Who would read English poems to them now? And when Thora said that, with tears in her eyes, I whispered that I would come back to see them again in the summer. Sira Ingolf walked with us to the boat, slipped a note into my father's hand, saying, "Give it to Sister Hilda;" lifted up his hands, and prayed aloud that we might have a safe and prosperous journey home; and we saw him standing on the bank looking after us, till at a bend of the river he was lost to our view.

His prayer was granted, for we had a prosperous voyage, first to Drontheim, and thence to Yarmouth. How I was welcomed home by my kindly aunt and all my Norfolk friends need not be related: they had been all apprised of my safety by the letters I wrote at Strockrfell, which arrived in Southwood a week before myself. I hope and believe they found me a better and a wiser man for that unsought residence among the slow-going but pious and hospitable people of the northern isle. At any rate, I did my best to make them acquainted with the noble and Christian character of the Biörnson family.

In the following summer I revisited Hialtadalr, with my father's full approbation, to seek the only daughter of that family for my bride. My suit was successful, as I had reason to hope it would be. Her brothers said, "We know you are a good man, and

will therefore be a good husband to our sister, though you live so far from Iceland."

The wedding etiquette in the valleys of the Skagafiord is somewhat different from that established in England. We marched to the parish church with the very slow step known as the "bride's walk," and in regular procession, Thora and myself—with bridesmaids and groomsmen, honest Veders being one of the latter—at the head of it, and Sira Ingolf in the centre. Our company was sufficient to fill the church. The ceremony was performed according to the Lutheran rites; and when we returned to Strockrfell it was to preside at a long table, under an ample tent pitched in the green meadow, and filled with guests from all the valleys that open along the fiord; and, I believe, the magnificence of our marriage feast was talked of among them for many a day.

When Thora and I sailed homeward, Sira Ingolf accompanied us, and was not a less welcome guest than ourselves in Southwood Hall; and when he returned to his Iceland parish, which nothing could persuade him to give up, my Aunt Hilda sailed with him as the pastor's wife. The people of Hialtadalr were satisfied at last, for the parsonage was rebuilt and suitably inhabited; and any traveller who has chanced to pass through the valley, speaks of marvellous improvement wrought on house and farm, to the great advantage and convenience of their inhabitants, and of books made more numerous among the letters-loving people, by the means and influence

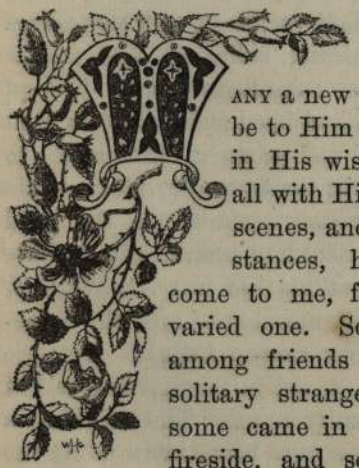
of the English lady. But years have passed away: the English lady has become an Iceland *fru;* the Iceland girl has become an English matron; for the races, though widely separated, are of ancient kindred. My own story now comes to an end, like that of a voyage when the ship is safe in port; but I close the record with a thankful heart, for the friend of my family, the partner of my life, and, above all, for the knowledge of the way that leads to life eternal, which I found in the far North.

THE CITY OF DEBTORS.

THE CITY OF DEBTORS.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW YEAR'S STORY.



MANY a new year have I seen, thanks be to Him who directed their events in His wisdom, and crowned them all with His goodness. In different scenes, and under different circumstances, have those new years come to me, for my life has been a varied one. Some of them found me among friends and kindred, some a solitary stranger in a strange land; some came in while I sat by my own fireside, and some dawned upon me when a voyager on the wide sea. Yet of all the new years I have seen, the one which keeps the firmest

hold on my recollection, because of the surrounding incidents and the blessed message which came with it to my mind, lies far behind me now: it was one of the years of my youth, and I can reckon thirty that have come and gone since then. The scene is still distinct and familiar to my memory: an old-fashioned office, forming part of a timber house in one of the most antiquated streets of Bristol—they called it Friars Street, and it has been pulled down and built over long ago—two rather sickly candles lighting up a high desk covered with account books and papers; and resting his arms on the said desk, like a man heartily tired, but with a look of mingled sadness and triumph, my cousin, Charles Stockwell.

For three weeks we had sat there every evening, after the hours of ordinary business, and sometimes far into the night, examining, collating, and endeavouring to arrange the complicated and ill-kept accounts of a firm which had been suddenly dissolved by the violent death of one partner, and injury to the other so serious that it threatened to incapacitate him for life. A stage-coach accident on the road between London and Bristol had been the immediate cause. The man who lost his life was Mr. Walford, a young but enterprising merchant, and the hopelessly-injured one was our Cousin Frank. We were three cousins in those days, not in the first degree, but all bearing the same family name. The neighbours in Friars Street, where we were born, knew us as the three Stockwells. Our parents had lived there all their lives, and had been familiar friends, beyond the

wont of kinsmen even in the west country. We followed in their steps, and were familiar friends too, bound together by early memories and by peculiar circumstances of birth and position, for we were all only sons, all left fatherless in our youth, and all early set to the business and cares of men. Cousin Charles was the eldest. He had succeeded his father in a small but well-established house in the American trade, of which Bristol had almost the monopoly then, as Liverpool has now. Frank was the next in age. He also had been a merchant, but of West Indian goods, and, as I have said, in partnership with Mr. Walford. I, Philip, was the youngest of the three, and at the time learning my chosen profession, that of a civil engineer, with a firm of note in the west country, and living at home with my widowed mother and two sisters, while my senior cousins were married men and had houses of their own.

Our neighbours and acquaintances considered us all respectable men. We had led what the world called regular lives; we had fallen into no flagrant sin, given way to no open vice, and done all that society expected from people in our station. We had sittings in the church where our parents had sat before us. We were generally to be found there on Sundays, for it was proper and respectable. We paid attention, on similar grounds, to all the forms of religion, but with us they were only forms. There was no spiritual life within our hearts, no serious seeking after it. We heard the promises of the gospel, but were not persuaded of them, nor of our

personal interest in them. We heard its threatenings, but were not warned to flee from the wrath to come. The world was with us alike in the church pew and at the home fireside; for it we lived and thought, hoped and endeavoured to get on, as people say; to be well regarded in our station of life, and, if possible, to rise above it; to gather the world's wealth, and to get the world's esteem, no matter for what poor and common-place causes—these were all our aims, and we looked to nothing beyond them. We were, of course, professing Christians, but our Christianity extended no further than a few dry and cold duties, gone through because we had been brought up in their practice, and must attend to them as well as to the other rules and customs of society.

Such was the state of mind in which we had grown up and come to man's estate and man's business. I have said Cousin Charles was the eldest: he was thought the wisest, too, and with some reason. Charles was by nature cool, clear-headed, and methodical in all his ways; his mercantile acquaintances called him a safe man, one whose reckoning might be depended on, and whose example might be followed in the most critical of affairs or times. The brightest of commercial bubbles—and there were such thirty years ago as well as to-day—could not tempt him to venture on a rash speculation. The most promising investment had no charm for Charles, except he was certain that all about it was sound; the highest-flown talker could not induce him to take part in scheme or company that was not long

established and working well. It was not principle, but prudence, that governed his conduct; yet even worldly prudence has its value and its reward. Charles had made no sudden or surprising additions to the business he inherited, yet under his management it increased slowly but surely. He made no great strides forward, but he never was obliged to take a backward step, and his accounts were kept with such strictness and regularity, that the Bristol men said he could find the odd penny of any year's outlay or incomings at a minute's warning.

Charles was proud of his own prudence and of its results. I think that pride made him somewhat ready to take the direction of other people and their affairs, and the only coolness that ever came between him and Cousin Frank arose from their different views of business. Frank was not less anxious to do well and creditably before the world, but he was naturally more sanguine and less clear-sighted. Moreover, it was his misfortune to set out in commercial life with a partner still more sanguine than himself; a man who believed in every promise of gain if it were only high and loud enough, and had the habit and ability of talking most people into his own belief. Cousin Frank and his partner hasted to be rich, and having neither the prudence of Cousin Charles to guide them, nor the higher principle which teaches man, in all his ventures and doings, to regard chiefly the commands of Him to whom the earth and its fulness belongs, they embarked in one doubtful speculation after another, getting their

affairs more and more entangled, and grasping at every promise of fortune, in hopes of immediate extrication and ultimate prosperity. Their friends were allowed to know little of their risks and schemes; none of them would have approved of the like, and such a course is apt to make men unscrupulous. The gambler will cheat his friends and ruin his family, and the rash speculator, who is of the same spirit, however the lax thinking and worse fashions of the age may excuse him, will not hesitate to deceive and involve his kindred. So it happened that Cousin Charles's capital and credit, and the means on which my poor mother and sisters depended for their support, as well as my own slender fortune, on which I had hoped to commence engineering, were more or less drawn into the tangled web of Frank and his partner's affairs, when that terrible accident took place on the London road, which made the one an invalid for life, and hurried the other into eternity. A crisis in the last promising scheme they were permitted to engage in had summoned both partners to London, and on their homeward way, in the midst of a dark night, the panic of the horses at some unaccustomed sound or shadow, and the upsetting of the stage-coach over a steep and stony bank, put a fearful end to their worldly hopes and speculations.

The shock was terrible to us all. The last enemy had come almost into our own circle, for Frank's life was long despaired of, and his presence strikes a deadly chill to hearts that have laid up for themselves no treasures above the earth and its interests. Nearly as terrible were the after discoveries, when the doctors told us that poor Frank might live they knew not how long; but his brain, injured by a concussion in his fall over the steep and stony bank, would never be capable of the application and energy requisite for the conduct of business. Mr. Walford had left no relation able to take his part in the firm, and by general consent of the creditors, as well as from his own wish to make matters as clear as he could for the family and for himself, the winding-up of their irregular and confused accounts devolved on Cousin Charles. He had worked hard upon them every evening for three weeks, with myself for his humble assistant, and I could be no more; my professional studies had qualified me for dealing with lines and levels, but not for putting in order or balancing commercial accounts. But Cousin Charles, if not the readiest, was one of the clearest accountants in Bristol, and one of the most persevering men. He worked at Frank's books and papers every evening, giving the day to his own business; worked hard and sat late, because he had partly pledged himself to the creditors, and partly it was his humour to come to a close before the new year came in. It was a gloomy business to go to, all those long and dreary evenings of dark December—the weight and the weariness of it are on my memory yet. But Cousin Charles had reached his goal at last, and finished a clear and concise statement of the affairs of Stockwell and Walford just as the clock struck ten on the last night of the year.

The statement contained little comfort for us. We appeared as creditors of the broken-up firm, which, considering our near relationship to one of the partners, might not look well in commercial eyes: men of the world are not apt to judge charitably in the office and warehouse more than in courts and cabinets. Notwithstanding that risk of our family honour, by which we had always set store, our losses would be heavy, and hard to get over; and there was poor Frank a penniless bankrupt and a hopeless invalid. No wonder that Cousin Charles looked sad and tired as the momentary triumph of having finished his work within the time passed away, and his strong and prudent heart sank at the prospect which lay before us. We had but one hope, and that was placed in the goodness and generosity of the principal creditor, Jacob Heartsworth. Nobody called him Mr. or Esq.; he was a man of plain speech and sober attire, of serious, thoughtful look and quiet ways. Some said he was a native of one of the New England States, to which his ancestors had emigrated from the west country, if not from its metropolis, our own town of Bristol, in old persecuting times. Some counted him a Quaker, some reckoned him a Methodist, but all who dealt with him—and his business transactions were large, both in England and America—agreed that a more just and honourable trader could not be found, or a more charitable and considerate creditor, where charity and consideration were needed. Those who knew Jacob Heartsworth best had no difficulty in accounting for that high and well-merited reputation: they also knew that his life and conversation were directed by sound religious principles, and to whatever sect or division of the visible Church he might belong, Jacob Heartsworth was a Christian, not in name only, but in deed and in truth. It was not from mere softness of natural temper, but from a constant feeling that "God for Christ's sake" had forgiven him, that he was himself forgiving, humble, tender-hearted, and kind.* He had travelled extensively in his youth, and now his hair was grey; he had read much and thought more, but thought chiefly of the things that belonged to his eternal peace, and was ready, when occasion served, to impress that thought on the neglectful minds of those with whom the chances of travel or of business brought him into familiar contact. My cousin and I knew nothing of the influence that governed his life and conduct, we had no knowledge then of the wisdom that is from above; but we had met Heartsworth in commercial transactions, we had heard of his general character, and our own desperate circumstances made us believe and hope in the kindness of the man, to us almost a stranger, that upon our representation of the real state of things, and the probabilities that Cousin Charles could show of retrieving losses and making all good in time, he would postpone his claim in our favour, and accept the security we could offer for repayment. With that hope we sat there in the cheerless, old-fashioned office, when our work was done, on

* Eph. iv. 32; Col. iii. 12, 13.

the last night of the year, waiting for Jacob Heartsworth. The vessel in which he intended to sail for America was to go out with the tide about two on New Year's morning; and he had promised, though some important affairs he had to transact might make it late, to call at the office, hear what we had to say, and give us his final decision.

We sat and talked in great anxiety and suspense, which made every minute seem an hour: the case would have been impracticable with any merchant of our acquaintance, and seemed doubtful enough with Jacob Heartsworth. Partly to encourage himself, and partly to assist his memory, Cousin Charles set before me in array all the arguments and persuasions he had in store for the principal creditor. But, like most very prudent men, Cousin Charles did not excel in the persuasive art: a certain amount of venturous and buoyant hope is needful to the mind that would win others to its views, and in the providential distribution of diverse gifts, that is rarely bestowed on the man of cold and calm calculation. It was probably a feeling of his own unfitness for the occasion that made my cousin despond in the midst of his setting forth, and recur, as he had often done since the woeful discovery burst upon us, to what he called, in his strict way, the disgraceful conduct of poor Frank and his dead partner.

"We will never get over it, Philip," he said; "there is nothing but ruin before us; and your poor mother and sisters, too, I don't know how they will live on the little that must be left them, if this

American don't agree, and I am sure he never will. They talk of him being a religious man, and all that —I don't profess much myself—but I am sure I am as religious as my neighbours, and I would not run the risk we expect Heartsworth to run for the best man in Bristol. Even if he does consent, though I know he won't, look at the debt I shall be plunged in all through Frank's doings; it must and will ruin me, and there's an end! But I won't stand the disgrace of losing the business my father left me; I'll fly the country, Philip. And now, my boy, while you are young, take warning, and keep out of Frank's courses—out of debt out of danger; there never was a truer proverb, and none of our family ever followed it as I did. Consider my method of business, Philip; it will be of use to you maybe when I am ruined and gone, all through trusting a cousin. I never let one year go out and another come in without clear accounts and no balance against me—that is the safe and sure way to get on."

Here my cousin was interrupted by a low knock at the office door, and thinking it was poor Frank's wife come to inquire after our success with Heartsworth, I rose and opened it, when in walked Heartsworth himself, with a friendly smile, and a courteous apology for being so late.

CHAPTER II.

MR. HEARTSWORTH'S NARRATIVE.

HIS manner encouraged us both, but better was yet in store. He looked over my cousin's statement for a few minutes, and then said quietly, while he glanced at the heap of books and papers on the desk, "You must have found it hard work to arrange those accounts so exactly, my friends, and give us the marrow of them."

"I never had harder work in my life," said Charles, hoping to get round to the main point that way.

"Well," said Heartsworth, in the same quiet tone, "He who sends us the work also sends the ability to do it; but regarding the matter you proposed to me, I have inquired concerning you in the town. I

have spoken with the rest of the creditors, and I think it right to agree to your offer, and accept your security."

"You are very kind, sir," was all that the joyful surprise would allow Cousin Charles to say; it would have cost him half an hour to marshal up his arguments, and all at once the business was done without them. I stammered out something to the same effect, but Mr. Heartsworth said:

"No, I am only doing my duty; it is the duty of every Christian to help an honest family in their time of trouble, which indeed comes to all. The best authority tells us that the life of man is full of it, as the sparks fly upward; and most men's experience will testify to the fact."

"Thank you, sir, thank you; I will never forget your goodness. It is a time of trouble to us indeed, a time I never expected to see, and never should have seen but for Cousin Frank. Oh, Mr. Heartsworth! he deceived us all." Charles was getting on his old ground again.

"No doubt he did," said Heartsworth, "and most of all deceived himself, as we sinners always do; but that is past. Providence has thought fit to bar up his way in this world, perhaps that he may turn into the strait and narrow one."

"I don't know what is to become of Frank and his family, I am sure," said Cousin Charles. "We'll all do what we can for him, of course, but, Mr. Heartsworth, if he and Walford had taken my advice, and done as I did, things would never have come to this

pass. The accident on the London road was the doing of Providence, as you say, and might have happened to myself; but then, Mr. Heartsworth, my affairs would not have been left in such a condition, as I was telling Philip here, meaning to warn him, because, you see, he is young. I never let an old year go out and a new one come in without balancing my accounts and seeing that I owe nobody anything. If a man does that regularly he won't run into rash speculations; they lead one into debt, and, in debt in danger, as the proverb says."

"It says truly, my friend; debt is a great evil. I doubt not that you did your best to keep out of it," and Heartsworth looked at us both calmly and kindly, "but all men are not so wise; and if you have but time to hear it now that the New Year is so near, and we may sit together and bid it welcome, for the Master of years only knows which of us will see its outgoing, I will tell you a wonderful example or proof of the thing."

"I'll be glad to sit with you, sir; I always like to hear of curious tales and transactions from people who know the world better than myself, and I made up my mind, when the accounts were done, to sit here till the clock struck twelve, and see the New Year in. They say one gets one's wish on New Year's morning, and I wish it may bring us better luck than the last," said Cousin Charles; and I chimed in with being very happy to make the third of the company.

"Well," said Heartsworth, "since you agree to

hear it, I will tell my tale. It happened in my travels long ago, that I came to a great city, larger and more populous than any town I ever saw. All manner of trades and manufactures, business and professions, were carried on there; men bought and sold, overreached and rivalled each other as they do everywhere. There was getting and spending, labour and idleness, fashion and folly, sin and sorrow, as in all other towns. There were schools and churches too, places of amusement and high places of wickedness, and all the townspeople were busy after their several callings, pursuits, or humours; but the strange peculiarity of that city was, that all its inhabitants, man, woman, and child, were in debt,—in debt beyond any of their powers to pay. The wealthiest lord and the poorest labourer were alike in that respect; some owed more and some less, but none of all the dwellers in that vast and populous city could discharge his own obligations or show a clear receipt. Every soul of them knew himself to be in debt, and therefore in danger, as the true proverb says, and none of them knew what day or hour he might be arrested; yet, wonderful to relate, they every one went on with their business, their pleasures, or their whims, without taking the slightest thought of their perilous position, or making the least endeavour to get out of it. Far from following your prudent example, friend Stockwell, nothing could induce any of them to take a serious look over their accounts as the year approached its end, and see how much the twelve months had increased the balance against them."

"They must have been all mad," said Cousin Charles.

"So any rational onlooker would think; but most of that city's people thought themselves remarkably wise. And certainly they were not wanting on any subject but that of their great debt," said Heartsworth. "To speak with many of them on any other topic, the times, the markets, investments, or the like, one would think them sagacious and clear-headed men; but when their debt and the danger of it came to be talked of, there was nothing but shuffling excuses, or at best promises to think of it some other time. You are surprised to hear of such folly, and well you may be; but I will tell you something still more astonishing, which I heard on authority not to be doubted. There came to that city once the son of a great king,—the greatest, wisest, and most gracious monarch that ever the nations knew. His son was heir of his kingdom and like to him in all things, yet out of pure compassion for that indebted city, and pure love to its thoughtless inhabitants, he came there without pomp or train, and offered to pay the debts of all who would come to him, however large the sum might be, and free them from all risk of law or bankruptcy, provided only they would leave their ill-balanced accounts in his hands, trusting to him for a full and free discharge, and for the future endeavour to live after his example, which was the best and noblest that man could find or follow.

"One would have expected to hear that the whole city had flown to avail themselves of his more than

princely offer: yet, would you believe it, my friends, I was told on the same undoubted authority that most of the townspeople paid no attention to it, but went about their shops, offices, or homes, minding their work, their profits, and their amusements, as if no such person had come to their city, and no such offer had ever been made. In public and in private they thought and spoke and concerned themselves about everybody but him, and everything but his most generous offer to pay their debts and set them free from danger. He sent forth agents and envoys who told them of his promise, and of his power and intention to make it good; they spoke in the churches, in the schools, and sometimes in the market-place, and the townspeople appeared to listen; but from their after conduct it was evident that their thoughts were not with the speakers or the theme, for they never went with their accounts to the king's son, or asked him to take their debts upon himself, as he had offered to do.

"Yet all the city were not so madly blind to their own interests: there were some who heard and believed what his agents and envoys told them, and went to the prince with the bills and bonds they could not pay, and the mortgages they could not redeem, and were made free men, both they and theirs for ever; for the prince paid their bonds and redeemed their mortgages according to his promise, and more than that, pledged himself to stand surety for all their future debts, if they only trusted him and endeavoured to follow his wise and good example. Some

of these men were reckoned rich in the city, and some were reckoned poor, but from that day they had every one this great advantage over the rest of the townspeople, that they never trembled at the probability of an arrest in the midst of their business or pleasures, nor dreaded to look into their own heavy accounts and see the sums they owed.

"And think you, was not that an advantage worth striving for? Yet those wise citizens had not to strive for it half so much as their fellow-townsmen did every day for some petty pride or profit, office or position, which, so far from enabling them to pay their debts, often left them deeper debtors than before. It was strange and unaccountable that none of the latter seemed to observe or estimate the great benefit which they had received by taking the king's son at his word, though some of them were their near kinsmen, and all of them knew how much they rejoiced in their freedom from debt and danger, how ready they were to proclaim the prince's praise, and tell how faithful they had found him to pledge and promise.

"And now, my friends, what think you was the name of that insane city? Its name was the City of Debtors, and the same will apply to Bristol, London, or any town on earth, ay, to the inhabited world at large, for all mankind are debtors in the heavy debt of sin, against which we pray in that best form of prayer, when in the primitive words of the old translators of our Bible, we say, 'Forgive us our debts.' And what think you was the name of him who came to take their debts upon himself? His name was the

Prince of peace, the son of the King of kings and Lord of lords, and heir of the kingdom that shall have no end: He whose coming was announced to the wise men of the East by the rising of a new and unnamed star, and to the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem by a multitude of the heavenly host, singing, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.' I have told you but an old story, and one which you have doubtless heard many a time before; but it is the best, the truest, and the most wonderful tale that ever was heard or told, read or written, among all our world's histories, for in it every man has a personal and everlasting interest to gain or lose.

"Friend Stockwell, you have spoken wisely concerning the danger of earthly debt, and the prudence of regulating one's accounts at the close of every year. All you have said on those points is sound and sensible; but were it not greater wisdom to consider how one's account for eternity stands, and whether one belongs to that great company whom the Son hath made free indeed, or to the City of Debtors?"

Mr. Heartsworth paused, for the cathedral clock struck twelve, and from all the churches of Bristol the bells rang out to welcome the New Year. "It is come," he said; "we have passed another of the turning-points of time, and commenced another circuit, but know not which of our courses will run to its close. Farewell, my friends. I rejoice that the Giver of all good has enabled me to be of some use to you at the close of your year of trouble; but I must

go to cross the great deep, and when I am gone, do try to think, in spite of earthly cares and concerns, which last but a few years, of the good old story I have tried to tell you in new words, of the soul's concerns which last for ever, and the debt which our everlasting Surety only can pay."

He shook hands with us both, handed Cousin Charles a written form of his consent to the proposed arrangement of our affairs, and left the office before we could thank him. It was never our fortune to see Mr. Heartsworth more. Though he reached his American home in safety and lived many years after, he never again visited England. His kindness enabled my cousin to retrieve our family losses, and, what was far more important, the tale he told us on that last night of the year took and kept possession of our minds. It was a word spoken in season. Times of trial are often the most favourable for sowing the good seed, as we found to our highest profit, when after years went and came, and we could close every one with a solemn thanksgiving for being made free men in the City of Debtors.

THE END.

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