

Literature, &c.

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From Hogg's Instructor.

THE SKY LEAPERS.

A TALE OF NORWAY.

MUCH of the interest felt on beholding a chain of lofty mountains, arises from the feeling that on lands such as these the foot of the invader has seldom rested, and has never long tarried. So often, from the pass of Thermopylae to the heights of Morgarten, have the brave proved their own hills to be impregnable, that no tale of overwhelming numbers will counteract the feeling that a mountain-land so won has been betrayed by the cowardice of the inhabitants. Of this cowardice history unfortunately gives us some proofs. But these few instances of weakness and treachery only serve to give the force of strong contrast to the bright examples of multitudes of higher and nobler spirits. These reflections apply more especially to Norway, the scene of the tradition which now awakens them; and which often rouses the warm Norse blood, when told by some of the older peasants to the listeners round a cottage hearth on a long winter's evening.

In 1612 there was a war between Norway and Sweden, distinguished from a mass of the forgotten conflicts at one time so frequent between these rival and neighbouring countries, by the tragic fate of Sinclair's body of Scottish allies, the remembrance of which is celebrated in many a fine Norwegian ballad. It is a matter of history that the Scots landed on the west coast of Norway to join their allies the Swedes, went along the only valley-pass leading to Sweden, and were annihilated in the deep defile of Gulbrandsdale by the peasantry. At the time when they should have arrived at Sweden, a small body of Swedes encamped in Jemteland resolved to meet their allies, of whose movements they had intelligence, and escort them over the frontier, crossing by the hill passes, and uniting with the Scots on the other side. The band, to whose fortunes we attach ourselves, numbered but three hundred warriors; but they were the very flower of Sweden. They resolved to penetrate the barrier at the most inaccessible point, believing that the Norse would collect in the southern country, where they were opposed by a Swedish army, and rest secure in the deep snows, which rendered the hills impassable, for the defence of their mountain frontier.

So they came, says the legendary story, to the foot of the wild pass of Ruden, a spot fated to be dangerous to the Swedes, and since strewn with the frozen corpses of the hosts of Labano and Zogga, who perished there. Their company filled the few cottages of the small hamlet on the Swedish side of the barrier where they arrived early in the day. They were eager in their inquiries for a guide, being resolved to pass the hills ere night, lest tidings should reach the Norsemen of their approaching foes; but all their search proved fruitless. Many of the Swedes of the village had been over these mountains, but none were on the spot possessing that firm confidence derived from certainty of knowledge, and from conscious intrepidity, which alone could make them secure or willing guides in an expedition of so much peril and importance. At last, old Sweeney Koping, the keeper of the little inn which was the Swedes' head quarters, shouted with the joy of him who has at once hit upon the happy solution of a difficulty. 'By the bear!' cried he, 'could none of you think of the only man in Jemteland fit for the enterprise, and he here on the spot all the while? Where is Jerl Lidens?'

A hundred voices echoed the eager question, and the leaders were told, that they must wait perforce till the morrow; for the only man able or willing to guide him, Lidens had gone forth on a journey and would not return that day.

'Well,' said Eric Von Dalin, the chief of the Swedish detachment, 'there is no help for it. To-day we must depend upon the kind entertainment of our host; but beware, my brave men all, beware of deep horns of ale or mood. Remember,' pointing to the ragged peaks glittering in the snow, 'remember that all who would sleep beyond those to-morrow, will need firm hands and true eyes. And, good Sweeney,' (addressing the innkeeper, who was the chief person of the hamlet, 'look well that no sound of our coming reach these Norse sluggards. There may be some here who, for their country's safety would cross the hill with warning.'

'Thou art right, by Manheim's freedom!' cried the host, 'here sits Alf Stavenger: he knows these hills better than his own hunting pouch, and would think little of carrying the news to his countrymen. I am sorry,' he continued, turning to Alf, 'verily I grieve to make an old friend a prisoner; but you must abide here in safe keeping till our men are well forward.'

'I care not if I stay here to-night and for ever,' replied the Norseman. Eric now looked for the first time upon the speaker, and confessed that he had never beheld a finer looking man. In the prime of the beauty of the northern youth, Alf Stavenger was remarkable for a cast of features bearing traces of a higher mind than can be discerned in the cheerful, lusty faces of his countrymen.

'Does the valley marksman speak thus?' inquired Sweeney.

'Ay,' answered the youth, 'when you are issued forth from the fire side, you can but

suck another roof. If your own land casts you out, you are fain to cling to the stranger—the enemy.

'Has Emlen's father been rough?' inquired Sweeney.

'Name him not!' replied the young peasant angrily. 'They have heaped refusal and insult upon me, let them look for their return! Ay, Skialm Harder may one day wish I had wed his daughter—my name shall yet be feofully known throughout Norway. Swede, I myself will guide your troop this night over the Tydel. Trust me fully, and you shall be placed to-morrow beyond those white peaks.'

'You will have a fearful passage first,' said an old peasant; 'there is no moon now, it will be pitch dark long ere you cross the Naeroo.'

'The night is to us as the noon-day,' cried a spirited young soldier; 'for your crags we fear them not, were they as high as the blue heavens. Our life has been amongst the rocks, and in our land we are called the "Sky-Leapers".'

'I will trust the young Norseman,' continued the chief; 'wounded pride and slighted love may well make a man hate the land that has spruned him, were it his own a hundred times.'

As the day was fast wearing over, little time was left in preparation. Each man carried with him his fir skates, to be used when after climbing the rough ascent; they would along those narrow and difficult paths which skirt the face of the cliffs crossing the mountains. Their guide told him that he should lead them, when it grew dark, by lighted torches, to be procured and used as he should afterwards direct them.

During their slippery and rugged journey, Alf could not help admiring the spirit, coolness and activity shown by the party in scaling the dangerous rocks, and they felt insensibly drawn one to another by that natural though unuttered friendship which binds together the brave and high souled. Still few words passed between them, though many of the Swedes spoke Norse very well, and Alf Swedish as thoroughly as his own tongue. One both sides were feelings which led them to commune with their own thoughts in silence.

After some hours of hard and successful climbing, they halted, at the close of day, for a few moments, on the snowy summit of a ridge, which they had just ascended, to fasten on their skates. They had now to traverse the long slippery defiles so peculiar to Norway, where the path runs upon narrow ledges of rock, at an awful height, winding abruptly in an cut along the ragged face of the hills. Here they formed in single file, and their guide, taking the lead of the column, kindled, by rapid friction, one of the pine branches, of which each had, by his orders, gathered an abundance on their way. He said, in a few brief and energetic words, 'that here must they tempt the fate of all who would conquer Norway, unless they chose to return: now were they really to win the proud name of Sky Leapers.' He bade them move along rapidly and steadily, following close the light of his torch. Every man was to bear a blazing pine, kindled from his; and thus, each pressing close on the light before him, the track would not be lost in the abrupt turns and windings.

He placed the coolest and most active in the rear, that they might pass lightly and skilfully over the snow roughened by the track of their leaders, and keep the line of lights, which was their only hope of safety, compact and unseparated.

What a change from the toilsome climbing which had wearied the most elastic limbs, and tried the most enduring spirit! They flew over the narrow slippery paths, now in a long straight arrow-course of fires, now lost and then emerging in the sharp turnings of the cliffs. The dangers of Naeroo, which makes even the natives shudder at the giddy narrow path and awful depths, were half unseen in the darkness, and all unfeared by these brave men, who darted exultingly through the keen, bracing night-breeze of the hills.

At every step the winding became more abrupt, and it seemed to his nearest follower, that even the guide looked anxious and afraid, when, almost coming close to him at a turning he saw, by the joining light of their torches, the countenance of Alf turned back towards the long line of flying stars, with a troubled and sorrowful look. To encourage him, he cried, in a bold and cheerful tone, 'No fear! no danger! On, brave Stavenger! The Sky-Leapers follow thee!' 'On!' shouted back the guide, with a cry that echoed through the whole band, and quickened their lightning speed. Their torches now flew along in one unbroken straight stream of fire, till a wild death-scream arose, marking the spot where light after light dropped in the dark silence. The depth was so terrible, that all sound of fall was unheard. But that cry reached the last of the sinking line, and their hearts died within them: there was no stopping their arrow flight—no turning aside without leaping into the sheer air.

Alf Stavenger shuddered at the death-leap of these brave men over the edge of the rock. His soul had been bound to them in their brief journeying together, and had they not come as his country invaders, he would have loved them as brothers for their frank courage. But Alf was at heart a true son of Norway. It is true he had resolved, in the desperation of his sorrow, to leave his fatherland for ever; still, when he saw this band coming to lay waste the valleys which he knew to be undefended, his anger was in a moment forgotten, and all

his hot Norse blood was stirred within him. He was detained, as we have seen, from crossing the hill to warn his countrymen; and he knew that when Jerl returned, he would be well able and willing to guide the Swedes over the pass. He soon planned his daring scheme. 'Ay,' thought he, while the waving train followed his leading torch, 'I told them that here they should earn the proud name of Sky-Leapers!—that here those who warred with Norway should brave their fate! I said that Skialm Harder would wish he had given me his fair daughter—that my name should be known over my land for a deed of fear and wonder! I promised they should sleep to-night on our side of the hills! Now will I well keep all that I have sworn. 'Tis a pity for them, too, so brave, so young, so unsuspecting; but two words have made my heart iron—Emlen and Norway.'

Alf well remembered one point, where a long straight path ended suddenly in a peak of rock, jutting far into the empty air. The road was continued round so sharp a re-entering angle, that much caution and nerve were needed, even by one well aware of all the danger, to wheel rapidly and steadily round the face of the abrupt precipice, and avoid shooting straight long over the ledge of rock. He fixed upon this spot for the death-leap; indeed the Swedes never could have passed it safely, without having before been fully warned of the peril, and afterwards cautioned at its approach.

When he looked back, as he led the line rapidly to their unseen and dreadful fate, he shuddered to think on what a death the brave and light hearted men who followed him were rushing. A word from the nearest follower roused him; he shouted to hasten their rapid flight, and darted boldly on, throwing his leading torch far over the point where they should have taken the sudden turn; but he had nearly fallen into the ruin of his followers. With the sounding speed of the flyers pressing hard upon his footsteps, all his nerve was barely sufficient, after flinging his blazing pine straight forward as a lure, to check his own course, and bear him round the point which severed life from death.

His speed was slackened by turning and for a second, he fell giddy and senseless; every nerve had been strung for the decisive moment, and his brain reeled with the struggle. He awakened to consciousness, to see the last of the line of torches dart into the empty space—then sink for ever; and he listened with a cold thrill of awe and terror to the echoes of the death-scream of the last of the Sky-Leapers.

From the Christian Treasury.

A VICTORY.

The joy-bells peal a merry tune

Along the evening air;

The crackling bonfires turn the sky

Ail crimson with their glare;

Bold music fills the startled streets

With mirth inspiring sound;

The gaping cannon's reddening breath

Wakes thunder shouts around;

And thousand joyful voices cry,

"Huzza! huzza! a victory!"

A little girl stood at the door,

And with her kitten played;

Less wild and frolicsome than she,

That rosy prattling maid

Sudden her cheek turns ghastly white;

Her eye with fear is filled,

And rushing in-of-doors, she screams,

"My brother Willie's killed!"

And thousand joyful voices cry,

"Huzza! huzza! a victory!"

A mother sat in thoughtful ease,

A-knitting by the fire,

Plying the needle's thrifty task

With hands that never tire.

She tore her few gray hairs, and shrieked,

"My joy on earth is done

O! who will lay me in my grave!

O God! my son, my son!"

And a thousand joyful voices cry,

"Huzza! huzza! a victory!"

A youthful wife the threshold crossed,

With matron's treasure blessed;

A smiling infant nestling lay

In slumber at her breast.

She spoke no word, she heaved no sigh,

The widow's tale to tell;

But, like a corpse, all white and stiff,

Upon the earth-floor fell;

And thousand joyful voices cry,

"Huzza! huzza! a victory!"

An old weak man, with head of snow,

And years threescore and ten.

Looked in upon his cabin home.

And anguish seized him then.

He help'd not wife, nor helpless babe,

Matron, nor little maid;

One scalding tear, one choking sob—

He knelt him down and prayed;

And thousand joyful voices cry,

"Huzza! huzza! a victory!"

From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.

THE MANTLE OF LOVE.

'I wish, mamma, that you would buy me a satin mantle like that which Caroline Morrison had on to-day,' exclaimed Emily Thornley, looking up anxiously into her mother's face as she spoke. 'Did you not remark how elegant it was, and how beautifully it was trimmed with gimp and fringe?' she added, finding her parent did not reply.

'To own the truth, I took no notice of Miss Morrison's dress, my thoughts were too much engrossed by the conversation I was holding with her mother,' Mrs Thornley made answer. 'Perhaps, Emily,' she continued a little reproachfully, 'you were so taken up with your admiration of the mantle, that you did not listen to it; was it so?' Emily blushed, and hung down her head. 'I feared as much,' the lady resumed. 'Now, my dear, I must say that I think you would have been better employed in listening to Mrs Morrison's account of the good effected by the Infant School she has opened for the poor of the village, than observing either the texture or the trimmings of a mantle.'

'Oh, now you remind me, mamma, I do remember all about it, but I was thinking just now much I should like to have such a mantle, and I forgot for the moment.'

'This is a proof that such frivolous things occupy your thoughts to the exclusion of subjects of utility.'

'No, mamma, one must think of one's dress sometimes; and you know that you were so kind as to say that you would take me with you to town to-morrow for the purpose of buying something of the kind for the autumn.'

'I did, my dear; and I do not intend to disappoint you of a suitable dress for the season; but you must remember that Mr Morrison is more wealthy than your papa, and can afford more expensive dress for his fair daughters.'

'Oh, I don't think Mr Morrison is very rich, mamma, though Caroline and Georgina always hold their heads up higher than any one else,' Emily interposed. 'Caroline would scarcely notice me to-day, because I was not so smart as she was, and so I should very much like to have such a mantle, if it were only to show her and her sister that you can afford to dress me as well as their papa and mamma can dress them.'

'That is an unworthy motive, Emily, and you certainly do not advance your own interest by such a plea,' Mrs Thornley observed. 'I was sorry to find that your thoughts were so much taken up by a trifle, that you could feel no interest in the benevolent cause which formed the subject of conversation, but I am still more grieved to discover that the wish to rival your friend was stronger than your admiration of the article in question.'

'Well, mamma, but everybody says how proud the Miss Morrisons are.'

'I never observed it; and I am of opinion that your everybody consists of some few envious girls, who, like yourself, Emily, have the desire, without the means of making a similar appearance.'

'Oh no; indeed I do assure you it is so, mamma.'

'Well, we will not dispute the matter, my dear, but I should much like to see you possessed of a mantle which would become you better than the one Miss Morrison had on to-day.'

'You mean something plainer and more durable, mamma?'

'I mean something more durable, Emily but one which would be at the same time more beautiful.'

The little girl looked astonished. 'What can be more beautiful than that figure satin?' she interrogated.

'The mantle I refer to,' the mother resumed, 'would make you appear more attractive than the richest satin could do, and it would at the same time afford you more pleasure than the ungenerous and unamiable gratification of competing with your friend. I allude to the mantle of Charity or Love.' Emily looked disconcerted. 'This mantle,' continued Mrs Thornley, 'would lead you to remark the estimable qualities of those around you, rather than their failings; and as it is much more gratifying to the feeling to contemplate that which excites our admiration, than those actions which arouse resentment or indignation, you would yourself be the gainer by it.'

'But we cannot avoid seeing people's faults when they are so very obvious,' Emily interposed.

'They may not be so obvious to one who is not pre-determined to observe them; of which a convincing proof has this morning been given. I saw not the slightest indication of pride in Miss Morrison's demeanour; but, on the contrary, observed with great pleasure the lively interest she evidently takes in the plans of benevolence her parents are executing. It is most probable that this circumstance was the real occasion of her seemingly distant manner towards yourself. Thus you see, my dear girl, I who was looking for her good qualities, readily discovered them; whilst you, having your thoughts full of envy, not only failed to see what was truth estimable, but committed an act of positive injustice, by putting an unfavourable construction on the motives which actuated her conduct. Now, which think you derived the most pleasures from Miss Morrison's presence—I who was admiring, or you who were condemning?'

Emily answered by a flood of penitential tears.