

BJØRNSTJERNE BJØRNSON

**ARNE; EARLY TALES
AND SKETCHES**

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson
Arne; Early Tales and Sketches

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Bjørnson B.

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Bjornstjerne Bjornson

Arne; Early Tales and Sketches Patriots Edition

ARNE

EARLY TALES AND SKETCHES WORKS OF

BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSEN PATRIOTS EDITION

PREFACE

"Arne" was written in 1858, one year later than "Synnöve Solbakken," and is thought by many to be Bjørnson's best story, though it is, in my opinion, surpassed in simplicity of style and delicate analysis of motives, feelings, and character by "A Happy Boy," his third long story, the translation of which is now in progress, and which will follow this volume.

Norway's most eminent composers have written music for many of Bjørnson's poems, and made them favorite songs, not only with the cultivated classes, but also with the common people. To the songs in "Arne" melodies were composed by Bjørnson's brilliant cousin, Rikard Nordraak, who died in 1865, only twenty-three years old, but who had already won a place as one of Norway's greatest composers.

With a view of popularizing these melodies in this country, all the poems have been given in precisely the same metre and rhyme as the original, and those caring to know how the tunes are supposed to have sounded on the lips of Arne are referred to "The Norway Music Album," edited by Auber Forestier and myself, and published by Oliver Ditson & Co. of Boston. In it will be found, together with the original and English words, Rikard Nordraak's music to the following five songs from "Arne": —

1. "Oh, my pet lamb, lift your head," from chapter v.
2. "It was such a pleasant, sunny day," from chapter viii.
3. "The tree's early leaf-buds were bursting their brown," from chapter xii.
4. "Oh how I wonder what I should see
Over the lofty mountains,"¹ from chapter xiv.
5. "He went in the forest the whole day long," from chapter xiv.

Mr. Bjørnson returned to Norway in May, 1881; he was welcomed with enthusiasm, and on the 17th of the same month, Norway's natal day, he delivered the oration at the dedication of the Wergeland Monument to a gathering of more than ten thousand people. His visit to America was a brilliant success. His addresses to his countrymen in America were chiefly on the constitutional struggle of Norway, on which subject an article by him will be found in the February (1881) issue of "Scribner's Monthly." As a souvenir of his pleasant sojourn among us, I will here attempt an English translation of the poem "Olaf Trygvason" with which he usually greeted his hearers at his lectures. It is one of his most popular songs.

Spreading sails o'er the North Sea speed;
High on deck stands at dawn, indeed,
Erling Skjalgson from Sole.
Spying o'er the sea towards Denmark:

¹ To this there will also be found in the Album a melody by Halfdan Kjerulf.

"Wherefore comes not Olaf Trygvason?"

Six and fifty the dragons are;
Sails are furled ... toward Denmark stare
Sun-scorched men ... then rises:
"Where stays the King's Long Serpent?
Wherefore comes not Olaf Trygvason?"

But when sun on the second day
Saw the watery, mastless way,
Like a great storm it sounded:
"Where stays the King's Long Serpent?
Wherefore comes not Olaf Trygvason?"

Quiet, quiet, in that same hour
Stood they all; for with endless power,
Groaning, the sea was splashing:
"Taken the King's Long Serpent!
Fallen is Olaf Trygvason!"

Thus for more than an hundred years
Sounds in every seaman's ears,
Chiefly in moon-lit watches:
"Taken the King's Long Serpent!
Fallen is Olaf Trygvason!"

The reader will not fail to be reminded by this song by Björnson of Longfellow's "Saga of King Olaf" (the Musician's Tale), in his "Tales of a Wayside Inn," and especially of those beautiful poems in this collection, "The Building of the Long Serpent," and "The Crew of the Long Serpent."

Hoping the translation of these stories and songs will enable the reader to appreciate in some degree the secret of Björnson's great popularity in the fair land that lies beneath the eternal snow and the unsetting sun, I now offer "Arne" to the American public.

RASMUS B. ANDERSON.

Asgard, Madison, Wis.,
August, 1881.

CHAPTER I

There was a deep gorge between two mountains; through this gorge a large, full stream flowed heavily over a rough and stony bottom. Both sides were high and steep, and so one side was bare; but close to its foot, and so near the stream that the latter sprinkled it with moisture every spring and autumn, stood a group of fresh-looking trees, gazing upward and onward, yet unable to advance this way or that.

"What if we should clothe the mountain?" said the juniper one day to the foreign oak, to which it stood nearer than all the others. The oak looked down to find out who it was that spoke, and then it looked up again without deigning a reply. The river rushed along so violently that it worked itself into a white foam; the north wind had forced its way through the gorge and shrieked in the clefts of the rocks; the naked mountain, with its great weight, hung heavily over and felt cold. "What if we should clothe the mountain?" said the juniper to the fir on the other side. "If anybody is to do it, I suppose it must be we," said the fir, taking hold of its beard and glancing toward the birch. "What do you think?" But the birch peered cautiously up at the mountain, which hung over it so threateningly that it seemed as if it could scarcely breathe. "Let us clothe it in God's name!" said the birch. And so, though there were but these three, they undertook to clothe the mountain. The juniper went first.

When they had gone a little way, they met the heather. The juniper seemed as though about to go past it. "Nay, take the heather along," said the fir. And the heather joined them. Soon it began to glide on before the juniper. "Catch hold of me," said the heather. The juniper did so, and where there was only a wee crevice, the heather thrust in a finger, and where it first had placed a finger, the juniper took hold with its whole hand. They crawled and crept along, the fir laboring on behind, the birch also. "This is well worth doing," said the birch.

But the mountain began to ponder on what manner of insignificant objects these might be that were clambering up over it. And after it had been considering the matter a few hundred years it sent a little brook down to inquire. It was yet in the time of the spring freshets, and the brook stole on until it reached the heather. "Dear, dear heather, cannot you let me pass; I am so small." The heather was very busy; only raised itself a little and pressed onward. In, under, and onward went the brook. "Dear, dear juniper, cannot you let me pass; I am so small." The juniper looked sharply at it; but if the heather had let it pass, why, in all reason, it must do so too. Under it and onward went the brook; and now came to the spot where the fir stood puffing on the hill-side. "Dear, dear fir, cannot you let me pass; I am really so small," said the brook, – and it kissed the fir's foot and made itself so very sweet. The fir became bashful at this, and let it pass. But the birch raised itself before the brook asked it. "Hi, hi, hi!" said the brook and grew. "Ha, ha, ha!" said the brook and grew. "Ho, ho, ho!" said the brook, and flung the heather and the juniper and the fir and the birch flat on their faces and backs, up and down these great hills. The mountain sat for many hundred years musing on whether it had not smiled a little that day.

It was plain enough: the mountain did not want to be clad. The heather fretted over this until it grew green again, and then it started forward. "Fresh courage!" said the heather.

The juniper had half raised itself to look at the heather, and continued to keep this position, until at length it stood upright. It scratched its head and set forth again, taking such a vigorous foothold that it seemed as though the mountain must feel it. "If you will not have me, then I will have you." The fir crooked its toes a little to find out whether they were whole, then lifted one foot, found it whole, then the other, which proved also to be whole, then both of them. It first investigated the ground it had been over, next where it had been lying, and finally where it should go. After this it began to wend its way slowly along, and acted just as though it had never fallen. The birch had become most wretchedly soiled, but now rose up and made itself tidy. Then they sped onward, faster and faster, upward and on either side, in sunshine and in rain. "What in the world can this be?" said the mountain,

all glittering with dew, as the summer sun shone down on it, – the birds sang, the wood-mouse piped, the hare hopped along, and the ermine hid itself and screamed.

Then the day came when the heather could peep with one eye over the edge of the mountain. "Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!" said the heather, and away it went. "Dear me! what is it the heather sees?" said the juniper, and moved on until it could peer up. "Oh dear, oh dear!" it shrieked, and was gone. "What is the matter with the juniper to-day?" said the fir, and took long strides onward in the heat of the sun. Soon it could raise itself on its toes and peep up. "Oh dear!" Branches and needles stood on end in wonderment. It worked its way forward, came up, and was gone. "What is it all the others see, and not I?" said the birch; and, lifting well its skirts, it tripped after. It stretched its whole head up at once. "Oh, – oh! – is not here a great forest of fir and heather, of juniper and birch, standing upon the table-land waiting for us?" said the birch; and its leaves quivered in the sunshine so that the dew trembled. "Aye, this is what it is to reach the goal!" said the juniper.

CHAPTER II

Up on the hill-top it was that Arne was born. His mother's name was Margit, and she was the only child at the houseman's place, – Kampen.² Once, in her eighteenth year, she stayed too long at a dance; her companions had left her, and so Margit thought that the way home would be just as long whether she waited until the dancing was over or not. And thus it happened that she kept her seat until the fiddler, known as Nils the tailor, suddenly laid aside his fiddle, as was his wont when drink took possession of him, let others troll the tune, seized the prettiest girl, moved his foot as evenly as the rhythm of a song, and with his boot-heel took the hat from the head of the tallest person present. "Ho!" said he. When Margit went home that evening, the moon-beams played on the snow with most wondrous beauty. After she had reached her bed-chamber she was moved to look out once more. She took off her boddice, but remained standing with it in her hand. Then she felt that she was cold, closed the door hastily, undressed, and nestled in under the robe. That night Margit dreamed about a great red cow that had wandered into the field. She went to drive it out, but though she tried hard, she could not stir from the spot; the cow stood calmly grazing there until it grew plump and well fed, and every now and then it looked at her, with large, heavy eyes.

The next time there was a dance in the parish Margit was present. She cared little for dancing that evening; she kept her seat to listen to the music, and it seemed strange to her that there were not others also who preferred this. But when the evening had worn on, the fiddler arose and wanted to dance. All at once he went directly to Margit Kampen. She scarcely knew what she was about, but she danced with Nils the tailor.

Soon the weather grew warm, and there was no more dancing. That spring Margit took such interest in a little lamb that had fallen ill, that her mother almost thought she was overdoing it.

"It is only a little lamb," said the mother.

"Yes, but it is ill," replied Margit.

It was some time since she had been to church; she wished to have her mother go, she said, and some one must be at home. One Sunday, later in the summer, the weather was so fine that the hay could well be left out for twenty-four hours, and the mother said that now they surely might both go. Margit could not reasonably object to this, and got ready for church; but when they were so far on their way that they could hear the church-bells, she burst into tears. The mother grew deathly pale; but they went on, the mother in advance, Margit following, listened to the sermon, joined in all the hymns to the very last, followed the prayer, and heard the bell ring before they left. But when they were seated in the family-room at home again, the mother took Margit's face between her hands and said: —

"Hide nothing from me, my child."

There came another winter when Margit did not dance. But Nils the tailor fiddled, took more strong drink than ever, and always, toward the close of the evening, swung the prettiest girl at the party. In those days, it was told as a certain fact that he could marry whom he pleased among the daughters of the first gard-owners in the parish; some added that Eli Böen herself had courted him for her daughter Birgit, who was madly in love with him.

But just at that time an infant of the houseman's daughter at Kampen was brought to baptism; it was christened Arne, and tailor Nils was spoken of as its father.

The evening of the same day Nils was at a large wedding; there he got drunk. He would not play, but danced all the time, and scarcely brooked having others on the floor. But when he crossed to Birgit Böen and asked her to dance, she declined. He gave a short laugh, turned on his heel, and caught hold of the first girl he encountered. She resisted. He looked down; it was a little dark maiden who had been sitting gazing fixedly at him, and who was now pale. Bowing lightly over her, he whispered, —

² The top of a hill is called in Norwegian "Kamp," and the houseman's place took its name from its situation.

"Will you not dance with *me*, Karen?"

She made no reply. He asked once more. Then she answered in a whisper, as he had asked, —
"That dance might go farther than I wished."

He drew slowly back, but once in the middle of the floor, he made a spring and danced the halling³ alone. No one else was dancing; the others stood looking on in silence.

Afterwards he went out in the barn, and there he lay down and wept. Margit kept at home with the little boy. She heard about Nils, how he went from dance to dance, and she looked at the child and wept, — looked at him again and was happy. The first thing she taught him was to say papa; but this she dared not do when the mother, or the grandmother, as she was henceforth called, chanced to be near. The result of this was that it was the grandmother whom the boy called papa. It cost Margit much to break him of this, and thus she fostered in him an early shrewdness. He was not very large before he knew that Nils the tailor was his father, and when he reached the age in which the romantic acquires a flavor, he became also aware what sort of a man tailor Nils was. The grandmother had strictly forbidden even the mention of his name; what she mainly strove for was to have the houseman's place, Kampen, become an independent gard, so that her daughter and her boy might be free from care. She availed herself of the gard-owner's poverty, effected the purchase of the place, paid off a portion of the money each year, and managed the business like a man, for she had been a widow for fourteen years. Kampen was a large place, and had been extended until now it fed four cows, sixteen sheep, and a horse in which she was half owner.

Nils the tailor meanwhile took to roving about the parish; his business had fallen off, partly because he felt less interest in it, partly also because he was not liked as before. He gave, therefore, more time to fiddling; this led oftener to drinking and thence to fighting and evil days. There were those who had heard him say he was unhappy.

Arne might have been about six years old, when one winter day he was frolicking in the bed, whose coverlet he had up for a sail, while he was steering with a ladle. The grandmother sat spinning in the room, absorbed in her own thoughts, and nodded occasionally as though she would make a fixed fact of something she was thinking about. The boy knew that he was unheeded, and he fell to singing, just as he had learned it, the rough, wild song about tailor Nils: —

"Unless 'twas only yesterday hither first you came,
You've surely heard already of Nils the tailor's fame.

"Unless 'twas but this morning you came among us first,
You've heard how he knocked over tall Johan Knutson Kirst.

"How, in his famous barn-fight with Ola Stor-Johann,
He said, 'Bring down your porridge when we two fight again.'

"That fighting fellow, Bugge, a famous man was he:
His name was known all over fjord and fell and sea.

"Now, choose the place, you tailor, where I shall knock you down,
And then I'll spit upon it, and there I'll lay your crown.'

"Ah, only come so near, I may catch your scent, my man,
Your bragging hurts nobody; don't dream it ever can.'

³ A popular dance in two-fourths time, described in this chapter.

"The first round was a poor one, and neither man could beat;
But both kept in their places, and steady on their feet.

"The second round, poor Bugge was beaten black and blue.
'Little Bugge, are you tired? It's going hard with you.'

"The third round, Bugge tumbled, and bleeding there he lay.
'Now, Bugge, where's your bragging?' 'Bad luck to me to-day!'"⁴

More the boy did not sing; but there were two other stanzas which his mother was not likely to have taught him: —

"Have you seen a tree cast its shadow on yesterday's snow?
Have you seen how Nils does his smiles on the girls bestow?

"Have you looked at Nils when to dance he just commences?
Come, my girl, you must go; it is too late, when you've lost your senses."

These two stanzas the grandmother knew, and they came all the more distinctly into her mind because they were not sung. She said nothing to the boy; but to the mother she said, "Teach the boy well about your own shame; do not forget the last verses."

Nils the tailor was so broken down by drink that he was no longer the man he had been, and some people thought his end could not be far distant.

It so happened that two American gentlemen were visiting in the parish, and having heard that a wedding was going on in the vicinity, wanted to attend it, that they might learn the customs of the country. Nils was playing there. They gave each a dollar to the fiddler, and asked for a halling; but no one would come forward to dance it, however much it was urged. Several begged Nils himself to dance. "He was best, after all," they said. He refused, but the request became still more urgent, and finally unanimous. This was what he wanted. He gave his fiddle to another player, took off his jacket and cap, and stepped smiling into the middle of the room. He was followed by the same eager attention as of old, and this gave him his old strength. The people crowded closely together, those who were farthest back climbing upon tables and benches. Some of the girls were perched up higher than all the rest, and foremost among these – a tall girl with sunny brown hair of a varying tint, with blue eyes deeply set beneath a strong forehead, a large mouth that often smiled, drawing a little to one side as it did so – was Birgit Böen. Nils saw her, as he glanced up at the beam. The music struck up, a deep silence followed, and he began. He dashed forward along the floor, his body inclining to one side, half aslant, keeping time to the fiddle. Crouching down, he balanced himself, now on one foot, now on the other, flung his legs crosswise under him, sprang up again, stood as though about to make a fling, and then moved on aslant as before. The fiddle was handled by skillful fingers, and more and more fire was thrown into the tune. Nils threw his head farther and farther back, and suddenly his boot-heel touched the beam, sending the dust from the ceiling in showers over them all. The people laughed and shouted about him; the girls stood well-nigh breathless. The tune hurraed with the rest, stimulating him anew with more and more strongly-marked accents, nor did he resist the exciting influences. He bent forward, hopped along in time to the music, made ready apparently for a fling, but only as a hoax, and then moved on, his body aslant as before; and when he seemed the least prepared for it, his boot-heel thundered against the beam again and again, whereupon he turned summersaults forwards and backwards in the air, landing each time erect on his feet. He broke

⁴ Translated by Augusta Plesner and S. Rugeley-Powers.

off abruptly, and the tune, running through some wild variations, worked its way down to a deep tone in the bass, where it quivered and vibrated, and died away with a long-drawn stroke of the bow. The crowd dispersed, and loud, eager conversation, mingled with shouts and exclamations, broke the silence. Nils stood leaning against the wall, and the American gentlemen went over to him, with their interpreter, and each gave him five dollars.

The Americans talked a little with the interpreter, whereupon the latter asked Nils if he would go with them as their servant; he should have whatever wages he wanted. "Whither?" asked Nils. The people crowded about them as closely as possible. "Out into the world," was the reply. "When?" asked Nils, and looking around with a shining face, he caught Birgit Böen's eyes, and did not let them go again. "In a week, when we come back here," was the answer. "It is possible I will be ready," replied Nils, weighing his two five-dollar pieces. He had rested one arm on the shoulder of a man standing near him, and it trembled so that the man wanted to help him to the bench.

"It is nothing," replied Nils, made some wavering steps across the floor, then some firm ones, and, turning, asked for a spring-dance.⁵

All the girls had come to the front. Casting a long, lingering look about him, he went straightway to one of them in a dark skirt; it was Birgit Böen. He held out his hand, and she gave him both of hers; then he laughed, drew back, caught hold of the girl beside her, and danced away with perfect abandon. The blood coursed up in Birgit's neck and face. A tall man, with a mild countenance, was standing directly behind her; he took her by the hand and danced off after Nils. The latter saw this, and – it might have been only through heedlessness – he danced so hard against them that the man and Birgit were sent reeling over and fell heavily on the floor. Shouting and laughter arose about them. Birgit got up at last, went aside, and wept bitterly.

The man with the mild face rose more slowly and went straight over to Nils, who was still dancing. "You had better stop a little," said the man. Nils did not hear, and then the man took him by the arm. Nils tore himself away and looked at him. "I do not know you," said he, with a smile. "No; but you shall learn to know me," said the man with the mild face, and with this he struck Nils a blow over one eye. Nils, who was wholly unprepared for this, was plunged heavily across the sharp-edged hearth-stone, and when he promptly tried to rise, he found that he could not; his back was broken.

At Kampen a change had taken place. The grandmother had been growing very feeble of late, and when she realized this she strove harder than ever to save money enough to pay off the last installment on the gard. "Then you and the boy will have all you need," she said to her daughter. "And if you let any one come in and waste it for you, I will turn in my grave." During the autumn, too, she had the pleasure of being able to stroll up to the former head-gard with the last remaining portion of the debt, and happy was she when she had taken her seat again, and could say, "Now that is done!" But at that very time she was attacked by her last illness; she betook herself forthwith to her bed, and never rose again. Her daughter buried her in a vacant spot in the churchyard, and placed over her a handsome cross, whereon was inscribed her name and age, with a verse from one of Kingo's⁶ hymns. A fortnight after the grandmother was laid in her grave, her Sunday gown was made over into clothes for the boy, and when he put them on, he became as solemn as though he were his grandmother come back again. Of his own accord, he went to the book with big print and large clasps she had read and sung from every Sunday, opened it, and there inside found her spectacles. These the boy had never been permitted to touch during his grandmother's lifetime; now he timidly took them up, put them on his nose, and looked through them into the book. All was misty. "How strange," thought the boy, "it was through them grandmother could read the word of God." He held them high up toward the light to see what the matter was, and – the spectacles lay on the floor.

⁵ A popular dance, in three-fourths time.

⁶ A Dane, the most noted psalmist of Scandinavia.

He was much alarmed, and when the door at that moment opened, it seemed to him as though his grandmother must be coming in, but it was his mother, and behind her, six men, who, with much tramping and noise, were bearing in a litter, which they placed in the middle of the floor. For a long time the door was left open, so that it grew cold in the room.

On the litter lay a man with dark hair and pale face; the mother moved about weeping. "Lay him carefully on the bed," she begged, herself lending a helping hand. But while the men were moving with him, something made a noise under their feet. "Oh, it is only grandmother's spectacles," thought the boy, but he did not say so.

CHAPTER III

It was in the autumn, as before stated. A week after Nils the tailor was borne into Margit Kampen's home, there came word to him from the Americans that he must hold himself in readiness to start. He lay just then writhing under a terrible attack of pain, and, gnashing his teeth, he shrieked, "Let them go to hell!" Margit stood motionless, as though he had made no answer. He noticed this, and presently he repeated slowly and feebly, "Let them – go."

As the winter advanced, he improved so much that he was able to sit up, although his health was shattered for life. The first time he actually sat up, he took out his fiddle and tuned it, but became so agitated that he had to go to bed again. He grew very taciturn, but was not hard to get along with; and as time wore on, he taught the boy to read, and began to take work in at home. He never went out, and would not talk with those who dropped in to see him. At first Margit used to bring him the parish news; he was always gloomy afterwards, so she ceased to do so.

When spring had fairly set in, he and Margit would sit longer than usual talking together after the evening meal. The boy was then sent off to bed. Some time later in the spring their bans were published in church, after which they were quietly married.

He did his share of work in the fields now, and managed everything in a sensible, orderly way. Margit said to the boy, "There is both profit and pleasure in him. Now you must be obedient and good, that you may do your best for him."

Margit had remained tolerably stout through all her sorrow; she had a ruddy face and very large eyes, which looked all the larger because there was a ring round them. She had full lips, a round face, and looked healthy and strong, although she was not very strong. At this period of her life, she was looking better than ever; and she always sang when she was at work, as had ever been her wont.

One Sunday afternoon, father and son went out to see how the crops were thriving that year. Arne ran about his father, shooting with a bow and arrow. Nils had himself made them for the boy. Thus they passed on directly up toward the road leading past the church and parsonage, down to what was called the broad valley. Nils seated himself on a stone by the roadside and fell to dreaming; the boy shot into the road and sprang after his arrow, – it was in the direction of the church. "Not too far away!" said the father. While the boy was playing there, he paused, as though listening. "Father, I hear music!" The father listened too; they heard the sounds of fiddling, almost drowned at times by loud shouts and wild uproar; but above all rose the steady rumbling of cart-wheels and the clatter of horses' feet; it was a bridal procession, wending its way home from church. "Come here, boy," shouted the father, and Arne knew by the tones of the voice that he must make haste. The father had hurriedly risen and hidden behind a large tree. The boy hastened after him. "Not here, over there!" cried the father, and the boy stepped behind an alder-copse. Already the carts were winding round the birch-grove; they came at a wild speed, the horses were white with foam, drunken people were crying and shouting; father and son counted cart after cart, – there were in all fourteen. In the first sat two fiddlers, and the wedding march sounded merrily through the clear air, – a boy stood behind and drove. Afterwards came a crowned bride, who sat on a high seat and glittered in the sunshine; she smiled, and her mouth drew to one side; beside her sat a man clad in blue and with a mild face. The bridal train followed, the men sat on the women's laps; small boys were sitting behind, drunken men were driving, – there were six people to one horse; the man who presided at the feast came in the last cart, holding a keg of brandy on his lap. They passed by screaming and singing, and drove recklessly down the hill; the fiddling, the voices, the rattling of wheels, lingered behind them in the dust; the breeze bore up single shrieks, soon only a dull rumbling, and then nothing. Nils stood motionless; there was a rustling behind him, he turned; it was the boy who was creeping forward.

"Who was it, father?" But the boy started, for his father's face was dreadful. Arne stood motionless waiting for an answer; then he remained where he was because he got none. After some

time he became impatient and ventured again. "Shall we go?" Nils was still gazing after the bridal train, but he now controlled himself and started on. Arne followed after. He put an arrow into the bow, shot it, and ran. "Do not trample down the grass," said Nils gruffly. The boy let the arrow lie and came back. After a while he had forgotten this, and once when his father paused, he lay down and turned summersaults. "Do not trample down the grass, I say." Here Arne was seized by one arm, and lifted by it with such violence that it was almost put out of joint. Afterward, he walked quietly behind.

At the door Margit awaited them; she had just come in from the stable, where she had evidently had pretty hard work, for her hair was tumbled, her linen soiled, her dress likewise, but she stood in the door smiling. "A couple of the cows got loose and have been into mischief; now they are tied again."

"You might make yourself a little tidy on Sunday," said Nils, as he went past into the house.

"Yes, there is some sense in tidying up now that the work is done," said Margit, and followed him. She began to fix herself at once, and sang while she was doing so. Now Margit sang well, but sometimes there was a little huskiness in her voice.

"Stop that screaming," said Nils; he had thrown himself on his back across the bed. Margit stopped.

Then the boy came storming in. "There has come into the yard a great black dog, a dreadful looking" —

"Hold your tongue, boy," said Nils from the bed, and thrust out one foot to stamp on the floor with it. "A devilish noise that boy is always making," he muttered afterward, and drew his foot up again.

The mother held up a warning finger to the boy. "You surely must see that father is not in a good humor," she meant. "Will you not have some strong coffee with syrup in it?" said she; she wanted to put him in a good humor again. This was a drink the grandmother had liked, and the rest of them too. Nils did not like it at all, but had drunk it because the others did so. "Will you not have some strong coffee with syrup in it?" repeated Margit; for he had made no reply the first time. Nils raised himself up on both elbows and shrieked, "Do you think I will pour down such slops?"

Margit was struck with surprise, and, taking the boy with her, went out.

They had a number of things to attend to outside, and did not come in before supper-time. Then Nils was gone. Arne was sent out into the field to call him, but found him nowhere. They waited until the supper was nearly cold, then ate, and still Nils had not come. Margit became uneasy, sent the boy to bed, and sat down to wait. A little after midnight Nils appeared.

"Where have you been, dear?" asked she.

"That is none of your business," he answered, and slowly sat down on the bench.

He was drunk.

After this, Nils often went out in the parish, and always came home drunk. "I cannot stand it at home here with you," said he once when he came in. She tried gently to defend herself, and then he stamped on the floor and bade her be silent: if he was drunk, it was her fault; if he was wicked, it was her fault too; if he was a cripple and an unfortunate being for his whole life, why, she was to blame too, and that infernal boy of hers.

"Why were you always dangling after me?" said he, and wept. "What harm had I done you that you could not leave me in peace?"

"Lord have mercy on me!" said Margit. "Was it I who went after you?"

"Yes, it was!" he shrieked as he arose, and amid tears he continued: "You have succeeded in getting what you wanted. I drag myself about from tree to tree. I go every day and look at my own grave. But I could have lived in splendor with the finest gard girl in the parish. I might have traveled as far as the sun goes, had not you and your damned boy put yourselves in my way."

She tried again to defend herself. "It was, at all events, not the boy's fault."

"If you do not hold your tongue, I will strike you!" — and he struck her.

After he had slept himself sober the next day, he was ashamed, and was especially kind to the boy. But soon he was drunk again, and then he struck the mother. At last he got to striking her almost every time he was drunk. The boy cried and lamented; then he struck him too. Sometimes his repentance was so deep that he felt compelled to leave the house. About this time his fondness for dancing revived. He began to go about fiddling as in former days, and took the boy with him to carry the fiddle-case. Thus Arne saw a great deal. The mother wept because he had to go along, but dared not say so to the father. "Hold faithfully to God, and learn nothing evil," she begged, and tenderly caressed her boy. But at the dances there was a great deal of diversion; at home with the mother there was none at all. Arne turned more and more from her and to the father; she saw this and was silent. At the dances Arne learned many songs, and he sang them at home to his father; this amused the latter, and now and then the boy could even get him to laugh. This was so flattering to Arne that he exerted himself to learn as many songs as possible; soon he noticed what kind the father liked best, and what it was that made him laugh. When there was not enough of this element in the songs he was singing, the boy added to it himself, and this early gave him practice in adapting words to music. It was chiefly lampoons and odious things about people who had risen to power and prosperity, that the father liked and the boy sang.

The mother finally concluded to take him with her to the stable of evenings; numerous were the pretexts he found to escape going, but when, nevertheless, she managed to take him with her, she talked kindly to him about God and good things, usually ending by taking him in her arms, and, amid blinding tears, begging him, entreating him not to become a bad man.

The mother taught the boy to read, and he was surprisingly quick at learning. The father was proud of this, and, especially when he was drunk, told Arne he had his head.

Soon the father fell into the habit, when drink got the better of him, of calling on Arne at dancing-parties to sing for the people. The boy always obeyed, singing song after song amid laughter and uproar; the applause pleased the son almost more than it did the father, and finally there was no end to the songs Arne could sing. Anxious mothers who heard this, went themselves to his mother and told her of it; their reason for so doing being that the character of these songs was not what it should be. The mother put her arms about her boy and forbade him, in the name of God and all that was sacred, to sing such songs, and now it seemed to Arne that everything he took delight in his mother opposed. For the first time he told his father what his mother had said. She had to suffer for this the next time the father was drunk; he held his peace until then. But no sooner had it become clear to the boy what he had done than in his soul he implored pardon of God and her; he could not bring himself to do so in spoken words. His mother was just as kind as ever to him, and this cut him to the quick.

Once, however, he forgot this. He had a faculty for mimicking people. Above all, he could talk and sing as others did. The mother came in one evening when Arne was entertaining his father with this, and it occurred to the father, after she had gone out, that the boy should imitate his mother's singing. Arne refused at first, but his father, who lay over on the bed and laughed until it shook, insisted finally that he should sing like his mother. She is gone, thought the boy, and cannot hear it, and he mimicked her singing as it sounded sometimes when she was hoarse and choked with tears. The father laughed until it seemed almost hideous to the boy, and he stopped of himself. Just then the mother came in from the kitchen; she looked long and hard at the boy, as she crossed the floor to a shelf after a milk-pan and turned to carry it out.

A burning heat ran through his whole body; she had heard it all. He sprang down from the table where he had been sitting, went out, cast himself on the ground, and it seemed as though he must bury himself out of sight. He could not rest, and got up feeling that he must go farther on. He went past the barn, and behind it sat the mother, sewing on a fine, new shirt, just for him. She had always been in the habit of singing a hymn over her work when she sat sewing, but now she was not singing. She was not weeping, either; she only sat and sewed. Arne could bear it no longer he flung himself

down in the grass directly in front of her, looked up at her, and wept and sobbed bitterly. The mother dropped her work and took his head between her hands.

"Poor Arne!" said she, and laid her own beside his. He did not try to say a word, but wept as he had never done before. "I knew you were good at heart," said the mother, and stroked down his hair.

"Mother, you must not say no to what I am going to ask for," was the first thing he could say.

"That you know I cannot do," answered she.

He tried to stop crying, and then stammered out, with his head still in her lap: "Mother, sing something for me."

"My dear, I cannot," said she, softly.

"Mother, sing something for me," begged the boy, "or I believe I will never be able to look at you again."

She stroked his hair, but was silent.

"Mother, sing, sing, I say! Sing," he begged, "or I will go so far away that I will never come home any more."

And while he, now fourteen in his fifteenth year as he was, lay there with his head in his mother's lap, she began to sing over him: —

"Father, stretch forth Thy mighty hand,
Thy Holy Spirit send yonder:
Bless Thou the child on the lonely strand,
Nor in its sports let it wander.
Slipp'ry the way, the water deep, —
Lord, in Thy arm but the darling keep,
Then through Thy mercy 't will never
Drown, but with Thee live forever.

"Missing her child, in disquiet sore,
Much for its safety fearing,
Often the mother calls from her door,
Never an answer hearing, —
Then comes the thought: where'er it be,
Blessed Lord, it is near to Thee;
Jesus will guide his brother
Home to the anxious mother."⁷

She sang several verses. Arne lay still: there descended upon him a blessed peace, and under its influence he felt a refreshing weariness. The last thing he distinctly heard was about Jesus: it bore him into the midst of a great light, and there it seemed as though twelve or thirteen were singing; but the mother's voice rose above them all. A lovelier voice he had never heard; he prayed that he might sing thus. It seemed to him that if he were to sing right softly he might do so; and now he sang softly, tried again softly, and still more softly, and then, rejoiced at the bliss that seemed almost dawning for him, he joined in with full voice, and the spell was broken. He awakened, looked about him, listened, but heard nothing, save the everlasting, mighty roar of the force, and the little creek that flowed past the barn, with its low and incessant murmuring. The mother was gone, — she had laid under his head the half-finished shirt and her jacket.

⁷ Auber Forestier's translation.

CHAPTER IV

When the time came to take the herds up into the woods, Arne wanted to tend them. His father objected; the boy had never tended cattle, and he was now in his fifteenth year. But he was so urgent that it was finally arranged as he wished; and the entire spring, summer, and autumn he was in the woods by himself the livelong day, only going home to sleep.

He took his books up there with him. He read and carved letters in the bark of the trees; he went about thinking, longing, and singing. When he came home in the evening his father was often drunk, and beat the mother, cursed her and the parish, and talked about how he might once have journeyed far away. Then the longing for travel entered the boy's mind too. There was no comfort at home, and the books opened other worlds to him; sometimes it seemed as though the air, too, wafted him far away over the lofty mountains.

So it happened about midsummer that he met Kristian, the captain's eldest son, who came with the servant boy to the woods after the horses, in order to get a ride home. He was a few years older than Arne, light-hearted and gay, unstable in all his thoughts, but nevertheless firm in his resolves. He spoke rapidly and in broken sentences, and usually about two things at once; rode horseback without a saddle, shot birds on the wing, went fly-fishing, and seemed to Arne the goal of his aspirations. He also had his head full of travel, and told Arne about foreign lands until everything about them was radiant. He discovered Arne's fondness for reading, and now carried up to him those books he had read himself. After Arne had finished reading these, Kristian brought him new ones; he sat there himself on Sundays, and taught Arne how to find his way in the geography and the map; and all summer and autumn Arne read until he grew pale and thin.

In the winter he was allowed to read at home; partly because he was to be confirmed the next year, partly because he always knew how to manage his father. He began to go to school; but there he took most comfort when he closed his eyes and fancied himself over his books at home; besides, there were no longer any companions for him among the peasant boys.

His father's ill-treatment of the mother increased with years, as did also his fondness for drink and his bodily suffering. And when Arne, notwithstanding this, had to sit and amuse him, in order to furnish the mother with an hour's peace, and then often talk of things he now, in his heart, despised, he felt growing within him a hatred for his father. This he hid far down in his heart, as he did his love for his mother. When he was with Kristian, their talk ran on great journeys and books; even to him he said nothing about how things were at home. But many times after these wide-ranging talks, when he was walking home alone, wondering what might now meet him there, he wept and prayed to God, in the starry heavens, to grant that he might soon be allowed to go away.

In the summer he and Kristian were confirmed. Directly afterward, the latter carried out his plan. His father had to let him go from home and become a sailor. He presented Arne with his books, promised to write often to him, – and went away.

Now Arne was alone.

About this time he was again filled with a desire to write songs. He no longer patched up old ones; he made new ones, and wove into them all that grieved him most.

But his heart grew too heavy, and his sorrow broke forth in his songs. He now lay through long, sleepless nights, brooding, until he felt sure that he could bear this no longer, but must journey far away, seek Kristian, and not say a word about it to any one. He thought of his mother, and what would become of her, – and he could scarcely look her in the face.

He sat up late one evening reading. When his heart became too gloomy, he took refuge in his books, and did not perceive that they increased the venom. His father was at a wedding, but was expected home that evening; his mother was tired, and dreaded her husband's return; had therefore

gone to bed. Arne started up at the sound of a heavy fall in the passage and the rattling of something hard, which struck against the door. It was his father who had come home.

Arne opened the door and looked at him.

"Is that you, my clever boy? Come and help your father up!"

He was raised up and helped in toward the bench. Arne took up the fiddle-case, carried it in, and closed the door.

"Yes, look at me, you clever boy. I am not handsome now; this is no longer tailor Nils. This I say – to you, that you – never shall drink brandy; it is – the world and the flesh and the devil – He resisteth the proud but giveth grace unto the humble. – Ah, woe, woe is me! – How far it has gone with me!"

He sat still a while, then he sang, weeping, —

"Merciful Lord, I come to Thee;
Help, if there can be help for me;
Though by the mire of sin defiled,
I'm still thine own dear ransomed child."⁸

"Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only" – He flung himself down, hid his face in his hands, and sobbed convulsively. Long he lay thus, and then he repeated word for word from the Bible, as he had learned it probably more than twenty years before: "Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, Lord, help me! But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table!"

He was silent now, and dissolved in a flood of tears.

The mother had awakened long since, but had not dared raise her eyes, now that her husband was weeping like one who is saved; she leaned on her elbows and looked up.

But scarcely had Nils descried her, than he shrieked out: "Are you staring at me; you, too? – you want to see, I suppose, what you have brought me to. Aye, this is the way I look, exactly so!" He rose up, and she hid herself under the robe. "No, do not hide, I will find you easily enough," said he, extending his right hand, and groping his way along with outstretched forefinger. "Tickle, tickle!" said he, as he drew off the covers and placed his finger on her throat.

"Father!" said Arne.

"Oh dear! how shriveled up and thin you have grown. There is not much flesh here. Tickle, tickle."

The mother convulsively seized his hand with both of hers, but could not free herself, and so rolled herself into a ball.

"Father!" said Arne.

"So life has come into you now. How she writhes, the fright! Tickle, tickle!"

"Father!" said Arne. The room seemed to swim about him.

"Tickle, I say!"

She let go his hands and gave up.

"Father!" shouted Arne. He sprang to the corner, where stood an axe.

"It is only from obstinacy that you do not scream. You had better not do so either; I have taken such a frightful fancy. Tickle, tickle!"

"Father!" shrieked Arne, seizing the axe, but remained standing as though nailed to the spot, for at that moment the father drew himself up, gave a piercing cry, clutched at his breast, and fell over. "Jesus Christ!" said he, and lay quite still.

⁸ Translated by Augusta Plesner and S. Rugeley-Powers.

Arne knew not where he stood or what he stood over; he waited, as it were, for the room to burst asunder, and for a strong light to break in somewhere. The mother began to draw her breath heavily, as though she were rolling off some great weight. She finally half rose, and saw the father lying stretched out on the floor, the son standing beside him with an axe.

"Merciful Lord, what have you done?" she shrieked, and started up out of bed, threw her skirt about her, and came nearer; then Arne felt as if his tongue were unloosed.

"He fell down himself," said he.

"Arne, Arne, I do not believe you," cried the mother, in a loud, rebuking tone. "Now Jesus be with you!" and she flung herself over the corpse, with piteous lamentation.

Now the boy came out of his stupor, and dropping down on his knees, exclaimed, "As surely as I look for mercy from God, he fell as he stood there."

"Then our Lord himself has been here," said she, quietly; and, sitting on the floor, she fixed her eyes on the corpse.

Nils lay precisely as he fell, stiff, with open eyes and mouth. His hands had drawn near together, as though he had tried to clasp them, but had been unable to do so.

"Take hold of your father, you are so strong, and help me lay him on the bed."

And they took hold of him and laid him on the bed. Margit closed his eyes and mouth, stretched him out and folded his hands.

Mother and son stood and looked at him. All they had experienced until then neither seemed so long nor contained so much as this moment. If the devil himself had been there, the Lord had been there also; the encounter had been short. All the past was now settled.

It was a little after midnight, and they had to be there with the dead man until day dawned. Arne crossed the floor, and made a great fire on the hearth, the mother sat down by it. And now, as she sat there, it rushed through her mind how many evil days she had had with Nils; and then she thanked God, in a loud, fervent prayer, for what He had done. "But I have truly had some good days also," said she, and wept as though she regretted her recent thankfulness; and it ended in her taking the greatest blame on herself who had acted contrary to God's commandment, out of love for the departed one, had been disobedient to her mother, and therefore had been punished through this sinful love.

Arne sat down directly opposite her. The mother's eyes were fixed on the bed.

"Arne, you must remember that it was for your sake I bore it all," and she wept, yearning for a loving word in order to gain a support against her own self-accusations, and comfort for all coming time. The boy trembled and could not answer. "You must never leave me," sobbed she.

Then it came suddenly to his mind what she had been, in all this time of sorrow, and how boundless would be her desolation should he, as a reward for her great fidelity, forsake her now.

"Never, never!" he whispered, longing to go to her, yet unable to do so.

They kept their seats, but their tears flowed freely together. She prayed aloud, now for the dead man, now for herself and her boy; and thus, amid prayers and tears, the time passed. Finally she said: —

"Arne, you have such a fine voice, you must sit over by the bed and sing for your father."

And it seemed as though strength was forthwith given him to do so. He got up, and went to fetch a hymn-book, then lit a torch, and with the torch in one hand, the hymn-book in the other, he sat down at the head of the bed and, in a clear voice, sang Kingo's one hundred and twenty-seventh hymn: —

"Turn from us, gracious Lord, thy dire displeasure!
Let not thy bloody rod, beyond all measure,
Chasten thy children, laden with sore oppressions,
For our transgressions."⁹

⁹ Auber Forestier's translation.

CHAPTER V

Arne became habitually silent and shy. He tended cattle and made songs. He passed his nineteenth birthday, and still he kept on tending cattle. He borrowed books from the priest and read; but he took interest in nothing else.

The priest sent word to him one day that he had better become a school-master, "because the parish ought to derive benefit from your talents and knowledge." Arne made no reply to this; but the next day, while driving the sheep before him, he made the following song: —

"Oh, my pet lamb, lift your head,
Though the stoniest path you tread,
Over the mountains lonely,
Still your bells follow only.

"Oh, my pet lamb, walk with care,
Lest you spoil all your wool beware,
Mother must soon be sewing
Skins for the summer's going.

"Oh, my pet lamb, try to grow
Fat and fine wheresoe'er you go!
Know you not, little sweeting,
A spring lamb is dainty eating!"¹⁰

One day in his twentieth year Arne chanced to overhear a conversation between his mother and the wife of the former gard owner; they were disputing about the horse they owned in common.

"I must wait to hear what Arne says," remarked the mother.

"That lazy fellow!" was the reply. "He would like, I dare say, to have the horse go ranging about the woods as he does himself."

The mother was now silent, although before she had been arguing her own case well.

Arne turned as red as fire. It had not occurred to him before that his mother might have to listen to taunting words for his sake, and yet perhaps she had often been obliged to do so. Why had she not told him of this?

He considered the matter well, and now it struck him that his mother scarcely ever talked with him. But neither did he talk with her. With whom did he talk, after all?

Often on Sunday, when he sat quietly at home, he felt a desire to read sermons to his mother, whose eyes were poor; she had wept too much in her day. But he did not have the courage to do so. Many times he had wanted to offer to read aloud to her from his own books, when all was still in the house, and he thought the time must hang heavily on her hands. But his courage failed him for this too.

"It cannot matter much. I must give up tending the herds, and move down to mother."

He let several days pass, and became firm in his resolve. Then he drove the cattle far around in the wood, and made the following song: —

"The vale is full of trouble, but here sweet Peace may reign;
Within this quiet forest no bailiffs may distract;
None fight, as in the vale, in the Blessed Church's name,

¹⁰ Adapted to the metre of the original from the translation of Augusta Plesner and S. Rugeley-Powers.

Yet if a church were here, it would no doubt be just the same.

"How peaceful is the forest: – true, the hawk is far from kind,
I fear he now is striving the plumpest sparrow to find;
I fear yon eagle's coming to rob the kid of breath,
And yet perchance if long it lived, it might be tired to death.

"The woodman fells one tree, and another rots away,
The red fox killed the lambkin white at sunset yesterday;
The wolf, though, killed the fox, and the wolf itself must die,
For Arne shot him down to-day before the dew was dry.

"I'll hie me to the valley back – the forest is as bad;
And I must see to take good heed, lest thinking drive me mad.
I saw a boy in my dreams, though where I cannot tell —
But I know he had killed his father – I think it was in Hell."¹¹

He came home and told his mother that she might send out in the parish after another herd-boy; he wanted to manage the gard himself. Thus it was arranged; but the mother was always after him with warnings not to overtax himself with work. She used also to prepare such good meals for him at this time that he often felt ashamed; but he said nothing.

He was working at a song, the refrain of which was "Over the lofty mountains." He never succeeded in finishing it, and this was chiefly because he wanted to have the refrain in every other line; finally he gave it up.

But many of the songs he made got out among the people, where they were well liked; there were those who wished very much to talk with him, especially as they had known him from boyhood up. But Arne was shy of all whom he did not know, and thought ill of them, chiefly because he believed they thought ill of him.

His constant companion in the fields was a middle-aged man, called Upland Knut, who had a habit of singing over his work; but he always sang the same song. After listening to this for a few months, Arne was moved to ask him if he did not know any others.

"No," was the man's reply.

Then after the lapse of several days, once when Knut was singing his song, Arne asked:

"How did you chance to learn this *one*?"

"Oh, it just happened so," said the man.

Arne went straight from him into the house; but there sat his mother weeping, a sight he had not seen since his father's death. He pretended not to notice her, and went toward the door again; but he felt his mother looking sorrowfully after him again and he had to stop.

"What are you crying for, mother?"

For a while his words were the only sound in the room, and therefore they came back to him again and again, so often that he felt they had not been said gently enough. He asked once more: —

"What are you crying for?"

"Oh, I am sure I do not know;" but now she wept harder than ever.

He waited a long time, then was forced to say, as courageously as he could: —

"There must be something you are crying about!"

Again there was silence. He felt very guilty, although *she* had said nothing, and *he* knew nothing.

¹¹ Adapted to the metre of the original, from the translation of Augusta Plesner and S. Rugeley-Powers.

"It just happened so," said the mother. Presently she added, "I am after all most fortunate," and then she wept.

But Arne hastened out, and he felt drawn toward the Kamp gorge. He sat down to look into it, and while he was sitting there, he too wept. "If I only knew what I was crying for," mused Arne.

Above him, in the new-plowed field, Upland Knut was singing his song: —

"Ingerid Sletten of Willow-pool
Had no costly trinkets to wear;
But a cap she had that was far more fair,
Although it was only of wool.

"It had no trimming, and now was old,
But her mother who long had gone
Had given it her, and so it shone
To Ingerid more than gold.

"For twenty years she laid it aside,
That it might not be worn away;
'My cap I'll wear on that blissful day
When I shall become a bride.'

"For thirty years she laid it aside
Lest the colors might fade away.
'My cap I'll wear when to God I pray
A happy and grateful bride.'

"For forty years she laid it aside,
Still holding her mother as dear;
'My little cap, I certainly fear
I never shall be a bride.'

"She went to look for the cap one day
In the chest where it long had lain;
But ah! her looking was all in vain, —
The cap had moldered away."¹²

Arne sat and listened as though the words had been music far away up the slope. He went up to Knut.

"Have you a mother?" asked he.

"No."

"Have you a father?"

"Oh, no; I have no father."

"Is it long since they died?"

"Oh, yes; it is long since."

"You have not many, I dare say, who care for you?"

"Oh, no; not many."

"Have you any one here?"

¹² Translated by Augusta Plesner and S. Rugeley-Powers.

"No, not here."

"But yonder in your native parish?"

"Oh, no; not there either."

"Have you not any one at all who cares for you?"

"Oh, no; I have not."

But Arne went from him loving his own mother so intensely that it seemed as though his heart would break; and he felt, as it were, a blissful light over him. "Thou Heavenly Father," thought he, "Thou hast given her to me, and such unspeakable love with the gift, and I put this away from me; and one day when I want it, she will be perhaps no more!" He felt a desire to go to her, if for nothing else only to look at her. But on the way, it suddenly occurred to him: "Perhaps because you did not appreciate her you may soon have to endure the grief of losing her!" He stood still at once. "Almighty God! what then would become of me?"

He felt as though some calamity must be happening at home. He hastened toward the house; cold sweat stood on his brow; his feet scarcely touched the ground. He tore open the passage door, but within the whole atmosphere was at once filled with peace. He softly opened the door into the family-room. The mother had gone to bed, the moon shone full in her face, and she lay sleeping calmly as a child.

CHAPTER VI

Some days after this, mother and son, who of late had been more together, agreed to be present at the wedding of some relatives at a neighboring gard. The mother had not been to any party since she was a girl.

They knew few people at the wedding, save by name, and Arne thought it especially strange that everybody stared at him wherever he went.

Once some words were spoken behind him in the passage; he was not sure, but he fancied he understood them, and every drop of blood rushed into his face whenever he thought of them.

He could not keep his eyes off the man who had spoken these words; finally, he took a seat beside him. But as he drew up to the table he thought the conversation took another turn.

"Well, now I am going to tell you a story, which proves that nothing can be buried so deep down in night that it will not find its way into daylight," said the man, and Arne was sure he looked at *him*. He was an ill-favored man, with thin, red hair encircling a great, round brow. Beneath were a pair of very small eyes and a little bottle-shaped nose; but the mouth was very large, with very pale, out-turned lips. When he laughed, he showed his gums. His hands lay on the table: they were clumsy and coarse, but the wrists were slender. He looked sharp and talked fast, but with much effort. People nicknamed him the Rattle-tongue, and Arne knew that tailor Nils had dealt roughly with him in the old days.

"Yes, there is a great deal of wickedness in this world; it comes nearer home to us than we think. But no matter; you shall hear now of an ugly deed. Those who are old remember Alf, Scrip Alf. 'Sure to come back!' said Alf; that saying comes from him; for when he had struck a bargain – and he could trade, that fellow! – he flung his scrip on his back. 'Sure to come back,' said Alf. A devilish good fellow, fine fellow, splendid fellow, this Alf, Scrip Alf!

"Well, there was Alf and Big Lazy-bones – aye, you knew Big Lazy-bones? – he was big and he was lazy too. He looked too long at a shining black horse Scrip Alf drove and had trained to spring like a summer frog. And before Big Lazy-bones knew what he was about, he had given fifty dollars for the nag Big Lazy-bones mounted a carriole,¹³ as large as life, to drive like a king with his fifty-dollar horse; but now he might lash and swear until the gard was all in a smoke; the horse ran, for all that, against all the doors and walls that were in the way; he was stone blind.

"Afterwards, Alf and Big Lazy-bones fell to quarreling about this horse all through the parish, just like a couple of dogs. Big Lazy-bones wanted his money back; but you may believe he never got so much as two Danish shillings. Scrip Alf thrashed him until the hair flew. 'Sure to come back,' said Alf. Devilish good fellow, fine fellow, splendid fellow, this Alf – Scrip Alf.

"Well, then, some years passed by without his being heard of again.

"It might have been ten years later that he was published on the church hill;¹⁴ there had been left to him a tremendous fortune. Big Lazy-bones was standing by. 'I knew very well,' said he, 'that it was money that was crying for Scrip Alf, and not people.'

"Now there was a great deal of gossip about Alf; and out of it all was gathered that he had been seen last on this side of Rören, and not on the other. Yes, you remember the Rören road – the old road?

"But Big Lazy-bones had succeeded in rising to great power and splendor, owning both farm and complete outfit.

"Moreover, he had professed great piety, and everybody knew he did not become pious for nothing – any more than other folks do. People began to talk about it.

¹³ A kind of road-sulky used by travelers in Norway.

¹⁴ Important announcements are made to the people in front of the church after service.

"It was at this time that the Rören road was to be changed, old-time folks wanted to go straight ahead, and so it went directly over Rören; but we like things level, and so the road now runs down by the river. There was a mining and a blasting, until one might have expected Rören to come tumbling down. All sorts of officials came there, but the amtmand¹⁵ oftenest of all, for he was allowed double mileage. And now, one day while they were digging down among the rocks, some one went to pick up a stone, but got hold of a hand that was sticking out of the rocks, and so strong was this hand that it sent the man who took hold of it reeling backwards. Now he who found this hand was Big Lazy-bones. The lensmand¹⁶ was sauntering about there, he was called, and the skeleton of a whole man was dug out. The doctor was sent for too; he put the bones so skillfully together that now only the flesh was wanting. But people claimed that this skeleton was precisely the same size as Scrip Alf. 'Sure to come back!' said Alf.

"Every one thought it most strange that a dead hand could upset a fellow like Big Lazy-bones, even when it did not strike at all. The lensmand talked seriously to him about it, – of course when no one was by to hear. But then Big Lazy-bones swore until everything grew black about the lensmand.

"'Well, well,' said the lensmand, 'if you had nothing to do with this, you are just the fellow to go to bed with the skeleton to-night; hey?' 'To be sure I am,' replied Big Lazy-bones. And now the doctor jointed the bones firmly together, and placed the skeleton in one of the beds of the barracks. In the other Big Lazy-bones was to sleep, but the lensmand laid down in his gown, close up to the wall. When it grew dark and Big Lazy-bones had to go in to his bed-fellow, it just seemed as though the door shut of itself, and he stood in the dark. But Big Lazy-bones fell to singing hymns, for he had a strong voice. 'Why are you singing hymns?' asked the lensmand, outside of the wall. 'No one knows whether he has had the chorister,' answered Big Lazy-bones. Afterward he fell to praying with all his might. 'Why are you praying?' asked the lensmand, outside of the wall. 'He has no doubt been a great sinner,' answered Big Lazy-bones. Then for a long time all was still, and it really seemed as though the lensmand must be sleeping. Then there was a shriek that made the barracks shake. 'Sure to come back!' An infernal noise and uproar arose: 'Hand over those fifty dollars of mine!' bellowed Big Lazy-bones, and there followed a screaming and a wrestling; the lensmand flung open the door, people rushed in with sticks and stones, and there lay Big Lazy-bones in the middle of the floor, and on him was the skeleton."

It was very still around the table. Finally a man who was about to light his clay pipe, said: —

"He surely went mad after that day."

"He did."

Arne felt every one looking at him, and therefore he could not raise his eyes.

"It is, as I have said," put in the first speaker; "nothing can be buried so deep down in night that it will not find its way into daylight!"

"Well, now I will tell about a son who beat his own father," said a fair, heavily-built man, with a round face. Arne knew not where he was sitting.

"It was a bully of a powerful race, over in Hardanger; he was the ruin of many people. His father and he disagreed about the yearly allowance, and the result of this was that the man had no peace at home or in the parish.

"Owing to this he grew more and more wicked, and his father took him to task. 'I will take rebuke from no one,' said the son. 'From me you shall take it as long as I live,' said the father. 'If you do not hold your tongue I will beat you,' said the son, and sprang to his feet. 'Aye, do so if you dare, and you will never prosper in the world,' answered the father, as he too rose. 'Do you think so?' – and the son rushed at him and knocked him down. But the father did not resist; he crossed his arms and let his son do as he chose with him.

¹⁵ The chief magistrate of an amt or county.

¹⁶ Bailiff.

"The son beat him, seized hold of him and dragged him to the door. 'I will have peace in the house!' But when they came to the door, the father raised himself up. 'Not farther than to the door,' said he, 'for so far I dragged my own father.' The son paid no heed to this, but dragged his head across the threshold. 'Not farther than to the door, I say!' Here the old man flung his son down at his feet, and chastised him, just as though he were a child."

"That was badly done," said several.

"Did not strike his father, though," Arne thought some one said; but he was not sure of it.

"Now I shall tell *you* something," said Arne, rising up, as pale as death, not knowing what he was going to say. He only saw the words floating about him like great snow-flakes. "I will make a grasp at them hap-hazard!" and he began.

"A troll met a boy who was walking along a road crying. 'Of whom are you most afraid?' said the troll, 'of yourself, or of others?' But the boy was crying, because he had dreamed in the night that he had been forced to kill his wicked father, and so he answered, 'I am most afraid of myself.' 'Then be at peace with yourself, and never cry any more; for hereafter you shall only be at war with others.' And the troll went his way. But the first person the boy met laughed at him, and so the boy had to laugh back again. The next person he met struck him; the boy had to defend himself, and struck back. The third person he met tried to kill him, and so the boy had to take his life. Then everybody said hard things about him, and therefore he knew only hard things to say of everybody. They locked their cupboards and doors against him, so he had to steal his way to what he needed; he even had to steal his night's rest. Since they would not let him do anything good, he had to do something bad. Then the parish said, 'We must get rid of this boy; he is so bad'; and one fine day they put him out of the way. But the boy had not the least idea that he had done anything wicked, and so after death he came strolling right into the presence of the Lord. There on a bench sat the father he had not slain, and right opposite, on another bench, sat all those who had forced him to do wrong.

"Which bench are you afraid of?" asked the Lord, and the boy pointed to the long one.

"Sit down there, beside your father," said the Lord, and the boy turned to do so.

"Then the father fell from the bench, with a great gash in his neck. In his place there came one in the likeness of the boy, with repentant countenance and ghastly features; then another with drunken face and drooping form; still another with the face of a madman, with tattered clothes and with hideous laughter.

"Thus it might have been with you," said the Lord.

"Can that really be?" replied the boy, touching the hem of the Lord's garment.

"Then both benches fell down from heaven, and the boy stood beside the Lord again and laughed.

"Remember this when you awaken," said the Lord, and at that moment the boy awoke.

"Now the boy who dreamed thus is I, and they who tempted him by thinking him wicked are you. I no longer fear myself, but I am afraid of you. Do not stir up my evil passions, for it is doubtful whether I may get hold of the Lord's garment."

He rushed out, and the men looked at each other.

CHAPTER VII

It was the next day, in the barn of the same gard. Arne had been drunk for the first time in his life, was ill in consequence of it, and had been lying in the barn almost twenty-four hours. Now, turning over, he had propped himself up on his elbows, and thus talked with himself: —

"Everything I look at becomes cowardice. That I did not run away when I was a boy, was cowardice; that I listened to father rather than to mother, was cowardice; that I sang those wicked songs for him was cowardice; I became a herd-boy, that was from cowardice; — I took to reading — oh, yes! that was from cowardice, too; I wanted to hide away from myself. Even after I was grown up, I did not help mother against father — cowardice; that I did not that night — ugh! — cowardice! I should most likely have waited until *she* was killed. I could not stand it at home after that — cowardice; neither did I go my way — cowardice; I did nothing, I tended cattle — cowardice. To be sure, I had promised mother to stay with her; but I should actually have been cowardly enough to break the promise, had I not been afraid to mingle with people. For I am afraid of people chiefly because I believe they see how bad I am. And it is fear of people makes me speak ill of them — cursed cowardice! I make rhymes from cowardice. I dare not think in a straightforward manner about my own affairs, and so I turn to those of others — and that is to be a poet.

"I should have sat down and cried until the hills were turned into water, that is what I should have done; but instead I say: 'Hush, hush!' and set myself to rocking. And even my songs are cowardly; for were they courageous they would be better. I am afraid of strong thoughts; afraid of everything that is strong; if I do rise up to strength, it is in a frenzy, and frenzy is cowardice. I am more clever, more capable, better informed than I seem to be. I am better than my words; but through cowardice I dare not be what I am. Fy! I drank brandy from cowardice; I wanted to deaden the pain! Fy! it hurt. I drank, nevertheless; drank, nevertheless; drank my father's heart's blood, and yet I drank! The fact is, my cowardice is beyond all bounds; but the most cowardly thing of all is that I can sit here and say all this to myself.

"Kill myself? Pooh! For that I am too cowardly. And then I believe in God, — yes, I believe in God. I long to go to Him; but cowardice keeps me from Him. From so great a change a cowardly person winces. But what if I tried as well as I am able? Almighty God! What if I tried? I might find a cure that even my milksop nature could bear; for I have no bone in me any longer, nor gristle; only something fluid, slush... What if I tried, with good, mild books, — I am afraid of the strong ones, — with pleasant stories and legends, all such as are mild; and then a sermon every Sunday and a prayer every evening, and regular work, that religion may find fruitful soil; it cannot do so amid slothfulness. What if I tried, dear, gentle God of my childhood, — what if I tried?"

But some one opened the barn-door, and hurried across the floor, pale as death, although drops of sweat rolled down the face. It was Arne's mother. It was the second day she had been seeking for her son. She called his name but did not pause to listen; only called and rushed about, till he answered from the hay-mow, where he was lying. She gave a loud shriek, sprang to the mow more lightly than a boy, and threw herself upon him.

"Arne, Arne, are you here? So I have really found you. I have been looking for you since yesterday; I have searched the whole night! Poor, poor Arne! I saw they had wounded you. I wanted so much to talk with you and comfort you; but then I never dare talk with you! Arne, I saw you drink! O God Almighty! let me never see it again!"

It was long before she could say more. "Jesus have mercy on you, my child; I saw you drink! Suddenly you were gone, drunk and crushed with grief as you were, and I ran around to all the houses. I went far out in the field; I did not find you. I searched in every copse; I asked every one. I was *here*, too, but you did not answer me — Arne, Arne! I walked along the river; but it did not seem to be deep enough anywhere" — She pressed up close to him. "Then it came with such relief to my mind that

you might have gone home, and I am sure I was not more than a quarter of an hour getting over the road. I opened the door and looked in every room, and then first remembered that I myself had the key; you could not possibly have entered. Arne, last night I searched along the road on both sides; I dared not go to the Kamp gorge. I know not how I came here; no one helped me; but the Lord put it into my heart that you must be here!"

He tried to soothe her.

"Arne, indeed, you must never drink brandy again."

"No, you may be sure of that."

"They must have been very rough with you. Were they rough with you?"

"Oh, no; it was I who was *cowardly*." He laid stress on the word.

"I cannot exactly understand why they should be rough with you. What was it they did to you? You will never tell me anything," and she began to weep again.

"You never tell me anything, either," said Arne, gently.

"But you are most to blame, Arne. I got so into the habit of being silent in your father's day that you ought to have helped me a little on the way! My God! there are only two of us, and we have suffered so much together!"

"Let us see if we cannot do better," whispered Arne. "Next Sunday I will read the sermon to you."

"God bless you for that! Arne?"

"Yes?"

"I have something I ought to say to you."

"Say it, mother."

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