

JACOB AUGUST RIIS

HERO TALES OF THE FAR
NORTH

Jacob August Riis

Hero Tales of the Far North

«Public Domain»

Riis J.

Hero Tales of the Far North / J. Riis — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| FOREWORD | 5 |
| A KNIGHT ERRANT OF THE SEA | 6 |
| HANS EGEDE, THE APOSTLE TO GREENLAND | 13 |
| GUSTAV VASA, THE FATHER OF SWEDEN | 20 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 24 |

Jacob A. Riis

Hero Tales of the Far North

FOREWORD

When a man knocks at Uncle Sam's gate, craving admission to his house, we ask him how much money he brings, lest he become a hindrance instead of a help. If now we were to ask what he brings, not only in his pocket, but in his mind and in his heart, this stranger, what ideals he owns, what company he kept in the country he left that shaped his hopes and ambitions,—might it not, if the answer were right, be a help to a better mutual understanding between host and guest? For the *Mayflower* did not hold all who in this world have battled for freedom of home, of hope, and of conscience. The struggle is bigger than that. Every land has its George Washington, its Kosciusko, its William Tell, its Garibaldi, its Kossuth, if there is but one that has a Joan d'Arc. What we want to know of the man is: were its heroes his?

This book is an attempt to ask and to answer that question for my own people, in a very small and simple way, it is true, but perhaps abler pens with more leisure than mine may follow the trail it has blazed. I should like to see some Swede write of the heroes of his noble, chivalrous people, whom lack of space has made me slight here, though I count them with my own. I should like to hear the epic of United Italy, of proud and freedom-loving Hungary, the swan-song of unhappy Poland, chanted to young America again and again, to help us all understand that we are kin in the things that really count, and help us pull together as we must if we are to make the most of our common country.

These were my—our—heroes, then. Every lad of Northern blood, whose heart is in the right place, loves them. And he need make no excuses for any of them. Nor has he need of bartering them for the great of his new home; they go very well together. It is partly for his sake I have set their stories down here. All too quickly he lets go his grip on them, on the new shore. Let him keep them and cherish them with the memories of the motherland. The immigrant America wants and needs is he who brings the best of the old home to the new, not he who threw it overboard on the voyage. In the great melting-pot it will tell its story for the good of us all.

To those who wonder that I have left the Saga era of the North untouched, I would say that I have preferred to deal here only with downright historic figures. For valuable aid rendered in insuring accuracy I am indebted to the services of Dr. P.A. Rydberg, Dr. J. Emile Blomén, Gustaf V. Lindner, and Professor Joakim Reinhard. My thanks are due likewise to many friends, Danes by birth like myself, who have helped me with the illustrations.

J. A. R.

RICHMOND HILL,
June, 1910.

A KNIGHT ERRANT OF THE SEA

The Eighteenth Century broke upon a noisy family quarrel in the north of Europe. Charles the Twelfth of Sweden, the royal hotspur of all history, and Frederik of Denmark had fallen out. Like their people, they were first cousins, and therefore all the more bent on settling the old question which was the better man. After the fashion of the lion and the unicorn, they fought "all about the town," and, indeed, about every town that came in their way, now this and now that side having the best of it. On the sea, which was the more important because neither Swedes nor Danes could reach their fighting ground or keep up their armaments without command of the waterways, the victory rested finally with the Danes. And this was due almost wholly to one extraordinary figure, the like of which is scarce to be found in the annals of warfare, Peder Tordenskjold. Rising in ten brief years from the humblest place before the mast, a half-grown lad, to the rank of admiral, ennobled by his King and the idol of two nations, only to be assassinated on the "field of honor" at thirty, he seems the very incarnation of the stormy times of the Eleven Years' War, with which his sun rose and set; for the year in which peace was made also saw his death.

Peder Jansen Wessel was born on October 28, 1690, in the city of Trondhjem, Norway, which country in those days was united with Denmark under one king. His father was an alderman with eighteen children. Peder was the tenth of twelve wild boys. It is related that the father in sheer desperation once let make for him a pair of leathern breeches which he would not be able to tear. But the lad, not to be beaten so easily, sat on a grind-stone and had one of his school-fellows turn it till the seat was worn thin, a piece of bravado that probably cost him dear, for doubtless the exasperated father's stick found the attenuated spot.

Since he would have none of the school, his father had him apprenticed out to a tailor with the injunction not to spare the rod. But sitting cross-legged on a tailor's stool did not suit the lad, and he took it out of his master by snowballing him thoroughly one winter's day. Next a barber undertook to teach him his trade; but Peder ran away and was drifting about the streets when the King came to Norway. The boy saw the splendid uniforms and heard the story of the beautiful capital by the Öresund, with its palaces and great fighting ships. When the King departed, he was missing, and for a while there was peace in Trondhjem.

Down in Copenhagen the homeless lad was found wandering about by the King's chaplain, who, being himself a Norwegian, took him home and made him a household page. But the boy's wanderings had led him to the navy-yard, where he saw mid-shipmen of his own size at drill, and he could think of nothing else. When he should have been waiting at table he was down among the ships. For him there was ever but one way to any goal, the straight cut, and at fifteen he wrote to the King asking to be appointed a midshipman. "I am wearing away my life as a servant," he wrote. "I want to give it, and my blood, to the service of your Majesty, and I will serve you with all my might while I live!"

The navy had need of that kind of recruits, and the King saw to it that he was apprenticed at once. And that was the beginning of his strangely romantic career.

Three years he sailed before the mast and learned seamanship, while Charles was baiting the Muscovite and the North was resting on its arms. Then came Pultava and the Swedish King's crushing defeat. The storm-centre was transferred to the North again, and the war on the sea opened with a splendid deed, fit to appeal to any ardent young heart. At the battle in the Bay of Kjöge, the *Dannebrog*, commanded by Ivar Hvitfeldt, caught fire, and by its position exposed the Danish fleet to great danger. Hvitfeldt could do one of two things: save his own life and his men's by letting his ship drift before the wind and by his escape risking the rest of the fleet and losing the battle, or stay where he was to meet certain death. He chose the latter, anchored his vessel securely, and fought on until the ship was burned down to the water's edge and blew up with him and his five hundred men.

Ivar Hvitfeldt's name is forever immortal in the history of his country. A few years ago they raised the wreck of the *Dannebrog*, fitly called after the Danish flag, and made of its guns a monument that stands on Langelinie, the beautiful shore road of Copenhagen.

Fired by such deeds, young Wessel implored the King, before he had yet worn out his first midshipman's jacket, to give him command of a frigate. He compromised on a small privateer, the *Ormen*, but with it he did such execution in Swedish waters and earned such renown as a dauntless sailor and a bold scout whose information about the enemy was always first and best, that before spring they gave him a frigate with eighteen guns and the emphatic warning "not to engage any enemy when he was not clearly the stronger." He immediately brought in a Swedish cruiser, the *Alabama* of those days, that had been the terror of the sea. In a naval battle in the Baltic soon after, he engaged with his little frigate two of the enemy's line-of-battle ships that were trying to get away, and only when a third came to help them did he retreat, so battered that he had to seek port to make repairs. Accused of violating his orders, his answer was prompt: "I promised your Majesty to do my best, and I did." King Frederik IV, himself a young and spirited man, made him a captain, jumping him over fifty odd older lieutenants, and gave him leave to war on the enemy as he saw fit.

The immediate result was that the Governor of Göteborg, the enemy's chief seaport in the North Sea, put a price on his head. Captain Wessel heard of it and sent word into town that he was outside—to come and take him; but to hurry, for time was short. While waiting for a reply, he fell in with two Swedish men-of-war having in tow a Danish prize. That was not to be borne, and though they together mounted ninety-four guns to his eighteen, he fell upon them like a thunderbolt. They beat him off, but he returned for their prize. That time they nearly sank him with three broad-sides. However, he ran for the Norwegian coast and saved his ship. In his report of this affair he excuses himself for running away with the reflection that allowing himself to be sunk "would not rightly have benefited his Majesty's service."

However, the opportunity came to him swiftly of "rightly benefiting" the King's service. After the battle of Kolberger Heide, that had gone against the Swedes, he found them beaching their ships under cover of the night to prevent their falling into the hands of the victors. Wessel halted them with the threat that every man Jack in the fleet should be made to walk the plank, saved the ships, and took their admiral prisoner to his chief. When others slept, Wessel was abroad with his swift sailer. If wind and sea went against him, he knew how to turn his mishap to account. Driven in under the hostile shore once, he took the opportunity, as was his wont, to get the lay of the land and of the enemy. He learned quickly that in the harbor of Wesensö, not far away, a Swedish cutter was lying with a Danish prize. She carried eight guns and had a crew of thirty-six men; but though he had at the moment only eighteen sailors in his boat, he crept up the coast at once, slipped quietly in after sundown, and took ship and prize with a rush, killing and throwing overboard such as resisted. In Sweden mothers hushed their crying children with his dreaded name; on the sea they came near to thinking him a troll, so sudden and unexpected were his onsets. But there was no witchcraft about it. He sailed swiftly because he was a skilled sailor and because he missed no opportunity to have the bottom of his ship scraped and greased. And when on board, pistol and cutlass hung loose; for it was a time of war with a brave and relentless foe.

His reconnoitring expeditions he always headed himself, and sometimes he went alone. Thus, when getting ready to take Marstrand, a fortified seaport of great importance to Charles, he went ashore disguised as a fisherman and peddled fish through the town, even in the very castle itself, where he took notice, along with the position of the guns and the strength of the garrison, of the fact that the commandant had two pretty daughters. He was a sailor, sure enough. Once when ashore on such an expedition, he was surprised by a company of dragoons. His men escaped, but the dragoons cut off his way to the shore. As they rode at him, reaching out for his sword, he suddenly dashed among them, cut one down, and, diving through the surf, swam out to the boat, his sword between his teeth. Their bullets churned up the sea all about him, but he was not hit. He seemed to bear a

charmed life; in all his fights he was wounded but once. That was in the attack on the strongly fortified port of Strömstad, in which he was repulsed with a loss of 96 killed and 246 wounded, while the Swedish loss footed up over 1500, a fight which led straight to the most astonishing chapter in his whole career, of which more anon.

All Denmark and Norway presently rang with the stories of his exploits. They were always of the kind to appeal to the imagination, for in truth he was a very knight errant of the sea who fought for the love of it as well as of the flag, ardent patriot that he was. A brave and chivalrous foe he loved next to a loyal friend. Cowardice he loathed. Once when ordered to follow a retreating enemy with his frigate *Hvide Örnen* (the White Eagle) of thirty guns, he hugged her so close that in the darkness he ran his ship into the great Swedish man-of-war *Ösel* of sixty-four guns. The chance was too good to let pass. Seeing that the *Ösel's* lower gun-ports were closed, and reasoning from this that she had been struck in the water-line and badly damaged, he was for boarding her at once, but his men refused to follow him. In the delay the *Ösel* backed away. Captain Wessel gave chase, pelted her with shot, and called to her captain, whose name was *Söstjerna* (sea-star), to stop.

"Running away from a frigate, are you? Shame on you, coward and poltroon! Stay and fight like a man for your King and your flag!"

Seeing him edge yet farther away, he shouted in utter exasperation, "Your name shall be dog-star forever, not sea-star, if you don't stay."

"But all this," he wrote sadly to the King, "with much more which was worse, had no effect."

However, on his way back to join the fleet he ran across a convoy of ten merchant vessels, guarded by three of the enemy's line-of-battle ships. He made a feint at passing, but, suddenly turning, swooped down upon the biggest trader, ran out his boats, made fast, and towed it away from under the very noses of its protectors. It meant prize-money for his men, but their captain did not forget their craven conduct of the night, which had made him lose a bigger prize, and with the money they got a sound flogging.

The account of the duel between his first frigate, *Lövendahl's Galley*, of eighteen guns, and a Swede of twenty-eight guns reads like the doings of the old vikings, and indeed both commanders were likely descended straight from those arch fighters. Wessel certainly was. The other captain was an English officer, Bactman by name, who was on the way to deliver his ship, that had been bought in England, to the Swedes. They met in the North Sea and fell to fighting by noon of one day. The afternoon of the next saw them at it yet. Twice the crew of the Swedish frigate had thrown down their arms, refusing to fight any more. Vainly the vessel had tried to get away; the Dane hung to it like a leech. In the afternoon of the second day Wessel was informed that his powder had given out. He had a boat sent out with a herald, who presented to Captain Bactman his regrets that he had to quit for lack of powder, but would he come aboard and shake hands?

The Briton declined. Meanwhile the ships had drifted close enough to speak through the trumpet, and Captain Wessel shouted over from his quarter-deck that "if he could lend him a little powder, they might still go on." Captain Bactman smilingly shook his head, and then the two drank to one another's health, each on his own quarter-deck, and parted friends, while their crews manned what was left of the yards and cheered each other wildly.

Wessel's enemies, of whom he had many, especially among the nobility, who looked upon him as a vulgar upstart, used this incident to bring him before a court-martial. It was unpatriotic, they declared, and they demanded that he be degraded and fined. His defence, which with all the records of his career are in the Navy Department at Copenhagen, was brief but to the point. It is summed up in the retort to his accusers that "they themselves should be rebuked, and severely, for failing to understand that an officer in the King's service should be promoted instead of censured for doing his plain duty," and that there was nothing in the articles of war commanding him to treat an honorable foe otherwise than with honor.

It must be admitted that he gave his critics no lack of cause. His enterprises were often enough of a hair-raising kind, and he had scant patience with censure. Thus once, when harassed by an Admiralty order purposely issued to annoy him, he wrote back: "The biggest fool can see that to obey would defeat all my plans. I shall not do it. It may suit folk who love loafing about shore, but to an honest man such talk is disgusting, let alone that the thing can't be done." He was at that time twenty-six years old, and in charge of the whole North Sea fleet. No wonder he had enemies.

However, the King was his friend. He made him a nobleman, and gave him the name Tordenskjold. It means "thunder shield."

"Then, by the powers," he swore when he was told, "I shall thunder in the ears of the Swedes so that the King shall hear of it!" And he kept his word.

Charles had determined to take Denmark with one fell blow. He had an army assembled in Skaane to cross the sound, which was frozen over solid. All was ready for the invasion in January 1716. The people throughout Sweden had assembled in the churches to pray for the success of the King's arms, and he was there himself to lead; but in the early morning hours a strong east wind broke up the ice, and the campaign ended before it was begun. Charles then turned on Norway, and laid siege to the city of Frederikshald, which, with its strong fort, Frederiksteen, was the key to that country. A Danish fleet lay in the Skagerak, blocking his way of reënforcements by sea. Tordenskjold, with his frigate, *Hvide Örnen*, and six smaller ships (the frigate *Vindhunden* of sixteen guns, and five vessels of light draught, two of which were heavily armed), was doing scouting duty for the Admiral when he learned that the entire Swedish fleet of forty-four ships that was intended to aid in the operations against Frederikshald lay in the harbor of Dynekilen waiting its chance to slip out. It was so well shielded there that its commander sent word to the King to rest easy; nothing could happen to him. He would join him presently.

Tordenskjold saw that if he could capture or destroy this fleet Norway was saved; the siege must perforce be abandoned. And Norway was his native land, which he loved with his whole fervid soul. But no time was to be lost. He could not go back to ask for permission, and one may shrewdly guess that he did not want to, for it would certainly have been refused. He heard that the Swedish officers, secure in their stronghold, were to attend a wedding on shore the next day. His instructions from the Admiralty were: in an emergency always to hold a council of war, and to abide by its decision. At daybreak he ran his ship alongside *Vindhunden*, her companion frigate, and called to the captain:

"The Swedish officers are bidden to a wedding, and they have forgotten us. What do you say—shall we go unasked?"

Captain Grip was game. "Good enough!" he shouted back. "The wind is fair, and we have all day. I am ready."

That was the council of war and its decision. Tordenskjold gave the signal to clear for action, and sailed in at the head of his handful of ships.

The inlet to the harbor of Dynekilen is narrow and crooked, winding between reefs and rocky steeps quite two miles, and only in spots more than four hundred feet wide. Halfway in was a strong battery. Tordenskjold's fleet was received with a tremendous fire from all the Swedish ships, from the battery, and from an army of four thousand soldiers lying along shore. The Danish ships made no reply. They sailed up grimly silent till they reached a place wide enough to let them wear round, broadside on. Then their guns spoke. Three hours the battle raged before the Swedish fire began to slacken. As soon as he noticed it, Tordenskjold slipped into the inner harbor under cover of the heavy pall of smoke, and before the Swedes suspected their presence they found his ships alongside. Broadside after broadside crashed into them, and in terror they fled, soldiers and sailors alike. While they ran Tordenskjold swooped down upon the half-way battery, seized it, and spiked its guns. The fight was won.

But the heaviest part was left—the towing out of the captured ships. All the afternoon Tordenskjold led the work in person, pulling on ropes, cheering on his men. The Swedes, returning

gamely to the fight, showered them with bullets from shore. One of the abandoned vessels caught fire. Lieutenant Tönder, of Tordenskjold's staff, a veteran with a wooden leg, boarded it just as the quartermaster ran up yelling that the ship was full of powder and was going to blow up. He tried to jump overboard, but the lieutenant seized him by the collar and, stumping along, made him lead the way to the magazine. A fuse had been laid to an open keg of powder, and the fire was sputtering within an inch of it when Lieutenant Tönder plucked it out, smothered it between thumb and forefinger, and threw it through the nearest port-hole. There were two hundred barrels of powder in the ship.

Tordenskjold had kept his word to the King. Not as much as a yawl of the Dynekilen fleet was left to the enemy. He had sunk or burned thirteen and captured thirty-one ships with his seven, and all the piled-up munitions of war were in his hands. King Charles gave up the siege, marched his army out of Norway, and the country was saved. The victory cost Tordenskjold but nineteen killed and fifty-seven wounded. On his own ship six men were killed and twenty wounded.

Of infinite variety was this sea-fighter. After a victory like this, one hears of him in the next breath gratifying a passing whim of the King, who wanted to know what the Swedish people thought of their Government after Charles's long wars that are said to have cost their country a million men. Tordenskjold overheard it, had himself rowed across to Sweden, picked up there a wedding party, bridegroom, minister, guests, and all, including the captain of the shore watch who was among them, and returned in time for the palace dinner with his catch. King Frederik was entertaining Czar Peter the Great, who had been boasting of the unhesitating loyalty of his men which his Danish host could not match. He now had the tables turned upon him. It is recorded that the King sent the party back with royal gifts for the bride. One would be glad to add that Tordenskjold sent back, too, the silver pitcher and the parlor clock his men took on their visit. But he didn't. They were still in Copenhagen a hundred years later, and may be they are yet. It was not like his usual gallantry toward the fair sex. But perhaps he didn't know anything about it.

Then we find him, after an unsuccessful attack on Göteborg that cost many lives, sending in his adjutant to congratulate the Swedish commandant on their "gallant encounter" the day before, and exchanging presents with him in token of mutual regard. And before one can turn the page he is discovered swooping down upon Marstrand, taking town and fleet anchored there, and the castle itself with its whole garrison, all with two hundred men, swelled by stratagem into an army of thousands. We are told that an officer sent out from the castle to parley, issuing forth from a generous dinner, beheld the besieging army drawn up in street after street, always two hundred men around every corner, as he made his way through the town, piloted by Tordenskjold himself, who was careful to take him the longest way, while the men took the short cut to the next block. The man returned home with the message that the town was full of them and that resistance was useless. The ruse smacks of Peder Wessel's boyish fight with a much bigger fellow who had beaten him once by gripping his long hair, and so getting his head in chancery. But Peder had taken notice. Next time he came to the encounter with hair cut short and his whole head smeared with soft-soap, and that time he won.

The most extraordinary of all his adventures befell when, after the attack on Strömstad, he was hastening home to Copenhagen. Crossing the Kattegat in a little smack that carried but two three-pound guns, he was chased and overtaken by a Swedish frigate of sixteen guns and a crew of sixty men. Tordenskjold had but twenty-one, and eight of them were servants and non-combatants. They were dreadfully frightened, and tradition has it that one of them wept when he saw the Swede coming on. Her captain called upon him to surrender, but the answer was flung back:

"I am Tordenskjold! Come and take me, if you can."

With that came a tiny broadside that did brisk execution on the frigate. Tordenskjold had hauled both his guns over on the "fighting side" of his vessel. There ensued a battle such as Homer would have loved to sing. Both sides banged away for all they were worth. In the midst of the din and smoke Tordenskjold used his musket with cool skill; his servants loaded while he fired. At every shot a man fell on the frigate.

Word was brought that there was no more round shot. He bade them twist up his pewter dinner service and fire that, which they did. The Swede tried vainly to board. Tordenskjold manoeuvred his smack with such skill that they could not hook on. Seeing this, Captain Lind, commander of the frigate, called to him to desist from the useless struggle; he would be honored to carry such a prisoner into Göteborg. Back came the taunt:

"Neither you nor any other Swede shall ever carry me there!" And with that he shot the captain down.¹

When his men saw him fall, they were seized with panic and made off as quickly as they could, while Tordenskjold's crew, of whom only fourteen were left, beat their drums and blew trumpets in frantic defiance. Their captain was for following the Swede and boarding her, but he couldn't. Sails, rigging, and masts were shot to pieces. Perhaps the terror of the Swedes was increased by the sight of Tordenskjold's tame bear making faces at them behind his master. It went with him everywhere till that day, and came out of the fight unscathed. But during the night the crew ran the vessel on the Swedish shore, whence Tordenskjold himself reached Denmark in an open boat which he had to keep bailing all night, for the boat was shot full of holes, and though he and his companions stuffed their spare clothing into them it leaked badly. The enemy got the smack, after all, and the bear, which, being a Norwegian, proved so untractable on Swedish soil that, sad to relate, in the end they cut him up and ate him.

King Charles, himself a knightly soul and an admirer of a gallant enemy, gave orders to have all Tordenskjold's belongings sent back to him, but he did not live to see the order carried out. He was found dead in the rifle-pits before Frederiksteen on December 11, 1718, shot through the head. It was Tordenskjold himself who brought the all-important news to King Frederik in the night of December 28,—they were not the days of telegraphs and fast steamers,—and when the King, who had been roused out of bed to receive him, could not trust his ears, he said with characteristic audacity, "I wish it were as true that your Majesty had made me a schoutbynacht,"—the rank next below admiral. And so he took the step next to the last on the ladder of his ambition.

Within seven months he took Marstrand. It is part of the record of that astonishing performance that when the unhappy Commandant hesitated as the hour of evacuation came, not sure that he had done right in capitulating, Tordenskjold walked up to the fort with a hundred men, half his force, banged on the gate, went in alone and up to the Commandant's window, thundering out:

"What are you waiting for? Don't you know time is up?"

In terror and haste, Colonel Dankwardt moved his Hessians out, and Tordenskjold marched his handful of men in. When he brought the King the keys of Marstrand, Frederik made him an admiral.

It was while blockading the port of Göteborg in the last year of the war that he met and made a friend of Lord Carteret, the English Ambassador to Denmark, and fell in love with the picture of a young Englishwoman, Miss Norris, a lady of great beauty and wealth, who, Lord Carteret told him, was an ardent admirer of his. It was this love which indirectly sent him to his death. Lord Carteret had given him a picture of her, and as soon as peace was made he started for England; but he never reached that country. The remnant of the Swedish fleet lay in the roadstead at Göteborg, under the guns of the two forts, New and Old Elfsborg. While Tordenskjold was away at Marstrand, the enemy sallied forth and snapped up seven of the smaller vessels of his blockading fleet. The news made him furious. He sent in, demanding them back at once, "or I will come after them." He had already made one ineffectual attempt to take New Elfsborg that cost him dear. In Göteborg they knew the strength of his fleet and laughed at his threat. But it was never safe to laugh at Tordenskjold. The first dark night he stole in with ten armed boats, seized the shore batteries of the old fort, and spiked their guns before a shot was fired. The rising moon saw his men in possession of the ships lying at anchor. With their blue-lined coats turned inside out so that they might pass for Swedish uniforms, they surprised

¹ He was not mortally wounded, and Tordenskjold took him prisoner later at the capture of Marstrand.

the watch in the guard-house and made them all prisoners. Now that there was no longer reason for caution, they raised a racket that woke the sleeping town up in a fright. The commander of the other fort sent out a boat to ascertain the cause. It met the Admiral's and challenged it, "Who goes there?"

"Tordenskjold," was the reply, "come to teach you to keep awake."

It proved impossible to warp the ships out. Only one of the seven lost ones was recovered; all the rest were set on fire. By the light of the mighty bonfire Tordenskjold rowed out with his men, hauling the recovered ship right under the guns of the forts, the Danish flag flying at the bow of his boat. He had not lost a single man. A cannon-ball swept away all the oars on one side of his boat, but no one was hurt.

At Marstrand they had been up all night listening to the cannonading and the crash upon crash as the big ships blew up. They knew that Tordenskjold was abroad with his men. In the morning, when they were all in church, he walked in and sat down by his chief, the old Admiral Judicher, who was a slow-going, cautious man. He whispered anxiously, "What news?" but Tordenskjold only shrugged his shoulders with unmoved face. It is not likely that either the old Admiral or the congregation heard much of that sermon, if indeed they heard any of it. But when it was over, they saw from the walls of the town the Danish ships at anchor and heard the story of the last of Tordenskjold's exploits. It fitly capped the climax of his life. Sweden's entire force on the North Sea, with the exception of five small galleys, had either been captured, sunk, or burned by him.

The King would not let Tordenskjold go when peace was made, but he had his way in the end. To his undoing he consented to take with him abroad a young scalawag, the son of his landlord, who had more money than brains. In Hamburg the young man fell in with a gambler, a Swedish colonel by name of Stahl, who fleeced him of all he had and much more besides. When Tordenskjold heard of it and met the Colonel in another man's house, he caned him soundly and threw him out in the street. For this he was challenged, but refused to fight a gambler.

"Friends," particularly one Colonel Münnichhausen, who volunteered to be his second, talked him over, and also persuaded him to give up the pistol, with which he was an expert. The duel was fought at the Village of Gledinge, over the line from Hanover, on the morning of November 12, 1720. Tordenskjold was roused from sleep at five, and, after saying his prayers, a duty he never on any account omitted, he started for the place appointed. His old body-servant vainly pleaded with his master to take his stout blade instead of the flimsy parade sword the Admiral carried. Münnichhausen advised against it; it would be too heavy, he said. Stahl's weapon was a long fighting rapier, and to this the treacherous second made no objection. Almost at the first thrust he ran the Admiral through. The seconds held his servant while Stahl jumped on his horse and galloped away. Tordenskjold breathed out his dauntless soul in the arms of his faithful servant and friend.

His body lies in a black marble sarcophagus in the "Navy Church" at Copenhagen. The Danish and Norwegian peoples have never ceased to mourn their idol. He was a sailor with a sailor's faults. But he loved truth, honor, and courage in foe and friend alike. Like many seafaring men, he was deeply religious, with the unquestioning faith of a child. There is a letter in existence written by him to his father when the latter was on his death-bed that bears witness to this. He thanks him with filial affection for all his care, and says naïvely that he would rather have his prayers than fall heir to twenty thousand daler. His pictures show a stocky, broad-shouldered youth with frank blue eyes, full lips, and an eagle nose. His deep, sonorous voice used to be heard, in his midshipman days, above the whole congregation in the Navy Church. In after years it called louder still to Denmark's foes. When things were at their worst in storm or battle, he was wont to shout to his men, "Hi, *now* we are having a fine time!" and his battle-cry has passed into the language. By it, in desperate straits demanding stout hearts, one may know the Dane after his own heart, the real Dane, the world over. Among his own Tordenskjold is still and always will be "the Admiral of Norway's fleet."

HANS EGEDE, THE APOSTLE TO GREENLAND

When in the fall of 1909 the statement was flashed around the world that the North Pole had at last been reached, a name long unfamiliar ran from mouth to mouth with that of the man who claimed to be its discoverer. Dr. Cook was coming to Copenhagen, the daily despatches read, on the Danish Government steamer *Hans Egede*. A shipload of reporters kept an anxious lookout from the Skaw for the vessel so suddenly become famous, but few who through their telescopes made out the name at last upon the prow of the ship gave it another thought in the eager welcome to the man it brought back from the perils of the Farthest North. Yet the name of that vessel stood for something of more real account to humanity than the attainment of a goal that had been the mystery of the ages. No such welcome awaited the explorer Hans Egede, who a hundred and seventy-two years before sailed homeward over that very route, a broken, saddened man, and all he brought was the ashes of his best-beloved that they might rest in her native soil. No gold medal was struck for him; the people did not greet him with loud acclaim. The King and his court paid scant attention to him, and he was allowed to live his last days in poverty. Yet a greater honor is his than ever fell to a discoverer: the simple natives of Greenland long reckoned the time from his coming among them. To them he was in their ice-bound home what Father Damien was to the stricken lepers in the South seas, and Dr. Grenfell is to the fishermen of Labrador.

Hans Poulsen Egede, the apostle of Greenland, was a Norwegian of Danish descent. He was born in the Northlands, in the parish of Trondenäs, on January 31, 1686. His grandfather and his father before him had been clergymen in Denmark, the former in the town of West Egede, whence the name. Graduated in a single year from the University of Copenhagen, "at which," his teachers bore witness, "no one need wonder who knows the man," he became at twenty-two pastor of a parish up in the Lofoden Islands, where the fabled maëlstrom churns. Eleven years he preached to the poor fisherfolk on Sunday, and on week-days helped his parishioners rebuild the old church. When it was finished and the bishop came to consecrate it, he chided Egede because the altar was too fine; it must have cost more than they could afford.

"It did not cost anything," was his reply. "I made it myself."

No wonder his fame went far. When the church bell of Vaagen called, boats carrying Sunday-clad fishermen were seen making for the island from every point of the compass. Great crowds flocked to his church; great enough to arouse the jealousy of neighboring preachers who were not so popular, and they made it so unpleasant that his wife at last tired of it. They little dreamed that they were industriously paving the way for his greater work and for his undying fame.

The sea that surges against that rockbound coast ever called its people out in quest of adventure. Some who went nine hundred years ago found a land in the far Northwest barred by great icebergs; but once inside the barrier, they saw deep fjords like their own at home, to which the mountains sloped down, covered with a wealth of lovely flowers. On green meadows antlered deer were grazing, the salmon leaped in brawling brooks, and birds called for their mates in the barrens. Above it all towered snow-covered peaks. They saw only the summer day; they did not know how brief it was, and how long the winter night, and they called the country Greenland. They built their homes there, and other settlers came. They were hardy men, bred in a harsh climate, and they stayed. They built churches and had their priests and bishops, for Norway was Christian by that time. And they prospered after their fashion. They even paid Peter's Pence to Rome. There is a record that their contribution, being in kind, namely, walrus teeth, was sold in 1386 by the Pope's agent to a merchant in Flanders for twelve livres, fourteen sous. They kept up communication with their kin across the seas until the Black Death swept through the Old World in the Fourteenth Century; Norway, when it was gone, was like a vast tomb. Two-thirds of its people lay dead. Those who were left had enough to do at home; and Greenland was forgotten.

The seasons passed, and the savages, with whom the colonists had carried on a running feud, came out of the frozen North and overwhelmed them. Dim traditions that were whispered among the natives for centuries told of that last fight. It was the Ragnarok of the Northmen. Not one was left to tell the tale. Long years after, when fishing vessels landed on that desolate coast, they found a strange and hostile people in possession. No one had ever dared to settle there since.

This last Egede knew, but little more. He believed that there were still settlements on the inaccessible east coast of Greenland where descendants of the old Northmen lived, cut off from all the world, sunk into ignorance and godlessness,—men and women who had once known the true light,—and his heart yearned to go to their rescue. Waking and dreaming, he thought of nothing else. The lamp in his quiet study shone out over the sea at night when his people were long asleep. Their pastor was poring over old manuscripts and the logs of whalers that had touched upon Greenland. From Bergen he gathered the testimony of many sailors. None of them had ever seen traces of, or heard of, the old Northmen.

To his bishop went Egede with his burden. Ever it rang in his ears: "God has chosen you to bring them back to the light." The bishop listened and was interested. Yes, that was the land from which seafarers in a former king's time had brought home golden sand. There might be more. It couldn't be far from Cuba and Hispaniola, those golden coasts. If one were to go equipped for trading, no doubt a fine stroke of business might be done. Thus the Right Reverend Bishop Krog of Trondhjem, and Egede went home, disheartened.

At home his friends scouted him, said he was going mad to think of giving up his living on such a fool's chase. His wife implored him to stay, and with a heavy heart Egede was about to abandon his purpose when his jealous neighbor, whose parishioners had been going to hear Egede preach, stirred up such trouble that his wife was glad to go. She even urged him to, and he took her at her word. They moved to Bergen, and from that port they sailed on May 3, 1721, on the ship *Haabet* (the Hope), with another and smaller vessel as convoy, forty-six souls all told, bound for the unknown North. The Danish King had made Egede missionary to the Greenlanders on a salary of three hundred daler a year, the same amount which Egede himself contributed of his scant store toward the equipment. The bishop's plan had prevailed; the mission was to be carried by the expected commerce, and upon that was to be built a permanent colonization.

Early in June they sighted land, but the way to it was barred by impassable ice. A whole month they sailed to and fro, trying vainly for a passage. At last they found an opening and slipped through, only to find themselves shut in, with towering icebergs closing around them. As they looked fearfully out over the rail, their convoy signalled that she had struck, and the captain of *Haabet* cried out that all was lost. In the tumult of terror that succeeded, Egede alone remained calm. Praying for succor where there seemed to be none, he remembered the One Hundred and Seventh Psalm: "He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder." And the morning dawned clear, the ice was moving and their prison widening. On July 3, *Haabet* cleared the last ice-reef, and the shore lay open before them.

The Eskimos came out in their kayaks, and the boldest climbed aboard the ship. In one boat sat an old man who refused the invitation. He paddled about the vessel, mumbling darkly in a strange tongue. He was an Angekok, one of the native medicine-men of whom presently Egede was to know much more. As he stood upon the deck and looked at these strangers for whose salvation he had risked all, his heart fell. They were not the stalwart Northmen he had looked for, and their jargon had no homelike sound. But a great wave of pity swept over him, and the prayer that rose to his lips was for strength to be their friend and their guide to the light.

Not at once did the way open for the coveted friendship with the Eskimos. While they thought the strangers came only to trade they were hospitable enough, but when they saw them build, clearly intent on staying, they made signs that they had better go. They pointed to the sun that sank lower toward the horizon every day, and shivered as if from extreme cold, and they showed their visitors

the icebergs and the snow, making them understand that it would cover the house by and by. When it all availed nothing and the winter came on, they retired into their huts and cut the acquaintance of the white men. They were afraid that they had come to take revenge for the harm done their people in the olden time. There was nothing for it, then, but that Egede must go to them, and this he did.

They seized their spears when they saw him coming, but he made signs that he was their friend. When he had nothing else to give them, he let them cut the buttons from his coat. Throughout the fifteen years he spent in Greenland Egede never wore furs, as did the natives. The black robe he thought more seemly for a clergyman, to his great discomfort. He tells in his diary and in his letters that often when he returned from his winter travels it could stand alone when he took it off, being frozen stiff. After a while he got upon neighborly terms with the Eskimos; but, if anything, the discomfort was greater. They housed him at night in their huts, where the filth and the stench were unendurable. They showed their special regard by first licking off the piece of seal they put before him, and if he rejected it they were hurt. Their housekeeping, of which he got an inside view, was embarrassing in its simplicity. The dish-washing was done by the dogs licking the kettles clean. Often, after a night or two in a hut that held half a dozen families, he was compelled to change his clothes to the skin in an open boat or out on the snow. But the alternative was to sleep out in a cold that sometimes froze his pillow to the bed and the tea-cup to the table even in his own home. Above all, he must learn their language.

It proved a difficult task, for the Eskimo tongue was both very simple and very complex. In all the things pertaining to their daily life it was exceedingly complex. For instance, to catch one kind of fish was expressed by one word, to catch another kind in quite different terms. They had one word for catching a young seal, another for catching an old one. When it came to matters of moral and spiritual import, the language was poor to desperation. Egede's instruction began when he caught the word "kine"—what is it? And from that time on he learned every day; but the pronunciation was as varied as the workaday vocabulary, and it was an unending task.

It proceeded with many interruptions from the Angekoks, who tried more than once to bewitch him, but finally gave it up, convinced that he was a great medicine-man himself, and therefore invulnerable. But before that they tried to foment a regular mutiny, the colony being by that time well under way, and Egede had to arrest and punish the leaders. The natives naturally clung to them, and when Egede had mastered their language and tried to make clear that the Angekoks deceived them when they pretended to go to the other world for advice, they demurred. "Did you ever see them go?" he asked. "Well, have you seen this God of yours of whom you speak so much?" was their reply. When Egede spoke of spiritual gifts, they asked for good health and blubber: "Our Angekoks give us that." Hell-fire was much in theological evidence in those days, but among the Eskimos it was a failure as a deterrent. They listened to the account of it eagerly and liked the prospect. When at length they became convinced that Egede knew more than their Angekoks, they came to him with the request that he would abolish winter. Very likely they thought that one who had such knowledge of the hot place ought to have influence enough with the keeper of it to obtain this favor.

It was not an easy task, from any point of view, to which he had put his hands. As that first winter wore away there were gloomy days and nights, and they were not brightened when, with the return of the sun, no ship arrived from Denmark. The Dutch traders came, and opened their eyes wide when they found Egede and his household safe and even on friendly terms with the Eskimos. Pelesse—the natives called the missionary that, as the nearest they could come to the Danish *präst* (priest)—Pelesse was not there after blubber, they told the Dutchmen, but to teach them about heaven and of "Him up there," who had made them and wanted them home with Him again. So he had not worked altogether in vain. But the brief summer passed, and still no relief ship. The crew of *Haabet* clamored to go home, and Egede had at last to give a reluctant promise that if no ship came in two weeks, he would break up. His wife alone refused to take a hand in packing. The ship was coming, she insisted, and at the last moment it did come. A boat arriving after dark brought the first word of it. The people ashore heard voices speaking in Danish, and flew to Egede, who had gone to bed, with

the news. The ship brought good cheer. The Government was well disposed. Trading and preaching were to go on together, as planned. Joyfully then they built a bigger and a better house, and called their colony Godthaab (Good Hope).

The work was now fairly under way. Of the energy and the hardships it entailed, even we in our day that have heard so much of Arctic exploration can have but a faint conception. Shut in on the coast of eternal ice and silence,—silence, save when in summer the Arctic rivers were alive, and crash after crash announced that the glaciers coming down from the inland mountains were "casting their calves," the great icebergs, upon the ocean,—the colonists counted the days from the one when that year's ship was lost to sight till the returning spring brought the next one, their only communication with their far-off home. In summer the days were sometimes burning hot, but the nights always bitterly cold. In winter, says Egede, hot water spilled on the table froze as it ran, and the meat they cooked was often frozen at the bone when set on the table. Summer and winter Egede was on his travels between Sundays, sometimes in the trader's boat, more often the only white man with one or two Eskimo companions, seeking out the people. When night surprised him with no native hut in sight, he pulled the boat on some desert shore and, commending his soul to God, slept under it. Once he and his son found an empty hut, and slept there in the darkness. Not until day came again did they know that they had made their bed on the frozen bodies of dead men who had once been the occupants of the house, and had died they never knew how. Peril was everywhere. Again and again his little craft was wrecked. Once the house blew down over their heads in one of the dreadful winter storms that ravage those high latitudes. Often he had to sit on the rail of his boat, and let his numbed feet hang into the sea to restore feeling in them. On land he sometimes waded waist-deep in snow, climbed mountains and slid down into valleys, having but the haziest notion of where he would land. At home his brave wife sat alone, praying for his safety and listening to every sound that might herald his return. Tremble and doubt they did, Egede owns, but they never flinched. Their work was before them, and neither thought of turning back.

The Eskimos soon came to know that Egede was their friend. When his boat entered a fjord where they were fishing, and his rowers shouted out that the good priest had come who had news of God, they dropped their work and flocked out to meet him. Then he spoke to a floating congregation, simply as if they were children, and, as with Him whose message he bore, "the people heard him gladly." They took him to their sick, and asked him to breathe upon them, which he did to humor them, until he found out that it was an *Angekok* practice, whereupon he refused. Once, after he had spoken of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, they took him to a new-made grave and asked him, too, to bring back their dead. They brought him a blind man to be healed. Egede looked upon them in sorrowful pity. "I can do nothing," he said; "but if he believes in Jesus, He has the power and can do it."

"I do believe," shouted the blind man: "let Him heal me." It occurred to Egede, perhaps as a mere effort at cleanliness, to wash his eyes in cognac, and he sent him away with words of comfort. He did not see his patient again for thirteen years. Then he was in a crowd of Eskimos who came to Godthaab. The man saw as well as Egede.

"Do you remember?" he said, "you washed my eyes with sharp water, and the Son of God in whom I believed, He made me to see."

Children the Eskimos were in their idolatry, and children they remained as Christians. By Egede's prayers they set great store. "You ask for us," they told him. "God does not hear us; He does not understand Eskimo." Of God they spoke as "Him up there." They believed that the souls of the dead went up on the rainbow, and, reaching the moon that night, rested there in the moon's house, on a bench covered with the white skins of young polar bears. There they danced and played games, and the northern lights were the young people playing ball. Afterward they lived in houses on the shore of a big lake overshadowed by a snow mountain. When the waters ran over the edge of the lake, it rained on earth. When the "moon was dark," it was down on earth catching seal for a living. Thunder was caused by two old women shaking a dried sealskin between them; the lightning came

when they turned the white side out. The "Big Nail" we have heard of as the Eskimos' Pole, was a high-pointed mountain in the Farthest North on which the sky rested and turned around with the sun, moon, and stars. Up there the stars were much bigger. Orion's Belt was so near that you had to carry a whip to drive him away.

The women were slaves. An Eskimo might have as many wives as he saw fit; they were his, and it was nobody's business. But adultery was unknown. The seventh commandment in Egede's translation came to read, "One wife alone you shall have and love." The birth of a girl was greeted with wailing. When grown, she was often wooed by violence. If she fled from her admirer, he cut her feet when he overtook her, so that she could run no more. The old women were denounced as witches who drove the seals away, and were murdered. An Eskimo who was going on a reindeer hunt, and found his aged mother a burden, took her away and laid her in an open grave. Returning on the third day, he heard her groaning yet, and smothered her with a big stone. He tried to justify himself to Egede by saying that "she died hard, and it was a pity not to speed her." Yet they buried a dog's head with a child, so that the dog, being clever, could run ahead and guide the little one's steps to heaven.

They could count no further than five; at a stretch they might get to twenty, on their fingers and toes, but there they stopped. However, they were not without resources. It was the day of long Sunday services, and the Eskimos were a restless people. When the sermon dragged, they would go up to Egede and make him measure on their arms how much longer the talk was going to be. Then they tramped back to their seats and sat listening with great attention, all the time moving one hand down the arm, checking off the preacher's progress. If they got to the finger-tips before he stopped, they would shake their heads sourly and go back for a remeasurement. No wonder Egede put his chief hope in the children, whom he gathered about him in flocks.

For all that, the natives loved him. There came a day that brought this message from the North: "Say to the speaker to come to us to live, for the other strangers who come here can only talk to us of blubber, blubber, blubber, and we also would hear of the great Creator." Egede went as far as he could, but was compelled by ice and storms to turn back after weeks of incredible hardships. The disappointment was the more severe to him because he had never quite given up his hope of finding remnants of the ancient Norse settlements. The fact that the old records spoke of a West Bygd (settlement) and an East Bygd had misled many into believing that the desolate east coast had once been colonized. Not until our own day was this shown to be an error, when Danish explorers searched that coast for a hundred miles and found no other trace of civilization than a beer bottle left behind by the explorer Nordenskjold.

Egede's hope had been that Greenland might be once more colonized by Christian people. When the Danish Government, after some years, sent up a handful of soldiers, with a major who took the title of governor, to give the settlement official character as a trading station, they sent with them twenty unofficial "Christians," ten men out of the penitentiary and as many lewd and drunken women from the treadmill, who were married by lot before setting sail, to give the thing a halfway decent look. They were good enough for the Eskimos, they seem to have thought at Copenhagen. There followed a terrible winter, during which mutiny and murder were threatened. "It is a pity," writes the missionary, "that while we sleep secure among the heathen savages, with so-called Christian people our lives are not safe." As a matter of fact they were not, for the soldiers joined in the mutiny against Egede as the cause of their having to live in such a place, and had not sickness and death smitten the malcontents, neither he nor the governor would have come safe through the winter. On the Eskimos this view of the supposed fruits of Christian teaching made its own impression. After seeing a woman scourged on shipboard for misbehavior, they came innocently enough to Egede and suggested that some of their best Angekoks be sent down to Denmark to teach the people to be sober and decent.

There came a breathing spell after ten years of labor in what had often enough seemed to him the spiritual as well as physical ice-barrens of the North, when Egede surveyed a prosperous mission, with trade established, a hundred and fifty children christened and schooled, and many of their elders

asking to be baptized. In the midst of his rejoicing the summer's ship brought word from Denmark that the King was dead, and orders from his successor to abandon the station. Egede might stay with provisions for one year, if there was enough left over after fitting out the ship; but after that he would receive no further help.

When the Eskimos heard the news, they brought their little children to the mission. "These will not let you go," they said; and he stayed. His wife, whom hardship and privation and the lonely waiting for her husband in the long winter nights had at last broken down, refused to leave him, though she sadly needed the care of a physician. A few of the sailors were persuaded to stay another year. "So now," Egede wrote in his diary when, on July 31, 1731, he had seen the ship sail away with all his hopes, "I am left alone with my wife and three children, ten sailors and eight Eskimos, girls and boys who have been with us from the start. God let me live to see the blessed day that brings good news once more from home." His prayer was heard. The next summer brought word that the mission was to be continued, partly because Egede had strained every nerve to send home much blubber and many skins. But it was as a glimpse of the sun from behind dark clouds. His greatest trials trod hard upon the good news.

To rouse interest in the mission Egede had sent home young Eskimos from time to time. Three of these died of smallpox in Denmark. The fourth came home and brought the contagion, all unknown, to his people. It was the summer fishing season, when the natives travel much and far, and wherever he went they flocked about him to hear of the "Great Lord's land," where the houses were so tall that one could not shoot an arrow over them, and to ask a multitude of questions: Was the King very big? Had he caught many whales? Was he strong and a great Angekok? and much more of the same kind. In a week the disease broke out among the children at the mission, and soon word came from islands and fjords where the Eskimos were fishing, of death and misery unspeakable. It was virgin soil for the plague, and it was terribly virulent, striking down young and old in every tent and hut. More than two thousand natives, one-fourth of the whole population, died that summer. Of two hundred families near the mission only thirty were left alive. A cry of terror and anguish rose throughout the settlements. No one knew what to do. In vain did Egede implore them to keep their sick apart. In fever delirium they ran out in the ice-fields or threw themselves into the sea. A wild panic seized the survivors, and they fled to the farthest tribes, carrying the seeds of death with them wherever they went. Whole villages perished, and their dead lay unburied. Utter desolation settled like a pall over the unhappy land.

Through it all a single ray of hope shone. The faith that Egede had preached all those years, and the life he had lived with them, bore their fruit. They had struck deeper than he thought. They crowded to him, all that could, as their one friend. Dying mothers held their suckling babes up to him and died content. In a deserted island camp a half-grown girl was found alone with three little children. Their father was dead. When he knew that for him and the baby there was no help, he went to a cave and, covering himself and the child with skins, lay down to die. His parting words to his daughter were, "Before you have eaten the two seals and the fish I have laid away for you, Pelesse will come, no doubt, and take you home. For he loves you and will take care of you." At the mission every nook and cranny was filled with the sick and the dying. Egede and his wife nursed them day and night. Childlike, when death approached, they tried to put on their best clothes, or even to have new ones made, that they might please God by coming into His presence looking fine. When Egede had closed their eyes, he carried the dead in his arms to the vestibule, where in the morning the men who dug the graves found them. At the sight of his suffering the scoffers were dumb. What his preaching had not done to win them over, his sorrows did. They were at last one.

That dreadful year left Egede a broken man. In his dark moments he reproached himself with having brought only misery to those he had come to help and serve. One thorn which one would think he might have been spared rankled deep in it all. Some missionaries of a dissenting sect—Egede was Lutheran—had come with the smallpox ship to set up an establishment of their own. At their

head was a man full of misdirected zeal and quite devoid of common-sense, who engaged Egede in a wordy dispute about justification by faith and condemned him and his work unsparingly. He had grave doubts whether he was in truth a "converted man." It came to an end when they themselves fell ill, and Egede and his wife had the last word, after their own fashion. They nursed the warlike brethren through their illness with loving ministrations and gave them back to life, let us hope, wiser and better men.

At Christmas, 1735, Egede's faithful wife, Gertrude, closed her eyes. She had gone out with him from home and kin to a hard and heathen land, and she had been his loyal helpmeet in all his trials. Now it was all over. That winter scurvy laid him upon a bed of pain and, lying there, his heart turned to the old home. His son had come from Copenhagen to help, happily yet while his mother lived. To him he would give over the work. In Denmark he could do more for it than in Greenland, now he was alone. On July 29, 1736, he preached for the last time to his people and baptized a little Eskimo to whom they gave his name, Hans. The following week he sailed for home, carrying, as all his earthly wealth, his beloved dead and his motherless children.

The Eskimos gathered on the shore and wept as the ship bore their friend away. They never saw him again. He lived in Denmark eighteen years, training young men to teach the Eskimos. They gave him the title of bishop, but so little to live on that he was forced in his last days to move from Copenhagen to a country town, to make both ends meet. His grave was forgotten by the generation that came after him. No one knows now where it is; but in ice-girt Greenland, where the northern lights on wintry nights flash to the natives their message from the souls that have gone home, his memory will live when that of the North Pole seeker whom the world applauds is long forgotten. Hans Egede was their great man, their hero. He was more,—he was their friend.

GUSTAV VASA, THE FATHER OF SWEDEN

A great and wise woman had, after ages of war and bloodshed, united the crowns of the three Scandinavian kingdoms upon one head. In the strong city of Kalmar, around which the tide of battle had ever raged hottest, the union was declared in the closing days of the Thirteenth Century. Norwegian, Swede, and Dane were thenceforth to stand together, to the end of time; so they resolved. It was all a vain dream. Queen Margaret was not cold in her grave before the kingdoms fell apart. Norway clung to Denmark, but Sweden went her own way. In the wars of two generations the Danish kings won back the Swedish crown and lost it, again and again, until in 1520 King Christian II clutched it for the last time, at the head of a conquering army. He celebrated his victory with a general amnesty, and bade the Swedish nobles to a great feast, held at the capital in November.

Christian is one of the unsolved riddles of history. Ablest but unhappiest of all his house, he was an instinctive democrat, sincerely solicitous for the welfare of the plain people, but incredibly cruel and faithless when the dark mood seized him. The coronation feast ended with the wholesale butchery of the unsuspecting nobles. Hundreds were beheaded in the public square; for days it was filled with the slain. It is small comfort that the wicked priest who egged the King on to the dreadful deed was himself burned at the stake by the master he had betrayed. The Stockholm Massacre drowned the Kalmar Union in its torrents of blood. Retribution came swiftly. Above the peal of the Christmas bells rose the clash and clangor of armed hosts pouring forth from the mountain fastnesses to avenge the foul treachery. They were led by Gustav² Eriksson Vasa, a young noble upon whose head Christian had set a price.

The Vasas were among the oldest and best of the great Swedish families. It was said of them that they ever loved a friend, hated a foe, and never forgot. Gustav was born in the castle of Lindholmen, when the news that the world had grown suddenly big by the discovery of lands beyond the unknown seas was still ringing through Europe, on May 12, 1496. He was brought up in the home of his kinsman, the Swedish patriot Sten Sture, and early showed the fruits of his training. "See what I will do," he boasted in school when he was thirteen, "I will go to Dalecarlia, rouse the people, and give the Jutes (Danes) a black eye." Master Ivar, his Danish teacher, gave him a whaling for that. White with anger, the boy drove his dirk through the book, nailing it to the desk, and stalked out of the room. Master Ivar's eyes followed the slim figure in the scarlet cloak, and he sighed wearily "*nobilium nati nolunt aliquid pati*,—the children of the great will put up with nothing."

Hardly yet of age, he served under the banner of Sten Sture against King Christian, and was one of six hostages sent to the King when he asked an interview of the Swedish leader. But Christian stayed away from the meeting and carried the hostages off to Denmark against his plighted faith. There Gustav was held prisoner a year. All that winter rumors of great armaments against Sweden filled the land. He heard the young bloods from the court prate about bending the stiff necks in the country across the Sound, and watched them throw dice for Swedish castles and Swedish women,—part of the loot when his fatherland should be laid under the yoke. Ready to burst with anger and grief, he sat silent at their boasts. In the spring he escaped, disguised as a cattle-herder, and made his way to Lübeck, where he found refuge in the house of the wealthy merchant Kort König.

They soon heard in Denmark where he was, and the King sent letters demanding his surrender; but the burghers of the Hanse town hated Christian with cause, and would not give him up. Then came Gustav's warder who had gone bail for him in sixteen hundred gulden, and pleaded for his prisoner.

"I am not a prisoner," was Gustav's retort, "I am a hostage, for whom the Danish king pledged his oath and faith. If any one can prove that I was taken captive in a fight or for just cause, let him stand forth. Ambushed was I, and betrayed." The Lübeck men thought of the plots King Christian

² The older spelling of this name is followed here in preference to the more modern Gustaf. Gustav Vasa himself wrote his name so.

was forever hatching against them. Now, if he succeeded in getting Sweden under his heel, their turn would come next. Better, they said, send this Gustav home to his own country, perchance he might keep the King busy there; by which they showed their good sense. His ex-keeper was packed off back home, and Gustav reached Sweden, sole passenger on a little coast-trader, on May 31, 1520. A stone marks the spot where he landed, near Kalmar; for then struck the hour of Sweden's freedom.

But not yet for many weary months did the people hear its summons. Swedish manhood was at its lowest ebb. Stockholm was held by the widow of Sten Sture with a half-famished garrison. In Kalmar another woman, Anna Bjelke, commanded, but her men murmured, and the fall of the fortress was imminent. When Gustav Vasa, who had slipped in unseen, exhorted them to stand fast, they would have mobbed him. He left as he had come, the day before the surrender. Travelling by night, he made his way inland, finding everywhere fear and distrust. The King had promised that if they would obey him "they should never want for herring and salt," so they told Gustav, and when he tried to put heart into them and rouse their patriotism, they took up bows and arrows and bade him be gone. Indeed, there were not wanting those who shot at him. Like a hunted deer he fled from hamlet to hamlet. Such friends as he had left advised him to throw himself upon the King's mercy; told him of the amnesty proclaimed. But Gustav's thoughts dwelt grimly among the Northern mountaineers whom as a boy he had bragged he would set against the tyrant. Insensibly he shaped his course toward their country.

He was with his brother-in-law, Joachim Brahe, when the King's message bidding him to the coronation came. Gustav begged him not to go, but Brahe's wife and children were within Christian's reach, and he did not dare stay away. When he left, the fugitive hid in his ancestral home at Råfsnäs on lake Mälär. There one of Brahe's men brought him news of the massacre in which his master and Gustav's father had perished. His mother, grandmother, and sisters were dragged away to perish in Danish dungeons. On Gustav's head the King had set a price, and spies were even then on his track.

Gustav's mind was made up. What was there now to wait for? Clad as a peasant, he started for Dalecarlia with a single servant to keep him company, but before he reached the mines the man stole all his money and ran away. He had to work now to live, and hired out to Anders Persson, the farmer of Rankhyttan. He had not been there many days when one of the women saw an embroidered sleeve stick out under his coat and told her master that the new hand was not what he pretended to be. The farmer called him aside, and Gustav told him frankly who he was. Anders Persson kept his secret, but advised him not to stay long in any one place lest his enemies get wind of him. He slipped away as soon as it was dark, nearly lost his life by breaking through the ice, but reached Ornäs on the other side of Lake Runn, half dead with cold and exposure. He knew that another Persson who had been with him in the war lived there, and found his house. Arendt Persson was a rascal. He received him kindly, but when he slept harnessed his horse and went to Måns Nilsson, a neighbor, with the news: the King's reward would make them both rich, if he would help him seize the outlawed man.

Måns Nilsson held with the Danes, but he was no traitor, and he showed the fellow the door. He went next to the King's sheriff; he would be bound to help. To be sure, he would claim the lion's share of the blood-money, but something was better than nothing. The sheriff came soon enough with a score of armed men. But Arendt Persson had not reckoned with his honest wife. She guessed his errand and let Gustav down from the window to the rear gate, where she had a sleigh and team in waiting. When the sheriff's posse surrounded the house, Gustav was well on his way to Master Jon, the parson of Svärdsjö, who was his friend. Tradition has it that while Christian was King, the brave little woman never dared show her face in the house again.

Master Jon was all right, but news of the man-hunt had run through the country, and when the parson's housekeeper one day saw him hold the wash-bowl for his guest she wanted to know why he was so polite to a common clod. Master Jon told her that it was none of her business, but that night he piloted his friend across the lake to Isala, where Sven Elfsson lived, a gamekeeper who knew the country and could be trusted. The good parson was hardly out of sight on his way back

when the sheriff's men came looking for Gustav. It did not occur to them that the yokel who stood warming himself by the stove might be the man they were after. But the gamekeeper's wife was quick to see his peril. She was baking bread and had just put the loaves into the oven with a long-handled spade. "Here, you lummo!" she cried, and whacked him soundly over the back with it, "what are ye standing there gaping at? Did ye never see folks afore? Get back to your work in the barn." And Gustav, taking the hint, slunk out of the room.

For three days after that he lay hidden under a fallen tree in the snow and bitter cold; but even there he was not safe, and the gamekeeper took him deeper into the forest, where a big spruce grew on a hill in the middle of a frozen swamp. There no one would seek him till he could make a shift to get him out of the country. The hill is still there; the people call it the King's Hill, and not after King Christian, either. But in those long nights when Gustav Vasa listened to the hungry wolves howling in the woods and nosing about his retreat, it was hardly kingly conceits his mind brooded over. His father and kinsmen were murdered; his mother and sister in the pitiless grasp of the tyrant who was hunting him to his death; he, the last of his race, alone and forsaken by his own. Bitter sorrow filled his soul at the plight of his country that had fallen so low. But the hope of the young years came to the rescue: all was not lost yet. And in the morning came Sven, the gamekeeper, with a load of straw, at the bottom of which he hid him. So no one would be the wiser.

It was well he did it, for half-way to the next town some prowling soldiers overtook them, and just to make sure that there was nothing in the straw, prodded the load with their spears. Nothing stirred, and they went on their way. But a spear had gashed Gustav's leg, and presently blood began to drip in the snow. Sven had his wits about him. He got down, and cut the fetlock of one of the beasts with his jack-knife so that it bled and no one need ask questions. When they got to Marnäs, Gustav was weak from the loss of blood, but a friendly surgeon was found to bind up his wounds.

Farther and farther north he fled, keeping to the deep woods in the day, until he reached Rättwik. Feeling safer there, he spoke to the people coming from church one Sunday and implored them to shake off the Danish yoke. But they only shook their heads. He was a stranger among them, and they would talk it over with their neighbors. Not yet were his wanderings over. To Mora he went next, where Parson Jakob hid him in a lonely farm-house. Evil chance led the spies direct to his hiding-place, and once more it was the housewife whose quick wit saved him. Dame Margit was brewing the Yule beer when she saw them coming. In a trice she had Gustav in the cellar and rolled the brewing vat over the trap-door. Then they might search as they saw fit; there was nothing there. The first blood was spilled for Gustav Vasa while he was at Mora, and it was a Dane who did it. He was the kind that liked to see fair play; when an under-sheriff came looking for the hunted man there, the Dane waylaid and killed him.

Christmas morning, when Master Jakob had preached his sermon in the church, Gustav spoke to the congregation out in the snow-covered churchyard. A gravestone was his pulpit. Eloquent always, his sorrows and wrongs and the memory of the hard months lent wings to his words. His speech lives yet in Dalecarlia, for now he was among its mountains.

"It is good to see this great meeting," he said, "but when I think of our fatherland I am filled with grief. At what peril I am here with you, you know who see me hounded as a wild beast day by day, hour by hour. But our beloved country is more to me than life. How long must we be thralls, we who were born to freedom? Those of you who are old remember what persecution Swedish men and women have suffered from the Danish kings. The young have heard the story of it and have learned from they were little children to hate and resist such rule. These tyrants have laid waste our land and sucked its marrow, until nothing remains for us but empty houses and lean fields. Our very lives are not safe." He called upon them to rise and drive the invaders out. If they wanted a leader, he was ready.

His words stirred the mountaineers deeply. Cries of anger were heard in the crowd; it was not the first time they had taken up arms in the cause of freedom. But when they talked it over, the older

heads prevailed; there had not been time enough to hear both sides. They told him that they would not desert the King; he must expect nothing of them.

Broken-hearted and desperate, Gustav Vasa turned toward the Norwegian frontier. He would leave the country for which there was no hope. While the table in the poorest home groaned with Yuletide cheer, Sweden's coming king hid under an old bridge, outcast and starving, till it was safe to leave. Then he took up his weary journey alone. The winter cold had grown harder as the days grew shorter. Famished wolves dogged his steps, but he outran them on his snow-shoes. By night he slept in some wayside shelter, such as they build for travellers in that desolate country, or in the brush. The snow grew deeper, and the landscape wilder, as he went. For days he had gone without food, when he saw the sun set behind the lofty range that was to bar him out of home and hope forever. Even there was no abiding place for him. What thoughts of his vanished dream, perchance of the distant lands across the seas where the tyrant's hand could not reach him, were in his mind, who knows, as he bent his strength to the last and hardest stage of his journey? He was almost there, when he heard shouts behind him and turned to sell his life dear. Two men on skis were calling to him. They were unarmed, and he waited to let them come up.

Their story was soon told. They had come to call him back. After he left, an old soldier whom they knew in Mora had come from the south and told them worse things than even Gustav knew. It was all true about the Stockholm murder; worse, the King was having gallows set up in every county to hang all those on who said him nay; a heavy tax was laid upon the peasants, and whoever did not pay was to have a hand or foot cut off; they could still follow the plow. And now they had sent away the one man who could lead against the Danes, with the forests full of outlawed men who would have enlisted under him as soon as ever the cry was raised! While the men of Dalecarlia were debating the news among themselves orders came from the bailiff at Westerås that the tax was to be paid forthwith. That night runners were sent on the trail of Gustav to tell him to come back; they were ready.

When he came, it was as if a mighty storm swept through the mountains. The people rose in a body. Every day whole parishes threw off their allegiance to King Christian. Sunday after Sunday Gustav spoke to the people at their meeting-houses, and they raised their spears and swore to follow him to death. Two months after the murder in Stockholm an army of thousands that swelled like an avalanche was marching south, and province after province joined in the rebellion. King Christian's host met them at Brunbäck in April. One of its leaders asked the country folk what kind of men the Dalecarlians were, and when he was told that they drank water and ate bread made of bark, he cried out, "Such a people the devil himself couldn't whip; let us get out." But his advice was not taken and the Danish army was wiped out. Gustav halted long enough to drill his men and give them time to temper their arrows and spears, then he fell upon Westerås and beat the Danes there. The peasant mob scattered too soon to loot the town, and the King's men came back with a sudden rush. Only Gustav's valor and presence of mind saved the day that had been won once from being lost again.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.