

BJØRNSTJERNE BJØRNSON

A HAPPY BOY

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson

A Happy Boy

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The present edition of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's works is published by special arrangement with the author. Mr. Bjørnson has designated Prof. Rasmus B. Anderson as his American translator, cooperates with him, and revises each work before it is translated, thus giving his personal attention to this edition.

PREFACE

"A Happy Boy" was written in 1859 and 1860. It is, in my estimation, Bjornson's best story of peasant life. In it the author has succeeded in drawing the characters with *remarkable distinctness*, while his profound psychological insight, his perfectly artless simplicity of style, and his thorough sympathy with the hero and his surroundings are nowhere more apparent. This view is sustained by the great popularity of "A Happy Boy" throughout Scandinavia.

It is proper to add, that in the present edition of Bjornson's stories, previous translations have been consulted, and that in this manner a few happy words and phrases have been found and adopted.

This volume will be followed by "The Fisher Maiden," in which Bjornson makes a new departure, and exhibits his powers in a somewhat different vein of story-telling.

RASMUS B. ANDERSON.

ASGARD, MADISON, WISCONSIN,
November, 1881.

A HAPPY BOY

CHAPTER I

His name was Oyvind, and he cried when he was born. But no sooner did he sit up on his mother's lap than he laughed, and when the candle was lit in the evening the room rang with his laughter, but he cried when he was not allowed to reach it.

"Something remarkable will come of that boy!" said the mother.

A barren cliff, not a very high one, though, overhung the house where he was born; fir and birch looked down upon the roof, the bird-cherry strewed flowers over it. And on the roof was a little goat belonging to Oyvind; it was kept there that it might not wander away, and Oyvind bore leaves and grass up to it. One fine day the goat leaped down and was off to the cliff; it went straight up and soon stood where it had never been before. Oyvind did not see the goat when he came out in the afternoon, and thought at once of the fox. He grew hot all over, and gazing about him, cried,—

"Killy-killy-killy-killy-goat!"

"Ba-a-a-a!" answered the goat, from the brow of the hill, putting its head on one side and peering down.

At the side of the goat there was kneeling a little girl.

"Is this goat yours?" asked she.

Oyvind opened wide his mouth and eyes, thrust both hands into his pants and said,—

"Who are you?"

"I am Marit, mother's young one, father's fiddle, the hulder of the house, granddaughter to Ola Nordistuen of the Heidegards, four years old in the autumn, two days after the frost nights—I am!"

"Is that who you are?" cried he, drawing a long breath, for he had not ventured to take one while she was speaking.

"Is this goat yours?" she again inquired.

"Ye-es!" replied he, raising his eyes.

"I have taken such a liking to the goat;—you will not give it to me?"

"No, indeed I will not."

She lay kicking up her heels and staring down at him, and presently she said: "But if I give you a twisted bun for the goat, can I have it then?"

Oyvind was the son of poor people; he had tasted twisted bun only once in his life, that was when grandfather came to his house, and he had never eaten anything equal to it before or since. He fixed his eyes on the girl.

"Let me see the bun first?" said he.

She was not slow in producing a large twisted bun that she held in her hand.

"Here it is!" cried she, and tossed it down to him.

"Oh! it broke in pieces!" exclaimed the boy, picking up every fragment with the utmost care. He could not help tasting of the very smallest morsel, and it was so good that he had to try another piece, and before he knew it himself he had devoured the whole bun.

"Now the goat belongs to me," said the girl.

The boy paused with the last morsel in his mouth; the girl lay there laughing, and the goat stood by her side, with its white breast and shining brown hair, giving sidelong glances down.

"Could you not wait a while," begged the boy,—his heart beginning to throb. Then the girl laughed more than ever, and hurriedly got up on her knees.

"No, the goat is mine," said she, and threw her arms about it, then loosening one of her garters she fastened it around its neck. Oyvind watched her. She rose to her feet and began to tug at the goat; it would not go along with her, and stretched its neck over the edge of the cliff toward Oyvind.

"Ba-a-a-a!" said the goat.

Then the little girl took hold of its hair with one hand, pulled at the garter with the other, and said prettily: "Come, now, goat, you shall go into the sitting-room and eat from mother's dish and my apron."

And then she sang,—

"Come, boy's pretty goatie,
Come, calf, my delight,
Come here, mewing pussie,
In shoes snowy white,
Yellow ducks, from your shelter,
Come forth, helter-skelter.
Come, doves, ever beaming,
With soft feathers gleaming!
The grass is still wet,
But sun 't will soon get;
Now call, though early 't is in the summer,
And autumn will be the new-comer."¹

There the boy stood.

He had taken care of the goat ever since winter, when it was born, and it had never occurred to him that he could lose it; but now it was gone in an instant, and he would never see it again.

The mother came trolling up from the beach, with some wooden pails she had been scouring; she saw the boy sitting on the grass, with his legs crossed under him, crying, and went to him.

"What makes you cry?"

"Oh, my goat—my goat!"

"Why, where is the goat?" asked the mother, glancing up at the roof.

"It will never come back any more," said the boy.

"Dear me! how can *that* be?"

Oyvind would not confess at once.

"Has the fox carried it off?"

"Oh, I wish it were the fox!"

"You must have lost your senses!" cried the mother. "What has become of the goat?"

"Oh—oh—oh! I was so unlucky. I sold it for a twisted bun!"

The moment he uttered the words he realized what it was to sell the goat for a bun; he had not thought about it before. The mother said,—

"What do you imagine the little goat thinks of you now, since you were willing to sell it for a twisted bun?"

The boy reflected upon this himself, and felt perfectly sure that he never could know happiness more in *this* world—nor in heaven either, he thought, afterwards.

He was so overwhelmed with sorrow that he promised himself that he would never do anything wrong again,—neither cut the cord of the spinning-wheel, nor let the sheep loose, nor go down to the sea alone. He fell asleep lying there, and he dreamed that the goat had reached heaven. There the Lord was sitting, with a long beard, as in the Catechism, and the goat stood munching at the leaves

¹ Auber Forestier's translation.

of a shining tree; but Oyvind sat alone on the roof, and, could get no higher. Then something wet was thrust right against his ear, and he started up. "Ba-a-a-a!" he heard, and it was the goat that had returned to him.

"What! have you come back again?" With these words he sprang up, seized it by the two fore-legs, and danced about with it as if it were a brother. He pulled it by the beard, and was on the point of going in to his mother with it, when he heard some one behind him, and saw the little girl sitting on the greensward beside him. Now he understood the whole thing, and he let go of the goat.

"Is it you who have brought the goat?"

She sat tearing up the grass with her hands, and said, "I was not allowed to keep it; grandfather is up there waiting."

While the boy stood staring at her, a sharp voice from the road above called, "Well!"

Then she remembered what she had to do: she rose, walked up to Oyvind, thrust one of her dirt-covered hands into his, and, turning her face away, said, "I beg your pardon."

But then her courage forsook her, and, flinging herself on the goat, she burst into tears.

"I believe you had better keep the goat," faltered Oyvind, looking away.

"Make haste, now!" said her grandfather, from the hill; and Marit got up and walked, with hesitating feet, upward.

"You have forgotten your garter," Oyvind shouted after her. She turned and bestowed a glance, first on the garter, then on him. Finally she formed a great resolve, and replied, in a choked voice, "You may keep it."

He walked up to her, took her by the hand, and said, "I thank you!"

"Oh, there is nothing to thank me for," she answered, and, drawing a piteous sigh, went on.

Oyvind sat down on the grass again, the goat roaming about near him; but he was no longer as happy with it as before.

CHAPTER II

The goat was tethered near the house, but Oyvind wandered off, with his eyes fixed on the cliff. The mother came and sat down beside him; he asked her to tell him stories about things that were far away, for now the goat was no longer enough to content him. So his mother told him how once everything could talk: the mountain talked to the brook, and the brook to the river, and the river to the sea, and the sea to the sky; he asked if the sky did not talk to any one, and was told that it talked to the clouds, and the clouds to the trees, the trees to the grass, the grass to the flies, the flies to the beasts, and the beasts to the children, but the children to grown people; and thus it continued until it had gone round in a circle, and neither knew where it had begun. Oyvind gazed at the cliff, the trees, the sea, and the sky, and he had never truly seen them before. The cat came out just then, and stretched itself out on the door-step, in the sunshine.

"What does the cat say?" asked Oyvind, and pointed.

The mother sang,—

"Evening sunshine softly is dying,
On the door-step lazy puss is lying.
'Two small mice,
Cream so thick and nice;
Four small bits of fish
Stole I from a dish;
Well-filled am I and sleek,
Am very languid and meek,'
Says the pussie."²

Then the cock came strutting up with all the hens.

"What does the cock say?" asked Oyvind, clapping his hands.

The mother sang,—

"Mother-hen her wings now are sinking,
Chanticleer on one leg stands thinking:
'High, indeed,
You gray goose can speed;
Never, surely though, she
Clever as a cock can be.
Seek your shelter, hens, I pray,
Gone is the sun to his rest for to-day,'—
Says the rooster."³

Two small birds sat singing on the gable.

"What are the birds saying?" asked Oyvind, and laughed.

"Dear Lord, how pleasant is life,

For those who have neither toil nor strife,'—

² Auber Forestier's translation.

³ Auber Forestier's translation.

Say the birds."⁴

—was the answer.

Thus he learned what all were saying, even to the ant crawling in the moss and the worm working in the bark.

The same summer his mother undertook to teach him to read. He had had books for a long time, and wondered how it would be when they, too, should begin to talk. Now the letters were transformed into beasts and birds and all living creatures; and soon they began to move about together, two and two; *a* stood resting beneath a tree called *b*, *c* came and joined it; but when three or four were grouped together they seemed to get angry with one another, and nothing would then go right. The farther he advanced the more completely he found himself forgetting what the letters were; he longest remembered *a*, which he liked best; it was a little black lamb and was on friendly terms with all the rest; but soon *a*, too, was forgotten, the books no longer contained stories, only lessons.

Then one day his mother came in and said to him,—

"To-morrow school begins again, and you are going with me up to the gard."

Oyvind had heard that school was a place where many boys played together, and he had nothing against that. He was greatly pleased; he had often been to the gard, but not when there was school there, and he walked faster than his mother up the hill-side, so eager was he. When they came to the house of the old people, who lived on their annuity, a loud buzzing, like that from the mill at home, met them, and he asked his mother what it was.

"It is the children reading," answered she, and he was delighted, for thus it was that he had read before he learned the letters.

On entering he saw so many children round a table that there could not be more at church; others sat on their dinner-pails along the wall, some stood in little knots about an arithmetic table; the school-master, an old, gray-haired man, sat on a stool by the hearth, filling his pipe. They all looked up when Oyvind and his mother came in, and the clatter ceased as if the mill-stream had been turned off. Every eye was fixed on the new-comers; the mother saluted the school-master, who returned her greeting.

"I have come here to bring a little boy who wants to learn to read," said the mother.

"What is the fellow's name?" inquired the school-master, fumbling down in his leathern pouch after tobacco.

"Oyvind," replied the mother, "he knows his letters and he can spell."

"You do not say so!" exclaimed the school-master. "Come here, you white-head!"

"Oyvind walked up to him, the school-master took him up on his knee and removed his cap.

"What a nice little boy!" said he, stroking the child's hair. Oyvind looked up into his eyes and laughed.

"Are you laughing at me!" The old man knit his brow, as he spoke.

"Yes, I am," replied Oyvind, with a merry peal of laughter.

Then the school-master laughed, too; the mother laughed; the children knew now that they had permission to laugh, and so they all laughed together.

With this Oyvind was initiated into school.

When he was to take his seat, all the scholars wished to make room for him; he on his part looked about for a long time; while the other children whispered and pointed, he turned in every direction, his cap in his hand, his book under his arm.

"Well, what now?" asked the school-master, who was again busied with his pipe.

⁴ Translated by H.R.G.

Just as the boy was about turning toward the school-master, he espied, near the hearthstone close beside him, sitting on a little red-painted box, Marit with the many names; she had hidden her face behind both hands and sat peeping out at him.

"I will sit here!" cried Oyvind, promptly, and seizing a lunch-box he seated himself at her side. Now she raised the arm nearest him a little and peered at him from under her elbow; forthwith he, too, covered his face with both hands and looked at her from under his elbow. Thus they sat cutting up capers until she laughed, and then he laughed also; the other little folks noticed this, and they joined in the laughter; suddenly a voice which was frightfully strong, but which grew milder as it spoke, interposed with,—

"Silence, troll-children, wretches, chatter-boxes!—hush, and be good to me, sugar-pigs!"

It was the school-master, who had a habit of flaring up, but becoming good-natured again before he was through. Immediately there was quiet in the school, until the pepper grinders again began to go; they read aloud, each from his book; the most delicate trebles piped up, the rougher voices drumming louder and louder in order to gain the ascendancy, and here and there one chimed in, louder than the others. In all his life Oyvind had never had such fun.

"Is it always so here?" he whispered to Marit.

"Yes, always," said she.

Later they had to go forward to the school-master and read; a little boy was afterwards appointed to teach them to read, and then they were allowed to go and sit quietly down again.

"I have a goat now myself," said Marit.

"Have you?"

"Yes, but it is not as pretty as yours."

"Why do you never come up to the cliff again?"

"Grandfather is afraid I might fall over."

"Why, it is not so very high."

"Grandfather will not let me, nevertheless."

"Mother knows a great many songs," said Oyvind.

"Grandfather does, too, I can tell you."

"Yes, but he does not know mother's songs."

"Grandfather knows one about a dance. Do you want to hear it?"

"Yes, very much."

"Well, then, come nearer this way, that the school-master may not see us."

He moved close to her, and then she recited a little snatch of a song, four or five times, until the boy learned it, and it was the first thing he learned at school.

"Dance!" cried the fiddle;
Its strings all were quaking,
The lensmand's son making
Spring up and say "Ho!"
"Stay!" called out Ola,
And tripped him up lightly;
The girls laughed out brightly,
The lensmand lay low.

"Hop!" said then Erik,
His heel upward flinging;
The beams fell to ringing,
The walls gave a shriek.
"Stop!" shouted Elling,

His collar then grasping,
And held him up, gasping:
"Why, you're far too weak!"

"Hey!" spoke up Rasmus,
Fair Randi then seizing;
"Come, give without teasing
That kiss. Oh! you know!"
"Nay!" answered Randi,
And boxing him smartly,
Dashed off, crying tartly:
"Take that now and go!"⁵

"Up, youngsters!" cried the school-master; "this is the first day, so you shall be let off early; but first we must say a prayer and sing."

The whole school was now alive; the little folks jumped down from the benches, ran across the floor and all spoke at once.

"Silence, little gypsies, young rascals, yearlings!—be still and walk nicely across the floor, little children!" said the school-master, and they quietly took their places, after which the school-master stood in front of them and made a short prayer. Then they sang; the school-master started the tune, in a deep bass; all the children, folding their hands, joined in. Oyvind stood at the foot, near the door, with Marit, looking on; they also clasped their hands, but they could not sing.

This was the first day at school.

⁵ Auber Forestier's translation.

CHAPTER III

Oyvind grew and became a clever boy; he was among the first scholars at school, and at home he was faithful in all his tasks. This was because at home he loved his mother and at school the school-master; he saw but little of his father, who was always either off fishing or was attending to the mill, where half the parish had their grinding done.

What had the most influence on his mind in these days was the school-master's history, which his mother related to him one evening as they sat by the hearth. It sank into his books, it thrust itself beneath every word the school-master spoke, it lurked in the school-room when all was still. It caused him to be obedient and reverent, and to have an easier apprehension as it were of everything that was taught him.

The history ran thus:—

The school-master's name was Baard, and he once had a brother whose name was Anders. They thought a great deal of each other; they both enlisted; they lived together in the town, and took part in the war, both being made corporals, and serving in the same company. On their return home after the war, every one thought they were two splendid fellows. Now their father died; he had a good deal of personal property, which was not easy to divide, but the brothers decided, in order that this should be no cause of disagreement between them, to put the things up at auction, so that each might buy what he wanted, and the proceeds could be divided between them. No sooner said than done. Their father had owned a large gold watch, which had a wide-spread fame, because it was the only gold watch people in that part of the country had seen, and when it was put up many a rich man tried to get it until the two brothers began to take part in the bidding; then the rest ceased. Now, Baard expected Anders to let him have the watch, and Anders expected the same of Baard; each bid in his turn to put the other to the test, and they looked hard at each other while bidding. When the watch had been run up to twenty dollars, it seemed to Baard that his brother was not acting rightly, and he continued to bid until he got it almost up to thirty; as Anders kept on, it struck Baard that his brother could not remember how kind he had always been to him, nor that he was the elder of the two, and the watch went up to over thirty dollars. Anders still kept on. Then Baard suddenly bid forty dollars, and ceased to look at his brother. It grew very still in the auction-room, the voice of the lensmand one was heard calmly naming the price. Anders, standing there, thought if Baard could afford to give forty dollars he could also, and if Baard grudged him the watch, he might as well take it. He bid higher. This Baard felt to be the greatest disgrace that had ever befallen him; he bid fifty dollars, in a very low tone. Many people stood around, and Anders did not see how his brother could so mock at him in the hearing of all; he bid higher. At length Baard laughed.

"A hundred dollars and my brotherly affection in the bargain," said he, and turning left the room. A little later, some one came out to him, just as he was engaged in saddling the horse he had bought a short time before.

"The watch is yours," said the man; "Anders has withdrawn."

The moment Baard heard this there passed through him a feeling of compunction; he thought of his brother, and not of the watch. The horse was saddled, but Baard paused with his hand on its back, uncertain whether to ride away or no. Now many people came out, among them Anders, who when he saw his brother standing beside the saddled horse, not knowing what Baard was reflecting on, shouted out to him:—

"Thank you for the watch, Baard! You will not see it run the day your brother treads on your heels."

"Nor the day I ride to the gard again," replied Baard, his face very white, swinging himself into the saddle.

Neither of them ever again set foot in the house where they had lived with their father.

A short time after, Anders married into a houseman's family; but Baard was not invited to the wedding, nor was he even at church. The first year of Anders' marriage the only cow he owned was found dead beyond the north side of the house, where it was tethered, and no one could find out what had killed it. Several misfortunes followed, and he kept going downhill; but the worst of all was when his barn, with all that it contained, burned down in the middle of the winter; no one knew how the fire had originated.

"This has been done by some one who wishes me ill," said Anders,—and he wept that night. He was now a poor man and had lost all ambition for work.

The next evening Baard appeared in his room. Anders was in bed when he entered, but sprang directly up.

"What do you want here?" he cried, then stood silent, staring fixedly at his brother.

Baard waited a little before he answered,—

"I wish to offer you help, Anders; things are going badly for you."

"I am faring as you meant I should, Baard! Go, I am not sure that I can control myself."

"You mistake, Anders; I repent"—

"Go, Baard, or God be merciful to us both!"

Baard fell back a few steps, and with quivering voice he murmured,—

"If you want the watch you shall have it."

"Go, Baard!" shrieked the other, and Baard left, not daring to linger longer.

Now with Baard it had been as follows: As soon as he had heard of his brother's misfortunes, his heart melted; but pride held him back. He felt impelled to go to church, and there he made good resolves, but he was not able to carry them out. Often he got far enough to see Anders' house; but now some one came out of the door; now there was a stranger there; again Anders was outside chopping wood, so there was always something in the way. But one Sunday, late in the winter, he went to church again, and Anders was there too. Baard saw him; he had grown pale and thin; he wore the same clothes as in former days when the brothers were constant companions, but now they were old and patched. During the sermon Anders kept his eyes fixed on the priest, and Baard thought he looked good and kind; he remembered their childhood and what a good boy Anders had been. Baard went to communion that day, and he made a solemn vow to his God that he would be reconciled with his brother whatever might happen. This determination passed through his soul while he was drinking the wine, and when he rose he wanted to go right to him and sit down beside him; but some one was in the way and Anders did not look up. After service, too, there was something in the way; there were too many people; Anders' wife was walking at his side, and Baard was not acquainted with her; he concluded that it would be best to go to his brother's house and have a serious talk with him. When evening came he set forth. He went straight to the sitting-room door and listened, then he heard his name spoken; it was by the wife.

"He took the sacrament to-day," said she; "he surely thought of you."

"No; he did not think of me," said Anders. "I know him; he thinks only of himself."

For a long time there was silence; the sweat poured from Baard as he stood there, although it was a cold evening. The wife inside was busied with a kettle that crackled and hissed on the hearth; a little infant cried now and then, and Anders rocked it. At last the wife spoke these few words:—

"I believe you both think of each other without being willing to admit it."

"Let us talk of something else," replied Anders.

After a while he got up and moved towards the door. Baard was forced to hide in the woodshed; but to that very place Anders came to get an armful of wood. Baard stood in the corner and saw him distinctly; he had put off his threadbare Sunday clothes and wore the uniform he had brought home with him from the war, the match to Baard's, and which he had promised his brother never to touch but to leave for an heirloom, Baard having given him a similar promise. Anders' uniform was now patched and worn; his strong, well-built frame was encased, as it were, in a bundle of rags; and,

at the same time, Baard heard the gold watch ticking in his own pocket. Anders walked to where the fagots lay; instead of stooping at once to pick them up, he paused, leaned back against the wood-pile and gazed up at the sky, which glittered brightly with stars. Then he drew a sigh and muttered,—

"Yes—yes—yes;—O Lord! O Lord!"

As long as Baard lived he heard these words. He wanted to step forward, but just then his brother coughed, and it seemed so difficult, more was not required to hold him back. Anders took up his armful of wood, and brushed past Baard, coming so close to him that the twigs struck his face, making it smart.

For fully ten minutes he stood as if riveted to the spot, and it is doubtful when he would have left, had he not, after his great emotion, been seized with a shivering fit that shook him through and through. Then he moved away; he frankly confessed to himself that he was too cowardly to go in, and so he now formed a new plan. From an ash-box which stood in the corner he had just left, he took some bits of charcoal, found a resinous pine-splint, went up to the barn, closed the door and struck a light. When he had lit the pine-splint, he held it up to find the wooden peg where Anders hung his lantern when he came early in the morning to thresh. Baard took his gold watch and hung it on the peg, blew out his light and left; and then he felt so relieved that he bounded over the snow like a young boy.

The next day he heard that the barn had burned to the ground during the night. No doubt sparks had fallen from the torch that had lit him while he was hanging up his watch.

This so overwhelmed him that he kept his room all day like a sick man, brought out his hymn-book, and sang until the people in the house thought he had gone mad. But in the evening he went out; it was bright moonlight. He walked to his brother's place, dug in the ground where the fire had been, and found, as he had expected, a little melted lump of gold. It was the watch.

It was with this in his tightly closed hand that he went in to his brother, imploring peace, and was about to explain everything.

A little girl had seen him digging in the ashes, some boys on their way to a dance had noticed him going down toward the place the preceding Sunday evening; the people in the house where he lived testified how curiously he had acted on Monday, and as every one knew that he and his brother were bitter enemies, information was given and a suit instituted.

No one could prove anything against Baard, but suspicion rested on him.

Less than ever, now, did he feel able to approach his brother.

Anders had thought of Baard when the barn was burned, but had spoken of it to no one. When he saw him enter his room, the following evening, pale and excited, he immediately thought: "Now he is smitten with remorse, but for such a terrible crime against his brother he shall have no forgiveness." Afterwards he heard how people had seen Baard go down to the barn the evening of the fire, and, although nothing was brought to light at the trial, Anders firmly believed his brother to be guilty.

They met at the trial; Baard in his good clothes, Anders in his patched ones. Baard looked at his brother as he entered, and his eyes wore so piteous an expression of entreaty that Anders felt it in the inmost depths of his heart. "He does not want me to say anything," thought Anders, and when he was asked if he suspected his brother of the deed, he said loudly and decidedly, "No!"

Anders took to hard drinking from that day, and was soon far on the road to ruin. Still worse was it with Baard; although he did not drink, he was scarcely to be recognized by those who had known him before.

Late one evening a poor woman entered the little room Baard rented, and begged him to accompany her a short distance. He knew her: it was his brother's wife. Baard understood forthwith what her errand was; he grew deathly pale, dressed himself, and went with her without a word. There was a glimmer of light from Anders' window, it twinkled and disappeared, and they were guided by this light, for there was no path across the snow. When Baard stood once more in the passage, a strange odor met him which made him feel ill. They entered. A little child stood by the fireplace

eating charcoal; its whole face was black, but as it looked up and laughed it displayed white teeth,—it was the brother's child.

There on the bed, with a heap of clothes thrown over him, lay Anders, emaciated, with smooth, high forehead, and with his hollow eyes fixed on his brother. Baard's knees trembled; he sat down at the foot of the bed and burst into a violent fit of weeping. The sick man looked at him intently and said nothing. At length he asked his wife to go out, but Baard made a sign to her to remain; and now these two brothers began to talk together. They accounted for everything from the day they had bid for the watch up to the present moment. Baard concluded by producing the lump of gold he always carried about him, and it now became manifest to the brothers that in all these years neither had known a happy day.

Anders did not say much, for he was not able to do so, but Baard watched by his bed as long as he was ill.

"Now I am perfectly well," said Anders one morning on waking. "Now, my brother, we will live long together, and never leave each other, just as in the old days."

But that day he died.

Baard took charge of the wife and the child, and they fared well from that time. What the brothers had talked of together by the bed, burst through the walls and the night, and was soon known to all the people in the parish, and Baard became the most respected man among them. He was honored as one who had known great sorrow and found happiness again, or as one who had been absent for a very long time. Baard grew inwardly strong through all this friendliness about him; he became a truly pious man, and wanted to be useful, he said, and so the old corporal took to teaching school. What he impressed upon the children, first and last, was love, and he practiced it himself, so that the children clung to him as to a playmate and father in one.

Such was the history of the school-master, and so deeply did it root itself in Oyvind's mind that it became both religion and education for him. The school-master grew to be almost a supernatural being in his eyes, although he sat there so sociably, grumbling at the scholars. Not to know every lesson for him was impossible, and if Oyvind got a smile or a pat on his head after he had recited, he felt warm and happy for a whole day.

It always made the deepest impression on the children when the old school-master sometimes before singing made a little speech to them, and at least once a week read aloud some verses about loving one's neighbor. When he read the first of those verses, his voice always trembled, although he had been reading it now some twenty or thirty years. It ran thus:—

"Love thy neighbor with Christian zeal!
Crush him not with an iron heel,
Though he in dust be prostrated!
Love's all powerful, quickening hand
Guides, forever, with magic wand
All that it has created."

But when he had recited the whole poem and had paused a little, he would cry, and his eyes would twinkle,—

"Up, small trolls! and go nicely home without any noise,—go quietly, that I may only hear good of you, little toddlers!"

But when they were making the most noise in hunting up their books and dinner-pails, he shouted above it all,—

"Come again to-morrow, as soon as it is light, or I will give you a thrashing. Come again in good season, little girls and boys, and then we will be industrious."

CHAPTER IV

Of Oyvind's further progress until a year before confirmation there is not much to report. He studied in the morning, worked through the day, and played in the evening.

As he had an unusually sprightly disposition, it was not long before the neighboring children fell into the habit of resorting in their playtime to where he was to be found. A large hill sloped down to the bay in front of the place, bordered by the cliff on one side and the wood on the other, as before described; and all winter long, on pleasant evenings and on Sundays, this served as coasting-ground for the parish young folks. Oyvind was master of the hill, and he owned two sleds, "Fleet-foot" and "Idler;" the latter he loaned out to larger parties, the former he managed himself, holding Marit on his lap.

The first thing Oyvind did in those days on awaking, was to look out and see whether it was thawing, and if it was gray and lowering over the bushes beyond the bay, or if he heard a dripping from the roof, he was long about dressing, as though there were nothing to be accomplished that day. But if he awoke, especially on a Sunday, to crisp, frosty, clear weather, to his best clothes and no work, only catechism or church in the morning, with the whole afternoon and evening free—heigh! then the boy made one spring out of bed, donned his clothes in a hurry as if for a fire, and could scarcely eat a mouthful. As soon as afternoon had come, and the first boy on skees drew in sight along the road-side, swinging his guide-pole above his head and shouting so that echoes resounded through the mountain-ridges about the lake; and then another on the road on a sled, and still another and another,—off started Oyvind with "Fleet-foot," bounded down the hill, and stopped among the last-comers, with a long, ringing shout that pealed from ridge to ridge all along the bay, and died away in the far distance.

Then he would look round for Marit, but when she had come he payed no further attention to her.

At last there came a Christmas, when Oyvind and Marit might be about sixteen or seventeen, and were both to be confirmed in the spring. The fourth day after Christmas there was a party at the upper Heidegards, at Marit's grandparents', by whom she had been brought up, and who had been promising her this party for three years, and now at last had to give it during the holidays. Oyvind was invited to it.

It was a somewhat cloudy evening but not cold; no stars could be seen; the next day must surely bring rain. There blew a sleepy wind over the snow, which was swept away here and there on the white Heidefields; elsewhere it had drifted. Along the part of the road where there was but little snow, were smooth sheets of ice of a blue-black hue, lying between the snow and the bare field, and glittering in patches as far as the eye could reach. Along the mountain-sides there had been avalanches; it was dark and bare in their track, but on either side light and snow-clad, except where the forest birch-trees put their heads together and made dark shadows. No water was visible, but half-naked heaths and bogs lay under the deeply-fissured, melancholy mountains. Gards were spread in thick clusters in the centre of the plain; in the gloom of the winter evening they resembled black clumps, from which light shot out over the fields, now from one window, now from another; from these lights it might be judged that those within were busy.

Young people, grown-up and half-grown-up, were flocking together from diverse directions; only a few of them came by the road, the others had left it at least when they approached the gards, and stole onward, one behind the stable, a couple near the store-house, some stayed for a long time behind the barn, screaming like foxes, others answered from afar like cats; one stood behind the smoke-house, barking like a cross old dog whose upper notes were cracked; and at last all joined in a general chase. The girls came sauntering along in large groups, having a few boys, mostly small ones, with them, who had gathered about them on the road in order to appear like young men. When such

a bevy of girls arrived at the gard and one or two of the grown youths saw them, the girls parted, flew into the passages or down in the garden, and had to be dragged thence into the house, one by one. Some were so excessively bashful that Marit had to be sent for, and then she came out and insisted upon their entering. Sometimes, too, there appeared one who had had no invitation and who had by no means intended to go in, coming only to look on, until perhaps she might have a chance just to take one single dance. Those whom Marit liked well she invited into a small chamber, where her grandfather sat smoking his pipe, and her grandmother was walking about. The old people offered them something to drink and spoke kindly to them. Oyvind was not among those invited in, and this seemed to him rather strange.

The best fiddler of the parish could not come until later, so meanwhile they had to content themselves with the old one, a houseman, who went by the name of Gray-Knut. He knew four dances; as follows: two spring dances, a halling, and an old dance, called the Napoleon waltz; but gradually he had been compelled to transform the halling into a schottishe by altering the accent, and in the same manner a spring dance had to become a polka-mazurka. He now struck up and the dancing began. Oyvind did not dare join in at once, for there were too many grown folks here; but the half-grown-up ones soon united, thrust one another forward, drank a little strong ale to strengthen their courage, and then Oyvind came forward with them. The room grew warm to them; merriment and ale mounted to their heads. Marit was on the floor most of the time that evening, no doubt because the party was at her grandparents'; and this led Oyvind to look frequently at her; but she was always dancing with others. He longed to dance with her himself, and so he sat through one dance, in order to be able to hasten to her side the moment it was ended; and he did so, but a tall, swarthy fellow, with thick hair, threw himself in his way.

"Back, youngster!" he shouted, and gave Oyvind a push that nearly made him fall backwards over Marit.

Never before had such a thing occurred to Oyvind; never had any one been otherwise than kind to him; never had he been called "youngster" when he wanted to take part; he blushed crimson, but said nothing, and drew back to the place where the new fiddler, who had just arrived, had taken his seat and was tuning his instrument. There was silence in the crowd, every one was waiting to hear the first vigorous tones from "the chief fiddler." He tried his instrument and kept on tuning; this lasted a long time; but finally he began with a spring dance, the boys shouted and leaped, couple after couple coming into the circle. Oyvind watched Marit dancing with the thick-haired man; she laughed over the man's shoulder and her white teeth glistened. Oyvind felt a strange, sharp pain in his heart for the first time in his life.

He looked longer and longer at her, but however it might be, it seemed to him that Marit was now a young maiden. "It cannot be so, though," thought he, "for she still takes part with the rest of us in our coasting." But grown-up she was, nevertheless, and after the dance was ended, the dark-haired man pulled her down on his lap; she tore herself away, but still she sat down beside him.

Oyvind's eyes turned to the man, who wore a fine blue broadcloth suit, blue checked shirt, and a soft silk neckerchief; he had a small face, vigorous blue eyes, a laughing, defiant mouth. He was handsome. Oyvind looked more and more intently, finally scanned himself also; he had had new trousers for Christmas, which he had taken much delight in, but now he saw that they were only gray wadmal; his jacket was of the same material, but old and dark; his vest, of checked homespun, was also old, and had two bright buttons and a black one. He glanced around him and it seemed to him that very few were so poorly clad as he. Marit wore a black, close-fitting dress of a fine material, a silver brooch in her neckerchief and had a folded silk handkerchief in her hand. On the back of her head was perched a little black silk cap, which was tied under the chin with a broad, striped silk ribbon. She was fair and had rosy cheeks, and she was laughing; the man was talking to her and was laughing too. The fiddler started another tune, and the dancing was about to begin again. A comrade came and sat down beside Oyvind.

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