ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

CHASING THE SUN

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Ballantyne R.

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Содержание

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Chapter One.
Preparations for the Chase

Fred Temple was a tall, handsome young fellow of about five-and-twenty.

He had a romantic spirit, a quiet gentlemanly manner, a pleasant smile, and a passionate desire for violent exercise. To look at him you would have supposed that he was rather a lazy man, for all his motions were slow and deliberate. He was never in a hurry, and looked as if it would take a great deal to excite him. But those who knew Fred Temple well used to say that there was a great deal more in him than appeared at first sight. Sometimes a sudden flush of the brow, or a gleam of his eyes, told of hidden fires within.

Fred, when a small boy, was extremely fond of daring and dangerous expeditions. He had risked his life hundreds of times on tree-tops and precipices for birds' nests, and had fought more hand-to-hand battles than any of the old Greek or Roman heroes. After he became a man, he risked his life more than once in saving the lives of others, and it was a notable fact that many of the antagonists of his boyhood became, at last, his most intimate friends.

Fred Temple was fair and ruddy. At about the age of nineteen certain parts of his good-looking face became covered with a substance resembling floss-silk. At twenty-five this substance had changed into a pair of light whiskers and a lighter moustache. By means of that barbarous custom called shaving he kept his chin smooth.

Fred's father was a wealthy Liverpool merchant. At the period when our tale opens Fred himself had become chief manager of the business. People began, about this time, to say that the business could not get on without him. There were a great number of hands, both men and women, employed by Temple and Son, and there was not one on the establishment, male or female, who did not say and believe that Mr Frederick was the best master, not only in Liverpool, but in the whole world. He did not by any means overdose the people with attentions; but he had a hearty offhand way of addressing them that was very attractive. He was a firm ruler. No skulker had a chance of escape from his sharp eye, but, on the other hand, no hard-working servant was overlooked.

One day it was rumoured in the works that Mr Frederick was going to take a long holiday. Since his appointment to the chief charge, Fred had taken few holidays, and had worked so hard that he began to have a careworn aspect, so the people said they were "glad to hear it; no one in the works deserved a long holiday better than he." But the people were not a little puzzled when Bob Bowie, the office porter, told them that their young master was going away for three months to chase the sun!

"Chase the sun, Bob! what d'ye mean?" said one. "I don't know wot I mean; I can only tell ye wot I say," answered Bowie bluntly.

Bob Bowie was an old salt—a retired seaman—who had sailed long as steward of one of the ships belonging to the House of Temple and Son, and, in consequence of gallantry in saving the life of a comrade, had been pensioned off, and placed in an easy post about the office, with good pay. He was called Old Bob because he looked old, and was weather-worn, but he was stout and hale, and still fit for active service.

"Come, Bowie," cried another, "how d'ye know he's goin' to chase the sun?"

"Cause I heerd him say so," replied Bob.

"Was he in earnest?" inquired a third.

"In coorse he wos," said Bob.

"Then it's my opinion," replied the other, "that old Mr Temple'll have to chase *his* son, and clap him in a strait-jacket w'en he catches him—if he talks such stuff."

The porter could not understand a joke, and did not like one, so he turned on his heel, and, leaving his friends to laugh at their comrade's jest, proceeded to the counting-room.

There were two counting-rooms—a small outer and a large inner one. In the outer room sat a tall middle-aged man, lanky and worn in appearance and with a red nose. Opposite to him, at the same desk, sat a small fat boy with a round red face, and no chin to speak of. The man was writing busily—the boy was drawing a caricature of the man, also busily.

Passing these, Bob Bowie entered the inner office, where a dozen clerks were all busily employed, or pretending to be so. Going straight onward like a homeward-bound ship, keeping his eyes right ahead, Bob was stranded at last in front of a green door, at which he knocked, and was answered with a hearty "Come in."

The porter went in and found Fred Temple seated at a table which was covered with books and papers.

"Oh! I sent for you, Bowie, to say that I want you to go with me to Norway to-morrow morning."

"To Norway, sir!" said Bowie in surprise.

"Ay, surely you're not growing timid in your old age, Bob! It is but a short voyage of two or three days. My little schooner is a good sea-boat, and a first-rate sailor."

"Why, as for bein' *timid*," said the porter, rubbing the end of his nose, which was copper-coloured and knotty, "I don't think I ever knowed that there feelin', but it does take a feller aback to be told all of a suddent, after he's reg'larly laid up in port, to get ready to trip anchor in twelve hours and bear away over the North Sea—not that I cares a brass fardin' for that fish-pond, blow high, blow low, but it's raither suddent, d'ye see, and my rig ain't just seaworthy."

Bowie glanced uneasily at his garments, which were a cross between those of a railway-guard and a policeman.

"Never mind the rig, Bob," cried Fred, laughing. "Do you get ready to start, with all the underclothing you have, by six to-morrow morning. We shall go to Hull by rail, and I will see to it that your top-sails are made all right."

"Wery good, sir."

"You've not forgotten how to make lobscouse or plum-duff, I dare say?"

Bob's eyes brightened as he replied stoutly, "By no manner o' means."

"Then be off, and, remember, sharp six."

"Ay, ay, sir," cried the old seaman in a nautical tone that he had not used for many years, and the very sound of which stirred his heart with old memories. He was about to retire, but paused at the threshold of the green door.

"Beg parding, sir, but if I might make so bold as to ax—"

"Go on, Bob," said Fred encouragingly.

"I heerd ye say to our cashier, sir, that you wos goin' for to *chase the sun*. Wot sort of a chase may that be, sir?"

"Ha! Bowie, that's a curious chase, but not a wild goose one, as I hope to show you in a month or two. You know, of course, that in the regions of the earth north of the Arctic Circle the sun shines by night as well as by day for several weeks in summer?"

"In coorse I do," answered Bob; "every seaman knows that or ought for to know it; and that it's dark all day as well as all night in winter for some weeks, just to make up for it, so to speak."

"Well, Bob, I am very desirous to see this wonderful sight with my own eyes, but I fear I am almost too late of setting out. The season is so far advanced that the sun is setting farther and farther north every night, and if the winds baffle us I won't be able to catch him sitting up all night; but if the winds serve, and we have plenty of them we may yet be in time to see him draw an unbroken circle in the sky. You see it will be a regular chase, for the sun travels north at a rapid pace. D'you understand?"

Bob Bowie grinned, nodded his head significantly, retired, and shut the door.

Fred Temple, left alone, seized a quill and scribbled off two notes,—one to a friend in Scotland, the other to a friend in Wales. The note to Scotland ran as follows:—

"***My Dear Grant***,—I have made up my mind to go to Norway for three months. Principal object to chase the sun. Secondary objects, health and amusement. Will you go? You will find my schooner comfortable, my society charming (if you make yourself agreeable), and no end of salmon-fishing and scenery. Reply by return of post. I go to Hull to-morrow, and will be there a week. This will give you ample time to get ready.

"Ever thine, ***Fred Temple***."

The note to Wales was addressed to Sam Sorrel, and was written in somewhat similar terms, but Sam being a painter by profession, the beauty of the scenery was enlarged on and held out as an inducement.

Both of Fred's friends had been prepared some time before for this proposal, and both of them at once agreed to assist him in "chasing the sun!"

That night Frederick Temple dreamed that the sun smiled on him in a peculiarly sweet manner; he dreamed, still further, that it beckoned him to follow it to the far north, whereupon Fred was suddenly transformed into a gigantic locomotive engine; the sun all at once became a green dragon with pink eyes and a blue tail; and he set off in chase of it into the Arctic regions with a noise like a long roar of the loudest thunder!

Chapter Two.
The Storm and the First Adventure

A storm raged on the bosom of the North Sea. The wind whistled as if all the spirits of Ocean were warring with each other furiously. The waves writhed and tossed on the surface as if in agony. White foam, greenish-grey water, and leaden-coloured sky were all that met the eyes of the men who stood on the deck of a little schooner that rose and sank and staggered helplessly before the tempest.

Truly, it was a grand sight—a terrible sight—to behold that little craft battling with the storm. It suggested the idea of God's might and forbearance,—of man's daring and helplessness.

The schooner was named the *Snowflake*. It seemed, indeed, little heavier than a flake of snow, or a scrap of foam, in the grasp of that angry sea. On her deck stood five men. Four were holding on to the weather-shrouds; the fifth stood at the helm. There was only a narrow rag of the top-sail and the jib shown to the wind, and even this small amount of canvas caused the schooner to lie over so much that it seemed a wonder she did not upset.

Fred Temple was one of the men who held on to the weather-rigging; two of the others were his friends Grant and Sam Sorrel. The fourth was one of the crew, and the man at the helm was the Captain; for, although Fred understood a good deal of seamanship, he did not choose to take on his own shoulders the responsibility of navigating the yacht. He employed for that purpose a regular seaman whom he styled Captain, and never interfered with him, except to tell him where he wished to go.

Captain McNab was a big, tough, raw-boned man of the Orkney Islands. He was born at sea, had lived all his life at sea, and meant (so he said) to die at sea. He was a grim, hard-featured old fellow, with a face that had been so long battered by storms that it looked more like the figure-head of a South-Sea whaler than the countenance of a living man. He seldom smiled, and when he did he smiled grimly; never laughed, and never spoke when he could avoid it. He was wonderfully slow both in speech and in action, but he was a first-rate and fearless seaman, in whom the owner of the schooner had perfect confidence.

As we have fallen into a descriptive vein it may be as well to describe the rest of our friends offhand. Norman Grant was a sturdy Highlander, about the same size as his friend Temple, but a great contrast to him; for while Temple was fair and ruddy, Grant was dark, with hair, beard, whiskers, and moustache bushy and black as night. Grant was a Highlander in heart as well as in name, for he wore a Glengarry bonnet and a kilt, and did not seem at all ashamed of exposing to view his brown hairy knees. He was a hearty fellow, with a rich deep-toned voice, and a pair of eyes so black and glittering that they seemed to pierce right through you and come out at your back when he looked at you! Temple, on the contrary, was clad in grey tweed from head to foot, wideawake included, and looked, as he was, a thorough Englishman. Grant was a doctor by profession; by taste a naturalist. He loved to shoot and stuff birds of every shape and size and hue, and to collect and squeeze flat plants of every form and name. His rooms at home were filled with strange specimens of birds, beasts, fishes, and plants from every part of Scotland, England, and Ireland—to the disgust of his old nurse, whose duty it was to dust them, and to the delight of his little brother, whose self-imposed duty it was to pull out their tails and pick out their eyes!

Grant's trip to Norway promised a rich harvest in a new field, so he went there with romantic anticipations.

Sam Sorrel was like neither of his companions. He was a little fellow—a mere spider of a man, and extremely thin; so thin that it seemed as if his skin had been drawn over the bones in a hurry and the flesh forgotten! The Captain once said to Bob Bowie in a moment of confidence that Mr

Sorrel was a “mere spunk,” whereupon Bob nodded his head, and added that he was no better than “half a fathom of pump water.”

If there was little of Sam, however, that little was good stuff. It has been said that he was a painter by profession. Certainly there was not a more enthusiastic artist in the kingdom. Sam was a strange mixture of earnestness, enthusiasm, and fun. Although as thin as a walking-stick, and almost as flat as a pancake, he was tough like wire, could walk any distance, could leap farther than anybody, and could swim like a cork. His features were sharp, prominent and exceedingly handsome. His eyes were large, dark, and expressive, and were surmounted by delicate eyebrows which moved about continually with every changeful feeling that filled his breast. When excited his glance was magnificent, and the natural wildness of his whole aspect was increased by the luxuriance of his brown hair, which hung in long elf-locks over his shoulders. Among his intimates he was known by the name of “Mad Sam Sorrel.”

When we have said that the crew of the schooner consisted of six picked men besides those described and our friend Bob Bowie, we have enumerated all the human beings who stood within the bulwarks of that trim little yacht on that stormy summer’s day.

There was, however, one other being on board that deserves notice. It was Sam Sorrel’s dog.

Like its master, this dog was a curious creature. It was little and thin, and without form of any distinct or positive kind. If we could suppose that this dog had been permitted to make itself, and that it had begun with the Skye-terrier, suddenly changed its mind and attempted to come the poodle, then midway in this effort had got itself very much dishevelled, and become so entangled that it was too late to do anything better than finish off with a wild attempt at a long-eared spaniel, one could understand how such a creature as “Titian” had come into existence.

Sam had meant to pay a tribute of respect to the great painter when he named his dog Titian. But having done his duty in this matter, he found it convenient to shorten the name into Tit—sometimes Tittles. Tittles had no face whatever, as far as could be seen by the naked eye. His whole misshapen body was covered with long shaggy hair of a light grey colour. Only the end of his black nose was visible in front and the extreme point of his tail in rear. But for these two landmarks it would have been utterly impossible to tell which end of the dog was which.

Somehow the end of his tail had been singed or skinned or burned, for it was quite naked, and not much thicker than a pipe-stem.

Tittles was extremely sensitive in regard to this, and could not bear to have his miserable projection touched.

How that storm did rage, to be sure! The whole sea was lashed into a boiling sheet of foam, and the schooner lay over so much that it was impossible for the men to stand on the deck. At times it seemed as if she were thrown on her beam-ends; but the good yacht was buoyant as a cork, and she rose again from every fresh blast like an unconquerable warrior.

“It seems to me that the masts will be torn out of her,” said Temple to the Captain, as he grasped the brass rail that surrounded the quarterdeck, and gazed upward with some anxiety.

“No fear o’ her,” said the Captain, turning the quid of tobacco in his cheek; “she’s a tight boat, an’ could stand a heavier sea than this. I hope it’ll blow a wee thing harder.”

“Harder!” exclaimed Fred.

“You must be fond of wind, Captain,” observed Grant with a laugh.

“Oo ay, I’ve no objection to wund.”

The Captain said this, as he said everything else, more than half through his nose, and very slowly.

“But do you not think that more wind would be apt to carry away our top-masts, or split the sails?” said Temple.

“It’s not unlikely,” was the Captain’s cool reply.

“Then why wish for it?” inquired the other in surprise.

"Because we're only thirty miles from the coast of Norway, and if the wund holds on as it's doin', we'll not make the land till dark. But if it blows harder we'll get under the shelter of the Islands in daylight."

"Dark!" exclaimed poor Sam Sorrel, who, being a bad sailor, was very sick, and clung to the lee bulwarks with a look of helpless misery; "I thought there was no dark in Nor—."

The unhappy painter stopped abruptly in consequence of a sensation in the pit of his stomach.

"There's not much darkness in Norway in summer," answered McNab, "but at the south end of it here there's a little—specially when the weather is thick. Ay, I see it's comin'."

The peculiar way in which the Captain said this caused the others to turn their eyes to windward, where it was very evident that something was coming, for the sky was black as ink, and the sea under it was ruffled with cold white foam.

"Stand by the clew-lines and halyards," roared the Captain.

The men, who were now all assembled on deck, sprang to obey. As they did so a squall came hissing down on the weather-quarter, and burst upon the vessel with such fury that for a moment she reeled under the shock like a drunken man, while the spray deluged her decks, and the wind shrieked through the rigging.

But this was too violent to last. It soon passed over and the gale blew more steadily, driving the *Snowflake* over the North Sea like a seamew.

That evening the mountains of Norway rose to view. About the time that this occurred the sky began to clear towards the north-west and soon after a white line of foam was seen on the horizon right ahead. This was the ocean beating on the great army of islands, or skerries, that line the west coast of Norway from north to south.

"Hurrah for old Norway!" shouted Fred Temple with delight, when he first observed the foam that leaped upon these bare rocky islets.

"It seems to me that we shall be wrecked," said Grant gravely. "I do not see an opening in these tremendous breakers, and if we can't get through them, even a landsman could tell that we shall be dashed to pieces."

"Why not put about the ship and sail away from them?" suggested Sorrel, looking round with a face so yellow and miserable that even the Captain was *almost* forced to smile.

"Because that is simply impossible," said Fred Temple.

Poor Sam groaned and looked down at his dog, which sat trembling on the deck between his feet, gazing up in its master's face sadly—at least so it is to be supposed; but the face of Tittles, as well as the expression thereof, was invisible owing to hair.

"*Is* there an opening, Captain?" inquired Fred in a low, serious tone.

"Oo ay, no fear o' that," replied the Captain.

There was, indeed, no fear of that, for as the schooner approached the islands, numerous openings were observed. It also became evident that the gentlemen had mistaken the distance from the broken water, for they were much longer of reaching the outer skerries than they had expected, and the foam, which at first appeared like a white line, soon grew into immense masses, which thundered on these weather-worn rocks with a deep, loud, continuous roar, and burst upwards in great spouts like white steam many yards into the air.

"Captain, are the islands as numerous everywhere along the coast as they are here?" said Fred.

"'Deed ay, an' more," answered the Captain, "some places ye'll sail for fifty or sixty miles after getting among the skerries before reachin' the main."

They were now within a hundred yards of the islands, towards a narrow channel, between two of which the Captain steered. Every one was silent, for there was something awful in the aspect of the great dark waves of the raging sea, as they rolled heavily forward and fell with crash after crash in terrific fury on the rocks, dashing themselves to pieces and churning the water into foam, so that the whole sea resembled milk.

To those who were unaccustomed to the coast, it seemed as if the schooner were leaping forward to certain destruction; but they knew that a sure hand was at the helm, and thought not of the danger but the sublimity of the scene.

"Stand by the weather-braces," cried McNab.

The schooner leaped as he spoke into the turmoil of roaring spray. In ten seconds she was through the passage, and there was a sudden and almost total cessation of heaving motion. The line of islands formed a perfect breakwater, and not a wave was formed, even by the roaring gale, bigger than those we find on such occasions in an ordinary harbour. As isle after isle was passed the sea became more and more smooth, and, although the surface was torn up and covered with foam, no great rollers heaved the vessel about. The tight little craft still bent over to the blast, but she cut through perfectly flat water now.

A delightful feeling of having come to the end of a rough voyage filled the hearts of all on board. Sam Sorrel raised his head, and began to look less yellow and more cheerful. Tittles began to wag the stump of his miserable tail, and, in short, every one began to look and to feel happy.

Thus did the *Snowflake* approach the coast of Norway.

Now, it is by no means an uncommon occurrence in this world that a calm should follow close on the heels of a storm. Soon after the *Snowflake* had entered the islands the storm began to abate, as if it felt that there was no chance of overwhelming the little yacht now. That night, and the greater part of the following day, a dead calm prevailed, and the schooner lay among the islands with her sails flapping idly from the yards.

A little after midnight all on board were asleep, save the man at the helm and Captain McNab, who seemed to be capable of existing without sleep for any length of time when occasion required. The schooner now lay in a latitude so far north that the light of the sun never quite left the sky in clear weather. A sweet soft twilight rested on the rocky islands and on the sea, and no sound disturbed the stillness except the creaking of the yards or the cries of seamews.

Yes, by the way, there was another sound. It proceeded from the cabin where our three friends lay sleeping on the sofas. The sound was that of snoring, and it issued from the wide-open mouth of Sam Sorrel, who lay sprawling on his back, with Tittles coiled up at his feet.

It is probable that Sam would have snored on for hours, but for a piece of carelessness on his part. Just before going to rest he had placed a tin can of water close to his head in such a way that it was balanced on the edge of a shelf. A slight roll of the schooner, caused by the entrance of a wave through an opening in the islands, toppled this can over and emptied its contents on the sleeper's face.

He leaped up with a roar, of course. Tittles jumped up with a yelp, while Grant and Temple turned round with a growl at having been awakened, and went off to sleep again.

But sleep was driven away from the eyes of Sam Sorrel. He made one or two efforts to woo it back in vain, so in despair he jumped up, put his sketch-book in his pocket, seized a double-barrelled fowling-piece, and went on deck, followed by Tittles. The little boat was floating under the quarter, and a great mountainous island lay close off the starboard bow. Getting into the boat, Sam rowed to the island, and was soon clambering up the heights with the activity of a squirrel.

Sam paused now and then to gaze with admiration on the magnificent scene that lay spread out far below him; the innumerable islands, the calm water bathed in the soft light of early morning, and the schooner floating just under his feet like a little speck or a sea-gull on the calm sea. Pulling out his book and pencil, he sat down on a rock and began to draw.

Suddenly the artist was startled by the sound of a heavy pair of wings overhead. Thousands of seagulls flew above him, filling the air with their wild cries, but Sam did not think it possible that they could cause the sound which he had, heard. While he was still in doubt an enormous eagle sailed majestically past him. It evidently had not seen him, and he sat quite still, scarce daring to draw his breath. In a moment the gigantic bird sailed round the edge of a precipitous cliff, and was gone.

Sam at once rose and hurried forward with his gun. He was much excited, for eagles are very difficult to approach—they are so shy and wary. Few men who go to Norway ever get the chance of a shot at the king of birds.

Judge, then, of the state of Sam Sorrel's mind when, on turning a corner of rock, he suddenly beheld the eagle standing on the edge of a great precipice about a hundred yards in advance of him.

But his hopes were much cast down when he observed that between him and the eagle there was a space of open ground, so that he could not creep farther forward without being seen. How was he to advance? What was he to do? Such a chance might not occur again during the whole voyage. No time was to be lost, so he resolved to make a rush forward and get as near as possible before the bird should take to flight.

No sooner thought than done. He rushed down the mountain-side like a madman. The eagle sprang up in alarm just as he reached the side of a rounded rock. Halting suddenly, he took aim, and fired both barrels. The eagle gave a toss of its head and a twirl of its tail, and, sailing slowly away round a neighbouring cliff, disappeared from view.

A deep groan burst from the poor artist as he exclaimed, "Oh dear, I've missed it!"

But Sam was wrong. He had *not* missed it. On climbing to the other side of the cliff he found the eagle stretched on the ground in a dying state. Its noble-looking eye scowled for a moment on him as he came up, then the head drooped forward and the bird died. It measured six feet four inches from tip to tip of its expanded wings, and was as magnificent a specimen of the golden eagle as one could wish to see.

With a triumphant step Sam carried it down to the yacht, where he found his comrades still sound asleep; so he quietly fastened the eagle up over Grant's bed, with the wings expanded and the hooked beak close to the sleeper's nose!

The day that followed this event continued calm, but towards evening a light breeze sprang up, and before midnight the *Snowflake* cast anchor in the harbour of Bergen.

Chapter Three.
Bergen—Talking, Supping, and Sleeping Under Difficulties

The city of Bergen is a famous and a strange old place. In ancient days it was a stronghold of the Vikings—those notorious sea-warriors who were little better than pirates, and who issued from among the dark mountains of Norway in their great uncouth galleys and swept across the seas, landing on the coasts everywhere, to the terror of surrounding nations.

They were a bold, fearless set, the Norse Vikings of old. They voyaged far and wide in open boats round the coasts of Europe, and across the stormy sea, long before the mariner's compass was invented, and they discovered Iceland and America long before Christopher Columbus was born. They had free spirits, these fierce Norwegians of old, and there was much good as well as evil in them. They had good and wise laws when nearly all the rest of the world was lawless; and many of the laws and customs which prevailed among them a thousand years ago exist at the present day. The bold Vikings were great colonisers; among other parts of the world they overran and settled in a large portion of Great Britain, and much of their blood—more than many people are aware of—flows in our own veins.

But I am wandering from my subject. Let me return to it by repeating that Bergen, this ancient stronghold of the Vikings, is a famous and a strange old place.

It is built at the foot of a steep mountain-range which is so close to the margin of the sea that the city has barely room to stand. One might fancy that the houses were crowding and jostling each other and squeezing themselves together, in order to avoid on the one hand being pushed up the mountain-side, and, on the other hand, being thrust into the sea. Some of the smaller cottages and a few villas seem to have been beaten in this struggle for standing-room, for they appear to have been obliged to clamber up the mountain-side, and perch themselves on spots where there does not seem to be standing-room for a goat. From such elevated positions they look down complacently on their crowded brethren.

The houses near the sea have not fared so well. They are built *in* the water on piles, and are all of them warehouses with projections in front, from which hang blocks and hoisting tackle. These projections resemble heads; the piles look like legs; and it does not require a very strong effort of imagination to believe that the warehouses are great living creatures which have waded into the sea, and are looking earnestly down into the water to observe how the fish are getting on.

The houses are all built of wood; all are painted white, and all have red-tiled roofs. They are peaked and gable-ended to an extraordinary degree, so that the general aspect of the city is confused and irregular—all the more interesting and picturesque on this account.

A thought strikes me here, and when a thought strikes one, I think we ought always to pay that thought the compliment of jotting it down. It is this—regularity in small details is pleasing; regularity on a grand scale is disagreeable. For instance, a chair with one leg turned, another square, and a third ornamentally carved, would be a disagreeable object. The two front legs at least must be regular, and the two back legs regular. A chair is a small matter. But proceed to a grander subject—a city. If every house is similar to its neighbours, if every street is parallel to the rest, the effect is bad; regularity here is disagreeable. This is a deep subject requiring much study and philosophical inquiry. If I were to go farther into it, our friend Fred Temple's adventures would have to be cast overboard. I will, therefore, cut it short with the remark that the subject is well worthy the attention of even deeper-thinking men than are ever likely to read this book.

When the three friends, Temple, Grant, and Sorrel, found themselves in the quaint old city of Bergen their first thought was *supper*; their second thought *bed*.

Now this may seem to some minds a dreadfully low and contemptible state of things. “What!” a romantic reader may exclaim, “they had arrived in that celebrated city, from which in days of old the stalwart Vikings used to issue on their daring voyages, in which the descendants of these grand fellows still dwell, and in which are interesting memorials of the past and quaint evidences of the present. Did your heroes, Temple, Sorrel, and Grant, think of supper and of bed when their feet for the first time trod the soil of Old Norway?”

Even so! Romantic reader, I am bound to tell you that romance is all very well in its way, but it has no power whatever over an empty stomach or an exhausted brain.

When our three friends landed in Bergen it was past midnight. Their admiration of the scenery had induced them to neglect supper and to defy sleep, so that when they landed they felt more than half inclined to fall upon their boatman and eat him up alive, and then to fall down on the stone pier and go off to sleep at once.

In this frame of mind and body they entered the house of Madame Sontoom, and called for supper.

Madame Sontoom was the owner of a private hotel. Moreover, she was the owner of a plump body and a warm heart. Consequently, she at once became a mother to all who were fortunate enough to dwell under her roof.

Her hotel was by no means like to a hotel in this country. It was more like a private residence. There were no hired waiters. Her amiable daughters waited; and they did not look upon you as a customer, or conduct themselves like servants. No, they treated you as a visitor, and conducted themselves with the agreeable familiarity of friends! Of course they presented their bill when you were about to leave them, but in all other respects the idea of a hotel was banished from the mind.

“Supper,” cried Temple, on entering the house.

“Ya, ya,” (yes, yes), in cheerful tones from two of Madame Sontoom’s daughters.

Then followed a violent conversation in the Norse language, in which there was much that was puzzling, and more that was amusing, for the Norwegian ladies were talkative and inquisitive.

Fred Temple had studied the Norse language for three months before setting out on this voyage, and, being a good linguist he understood a good deal of what was said, and could make his own wants known pretty well. Grant had studied the language also, but not for so long a time, and, being an indifferent linguist, he made little headway in conversation. As to Sam Sorrel, he had no talent for languages. He hated every language but his mother-tongue, had not studied Norse at all, and did not intend to do so. It may be supposed, therefore, that he was dumb. Far from it. He had picked up a few phrases by ear, and was so fond of making use of these, and of twisting them into all shapes and out of all shape, that he really appeared to be a great talker of Norse, although in reality he could scarcely talk at all!

Supper consisted of coffee, rolls, eggs, “gamleost” (old cheese), lobster, and smoked salmon. The viands were good, the appetites were also good, so the supper went off admirably.

“Ver so goot,” said one of the young ladies, handing Mr Sorrel a plate of smoked salmon.

“Tak, tak,” (thanks, thanks), said our artist, accepting the salmon, and beginning to devour it.

“I say, what d’ye mean by ‘ver so goot’? You’re never done saying it. What does it mean?”

The fair waitress laughed, and bowed politely, as much as to say, “I don’t understand English.”

“Can you explain it, Fred?” said Sam.

“Well, yes, I can give you a sort of explanation,” replied Fred, “but it is not an easy sentence to translate. ‘Ver so goot’ (another claw of that lobster, please. Thanks),—‘ver so goot’ is an expression that seems to me capable of extension and distension. It is a comfortable, jovial, rollicking expression, if I may say so. I cannot think of a better way of conveying an idea of its meaning than saying that it is a compound of the phrases ‘be so good,’ ‘by your leave,’ ‘good luck to you,’ ‘go it, ye cripples,’ and ‘that’s your sort.’ The first of these, ‘be so good,’ is the literal translation. The others are more or less

mixed up with it. You may rely on it, Sam, that when a Norwegian offers you anything and says ‘ver so goot,’ he means you well, and hopes that you will make yourself comfortable.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.