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## FEMALE INTREPIDITY.

A TALE OF LAPLAND.

They who have traversed the dreary wastes of Lapland, full well remember the huts of Koutokeino. The busy merchant or passing stranger who has left the gloomy thicket of Skovbredden, views with rejoicing the lonely cots and log-built parsonage which yield him his first shelter from the rushing of the snow-drift. Yet it is a lonely spot, and, while the blast of the hurricane sleeps, a solemn dulness reigns. The boundless, trackless solitudes which reach from Alp to Alp and vale to vale, till the dwarf birch fails, and the cloud-berry gives its fruit no longer, stretch around the village. The frozen river, the deeply bedded trees, the icy hills, and snow-embosomed plains, present the silent landscape.

On a bleak dark day in January, when the sky threatened heavily, and the wind began to prophecy in sullen tones, a party of travellers set out from Koutokeino on their route to Alten. But, though the journey promised cold and suffering, they were bound on a joyous errand, and many were the reindeer which sped forward on that morning to the scene of a Lapland wedding. And the herd went forth, sportive and healthful, amidst the shouting of the drivers; their bells rang merrily, and their clinking hoofs sent out the well-known sound which is heard from afar. There were also, besides the peasantry, the foged,\* two merchants of Alten, and an English wanderer, who had come up from the very borders of the *Euxine*, and had trod with safety the wilds of Siberia. The pulk† of the Englishman was open, after the custom of the native of Lapland, and he had in vain been urged to travel in the closer sledge which the merchants commonly made use of. His deer, too, was fresh and vigorous, and though he had securely skimmed along the Russian snows, the weather had been favourable, and the country as yet smooth and free from danger. But he who dares the peril of a northern winter, and treads within the arctic circle, must stand prepared for change. The moon shone brightly on the glittering waste, and gleamed cheerfully on the spangled mountains when the group set forth, but, nimbly as they started, they had not reached the passes of the Solivara heights before the cold advanced, and the snow deepened, and the mist hovered in the distance. The light now declined, the precipices were at hand, the fog was hastening onwards, and the deer were at their fullest speed. The party, however, had gained the summit of the hills before this march of night, but they had scarcely gazed upon the deeps below, when the heavens became darkened, and the eastern stars, to which their anxious eyes had often turned, were seen no longer. The dense cloud had shadowed all, but the speed of the journey was unrelaxed. The wappus‡ hurried not. The Laplanders flanked the sides of their deer. It was a race in the night along the frozen Solivara, the highest of the Finmark Alpa. The bellowing of the tempest increased the terror of the time, for, in these distant lands, the fatal snow-drift succeeds often to the shrouding mist. There was a general halt. The descent of the mountain presented a formidable danger. The guide, though a well-travelled native, had forgotten the usual pass. But it was determined to go forward, and the least headlong path along the mighty chain was eagerly sought for. The pulks were again put in motion, and the deer approached the gaping declivity. There was no delay. Each driver fastened the rein tightly round his arm, and trusted to his beast. The sledges flew like the lightning. It was still dark, and neither moon, nor star, nor northern flash appeared to mark the track. Deer, carriage, traveller and guide, were

hurried on in equal confusion. The master of the pulk lost his power; the animal, tangled in the trace, his footing; but while man and beast were struggling in the snow, the sledge dashed down the height, dragging along its inmate, and rolling like a ball. Every one was in dread of his neighbour. The sheriff's pulk dashed against that of his nearest countrymen, and there might now be seen driver upon driver, deer by the side of deer, and sledge upon sledge, in the general overturn. Loud shouts sounded on all sides, and "wappus!" "wappus!" was echoed by the routed assembly. But the wappus was himself in jeopardy, and some moments went by before the guide could detach himself from his own pulk in order to give the needful aid. Happy were the foged and his fellows, when safe from storm and frost, they pushed their jaded cattle into Alten. The peasant's heart was joyous as he beheld once more the *gammes*\* of his country, and looked forward to the brandy bumpers of the wedding. The sheriff blessed himself as he looked upon his dwelling, circled by stately firs, and the merchant was cheered by the sight of the well known *fjord*† where his ships and riches lay. It was indeed Alten, with its grassy waters, its rock towering above the flood, its tall birches, and tufts of pine, with naked summits in the distance high surmounting all.

The nuptial rites had begun before the arrival of the party from Koutokeino. The chapel, two Finmark miles from Alten, had been early crowded with Laplanders, and the holy ordinances of marriage and the sacrament were administered with the customary solemnities. Each Lap was arrayed in his best attire, and paid an attention to the Norsk service—of which he understood not one word—which would have done honour to an English congregation. Conspicuous amongst the assembly were the bride and her spouse. The first with her blue *koften*‡ gaily trimmed with divers colours, her ribands streaming from her head, and hair banded by a golden fillet—the bridegroom, with his blue frock, also, set off with red and white embroidery. The day passed on joyfully; the shops of the merchants were crowded with natives, who quaffed brandy till their money would hold out no longer; and the very stripling girls clubbed together to gain their jovial glass. But the grand festivity was reserved for the evening. The supper, to which the people of the neighbourhood were invited, was given in a large outhouse let for the purpose by the traders of the place. The deep vessels filled with savoury venison, such as a man's heart delighteth in, were already emptied by the frequent fingers of the guests, and the brandy was in like manner drawing nearly to a close, when the foged arrived with his mountain party. He had set off in a boat with haste from Alten, and having called at the house of the giest-giver.§ lost no time in reaching the scene of rejoicing. A fresh present of brandy renewed the mirth, and the worthy sheriff, while he smiled on the happy group before him, could not help reflecting that a plenteous bowl of punch was awaiting his own bidding at the habitation of the general host. But suddenly, amid the greeting and *puurists*|| of the newly-come Laplanders, a buzz was heard through the room, and the countenance of the foged fell. Where was the English stranger? He had been rather behind, and the magistrate had pressed briskly forward. He was in the open pulk, and by chance might have got out, in which case, if left by his deer, his situation would be critical. Where was the wappus? The guide was once more loudly called for, and he admitted that, at the last halt, he had not noticed the Englishman. "The deer," said the wappus, "was mettlesome, but the foreigner was wilful, after the manner

of his countrymen." "He may still come," said the foged, but the speaker's look but ill agreed with the words which tottered on his lips.

The party were in confusion, for the Laps respect the rites of hospitality, and they felt that their guide had deserted the stranger in the hour of danger. But no one moved from his place, and the missing traveller came not. The sheriff forgot his flowing bowl, and the brandy lingered on the table.

Among the numerous guests who had helped to celebrate the wedding, and partake the cheer, was a Lapland girl of Koutokeino. Her countenance beamed intelligence which nature had denied to her kinsfolk, and she had been listening to the story which went round, with an eagerness which promised action rather than idle pity. "And shall we leave the stranger to perish in the snow?" said the maiden, glancing at her neighbours with indignant heroism. "Shame, Laps of the mountain!—Uttereon!" continued she, calling to a youth who sat near her. The appeal was not in vain. A lad of twenty, one of those bold fishers who dare the sudden tempests of the polar main, started up, wrapped his mantle round him, and obeyed the voice which summoned. "Uttereon!" said the girl once more, "we must go back instantly and seek this poor stranger!" The youth made no reply, but, drawing his deer-skin still closer, hastened to the door. The sheriff followed with a numerous concourse, and the boats quickly brought them back to Alten. "Now let us have our sledges, and go forward," said the maiden, again appealing to the courage of the fisherman. The deer were yoked, and the reins fixed, the damsel's pulk being fastened behind that of Uttereon, and others were preparing their cattle to aid the search, when the Englishman's sledge was observed at a distance with the animal in its traces, but no driver to welcome his companions. "Then the worst has indeed happened," cried the foged, "and poor Montague is cast upon the wilderness. It is of no use my friends," he added, looking mournfully towards Uttereon and his associate. "Hopeless; indeed!" exclaimed the fisherman, seeming as though he would unharness his ready beast. "But, hopeless as it may be, it must be done," replied the girl of the mountains, "and let those who fear desert the wretched outcast, and leave him to the mercies of our frost." There needed no more. The pulk was instantly put forward, and many were the hardy peasants who went forth in quest of the stranger. The foged himself could not resist the chance, forlorn as it was, and he dashed on to the rescue among the foremost of the group.

The storm had now ceased, and the brilliant lights of the firmament resumed their glory. All nature seemed to welcome the kind work of benevolence which was in progress. The beautiful Aurora danced above the travellers, and shot forth its varied flames with arrowy swiftness. The wind was no more, and the deer sprang rapidly across the shining wastes. The herd had now reached Skovbedden, a birchen thicket between Alten and Koutokeino, but there was no vestige of the Englishman. It was determined to halt for the night, and a council was held. The foged declared he should return to Alten in the morning; and even Uttereon himself allowed the uselessness of further search. The maiden alone was unmoved, and by her look seemed to upbraid the wavering fisherman for his retreat. The supper of stewed venison being now hastily despatched, the party turned their deer loose, and went to rest, some in sacks, some on pillows of snow, others beneath the coverlet of the newly-risen drift.

But the maid of Koutokeino slept not. She sat by the fire sullen and sorrowful, and as the glare of the flame

\* Sheriff † Sledge, like a canoe or cockboat. ‡ Guide.

\* Huts. † Firth. ‡ Frock § The person who furnishes entertainment for strangers. || Lapland expressions of friendship.