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## THIODOLF THE ICELANDER. BY BARON DE LA MOTTE FOUQUE. CHAPTER XV.

They had now been embarked many days, when one evening the sun went down behind dark clouds, and the sea looked quiet. Malgherita, mindful of the former storm which in the autumn had thrown them in such hapless plight on the shore of Iceland, trembled violently; but Thiodolf said, laughing: "Oh, lovely little lady, I have already told thee that the men who then managed your ship deserved nothing better than what befell them, so awkwardly and cowardly did they oppose the storm; but now brave Icelanders guide this ship, and Thiodolf is at the helm. And more than all, hast thou so little trust in the white Christ."

Malgherita felt ashamed and strengthened at the same time. She wished good night to Thiodolf, who had determined not to move from the helm, especially during the night, and went with her husband to rest. It might have been soon after midnight, when suddenly a loud cry was raised on board the ship; the terrified Malgherita saw torches shining through the cabin-window out in the dark night, and Pietro noticed, with no less alarm, that the light must come from another ship, which must in the darkness be sailing fearfully close to their own. A moment decided their fate, and that happily. The two vessels disappeared from each other, and nothing remained but a light contest with the sea, which had now again subsided, and offered little resistance. Pietro and Malgherita again closed their eyes in sweet slumber.

The early morning sun shone brightly on the water; the young Provencals had risen, and after wishing each other joy of their escape, were about to leave their cabin, when Thiodolf came towards them radiant with joy. "Oh my friends," cried he, "good fortune is following us with eagle wings. It is not enough that we escaped being run down by the stranger ship when we touched so closely in the darkness, but that ship is a marvellously glorious prize. See, that other steersman is rejoicing certainly over us, and is sailing towards us with as hearty a longing as we towards him, since we have both recognized in the joyful morning light our flags and colors."

"Then it is some very dear friend," said Malgherita, "who guides that vessel? Or perchance it brings tidings of some festivity?"  
"A friend? No, that I cannot say," answered Thiodolf. "But festivity? Yes, it may bring us that. For see, he on the stranger ship yonder is Swartur, the sea-robber, a brother of Mordur's, whom I slew. Now he would fain take vengeance on me for his dead brother; and I would fain win peace for Iceland by altogether destroying this bad brood. Thou shalt see presently, little Malgherita! It will be, indeed, a right joyous festivity."

And as Malgherita shook with terror, he tried to comfort her by saying, "Thou knowest not yet how gloriously northern spears whistle over the roaring waves. And then Pietro, I hope, will share in the merry sport. He already can throw spears right well."

"Yes, surely, I will have my share," said Pietro, glowing with joyful knightly thoughts. "And Malgherita, I pray thee earnestly not to oppress my heart, and the hearts of the other brave fighters, by needless lamentations. Harkken, how very near to us the enemy is blowing his war-trumpet."

"Be at ease, thou fair little creature," cried Thiodolf. "My shield shall be always at hand to cover Pietro; and if need is, my breast likewise. Ah, he will be a thousand times dearer to thee when he returns victorious."

The two young heroes hastened on deck. Malgherita stretched forth her hands imploringly, partly after them, partly up to heaven; whilst Pietro, soon completely armed, with Thiodolf's careful assistance, stood before the troops.

The fight began. Those who have never known what knightly joy there is in throwing heavy iron-pointed spears, can hardly imagine the gladness which a sea-fight brings to the northern heroes, when the deadly weapon glances close to their temples, or falls back powerless against the resounding shields: then hurled again into the enemy's ranks with fearless strength; oftentimes the same spear, which had but just flown past the thrower, threatening death to him, and sinking, still trembling from the force with which it was flung, deep into the planks of the deck. Every spear which struck in an enemy's breast, or even in an enemy's shield, on the one side steeled the arm with a confident strength, and on the other inflamed to a more deadly wrath.

As Thiodolf had truly said to Malgherita, the spears whistled with a peculiar sound over the roaring waves. Pietro, from his warlike exercises with Thiodolf in Iceland, threw like a practiced Northman. He was less expert with the use of his shield as a covering; but Thiodolf stood at his side like a guardian angel, turning off with rapid movements what approached too dangerously near his friend, without delaying, for

one moment, his own mighty throws, and often crying out, "Only boldly fling far into the storm, comrade! I will receive the rain-drops meant for thee on my iron covering."

The ships in the mean while drew nearer and nearer; and as the desire for combat was equally strong on both sides, each party threw out long iron hooks into their enemy's deck, and thus drew the ships close with such immense power that suddenly they struck with an unexpected crash. While all on board both ships staggered from the shock, Thiodolf had darted like an eagle into the midst of the enemies, had seized the fierce Swartur by the throat, and after twice striking violently on his helmet with the spear, he flung him far into the sea; so that the stunned pirate, after once only rising to the surface, sank for ever in the deep.

This decided the combat; the men on board the pirate's ship lowered their spears, and Thiodolf granted them pardon. He made his followers take possession of the ship, and assigned different posts to such of the pirates who swore to serve him.

He then led Pietro to Margaret, saying,—"Dost thou see now how I have brought him safe back to thee? So must thou be brave and cheerful if this happen again; for we shall have more meetings of the like kind. But thou seest that spears do not always devour a man."

And whilst the young pair were speaking loving and thankful words to each other, Thiodolf went over the decks of both ships, seeking out the best and most ornamented of the spears that had been thrown, for he had a great love for them. While he was about this, he fell into talk with one of Swartur's warriors, whom he asked whither they were bound.

"We were bound," answered the man, "for Norway, to the neighborhood of Bergen. A great feast is to be kept in memory of the victory once gained there over the famous Icelandic chief, Helmfrið; when he was forced to leave his shield, after he had in vain striven to win a fair princess. You must have heard that in your native songs."

"Yes, I know it well," said Thiodolf. "The brother of Helmfrið's sword hangs at my side; and how might it be if I won the shield to wear with it?"

"You will find there a great multitude of armed men," said Swartur's soldier, "and a mighty opposition."

Thiodolf did not answer; he went to the helm of his ship, and steered it full towards the southwest.

Not far from the island of Faro, to the west of the town of Bergen, there rises a high mountain, called by the people, on account of its strange shape, "the Monk." There, when the sea is not too high, ships can find a good harbor; and the ship which in a storm can reach "the Monk," lies concealed.

Thiodolf had directed his eyes to the port. He left at its entrance his own ship, and many trusty soldiers to protect her; and with the pirate's vessel, he prepared to approach the shore of Bergen. As he did not summon Pietro to accompany him, the knight came up to him with a displeased look, and said, "Did I then show myself so unworthy in the last combat, that thou wilt not take me with thee on this new adventure which now thou art planning in thy mind?"

"Thor and all the mighty gods forbid!" answered Thiodolf. "Thou art my well-beloved and brave comrade in arms. I but thought that thou shouldst remain here with Malgherita; because there may be rather warm work for us on the coast of Norway."

Then Malgherita drew near, and said with an effort, but proudly, "I pray you, Thiodolf, never again to think of rejecting the brave arm of my lord by reason of that childish utterance of my fears. You will here leave me such a guard as befits my rank; and for the rest, I commit the renowned Marquis of Castelfranco to God's keeping."

Pietro pressed a warm kiss on the lips of his noble wife. Thiodolf bent low before her, saying, "I cannot tell you, lady, how gloriously bright you shine before me at this moment. The fair maidens who fill the cups of the heroes in Walhalla must look like you. But we, Pietro, must not less brightly shine after our fashion than thy fair wife after hers; and therefore let us hasten to Bergen, where many noble deeds are to be done."

The friends went on board the pirate's vessel, and set sail singing for the woody strand. There, beside two great glowing fires which extended from the summit of a light down to the sea, sat many warriors in full armor feasting, while the sound of harps floated joyfully above the revelers. High up on the hill an almost gigantic golden shield was seen brightly shining from between the branches of some linden-trees; and at certain parts of the song, the guests rose from their seats, greeted, as it were, the shield, and struck together their silver-edged drinking-horns. It was beautiful to see how the festal torch-light shone upon the dark green of the leaves, and

seemed to vie with the brightness of the golden shield.

As Thiodolf and his companions left their vessel, and going along the shore, approached the banqueters, they heard the following words of the song:

"For a king's daughter didst thou fight, brave youth, But won pale death instead to be thy bride; Helmfrið, thou hero of the northern isle, Thou lightly didst thou think of Norway's sons. Thou fondly didst anticipate the joy Of winning here a wreath of victory— Of holding here thy splendid marriage-feast— But thy spear broke, thy shield fell to the ground.

"Upon the turf it fell, and thy red blood Gushed over the bright gold in trickling streams; Scarce could thy warriors bear thy vanquished form, Thy wounded body to thy ships again. Go forth, thou valiant fighter, thou brave knight, Thou hast found thy master in the hero-land. Henceforth, when Iceland is the minstrel's theme, Let Norway's noble deed be louder sung!"

"That may well be, ye noble Northmen," said Thiodolf, when, after the old hospitable custom, he and his companions had been desired to sit down, and had received drinking-horns. "But I think we shall try it to-day once again; unless perchance you will give me with your good will the shield of Helmfrið up yonder, and receive in exchange as a friendly gift this one on my arm, which, in truth, is no bad piece of armor."

"That bargain could hardly pass," said an old Norman, shaking his head. "How art thou called, thou that thinkest to offer thy shield in the place of Helmfrið's?"

"In sooth I am not called Helmfrið, but only Thiodolf," answered the youth, and bent his head modestly. "You have, indeed, never yet heard this name; for this is my first expedition out in the world. But have patience and forbearance, sirs, and take my shield instead of that one. I promise you that in two years at latest it shall be of no less worth."

"You look like one who would hold his word," said the old Norwegian, "and I feel no doubts about you; but yet the exchange you propose can in no ways be effected."

"Then a fight must come to pass," said Thiodolf, rising up; "for I am firmly resolved either to remain dead upon this coast, or to carry off with me Helmfrið's shield. So, choose you out, my dear German countrymen, certain of your warriors who shall defend the shield against me. I have five-and-twenty soldiers with me; and I seek an equal number to oppose me, or if it seem good to you, a double number."

"It would be strange," said the old man, "if Norway's warriors used superior numbers to secure victory. I will myself defend the hill on which the shield hangs against you; and I will draw lots for five-and-twenty comrades—not one man more."

"That was just what I myself expected of you," answered Thiodolf, with a kindly nod of his head.

The preparations for the fight were made. The path which led through the two fires up to the shield was to be stormed and defended; all attacks from the sides or the rear were forbidden in the trial of strength between the Normans and the Icelanders, as disturbing and likely to confuse the clear judgment which was to be formed on the valor of the two parties.

The old man had drawn the lots, and now he stood on the linden-hill with twenty-five noble warriors; the golden shield shone over their spears to inspire them; the war-trumpets sounded, and the combat began.

The lances flew high among the branches of the trees, so that fresh boughs fell together with the heavy spears, like wreathes of victory, on helmet and armor. One of the Norwegian warriors, whom death had struck at the first throw, lay covered with broken branches, as beneath a beautiful fresh grave in spring.

And now they drew nearer to each other with swords and battle-axes, and a fearful and mighty strife began. The heroes fought in silence; but there was often heard a long-drawn breath and a groan amidst the clank of arms; for each warrior exerted his strength to the very utmost, well knowing that he had to do with adversaries who could not be repulsed with less effort. Sounds from the harps of the gazers-on arose, doubtful and uncertain, as if preparing for a song of victory, when the combat should be decided.

Throng-piercer, the lately named sword of Thiodolf, had already done great honor to its name. The Norwegians fell before it in their blood; the old hero, who had led them on, stood almost alone in front of the golden shield; but he stood so firm and ready for the fight, and he hurled the spears, which lay thick around his hot place, so rapidly and with such certain aim, that none could yet say confidently that the victory was won by the Icelanders. Thiodolf, meaning to decide all with one blow, threw his shield over his back, seized Throng-piercer with both hands for a mighty stroke, and sprung wildly up to the old man. The spear of the latter flew with a steady aim towards his face; but Pietro turned

away the weapon with his shield, while at the same moment a lance struck the knight's unprotected side, and stretched him breathless on the grass.

Thiodolf by this time had reached his enemy, and thundered such a blow on his steel helmet that the old man fell down with a heavy groan, and the victor, unopposed, flew like an arrow up the linden-tree, seized Helmfrið's golden shield, and, springing down again as rapidly, he swung the recovered armor high over his head, and a tumultuous shout of victory rang through the forest.

The warriors of Norway sank spears, and swords, and battle-axes, slowly towards the ground, and raised a solemn, somewhat mournful, song of praise in honor of the stranger victor. He the while knelt beside his beloved Pietro, and looked at his wound, scolding him sharply. "How, then, shall I show myself to that little Malgherita," cried he, in angry sorrow, "if I bring thee wounded to the Monk's Rock—perchance wounded mortally? Did I ever tell thee to cover me with thy shield? why didst thou do anything so foolish? Such a mad deed! Wait a little! it thou diest, thou shalt have to answer me for it, I can tell thee."

At these words a smile passed over Pietro's pale face, but he had no strength to answer. Then there came one to help the Iclander in his care for the knight, who rubbed the wounded man with strong oil, and spoke earnestly to Thiodolf: "Shame on thee! such a choice fighter, and such a had leech to tend the wound of thy friend! I hope that when thou art older, thou wilt get more skill. Look more narrowly before thou beginnest to scold and to lament. The skin is hardly broken; and he is faint, not from the wound, but from the stunning blow."

Thiodolf and Pietro looked into the face of the grave speaker, and knew him to be the old warrior who had defended the shield against them, and who wore a broad bandage around his unhealed head, which ached and smarted from the blow of Thiodolf. He gave his hand kindly to his victor, saying: "It need not be said that the Helmfrið's shield is now thine. But I would pray thee, in the name of this whole assembly, to abide by the exchange thou first spoke of, and to leave us in possession of Thiodolf's shield. We know now what we shall possess in it."

Thiodolf bent respectfully, and offered his bright shield to the old man, who took it from his hand; and the Norwegian forthwith, to the sound of harps, and with loud cries of joy, hung it on the same branch where the shield of Helmfrið had before hung.

### CHAPTER XVI.

When the old chief's favorable opinion of Pietro's wound had been found correct, Thiodolf hastened to take him back to Malgherita. The brave men of Norway accompanied their renowned guests to the shore with songs and music, and horns filled with mead. Thus the victors sailed joyously back to their comrades. Thiodolf stood on the fore part of the ship, Pietro at his side, and the golden shield at the end of a lance sparkled in front of them, so that it gave out the happy tidings to the Monk's Rock long before the ship had touched the strand.

Thiodolf said to Malgherita, as she joyfully approached them, "Hearken, pretty lady; thou didst very well to let thy husband come with me to the coast of Bergen. To speak the truth, he owed me a little to-day for the services I have done him; and perhaps that interferes somewhat with a true, open friendship. But now all is right. Without him I should be lying pale and cold on the linden-hill, or else in a Runic grave; and Helmfrið's shield would be hanging in his old place. Embrace me, brother Pietro; for equal and equal are good companions."

The two young heroes embraced; and Malgherita looked up at her knight with yet more joyful pride and happier love.

After Thiodolf had left them awhile to see to the embarking, Malgherita pointed to the Monk's Rock, which looked strangely in the red evening glow, half-veiled by mists, and said: "Ah, Pietro, I would that huge stone had never come before my eyes; it will now often appear to me again in my dreams. For, trust me, those who have once seen the iron north so stern and unchangeable will never lose it from their mind, even when the most balmy flowers and fruits of the south bloom around them in full luxuriance; and that fearful image which we see yonder greatly increases the gloomy impression." Pietro strove to dispense her fears; but she repeated, that at all times so terrible a monk's figure would rise frightfully before her.

Just then the trumpets sounded for the departure; and the sails were given to the wind as the stars began to appear.

A soft breeze blew over the sea, bringing, as it were, a southern greeting to the voyagers, who were yet in the north. And Thiodolf said to Pietro and the fair lady: "The moon shines bright upon the waters. Could you not sit awhile beside me at the helm, and we might talk together in this pleasant twilight?"

"Willingly," said Malgherita. "Tell us the history of that golden shield which you have won to-day."

"If it give you pleasure, I shall do it joyfully," answered Thiodolf. And he began in the following manner: "There was a man called Helmfrið; he was the best of all the spearmen, swimmers, and mariners of Iceland. Besides, he was of high courage, and of so noble stature that none could be compared with him. Our old people, who were young men with him, know not how to speak enough of him. As he grew to man's estate, and yet never seemed to think of wooing any lovely maiden, his comrades would ask him whether he bore no love to fair women; and once Helmfrið thus answered: 'Great love I bear to fair women; but yet the fairest that I have hitherto seen are not fair enough for me, far and wide as I have been in the world. But I have heard speak of a king's daughter in Norway, who is fair above all on earth; and I will go forth after her, and win her for me, for she belongs to me or to none.' And soon afterwards he had sailed for Norway."

"When he arrived there, the king's daughter, who had, perchance, heard of the bold and presumptuous speech of her suitor, showed herself beyond measure towards him. She also imposed upon him trials of skill in arms, unheard of among other warriors; she would now bid him throw spears of gigantic force, then bring wild horses and tame them, and many like exploits; all with the intention that he should fail in some one of them, and thus his proud spirit would be brought low. But he came out of all those trials more and more glorious; and the maiden knew not what else she could lay upon him. Then she once met him on a hill of linden-trees, and spoke thus to him: 'Thou mighty Helmfrið, thou speakest fairly of thy love for me; but what thou hast done to prove its truth are only warlike games, which thou thyself lovest, and which help to increase thy renown. But now I would give thee another trial—to leave something undone for my sake.'

"And as he prayed her earnestly to make known her pleasure to him, she said that he must doff his armour, and become, for love of her, a poor fisherman. He did so that very day; but before three weeks had passed, the other fishermen looked upon this so brave and skillful comrade as their master; so that he was wont to be called the fish-king, and was held in great honor."

"Again the king's daughter met him, and reproached him with having everything to his advantage, bidding him now throw away his nets, and become a smith. He obeyed her; and what did it avail? Very soon no man would wear arms which were not forged by the smith Helmfrið; his door was thronged with noble horses, which he was to shoe; and the soldiers showed more reverence to him than to the king, who was father of the maiden."

"At length she bade him put on the garb of a Christian monk—he had been christened during one of his expeditions—and not come forth again from the linden-forest, or hold intercourse with any in the world. He bore his with great firmness and gentleness; only showing himself somewhat impatient with those who would visit him, notwithstanding his prohibition, for he lamed some with the stones that he flung at them."

And now the maiden felt that the love and truth of the brave Helmfrið had melted her hard heart. She came to him one bright evening in the linden-forest, gave him her fair hand, and said that she was his bride. From that moment an overwhelming pride came back into his heart; he would give a good word to no man, for the sake of his love; and arming himself again in bright steel, he went, with several Icelanders, who had come with him into Norway and obeyed him in all things, into the presence of the king and his court, saying: "Thy daughter and I are one; she goes back with me to Iceland as my wife. Say a hasty farewell to her; for my pennons are waving, and my sails are swelling."

"But the Norwegian prince took this ill; and when Helmfrið would have carried her away by force, sharp fight ensued. There would have been no harm in that, but that the mighty Helmfrið had forgotten that his strength had departed while he lived the austere life of a hermit. Thus was he conquered for the first time and pressed so sorely that his companions could hardly bring him in safety to his ship, for he was senseless from his wounds; and his golden shield remained in possession of his enemies."

"He never could forget this disgrace, nor ever again showed himself among the ranks of the north. But, from the south, wondrous tales of the hero-deed which he has accomplished have come over to us. It is said that the Norway king once offered him peace and his daughter's hand; but Helmfrið, red with shame and wrath, answered: 'My shield is lost! all is lost! my love and all!'

"Then the king's daughter left the world and