

A LIFE'S ENIGMA - A NORWEGIAN REVEALED

BY JOHNSTON B. JOHNSON.

(Continued.)

Out from the sea he had come to him that night, as first, into the sea she had now passed away again; and with her the story of her life. In the midnight darkness of that silent deep lay all that was dear to him; should he not follow? He had come to that place with a firm determination to make an end of the thing that tormented him; this was not the end; and now it could never come; the trouble was, indeed, only now in reality beginning. Aasta's dead cried out to him that he had made a terrible mistake, and had killed her. Even if his misery should become ten times greater, he must live on to find out how all had happened. She who was almost the only one saved on that fearful night, had been saved only to be killed by him who had saved her. He who had gone voyaging and trading about as if the world were nothing but sea and mart, had all at once become the victim of a love which had killed the woman he had chosen, and must now kill him. Was he a bad man? He had never heard any one say so, neither had he ever felt it himself. But what if, after all, it were so? He rose, not, however, to cast himself overboard, sleep, but to return to the valley; no man kills himself just when he has found a great enigma which he wishes to solve.

But the enigma of Aasta's life could never be solved now. She had lived in America ever since she had been grown up, and she was coming from there when the ship ran into each other. In what part of America should his quest begin? From what part of Norway should he first come he did not positively know; and he was uncertain even whether her family name had not been changed since then. And that foreign skipper? Who could he be? Did he know Aasta, or was it only she who knew something of him? To question this was like questioning the very truth, and to journey forth to the vestige, was like plunging into its depths.

Surely he had made a terrible mistake. A woman penitent on account of some guilty thing would have found relief in confessing it to her husband; and one still penitent would have sought refuge in some evasion or other. But Aasta had neither confessed anything nor had recourse to any evasion, but had sought refuge in death when he had no reason to believe that she was guilty of anything. Such conduct showed no sign of guilt. But why not? Some folks had a great dread of confessing anything. Aasta, however, had no such dread, for she had already confessed there was something about her life which she could never tell him. Perhaps, then, the greatest of her guilt made confession impossible. But she could not have had the burden of any great guilt upon her; for she was often joyous—joyous, even full of fun. She was lively and impetuous, it is true; but she was also very full of tender feeling and kindness. Perhaps the guilt was some other person's and not hers at all? Why, then, had she not told him so? If she had only done this, all would have come right. But supposing there was no guilt, either on her side or on that of anybody else, how then? But she herself had said there was something she could never tell him; and then, how about that foreign skipper? She was so afraid of how was it? Ah, he had been still alive, he would still have tormented her! This thought moved him deeply, and made him repeat and repeat himself beyond measure.

Still he began again—perhaps she was not so guilty as she believed; or perhaps not so guilty as others might have thought. How often did he repeat quite innocently, and only through ignorance, though so few could understand that! Thus Aasta had thought that he, who was always full of suspicion, would not understand it. Out of one clear, simple answer he would have found matter for a hundred suspicious questions; and so she had chosen to hide herself to death rather than to him. Why could he never leave her in peace? She had fled from the things of her past life, and sought refuge with him; and then he, too, sought constantly to drag them forward and find them in her face! She was truly attached to him, and showed him all her love and tenderness; what right had he, then, to concern himself about her past? And if he had any such right, why did he not say so in the beginning? Whereas, the more her affection had grown, the more his disgust had grown through her—when she, not merely through admiration and gratitude, but also through love, had become wholly his own, then, forsooth, he must begin to wish to know all about what she had done and been in days gone by. The more, too, she had pleaded for herself, the worse he had thought of her, and the more he had insisted that there was something he ought to be told.

Then, for the first time, arose the question, had he told her everything? Would it really be right for husband and wife to tell each other everything? Would all be understood if it were told? Most certainly not.

He heard two children playing, and he looked around. He was sitting in the green inclosure Aast had spoken of a little while ago, but he had not been aware of it till now. Five years had passed; he thought it was only a few minutes. The children had most likely been playing there for a long time; but he heard them now for the first time.

What! Was not one of them Agnes, the clergyman's little daughter of eight years, whom Aasta had loved even to idolatry, and who was so like her! Good heavens! how like she was!

Agnes had just set her little brother upon a great stone, where he had to be in school, while she was schoolmaster.

"Say now just what I say," she commanded.

"Our Father,"

"Our Father,"

"Who art in Heaven,"

"Arise be name,"

"Thy kingdom come,"

"Thy will be done,"

"No; say!"

Dots! crept away; not, however, because the prayer had touched him; in deed, he had not marked that it was a prayer; but while he looked at and listened to the children, he became, in his own eyes, a horrible wild beast, until he dragged himself behind some bushes, so that the children might not discover him; he was more afraid of them than he had ever been of any one in all his life. He slunk off into the forest, far away from the high road.

To be continued.

A Boy's Charity.

From the Detroit Free Press.

"Well, my son," said a Dutch father to his eight-year-old son the other night, "what have you done to-day that may be set down as a good deed?"

"Gave a poor boy five cents," replied the hopeful.

"Ah, all that was charity, and charity is always right. He was an orphan boy, was he?"

"I didn't stop to ask," replied the boy; "I gave him the money for kicking a boy who split in my dinner basket!"

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From Glasgow, on Saturday, March 2nd, at 10 o'clock, to London, Liverpool, and St. John, N. B.

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From St. John, N. B., on Monday, March 11th, at 10 o'clock, to Glasgow, London, and Liverpool.

From Glasgow, on Thursday, March 14th, at 10 o'clock, to London, Liverpool, and St. John, N. B.

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