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THIODOLF THE ICELANDER.

BY BARON DE LA MOTTE FOUGÈRE. CHAPTER X.

"We have then had a wedding in Iceland!" said Thiodolf, as they all sat the next morning at breakfast in the hall. "How did you like it, dear bride and bridegroom? I think that though you were a little frightened at first, and the storm sang a wild song without, you are yet well pleased with the whole business, as it all fell out, and not altogether displeased with me. Is it not so?" And he stretched out both his hands to the young husband and wife with hearty good nature; Pietro and Malgherita warmly pressed them.

"There is but one thing to be thought about," said Nefolf, "but that is a very important one." "Now," cried Thiodolf, "I shall be glad to hear this marvellous fact." "But what can I do?" answered the old man. "When I begin to speak out what is in my heart, it is all one as to begin to chide thee; and then thou wilt break forth into thy berserker rage, which belongs to our race as to all the northern hero-races, and thou wilt destroy us all."

"Uncle," said Thiodolf, "after the berserker rage one becomes powerless as a child; then you can bind me and take every sort of vengeance on me which comes into your head." "And when we are all slain by thy wild hand," returned his uncle, "who is there to take vengeance on thee?" "That is true," answered Thiodolf, shaking his head; "that makes it a very bad business.—I will tell you something, uncle; only scold me in moderation, and then I think I can keep myself quiet. All the year through, you know, I am used to a certain amount of grumbling. It is true that yesterday somewhat of the old rage broke loose in me, and therefore to-day I can less answer for myself than usual."

"Just so," said Nefolf; "one must be very much on one's guard with thee." "Ay!" replied Thiodolf; "but if my berserker rage is strong, I am strong too, and I can keep it down for a good while. If it gets too much for me, I will stamp with my feet; and then leave off at once, my very dear uncle, if your neck is precious to you. And now take courage, in the name of all the gods."

"Well, then," began his uncle, "what couldst thou mean by putting so completely out of sight respect and good manners towards the noble Gunnar? Like a forward, impatient boy, thou didst tear the pious priest from his protector, and bring to pass with noise, injustice, and outrage, what might have been done with peace, gentleness, and justice. Didst thou think, my boy, that thou wert the Mount Hecla, who pours forth fire and smoke over Iceland according to its good pleasure? Nay, truly, thou art not that; and if thou chooseth to fancy thyself to be such, we must, as soon as may be, bring thee to thy senses again, by showing thee at once thy mad handiwork. I will do my best in this; and Gunnar, unasked, will do as much. With all his relations and allies—"

Then Thiodolf stamped on the ground, and the old man was silent. But the youth only cried out: "I rather like you to scold me; for I can then think on the face of my dear father, as he lay so still, and stiff, and dead, when the spear of the sea-robber had struck him, and they bore him to the grave, and I followed him, mourning. But I pray you earnestly to abstain from the like foolish threatenings about Gunnar and his relations. Let him come, with uncles and cousins, and, if he pleases, with aunts and sisters to boot. I have long had a great wish to make face against a little body of five or six warriors, who would come upon me all at once; and if every one in this court wishes to encounter but half the number, it would be light play with Gunnar."

At this moment one of the household entered, announcing that a messenger from Gunnar stood without, of wrathful mien, and bearing a red shield, after a warlike fashion. He demanded that the Christian priest, Jonas, should be restored, and would not hear of receiving hospitality.

"There is not the least need that he should!" cried Thiodolf, still somewhat wild from what had been said; he then seized the priest by the arm, and hastened out with him, to give such answer as he thought fit. Pietro would have followed to protect his fellow-Christian, but Nefolf implored him to remain.

"My wild nephew," said he, "is not wicked, and will assuredly do the old man no hurt. But since yesterday evening the blood runs madly in his veins, and he does not so master himself that any one can speak to him unaverted without some mischief probably ensuing."

the oak palisade, suspended in the air, and called out to the messenger: "Since thou hast made thy request so boldly and after such unmannerly fashion, it would be a rightful return to thee if I were to throw thy jewel broken at thy feet.—But I myself love him too well for that. Wait a little, and I will bring him down to thee forthwith." Then he drew back the priest, stroked his cheek lovingly, and carried him down to the door with the attention and reverence of a son. As he gave him over to the messenger, he said to the latter, "Take that dear good old man carefully home for me. I should have done it myself, had you not made so needless a noise with this coming of yours. And you may tell your lord that it need not come to war between us. I will give myself up to him at the next assembly on the Rock of Justice, and submit to what he himself shall acknowledge to be fair." Thierewith he returned to his friends around the fire, and said, smiling: "Be in no trouble about a war. I see that with fellow-countrymen that is not to be thought of. Still I will not be threatened; and I know well how I can peaceably get out of the business. But if Gunnar will have war and tumult—well then, it is his fault, and I shall no longer be in the least sorry for it."

CHAPTER XI. The powerful protector of the old Jonas seemed not to believe in the peaceable intentions which Thiodolf had notified to him through his messenger; on the contrary, he diligently furnished himself and his friends with arms and horses, and summoned from afar all his allies, merely, he said, to lead them in the beginning of spring to the general assembly of the people at the Rock of Justice; but it could plainly be seen, by the disciplining of his troops, that he looked rather to do, or to prevent, some bold deed, than to make preparations for an august and imposing appearance. Jonas spoke on this subject to his noble host with affectionate earnestness, and required that he, as a Christian, should show himself like his heavenly master, by agreeing to a peaceful reconciliation; but Gunnar answered:

"Dear old sir, I do all this only from necessity; for the unruly youth, I tell you, will do none of all those just things that he has promised me." "Ay, ay," said Jonas, shaking his old head, "you good Icelanders assuredly belong to that noble German race from which we Englishmen also are proud of having come. And can you thus doubt one another's word? To me that wild young lion appeared a noble creature of the Lord."

"I will not deny it," said Gunnar; "on the contrary, we Icelanders look upon him as a glorious scion of his house, who in time will bring much honor to our island. Neither do I say that he means to tell me falsehoods; only you yourself cannot deny that he is wild as a storm in autumn; and who knows whether the storm may carry him? But, at all events, the bold son of Asmundur will not easily get over this business; for although many former things have been passed over and forgiven him in the assembly of the people, they are all very wrath with him this time. They might be too harsh with him; and as I am a rich and powerful man, it is my duty to look carefully to this, for the sake of the whole island."

They had often thus spoken together; for Jonas, although he had not much to say against Gunnar's arguments, yet always led him back to the subject, thinking by slow degrees to bring him to milder thoughts. This mid-day sun was now shining bright over the snow, and it looked almost as if a kindly sun were rising in Gunnar's mind. He showed more mirth than disgust at Thiodolf's wild impetuosity; and he owned that bold mad deeds were not uncommon amongst the youths of Iceland; only, he added, none had ever been quite so daring as Thiodolf's. Just then an old servant entered the room; he looked vexed and astonished, and said that one of the foreign soldiers, who were now pressing into Gunnar's service on account of the high pay, had just struck dead the finest bull of the herd, because the noble creature on its way home had a little threatened him with his horns. Gunnar was about to burst forth; but Jonas said, smiling:

"Now truly, dear sir, the woe or wo of Iceland is not here concerned, and you may, without blame, show yourself to be a patient Christian." Gunnar nodded an assent, and desired that the soldier might be brought in. A tall stalwart figure entered, clothed in iron, with a cap of bear-skin half drawn over his face, his chin and upper lip covered with a thick grizzled beard.

"Why didst thou kill the bull?" asked Gunnar.

"It was but stroke of axe against stroke of horn," answered the soldier. "The return seems to me fair; and such an exchange has been heard of before. I should have been but a hid help to you in peril, had I, instead, cautiously avoided

the danger. Trust me, my way was much the quickest and best."

"The quickest, may be," said Gunnar, half-displeased and half-laughing; "but as to the best?" "If my way pleases you not," answered the soldier, "then let me go. I will not take you pay any longer. Things are here very different from what I looked for—neither bear-hunting nor other fights! There are indeed bear-skins for us to sleep on; but except that, you have hardly the least thing which an honorable man can take pleasure in."

Gunnar's wrath was kindled, and he struck with his drawn sword at the speaker; but a beseeching look from the Christian priest softened him at once, and he said: "Go, if it please thee."

"Yes, with a wound," answered the soldier; and stretched out his arm, from which the hot blood ran from a scratch which Gunnar's sword had made." Gunnar offered him in amends gold and weapons; but the indignant soldier would take nothing at first, until at last he changed his purpose, and breaking off the head of a beautiful lance which Gunnar held towards him, he cried out: "I will take away this as a memorial; and now all is well. But, Lord Gunnar, swear to me, before this witness that you will in no way bring a complaint against me at the Rock of Judgment, and that our strife is dead and buried for ever."

Gunnar did so, before Jonas and the troops who had come into the hall; and the soldier, wrapping the spear-head in his mantle, strode out of the house. Jonas praised Gunnar's conduct; but found him, after this compliance, which he rated high, less willing than ever to give up his warlike preparations against Thiodolf.

The bold youth was the while following the winter chase in the mountains and on the sea-coasts; he came very rarely to his home, where much anxiety was felt about him by those who knew the power and the wrath of his rich enemy. But all this did not disturb him; and as soon as spring sent its first thawing breath over the sea, he prepared with light cheerfulness for his journey to the assembly of the people.

CHAPTER XII. There is in Iceland a high rock, which stands up in the midst of a green valley, once overgrown with shady bushes, so that a man could lie under them, and hear and see whoever was speaking from the summit of the rock. In the days of Thiodolf, this rock was called the "Rock of Judgment;" and it was the custom at the beginning of spring, or any appointed time, to meet there, and to speak of what was for the good and welfare of the whole nation. For Iceland was then a free country, and the people were judged by none other than certain judges whom they themselves chose, and who were called *Laugmannir*.

In the spring we are speaking of, the brave Icelanders were standing or sitting together all armed, as befits noble and brave men; so that many bright spear-points flashed through the branches, and many polished shields shone on the fresh grass, as they lay at their masters' feet. Some had also brought their hounds and falcons with them. Many a large, beautifully marked dog lay stretched by his brave lord; and curving falcons sat on their shoulders, or swept around their heads with slow and well-trained flight.

Thiodolf was thus standing in the throng, with his faithful falcon on his shoulder; and he held his tame wolf by a chain, which he could let slip, if he pleased, in an instant. He had refused all other companions; his uncle he thought too old and thoughtful for many things that might come to pass on this occasion; had Pietro come with him, Malgherita would have wept till her bright eyes were dimmed; and as warriors of lower rank, he could protect himself as well without them as with them. In truth, it was easy to see that he was more likely to give help than to need it; and in spite of the brilliant company of kinsmen, friends, and soldiers who surrounded the rich Gunnar, the two sides did not seem so very unequal. But all the Icelanders now looked askance and vexed at the youth whom they had so dearly loved, full of sorrowful displeasure for the harm which he had brought upon himself.

Then Gunnar ascended the rock, and with many wise words he made known the terrible outrage that Thiodolf had offered him—outrage yet more terrible to the security of their beloved island, which hitherto their fathers had preserved in peace and honor, safe from the tyranny of imperious chiefs.—But could it be called deceit and severity, when every bold youth might break through the limits of the law, plundering and attacking to his heart's content? This mischief must be punished, and Thiodolf must declare what expiation he will make for his offence—whether he will give gold, arms, horses, or a piece of land—or whether he will betake himself to exile for many years.

When Gunnar had finished his rather long speech, he made as though he would have left the place to his enemy; but Thiodolf called up to him, "Remain thou there; we shall have room side by side, and the business will soon be over."

Gunnar perchance thought of a bloody ending; for he drew tighter the fastenings of his armor, put on his iron cap, and said with forced calmness, "Come up, thou wild adversary; I await thee here."

Thiodolf fastened the wolf's chain securely to an oak, bade the monster to be quiet, and then the next instant sprang, with all his powerful activity, beside Gunnar on the rock. The falcon hovered high above them both.

"Hast thou now done with thy speech?" asked the youth, boldly; and as Gunnar answered that he had, Thiodolf broke forth into a loud, merry laugh, saying, "That is well; for thou hast already used many needless words, which will profit thee nothing during thy whole life." "Do you hear it, Icelanders? do you hear how he scorns me and your laws?" cried Gunnar, angrily; and a murmur of deep threatening wrath was heard throughout the whole assembly, foretelling a speedy outbreak. But Thiodolf stamped with his foot till the rock seemed to shake under him; while he called out to the people below, with his loud penetrating voice, "Silence!" No sound was heard again but that of the wolf, who howled loudly and fiercely; but no sooner had his master cried, "Hold thou too thy peace—the business concerns thee as little as those others," than he laid himself quietly down, and curled up like an obedient dog.

"Countrymen," said Thiodolf, "you must not again begin to be angry, if I again begin to laugh; for see now, I cannot think of the long-drawn-out speech of the wise rich man without laughing. He has taken so much trouble about it; I think I can see him in his dwelling, how he pondered over it, and tried it before his household, and perhaps before his guests; and they all marvelled greatly at it, and at length knew it so well that they could even help him, did he stumble at any part; and then he at length clambered up this rock, and brought his wisdom with him; and then—all these pains and majestic appearance are in vain—my children, I must laugh; so, have a little patience, I will soon make you see how very much he has wasted his breath."

He broke out again into a loud laugh; and the wild youthful merriment was caught up by the whole assembly. All noise, not even those who had Gunnar's business most at heart, could resist the infection.

Then the irritated complainant grew more wrathful; he lowered the point of his spear towards Thiodolf. But the latter immediately grasped his adversary's arm, and cried out, "Beware, that thou dost not make me angry. I could easily break thy bones in pieces, and I should be sorry to do it in this honorable assembly; but the guilt would be thine own. How goes it with the bear, when he seizes the wild bull? But be patient, open thine eyes, and say thyself whether this broken lance does not forbid thee to bring any complaint against me." And he held before Gunnar's eyes the broken polished head of a lance; and, for further proof, he drew back his sleeve, and showed a deep scar, which gave some evidence that he was the same with whom Gunnar had made a solemn reconciliation before witnesses, on the occasion of the slaughtered bull. Gunnar looked down surprised and ashamed. At length he declared, while his cheeks glowed with shame and displeasure, that he was truly outwitted, and that the whole business was ended.—Hardly had the word passed his lips, when Thiodolf clasped him lovingly in his arms, and kissed him heartily, saying: "Bear me ill no longer; indeed, I used no craft in the matter, but it all turned out so of itself. I had lately met the old pirate Mordur on the sea-coast as I went to fish, and I slew him dead with my battle-axe."

A loud cry of joy interrupted the youth, for this same pirate Mordur had been the terror of the whole island, and none had dared to oppose him hand to hand. Some voices in the crowd asked wherefore the youth had so long kept back the good news; but Thiodolf stamped violently on the rock, and thundered out, "Silence!—What more is there to be said," continued he, "when one soldier has thrown down another never to rise again? It has often happened before, and will often happen again in this world. But when I had dug a grave for the grim old fellow, and was about to lay him in it, it came across me that if I had such a long grizzled beard on my lips and chin, none would know me again. I cut off his wild bush of hair, made myself a good beard with it, drew my bearskin cap over my face, and first only thought of having a little sport with the gentle Provencal lady who lives in our house. But as she has already been twice almost killed by my jokes—she is not, indeed, very strong by nature—I thought to myself, thou mightest do him some service which would

reconcile him to thee. If that may not be—well, I must submit, if I am banished the island for some years, at the Rock of Judgment; at all events, I meant to go forth to seek adventures. Then it all happened as Gunnar himself can best relate. Dear Gunnar, be pacified; in truth, I have meant nothing but good towards you."

The true-hearted youth obtained ready forgiveness from Gunnar; and to honor his valiant deed of slaying the pirate Mordur, the noblest inhabitants of Iceland accompanied the brave Thiodolf to his home with the sound of horns and joyful cries.

CHAPTER XIII. In one of those lovely days which spring brings to the earth, and with which she rejoices even the remote and far-north Iceland, Pietro and Malgherita had wandered down to the sea-shore. Their way had led them unconsciously to the same spot where, in the autumn, they had reached the land after their shipwreck; and as all now looked bright and blooming around them, and the sun gaily flashed upon the blue waves, thoughts of the past came over them, and they sang together this lay:

PIETRO. A fisher wandered by a brook Which watered Provence's flowery land, And dowy pearls fell from his eyes, And dropped into his hollow hand. A golden lute upon his shoulders gleamed, And almost like an erant-knight he seemed.

MALGHERITA. A maid 'pon the castle wall Gazed on the meadows from above, And then there came a trueful sound, Which floated as on wings of love. It was the fisherman who passed that way, And sang, O heaven! a most harmonious lay.

PIETRO. An ancient bearded warrior knight, Lord of that castle fair, Came back from hunting through the fields, And reined his proud steed there. "Say, usher, hast thou taken nigh this day? Come with me, and thy toil I will repay."

MALGHERITA. A maiden saw them from the wall, As underneath they passed, And fearful paled she up and down, And her heart beat thick and fast. Full well she knew the gentle fisher youth, And wished that no one else should guess the truth.

PIETRO. A fisher passed the castle gate, He gained the castle-hall, "How camest thou here, my boy, for youth, Into thy nest to fall?" "My lord, I drew them with my singing sweet, Well nigh with all the world I might compete."

MALGHERITA. An ancient warrior had desired To near the fisher's bay, "He need not now rise far," he said, "To win his laurel of praise." In sooth, the old knight's daughter, young and fair, With her sweet song and lute, was rosy there.

PIETRO. A maiden on the fisher gazed When he had sung his lay, And by the golden gleam of song Love found his silent way. And when the fisher turned him to depart, "Ah! mo! be here away her little heart!"

MALGHERITA. A fisher left the castle-gate, His eyes were filled with dew; The shaft of love was in his heart, And pierced it through and through. Again, again he came disguised that way, Again, again he sang his gentle lay.

NOTE TOGETHER. A noble knight and lady fair, In northern fields of snow, Sang of the sweet and sunny south, And their hearts were filled with woe. They sighed, they wept, their cheeks with crimson burned, And for the flowers of home their bosoms yearned.

And as in these verses they recalled one of the pleasant devices which Pietro had formerly planned and accomplished, that he might see Malgherita in her father's castle, a longing after their fair southern land arose in their hearts, and they gazed on the sea as if beseeching it to bear them back to Tuscany, to the blooming valley above which shone the noble castle of the Marquis Pietro Castellfranco. Then there sounded to them from the sea the following song:

"Who will go forth with me Over the glassy sea? A fast-sailing vessel and beautons is mine: Swift will she bear ye, Aye swiftly and surely, Back to the land of the olive and vine."

This time Malgherita thought indeed that she heard the voices of some of those elves whom Thiodolf called "good people," who perhaps had the wish to help her. And suddenly a beautiful vessel came in sight, full of men in shining armor; her rowers plied their oars with strong and practiced arms over the smooth sea, while her snow-white sails caught the breeze, and she seemed to rejoice in her bold but easily directed movements. At length they cast anchor in the bay. The oc-