

fast, and rushed furiously against his opponent; but Sigurd was prepared, and warded off the blow with his arm. Erick foamed with rage; he felt for his knife, but fortunately it was gone, or that night must have been a bloody one. Then with both arms he caught his guest round the waist, and tried to throw him. The other struggled to free himself; but before he succeeded, Erick had tripped him, and his head struck heavily against the frozen ground, with Erick's large body upon it. Erick rose and looked at Sigurd: Sigurd did not rise.

It was about midnight. Ingeborg was sitting up with her sick child; she heard a noise in the hall, laid the child on the bed, and opened the door. Four men came into the room, bearing something between them. They laid her husband upon the bed. "Almighty God, what have you done with him?" she shrieked.

"He quarrelled with Erick Skogstod and got the worst of it," said one of the men.

Sigurd was never himself again. The doctor said that he had received a severe shock of the brain. He was like a child, and hardly knew anybody. A year after he died, and before long the oldest child followed him.

Four winters had passed since Ingeborg buried her husband; still she was the same stately woman to look at, and people saw little change in her. Now she lived as a rich widow on a large estate, and again people began to whisper of suitors and wooing. But they soon ceased, for the widow of Rimul was not backward in showing the lads in the valley that she had not changed her mind since her maiden days.

Ragnhild Rimul, Ingeborg's daughter, was fairer than Spring. If Ingeborg's hair had been fair and golden, her daughter's was fairer still; if Ingeborg's eyes had been deep and blue, Ragnhild's were deeper and bluer. The young birch is light and slender; and when by chance it grows alone in the dark, heavy pine forest, it looks lighter and more slender. Ragnhild was a birch in the pine-forest. Spring and sunshine were always about her.

The sitting-room at Rimul was large and light. The windows looked east and south, and the floor was always strewn with fresh juniper-needles. In the corner between the windows was a little book-shelf with a heavy silver-clasped Bible, a few hymn-books, and a "house-postle," or a book of daily devotions. Under the book-shelf was what Ragnhild called her corner, where she had a little chair, and kept her shells, pieces of broken china, and other precious things. There was no stove in the room, but an open hearth, before which stood a large arm-chair, which in former times had belonged to Sigurd's father and grandfather, and had been standing there ever since. The room had a ceiling of unpainted planks, and the timber walls still retained the pleasant color of fresh-hewn pine beams. A door led from the sitting-room into the chamber where Ingeborg and her daughter slept. In another building across the yard were the barns, the stables, and the servant-hall. The maids slept in the cow-stable which almost rivalled the dwelling-house in comfort and neatness. Behind the buildings the land rose more abruptly towards the mountains, but the slope was overgrown with thick-leaved groves, whose light foliage gradually shaded into the dark pine forest above. The fields of Rimul reached from the mansion down to where the river joined the fjord.

Sunshine had always been scarce there in the valley; Rimul, however, had the advantage of all other places, for the sun always came first there and lingered longest. Thus it had sun both within and without.

IV.—LAYS AND LEGENDS.

Old Gunhild had been a good singer in her time; indeed, she had quite a fine voice even now, perhaps a little husky at times and rather low for a woman. But Thor and Gunnar, at least, both thought it wonderfully melodious, and there is no doubt but it was remarkably well adapted to the wild and doleful lays it was her wont to sing.

One winter night the fire burnt cheerfully on the hearth, and they were all gathered round it as usual; Thor smoking, and working at his spoons and boxes, Gunnar eagerly listening to his grandmother's stories.

"Sing, now, grandmother," demanded the boy, as a marvellous Troll-story had just been finished.

"Very well. What do you want?" For grandmother was always ready to sing.

"Something about the Hulder." And she sang of a young man who lay down in the woods to sleep, but could not sleep for the strange voices he heard from flower and river and mountain; then over them all stole the sad, joyful yearning tones of the Hulder's loor; and anon he beheld a beautiful maiden in scarlet bodice and golden hair, who fled before him night and day through the forest, till he heard the sound of the Sabbath-bell. He whispered the name of Christ:—

"Then saw I the form of the maiden fair
Vanish as mist in the morning air.

"With the last toll of the Sabbath-bell
Gone was the maiden and broken the spell.

"O young lads and maidens, beware, beware,
In the darksome woods,
The treacherous Hulder is playing there,
In the darksome woods."

After running through some wild mournful notes, Gunhild's voice gradually sank into a low, inarticulate murmur. Thor's box was no nearer done than when the song commenced, and his pipe had gone out. Gunnar's eyes rest-

ed dreamily in the fire. For a while they all sat in silence. Gunhild was the first to speak.

"What are you staring at, child?" said she. Gunnar did not hear.

"What are you looking for in the fire, child?" repeated the grandmother a little louder. Gunnar seemed to wake up as from some beautiful dream, which he tried to keep, but could not.

"Why, grandmother, what did you do that for?" said he, slowly and reluctantly turning his eyes from the flickering flames.

"Do what, child?" asked his grandmother, half frightened at the strange look in his eyes.

"You scared her away," said he gloomily.

"Scared whom away?"

"The Hulder with scarlet bodice and golden hair."

"Bless you, child! Whatever you do, don't look at me in that way. Come, let the Hulder alone, and let us talk about something else."

"Another story?"

"As you please, another story."

But Gunhild knew very little about other things than Necks, Hulders, and fairies, and before long she was deep in another legend of the same nature. This was what she told:—

"He who is sorrowful knows Necken, and Necken knows him best who is sorrowful. When the heart is light, the ear is dull; but when the eye is dimmed by the hidden tear, then the soul is in the ear, and it can hear voices in the forest and sea which are dumb to the light-hearted. I remember the day when old Gunnar first told me that I was fair, and said his heart and his cottage would always have a place for me. I was gay and happy then; my heart danced in my bosom, and my feet beat the time on the ground. I went to the old cataract. It cared little for my joy; it looked cold and dreary.

"Two years from that day the church-bells tolled over my first-born. My heart was heavy, and my eye so hot that it burned the tear before it could reach the eyelid. Again I sat on Necken's stone at the cataract, and from the waters arose strange music, sad but sweet and healing, like the mild shower after the scorching heat. Then the tears started and I wept, and the music wept too; we wept together, and neither of us knew who stopped first. Since then I have always loved the old cataract; for now I know that it was true, as the legends say, that Necken plays his harp there amid the roar of the waters. And Necken knows sorrow; he loved, but he loved in vain.

"Love is like fire, child; love is like fire. Wounds of fire are hard to heal; harder still are those of love. Necken loved a mortal maiden; fair was she like the morning, but fickle as the sea-wind. It was a midsummer morning he saw her last, and midsummer night she had promised to wed him. Midsummer night came, but she came not. It is said to be years and years ago; but still the midsummer night has never missed him, as he raises his head above the water, looking for his bride, when the midnight hour strikes. Strangely, then, do the mournful chords tremble through the forests in the lonely night; for he calls his bride. If they ever reached her ear, no one knows; but that lad or that maiden, who comes to the cataract at the midnight hour, will hear the luring music, and he who loves in truth and loves in sorrow will never go away un comforted. Many a fair maiden has spoken there the desire of her heart, and has been heard; many a rejected wooer came there with a heart throbbing with love and heavy with sorrow; he has called for help and help he has found, if he was worthy thereof. For Necken knows the heart of man; he rewards him who is worthy of reward, and punishes him who deserves punishment. Many a lad wooed a maiden, but loves her gold. Such also have sought the cataract at the midnight hour; they have never since been seen, for they never returned. An invisible arm has hurled them down into the whirling pools, and their cries have been heard from afar, as they were seized by the seething rapids.

"Long ago, when my forehead was smooth like the fjord in the summer morning, when my cheek was as fresh as the early dawn, and my hair like a wheat-field in September, then I knew a lad whom no one will forget who had ever seen him; and that lad was Saemund of Fagerlien. Never eagle, however high its flight, was safe from his arrow; never bear made his den too deep for him to find it; never a beam was built beyond the reach of his heel.

"Saemund's father was a houseman; had no farm for his son, no silver spoons or costly linen. But if you wanted to see sport, you ought to have gone to the dance, when Saemund was there. Never that girl lived, gardman's or houseman's daughter, who did not feel her heart leap in her bosom when he offered to lead her in the lustrous spring-dance. He never challenged a man to fight but too late that man repented who offered him a challenge.

"The sun shone on many fair maidens in those days; but strength is failing now, and beauty is fading, and the maidens nowadays are not like those who lived before them. But even then no lad who had cast his eyes on Margit of Elgerfold would wish to look at another maiden. For when she was present, all others faded, like a cluster of pines when a white birch sprouts in the midst of them. Thorkild of Elgerfold was at that time surely the proudest, and, likely enough, also among the richest in the parish. He had no other child than Margit, and there was no lad in the valley he thought good enough for her.

"I have often heard old and truthful people say, that there were more wooers in one week at Elgerfold in those days than all the other

maidens of the valley saw all the year round. Old Thorkild, Margit's father, did not fancy that wooing-business; but Margit had always been used to have her own way; so it was just as well to say nothing about it.

"Then came winter, and with winter came gay feasts, weddings, and merry dancing-parties. Of course Margit was there, and as for Saemund, no wedding or party was complete without him; they might as well have failed to ask the bridegroom. But people would say, that during that winter he led Margit of Elgerfold in the dance perhaps a little oftener than was agreeable to old Thorkild, her father. He was only a houseman's son, you know, and she was a rich man's daughter. And if you did not try to shut your eyes, you could not help noticing that Margit's sparkling eyes never shone as brightly as when Saemund asked her to dance, and the smile on her lips never was sweeter and happier than when she rested on his arm.

"When winter was over, Margit went to the saeter* with the cattle; the saeter-road was quite fashionable that summer; probably it was more frequented than even the highway. And a gay time they had up there; for there was hardly a lad, gardman's or houseman's son, who did not visit the saeter of Elgerfold, and especially on Saturday evenings, when scores of young men would chance to meet on the saeter green. The girls from the neighboring saeters would be sure to end with a whirling spring-dance. But one was missed in the number of Margit's visitors, and that happened to be he who would have been most welcome. Saemund had shouldered his gun and spent the long summer days hunting. He had never been at the saeter of Elgerfold; and as there were no parties at that season, he and Margit hardly ever saw each other.

"People were busy talking at that time, as people always are. Why did Margit, said they, before summer was over, dismiss every one of her suitors, even the sons of the mightiest men in the parish? Of course, because she had taken it into her foolish head, that she wanted somebody who did not want her, and the only one who did not seem to want her was Saemund of Fagerlien. Now parish talk is not altogether to be trusted, but neither is it altogether to be disbelieved; for there always is some truth at the bottom, and the end showed that this was not gathered altogether from the air; either, as the saying is, Margit had gold, and she had beauty; but for all that she was but a weak woman, and what woman's heart could resist those bottomless eyes of Saemund's? Surely, Margit had soon found that she could not. So she thought the matter over, until at last she discovered that there was hardly one thought in her soul which was not already his. But what should she do? "Here at home he will never come to see me," said she to herself, "for he knows father would not like it. I had better go to the saeter, and have the boys come to visit me there; then, when all the rest go, he will hardly be the only one to stay away." But summer came and went, and saeter-time was nearly gone. Yet he had not come. "This will not do," thought Margit: "perhaps he imagines I intend to marry some one of the gardman's lads, since they come here so often." And she dismissed them all. Now he must surely come. But autumn came, and the fall storms, the messengers of winter, swept through the valley and stripped the forest of its beauty. Yet he had not come. It was cold on the saeter then, and thick clouds in the east foreboded snow. Then old Thorkild himself went to the saeter, and wanted to know why his daughter had not come home with the cattle long ago. It certainly was madness to stay in the mountains now, so late in the season, when the hoar frost covered the fields and the pasture was nearly frozen. Perhaps the hoar frost had touched Margit's cheeks too, for the spring-like roses were fading fast, and the paleness of winter was taking their place. "She has caught a bad cold," said her father; "she stayed too late in the mountains."

"People seldom saw Saemund that summer. All they knew was that he was in the highlands hunting. Now and then he would appear in the valley at the office of the judge with two or three bear-skins, and receive his premiums. Nobody could understand why he did not go to the Elgerfold saeter, like all the other lads; for there was no doubt he would be welcome. But Saemund himself well knew why he stayed away. If he had not felt that Margit of Elgerfold was dearer to him than he even liked to own to himself, he might perhaps have seen her oftener. It is only a foolish fancy, thought he, at first; when summer comes it will pass away. But summer came, and Saemund found that his foolish fancy was getting the better of him. He did not know what to make of himself. How could he, a low-born houseman's son, have the boldness to love the fairest and richest heiress in all the valley? How could he ever expect to marry her? The thought was enough to drive him mad.

"Winter came, and Margit was waiting still. Winter went; Saemund had not yet come. Spring dawned, the forest was budding, and midsummer drew near.

"There is no other way," thought Margit, as

* Saeter is a place in the mountains where the Norwegian peasants spend their summers, pasturing their cattle. In the interior districts the whole family generally goes to the saeter, while in the lower valleys they send only their daughters and one or more maid-servants.

† A common expression in Norway for something that seems to have originated without any apparent cause or foundation.

she sat in her garret-window and saw the silence of the midsummer night stealing over the fjord, the river, and the distant forests. Even the roaring of the cataract sounded half smothered and faint. "There is no other way," repeated she. "I will try, and if I am wrong—well, if I am wrong, then may God be merciful to me." She went to the door of her father's room and listened; he slept. She waited no longer. The cataract was not far away; soon she was there. The doleful cry of an owl was the first sound to break the silence; she stopped and shuddered, for the owl is a prophet of evil. Then an anxious hush stole through the forest, and in another moment the silence was breathless; Margit listened; she heard but the beating of her own heart, then something like a strange whispering hum below, overhead, and all around her. She felt that it was the midnight hour coming. It seemed to her that she was moving, but she knew not whether her feet carried her. When her sight cleared, she found herself at the edge of the cataract. There she knelt down.

"Necken," prayed she, "hear me, oh hear me! Margit's heart is full of sorrow, and none but thou canst help her. Long has she loved Saemund, long has she waited, but he would not come." "Margit, he has come," whispered a well-known voice in her ear, and Margit sank in Saemund's arms. Long had she waited, at last he had come; and as their hearts and their lips met, they heard and they felt the sounds of wonderful harmony. It was the tones of Necken's harp. Both had sought and both had found him.—*Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen.*

A SUMMER SONG.

BY SHELTON CHADWICK.

'Twas in the golden prime of June,
The flowers were hung with diamond drops,
And birds atit in the tree tops
Sang till the woods were all in tune.

Warm goddess dreaming airily
Upon her couch in the balmy East,
Like Rosy Danae of Love's feast,
Clasping the green earth fairly.

Crushing in earth's wreathed cup rich wine,
Until her goblet gleamed brimful,
Never was bride so beautiful,
The dainty reveller seemed divine.

Rich strains of Orphean music stole
Out of the copses morn and even,
The vocalizing light of heaven
Awoke the Memnon of each soul.

She twined gay garlands 'mid her curls,
While tripping over crowslip bowers;
Her gracious smile fell on her flowers,
Like some coy virgin's on her pearls.

The sunbeams hung in blazing sheaves
Among the glad breeze-billowed corn
The rich-hued butterfly was born,
And soft winds kissed the panting leaves.

Take heed where'er such raptures fall,
Such glowing love is passing sweet,
As mourning dew-drops fair and fleet,
And tempered May-Love best of all.

A CURIOUS CASE.

In that quiet time of year when none of the dangerous and treacherous little storms so frequent in the Mediterranean—known to sailors by the name of white squalls—disturb the tranquil serenity of its deep blue waters; when by day the warm and brilliant rays of the sun make the crest of every little ripple glitter and sparkle, till the surface of the sea resembles a dewy meadow at sunrise; and when at night the moon always rises clearly and brilliantly into a deep blue expanse of cloudless sky, studded with myriads of stars that shine with a softer and purer radiance than they ever do when seen through the foggy, misty atmosphere of our beloved England.

It was at such a time, and on such a night as this, somewhere between Beyrout and Malta, that the noble frigate *Aster* was cleaving her way through the dark waters—so quietly and smoothly that, but for the phosphorescent line of light which she left in her wake, and the ripples of brilliant foam which she scornfully dashed, with a murmur as of protest at their unwonted disturbance, from her shapely bow, could an observer have been near her, he might have thought he gazed on some beautiful vision of a ship, with all her bellying sails gleaming white in the moonlight against a dark background of sky, instead of a solid reality of oak and canvas, freighted with living men.

Captain Richard Montague had left his orders for the night, and had turned in some hours before. The middle watch had been mustered, and were stretched about the deck, amongst the ropes, and between the guns, seeking such repose as the hard planks afforded their weary limbs—lulled to sleep by the almost imperceptible motion of the ship, and the soft, cool breeze, which was just sufficient to fill the swelling sails. Lieutenant Jones, the officer of the watch, was pacing up and down the quarter-deck, keeping a watchful eye on the sails and the helmsman, his hands buried deep in the pockets of his loose, easy-fitting monkey jacket, and whistling softly to himself, "Home, sweet home." For myself, I was listlessly swinging