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## THIODOLF THE ICELANDER.

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CHAPTER XL.

The following days passed in warlike exercises, which the people—already used to wonder at the strength and dexterity of the Væringers—now flocked to witness in much larger numbers, since Thiodolf far surpassed all his brave brothers in arms in throwing of spears, wrestling, and all the martial games which were most esteemed.—He had soon so mastered the manner in which here the troops were led to the field, that nothing remained for him to learn; and Helmfriid often took pleasure in entrusting the management of the different manoeuvres of the whole Væringers squadron to his youthful friend; he himself the while sitting by as only a pleased spectator, on his splendid Persian horse.

At length the noblest of the city came daily on horses and in chariots to the place where the Væringers were exercised, and took delight in the brilliant appearance of the young leader. The report of him even reached the emperor, who decided that his northern body-guard, in their increased splendor, should hold a mock fight in his presence, and in that of his daughters and the other noble ladies of the court.

"Thiodolf," said the Væringers chief, "since the emperor would see us in our full knightly pomp, put from thee, for my sake, that rough bull's head helmet. There are helmets now in my armory from which thou mayest choose.—Follow me, and take that which pleases thee best."

But that Thiodolf altogether refused. "If I may not keep my helmet of skin," he said, "at least I alone shall forge myself a new one. I have enough gold and silver remaining of my tribute money from Zante; and as to jewels, friend Bertram will surely lend me what I want."

The merchant of Marseilles, who was present, readily held out to him the carefully preserved casket; and as readily did Thiodolf accept it, as he had now the word and good-will of the leader.

For many days Thiodolf was seen incessantly hammering and knocking in the forge; and his songs, also, were heard far beyond the wall of the Væringers fortress. At last, on the evening before the review, he came to his chief, with a new and almost entirely golden helmet in his hand, and asked, "How does this please you?"

"Put it on, my boy," said the old man. And when the new helmet shone on the youth's brow, it still looked like a bull's head, but most beautifully worked out of precious metals. The face of the animal looked fiercely and boldly out from the gold plates in front, the silver horns rose majestically above, two costly diamonds shone in the hollow of the eyes, and many rubies and emeralds sparkled in the fastenings and clasps.

"Thou art a wonderful man," said Helmfriid. "Thy work as a smith pleases me well; but thou wilt look strange in it to many people."

"If it but please you, dear master," answered Thiodolf, "those who do not like it may look away. Have you any other commands to give?"

Helmfriid smiled and shook his head; and Thiodolf hastened forth to make the most careful and skillful arrangement for his Icelanders on the morrow.

The early glow of morning rose out of a moist refreshing autumnal mist. The grass glittered with many colors on the level space at the summit of the hill, where the Væringers, in two large bands, one commanded by Helmfriid, and the other by Thiodolf, had placed themselves for the mock fight. A deep and broad stream divided the field, and some bridges, passable to man and horse, were thrown across it. It had been arranged for the knightly sport, that Helmfriid was to strive to win a passage over the water in some one spot, and to bring there suddenly an overpowering force before Thiodolf could collect one equally strong to defend the threatened bridge. The emperor, and the lords and ladies of his court, took their position on Helmfriid's side, partly out of respect for the glorious old age of the Væringers chief, partly also that his being the attacking, not the defending party, the pursuit of the riders, and the hurling of spears of the foot-soldiers, were less likely to turn to wild disorder.

At the glance of the emperor, the piercing sound of a trumpet gave the signal to those who rode around him; the northern horns of the Væringers gave a joyous answer; and the fight began.

Many riders sprang from one side of the stream to the other, together with the light-armed foot-soldiers; and they threatened each other in many skillful evolutions, till at length they let fly their lances against their opponents. This seemed at first rather serious play to the Greeks; but they soon perceived that the lances flew so boldly among the ranks only because each man was satisfied that his adversary was skillful enough to avoid the blow, or else to receive it on his shield. The difference between this and a real fight was merely, that they called out before they threw their lances, and also shook them long in the air,

in order to draw their enemies' attention. And at times lances flew gayly through the air without any warning, but then they only pierced deeply the sward, giving plain proof of the strength which had hurled them.

In the mean while the leaders, with keen sharp glances, held their position on the highest ground, as if on opposite watch-towers; the squadrons were directed partly by their looks, partly by the signals which they gave with their silver horns, partly by the orders of swift messengers.

Now collecting in the little valley, or drawn out behind bushes, the troops of Helmfriid ran and glided as if growing out of the ground, to make a sudden attack on one of the bridges; but as suddenly a detachment of Thiodolf's men appeared in a spot where none looked for them, and the assailants paused, threw their lances, and returned, each party retaining its first position.

Already the ladies, and those about the chariot of the emperor, began to fear that for this day the young Northman would only show his skill as leader, not his knightly prowess; for Thiodolf remained almost motionless on the hill, while in Helmfriid could be discerned more and more traces of that fiery impatient temper, which the fight on the Linden Hill in Norway had first aroused in him.

The old hero, with increasing excitement, gave his war-cry, and rode rapidly backwards and forwards among his troops, singing some verses of the songs of the North, and not able to stay himself from flinging spears with his own hand amongst his adversary's ranks. The eyes of the spectators were more and more fixed on him.

Then the fight so far changed as to appear to give a proof of Helmfriid's superiority. His troops rushed so quickly and unexpectedly towards a bridge, that Thiodolf was unable to oppose an equal force to them. The attacked were borne back from the bridge, Helmfriid passed, and the contest appeared decided.

Thiodolf blew loudly on his silver horn, till its shrill tones seemed to pierce through the uproar of the fight; and immediately his horse and foot troops, collecting from all sides, formed themselves into a long line, which, upon Thiodolf's joyous cry of "Forward, Northmen!" rushed behind their young leader over the nearest bridge to the opposite bank, and there so promptly, and in such good order, drew out against the troops of Helmfriid there posted, that they seemed overcome by this bold and unlooked for attack, and knew no longer which way they should turn; while Helmfriid, with all who were with him on the other side, hastened to recross the bridge, that he might not with divided forces twice meet with an overwhelming opposition.

But this movement, unprepared, and begun in confused haste, was not effected quick enough.—It was easy to see that Thiodolf would surround and defeat those left behind sooner than Helmfriid could pass the bridge; and the court spectators rejoiced at this brilliant display of the young Northman's dexterity; the ladies did not turn their eyes from him, their hearts beat with impatience for the noble knight to complete his bold undertaking; the emperor himself leaned forward in his chariot with kindling eyes and approving gestures. When suddenly the detachment led on by Thiodolf, with the rapid movements of an eagle, to a narrow pass overgrown with bushes—which it was necessary to gain in order to complete the victory—made an unexpected halt.—The spectators saw this with astonishment, the emperor almost with alarm, as he had taken so decidedly part with the young chief; he hastily commanded one of the courtiers to ride off and bid the youth to complete his victory.

The messenger galloped quickly over the plain, and having reached Thiodolf, he found him standing as a barrier at the entrance of the pass, and keeping back his own too fiery warriors with words and threats.

"Forward, forward!" cried the impatient Greek to the troops.

"Let none move from this place!" cried Thiodolf with his voice of thunder; and made a sign to the Greek, deeming him too unimportant to waste a word on him, to get out of the dust.

"In the emperor's name!" cried the courtier.

"Ay," said Thiodolf, "that truly changes the case; you must then come nearer. Do so, and look hither."

He pointed to the pass, where women and children, who had come to see the fight had before taken up their position, thinking that no danger could befall them in this safe place, and that the noble sport could here be viewed in quiet. Now, they were all running and shrieking in wild confusion. Children fell screaming over other children; and while their mothers tried to carry them off, they found their way barred by other mothers.

"It is no matter," cried the Greek; "forward! Why are people so careless in these reviews? Victory is more important than their safety."

"Halt!" cried Thiodolf to his troops; adding, to the Greek, "Return whence you came."

He, desirous to have the emperor's command

executed, cried to the troops, "I am Michael Androgenes, the imperial chamberlain. Forward!"

And he made a movement as if he himself would spring into the pass. The women and children screamed with terror. Then Thiodolf rode against the chamberlain, so that he and his horse fell together, saying, as they both rolled in the dust, "Now, it would ill please you if I let my iron-hoofed troops rush over you. See you now, we must never forget how we care for our own lives, when we so boldly speak against the bodies and lives of others. Or shall I cry, Forward!"

The abashed chamberlain gathered himself up, and went away somewhat limping.

In the meanwhile Helmfriid had again collected his forces and taken the bridge, so that Thiodolf now on his side seemed completely surrounded. It was much too late to break through the pass, which was at length clear; the only open spot led to a broad foaming part of the stream, far from all the bridges. And near there the chariots of the court were standing, as the difficulty of the passage seemed to secure them from the troops.

But thither Thiodolf turned the rapid course of his riders and foot-soldiers. A cloud of dust arose round the chariots of the emperor's followers; and the Icelanders gave their wild cry, the women shrieked fearfully, the courtiers seemed bewildered, and Thiodolf's glancing form flew close by the Emperor's chariot. "Boldly through, my northern heroes!" he cried; and immediately the stream was covered with swarming men and horses; the chariots were untouched only a thick dust remained, through which it might be seen that Thiodolf repeatedly plunged back into the water to assist with his powerful arm wearied swimmers and sinking horses.

CHAPTER XLII.

The troops on both sides were again in their position, the imperial trumpets sounded a halt, nobles of the court rode up to the two leaders, bringing the command that they should make their troops pass in review before the emperor. The chamberlain, Michael Androgenes, would not carry the message to Thiodolf for the second time, and hastened to become the messenger to Helmfriid's squadron.

The northern trumpets sounded; at the well-known national notes, the soldiers formed into two well-ordered divisions; Helmfriid, with his defiled first, Thiodolf closely observed the actions and demeanor of the old Væringers chief; he rejoiced to see that after Helmfriid had passed, saluting the emperor, he returned and took his place near the royal chariot, while the troops went slowly on their way back. "Now," thought Thiodolf, "I can, at my ease, look on that noble prince, and, better still, on those delicate ladies."

As the turn came to him, and he had saluted with a warrior's greeting, all eyes were turned on him with friendly curiosity; and amongst them, two of rare beauty, belonging to the fair angelic face of a young maiden whom Thiodolf saw on the left hand of the emperor. Now he was heartily glad to have to remain beside the chariot. Hardly had he passed it when he wheeled round his Arab horse, urging him so impetuously back to the appointed place, and then checking him so suddenly that the foaming horse reared high in displeasure, and, for a moment, threatened to fall back with his armed burden. Thiodolf's calm look rested on the lovely face of the maiden; he saw the rosy cheeks blanch in terror;—he heard a warning cry, soft as a silver bell, pass the fresh lips; and he stroked his charger's slender neck, as if to thank him. The emperor asked him why he had not made his way through the pass.

"Mighty lord," answered Thiodolf, "I would rather have slain my noble horse with my own hand, than have driven him over those women and children, who had so confidently and fearlessly collected there to see the sport. It was a very sad sight when they all cried and ran about. I was not joyful again till I saw them in safety on the hill, and beginning to laugh."

"You are a very soft-hearted soldier," said the emperor with a friendly smile.

"Yes," answered Thiodolf, simply; "very much so with my good friends, but more especially with women and children; a true-hearted man would not crush a flower needlessly."

The emperor stretched out his hand towards him and presented him to the two ladies who sat with him in the chariot. Then Thiodolf learned that the lady at the right of the emperor was his daughter Zoe; the blooming beauty at his left, who had so fixed the eyes of the youth, and who now smiled on him with a sweet blush, was also called Zoe, and was the emperor's niece. Thiodolf then received the command to appear at the noon-day repast in the palace; and at a sign from the emperor, he sprang away, courteously greeting, and put himself again at the head of his troop, which had defiled past. As they now returned into the city, and he had rejoined Helmfriid, he said:

"I pray you, dear master, how is it that the Zoe who is the emperor's daughter, can be the companion of such a blooming, lovely child as the other Zoe at the emperor's left hand? They do not look at all well together. Winter and spring are better, as once when aunt Gunhilda sat by little Malgherita; but such a mournful autumn as that good, elderly Zoe, compared to her brilliant niece, truly that looks very cheerless."

"You must complain of that to heaven, who has placed them both near the emperor," answered Helmfriid, smiling. "He waited long for the throne in vain expectation, and only ascended it a few years ago when he was already aged; he seems to have cast the joyless clouds of his existence upon his daughters. The eldest Eudoxia, has already entered the cloister; the youngest, Theodora, is her austere pupil, and only appears at court on great festivals, as to-day, perchance, at noon; Zoe, the second, is drawing towards a sad, solitary old age, although she is looked upon as heiress to the throne; for who would try to win the affection of the grave sorrowful princess?"

"I know not," said Thiodolf, "and in truth I care very little. You must tell me of the young, blooming Zoe, who has a good right to bear that name, since the Greek word means 'life.'"

"She!" answered Helmfriid, "she is but a distant relation of the emperor, and has no hope of succeeding to the throne."

"Ah! my dear, brave master," said Thiodolf with a sigh; "you are surely become very old. You would certainly never have given such an answer on the Linden hills."

Helmfriid frowned, as if in anger; but suddenly looking at his golden shield, which Thiodolf had restored to him, he only said, "Thou strange boy!" and shook his head, smiling.

Both heroes adorned themselves splendidly in the Væringers fortress before they went to the royal feast; they carefully polished their arms, and put on yet more costly belts and scarfs than they had worn at the review. Then they gravely took the road to the palace.

The two princesses, who were called by the same name of Zoe, sat near each other at the sumptuous table, on the right hand of the emperor; on the left, his other far more pale and grave daughter, Theodora. The place of the young chief, Thiodolf, was at some distance from the emperor and the noble ladies; but as the sovereign frequently addressed his speech to him, and he answered in his strangely expressed but powerful and sometimes graceful language, he appeared to be the centre of the whole company. The young and blooming Zoe often turned her bright looks upon him, and in their sunshine flowers seemed to sprig up in his heart, so that he could not forbear thinking of the songs and tales so dear to him of his native island.

"Zoe wishes to hear some of your northern songs," said the emperor, speaking of his daughter.

But Thiodolf, as often as his name sounded, thought only of the young Zoe, and he answered with gay spirits:

"O mighty sire! whatever of delicate flowers may spring up in our valleys, belong surely to the lovely princess."

The elder Zoe bowed graciously towards the Northman; and as he bent his head to the younger, who sat near her, no one was aware of the error except perchance the young Zoe herself. At a look from the emperor, a lute was brought to the youth, and he began to sing as follows, taking care that it should not fare with this delicate instrument as with Haroun's in Achmet's castle:

"Life! thou source of all existence—  
Breath of God! mysterious flame!  
Many a language hath attempted,  
Far and near to give thee name."

Thou knowest what the Northman calls thee;  
Vital! saith the Roman song;  
But the Greek in tenderer accent,  
Zoe! sighs with silver tongue."

As the northern speech of the Væringers was now generally understood at the court, the emperor and the ladies seized the graceful meaning of the song, and again the two princesses behaved as before. The eldest bowed to Thiodolf, Thiodolf to the younger, who read well in his kindling looks to whom the song applied; she looked down smiling, and the other guests remained in their error; for as all the courtiers had eyes only for the heiress of the throne, they supposed that it must be so with every one. It happened that Thiodolf let fall a look on the face of the pale princess Theodora. She was gazing very earnestly at him, and appeared almost like a vision recalling thoughts of death and eternity, which, visible only to one, came suddenly between him and all the joys of a feast. Thiodolf looked down in confusion, and gave away the lute.—Soon after the guests rose from table. Thiodolf, in a half-dreamy state, wandered out towards the dwelling of Pietro and Malgherita. The blooming figure of the fair Zoe floated before him, and every kindly word, every sweet smile or greeting

which she had addressed to him, returned like sunshine to his mind; but then it seemed as if Theodora came and spread with her pale hands a large black mantle between him and the beautiful princess, concealing her from him.

"That which is stirring in me to-day," cried he, impatiently, "must be known to him whom Christians call the devil!"

"Are you swearing?" said Bertram with a smile, as he accidentally met him from a neighboring street.

"Ah!" cried Thiodolf, "any time would be fitter than this to speak with you, who are bright as sunshine, and calm as noon-tide. I am little better than distraught."

He hastened past hurriedly, and Bertram looked after him with a smile:—"Thou wilt soon find rest, thou true foamy sea. It is Heaven's best gift when it sends storms to try and purify the like of thee."

Pietro and Malgherita the while were intent with wondering looks on a picture which had come to them in a mysterious manner. And even when Thiodolf had joined them, they could not turn away from its contemplation. They silently made a sign to him to approach, and turned the torches so that he could the better see the picture. After the first glance the guest remained no less dazzled and amazed than the hosts. What first caught his eye was the figure of Isolda in a pilgrim's dress bending at the gate of a large convent as if praying for admission. But at the gate stood a pale, austere woman, from whose mouth came out the words, "The house of the Lord is open to the lowly; but iron bolts shut out the proud. Return, my daughter, when thou art changed." And in another part of the picture Isolda was seen in a dark, dreary dwelling, praying before a crucifix. Implements of work around her showed how she spent the time which was not directly given to work. From her mouth came the words, "Lord, if I am to go down as low as I once raised myself high, whether then shall I sink?" When by degrees the gazers on the picture could express themselves in words, it appeared, that a pretty dumb maiden had, in the morning, brought the picture and immediately vanished.

"That Isolda has painted the picture," said Malgherita, "there can be no doubt. Even from childhood the spirit of our great forefather has shown itself in her, not only by her proud and earnest character, but by the skill over pencil and brush which she has inherited.—See how these figures are drawn, so bold and distinct, so free and so correct, so powerful in every feature. My friends, no one in the world can thus paint Isolda."

"O Isolda!" said Thiodolf humbly and bending down his head, "hast thou to remind me of thee thus? Well didst thou say, I was not worthy of thee. But thou, glorious sun, again risest in my heaven, and all delusions of night give place."

Pietro and Malgherita understood not his words; and he only answered to their questions, "All is now right again; but truly it had well nigh been very wrong. Shame, that a Northman's heart could beat so lightly and childishly."

Then he looked with a steady gaze on the picture, and cried out: "The pale woman who sends Isolda away from the convent-gate is truly and indeed the Princess Theodora. Isolda must be in Constantinople. Dry thine eyes, Malgherita; in a few days she shall be once more beside us."

CHAPTER XLIII.

The noble lady was not found so soon as Thiodolf had expected; far otherwise. In spite of every effort, Isolda remained as invisible as ether, and her friends began to doubt whether she had not sent that picture of her history to Malgherita out of some far-distant country. A deep sorrow began to twine itself round Thiodolf's existence, the deeper because he reproached himself with having forfeited the blessing of finding Isolda by the levity with which he had looked upon the Princess Zoe. Even now he could not always, when invited to court, as often happened, meet the eyes of the lovely lady without a beating of the heart; but he checked this by paying assiduous attentions to the elder Zoe. Yet the younger knew, by some wonderful instinct, who was the real object of them.

At this time, whenever Thiodolf showed himself in the streets of Constantinople, the citizens thronged round him, and often greeted him with loud words of approbation; for the gentleness with which he had protected the women and children in the narrow pass, drew towards him the love and honor of all hearts, and the very fearfulness of his giant-like stature only contrasted more beautifully with his kind and gentle disposition. It often happened that some of the children whom he had saved would run out of the house-doors and spring towards his horse.—Then he would lift one or other of them with safe dexterity before him on the saddle, and make his Arab horse curvet to delight them. He was the darling and the talk of the whole people.