

BOOK THREE *of*

THE HISTORY OF THE DANES

'Gesta Danorum'

by

Saxo Grammaticus

'Saxo the Learned'

Written in Latin in the early 13th century

Little is known of Saxo, except his authorship of this very fanciful history

Translated

by

Oliver Elton (1861 – 1945)

[The first mention of 'Amleth' will be found on Page 13]

After Hiartuar, HOTHER, whom I mentioned above, the brother of Athisl, and also the fosterling of King Gewar, became sovereign of both realms. It will be easier to relate his times if I begin with the beginning of his life. For if the earlier years of his career are not doomed to silence, the latter ones can be more fully and fairly narrated.

When Helgi had slain Hodbrodd, his son Hother passed the length of his boyhood under the tutelage of King Gewar. While a stripling, he excelled in strength of body all his foster-brethren and compeers. Moreover, he was gifted with many accomplishments of mind. He was very skilled in swimming and archery, and also with the gloves; and further was as nimble as such a youth could be, his training being equal to his strength. Though his years were unripe, his richly-dowered spirit surpassed them. None was more skilful on lyre or harp; and he was cunning on the timbrel, on the lute, and in every modulation of string instruments. With his changing measures he could sway the feelings of men to what passions he would; he knew how to fill human hearts with joy or sadness, with pity or with hatred, and used to enwrap the soul with the delight or terror of the ear. All these accomplishments of the youth pleased Nanna, the daughter of Gewar, mightily, and she began to seek his embraces. For the valour of a youth will often kindle a maid, and the courage of those whose looks are not so winning is often acceptable. For love hath many avenues; the path of pleasure is opened to some by grace, to others by bravery of soul, and to some by skill in accomplishments. Courtesy brings to some stores of Love, while most are commended by brightness of beauty. Nor do the brave inflict a shallower wound on maidens than the comely.

Now it befell that Balder the son of Odin was troubled at the sight of Nanna bathing, and was seized with boundless love. He was kindled by her fair and lustrous body, and his heart was set on fire by her manifest beauty; for nothing exciteth passion like comeliness. Therefore he resolved to slay with the sword Hother, who, he feared, was likeliest to baulk his wishes; so that his love, which brooked no postponement, might not be delayed in the enjoyment of its desire by any obstacle.

About this time Hother chanced, while hunting, to be led astray by a mist, and he came on a certain lodge in which were wood-maidens; and when they greeted him by his own name, he asked who they were. They declared that it was their guidance and government that mainly determined the fortunes of war. For they often invisibly took part in battles, and by their secret assistance won for their friends the coveted victories. They averted, indeed, that they could win triumphs and inflict defeats as they would; and further told him how Balder had seen his foster-sister Nanna while she bathed, and been kindled with passion for her; but counselled Hother not to attack him in war, worthy as he was of his deadliest hate, for they declared that Balder was a demigod, sprung secretly from celestial seed. When Hother had heard this, the place melted away and left him shelterless, and he found himself standing in the open and out in the midst of the fields, without a vestige of shade. Most of all he marvelled at the swift flight of the maidens, the shifting of the place, and the delusive semblance of the building. For he knew not that all that had passed around him had been a mere mockery and an unreal trick of the arts of magic.

Returning thence, he related to Gewar the mystification that had followed on his straying, and straightway asked him for his daughter. Gewar answered that he would most gladly favour him, but that he feared if he rejected Balder he would incur his wrath; for Balder, he said, had proffered him a like request. For he said that the sacred strength of Balder's body was proof even against steel; adding, however, that he knew of a sword which could deal him his death, which was fastened up in the closest bonds; this was in the keeping of Miming, the Satyr of the woods, who also had a bracelet of a secret and marvellous virtue, that used to increase the wealth of the owner. Moreover, the way to these regions was impassable and filled with obstacles, and therefore hard for mortal men to travel. For the greater part of the road was perpetually beset with extraordinary cold. So he advised him to harness a car with reindeer, by means of whose great speed he could cross the hard-frozen ridges. And when he had got to the place, he should set up his tent away from the sun in such wise that it should catch the shadow of the cave where Miming was wont to be; while he should not in return cast a shade upon Miming, so that no unaccustomed darkness might be thrown and prevent the Satyr from going out. Thus both the bracelet and the sword would be ready to his hand, one being attended by fortune in wealth and the other by fortune in war, and each of them thus bringing a great prize to the owner. Thus much said Gewar; and Hother was not slow to carry out his instructions. Planting his tent in the manner aforesaid, he passed the nights in anxieties and the days in hunting. But through either season he remained very wakeful and sleepless, allotting the divisions of night and day so as to devote the one to reflection on events, and to spend the other in providing food for his body. Once as he watched all night, his spirit was drooping and dazed with anxiety, when the Satyr cast a shadow on his tent. Aiming a spear at him, he brought him down with the blow, stopped him, and bound him, while he could not make his escape. Then in the most dreadful words he threatened him with the worst, and demanded the sword and bracelets. The Satyr was not slow to tender him the ransom of his life for which he was

asked. So surely do all prize life beyond wealth; for nothing is ever cherished more among mortals than the breath of their own life. Hother, exulting in the treasure he had gained, went home enriched with trophies which, though few, were noble.

When Gelder, the King of Saxony, heard that Hother had gained these things, he kept constantly urging his soldiers to go and carry off such glorious booty; and the warriors speedily equipped a fleet in obedience to their king. Gewar, being very learned in divining and an expert in the knowledge of omens, foresaw this; and summoning Hother, told him, when Gelder should join battle with him, to receive his spears with patience, and not let his own fly until he saw the enemy's missiles exhausted; and further, to bring up the curved scythes wherewith the vessels could be rent and the helmets and shields plucked from the soldiers. Hother followed his advice and found its result fortunate. For he bade his men, when Gelder began to charge, to stand their ground and defend their bodies with their shields, affirming that the victory in that battle must be won by patience. But the enemy nowhere kept back their missiles, spending them all in their extreme eagerness to fight; and the more patiently they found Hother bear himself in his reception of their spears and lances, the more furiously they began to hurl them. Some of these stuck in the shields and some in the ships, and few were the wounds they inflicted; many of them were seen to be shaken off idly and to do no hurt. For the soldiers of Hother performed the bidding of their king, and kept off the attack of the spears by a penthouse of interlocked shields; while not a few of the spears smote lightly on the bosses and fell into the waves. When Gelder was emptied of all his store, and saw the enemy picking it up, and swiftly hurling it back at him, he covered the summit of the mast with a crimson shield, as a signal of peace, and surrendered to save his life. Hother received him with the friendliest face and the kindest words, and conquered him as much by his gentleness as he had by his skill.

At this time Helgi, King of Halogaland, was sending frequent embassies to press his suit for Thora, daughter of Kuse, sovereign of the Finns and Perms. Thus is weakness ever known by its wanting help from others. For while all other young men of that time used to sue in marriage with their own lips, this man was afflicted with so faulty an utterance that he was ashamed to be heard not only by strangers, but by those of his own house. So much doth calamity shun all witnesses; for natural defects are the more vexing the more manifest they are. Kuse despised his embassy, answering that that man did not deserve a wife who trusted too little to his own manhood, and borrowed by entreaty the aid of others in order to gain his suit. When Helgi heard this, he besought Hother, whom he knew to be an accomplished pleader, to favour his desires, promising that he would promptly perform whatsoever he should command him. The earnest entreaties of the youth prevailed on Hother, and he went to Norway with an armed fleet, intending to achieve by arms the end which he could not by words. And when he had pleaded for Helgi with the most dulcet eloquence, Kuse rejoined that his daughter's wish must be consulted, in order that no paternal strictness might forestall anything against her will. He called her in and asked her whether she felt a liking for her wooer; and when she assented he promised Helgi her hand. In this way Hother, by the sweet sounds of his fluent and well-turned oratory, opened the ears of Kuse, which were before deaf to the suit he urged.

While this was passing in Halogaland, Balder entered the country of Gewar armed, in order to sue for Nanna. Gewar bade him learn Nanna's own mind; so he approached the maiden with the most choice and cajoling words; and when he could win no hearing for his prayers,

he persisted in asking the reason of his refusal. She replied, that a god could not wed with a mortal, because the vast difference of their natures prevented any bond of intercourse. Also the gods sometimes used to break their pledges; and the bond contracted between unequals was apt to snap suddenly. There was no firm tie between those of differing estate; for beside the great, the fortunes of the lowly were always dimmed. Also lack and plenty dwelt in diverse tents, nor was there any fast bond of intercourse between gorgeous wealth and obscure poverty. In fine, the things of earth would not mate with those of heaven, being sundered by a great original gulf through a difference in nature; inasmuch as mortal man was infinitely far from the glory of the divine majesty. With this shuffling answer she eluded the suit of Balder, and shrewdly wove excuses to refuse his hand.

When Hother heard this from Gewar, he complained long to Helgi of Balder's insolence. Both were in doubt as to what should be done, and beat their brains over divers plans; for converse with a friend in the day of trouble, though it removeth not the peril, yet maketh the heart less sick. Amid all the desires of their souls the passion of valour prevailed, and a naval battle was fought with Balder. One would have thought it a contest of men against gods, for Odin and Thor and the holy array of the gods fought for Balder. There one could have beheld a war in which divine and human might were mingled. But Hother was clad in his steel-defying tunic, and charged the closest bands of the gods, assailing them as vehemently as a son of earth could assail the powers above. However, Thor was swinging his club with marvellous might, and shattered all interposing shields, calling as loudly on his foes to attack him as upon his friends to back him up. No kind of armour withstood his onset, no man could receive his stroke and live. Whatsoever his blow fended off it crushed; neither shield nor helm endured the weight of its dint; no greatness of body or of strength could serve. Thus the victory would have passed to the gods, but that Hother, though his line had already fallen back, darted up, hewed off the club at the haft, and made it useless. And the gods, when they had lost this weapon, fled incontinently. But that antiquity vouches for it, it were quite against common belief to think that men prevailed against gods. (We call them gods in a supposititious rather than in a real sense; for to such we give the title of deity by the custom of nations, not because of their nature.)

As for Balder, he took to flight and was saved. The conquerors either hacked his ships with their swords or sunk them in the sea; not content to have defeated gods, they pursued the wrecks of the fleet with such rage, as if they would destroy them to satiate their deadly passion for war. Thus doth prosperity commonly whet the edge of licence. The haven, recalling by its name Balder's flight, bears witness to the war. Gelder, the King of Saxony, who met his end in the same war, was set by Hother upon the corpses of his oarsmen, and then laid on a pyre built of vessels, and magnificently honoured in his funeral by Hother, who not only put his ashes in a noble barrow, treating them as the remains of a king, but also graced them with most reverent obsequies. Then, to prevent any more troublesome business delaying his hopes of marriage, he went back to Gewar and enjoyed the coveted embraces of Nanna. Next, having treated Helgi and Thora very generously, he brought his new queen back to Sweden, being as much honoured by all for his victory as Balder was laughed at for his flight.

At this time the nobles of the Swedes repaired to Denmark to pay their tribute; but Hother, who had been honoured as a king by his countrymen for the splendid deeds of his father, experienced what a lying pander Fortune is. For he was conquered in the field by Balder,

whom a little before he had crushed, and was forced to flee to Gewar, thus losing while a king that victory which he had won as a common man. The conquering Balder, in order to slake his soldiers, who were parched with thirst, with the blessing of a timely draught, pierced the earth deep and disclosed a fresh spring. The thirsty ranks made with gaping lips for the water that gushed forth everywhere. The traces of these springs, eternised by the name, are thought not quite to have dried up yet, though they have ceased to well so freely as of old. Balder was continually harassed by night phantoms feigning the likeness of Nanna, and fell into such ill health that he could not so much as walk, and began the habit of going his journeys in a two horse car or a four-wheeled carriage. So great was the love that had steeped his heart and now had brought him down almost to the extremity of decline. For he thought that his victory had brought him nothing if Nanna was not his prize. Also Frey, the regent of the gods, took his abode not far from Upsala, where he exchanged for a ghastly and infamous sin-offering the old custom of prayer by sacrifice, which had been used by so many ages and generations. For he paid to the gods abominable offerings, by beginning to slaughter human victims.

Meantime Hother learned that Denmark lacked leaders, and that Hiartuar had swiftly expiated the death of Rolf; and he used to say that chance had thrown into his hands that to which he could scarce have aspired. For first, Rolf, whom he ought to have killed, since he remembered that Rolf's father had slain his own, had been punished by the help of another; and also, by the unexpected bounty of events, a chance had been opened to him of winning Denmark. In truth, if the pedigree of his forefathers were rightly traced, that realm was his by ancestral right! Thereupon he took possession, with a very great fleet, of Isefjord, a haven of Zealand, so as to make use of his impending fortune. There the people of the Danes met him and appointed him king; and a little after, on hearing of the death of his brother Athisl, whom he had bidden rule the Swedes, he joined the Swedish empire to that of Denmark. But Athisl was cut off by an ignominious death. For whilst, in great jubilation of spirit, he was honouring the funeral rites of Rolf with a feast, he drank too greedily, and paid for his filthy intemperance by his sudden end. And so, while he was celebrating the death of another with immoderate joviality, he forced on his own apace.

While Hother was in Sweden, Balder also came to Zealand with a fleet; and since he was thought to be rich in arms and of singular majesty, the Danes accorded him with the readiest of voices whatever he asked concerning the supreme power. With such wavering judgment was the opinion of our forefathers divided. Hother returned from Sweden and attacked him. They both coveted sway, and the keenest contest for the sovereignty began between them; but it was cut short by the flight of Hother. He retired to Jutland, and caused to be named after him the village in which he was wont to stay. Here he passed the winter season, and then went back to Sweden alone and unattended. There he summoned the grandees, and told them that he was weary of the light of life because of the misfortunes wherewith Balder had twice victoriously stricken him. Then he took farewell of all, and went by a circuitous path to a place that was hard of access, traversing forests uncivilised. For it oft happens that those upon whom has come some inconsolable trouble of spirit seek, as though it were a medicine to drive away their sadness, far and sequestered retreats, and cannot bear the greatness of their grief amid the fellowship of men; so dear, for the most part, is solitude to sickness. For filthiness and grime are chiefly pleasing to those who have been stricken with ailments of the soul. Now he had been wont to give out from the top of a hill decrees to the people when they came to consult him; and hence

when they came they upbraided the sloth of the king for hiding himself, and his absence was railed at by all with the bitterest complaints.

But Hother, when he had wandered through remotest byways and crossed an uninhabited forest, chanced to come upon a cave where dwelt some maidens whom he knew not; but they proved to be the same who had once given him the invulnerable coat. Asked by them wherefore he had come thither, he related the disastrous issue of the war. So he began to bewail the ill luck of his failures and his dismal misfortunes, condemning their breach of faith, and lamenting that it had not turned out for him as they had promised him. But the maidens said that though he had seldom come off victorious, he had nevertheless inflicted as much defeat on the enemy as they on him, and had dealt as much carnage as he had shared in. Moreover, the favour of victory would be speedily his, if he could first lay hands upon a food of extraordinary delightsomeness which had been devised to increase the strength of Balder. For nothing would be difficult if he could only get hold of the dainty which was meant to enhance the rigour of his foe.

Hard as it sounded for earthborn endeavours to make armed assault upon the gods, the words of the maidens inspired Hother's mind with instant confidence to fight with Balder. Also some of his own people said that he could not safely contend with those above; but all regard for their majesty was expelled by the boundless fire of his spirit. For in brave souls vehemence is not always sapped by reason, nor doth counsel defeat rashness. Or perchance it was that Hother remembered how the might of the lordliest oft proveth unstable, and how a little clod can batter down great chariots.

On the other side, Balder mustered the Danes to arms and met Hother in the field. Both sides made a great slaughter; the carnage of the opposing parties was nearly equal, and night stayed the battle. About the third watch, Hother, unknown to any man, went out to spy upon the enemy, anxiety about the impending peril having banished sleep. This strong excitement favours not bodily rest, and inward disquiet suffers not outward repose. So, when he came to the camp of the enemy he heard that three maidens had gone out carrying the secret feast of Balder. He ran after them (for their footsteps in the dew betrayed their flight), and at last entered their accustomed dwelling. When they asked him who he was, he answered, a lutanist, nor did the trial belie his profession. For when the lyre was offered him, he tuned its strings, ordered and governed the chords with his quill, and with ready modulation poured forth a melody pleasant to the ear. Now they had three snakes, of whose venom they were wont to mix a strengthening compound for the food of Balder, and even now a flood of slaver was dripping on the food from the open mouths of the serpents. And some of the maidens would, for kindness sake, have given Hother a share of the dish, had not eldest of the three forbidden them, declaring that Balder would be cheated if they increased the bodily powers of his enemy. He had said, not that he was Hother, but that he was one of his company. Now the same nymphs, in their gracious kindness, bestowed on him a belt of perfect sheen and a girdle which assured victory.

Retracing the path by which he had come, he went back on the same road, and meeting Balder plunged his sword into his side, and laid him low half dead. When the news was told to the soldiers, a cheery shout of triumph rose from all the camp of Hother, while the Danes held a public mourning for the fate of Balder. He, feeling no doubt of his impending death, and stung by the anguish of his wound, renewed the battle on the morrow; and, when it raged hotly, bade that he should be borne on a litter into the fray, that he might not seem

to die ignobly within his tent. On the night following, Proserpine was seen to stand by him in a vision, and to promise that on the morrow he should have her embrace. The boding of the dream was not idle; for when three days had passed, Balder perished from the excessive torture of his wound; and his body given a royal funeral, the army causing it to be buried in a barrow which they had made.

Certain men of our day, Chief among whom was Harald, since the story of the ancient burial-place still survived, made a raid on it by night in the hope of finding money, but abandoned their attempt in sudden panic. For the hill split, and from its crest a sudden and mighty torrent of loud-roaring waters seemed to burst; so that its flying mass, shooting furiously down, poured over the fields below, and enveloped whatsoever it struck upon, and at its onset the delvers were dislodged, flung down their mattocks, and fled divers ways; thinking that if they strove any longer to carry through their enterprise they would be caught in the eddies of the water that was rushing down. Thus the guardian gods of that spot smote fear suddenly into the minds of the youths, taking them away from covetousness, and turning them to see to their safety; teaching them to neglect their greedy purpose and be careful of their lives. Now it is certain that this apparent flood was not real but phantasmal; not born in the bowels of the earth (since Nature suffereth not liquid springs to gush forth in a dry place), but produced by some magic agency. All men afterwards, to whom the story of that breaking in had come down, left this hill undisturbed. Wherefore it has never been made sure whether it really contains any wealth; for the dread of peril has daunted anyone since Harald from probing its dark foundations.

But Odin, though he was accounted the chief of the gods, began to inquire of the prophets and diviners concerning the way to accomplish vengeance for his son, as well as all others whom he had heard were skilled in the most recondite arts of soothsaying. For godhead that is incomplete is oft in want of the help of man. Rostioph (Hrossthiof), the Finn, foretold to him that another son must be born to him by Rinda (Wrinda), daughter of the King of the Ruthenians; this son was destined to exact punishment for the slaying of his brother. For the gods had appointed to the brother that was yet to be born the task of avenging his kinsman. Odin, when he heard this, muffled his face with a cap, that his garb might not betray him, and entered the service of the said king as a soldier; and being made by him captain of the soldiers, and given an army, won a splendid victory over the enemy. And for his stout achievement in this battle the king admitted him into the chief place in his friendship, distinguishing him as generously with gifts as with honours. A very little while afterwards Odin routed the enemy single-handed, and returned, at once the messenger and the doer of the deed. All marvelled that the strength of one man could deal such slaughter upon a countless host. Trusting in these services, he privily let the king into the secret of his love, and was refreshed by his most gracious favour; but when he sought a kiss from the maiden, he received a cuff. But he was not driven from his purpose either by anger at the slight or by the odiousness of the insult.

Next year, loth to quit ignobly the quest he had taken up so eagerly, he put on the dress of a foreigner and went back to dwell with the king. It was hard for those who met him to recognise him; for his assumed filth obliterated his true features, and new grime hid his ancient aspect. He said that his name was Roster (Hrosstheow), and that he was skilled in smithcraft. And his handiwork did honour to his professions: for he portrayed in bronze many and many a shape most beautifully, so that he received a great mass of gold from the

king, and was ordered to hammer out the ornaments of the matrons. So, after having wrought many adornments for women's wearing, he at last offered to the maiden a bracelet which he had polished more laboriously than the rest and several rings which were adorned with equal care. But no services could assuage the wrath of Rinda; when he was fain to kiss her she cuffed him; for gifts offered by one we hate are unacceptable, while those tendered by a friend are far more grateful: so much doth the value of the offering oft turn on the offerer. For this stubborn-hearted maiden never doubted that the crafty old man was feigning generosity in order to seize an opening to work his lust. His temper, moreover, was keen and indomitable; for she knew that his homage covered guile, and that under the devotion of his gifts there lay a desire for crime. Her father fell to upbraiding her heavily for refusing the match; but she loathed to wed an old man, and the plea of her tender years lent her some support in her scorning of his hand; for she said that a young girl ought not to marry prematurely.

But Odin, who had found that nothing served the wishes of lovers more than tough persistency, though he was stung with the shame of his double rebuff, nevertheless, effacing the form he had worn before, went to the king for the third time, professing the completest skill in soldiership. He was led to take this pains not only by pleasure but by the wish to wipe out his disgrace. For of old those who were skilled in magic gained this power of instantly changing their aspect and exhibiting the most different shapes. Indeed, they were clever at imitating any age, not only in its natural bodily appearance, but also in its stature; and so the old man, in order to exhibit his calling agreeably, used to ride proudly up and down among the briskest of them. But not even such a tribute could move the rigour of the maiden; for it is hard for the mind to come back to a genuine liking for one against whom it has once borne heavy dislike. When he tried to kiss her at his departure, she repulsed him so that he tottered and smote his chin upon the ground. Straightway he touched her with a piece of bark whereon spells were written, and made her like unto one in frenzy: which was a gentle revenge to take for all the insults he had received.

But still he did not falter in the fulfilment of his purpose; for trust in his divine majesty buoyed him up with confidence; so, assuming the garb of a maiden, this indefatigable journeyer repaired for the fourth time to the king, and, on being received by him, showed himself assiduous and even forward. Most people believed him to be a woman, as he was dressed almost in female attire. Also he declared that his name was Wecha, and his calling that of a physician: and this assertion he confirmed by the readiest services. At last he was taken into the household of the queen, and played the part of a waiting-woman to the princess, and even used to wash the soil off her feet at eventide; and as he was applying the water he was suffered to touch her calves and the upper part of the thighs. But fortune goes with mutable steps, and thus chance put into his hand what his address had never won. For it happened that the girl fell sick, and looked around for a cure; and she summoned to protect her health those very hands which aforesaid she had rejected, and appealed for preservation to him whom she had ever held in loathing. He examined narrowly all the symptoms of the trouble, and declared that, in order to check the disease as soon as possible, it was needful to use a certain drugged draught; but that it was so bitterly compounded, that the girl could never endure so violent a cure unless she submitted to be bound; since the stuff of the malady must be ejected from the very innermost tissues. When her father heard this he did not hesitate to bind his daughter; and laying her on the bed, he bade her endure patiently all the applications of the doctor. For

the king was tricked by the sight of the female dress, which the old man was using to disguise his persistent guile; and thus the seeming remedy became an opportunity of outrage. For the physician seized the chance of love, and, abandoning his business of healing, sped to the work, not of expelling the fever, but of working his lust; making use of the sickness of the princess, whom in sound health he had found adverse to him. It will not be wearisome if I subjoin another version of this affair. For there are certain who say that the king, when he saw the physician groaning with love, but despite all his expense of mind and body accomplishing nothing, did not wish to rob of his due reward one who had so well earned it, and allowed him to lie privily with his daughter. So doth the wickedness of the father sometimes assail the child, when vehement passion perverts natural mildness. But his fault was soon followed by a remorse that was full of shame, when his daughter bore a child.

But the gods, whose chief seat was then at Byzantium, (Asgard), seeing that Odin had tarnished the fair name of godhead by divers injuries to its majesty, thought that he ought to be removed from their society. And they had him not only ousted from the headship, but outlawed and stripped of all worship and honour at home; thinking it better that the power of their infamous president should be overthrown than that public religion should be profaned; and fearing that they might themselves be involved in the sin of another, and though guiltless be punished for the crime of the guilty. For they saw that, now the derision of their great god was brought to light, those whom they had lured to proffer them divine honours were exchanging obeisance for scorn and worship for shame; that holy rites were being accounted sacrilege, and fixed and regular ceremonies deemed so much childish raving. Fear was in their souls, death before their eyes, and one would have supposed that the fault of one was visited upon the heads of all. So, not wishing Odin to drive public religion into exile, they exiled him and put one Oller (Wulder?) in his place, to bear the symbols not only of royalty but also of godhead, as though it had been as easy a task to create a god as a king. And though they had appointed him priest for form's sake, they endowed him actually with full distinction, that he might be seen to be the lawful heir to the dignity, and no mere deputy doing another's work. Also, to omit no circumstance of greatness, they further gave him the name of Odin, trying by the prestige of that title to be rid of the obloquy of innovation. For nearly ten years Oller held the presidency of the divine senate; but at last the gods pitied the horrible exile of Odin, and thought that he had now been punished heavily enough; so he exchanged his foul and unsightly estate for his ancient splendour; for the lapse of time had now wiped out the brand of his earlier disgrace. Yet some were to be found who judged that he was not worthy to approach and resume his rank, because by his stage-tricks and his assumption of a woman's work he had brought the foulest scandal on the name of the gods. Some declare that he bought back the fortune of his lost divinity with money; flattering some of the gods and mollifying some with bribes; and that at the cost of a vast sum he contrived to get back to the distinction which he had long quitted. If you ask how much he paid for them, inquire of those who have found out what is the price of a godhead. I own that to me it is but little worth.

Thus Oller was driven out from Byzantium by Odin and retired into Sweden. Here, while he was trying, as if in a new world, to repair the records of his glory, the Danes slew him. The story goes that he was such a cunning wizard that he used a certain bone, which he had marked with awful spells, wherewith to cross the seas, instead of a vessel; and that by this bone he passed over the waters that barred his way as quickly as by rowing.

But Odin, now that he had regained the emblems of godhead, shone over all parts of the world with such a lustre of renown that all nations welcomed him as though he were light restored to the universe; nor was any spot to be found on the earth which did not homage to his might. Then finding that Boe, his son by Rhlda, was enamoured of the hardships of war, he called him, and bade him bear in mind the slaying of his brother: saying that it would be better for him to take vengeance on the murderers of Balder than to overcome them once in battle; for warfare was most fitting and wholesome when a holy occasion for waging it was furnished by a righteous opening for vengeance.

News came meantime that Gewar had been slain by the guile of his own satrap (jarl), Gunne. Hother determined to visit his murder with the strongest and sharpest revenge. So he surprised Gunne, cast him on a blazing pyre, and burnt him; for Gunne had himself treacherously waylaid Gewar, and burnt him alive in the night. This was his offering of vengeance to the shade of his foster-father; and then he made his sons, Herlek and Gerit, rulers of Norway.

Then he summoned the elders to assembly, and told them that he would perish in the war wherein he was bound to meet Boe, and said that he knew this by no doubtful guesswork, but by sure prophecies of seers. So he besought them to make his son Rorik king, so that the judgment of wicked men should not transfer the royalty to strange and unknown houses; averring that he would reap more joy from the succession of his son than bitterness from his own impending death. This request was speedily granted. Then he met Boe in battle and was killed; but small joy the victory gave Boe. Indeed, he left the battle so sore stricken that he was lifted on his shield and carried home by his foot-soldiers supporting him in turn, to perish next day of the pain of his wounds. The Ruthenian army gave his body a gorgeous funeral and buried it in a splendid howe, which it piled in his name, to save the record of so mighty a warrior from slipping out of the recollection of after ages.

So the Kurlanders and the Swedes, as though the death of Hother set them free from the burden of their subjection, resolved to attack Denmark, to which they were accustomed to do homage with a yearly tax. By this the Slavs also were emboldened to revolt, and a number of others were turned from subjects into foes. Rorik, in order to check this wrongdoing, summoned his country to arms, recounted the deeds of his forefathers, and urged them in a passionate harangue unto valorous deeds. But the barbarians, loth to engage without a general, and seeing that they needed a head, appointed a king over them; and, displaying all the rest of their military force, hid two companies of armed men in a dark spot. But Rorik saw the trap; and perceiving that his fleet was wedged in a certain narrow creek among the shoal water, took it out from the sands where it was lying, and brought it forth to sea; lest it should strike on the oozy swamps, and be attacked by the foe on different sides. Also, he resolved that his men should go into hiding during the day, where they could stay and suddenly fall on the invaders of his ships. He said that perchance the guile might in the end recoil on the heads of its devisors. And in fact the barbarians who had been appointed to the ambushade knew nothing of the wariness of the Danes, and sallying against them rashly, were all destroyed. The remaining force of the Slavs, knowing nothing of the slaughter of their friends, hung in doubt wondering over the reason of Rorik's tarrying. And after waiting long for him as the months wearily rolled by, and finding delay every day more burdensome, they at last thought they should attack him with their fleet.

Now among them there was a man of remarkable stature, a wizard by calling. He, when he

beheld the squadrons of the Danes, said: "Suffer a private combat to forestall a public slaughter, so that the danger of many may be bought off at the cost of a few. And if any of you shall take heart to fight it out with me, I will not flinch from these terms of conflict. But first of all I demand that you accept the terms I prescribe, the form whereof I have devised as follows: If I conquer, let freedom be granted us from taxes; if I am conquered, let the tribute be paid you as of old: For to-day I will either free my country from the yoke of slavery by my victory or bind her under it by my defeat. Accept me as the surety and the pledge for either issue." One of the Danes, whose spirit was stouter than his strength, heard this, and proceeded to ask Rorik, what would be the reward for the man who met the challenger in combat? Rorik chanced to have six bracelets, which were so intertwined that they could not be parted from one another, the chain of knots being inextricably laced; and he promised them as a reward for the man who would venture on the combat. But the youth, who doubted his fortune, said: "Rorik, if I prove successful, let thy generosity award the prize of the conqueror, do thou decide and allot the palm; but if my enterprise go little to my liking, what prize canst thou owe to the beaten, who will be wrapped either in cruel death or in bitter shame? These things commonly go with feebleness, these are the wages of the defeated, for whom naught remains but utter infamy. What guerdon must be paid, what thanks offered, to him who lacks the prize of courage? Who has ever garlanded with ivy the weakling in war, or decked him with a conqueror's wage? Valour wins the prize, not sloth, and failure lacks renown. For one is followed by triumph and honour, the other by an unsightly life or by a stagnant end. I, who know not which way the issue of this duel inclines, dare not boldly anticipate that as a reward, of which I know not whether it be rightly mine. For one whose victory is doubtful may not seize the assured reward of the victor. I forbear, while I am not sure of the day, to claim firmly the title to the wreath. I refuse the gain, which may be the wages of my death as much as of my life. It is folly to lay hands on the fruit before it is ripe, and to be fain to pluck that which one is not yet sure is one's title. This hand shall win me the prize, or death." Having thus spoken, he smote the barbarian with his sword; but his fortune was tardier than his spirit; for the other smote him back, and he fell dead under the force of the first blow. Thus he was a sorry sight unto the Danes, but the Slavs granted their triumphant comrade a great procession, and received him with splendid dances. On the morrow the same man, whether he was elated with the good fortune of his late victory, or was fired with the wish to win another, came close to the enemy, and set to girding at them in the words of his former challenge. For, supposing that he had laid low the bravest of the Danes, he did not think that any of them would have any heart left to fight further with him upon his challenge. Also, trusting that, now one champion had fallen, he had shattered the strength of the whole army, he thought that naught would be hard to achieve upon which his later endeavours were bent. For nothing pampers arrogance more than success, or prompts to pride more surely than prosperity.

So Rorik was vexed that the general courage should be sapped by the impudence of one man; and that the Danes, with their roll of victories, should be met presumptuously by those whom they had beaten of old; nay, should be ignominiously spurned; further, that in all that host not one man should be found so quick of spirit or so vigorous of arm, that he longed to sacrifice his life for his country. It was the high-hearted Ubbe who first wiped off this infamous reproach upon the hesitating Danes. For he was of great bodily strength and powerful in incantations. He also purposely asked the prize of the combat, and the king promised him the bracelets. Then said he: "How can I trust the promise when thou keepest

the pledge in thine own hands, and dost not deposit the gift in the charge of another? Let there be some one to whom thou canst entrust the pledge, that thou mayst not be able to take thy promise back. For the courage of the champion is kindled by the irrevocable certainty of the prize." Of course it was plain that he had said this in jest; sheer courage had armed him to repel the insult to his country. But Rorik thought he was tempted by avarice, and was loth to seem as if, contrary to royal fashion, he meant to take back the gift or revoke his promise; so, being stationed on his vessel, he resolved to shake off the bracelets, and with a mighty swing send them to the asker. But his attempt was balked by the width of the gap between them; for the bracelets fell short of the intended spot, the impulse being too faint and slack, and were reft away by the waters. For this nickname of Slyngebond, (swing-bracelet) clung to Rorik. But this event testified much to the valour of Ubbe. For the loss of his drowned prize never turned his mind from his bold venture; he would not seem to let his courage be tempted by the wages of covetousness. So he eagerly went to fight, showing that he was a seeker of honour and not the slave of lucre, and that he set bravery before lust of pelf; and intent to prove that his confidence was based not on hire, but on his own great soul. Not a moment is lost; a ring is made; the course is thronged with soldiers; the champions engage; a din arises; the crowd of onlookers shouts in discord, each backing his own. And so the valour of the champions blazes to white-heat; falling dead under the wounds dealt by one another, they end together the combat and their lives. I think that it was a provision of fortune that neither of them should reap joy and honour by the other's death. This event won back to Rorik the hearts of the insurgents and regained him the tribute.

At this time Horwendil and Feng, whose father Gerwendil had been governor of the Jutes, were appointed in his place by Rorik to defend Jutland. But Horwendil held the monarchy for three years, and then, to will the height of glory, devoted himself to roving. Then Koller, King of Norway, in rivalry of his great deeds and renown, deemed it would be a handsome deed if by his greater strength in arms he could bedim the far-famed glory of the rover; and cruising about the sea, he watched for Horwendil's fleet and came up with it. There was an island lying in the middle of the sea, which each of the rovers, bringing his ships up on either side, was holding. The captains were tempted by the pleasant look of the beach, and the comeliness of the shores led them to look through the interior of the springtide woods, to go through the glades, and roam over the sequestered forests. It was here that the advance of Koller and Horwendil brought them face to face without any witness. Then Horwendil endeavoured to address the king first, asking him in what way it was his pleasure to fight, and declaring that one best which needed the courage of as few as possible. For, said he, the duel was the surest of all modes of combat for winning the meed of bravery, because it relied only upon native courage, and excluded all help from the hand of another. Koller marvelled at so brave a judgment in a youth, and said: "Since thou hast granted me the choice of battle, I think it is best to employ that kind which needs only the endeavours of two, and is free from all the tumult. Certainly it is more venturesome, and allows of a speedier award of the victory. This thought we share, in this opinion we agree of our own accord. But since the issue remains doubtful, we must pay some regard to gentle dealing, and must not give way so far to our inclinations as to leave the last offices undone. Hatred is in our hearts; yet let piety be there also, which in its due time may take the place of rigour. For the rights of nature reconcile us, though we are parted by differences of purpose; they link us together, howsoever rancour estrange our spirit. Let us, therefore,

have this pious stipulation, that the conqueror shall give funeral rites to the conquered. For all allow that these are the last duties of human kind, from which no righteous man shrinks. Let each army lay aside its sternness and perform this function in harmony. Let jealousy depart at death, let the feud be buried in the tomb. Let us not show such an example of cruelty as to persecute one another's dust, though hatred has come between us in our lives. It will be a boast for the victor if he has borne his beaten foe in a lordly funeral. For the man who pays the rightful dues over his dead enemy wins the goodwill of the survivor; and whoso devotes gentle dealing to him who is no more, conquers the living by his kindness. Also there is another disaster, not less lamentable, which sometimes befalls the living -- the loss of some part of their body; and I think that succour is due to this just as much as to the worst hap that may befall. For often those who fight keep their lives safe, but suffer maiming; and this lot is commonly thought more dismal than any death; for death cuts off memory of all things, while the living cannot forget the devastation of his own body. Therefore this mischief also must be helped somehow; so let it be agreed, that the injury of either of us by the other shall be made good with ten talents (marks) of gold. For if it be righteous to have compassion on the calamities of another, how much more is it to pity one's own? No man but obeys nature's prompting; and he who slights it is a self-murderer."

After mutually pledging their faiths to these terms, they began the battle. Nor was their strangeness his meeting one another, nor the sweetness of that spring-green spot, so heeded as to prevent them from the fray. Horwendil, in his too great ardour, became keener to attack his enemy than to defend his own body; and, heedless of his shield, had grasped his sword with both hands; and his boldness did not fail. For by his rain of blows he destroyed Koller's shield and deprived him of it, and at last hewed off his foot and drove him lifeless to the ground. Then, not to fail of his compact, he buried him royally, gave him a howe of lordly make and pompous obsequies. Then he pursued and slew Koller's sister Sela, who was a skilled warrior and experienced in roving.

He had now passed three years in valiant deeds of war; and, in order to win higher rank in Rorik's favour, he assigned to him the best trophies and the pick of the plunder. His friendship with Rorik enabled him to woo and will in marriage his daughter Gerutha, who bore him a son **Amleth**.

Such great good fortune stung Feng with jealousy, so that he resolved treacherously to waylay his brother, thus showing that goodness is not safe even from those of a man's own house. And behold, when a chance came to murder him, his bloody hand sated the deadly passion of his soul. Then he took the wife of the brother he had butchered, capping unnatural murder with incest. For whoso yields to one iniquity, speedily falls an easier victim to the next, the first being an incentive to the second. Also, the man veiled the monstrosity of his deed with such hardihood of cunning, that he made up a mock pretence of goodwill to excuse his crime, and glossed over fratricide with a show of righteousness. Gerutha, said he, though so gentle that she would do no man the slightest hurt, had been visited with her husband's extremest hate; and it was all to save her that he had slain his brother; for he thought it shameful that a lady so meek and unrancorous should suffer the heavy disdain of her husband. Nor did his smooth words fail in their intent; for at courts, where fools are sometimes favoured and backbiters preferred, a lie lacks not credit. Nor did Feng keep from shameful embraces the hands that had slain a brother; pursuing with equal guilt both of his wicked and impious deeds.

Amleth beheld all this, but feared lest too shrewd a behaviour might make his uncle suspect him. So he chose to feign dulness, and pretend an utter lack of wits. This cunning course not only concealed his intelligence but ensured his safety. Every day he remained in his mother's house utterly listless and unclean, flinging himself on the ground and bespattering his person with foul and filthy dirt. His discoloured face and visage smutched with slime denoted foolish and grotesque madness. All he said was of a piece with these follies; all he did savoured of utter lethargy. In a word, you would not have thought him a man at all, but some absurd abortion due to a mad fit of destiny. He used at times to sit over the fire, and, raking up the embers with his hands, to fashion wooden crooks, and harden them in the fire, shaping at their lips certain barbs, to make them hold more tightly to their fastenings. When asked what he was about, he said that he was preparing sharp javelins to avenge his father. This answer was not a little scoffed at, all men deriding his idle and ridiculous pursuit; but the thing helped his purpose afterwards. Now it was his craft in this matter that first awakened in the deeper observers a suspicion of his cunning. For his skill in a trifling art betokened the hidden talent of the craftsman; nor could they believe the spirit dull where the hand had acquired so cunning a workmanship. Lastly, he always watched with the most punctual care over his pile of stakes that he had pointed in the fire. Some people, therefore, declared that his mind was quick enough, and fancied that he only played the simpleton in order to hide his understanding, and veiled some deep purpose under a cunning feint. His wiliness (said these) would be most readily detected, if a fair woman were put in his way in some secluded place, who should provoke his mind to the temptations of love; all men's natural temper being too blindly amorous to be artfully dissembled, and this passion being also too impetuous to be checked by cunning. Therefore, if his lethargy were feigned, he would seize the opportunity, and yield straightway to violent delights. So men were commissioned to draw the young man in his rides into a remote part of the forest, and there assail him with a temptation of this nature. Among these chanced to be a foster-brother of Amleth, who had not ceased to have regard to their common nurture; and who esteemed his present orders less than the memory of their past fellowship. He attended Amleth among his appointed train, being anxious not to entrap, but to warn him; and was persuaded that he would suffer the worst if he showed the slightest glimpse of sound reason, and above all if he did the act of love openly. This was also plain enough to Amleth himself. For when he was bidden mount his horse, he deliberately set himself in such a fashion that he turned his back to the neck and faced about, fronting the tail; which he proceeded to encompass with the reins, just as if on that side he would check the horse in its furious pace. By this cunning thought he eluded the trick, and overcame the treachery of his uncle. The reinless steed galloping on, with rider directing its tail, was ludicrous enough to behold.

Amleth went on, and a wolf crossed his path amid the thicket. When his companions told him that a young colt had met him, he retorted, that in Feng's stud there were too few of that kind fighting. This was a gentle but witty fashion of invoking a curse upon his uncle's riches. When they averred that he had given a cunning answer, he answered that he had spoken deliberately; for he was loth to be thought prone to lying about any matter, and wished to be held a stranger to falsehood; and accordingly he mingled craft and candour in such wise that, though his words did lack truth, yet there was nothing to betoken the truth and betray how far his keenness went.

Again, as he passed along the beach, his companions found the rudder of a ship, which had

been wrecked, and said they had discovered a huge knife. "This," said he, "was the right thing to carve such a huge ham;" by which he really meant the sea, to whose infinitude, he thought, this enormous rudder matched. Also, as they passed the sandhills, and bade him look at the meal, meaning the sand, he replied that it had been ground small by the hoary tempests of the ocean. His companions praising his answer, he said that he had spoken it wittingly. Then they purposely left him, that he might pluck up more courage to practise wantonness. The woman whom his uncle had dispatched met him in a dark spot, as though she had crossed him by chance; and he took her and would have ravished her, had not his foster-brother, by a secret device, given him an inkling of the trap. For this man, while pondering the fittest way to play privily the prompter's part, and forestall the young man's hazardous lewdness, found a straw on the ground and fastened it underneath the tail of a gadfly that was flying past; which he then drove towards the particular quarter where he knew Amleth to be: an act which served the unwary prince exceedingly well. The token was interpreted as shrewdly as it had been sent. For Amleth saw the gadfly, espied with curiosity the straw which it wore embedded in its tail, and perceived that it was a secret warning to beware of treachery. Alarmed, scenting a trap, and fain to possess his desire in greater safety, he caught up the woman in his arms and dragged her off to a distant and impenetrable fen. Moreover, when they had lain together, he conjured her earnestly to disclose the matter to none, and the promise of silence was accorded as heartily as it was asked. For both of them had been under the same fostering in their childhood; and this early rearing in common had brought Amleth and the girl into great intimacy.

So, when he had returned home, they all jeeringly asked him whether he had given way to love, and he avowed that he had ravished the maid. When he was next asked where he did it, and what had been his pillow, he said that he had rested upon the hoof of a beast of burden, upon a cockscomb, and also upon a ceiling. For, when he was starting into temptation, he had gathered fragments of all these things, in order to avoid lying. And though his jest did not take aught of the truth out of the story, the answer was greeted with shouts of merriment from the bystanders. The maiden, too, when questioned on the matter, declared that he had done no such thing; and her denial was the more readily credited when it was found that the escort had not witnessed the deed. Then he who had marked the gadfly in order to give a hint, wishing to show Amleth that to his trick he owed his salvation, observed that latterly he had been singly devoted to Amleth. The young man's reply was apt. Not to seem forgetful of his informant's service, he said that he had seen a certain thing bearing a straw flit by suddenly, wearing a stalk of chaff fixed in its hinder parts. The cleverness of this speech, which made the rest split with laughter, rejoiced the heart of Amleth's friend.

Thus all were worsted, and none could open the secret lock of the young man's wisdom. But a friend of Feng, gifted more with assurance than judgment, declared that the unfathomable cunning of such a mind could not be detected by any vulgar plot, for the man's obstinacy was so great that it ought not to be assailed with any mild measures; there were many sides to his wiliness, and it ought not to be entrapped by any one method. Accordingly, said he, his own profounder acuteness had hit on a more delicate way, which was well fitted to be put in practice, and would effectually discover what they desired to know. Feng was purposely to absent himself, pretending affairs of great import. Amleth should be closeted alone with his mother in her chamber; but a man should first be commissioned to place himself in a concealed part of the room and listen heedfully to what

they talked about. For if the son had any wits at all he would not hesitate to speak out in the hearing of his mother, or fear to trust himself to the fidelity of her who bore him. The speaker, loth to seem readier to devise than to carry out the plot, zealously proffered himself as the agent of the eavesdropping. Feng rejoiced at the scheme, and departed on pretence of a long journey. Now he who had given this counsel repaired privily to the room where Amleth was shut up with his mother, and lay down skulking in the straw. But Amleth had his antidote for the treachery. Afraid of being overheard by some eavesdropper, he at first resorted to his usual imbecile ways, and crowed like a noisy cock, beating his arms together to mimic the flapping of wings. Then he mounted the straw and began to swing his body and jump again and again, wishing to try if aught lurked there in hiding. Feeling a lump beneath his feet, he drove his sword into the spot, and impaled him who lay hid. Then he dragged him from his concealment and slew him. Then, cutting his body into morsels, he seethed it in boiling water, and flung it through the mouth of an open sewer for the swine to eat, bestrewing the stinking mire with his hapless limbs. Having in this wise eluded the snare, he went back to the room. Then his mother set up a great wailing, and began to lament her son's folly to his face; but he said: "Most infamous of women; dost thou seek with such lying lamentations to hide thy most heavy guilt? Wantoning like a harlot, thou hast entered a wicked and abominable state of wedlock, embracing with incestuous bosom thy husband's slayer, and wheedling with filthy lures of blandishment him who had slain the father of thy son. This, forsooth, is the way that the mares couple with the vanquishers of their mates; for brute beasts are naturally incited to pair indiscriminately; and it would seem that thou, like them, hast clean forgot thy first husband. As for me, not idly do I wear the mask of folly; for I doubt not that he who destroyed his brother will riot as ruthlessly in the blood of his kindred. Therefore it is better to choose the garb of dulness than that of sense, and to borrow some protection from a show of utter frenzy. Yet the passion to avenge my father still burns in my heart; but I am watching the chances, I await the fitting hour. There is a place for all things; against so merciless and dark spirit must be used the deeper devices of the mind. And thou, who hadst been better employed in lamenting thine own disgrace, know it is superfluity to bewail my witlessness; thou shouldst weep for the blemish in thine own mind, not for that in another's. On the rest see thou keep silence." With such reproaches he rent the heart of his mother and redeemed her to walk in the ways of virtue; teaching her to set the fires of the past above the seductions of the present.

When Feng returned, nowhere could he find the man who had suggested the treacherous espial; he searched for him long and carefully, but none said they had seen him anywhere. Amleth, among others, was asked in jest if he had come on any trace of him, and replied that the man had gone to the sewer, but had fallen through its bottom and been stifled by the floods of filth, and that he had then been devoured by the swine that came up all about that place. This speech was flouted by those who heard; for it seemed senseless, though really it expressly avowed the truth.

Feng now suspected that his stepson was certainly full of guile, and desired to make away with him, but durst not do the deed for fear of the displeasure, not only of Amleth's grandsire Rorik, but also of his own wife. So he thought that the King of Britain should be employed to slay him, so that another could do the deed, and he be able to feign innocence. Thus, desirous to hide his cruelty, he chose rather to besmirch his friend than to bring disgrace on his own head. Amleth, on departing, gave secret orders to his mother to hang the hall with woven knots, and to perform pretended obsequies for him a year thence;

promising that he would then return. Two retainers of Feng then accompanied him, bearing a letter graven on wood - a kind of writing material frequent in old times; this letter enjoined the king of the Britons to put to death the youth who was sent over to him. While they were reposing, Amleth searched their coffers, found the letter, and read the instructions therein. Whereupon he erased all the writing on the surface, substituted fresh characters, and so, changing the purport of the instructions, shifted his own doom upon his companions. Nor was he satisfied with removing from himself the sentence of death and passing the peril on to others, but added an entreaty that the King of Britain would grant his daughter in marriage to a youth of great judgment whom he was sending to him. Under this was falsely marked the signature of Feng.

Now when they had reached Britain, the envoys went to the king, and proffered him the letter which they supposed was an implement of destruction to another, but which really betokened death to themselves. The king dissembled the truth, and entreated them hospitably and kindly. Then Amleth scouted all the splendour of the royal banquet like vulgar viands, and abstaining very strangely, rejected that plenteous feast, refraining from the drink even as from the banquet. All marvelled that a youth and a foreigner should disdain the carefully cooked dainties of the royal board and the luxurious banquet provided, as if it were some peasant's relish. So, when the revel broke up, and the king was dismissing his friends to rest, he had a man sent into the sleeping-room to listen secretly, in order that he might hear the midnight conversation of his guests. Now, when Amleth's companions asked him why he had refrained from the feast of yestereve, as if it were poison, he answered that the bread was flecked with blood and tainted; that there was a tang of iron in the liquor; while the meats of the feast reeked of the stench of a human carcase, and were infected by a kind of smack of the odour of the charnel. He further said that the king had the eyes of a slave, and that the queen had in three ways shown the behaviour of a bondmaid. Thus he reviled with insulting invective not so much the feast as its givers. And presently his companions, taunting him with his old defect of wits, began to flout him with many saucy jeers, because he blamed and cavilled at seemly and worthy things, and because he attacked thus ignobly an illustrious king and a lady of so refined a behaviour, bespattering with the shamefullest abuse those who merited all praise.

All this the king heard from his retainer; and declared that he who could say such things had either more than mortal wisdom or more than mortal folly; in these few words fathoming the full depth of Amleth's penetration. Then he summoned his steward and asked him whence he had procured the bread. The steward declared that it had been made by the king's own baker. The king asked where the corn had grown of which it was made, and whether any sign was to be found there of human carnage? The other answered, that not far off was a field, covered with the ancient bones of slaughtered men, and still bearing plainly all the signs of ancient carnage; and that he had himself planted this field with grain in springtide, thinking it more fruitful than the rest, and hoping for plenteous abundance; and so, for aught he knew, the bread had caught some evil savour from this bloodshed. The king, on hearing this, surmised that Amleth had spoken truly, and took the pains to learn also what had been the source of the lard. The other declared that his hogs had, through negligence, strayed from keeping, and battered on the rotten carcase of a robber, and that perchance their pork had thus come to have something of a corrupt smack. The king, finding that Amleth's judgment was right in this thing also, asked of what liquor the steward had mixed the drink? Hearing that it had been brewed of water and meal, he had the spot

of the spring pointed out to him, and set to digging deep down; and there he found, rusted away, several swords, the tang whereof it was thought had tainted the waters. Others relate that Amleth blamed the drink because, while quaffing it, he had detected some bees that had fed in the paunch of a dead man; and that the taint, which had formerly been imparted to the combs, had reappeared in the taste. The king, seeing that Amleth had rightly given the causes of the taste he had found so faulty, and learning that the ignoble eyes wherewith Amleth had reproached him concerned some stain upon his birth, had a secret interview with his mother, and asked her who his father had really been. She said she had submitted to no man but the king. But when he threatened that he would have the truth out of her by a trial, he was told that he was the offspring of a slave. By the evidence of the avowal thus extorted he understood the whole mystery of the reproach upon his origin. Abashed as he was with shame for his low estate, he was so ravished with the young man's cleverness, that he asked him why he had aspersed the queen with the reproach that she had demeaned herself like a slave? But while resenting that the courtliness of his wife had been accused in the midnight gossip of a guest, he found that her mother had been a bondmaid. For Amleth said he had noted in her three blemishes showing the demeanor of a slave; first, she had muffled her head in her mantle as handmaids do; next, that she had gathered up her gown for walking; and thirdly, that she had first picked out with a splinter, and then chewed up, the remnant of food that stuck in the crevices between her teeth. Further, he mentioned that the king's mother had been brought into slavery from captivity, lest she should seem servile only in her habits, yet not in her birth.

Then the king adored the wisdom of Amleth as though it were inspired, and gave him his daughter to wife; accepting his bare word as though it were a witness from the skies. Moreover, in order to fulfil the bidding of his friend, he hanged Amleth's companions on the morrow. Amleth, feigning offence, treated this piece of kindness as a grievance, and received from the king, as compensation, some gold, which he afterwards melted in the fire, and secretly caused to be poured into some hollowed sticks.

When he had passed a whole year with the king he obtained leave to make a journey, and returned to his own land, carrying away of all his princely wealth and state only the sticks which held the gold. On reaching Jutland, he exchanged his present attire for his ancient demeanour, which he had adopted for righteous ends, purposely assuming an aspect of absurdity. Covered with filth, he entered the banquet-room where his own obsequies were being held, and struck all men utterly aghast, rumour having falsely noised abroad his death. At last terror melted into mirth, and the guests jeered and taunted one another, that he whose last rites they were celebrating as though he were dead, should appear in the flesh. When he was asked concerning his comrades, he pointed to the sticks he was carrying, and said, "Here is both the one and the other." This he observed with equal truth and pleasantry; for his speech, though most thought it idle, yet departed not from the truth; for it pointed at the weregild of the slain as though it were themselves. Thereon, wishing to bring the company into a gayer mood, he jollied the cupbearers, and diligently did the office of plying the drink. Then, to prevent his loose dress hampering his walk, he girdled his sword upon his side, and purposely drawing it several times, pricked his fingers with its point. The bystanders accordingly had both sword and scabbard riveted across with an iron nail. Then, to smooth the way more safely to his plot, he went to the lords and plied them heavily with draught upon draught, and drenched them all so deep in wine, that their feet were made feeble with drunkenness, and they turned to rest within the palace, making

their bed where they had revelled. Then he saw they were in a fit state for his plots, and thought that here was a chance offered to do his purpose. So he took out of his bosom the stakes he has long ago prepared, and went into the building, where the ground lay covered with the bodies of the nobles wheezing off their sleep and their debauch. Then, cutting away its support, he brought down the hanging his mother had knitted, which covered the inner as well as the outer walls of the hall. This he flung upon the snorers, and then applying the crooked stakes, he knotted and bound them up in such insoluble intricacy, that not one of the men beneath, however hard he might struggle, could contrive to rise. After this he set fire to the palace. The flames spread, scattering the conflagration far and wide. It enveloped the whole dwelling, destroyed the palace, and burnt them all while they were either buried in deep sleep or vainly striving to arise. Then he went to the chamber of Feng, who had before this been conducted by his train into his pavilion; plucked up a sword that chanced to be hanging to the bed, and planted his own in its place. Then, awakening his uncle, he told him that his nobles were perishing in the flames, and that Amleth was here, armed with his crooks to help him, and thirsting to exact the vengeance, now long overdue, for his father's murder. Feng, on hearing this, leapt from his couch, but was cut down while deprived of his own sword, and as he strove in vain to draw the strange one. O valiant Amleth, and worthy of immortal fame, who being shrewdly armed with a feint of folly, covered a wisdom too high for human wit under a marvellous disguise of silliness! And not only found in his subtlety means to protect his own safety, but also by its guidance found opportunity to avenge his father. By this skilful defence of himself, and strenuous revenge for his parent, he has left it doubtful whether we are to think more of his wit or his bravery.

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