

The Hystorie of Hamblet, Prince of Denmark

A translation from François de Belleforest's 1576 work, *Les Histoires Tragiques*. This was based on a story in *Gesta Danorum* (The History of the Danes) which was written in Latin in about 1200 by the Danish poet, Saxo Grammaticus, and published in Paris in 1514.

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CHAPTER I

How Horvendile and Fengon were made Governors of the Province of Ditmarse, and how Horvendile married Geruth, the daughter to Rodericke, chief King of Denmark, by whom he had Hamblet and how after his marriage his brother Fengon slew him traitorously, and married his brother's wife, and what followed.

[The Danes in times past barbarous and uncivil. The cruelty of the Danes]

You must understand, that long time before the Kingdom of Denmark received the faith of Jesus Christ, and embraced the doctrine of the Christians, that the common people in those days were barbarous and uncivil, and their princes cruel, without faith or loyalty, seeking nothing but murder, and deposing (or at the least) offending each other, either in honours, goods, or lives; not caring to ransom such as they took prisoners, but rather sacrificing them to the cruel vengeance naturally imprinted in their hearts: in such sort, that if there were sometime a good prince or king among them, who being adorned with the most perfect gifts of nature, would commit himself to virtue, and use courtesy, although the people held him in admiration (as virtue is admirable to the most wicked) yet the envy of his neighbours was so great, that they never ceased until that virtuous man were dispatched out of the world.

[Rodericke King of Denmark. Horvendile a King and a pirate. Collere King of Norway]

King Rodericke, as then reigning in Denmark, after he had appeased the troubles in the country, and driven the Sweathlanders and Slaveans from thence, he divided the kingdom into divers provinces, placing governors therein; who after (as the like happened in France) bare the names of Dukes, Marquesses, and Earls, giving the government of Juty (at this present called Ditmarse) lying upon the country Juty at this of the Cimbrians, in the straight or narrow part of land that then did show like a point or cape of ground upon the sea, which marse northward bordereth upon the country of Norway, to two valiant and warlike lords Horvendile and Fengon, sons to Gervendile, who likewise had been governor of that province. Now the greatest honour that men of noble birth could at that time win and obtain, was in exercising the art of piracy upon the seas, assailing their neighbours, and the countries bordering upon them; and how much the more they used to rob, pill, and spoil other provinces, and islands far adjacent, so much the more their honours and reputation

increased and augmented: wherein Horvendile obtained the highest place in his time, being the most renowned pirate that in those days scoured the seas and havens of the north parts: whose great fame so moved the heart of Collere, King of Norway, that he was much grieved to hear that Horvendile surmounted him in feats of arms, thereby obscuring the glory by him already obtained upon the seas: (honour more than covetousness of riches (in those days) being the reason that provoked those barbarian princes to overthrow and vanquish one the other, not caring to be slain by the hands of a victorious person).

[Horvendile slew Collere]

This valiant and hardy king having challenged Horvendile to fight with him body to body, the combat was by him accepted, with conditions, that he which should be vanquished should lose all the riches he had in his ship, and that the vanquisher should cause the body of the vanquished (that should be slain in the combat) to be honourably buried, death being the prize and reward of him that should lose the battle: and to conclude, Collere, King of Norway (although a valiant, hardy, and courageous prince) was in the end vanquished and slain by Horvendile, who presently caused a tomb to be erected, and therein (with all honourable obsequies fit for a prince) buried the body of King Collere, according to their ancient manner and superstitions in these days, and the conditions of the combat, bereaving the King's ships of all their riches; and having slain the King's sister, a very brave and valiant warrior, and overrun all the coast of Norway, and the Northern Islands, returned home again laden with much treasure, sending the most part thereof to his sovereign, King Rodericke, thereby to procure his good liking, and so to be accounted one of the greatest favourites about his Majesty.

The King, allured by those presents, and esteeming himself happy to have so valiant a subject, sought by a great favour and courtesy to make him become bounden unto him perpetually, giving him Geruth his daughter to his wife, of whom he knew Horvendile to be already much enamoured. And the more to honour him, determined himself in person to conduct her into Juty, where the marriage was celebrated according to the ancient manner: and to be brief, of this marriage proceeded Hamblet, of whom I intend to speak, and for his cause have chosen to renew this present history.

Fengon, brother to this prince Horvendile, who not only fretting and despighting in his heart at the great honour and reputation won by his brother in warlike affairs, but solicited and provoked by a foolish jealousy to see him honoured with royal alliance, and fearing thereby to be deposed from his part of the government, or rather desiring to be only governor, thereby to obscure the memory of the victories and conquests of his brother Horvendile, determined (whatsoever happened) to kill him; which he elected in such sort, that no man once so much as suspected him, every man esteeming that from such and so firm a knot of alliance and consanguinity there could proceed no other issue than the full effects of virtue and courtesies: but (as I said before) the desire of bearing sovereign rule and authority respecteth neither blood nor amity, nor caring for virtue, as being wholly without respect of laws, or majesty divine; for it is not possible that he which invadeth the country and taketh away the riches of another man without cause or reason, should know or fear God. Was not this a crafty and subtle counsellor? But he might have thought that the mother, knowing her husband's case, would not cast her son into the danger of death. But Fengon, having secretly assembled certain men, and perceiving himself strong enough to execute his enterprise, Horvendile his brother being at a banquet with his friends, suddenly set upon

him, where he slew him as traitorously, as cunningly he purged himself of so detestable a murder to his subjects; for that before he had any violent or bloody hands, or once committed parricide upon his brother, he had incestuously abused his wife, whose honour he ought as well to have sought and procured as traitorously he pursued and effected his destruction. And it is most certain, that the man that abandoneth himself to any notorious and wicked action, whereby he becometh a great sinner, he careth not to commit much more heinous and abominable offences, and covered his boldness and wicked practice with so great subtlety and policy, and under a veil of mere simplicity, that being favoured for the honest love that he bare to his sister-in-law, for whose sake, he affirmed, he had in that sort murdered his brother, that his sin found excuse among the common people and of the nobility was esteemed for justice: for that Geruth, being as courteous a princess as any then living in the north parts, and one that had never once so much as offended any of her subjects, either commons or courtiers, this adulterer and infamous murderer, slandered his dead brother, that he would have slain his wife, and that he by chance finding him upon the point ready to do it, in defence of the lady had slain him, bearing off the blows, which as then he struck at the innocent princess, without any other cause of malice whatsoever. Wherein he wanted no false witness to approve his act, which deposed in like sort, as the wicked calumniator himself protested, being the same persons that had borne him company, and were participants of his treason; so that instead of pursuing him as a parricide and an incestuous person, all the courtiers admired and flattered him in his good fortune, making more account of false witness and detestable wicked reporters, and more honouring the calumniators, than they esteemed of those that seeking to call the matter in question, and admiring the virtues of the murdered prince, would have punished the massacrers and bereavers of his life. Which was the cause that Fengon, boldened and encouraged by such impunity, durst venture to couple himself in marriage with her whom he used as his concubine during good Horvendile's life, in that sort spotting his name with a double vice, and charging his conscience with abominable guilt, and two-fold impiety, as incestuous adultery and parricide murder: and that the unfortunate and wicked woman, that had received the honour to be the wife of one of the valiantest and wisest princes in the north, debased herself in such vile sort, as to falsify her faith unto him, and which is worse, to marry him, that had been the tyrannous murderer of her lawful husband; which made divers men think that she had been the causer of the murder, thereby to live in her adultery without control. But where shall a man find a more wicked and bold woman, than a great personage once having loosed the bands of honour and honesty? This princess, at the first, for her rare virtues and courtesies was honoured of all men and beloved of her husband, as soon as she once gave ear to the tyrant Fengon, forgot both the rank she held among the greatest names, and the duty of an honest wife on her behalf. But I will not stand to gaze and marvel at women, for that there are many which seek to blaze and set them forth, in which their writings they spare not to blame them all for the faults of some one, or few women. But I say, that either nature ought to have bereaved man of that opinion to accompany with women, or else to endow them with such spirits, as that they may easily support the crosses they endure, without complaining so often and so strangely, seeing it is their own beastliness that overthrows them. For if it be so, that a woman is so imperfect a creature as they make her to be, and that they know this beast to be so hard to be tamed as they affirm, why then are they so foolish to preserve them, and so dull and brutish as to trust their deceitful and wanton embracings? But let us leave her in this

extremity of laciviousness, and proceed to show you in what sort the young prince Hamblet behaved himself, to escape the tyranny of his uncle.

CHAPTER II

How Hamblet counterfeited the madman to escape the tyranny of his uncle and how he was tempted by a woman (through his uncle's procurement) who thereby thought to undermine the Prince, and by that means to find out whether he counterfeited madness or not, and how Hamblet would by no means be brought to consent unto her, and what followed.

GERUTH having (as I said before) so much forgotten herself, the prince Hamblet perceiving himself to be in danger of his life, as being abandoned of his own mother, and forsaken of all men, and assuring himself that Fengon would not detract the time to send him the same way his father Horvendile was gone, to beguile the tyrant in his subtleties (that esteemed him to be of such a mind that if he once attained to man's estate he would not long delay the time to revenge the death of his father) counterfeiting the madman with such craft and subtle practices, that he made show as if he had utterly lost his wits: and under that veil he covered his presence, and defended his life from the treasons and practices of the tyrant his uncle. And although he had been at the school of the Roman Prince, who, because he counterfeited himself to be a fool, was called Brutus, yet he imitated his fashions, and his wisdom. For every day being in the Queen's palace (who as then was more careful to please her whoremaster, than ready to revenge the cruel death of her husband, or to restore her son to his inheritance) he rent and tore his clothes, wallowing and lying in the dirt and mire, face all filthy and black, running through the streets like a man distraught, not speaking one word, but such as seemed to proceed of madness and mere frenzy; all his actions and gestures being no other than the right countenances of a man wholly deprived of all reason and understanding, in such sort, that as then he seemed fit for nothing but to make sport to the pages and ruffling courtiers that attended in the court of his uncle and father-in-law. But the young prince noted them well enough, minding one day to be revenged in such manner, that the memory thereof should remain perpetually to the world.

Behold, I pray you, a great point of a wise and brave spirit in a young prince, by so great a show of imperfection in his person for advancement, and his own humbling and despising, to work the means and to prepare the way for himself to be one of the happiest kings in his age. In like sort, never any man was reputed by any of his actions more wise and prudent than Brutus, dissembling a great alteration in his mind, for that the occasion of such his device of foolishness proceeded only of a good and mature counsel and deliberation, not only to preserve his goods, and shun the rage of the proud tyrant, but also to open a large way to procure the banishment and utter ruin of wicked Tarquinius, and to enfranchise the people (which were before oppressed) from the yoke of a great and miserable servitude.

And so, not only Brutus, but this man and worthy prince, to whom we may also add King David, that counterfeited the madman among the petty kings of Palestina to preserve his life from the subtle practices of those kings. I show this example unto such as, being offended with any great personage, have not sufficient means to prevail in their intents, or revenge the injury by them received. But when I speak of revenging any injury received upon a great personage or superior, it must be understood by such a one as is not our sovereign, against whom we may by no means resist, nor once practice any treason nor

conspiracy against his life: and he that will follow this course must speak and do all things whatsoever that are pleasing and acceptable to him whom he meaneth to deceive, practise his actions, and esteem him above all men, clean contrary to his own intent and meaning; for that is rightly to play and counterfeit the fool, when a man is constrained to dissemble and kiss his hand, whom in his heart he could wish an hundred foot depth under the earth, so he might never see him more, if it were not a thing wholly to be disliked in a Christian, who by no means ought to have a bitter gall, or desires infected with revenge. Hamblet, in this sort counterfeiting the madman, many times did divers actions of great and deep consideration, and often made such a sofitte answerer, that a wise man would soon have judged from what spirit so fine an invention might proceed; for that standing by the fire and sharpening sticks like poniards and pricks, one in smiling manner asked him wherefore he made those little staves so sharp at the points? I prepare (saith he) piercing darts and sharp arrows to revenge my father's death. Fools, as I said before, esteemed those his words as nothing; but men of quick spirits, and such as had a deeper reach began to suspect somewhat, esteeming that under that kind of folly there lay hidden a great and rare subtlety, such as one day might be prejudicial to their prince, saying, that under colour of such rudeness he shadowed a crafty policy, and by his devised simplicity, he concealed a sharp and pregnant spirit: for which cause they counselled the king to try and know, if it were possible, how to discover the intent and meaning of the young prince; and they could find no better nor more fit invention to entrap him, than to set some fair and beautiful woman in a secret place, that with flattering speeches and all the craftiest means she could use, should purposely seek to allure his mind to have his pleasure of her: for the nature of all young men, (especially such as are brought up wantonly) is so transported with the desires of the flesh, and entereth so greedily into the pleasures therof, that it is almost impossible to cover the foul affection, neither yet to dissemble or hide the same by art or industry, much less to shun it. What cunning or subtlety so ever they use to cloak their presence, seeing occasion offered, and that in secret, especially in the most enticing sin that reigneth in man, they cannot choose (being constrained by voluptuousness) but fall to natural effect and working. To this end certain courtiers were appointed to lead Hamblet into a solitary place within the woods, whither they brought the woman, inciting him to take their pleasures together, and to embrace one another, but the subtle practices used in these our days, not to try if men of great account be extract out of their wits, but rather to deprive them of strength, virtue and wisdom, by means of such devilish tricks and infernal spirits, their domestical servants, and ministers of corruption. And surely the poor prince at this assault had him in great danger, if a gentleman (that in Horvendile's time had been nourished with him) had not shown himself more affectioned to the bringing up he had received with Hamblet, than desirous to please the tyrant, who by all means sought to entangle the son in the same nets wherein the father had ended his days. This gentleman bore the courtiers (appointed as aforesaid of this treason) company, more desiring to give the prince instruction what he should do, then to entrap him, making full account that the least show of perfect sense and wisdom that Hamblet should make would be sufficient to cause him to lose his life: and therefore by certain signs, he gave Hamblet intelligence in what danger he was like to fall, if by any means he seemed to obey, or once like the wanton toys and vicious provocations of the gentlewoman sent to pleasure him. This much abashed the prince, as then wholly being in affection to the lady, but by her he was likewise informed of the treason, as being one that from her infancy loved and favoured him, and would have

been exceeding sorrowful for his misfortune, and much more to leave his company without enjoying the pleasure of his body, whom she loved more than herself. The prince in this sort having both deceived the courtiers, and the lady's expectation, that affirmed and swore that he never once offered to have his pleasure of the woman, although in subtlety he affirmed the contrary, every man there upon assured themselves that without all doubt he was distraught of his senses, that his brains were as then wholly void of force, and incapable of reasonable apprehension, so that as then Fengon's practice took no effect: but for all that he left not off, still seeking by all means to find out Hamblet's subtlety, as in the next chapter you shall perceive.

CHAPTER III

How Fengon, uncle to Hamblet, a second time to entrap him in his politic madness, caused one of his counsellors to be secretly hidden in the Queen's Chamber behind the arras, to hear what speeches passed between Hamblet and the Queen; and how Hamblet killed him and escaped that danger, and what followed.

[Another subtlety used to deceive Hamblet]

AMONG the friends of Fengon, there was one that above all the rest doubted of Hamblet's practices in counterfeiting the madman, who for that cause said that it was impossible that so crafty a gallant as Hamblet, that counterfeited the fool, should be discovered with so common and unskilful practices, which might easily be perceived, and that to find out his politic presence it were necessary to invent some subtle and crafty means, more attractive, whereby the gallant might not have the leisure to use his accustomed dissimulation; which to effect he said he knew a fit way, and a most convenient mean to effect the kings desire, and thereby to entrap Hamblet in his subtleties, and cause him of his own accord to fall into the net prepared for him, and thereby evidently show his secret meaning. His device was thus, that King Fengon should make as though he were to go some long voyage concerning affairs of great importance, and that in the meantime Hamblet should be shut up alone in a chamber with his mother, wherein some other should secretly be hidden behind the hangings, unknown either to him or his mother, there to stand and hear their speeches, and the complots by them to be taken concerning the accomplishment of the dissembling fool's presence; assuring the King that if there were any point of wisdom and perfect sense in the gallant's spirit, that without all doubt he would easily discover it to his mother, as being devoid of all fear that she would utter or make known his secret intent, being the woman that had borne him in her body, and nourished him so carefully; and withal offered himself to be the man that should stand to harken and bear witness of Hamblet's speeches with his mother, that he might not be esteemed a counsellor in such a case wherein he refused to be the executioner for the behoof and service of his prince. This invention pleased the King exceeding well, esteeming it as the only and sovereign remedy to heal the prince of his lunacy; and to that end making a long voyage, issued out of his palace, and rode to hunt in the forest.

[Hamblet's subtlety

Revenge taken by Hamblet upon him that would have betrayed him]

Meantime the counsellor entered secretly into the Queen's chamber, and there hid himself behind the arras, not long before the Queen and Hamblet came thither, who being crafty and politic, as soon as he was within the chamber, doubting some treason, and fearing if he should speak severely and wisely to his mother touching his secret practices he should be understood, and by that means intercepted, used his ordinary manner of dissimulation, and began to come like a cock beating with his arms (in such manner as cocks use to strike with their wings) upon the hangings of the chamber: whereby, feeling something stirring under them, he cried, A rat, a rat! and presently drawing his sword thrust it into the hangings, which done, pulled the counsellor (half dead) out by the heels, made an end of killing him, and being slain, cut his body in pieces, which he caused to be boiled, and then cast it into an open vault or privy, that so it might serve for food to the hogs.

[Queen Geruthe's repentence
Rinde, a Princess of an admirable chastity]

By which means having discovered the ambush, and given the inventer thereof his just reward, he came again to his mother, who in the meantime wept and tormented herself to see all her hopes frustrate, for that what fault soever she had committed yet was she sore grieved to see her only child made a mere mockery, every man reproaching her with his folly, one point whereof she had as then seen before her eyes, which was no small prick to her conscience, esteeming that the gods sent her that punishment for joining incestuously in marriage with the tyrannous murderer of her husband, who likewise ceased not to invent all the means he could to bring his nephew to his end, accusing his own natural indiscretion, as being the ordinary guide of those that so much desire the pleasures of the body, who shutting up the way to all reason, respect not what may ensue of their lightness and great inconstancy, and how a pleasure of small moment is sufficient to give them cause of repentance during their lives, and make them curse the day and time that ever any such apprehensions entered into their minds, or that they closed their eyes to reject the honesty requisite in ladies of her quality, and to despise the holy institution of those dames that had gone before her, both in nobility and virtue, calling to mind the great praises and commendations given by the Danes to Rinde, daughter to King Rothere, the chastest lady in her time, and withal so shamefast that she would never consent to marriage with any prince or knight whatsoever; surpassing in virtue all the ladies of her time, as she herself surmounted them in beauty, good behaviour, and comeliness. And while in this sort she sat tormenting herself, Hamblet entered into the chamber, who having once again searched every corner of the same, distrusting his mother as well as the rest, and perceiving himself to be alone, began in sober and discreet manner to speak unto her, saying, What treason is this, O most infamous woman! of all that ever prostrated themselves to the will of an abominable whore monger, who, under the veil of a dissembling creature, covereth the most wicked and detestable crime that man could ever imagine, or was committed. Now may I be assured to trust you, that like a vile wanton adultress, altogether impudent and given over to her pleasure, runs spreading forth her arms joyfully to embrace the traitorous villainous tyrant that murdered my father, and most incestuously receives the villain into the lawful bed of your loyal spouse, imprudently entertaining him instead of the dear father of your miserable and discomforted son, if the gods grant him not the grace speedily to escape from a captivity so unworthy the degree he holdeth, and the race and noble family of his ancestors. Is this the part of a Queen, and daughter to a King? to live like a brute

beast (and like a mare that yieldeth her body to the horse that hath beaten her companion away), to follow the pleasure of an abominable king that hath murdered a far more honest and better man than himself in massacring Horvendile, the honour and glory of the Danes, who are now esteemed of no force nor valour at all, since the shining splendour of knighthood was brought to an end by the most wickedest and cruellest villain living upon earth.

I, for my part, will never account him for my kinsman, nor once know him for mine uncle, nor you my dear mother, for not having respect to the blood that ought to have united us so straightly together, and who neither with your honour nor without suspicion of consent to the death of your husband could ever have agreed to have married with his cruel enemy. O, Queen Geruthe, it is the part of a bitch to couple with many, and desire acquaintance of divers mastiffs: it is licentiousness only that hath made you deface out of your mind the memory of the valour and virtues of the good King your husband and my father: it was an unbridled desire that guided the daughter of Rodericke to embrace the tyrant Fengon, and not to remember Horvendile (unworthy of so strange entertainment), neither that he killed his brother traitorously, and that she being his father's wife betrayed him, although he so well favoured and loved her, that for her sake he utterly bereaved Norway of her riches and valiant soldiers to augment the treasures of Rodericke, and make Geruthe wife to the hardiest prince in Europe: it is not the part of a woman, much less of a princess, in whom all modesty, courtesy, compassion, and love ought to abound, thus to leave her dear child to fortune in the bloody and murderous hands of a villain and traitor. Brute beasts do not so, for lions, tigers, ounces and leopards fight for the safety and defence of their whelps; and birds that have beaks, claws, and wings, resist such as would ravish them of their young ones; but you, to the contrary, expose and deliver me to death, whereas ye should defend me. Is not this as much as if you should betray me, when you knowing the perverseness of the tyrant and his intents, full of deadly counsel as touching the race and image of his brother, have not once sought, nor desired to find the means to save your child (and only son) by sending him into Swethland, Norway, or England, rather than to leave him as a prey to your infamous adulterer? Be not offended, I pray you, Madame, if transported with dolour and grief, I speak so boldly unto you, and that I respect you less than duty requireth; for you, having forgotten me, and wholly rejected the memory of the deceased, my father, must not be abashed if I also surpass the bounds and limits of due consideration. Behold into what distress I am now fallen, and to what mischief my fortune, and your over great lightness, and want of wisdom have induced me, that I am constrained to play the madman to save my life, instead of using and practising arms, following adventures, and seeking all means to make myself known to be the true and undoubted heir of the valiant and virtuous King Horvendile.

[We must use subtlety to a disloyal person]

It was not without cause, and just occasion, that my gestures, countenances, and words, seem all to proceed from a madman, and that I desire to have all men esteem me wholly deprived of sense and reasonable understanding, because I am well assured, that he that hath made no conscience to kill his own brother (accustomed to murders, and allured with desire of government without control in his treasons) will not spare, to save himself with the like cruelty, in the blood and flesh of the loins of his brother by him massacred: and, therefore, it is better for me to feign madness, than to use my right senses as nature hath

bestowed them upon me; the bright shining clearness therof I am forced to hide under this shadow of dissimulation, as the sun doth his beams under some great cloud, when the weather in summertime overcasteth. The face of a madman serveth to cover my gallant countenance, and the gestures of a fool are fit for me, to the end that guiding myself wisely therein, I may preserve my life for the Danes, and the memory of my late deceased father; for the desire of revenging his death is so engraved in my heart, that if I die not shortly, I hope to take such and so great vengeance, that these countries shall for ever speak thereof. Nevertheless, I must stay the time, means, and occasion, lest by making overgreat haste, I be now the cause of mine own sudden discovery and overthrow, and by that means end before I begin to effect my heart's desire. He that hath to do with a wicked, disloyal, cruel, and discourteous man must use craft and politic inventions, such as a fine wit can best imagine, not to discover his enterprise; for seeing that by force I cannot effect my desire, reason alloweth me by dissimulation, subtlety, and secret practices to proceed therein.

[We must weep for our own faults and not for others]

To conclude, weep not (madam) to see my folly, but rather sigh and lament your own offence, tormenting your conscience in regard of the infamy that hath so defiled the ancient renown and glory that (in times past) honoured Queen Geruth; for we are not to sorrow and grieve at other mens vices, but for our own misdeeds, and great follies. Desiring you, for the surplus of my proceedings, above all things (as you love your own life and welfare) that neither the King nor any other may by any means know mine intent; and let me alone with the rest, for I hope in the end to bring my purpose to effect.

Although the Queen perceived herself nearly touched, and that Hamblet moved her to the quick, where she felt herself interested, nevertheless she forgot all disdain and wrath, which thereby she might as then have had, hearing herself so sharply chidden and reprov'd, for the joy she then conceived, to behold the gallant spirit of her son, and to think what she might hope, and the easier expect of his so great policy and wisdom. But on the one side she durst not lift up her eyes to behold him, remembering her offence, and on the other side she would gladly have embraced her son, in regard of the wise admonitions by him given unto her, which as then quenched the flames of unbridled desire that before had moved her to affect King Fengon, to engraff in her heart the virtuous actions of her lawful spouse, whom inwardly she much lamented, when she beheld the lively image and portraiture of his virtue and great wisdom in her child, representing his father's haughty and valiant heart: and so, overcome and vanquished with this honest passion, and weeping most bitterly, having long time fixed her eyes upon temptation, and as it were wholly amazed, at the last embracing him in her arms (with the like love that a virtuous mother may or can use to kiss and entertain her own child), she spake unto him in this manner.

I know well (my son) that I have done the great wrong in marrying with Fengon, the cruel tyrant and murderer of thy father, and my loyal spouse: but when thou shalt consider the small means of resistance, and the treason of the palace, with the little cause of confidence we are to expect or hope for of the courtiers, all wrought to his will, as also the power he made ready, if I should have refused to like of him, thou wouldest rather excuse then accuse me of lasciviousness or inconstancy, much less offer me that wrong to suspect that ever thy mother Geruth once consented to the death and murder of her husband: swearing unto thee (by the majesty of the Gods) that if it had lain in my power to have resisted the tyrant, although it had been with the loss of my blood, yea and my life, I would surely have

saved the life of my lord and husband, with as good a will and desire as, since that time, I have often been a means to hinder and impeach the shortening of thy life, which being taken away, I will no longer live here upon earth. For seeing that thy senses are whole and sound, I am in hope to see an easy means invented for the revenging of thy father's death. Nevertheless, mine own sweet son, if thou hast pity of thyself, or care of the memory of thy father (although thou wilt do nothing for her that deserveth not the name of a mother in this respect) I pray thee, cast thine affairs wisely: be not hasty, nor over furious in thy enterprises, neither yet advance thyself more than reason shall move thee to effect thy purpose. Thou seest there is not almost any man wherein thou mayest put thy trust, nor any woman to whom I dare utter the least part of my secrets, that would not presently report it to thine adversary, who, although in outward show he dissembleth to love thee, the better to enjoy his pleasures of me, yet he distrusteth and feareth me for thy sake, and is not so simple to be easily persuaded that thou art a fool or mad; so that if thou chance to do anything that seemeth to proceed of wisdom or policy (how secretly soever it be done) he will presently be informed thereof, and I am greatly afraid that the devils have showed him what hath past at this present between us (fortune so much pursueth and contrarieth our ease and welfare) or that this murder that now thou has committed be not the cause of both our destructions, which I by no means will seem to know, but will keep secret both thy wisdom and hardy enterprise; beseeching the Gods (my good son) that they, guiding thy heart, directing thy counsels, and prospering thy enterprise, I may see thee possess and enjoy that which is thy right, and wear the crown of Denmark, by the tyrant taken from thee; that I may rejoice in thy prosperity, and therewith content myself, seeing with what courage and boldness thou shalt take vengeance upon the murderer of thy father, as also upon all those that have assisted and favoured him in his murderous and bloody enterprise. Madame (said Hamblet) I will put my trust in you, and from henceforth mean not to meddle further with your affairs, beseeching you (as you love your own flesh and blood) that you will from henceforth no more esteem of the adulterer, mine enemy whom I will surely kill, or cause to be put to death, in despite of all the devils in hell: and have he never so many flattering courtiers to defend him, yet will I bring him to his death, and they themselves also shall bear him company therein, as they have been his perverse counsellors in the action of killing my father, and his companions in his treason, massacre and cruel enterprise. And reason requireth that, even as traiterously they then caused their prince to be put to death, that with the like (nay well, much more) justice they should pay the interest of their felonious actions.

[Hother, father to Rodericke
Gulmon burnt his Lord Gevare

We must observe neither faithfulness or fidelity to traitors or parricides]

You know (Madam) how Hother your grandfather, and father to the good King Rodericke, having vanquished Gulmon, caused him to be burnt, for that the cruel villain had done the like to his lord Gevare, whom he betrayed in the night-time. And who knoweth not that traitors and perjured persons deserve no faith nor loyalty to be observed towards them, and that conditions made with murderers ought to be esteemed as cobwebs, and accounted as if they were things never promised nor agreed upon: but if I lay hands upon Fengon, it will neither be felony nor treason, he being neither my king nor my lord, but I shall justly punish him as my subject, that hath disloyally behaved himself against his lord and sovereign

prince. And seeing that glory is the reward of the virtuous, and the honour and praise of those that do service to their natural prince, why should not blame and dishonour accompany traitors, and ignominious death all those that dare be so bold as to lay violent hands upon sacred kings, that are friends and companions of the gods, as representing their majesty and persons. To conclude, glory is the crown of virtue, and the price of constancy; and seeing that it never accompanieth with infelicity, but shunneth cowardice and spirits of base and traitorous conditions, it must necessarily follow, that either a glorious death will be mine end, or with my sword in hand (laden with triumph and victory) I shall bereave them of their lives that made mine unfortunate, and darkened the beams of that virtue which I possessed from the blood and famous memory of my predecessors. For why should men desire to live, when shame and infamy are the executioners that torment their consciences, and villainy is the cause that withholdeth the heart from valiant enterprises, and diverteth the mind from honest desire of glory and commendation, which endureth for ever? I know it is foolishly done to gather fruit before it is ripe, and to seek to enjoy a benefit, not knowing whether it belong to us of right; but I hope to effect it so well, and have so great confidence in my fortune (that hitherto hath guided the action of my life) that I shall not die without revenging myself upon mine enemy, and that himself shall be the instrument of his own decay, and to execute that which of myself I durst not have enterprised.

After this, Fengon (as if he had been out some long journey) came to the court again, and asked for him that had received the charge to play the intelligencer, to entrap Hamblet in his dissembled wisdom, was abashed to hear neither news nor tidings of him, and for that cause asked Hamblet what was become of him, naming the man. The prince that never used lying, and who in all the answers that ever he made (during his counterfeit madness) never strayed from the truth (as a generous mind is a mortal enemy to untruth) answered and said, that the counsellor he sought for was gone down through the privy, where being choked by the filthiness of the place, the hogs meeting him had filled their bellies.

CHAPTER IV

How Fengon the third time devised to send Hamblet to the King of England, with secret letters to have him put to death: and how Hamblet when his companions slept, read the letters and instead of them counterfeited others, willing the King of England to put the two messengers to death and to marry his daughter to Hamblet, which was effected; and how Hamblet escaped out of England.

A MAN would have judged anything, rather than that Hamblet had committed that murder, nevertheless Fengon could not content himself, but still his mind gave him that the fool would play him some trick of legerdemain, and willingly would have killed him, but he feared King Rodericke, his grandfather, and further durst not offend the Queen, mother to the fool whom she loved and much cherished, showing great grief and heaviness to see him so transported out of his wits. And in that conceit, seeking to be rid of him, determined to find the means to do it by the aid of a stranger, making the King of England minister of his massacring resolution, choosing rather that his friend should defile his renown with so great a wickedness, than himself to fall into perpetual infamy by an exploit of so great cruelty, to whom he purposed to send him, and by letters desire him to put him to death.

Hamblet, understanding that he should be sent into England, presently feared the occasion of his voyage, and for that cause speaking to the Queen, desired her not to make any show of sorrow or grief for his departure, but rather counterfeit a gladness, as being rid of his presence; whom, although she loved, yet she daily grieved to see him in so pitiful estate, deprived of all sense and reason: desiring her further, that she should hang the hall with tapestry, and make it fast with nails upon the walls, and keep the brands for him which he had sharpened at the points, then, when as he said he made arrows to revenge the death of his father: lastly, he counselled her, that the year after his departure being accomplished she should celebrate his funerals; assuring her that at the same instant she should see him return with great contentment and pleasure unto her from that his voyage.

[Hamblet's craft to save his life]

Now, to bear him company were assigned two of Fengon's faithful ministers, bearing letters engraved in wood, that contained Hamblet's death, in such sort as he had advertised the King of England. But the subtle Danish prince (being at sea) whilst his companions slept, having read the letters, and known his uncle's great treason, with the wicked and villainous minds of the two courtiers that led him to the slaughter, razed out the letters that concerned his death, and instead thereof graved others, with commission to the King of England to hang his two companions; and not content to turn the death they had devised against him upon their own necks, wrote further, that King Fengon willed him to give his daughter to Hamblet in marriage. And so arriving in England, the messengers presented themselves to the King, giving him Fengon's letters; who having read the contents, said nothing as then, but stayed convenient time to effect Fengon's desire, meantime using the Danes familiarly, doing them that honour to sit at his table (for that kings as then were not so curiously, nor solemnly served as in these our days) for in these days mean kings, and lords of small revenue are as difficult and hard to be seen, as in times past the monarchs of Persia used to be: or as it is reported of the great king of ... will not permit any man to see his face which ordinarily he covereth with a veil. And as the messengers sat at the table with the King, subtle Hamblet was so far from being merry with them, that he would not taste one bit of meat, bread, nor cup of beer whatsoever, as then set upon the table, not without great wondering of the company, abashed to see a young man and a stranger not to esteem of the delicate meats and pleasant drinks served at the banquet, rejecting them as things filthy, evil of taste, and worse prepared. The King, who for that time dissembled what he thought, caused his guests to be conveyed into their chamber, willing one of his secret servants to hide himself therein, and so to certify him what speeches passed among the Danes at their going to bed.

Now they were no sooner entered into the chamber, and those that were appointed to attend upon them gone out, but Hamblet's companions asked him, why he refused to eat and drink of that which he found upon the table, not honouring the banquet of so great a King, that entertained them in friendly sort, with such honour and courtesy as it deserved ~ saying further, that he did not well, but dishonoured him that sent him, as if he sent men into England that feared to be poisoned by so great a King. The prince, that had done nothing without reason and prudent consideration, answered them, and said: What, think you, that I will eat bread dipped in human blood, and defile my throat with the rust of iron, and use that meat that stinketh and savoureth of man's flesh, already putrified and corrupted, and that scenteth like the savour of a dead carrion, long since cast into a vault?

And how would you have me to respect the King, that hath the countenance of a slave; and the Queen, who instead of great majesty, hath done three things more like a woman of base parentage, and fitter for a waiting gentlewoman then beseeming a lady of her quality and estate. And having said so, used many injurious and sharp speeches as well against the King and Queen, as others that had assisted at that banquet for the entertainment of the Danish ambassadors; and therein Hamblet said truth, as hereafter you shall hear, for that in those days, the north parts of the world, living as then under Satan's laws, were full of enchanters, so that there was not any young gentleman whatsoever that knew not something therein sufficient to serve his turn, if need required: as yet in those days in Gothland and Biarmy, there are many that knew not what the Christian religion permitteth, as by reading the histories of Norway and Gothland, you may easily perceive: and so Hamblet, while his father lived, had been instructed in that devilish art, whereby the wicked spirit abuseth mankind, and advertiseth him (as he can) of things past.

It toucheth not the matter herein to discover the parts of divination in man, and whether this prince, by reason of his over great melancholy, had received those impressions, divining that, which never any but himself had before declared, like the philosophers, who discoursing of divers deep points of philosophy, attribute the force of those divinations to such as are saturnists by complexion, who oftentimes speak of things which, their fury ceasing, they then already can hardly understand who are the pronouncers; and for that cause Plato saith, many diviners and many poets, after the force and vigour of their fire beginneth to lessen, do hardly understand what they have written, although entreating of such things, while the spirit of divination continueth upon them, they do in such sort discourse thereof that the authors and inventors of the arts themselves by them alleged, commend their discourses and subtle disputations. Likewise I mean not to relate that which divers men believe, that a reasonable soul becometh the habitation of a meaner sort of devils, by whom men learn the secrets of things natural; and much less do I account of the supposed governors of the world fained by magicians, by whose means they brag to effect marvellous things. It would seem miraculous that Hamblet should divine in that sort, which after proved so true (if as I said before) the devil had not knowledge of things past, but to grant it he knoweth things to come I hope you shall never find me in so gross an error. You will compare and make equal derivation, and conjecture with those that are made by the spirit of God, and pronounced by the holy prophets, that tasted of that marvellous science, to whom only was declared the secrets and wondrous works of the Almighty. Yet there are some imposturious companions that impute so much divinity to the devil, the father of lies, that they attribute unto him the truth of the knowledge of things that shall happen unto men, alleging the conference of Saul with the witch, although one example out of the Holy Scriptures, specially set down for the condemnation of wicked man, is not of force to give a sufficient law to all the world; for they themselves confess that they can divine, not according to the universal cause of things, but by signs borrowed from such like causes, which are always alike, and by those conjectures they can give judgement of things to come, but all this being grounded upon a weak support (which is a simple conjecture) and having so slender a foundation, as some foolish or late experience the fictions being voluntary. It should be a great folly in a man of good judgment, specially one that embraceth the preaching of the gospel, and seeketh after no other but the truth thereof, to repose upon any of these likelihoods or writings full of deceit.

As touching magical operations, I will grant them somewhat therein, finding divers histories that write thereof, and that the Bible maketh mention, and forbiddeth the use thereof: yea, the laws of the gentiles and ordinances of emperors have been made against it in such sort, that Mahomet, the great heretic and friend of the devil, by whose subtleties he abused most part of the east countries, hath ordained great punishments for such as use and practise those unlawful and damnable arts, which, for this time leaving of, let us return to Hamblet, brought up in these abuses, according to the manner of his country, whose companions hearing his answer reproached him of folly, saying that he could by no means show a greater point of indiscretion, then in despising that which is lawful, and rejecting that which all men received as a necessary thing, and that he had not grossly so forgotten himself as in that sort to accuse such and so excellent a man as the King of England, and to slander the Queen, being then as famous and wise a princess as any at that day reigning in the islands thereabouts, to cause him to be punished according to his deserts; but he, continuing in his dissimulation, mocked him, saying that he had not done anything that was not good and most true. On the other side, the King being advertised thereof by him that stood to hear the discourse, judged presently that Hamblet, speaking so ambiguously, was either a perfect fool, or else one of the wisest princes in his time, answering so suddenly, and so much to the purpose upon the demand by his companions made touching his behaviour; and the better to find the truth, caused the baker to be sent for, of whom enquiring in what place the corn grew whereof he made bread for his table, and whether in that ground there were not some signs or news of a battle fought, whereby human blood had therein been shed? The baker answered that not far from thence there lay a field full of dead men's bones, in times past slain in a battle, as by the great heaps of wounded skulls might well appear, and for that the ground in that part was become fatter then other grounds, by reason of the fat and humours of the dead bodies, that every year the farmers used there to have in the best wheat they could find to serve his majesty's house. The King perceiving it to be true, according to the young prince's words, asked where the hogs had been fed that were killed to be served at his table? And answer was made him, that those hogs getting out of the said field wherein they were kept, had found the body of a thief that had been hanged for his demerits, and had eaten thereof: whereat the King of England being abashed, would needs know with what water the beer he used to drink of had been brewed? Which having known, he caused the river to be digged somewhat deeper, and therein found great store of swords and rusty armours, that gave an ill savour to the drink. It were good I should here dilate somewhat of Merlin's prophecies, which are said to be spoken of him before he was fully one year old; but if you consider well what hath already been spoken, it is no hard matter to divine of things past, although the minister of Satan therein played his part, giving sudden and prompt answers to this young prince, for that herein are nothing but natural things, such as were well known to be true, and therefore not needful to dream of things to come. This known, the King, greatly moved with a certain curiosity to know why the Danish prince said that he had the countenance of a slave, suspecting thereby that he reproached the baseness of his blood, and that he would claim that never any prince had been his sire, wherein to satisfy himself he went to his mother, and leading her into a secret chamber, which he shut as soon as they were entered, desired her of her honour to show him of whom he was engendered in this world. The good lady, well assured that never any man had been acquainted with her love touching any other man then her husband, swore that the king her husband only was the man that had enjoyed

the pleasures of her body; but the King her son, already with the truth of the Danish prince's answers, threatened his mother to make her tell by force, if otherwise she would not confess it, who for fear of death acknowledged that she had prostrated her body to a slave, and made him father to the King of England; whereat the King was abashed, and wholly ashamed. I give them leave to judge who esteeming themselves honester than their neighbours, and supposing that there can be nothing amiss in their houses, make more enquiry then is requisite to know the which they would rather not have known. Nevertheless dissembling what he thought, and biting upon the bridle, rather than he would deprive himself by publishing the lasciviousness of his mother, thought better to leave a great sin unpunished, then thereby to make himself contemptible to his subjects, who per adventure would have rejected him, as not desiring to have a bastard to reign over so great a kingdom.

But as he was sorry to hear his mother's confession, on the other side he took great pleasure in the subtlety and quick spirit of the young prince, and for that cause went unto him to ask him, why he had reprov'd three things in his queen convenient for a slave, and savouring more of baseness then of royalty, and far unfit for the majesty of a great prince? The King, not content to have received a great displeasure by knowing himself to be a bastard, and to have heard with what injuries he charged her whom he loved best in all the world, would not content himself until he also understood that which displeas'd him, as much as his own proper disgrace, which was that his Queen was the daughter of a chambermaid, and withal noted certain foolish countenances she made, which not only showed of what parentage she came, but also that her humours savoured of the baseness and low degree of her parents, whose mother, he assured the king, was as then yet holden in servitude. The King admiring the young prince, and beholding in him some matter of greater respect then in the common sort of men, gave him his daughter in marriage, according to the counterfeit letters by him devised, and the next day caused the two servants of Fengon to be executed, to satisfy, as he thought, the King's desire. But Hamblet, although the sport pleas'd him well, and that the King of England could not have done him a greater favour, made as though he had been much offended, threatening the King to be revenged, but the King, to appease him, gave him a great sum of gold, which Hamblet caused to be molten, and put into two staves, made hollow for the same purpose, to serve his turn there with as need should require; for of all other the King's treasures he took nothing with him into Denmark but only those two staves, and as soon as the year began to be at an end, having somewhat before obtained licence of the King his father-in-law to depart, went for Denmark; then, with all the speed he could to return again into England to marry his daughter, and so set sail for Denmark.

CHAPTER V

How Hamblet, having escaped out of England and arrived in Denmark the same day that the Danes were celebrating his funerals, supposing him to be dead in England; and how he revenged his father's death upon his uncle and the rest of the courtiers; and what followed.

HAMBLET in that sort sailing into Denmark, being arriv'd in the country, entered into the palace of his uncle the same day that they were celebrating his funerals, and going into the hall, procur'd no small astonishment and wonder to them all, no man thinking other but

that he had been dead: among the which many of them rejoiced not a little for the pleasure which they knew Fengon would conceive for so pleasant a loss, and some were sad, as remembering the honourable King Horvendile, whose victories they could by no means forget, much less deface out of their memories that which appertained unto him, who as then greatly rejoiced to see a false report spread of Hamblet's death, and that the tyrant had not as yet obtained his will of the heir of Juty, but rather hoped God would restore him to his senses again for the good and welfare of that province. Their amazement at the last being turned into laughter, all that as then were assistant at the funeral banquet of him whom they esteemed dead, mocked each at other, for having been so simply deceived, and wondering at the prince, that in his so long a voyage he had not recovered any of his senses asked what was become of them that had borne him company into Great Britain? To whom he made answer (showing them the two hollow staves, wherein he had put his molten gold, that the King of England had given him to appease his fury, concerning the murder of his two companions) and said, Here they are both. Whereat many that already knew his humours, presently conjectured that he had played some trick of legerdemain, and to deliver himself out of danger, had thrown them into the pit prepared for him; so that fearing to follow after them and light upon some evil adventure, they went presently out of the court.

[Drunkenness a vice over-common in the north parts of the world.

A strange revenge taken by Hamblet]

And it was well for them that they did so, considering the tragedy acted by him the same day, being accounted his funeral, but in truth their last days, that as then rejoiced for their overthrow; for when every man busied himself to make good cheer, and Hamblet's arrival provoked them more to drink and carouse, the prince himself at that time played the butler and a gentleman attending on the tables, not suffering the pots nor goblets to be empty, whereby he gave the noblemen such store of liquor, that all of them being full laden with wine and gorged with meat, were constrained to lay themselves down in the same place where they had supped, so much that their senses were dulled, and overcome with the fire of over-great drinking (a vice common and familiar among the Almaines, and other nations inhabiting the north parts of the world) which when Hamblet perceiving, and finding so good opportunity to effect his purpose and be revenged of his enemies, and by the means to abandon the actions, gestures, and apparel of a madman, occasion so fitly finding his turn, and as it were effecting itself, failed not to take hold therof, and seeing those drunken bodies, filled with wine, lying like hogs upon the ground, some sleeping, others vomiting the over-great abundance of wine which without measure they had swallowed up, made the hangings about the hall to fall down and cover them all over; which he nailed to the ground, being boarded, and at the ends thereof he stuck the brands, whereof I spake before, by him sharpened, which served for pricks, binding and tying the hangings in such sort, that what force soever they used to loose themselves, it was impossible to get from under them: and presently he set fire to the four corners of the hall, in such sort, that all that were as then therein not one escaped away, but were forced to purge their sins by fire, and dry up the great abundance of liquor by them received into their bodies, all of them dying in the inevitable and merciless flames of the hot and burning fire: which the prince perceiving, became wise, and knowing that his uncle, before the end of the banquet, had withdrawn himself into his chamber, which stood apart from the place where the fire burnt, went

thither and entering into the chamber, laid hand upon the sword of his father's murderer, leaving his own in the place, which while he was at the banquet some of the courtiers had nailed fast into the scabberd, and going to Fengon said: I wonder, disloyal King, how thou canst sleep here at thine ease, and all thy palace is burnt, the fire thereof having burnt the greatest part of thy courtiers and ministers of thy cruelty, and detestable tyrannies; and which is more, I cannot imagine how thou shouldst well assure thyself and thy estate, as now to take thy ease, seeing Hamblet so near thee armed with the shafts by him prepared long since, and at this present is ready to revenge the traitorous injury by thee done to his lord and father.

[A mock but yet sharp and stinging, given by Hamblet to his uncle]

Fengon, as then knowing the truth of his nephew's subtle practice, and hearing him speak with staid mind, and which is more, perceived a sword naked in his hand, which he already lifted up to deprive him of his life, leaped quickly out of the bed, taking hold of Hamblet's sword, that was nailed into the scabberd, which as he sought to pull out, Hamblet gave him such a blow upon the chine of the neck, that he cut his head clean from his shoulders, and as he fell to the ground said, This just and violent death is a just reward for such as thou art: now go thy ways, and when thou comest in hell, see thou forget not to tell thy brother (whom thou traitorously slewest) that it was his son that sent thee thither with the message, to the end that being comforted thereby, his soul may rest among the blessed spirits, and quit me of the obligation that bound me to pursue his vengeance upon mine own blood, that seeing it was by thee that I lost the chief thing that tied me to this alliance and consanguinity. A man (to say the truth) hardy, courageous, and worthy of eternal commendation, who arming himself with a crazy, dissembling, and strange show of being distract out of his wits, under that pretence deceived the wise, politic, and crafty, thereby not only preserving his life from the treasons and wicked practices of the tyrant, but (which is more) by a new and unexpected kind of punishment, revenged his father's death, many year after the act committed: in no such sort that directing his courses with such prudence, and effecting his purposes with so great boldness and constancy, he left a judgement to be decided among men of wisdom, which was more commendable in him, his constancy or magnanimity, or his wisdom in ordering his affairs, according to the premeditable determination he had conceived.

[Commendation of Hamblet for killing the tyrant. How just vengeance ought to be considered

David's intent in commanding Solomon to revenge him of some of his enemies]

If vengeance ever seemed to have any show of justice, it is then, when piety and affection constraineth us to remember our fathers unjustly murdered, as the things whereby we are dispensed withal, and which seek the means not to leave treason and murder unpunished: seeing David a holy and just King, and of nature simple, courteous, and debonnaire, yet when he died he charged his son Solomon (that succeeded him in his throne) not to suffer certain men that had done him injury to escape unpunished. Not that this holy King (as then ready to die, and to give account before God of all his actions) was careful or desirous of revenge, but to leave this example unto us, that where the prince or country is interested, the desire of revenge cannot by any means (how small soever) bear the title of condemnation, but is rather commendable and worthy of praise: for otherwise the good Kings of Juda, nor others had not pursued them to death, that had offended their

predecessors, if God himself had not inspired and engraven that desire within their hearts. Hereof the Athenian laws bear witness, whose custom was to erect images in remembrance of those men that, revenging the injuries of the commonwealth, boldly massacred tyrants and such as troubled the peace and welfare of the citizens.

Hamblet, having in this manner revenged himself, durst not presently declare his action to the people, but to the contrary determined to work by policy, so to give them intelligence, what he had done, and the reason that drew him hereunto: so that being accompanied with such of his father's friends that then were rising, he stayed to see what the people would do when they should hear of that sudden and fearful action. The next morning the towns bordering thereabouts, desiring to know from whence the flames of fire proceeded the night before they had seen, came thither, and perceiving the King's palace burnt to ashes, and many bodies (most part consumed) lying among the ruins of the house, all of them were much abashed, nothing being left of the palace but the foundation. But they were much more amazed to behold the body of the king all bloody, and his head cut off lying hard by him; whereat some began to threaten revenge, yet not knowing against whom; others beholding so lamentable a spectacle, armed themselves, the rest rejoicing, yet not daring to make any show thereof; some detesting the cruelty, others lamenting the death of their Prince, but the greatest part calling Horvendile's murder to remembrance, acknowledging a just judgement from above, that had thrown down the pride of the tyrant. And in this sort, the diversities of opinions among that multitude of people being many, yet every man ignorant what would be the issue of that tragedy, none stirred from thence, neither yet attempted to move any tumult, every man fearing his own skin, and distrusting his neighbour, esteeming each other to be consenting to the massacre.

CHAPTER VI

How Hamblet, having slain his Uncle, and burnt his Palace, made an Oration to the Danes to show them what be done; and how they made him King of Denmark; and what followed.

HAMBLET then seeing the people to be so quiet, and most part of them not using any words, all searching only and simply the cause of this massacre and destruction, not minding to lose any time, but aiding himself with the commodity thereof, entered among the multitude of people, and standing in the middle spake unto them as followeth.

If there be any among you (good people of Demnark) that as yet have fresh within your memories the wrong done to the valiant King Horvendile, let him not be moved, nor think it strange to behold the confused, hideous, and fearful spectacle of this present calamity: if there be any man that affecteth fidelity, and alloweth of the love and duty that man is bound to show his parents, and find it a just cause to call to remembrance the injuries and wrongs that have been done to our progenitors, let him not be ashamed beholding this massacre, much less offended to see so fearful a spoil both of men and of the bravest house in all this country: for the hand that hath done this justice could not effect it by any other means, neither yet was it lawful for him to do it otherwise, then by ruining both sensible and unsensible things, thereby to preserve the memory of so just a vengeance.

I see well (my good friends) and am very glad to know so good attention and devotion in you, that you are sorry (before your eyes) to see Fengon so murdered, and without a head,

which heretofore you acknowledged for your commander; but I pray you remember this body is not the body of a king, but of an execrable tyrant, and a parricide most detestable. Oh Danes! the spectacle was much more hideous when Horvendile your King was murdered by his brother. What should I say a brother! nay, rather by the most abominable executioner that ever beheld the same. It was you that saw Horvendile's members massacred, and that with tears and lamentations accompanied him to the grave; his body disfigured, hurt in a thousand places, and misused in ten times as many fashions. And who doubteth (seeing experience hath taught you) that the tyrant (in massacring your lawful King) sought only to infringe the ancient liberties of the common people? and it was one hand only, that murdering Horvendile, cruelly dispoiled him of life, and by the same means unjustly bereaved you of your ancient liberties, and delighted more in oppression then to embrace the pleasant countenance of prosperous liberty without adventuring for the same. And what madman is he that delighteth more in the tyranny of Fengon then in the clemency and renewed courtesy of Horvendile? If it be so, that by clemency and affability the hardest and stoutest hearts are mollified and made tractable, and that evil and hard usage causeth subjects to be outrageous and unruly, why behold you not the debonair carriage of the first, to compare it with the cruelties and insolencies of the second, in every respect as cruel and barbarous as his brother was gentle, meek, and courteous? Remember, O you Danes, remember what love and amity Horvendile showed unto you; with what equity and justice he swayed the great affairs of this kingdom, and with what humanity and courtesy he defended and cherished you, and then I am assured that the simplest man among you will both remember and acknowledge that he had a most peaceable, just, and righteous king taken from him, to place in his throne a tyrant and murderer of his brother: one that hath perverted all right, abolished the ancient laws of our fathers, contaminated the memories of our ancestors, and by his wickedness polluted the integrity of this kingdom, upon the neck thereof having placed the troublesome yoke of heavy servitude, abolishing that liberty wherein Horvendile used to maintain you, and suffered you to live at your ease. And should you now be sorry to see the end of your mischiefs, and that this miserable wretch, pressed down with the burden of his offences, at this present payeth the usury of the parricide committed upon the body of his brother, and would not himself be the revenger of the outrage done to me, whom he sought to deprive of mine inheritance, taking from Denmark a lawful successor, to plant a wicked stranger, and bring into captivity those that my father had enfranchised and delivered out of misery and bondage? And what man is he, that having any spark of wisdom, would esteem a good deed to be an injury, and account pleasures equal with wrongs and evident outrages? It were then great folly and temerity in princes and valiant commanders in the wars to expose themselves to perils and hazards of their lives for the welfare of the common people, if that for a recompense they should reap hatred and indignation of the multitude. To what end should Hother have punished Balder, if, instead of recompense, the Danes and Swethlanders had banished him to receive and accept the successors of him that desired nought but his death and overthrow? What is he that hath so small feeling of reason and equity, that would be grieved to see treason rewarded with the like, and that an evil act is punished with just demerit in the party himself that was the occasion? Who was ever sorrowful to behold the murderer of innocents brought to his end, or what man weepeth to see a just massacre done upon a tyrant, usurper, villain, and bloody personage?

I perceive you are attentive, and abashed for not knowing the author of your deliverance, and sorry that you cannot tell to whom you should be thankful for such and so great a benefit as the destruction of a tyrant, and the overthrow of the place that was the storehouse of his villainies, and the true receptacle of all the thieves and traitors in this kingdom: but behold (here in your presence) him that brought so good an enterprise to effect. It is I (my good friends) it is I, that confess I have taken vengeance for the violence done unto my lord and father, and for the subjection and servitude that I perceived in this country, whereof I am the just and lawful successor. It is I alone, that have done this piece of work, whereunto you ought to have lent me your hands, and therein have aided and assisted me. I have only accomplished that which all of you might justly have effected, by good reason, without falling into any point of treason or felony. It is true that I hope so much of your good wills towards the deceased king Horvendile, and that the remembrances of his virtues is yet so fresh within your memories, that if I had required your aid herein, you would not have denied it, specially to your natural prince. But it liked me best to do it myself alone, thinking it a good thing to punish the wicked without hazarding the lives of my friends and loyal subjects, not desiring to burden other men's shoulders with this weight; for that I made account to effect it well enough without exposing any man into danger, and by publishing the same should clean have overthrown the device, which at this present I have so happily brought to pass. I have burnt the bodies of the courtiers to ashes, being companions in the mischiefs and treasons of the tyrant; but I have left Fengon whole, that you might punish his dead carcass (seeing that when he lived you durst not lay hands upon him) to accomplish the full punishment and vengeance due unto him, and so satisfy your choler upon the bones of him that filled his greedy hands and coffers with your riches, and shed the blood of your brethren and friends. Be joyful, then (my good friends); make ready the nosegay for this usurping king: burn his abominable body, boil his lascivious members, and cast the ashes of him that hath been hurtful to all the world into the air: drive from you the sparks of pity, to the end that neither silver, nor crystal cup, nor sacred tomb may be the restful habitation of the reliques and bones of so detestable a man: let not one trace of a parricide be seen, nor your country defiled with the presence of the least member of this tyrant without pity, that your neighbours may not smell the contagion, nor our land the polluted infection of a body condemned for his wickedness. I have done my part to present him to you in this sort; now it belongs to you to make an end of the work, and put to the last hand of duty whereunto your several functions call you; for in this sort you must honour abominable princes, and such ought to be the funeral of a tyrant, parricide, and usurper, both of the bed and patrimony that no way belonged unto him, who having bereaved his country of liberty, it is fit that the land refuse to give him a place for the eternal rest of his bones.

O my good friends, seeing you know the wrong that hath been done unto me, what my griefs are, and in what misery I have lived since the death of the King, my lord and father, and seeing that you have both known and tasted these things then, when as I could not conceive the outrage that I felt, what need I recite it unto you? What benefit would it be to discover it before them that knowing it would burst (as it were with despite) to hear of my hard chance, and curse Fortune for so much humbling a royal prince, as to deprive him of his majesty, although not any of you durst so much as show one sight of sorrow or sadness? You know how my father-in-law conspired my death, and sought by divers means to take away my life; how I was forsaken of the Queen my mother, mocked of my friends, and

despised of mine own subjects: hitherto I have lived laden with grief, near wholly confounded in tears, my life still accompanied with fear and suspicion, expecting the hour when the sharp sword would make an end of my life and miserable anguishes. How many times, counterfeiting the madman, have I heard you pity my distress, and secretly lament to see me disinherited? And yet no man sought to revenge the death of my father, nor to punish the treason of my incestuous uncle, full of murders and massacres. This charity ministered comfort, and your affectionate complaints made me evidently see your good wills, that you had in memory the calamity of your prince, and within your hearts engraven the desire of vengeance for the death of him that deserved a long life. And what heart can be so hard and untractable, or spirit so severe, cruel, and rigorous, that would not relent at the remembrance of my extremities, and take pity of an orphan child, so abandoned of the world ~ what eyes were so void of moisture but would distil a field of tears, to see a poor prince assaulted by his own subjects, betrayed by his mother, pursued by his uncle, and so much oppressed that his friends durst not show the effects of their charity and good affection? O (my good friends) show pity to him whom you have nourished, and let your hearts take some compassion upon the memory of my misfortunes! I speak to you that are innocent of all treason, and never defiled your hands, spirits, nor desires with the blood of the great and virtuous King Horvendile. Take pity upon the Queen, sometime your sovereign lady, and my right honourable mother, forced by the tyrant, and rejoice to see the end and extinguishing of the object of her dishonour, which constrained her to be less pitiful to her own blood, so far as to embrace the murderer of her own dear spouse, charging herself with a double burden of infamy and incest, together with injuring and disannulling of her house, and the ruin of her race. This hath been the occasion that made me counterfeit folly, and cover my intents under a veil of meet madness, which hath wisdom and policy thereby to enclose the fruit of this vengeance, which, that it hath attained to the full point of efficacy and perfect accomplishment, you yourselves shall be judges; for touching this and other things concerning my profit, and the managing of great affairs, I refer myself to your counsels, and thereunto am fully determined to yield, as being those that trample under your feet the murderers of my father, and despise the ashes of him that hath polluted and violated the spouse of his brother, by him massacred; that both committed felony against his lord, traitorously assailed the majesty of his King, and odiously thrall'd his country under servitude and bondage, and you his loyal subjects, from whom he, bereaving your liberty, feared not to add incest to parricide, detestable to all the world. To you also it belongeth by duty and reason commonly to defend and protect Hamblet, the minister and executor of just vengeance, who being jealous of your honour and your reputation, both hazarded himself, hoping you will serve him for fathers, defenders, and tutors, and regarding him in pity, restore him to his goods and inheritances. It is I that have taken away the infamy of my country, and extinguished the fire that embraced your fortunes. I have washed the spots that defiled the reputation of the Queen, overthrowing both the tyrant and the tyranny, and beguiling the subtleties of the craftiest deceiver in the world, and by that means brought his wickedness and impostures to an end. I was grieved at the injury committed both to my father and my native country, and have slain him that used more rigorous commandments over you, than was either just or convenient to be used unto men that have commanded the valiantest nations in the world. Seeing, then, he was such a one to you, it is reason that you acknowledge the benefit, and think well of for the good I had done your posterity, and admiring my spirit and wisdom, choose me your king, if

you think me worthy of the place. You see I am the author of your preservation, heir of my father's kingdom, not straying in any point from his virtuous action, no murderer, violent parricide, nor man that ever offended any of you, but only the vicious. I am lawful successor in the kingdom, and just revenger of a crime above all others most grievous and punishable: it is to me that you owe the benefit of your liberty received, and of the subversion of that tyranny that so much afflicted you, that hath trodden under feet the yoke of the tyrant, and overwhelmed his throne, and taken the sceptre out of the hands of him that abused a holy and just authority; but it is you that are to recompense those that have well deserved, you know what is the reward of so great desert, and being in your hands to distribute the same, it is of you that I demand the price of my virtue, and the recompense of my victory.

[Hamblet King of one part of Denmark]

This oration of the young prince so moved the hearts of the Danes, and won the affections of the nobility, that some wept for pity, other for joy, to see the wisdom and gallant spirit of Hamblet; and having made an end of their sorrow, all with one consent proclaimed him King of Juty and Chersonse, at this present the proper country of Denmark. And having celebrated his coronation, and received the homages and fidelities of his subjects, he went into England to fetch his wife, and rejoiced with his father-in-law touching his good fortune; but it wanted little that the king of England had not accomplished that which Fengon with all his subtleties could never attain.

CHAPTER VII

How Hamblet, after his coronation, went into England; and how the King of England secretly would have put him to death; and how he slew the King of England and returned again into Denmark with two wives; and what followed.

HAMBLET, being in England, showed the King what means he had wrought to recover his kingdom; but when the King of England understood of Fengon's death, he was both abashed and confused in his mind, at that instant feeling himself assailed with two great passions, for that in times past he and Fengon having been companions together in arms, had given each other their faith and promises, by oath, that if either of them chanced to be slain by any man whatsoever, he that survived (taking the quarrel upon him as his own) should never cease till he were revenged, or at the least do his endeavour. This promise incited the barbarous king to massacre Hamblet, but the alliance presenting itself before his eyes, and beholding the one dead, although his friend, and the other alive, and husband to his daughter, made him deface his desire of revenge. But in the end, the conscience of his oath and promise obtained the upper hand, and secretly made him conclude the death of his son-in-law, which enterprise after that was cause of his own death, and overrunning of the whole country of England by the cruelty and despight conceived by the King of Denmark. I have purposely omitted the discourse of that battle, as not much pertinent to our matter, as also, not to trouble you with too tedious a discourse, being content to show you the end of this wise and valiant king Hamblet, who revenging himself upon so many enemies, and discovering all the treasons practised against his life, in the end served for a sport to fortune, and an example to all great personages that trust overmuch to the felicities of this world, that are of small moment, and less continuance.

The King of England perceiving that he could not easily effect his desire upon the King, his son-in-law, as also not being willing to break the laws and rights of hospitality, determined to make a stranger the revenger of his injury, and so accomplish his oath made to Fengon without defiling his hands with the blood of the husband of his daughter, and polluting his house by the traitorous massacring of his friend. In reading of this history, it seemeth, Hamblet should resemble another Hercules, sent into divers places of the world by Euristhene (solicited by Juno) where he knew any dangerous adventure, thereby to overthrow and destroy him; or else Bellerophon sent to Ariobatus to put him to death; or (leaving profane histories) another Urias, by King David appointed to be placed in the forefront of the battle, and the man that should be first slain by the barbarians. For the King of England's wife being dead not long before (although he cared not for marrying another woman) desired his son-in-law to make a voyage for him into Scotland, flattering him in such sort, that he made him believe that his singular wisdom caused him to prefer him to that ambassage, assuring himself that it were impossible that Hamblet, the subtlest and wisest prince in the world, should take any thing in the world in hand without effecting the same.

Now the Queen of Scots being a maid, and of a haughty courage, despised marriage with all men, as not esteeming any worthy to be her companion, in such manner that by reason of this arrogant opinion there never came any man to desire her love but she caused him to lose his life: but the Danish King's fortune was so good, that Hermetrude (for so was the Queen's name) hearing that Hamblet was come thither to entreat a marriage between her and the King of England, forgot all her pride, and dispelling herself of her stern nature, being as then determined to make him (being the greatest prince as then living) her husband, and deprive the English princess of her spouse, whom she thought fit for no men but herself; and so this Amazon without love, disdainig Cupid, by her free will submitted her haughty mind to her concupiscence. The Dane arriving in her court, desired she to see the old King of England's letters, and mocking at his fond appetites, whose blood as then was half congealed, cast her eyes upon the young and pleasant Adonis of the North, esteeming her self happy to have such a prey fallen into her hands, wherof she made her full account to have the possession: and to conclude, she that never had been overcome by the grace, courtesy, valour, or riches of any prince nor lord whatsoever, was as then vanquished with the only report of the subtleties of the Dane; who knowing that he was already fianced to the daughter of the King of England, spake unto him and said: I never looked for so great a bliss, neither from the gods nor yet from fortune, as to behold in my countries the most complete prince in the North, and he that hath made himself famous and renowned through all the nations of the world, as well neighbours as strangers, for the only respect of his virtue, wisdom, and good fortune, serving him much in the pursuit and effect of divers things by him undertaken, and think myself much beholding to the King of England (although his malice seeketh neither my advancement nor the good of you, my lord) to do me so much honour as to send me so excellent a man to entreat of a marriage (he being old, and a mortal enemy to me and mine) with me that am such a one as every man seeth, is not desirous to couple with a man of so base quality as he, whom you have said to be the son of a slave. But on the other side, I marvel that the son of Horvendile, and grand-child to King Rodericke, he that by his foolish wisdom and fained madness surmounted the forces and subtleties of Fengon, and obtained the kingdom of his adversary, should so much debase himself (having otherwise been very wise and well

advised in all his actions) touching his bedfellow; and he that for his excellency and valour surpasseth human capacity, should stoop so low as to take to wife her that, issuing from a servile race, hath only the name of a king for her father, for that the baseness of her blood will always cause her to show what are the virtues and noble qualities of her ancestors. And you, my lord, said she, are you so ignorant as not to know that marriage should not be measured by any foolish opinion of an outward beauty, but rather by virtues, and antiquity of race, which maketh the wife to be honoured for her prudence, and never degenerating from the integrity of his ancestors: exterior beauty also is nothing, where perfection of the mind doth not accomplish and adorn that which is outwardly seen to be in the body, and is lost by an accident and occurrence of small moment: as also such toys have deceived many men, and drawing them like enticing baits, have cast them headlong into the gulf of their dishonour, and utter overthrow. It was I to whom this advantage belonged, being a queen, and such a one as for nobility may compare myself with the greatest princes in Europe, being nothing inferior unto any of them, neither for antiquity of blood, nobility of parents, nor abundance of riches; and I am not only a queen, but such a one as that, receiving whom I will for my companion in bed, can make him bear the title of a king, and with my body give him possession of a great kingdom, and goodly province. Think then, my Lord, how much I account of your alliance, who being accustomed with the sword to pursue such as durst embolden themselves to win my love, it is to you only to whom I make a present both of my kisses, embracings, sceptre, and crown: what man is he, if he be not made of stone, that would refuse so precious a pawn as Hermetrude, with the Kingdom of Scotland? Accept, sweet King, accept this Queen, who with so great love and amity, desireth your so great profit, and can give you more contentment in one day than the princess of England would yield you pleasure during her life: although she surpass me in beauty, her blood being base it is fitter for such a King as you are to chuse Hermetrude, less beautiful but noble and famous, rather than the English lady with great beauty, but issuing from an unknown race, without any title of honour.

Now think if the Dane, hearing such forcible reasons and understanding that by her which he half doubted, as also moved with choler for the treason of his father-in-law, that purposely sent him thither to lose his life, and being welcomed, kissed, and played withal by this Queen, young and reasonable fair, if he were not easy enough to be converted, and like to forget the affection of his first wife, with this to enjoy the realm of Scotland, and so open the way to become King of all Great Britain: that, to conclude, he married her, and led her with him to the King of England's court, which moved the King from that time forward much more to seek the means to bereave him of his life; and had surely done it, if his daughter, Hamblet's other wife, more careful of him than had rejected her than of her father's welfare, had not discovered the enterprise to Hamblet, saying: I know well, my Lord, that the allurements and persuasions of a bold and altogether shameless woman, being more lascivious than the chaste embracements of a lawful and modest wife, are of more force to entice and charm the senses of young men; but for my part, I cannot take this abuse for satisfaction, to leave me in this sort without all cause, reason, or precedent fault once known in me, your loyal spouse, and take more pleasure in the alliance of her who one day will be the cause of your ruin and overthrow. And although a just cause of jealousy and reasonable motion of anger, dispense with me at this time to make no more account of you than you do of me, that am not worthy to be so scornfully rejected; yet matrimonial charity shall have more force and vigour in my heart, than the disdain which I have justly conceived

to see a concubine hold my place, and a strange woman before my face enjoy the pleasures of my husband. This injury, my Lord, although great and offensive, which to revenge divers ladies of great renown have in times past sought and procured the death of their husbands, cannot so much restrain my good wil, but that may not choose but advertise you what treason is devised against you, beseeching you to stand upon your guard, for that my father's only seeking is to bereave you of your life, which if it happen, I shall not long live after you. Many reasons induce me to love and cherish you, and those of great consequence, but especially and above all the rest, I am and must be careful of you, when I feel your child stirring in my womb; for which respect, without so much forgetting yourself, you ought to make more account of me than of your concubine, whom I will love because you love her, contenting myself that your son hateth her, in regard of the wrong she doth to his mother; for it is impossible that any passion or trouble of the mind whatsoever can quench those fierce passions of love that made me yours, neither that I should forget your favours past, when loyally you sought the love of the daughter of the King of England.

Neither is it in the power of that thief that hath stole your heart, nor my father's choler, to hinder me from seeking to preserve you from the cruelty of your dissembling friend (as heretofore by counterfeiting the madman, you prevented the practices and treasons of your uncle Fengon) the complot being determined to be executed upon you and yours. Without this advertisement, the Dane had surely been slain, and the Scots that came with him; for the King of England, inviting his son-in-law to a banquet, with greatest courtesies that a friend can use to him whom he loved as himself, had the means to entrap him, and cause him dance a pitiful galliard, in that sort to celebrate the marriage between him and his new lady. But Hamblet went thither with armour under his clothes, and his men in like sort; by which means he and his escaped with little hurt, and so after that happened the battle before spoken of, wherein the King of England losing his life, his country was the third time sacked by the barbarians of the islands and country of Denmark.

CHAPTER VIII

How Hamblet being In Denmark, was assailed by Wiglerus his Uncle, and after betrayed by his last wife, called Hermetrude, and was slain: after whose death she married his enemy, Wiglerus.

HAMBLET having obtained the victory against the King of England, and slain him, laden with great treasures and accompanied with his two wives, set forward to sail into Denmark, but by the way he had intelligence that Wiglere, his uncle, and son to Rodericke, having taken the royal treasure from his sister Geruth (mother to Hamblet) had also seized upon the kingdom, saying, that neither Horvendile nor any of his held it but by permission, and that it was in him (to whom the property belonged) to give the charge thereof to whom he would. But Hamblet, not desirous to have any quarrel with the son of him from whom his predecessors had received their greatness and advancement, gave such and so rich presents to Wiglere, that he, being contented, withdrew himself out of the country and territories of Geruths son.

[Hermetrude betrayeth Hamblet her husband]

But within certain time after, Wiglere, desirous to keep all the country in subjection, enticed by the conquest of Scanie and Sialandie, and also that Hermetrude (the wife of Hamblet, whom he loved more then himself) had secret intelligence with him, and had promised him marriage, so that he would take her out of the hands of him that held her, sent to defy Hamblet, and proclaimed open war against him. Hamblet, like a good and wise prince, loving especially the welfare of his subjects, sought by all means to avoid that war; but again refusing it, he perceived a great spot and blemish in his honour, and, accepting the same, he knew it would be the end of his days. By the desire of preserving his life on the one side, and his honour on the other side pricking him forward, but, at the last, remembering that never any danger whatsoever had once shaken his virtues and constancy, chose rather the necessity of his ruin, then to lose the immortal fame that valiant and honourable men obtained in the wars. And there is as much difference between a life without honour and an honourable death, as glory and renown is more excellent then dishonour and evil report.

[Hamblet slain]

But the thing that spoiled this virtuous prince was the over-great trust and confidence he had in his wife Hermetrude, and the vehement love he bare unto her, not once repenting the wrong in that case done to his lawful spouse, and for the which (peradventure that misfortune had never happened unto him, and it would never have been thought that she, whom he loved above all things, would have so villainously betrayed him) he not once remembering his first wife's speeches, who prophesied unto him, that the pleasures he seemed to take in his other wife would in the end be the cause of his overthrow, as they had ravished him of the best part of his senses, and quenched in him the great prudence that made him admirable in all the countries in the ocean seas, and through all Germany. Now, the greatest grief that this King (besotted on his wife) had, was the separation of her whom he adored, and, assuring himself of his overthrow, was desirous either that she might bear him company at his death, or else to find her a husband that should love her (he being dead) as well as ever he did. But the disloyal Queen had already provided herself of a marriage to put her husband out of trouble and care for that, who perceiving him to be sad for her sake, when she should have absented herself from him, she, to blind him the more and to encourage him to set forward to his own destruction, promised to follow him whether soever he went, and to take the like fortune that befell to him, were it good or evil, and that so she would give him cause to know how much she surpassed the English woman in her affection towards him, saying, that woman is accursed that feareth to follow and accompany her husband to the death: so that, to hear her speak, men would have said that she had been the wife of Mithridates, or Zenobia Queen of Palmira, she made so great a show of love and constancy. But by the effect it was after easily perceived how vain the promise of this unconstant and wavering princess was; and how uncomparable the life of this Scottish Queen was to the vigour of her chastity, being a maid before she was married. For that Hamblet had no sooner entered into the field, but she found means to see Wiglere, and the battle begun, wherein the miserable Danish prince was slain; but Hermetrude presently yielded herself, with all her dead husband's treasures, into the hand of the tyrant, who, more than content with that metamorphosis so much desired, gave order that presently the marriage (bought with the blood and treason of the son of Horvendile) should be celebrated.

Thus you see that there is no promise or determination of a woman, but that a very small discommodity of fortune mollifieth and altereth the same, and which time doeth not pervert; so that the misfortunes subject to a constant man shake and overthrow the natural slippery loyalty of the variable steps of women, wholly without any faithful assurance of love, or true unfained constancy: for as a woman is ready to promise, so is she heavy and slow to perform and effect that which she hath promised, as she that is without end or limit in her desires, flattering herself in the diversity of her wanton delights, and taking pleasure in diversity and change of new things, which as soon she doth forget and grow weary of: and, to conclude, such she is in all her actions, she is rash, covetous, and unthankful, whatsoever good or service can be done unto her. But now I perceive I err in my discourse, vomiting such things unworthy of this sex; but the vices of Hermetrude have made me say more then I meant to speak, as also the author, from whence I take this History, hath almost made me hold this course, I find so great a sweetness and liveliness in this kind of argument; and the rather because it seemeth so much the truer, considering the miserable success of poor King Hamblet.

Such was the end of Hamblet, son to Horvendile, Prince of Juty; to whom, if his fortune had been equal with his inward and natural gifts, I know not which of the ancient Grecians and Romans had been able to have compared with him for virtue and excellency: but hard fortune following him in all his actions, and yet he vanquishing the malice of his time with the vigour of constancy, hath left us a notable example of haughty courage, worthy of a great prince, arming himself with hope in things that were wholly without any colour or show thereof, and in all his honourable actions made himself worthy of perpetual memory, if one only spot had not blemished and darkened a good part of his praises. For that the greatest victory that a man can obtain is to make himself victorious and lord over his own affections, and that restraineth the unbridled desires of his concupiscence; for if a man be never so princely, valiant, and wise, if the desires and enticements of his flesh prevail, and have the upper hand, he will debase his credit and, gazing after strange beauties, become a fool, and (as it were) incensed, dote on the presence of women. This fault was in the great Hercules, Sampson; and the wisest man that ever lived upon the earth, following this train, therein impaired his wit; and the most noble, wise, valiant, and discreet personages of our time, following the same course, have left us many notable examples of their worthy and notable virtues.

But I beseech you that shall read this History not to resemble the spider, that feedeth of the corruption that she findeth in the flowers and fruits that are in the gardens, whereas the bee gathereth her honey out of the best and fairest flower she can find: for a man that is well brought up should read the lives of whoremongers, drunkards, incestuous, violent, and bloody persons, not to follow their steps and so to defile himself with such uncleanness, but to shun fornication, abstain the superfluities and drunkenness in banquets, and follow the modesty, courtesy, and continency that recommendeth Hamblet in this discourse, who, while other made good cheer, continued sober; and where all men sought as much as they could to gather together riches and treasure, he, simply accounting riches nothing comparable to honour, sought to gather a multitude of virtues, that might make him equal to those that by them were esteemed as gods; having not as then received the light of the Gospel, that men might see among the barbarians, and them that were far from the knowledge of one only God, that nature was provoked to follow that which is good, and

those forward to embrace virtue, for that there was never any nation, how rude or barbarous soever, that took not some pleasure to do that which seemed good, thereby to win praise and commendations, which we have said to be the reward of virtue and good life. I delight to speak of these strange histories, and of people that were unchristened, that the virtue of the rude people may give more splendour to our nation, who seeing them so complete, wise, prudent, and well advised in their actions, might strive not only to follow (imitation being a small matter) but to surmount them, as our religion surpasseth their superstition, and our age more purged, subtle, and gallant, than the season wherein they lived and made their virtues known.

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