

Tales from Danish Ballads.

1.

BOESMER IN ELFLAND.

BY the stream-side, where it darkled beneath the leafy lindens, there dwelt the father of Boesmer. Two fair daughters and five sons had he; but comeliest of them all was he of whom it was spoken:

Of his good sons five and his daughters twain,
For Boesmer the bosoms of maids were fain,
The leaf's on the linden.

Hidden beneath the bank of the stream, there lay the elf-maiden; and there through fifteen winters had she lain, seeking how she might capture the good-will and beguile the heart of Boesmer.

On a night whose balmy breathing eve had bent the flowers with soft dew, the elf-maiden arose, and drew over her moon-white shoulders a mantle, blue as the cornflower of the mead-lands. Over her shoulders she drew the mantle, and softly she mounted to the chamber where lay Boesmer, deep in sleep. She tapped upon his door with white fingers, saying, "Arise, Boesmer; open the door, that I may enter."

"With no one," answered he, "have I made tryst this night, nor to me shall anyone ere day dawn enter."
But the elf-maid might not be gainsaid:

Deftly her fingers the bolts withdrew,
For well the wards of the lock she knew;

Deft were her fingers, white and small,
The lock was loosed and the bar must fall.

At the bed-head she seated herself, and, leaning over him, she lifted his golden hair in her shapely hands, letting it slide through her fingers as she murmured in his ear:

"Thou shalt do it, Sir Boesmer; by thy faith thou shalt do it;—thou shalt tryst with me on the elfin-bridge ere the dews of the morning are gathered."

BOESMER IN ELFLAND.

Boesmer awoke from his sleep; and all was hushed in heavy midnight as to himself he whispered:

"It seems a maid most fair I have seen,
Nor ever lovelier maid has been;

"It seems I have seen a maid most fair,
With mantle of silk and with floating hair;

"I have promised—my blood is with love astir—
On the elfin-bridge to tryst with her."

And he thought he heard a voice that cried to him in answer:

"Lie still, young Boesmer; the dream was wild;
An elfin-maid hath thy sleep beguiled."

But to the voice Boesmer, unwondering replied:

"As God may will my dream shall go;—
But sooth—have I given my word or no?"

The sunlight laughed among the trees, and the winds of morning blew far the mists of sleep as young Boesmer arose from his bed. Slowly he drew his sark over his golden locks, and slowly he drew on his jerkin of velvet, deep blue. Boots of buckskin he fastened on his feet, and at his heels spurs of gold. Then to his two swains he called:

"Saddle me my grey steed; and upon my grey steed lay the harness, that I upon the elfin-bridge may this morning keep my tryst."

His sword he buckled to his side, the while his mother wrung her hands in apprehension; and whilst still wringing her hands she wept, forth from the courtyard rode young Boesmer.

As now over the bridge he rode, his horse, shod with golden shoes, stumbled; it fell, and Boesmer was flung downwards into the angry stream below. The steed sank in the waters; but Boesmer, opening his eyes, beheld the elf-maiden bending over him, whilst his head with its clusters of golden locks rested in the lap of her.

"Welcome, Sir Boesmer," said she; "and welcome, Sir Boesmer, to this my home;— for thee are poured both the mead and the wine of greeting."

"Let the mead and thereto the wine remain in thine own keeping," said he; "in sorrowful fashion to this thy home am I come."

"Tell me, then, Sir Boesmer, and tell me truly," she answered, "where wast thou born, and in what place there—

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH.

after wast thou reared?—and where dwelleth the maid whom thou for thy true love hast chosen?"

"In Denmark was I born, and there, too, was I reared; and in Denmark dwells my dear love, with whom I will live and die."

Then spake the daughter of elves to her handmaid:

"Go fetch me a horn," said she, "filled with the red wine of the elves; and cast into the wine but two grains of elfin-corn.

"A pledge of wine in a wild-deer's horn,
With two grains blended of elfin-corn."

Soon the handmaid returned, and in her hands she bore a horn, its brim beaded with the rosy wine that sparkled within it.

"Now drink to me, Sir Boesmer," said the elf-maiden; "drink to me, and I, too, will drink to thee; and thereafter shalt thou be free to go whithersoever thou wilt."

He set the horn to his lips, but at the first touch of the wine all memory of the earth he had left passed from him;—his parents he forgot, his sisters, and his brothers; he forgot, too, his heart's dear love, with whom he would live and die.

"Tell me now, Sir Boesmer, and tell me truly," said the elf-maiden; "where wast thou born, and in what place thereafter wast thou reared?—and where dwelleth the maid whom thou for thy true love hast chosen?"

"In elfland was I born," answered he, "and in elfland was I reared;—and there art thou, my own dear love, with whom I will live and die."

Fulfilled was the heart's desire of the elf-maiden; and young Boesmer lay at her side; but for him his father and his mother sorrowed and wept; his sisters and his brothers; but deeper even than these mourned for him his true love:

Deeper his true love sorrowed for him,
With tears in the cloister her eyes were dim
The leaf's on the linden.