

KARL AND KRAGELILLE.

At board in the high hall sat Karl the King, holding speech with his swains and champions; and said he, "Were it now well that ye sought as fellow for me the fairest maid upon whom ever sun shone?"

"Whither should we ride," then answered the Danish lords as they arose before their King, "whither should we ride to seek such a maid?"

Search ye through all lands, and seek ye through all kingdoms; and her ye shall find who may be my fellow."

Forth they rode, over lands and through kingdoms, but never saw they maid worthy, in their thought, to sit beside Karl the King. Back, therefore, they turned; and riding now again towards their home, they saw where, in the shade of the lindens, sat a maiden, tending the goats of the cottar-herdsman, whose abode lay hard by.

"Here thou sittest, young maiden," said they, "under the leafy boughs of the green spreading linden; and from what noble line art thou sprung that thou art so fair?"

"The herdsman is my father," she answered; "and he watches the kine on the mountain side; and my name, would ye know it, is Kragelille. The herdsman is my father, and through the fens he herds the kine; and I myself am called Kragelille; but of my name will I sing no praises."

Her gown was rent and threadbare,
Her bodice coarse and mean;
But hair she had as the fine-spun gold,
Glowing her shoulders between.
The while alone I here go riding.

White was the throat of her as whitest ermine, and rose-red was her cheek; and well the Danish lords wondered that poverty so heavily should lay its hand upon one so fair.

Home they rode to their King; and, said they, "In no place might we find a maid as fellow for thee; but swear thou, O noble lord, that there shall befall no evil, and to thee will we in verily show the fairest maiden upon whom ever sun shone."

"Though she have neither hall nor holm, and though no great riches she have in hoard, yet if so be that she is a

Danish maiden, and virtue dwell in the heart of her, it well may hap that ye for me have found a fellow."

"Over the grassy meads and the shaded lands there rode we; and there we found her, tending the goats of the herdsman. He, watching the cattle in the fens and on the mountain side, her father is, and she herself is called Kragelille; nor would she of her name sing praises. Meanly was she clothed, in garb coarse and threadbare: but lightly betwixt the shoulders of her lay hair as it were of gold, finely spun, and living with light.

"Pure white her throat as ermine,
As roses her cheeks were red,
And wondered each Dane of us how ill
The hap of her had sped."

"Cast silken robes upon her," said the King, "and set her high upon a red steed; lead her hither to Axelborg, that I may myself behold her."

Forth again rode the Danish lords, over the green and sun-lit lands; and they came to the place where Kragelille sat, the goats cropping the green grass around her.

Upon her they cast silken robes; and wit ye well there never was seen a fairer or more delightful maiden. To Axelborg they led her, put on her a royal mantle of cramoisie, and her they followed as into the big hall to young King Karl she stepped. In at the door trod the young maiden, and it was the king himself who raised her. Upon cushions, blue as the cornflower of summer, he laid his hand, saying, "Come thou, young and fair maiden, and rest hereon. And tell me, in secret tell me, fair and young as thou art, from what noble line comest thou that thou art so queenly in thy ways, and joy-giving as the daughter of kings?"

"King Sigurd was my father," said she, "and he died in the den of the dragon; my mother was Brynhild, and I myself am named Adelraad, since they were nobly born and of noble counsel who came together at my life-giving. I was but a little maiden when the herdsman slew my father, and into the den of the fell dragon cast him. Forth from the land they bore my mother, nor do I know if she still lives, or if she have gone the darksome way of the dead. Since those days have I dwelt with the herdsman and his old wife, and by them have I been reared."

Then said Karl the youthful King
As he touched her cheek, "I vow
Thou shalt not suffer nor sorrow more,
For my all-dearest art thou."

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH.

And thereto he added: "Will the Heaven-Father spare me the power for the deed, then ere the Moon's Day appear shalt thou be avenged on the herdsman."

"Wilt thou give me vengeance," said she, "not there-against will I set myself; but spare thou the wife of the herdsman, for she proved ever kind towards me; yea, wilt thou avenge me on them that slew my father, spare yet the wife, who hath ever fed and clothed me."

To young King Karl gave Adelaad
True troth—the comely may!
And ere dawned soon the Day of the Moon—
Dawned brighter their bridal day.
The while alone I here go riding.

NOTE.—The name Kragelille means "Little Crow," and Adelaad means "Noble Counsel." William Morris has a most beautiful version of this story in the "Earthly Paradise," under the title "The Fostering of Aslaug."

ELF-STRICKEN

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In the darkness of early morning forth rode Swain Oluf, his thoughts dwelling on the near day-dawn.

As from the shadow of the dark mountains he rode, there in wild array danced elves and gnomes; and in the midst, too, there danced the very queen of the elves. Seeing Oluf, she left the whirling ring and approached the mortal.

Out from the dance there danced a maid,
Her arm around Oluf's neck she laid.
*But light is the lilt of the dance 'neath
the lindens.*

"Harken to me," said she; "Oh, Swain Oluf, most amiable, hearken to me, and tell me whither thou listest to ride this day-dawn?"

"I ride," he answered, "to the shore of the sounding sea and the coast highlands, for thereunder awaiteth me my betrothed and my heart's beloved."

"Nay," said the maiden, lightly touching him with slender hand; "first shalt thou with me tread a measure in the dance." But Oluf answered:

"I may not bide, and I dare not stay,
For to-morn is, lo! my bridal day."

"Yet hearken, Swain Oluf," again she said; "wilt thou love me, to thee will I give great treasure;—to thee will I give a grey steed, whose swiftness may bear thee to Rome afar and hither again within the hour. Such a steed shall be thine, and a saddle wrought and gleaming with gold to lay thereon. To thee, too, will I give a shirt of mail, that shall charm wounds from thy body and fear from thy heart; and thereto a sword whose like never was known to proudest lord living. The benches of my bower and the draw-bridges of my hall thou shalt find goodly geared and bright with gold; and wilt thou love me, into thy hands shall all be given."

"Thy gold and thy gear rest in thine own hands; and as for me, this morn I ride to my betrothed."

"If thou deny me, and if thou wilt not dance with me, sickness and sorrow shall be thy portion. And tell me, Swain

Oluf, wilt thou rather die in the night of the day now coming, or linger seven years in sickness under the highlands where dwells thy heart's love?"

"Rather would I die with the day coming," said he, "than lie seven years in sickness."

Over his saddle bow he bent, and through the elfin dance he rode; but over the heart she smote him, so that he fell, and lay on the dewy grass; over the heart she smote him, so that to his heart's root it quivered.

"Arise, arise, Swain Oluf!" cried she. "Yet no more living days shalt thou see but one—arise"; and therewith she raised him again on his steed, saying, "Ride now, and keep tryst with thy heart's beloved."

Towards his home Oluf now turned his steed, and thitherwards he laboured full wearily. To the gate of the burg he came, and there stood his dear mother.

"Son Oluf!" she cried; "tell me, my dear son, why your cheeks are grown so wan? Why are your cheeks grown so wan, and wherefore does the blood flow down your saddle-sides?"

"My steed bore me on faltering foot,
He stumbled over an alder root."

"Nay, son Oluf," said she; "lightly thou speakest of evil matters. Thou hast been in the dance of the elf maidens."

"Yea, truly," said he; "and pale must be the cheek of him who has seen the play of the elf maidens. And now, dear mother of mine, prepare thou my bed; and do thou lead me thereto, dear sister. Take thou, beloved father, my steed; and thou, O brother, call the priest to my bedside. On the blue cushions lay me, that there I may die."

"Cease thou, son Oluf, from boding speech, for many a man was seized with sickness, yet died not thereof."

"Yea, that which is to be will be; but never more shall I behold my betrothed and my heart's beloved!"

"Tell me, then O Oluf, to whom is thy all-dearest to be given?"

"To my father be given my grey steed, for full oft to the king's court rides he. My carriage shall my mother have, for many a time has she borne me gently in her bosom. To my sister be given my red gold; and my all-dearest, let her be the bride of my youngest brother.

"Stand forth, O brothers, from my bedside,
And fare ye to meet my dear young bride.

"And hear ye, husbands of my sisters; greet ye fairly my noble maiden." Thereon young Oluf turned him to the wall, and ere midnight he lay cold in death's slumber.

At early morn came little Kirstin. With bridal array she came as the sun shone over the wide meads; but as she neared the burg, borne on the sweet air came the clanging of bells; and at that moment, too, she knew that her heart was heavy within her.

"Wherefore do the bells jangle and ring?" said she; "for in my ken is there no one who lieth sick in this burg."

"In this land the wont is to ring in its chosen maid, and with bells to welcome its well-beloved."

Over the fields came little Kirstin, and there in the high chamber stood burning lights.

"The dear Christ ease me of my boding dread," said she; "they burn lights in the clear and open day:

"The dear Christ ease me of this my dread,
For I fear that Oluf my love is dead."

Through the doorways they led the bride, and bitterly wept the dames and the maidens; into the hall they followed her, and deep sorrow filled her heart whilst yet the rosy glows mantled in the cheeks and throat of her. Upon the bridal bench they set her, and to her the champions bore and poured wine of greeting. Then said the bride, and her words were heavy with sorrow:

"Back and forth the champions fare,
But wit ye my heart of joy is bare;
Lords a many in hall I see,
But one—Lord Oluf—comes not to me;
Favours ye wear as nothing loth,
But him I see not who has my troth."

Then answered his mother as well as for sorrow she might: "He rides on the sunny meadows, taming the proud spirit of his war-horse; there, too, with hawk and with hounds he rides over the pleasant lands."

"Are then hawk and hound dearer to him than the young bride he has chosen? And will he rather thus dally with them than sit with his bride in the high hall?"

When now the sun had long set, and the smoke from the hall hung low in the night air, they led the bride to rest. Lighting up the bridal candles, they followed her; but as they neared the bedchamber the page to Swain Oluf, who followed, cried to Kirstin:

"To you, the maid of Lord Oluf, who was my master—to you I say that he now lies dead on the bier; in his chamber

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH.

a corpse he lies, while with his brother you shall now plight new troth."

"Never should the day dawn," said she, "wherein I with two brothers should plight troth; but this can I read in the faces of you all, little and great: not far from us lieth Oluf."

"It boots no longer to hide it from thee; Oluf lieth, indeed, dead in his chamber."

Then she said to the dames around that she willed to look on the corpse where it lay. The door they opened, and stood before the raised bier. Towards it ran little Kirstin, and threw aside the white linen. The red covering she raised, and there lay Oluf, cold and still, whiles afar off laughed the queen-maid of the elves.

Her hand on his bosom she rested;
Herself she was sorrowful breasted.

On his breast she laid her hand, and her heart trembled and throbbed within her. She touched his pale lips, and the same moment her heart within her broke for sorrow. Wit ye well that the cheeks of the maidens were bathed in tears, and the breasts of the dames heaved with sobs, as they beheld the little Kirstin broken-hearted with grief.

On the second day-dawn were there three corpses borne from the house of Oluf:

One was Oluf and one was his bride,
And one his dear mother—through grief
she died.
*But light is the lilt of the dance 'neath
the lindens.*