

Shakespeare's Sources

for

HAMLET

Saxo's 'The History of the Danes'

&

Belleforest's 'The Hystorie of Hamblet'

BOOK THREE *of*

THE HISTORY OF THE DANES

'Gesta Danorum'

by

Saxo Grammaticus

'Saxo the Learned'

Written in Latin in the early 13th century

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

Translated

by

Oliver Elton (1861 – 1945)

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

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

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

Now it befell that Balder the son of Odin was troubled at the sight of Nanna bathing, and was

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

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

Returning thence, he related to Gewar the mystification that had followed on his straying, and straightway asked him for his daughter. Gewar answered that he would most gladly favour him, but that he feared if he rejected Balder he would incur his wrath; for Balder, he said, had proffered him a like request. For he said that the sacred strength of Balder's body was proof even against steel; adding, however, that he knew of a sword which could deal him his death, which was fastened up in the closest bonds; this was in the keeping of Miming, the Satyr of the woods, who also had a bracelet of a secret and marvellous virtue, that used to increase the wealth of the owner. Moreover, the way to these regions was impassable and filled with obstacles, and therefore hard for mortal men to travel. For the greater part of the road was perpetually beset with extraordinary cold. So he advised him to harness a car with reindeer, by means of whose great speed he could cross the hard-frozen ridges. And when he had got to the place, he should set up his tent away from the sun in such wise that it should catch the shadow of the cave where Miming was wont to be; while he should not in return cast a shade upon Miming, so that no unaccustomed darkness might be thrown and prevent the Satyr from going out. Thus both the bracelet and the sword would be ready to his hand, one being attended by fortune in wealth and the other by fortune in war, and each of them thus bringing a great prize to the owner. Thus much said Gewar; and Hother was not slow to carry out his instructions. Planting his tent in the manner aforesaid, he passed the nights in anxieties and the days in hunting. But through either season he remained very wakeful and sleepless, allotting the divisions of night and day so as to devote the one to reflection on events, and to spend the other in providing food for his body. Once as he watched all night, his spirit was drooping and dazed with anxiety, when the Satyr cast a shadow on his tent. Aiming a spear at him, he brought him down with the blow, stopped him, and bound him, while he could not make his escape. Then in the most dreadful words he threatened him with the worst, and demanded the sword and bracelets. The Satyr was not slow to tender him the ransom of his life for which he was asked. So surely do all prize life beyond wealth; for nothing is ever cherished more among mortals than the breath of their own life. Hother, exulting in the treasure he had gained, went

home enriched with trophies which, though few, were noble.

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

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

While this was passing in Halogaland, Balder entered the country of Gewar armed, in order to sue for Nanna. Gewar bade him learn Nanna's own mind; so he approached the maiden with the most choice and cajoling words; and when he could win no hearing for his prayers, he persisted in asking the reason of his refusal. She replied, that a god could not wed with a mortal, because the vast difference of their natures prevented any bond of intercourse. Also the gods sometimes used to break their pledges; and the bond contracted between unequals was apt to snap suddenly. There was no firm tie between those of differing estate; for beside the

great, the fortunes of the lowly were always dimmed. Also lack and plenty dwelt in diverse tents, nor was there any fast bond of intercourse between gorgeous wealth and obscure poverty. In fine, the things of earth would not mate with those of heaven, being sundered by a great original gulf through a difference in nature; inasmuch as mortal man was infinitely far from the glory of the divine majesty. With this shuffling answer she eluded the suit of Balder, and shrewdly wove excuses to refuse his hand.

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

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

At this time the nobles of the Swedes repaired to Denmark to pay their tribute; but Hother, who had been honoured as a king by his countrymen for the splendid deeds of his father, experienced what a lying pander Fortune is. For he was conquered in the field by Balder, whom a little before he had crushed, and was forced to flee to Gewar, thus losing while a king that victory which he had won as a common man. The conquering Balder, in order to slake his soldiers, who were parched with thirst, with the blessing of a timely draught, pierced the earth deep and disclosed a fresh spring. The thirsty ranks made with gaping lips for the water that gushed forth everywhere. The traces of these springs, eternised by the name, are thought not quite to have dried up yet, though they have ceased to well so freely as of old. Balder was

continually harassed by night phantoms feigning the likeness of Nanna, and fell into such ill health that he could not so much as walk, and began the habit of going his journeys in a two horse car or a four-wheeled carriage. So great was the love that had steeped his heart and now had brought him down almost to the extremity of decline. For he thought that his victory had brought him nothing if Nanna was not his prize. Also Frey, the regent of the gods, took his abode not far from Upsala, where he exchanged for a ghastly and infamous sin-offering the old custom of prayer by sacrifice, which had been used by so many ages and generations. For he paid to the gods abominable offerings, by beginning to slaughter human victims.

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

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

But Hother, when he had wandered through remotest byways and crossed an uninhabited forest, chanced to come upon a cave where dwelt some maidens whom he knew not; but they proved to be the same who had once given him the invulnerable coat. Asked by them wherefore he had come thither, he related the disastrous issue of the war. So he began to bewail the ill luck of his failures and his dismal misfortunes, condemning their breach of faith, and lamenting that it had not turned out for him as they had promised him. But the maidens

said that though he had seldom come off victorious, he had nevertheless inflicted as much defeat on the enemy as they on him, and had dealt as much carnage as he had shared in. Moreover, the favour of victory would be speedily his, if he could first lay hands upon a food of extraordinary delightsomeness which had been devised to increase the strength of Balder. For nothing would be difficult if he could only get hold of the dainty which was meant to enhance the rigour of his foe.

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

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

Retracing the path by which he had come, he went back on the same road, and meeting Balder plunged his sword into his side, and laid him low half dead. When the news was told to the soldiers, a cheery shout of triumph rose from all the camp of Hother, while the Danes held a public mourning for the fate of Balder. He, feeling no doubt of his impending death, and stung by the anguish of his wound, renewed the battle on the morrow; and, when it raged hotly, bade that he should be borne on a litter into the fray, that he might not seem to die ignobly within his tent. On the night following, Proserpine was seen to stand by him in a vision, and to promise that on the morrow he should have her embrace. The boding of the dream was not idle; for when three days had passed, Balder perished from the excessive torture of his wound; and his body given a royal funeral, the army causing it to be buried in a barrow which they had made.

Certain men of our day, Chief among whom was Harald, since the story of the ancient burial-place still survived, made a raid on it by night in the hope of finding money, but abandoned their attempt in sudden panic. For the hill split, and from its crest a sudden and mighty torrent

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

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

Next year, loth to quit ignobly the quest he had taken up so eagerly, he put on the dress of a foreigner and went back to dwell with the king. It was hard for those who met him to recognise him; for his assumed filth obliterated his true features, and new grime hid his ancient aspect. He said that his name was Roster (Hrosstheow), and that he was skilled in smithcraft. And his handiwork did honour to his professions: for he portrayed in bronze many and many a shape most beautifully, so that he received a great mass of gold from the king, and was ordered to hammer out the ornaments of the matrons. So, after having wrought many adornments for women's wearing, he at last offered to the maiden a bracelet which he had polished more laboriously than the rest and several rings which were adorned with equal care. But no services could assuage the wrath of Rinda; when he was fain to kiss her she cuffed him; for gifts offered by one we hate are unacceptable, while those tendered by a friend are far more grateful: so much doth the value of the offering oft turn on the offerer. For this stubborn-hearted maiden never doubted that the crafty old man was feigning generosity in order to seize an opening to work his lust. His temper, moreover, was keen and indomitable; for she knew that his homage covered guile, and that under the devotion of his gifts there lay a desire for crime. Her father fell to upbraiding her heavily for refusing the match; but she loathed to wed an old man, and the plea of her tender years lent her some support in her scorning of his hand; for she

said that a young girl ought not to marry prematurely.

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

But still he did not falter in the fulfilment of his purpose; for trust in his divine majesty buoyed him up with confidence; so, assuming the garb of a maiden, this indefatigable journeyer repaired for the fourth time to the king, and, on being received by him, showed himself assiduous and even forward. Most people believed him to be a woman, as he was dressed almost in female attire. Also he declared that his name was Wecha, and his calling that of a physician: and this assertion he confirmed by the readiest services. At last he was taken into the household of the queen, and played the part of a waiting-woman to the princess, and even used to wash the soil off her feet at eventide; and as he was applying the water he was suffered to touch her calves and the upper part of the thighs. But fortune goes with mutable steps, and thus chance put into his hand what his address had never won. For it happened that the girl fell sick, and looked around for a cure; and she summoned to protect her health those very hands which aforesaid she had rejected, and appealed for preservation to him whom she had ever held in loathing. He examined narrowly all the symptoms of the trouble, and declared that, in order to check the disease as soon as possible, it was needful to use a certain drugged draught; but that it was so bitterly compounded, that the girl could never endure so violent a cure unless she submitted to be bound; since the stuff of the malady must be ejected from the very innermost tissues. When her father heard this he did not hesitate to bind his daughter; and laying her on the bed, he bade her endure patiently all the applications of the doctor. For the king was tricked by the sight of the female dress, which the old man was using to disguise his persistent guile; and thus the seeming remedy became an opportunity of outrage. For the physician seized the chance of love, and, abandoning his business of healing, sped to the work, not of expelling the fever, but of working his lust; making use of the sickness of the princess, whom in sound health he had found adverse to him. It will not be wearisome if I subjoin another version of this affair. For there are certain who say that the king, when he saw the physician groaning with love, but despite all his expense of mind and body accomplishing nothing, did not wish to rob of his due reward one who had so well earned it, and allowed him to lie privily with his daughter. So doth the wickedness of the father sometimes assail the child, when vehement passion perverts natural mildness. But his fault was soon followed by a remorse that was full of shame, when his daughter bore a child.

But the gods, whose chief seat was then at Byzantium, (Asgard), seeing that Odin had tarnished the fair name of godhead by divers injuries to its majesty, thought that he ought to be removed

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

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

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

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

Then he summoned the elders to assembly, and told them that he would perish in the war

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

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

Now among them there was a man of remarkable stature, a wizard by calling. He, when he beheld the squadrons of the Danes, said: "Suffer a private combat to forestall a public slaughter, so that the danger of many may be bought off at the cost of a few. And if any of you shall take heart to fight it out with me, I will not flinch from these terms of conflict. But first of all I demand that you accept the terms I prescribe, the form whereof I have devised as follows: If I conquer, let freedom be granted us from taxes; if I am conquered, let the tribute be paid you as of old: For to-day I will either free my country from the yoke of slavery by my victory or bind her under it by my defeat. Accept me as the surety and the pledge for either issue." One of the Danes, whose spirit was stouter than his strength, heard this, and proceeded to ask Rorik, what would be the reward for the man who met the challenger in combat? Rorik chanced to have six bracelets, which were so intertwined that they could not be parted from one another, the chain of knots being inextricably laced; and he promised them as a reward for the man who would venture on the combat. But the youth, who doubted his fortune, said: "Rorik, if I prove successful, let thy generosity award the prize of the conqueror, do thou decide and allot the palm; but if my enterprise go little to my liking, what prize canst thou owe to the beaten, who will be wrapped either in cruel death or in bitter shame? These things commonly go with feebleness, these are the wages of the defeated, for whom naught remains but utter infamy.

What guerdon must be paid, what thanks offered, to him who lacks the prize of courage? Who has ever garlanded with ivy the weakling in war, or decked him with a conqueror's wage? Valour wins the prize, not sloth, and failure lacks renown. For one is followed by triumph and honour, the other by an unsightly life or by a stagnant end. I, who know not which way the issue of this duel inclines, dare not boldly anticipate that as a reward, of which I know not whether it be rightly mine. For one whose victory is doubtful may not seize the assured reward of the victor. I forbear, while I am not sure of the day, to claim firmly the title to the wreath. I refuse the gain, which may be the wages of my death as much as of my life. It is folly to lay hands on the fruit before it is ripe, and to be fain to pluck that which one is not yet sure is one's title. This hand shall win me the prize, or death." Having thus spoken, he smote the barbarian with his sword; but his fortune was tardier than his spirit; for the other smote him back, and he fell dead under the force of the first blow. Thus he was a sorry sight unto the Danes, but the Slavs granted their triumphant comrade a great procession, and received him with splendid dances. On the morrow the same man, whether he was elated with the good fortune of his late victory, or was fired with the wish to win another, came close to the enemy, and set to girding at them in the words of his former challenge. For, supposing that he had laid low the bravest of the Danes, he did not think that any of them would have any heart left to fight further with him upon his challenge. Also, trusting that, now one champion had fallen, he had shattered the strength of the whole army, he thought that naught would be hard to achieve upon which his later endeavours were bent. For nothing pampers arrogance more than success, or prompts to pride more surely than prosperity.

So Rorik was vexed that the general courage should be sapped by the impudence of one man; and that the Danes, with their roll of victories, should be met presumptuously by those whom they had beaten of old; nay, should be ignominiously spurned; further, that in all that host not one man should be found so quick of spirit or so vigorous of arm, that he longed to sacrifice his life for his country. It was the high-hearted Ubbe who first wiped off this infamous reproach upon the hesitating Danes. For he was of great bodily strength and powerful in incantations. He also purposely asked the prize of the combat, and the king promised him the bracelets. Then said he: "How can I trust the promise when thou keepest the pledge in thine own hands, and dost not deposit the gift in the charge of another? Let there be some one to whom thou canst entrust the pledge, that thou mayst not be able to take thy promise back. For the courage of the champion is kindled by the irrevocable certainty of the prize." Of course it was plain that he had said this in jest; sheer courage had armed him to repel the insult to his country. But Rorik thought he was tempted by avarice, and was loth to seem as if, contrary to royal fashion, he meant to take back the gift or revoke his promise; so, being stationed on his vessel, he resolved to shake off the bracelets, and with a mighty swing send them to the asker. But his attempt was balked by the width of the gap between them; for the bracelets fell short of the intended spot, the impulse being too faint and slack, and were reft away by the waters. For this nickname of Slyngebond, (swing-bracelet) clung to Rorik. But this event testified much to the valour of Ubbe. For the loss of his drowned prize never turned his mind from his bold venture; he would not seem to let his courage be tempted by the wages of covetousness. So he eagerly went to fight, showing that he was a seeker of honour and not the slave of lucre, and that he set bravery before lust of pelf; and intent to prove that his confidence was based not on hire, but on his own great soul. Not a moment is lost; a ring is made; the course is thronged with soldiers; the champions engage; a din arises; the crowd of onlookers shouts in discord, each backing his own. And so the valour of the champions blazes to white-heat; falling dead under

the wounds dealt by one another, they end together the combat and their lives. I think that it was a provision of fortune that neither of them should reap joy and honour by the other's death. This event won back to Rorik the hearts of the insurgents and regained him the tribute.

At this time Horwendil and Feng, whose father Gerwendil had been governor of the Jutes, were appointed in his place by Rorik to defend Jutland. But Horwendil held the monarchy for three years, and then, to will the height of glory, devoted himself to roving. Then Koller, King of Norway, in rivalry of his great deeds and renown, deemed it would be a handsome deed if by his greater strength in arms he could bedim the far-famed glory of the rover; and cruising about the sea, he watched for Horwendil's fleet and came up with it. There was an island lying in the middle of the sea, which each of the rovers, bringing his ships up on either side, was holding. The captains were tempted by the pleasant look of the beach, and the comeliness of the shores led them to look through the interior of the springtide woods, to go through the glades, and roam over the sequestered forests. It was here that the advance of Koller and Horwendil brought them face to face without any witness. Then Horwendil endeavoured to address the king first, asking him in what way it was his pleasure to fight, and declaring that one best which needed the courage of as few as possible. For, said he, the duel was the surest of all modes of combat for winning the meed of bravery, because it relied only upon native courage, and excluded all help from the hand of another. Koller marvelled at so brave a judgment in a youth, and said: "Since thou hast granted me the choice of battle, I think it is best to employ that kind which needs only the endeavours of two, and is free from all the tumult. Certainly it is more venturesome, and allows of a speedier award of the victory. This thought we share, in this opinion we agree of our own accord. But since the issue remains doubtful, we must pay some regard to gentle dealing, and must not give way so far to our inclinations as to leave the last offices undone. Hatred is in our hearts; yet let piety be there also, which in its due time may take the place of rigour. For the rights of nature reconcile us, though we are parted by differences of purpose; they link us together, howsoever rancour estrange our spirit. Let us, therefore, have this pious stipulation, that the conqueror shall give funeral rites to the conquered. For all allow that these are the last duties of human kind, from which no righteous man shrinks. Let each army lay aside its sternness and perform this function in harmony. Let jealousy depart at death, let the feud be buried in the tomb. Let us not show such an example of cruelty as to persecute one another's dust, though hatred has come between us in our lives. It will be a boast for the victor if he has borne his beaten foe in a lordly funeral. For the man who pays the rightful dues over his dead enemy wins the goodwill of the survivor; and whoso devotes gentle dealing to him who is no more, conquers the living by his kindness. Also there is another disaster, not less lamentable, which sometimes befalls the living -- the loss of some part of their body; and I think that succour is due to this just as much as to the worst hap that may befall. For often those who fight keep their lives safe, but suffer maiming; and this lot is commonly thought more dismal than any death; for death cuts off memory of all things, while the living cannot forget the devastation of his own body. Therefore this mischief also must be helped somehow; so let it be agreed, that the injury of either of us by the other shall be made good with ten talents (marks) of gold. For if it be righteous to have compassion on the calamities of another, how much more is it to pity one's own? No man but obeys nature's prompting; and he who slights it is a self-murderer."

After mutually pledging their faiths to these terms, they began the battle. Nor was their strangeness his meeting one another, nor the sweetness of that spring-green spot, so heeded as to prevent them from the fray. Horwendil, in his too great ardour, became keener to attack his

enemy than to defend his own body; and, heedless of his shield, had grasped his sword with both hands; and his boldness did not fail. For by his rain of blows he destroyed Koller's shield and deprived him of it, and at last hewed off his foot and drove him lifeless to the ground. Then, not to fail of his compact, he buried him royally, gave him a howe of lordly make and pompous obsequies. Then he pursued and slew Koller's sister Sela, who was a skilled warrior and experienced in roving.

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

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

Amleth beheld all this, but feared lest too shrewd a behaviour might make his uncle suspect him. So he chose to feign dulness, and pretend an utter lack of wits. This cunning course not only concealed his intelligence but ensured his safety. Every day he remained in his mother's house utterly listless and unclean, flinging himself on the ground and bespattering his person with foul and filthy dirt. His discoloured face and visage smutched with slime denoted foolish and grotesque madness. All he said was of a piece with these follies; all he did savoured of utter lethargy. In a word, you would not have thought him a man at all, but some absurd abortion due to a mad fit of destiny. He used at times to sit over the fire, and, raking up the embers with his hands, to fashion wooden crooks, and harden them in the fire, shaping at their lips certain barbs, to make them hold more tightly to their fastenings. When asked what he was about, he said that he was preparing sharp javelins to avenge his father. This answer was not a little scoffed at, all men deriding his idle and ridiculous pursuit; but the thing helped his purpose afterwards. Now it was his craft in this matter that first awakened in the deeper observers a suspicion of his cunning. For his skill in a trifling art betokened the hidden talent of the craftsman; nor could they believe the spirit dull where the hand had acquired so cunning a workmanship. Lastly, he always watched with the most punctual care over his pile of stakes that he had pointed in the fire. Some people, therefore, declared that his mind was quick enough, and fancied that he only played the simpleton in order to hide his understanding, and veiled some deep purpose under a cunning feint. His wiliness (said these) would be most readily detected, if a fair woman were put in his way in some secluded place, who should provoke his mind to the temptations of love; all men's natural temper being too blindly amorous to be artfully dissembled, and this passion being also too impetuous to be checked by

cunning. Therefore, if his lethargy were feigned, he would seize the opportunity, and yield straightway to violent delights. So men were commissioned to draw the young man in his rides into a remote part of the forest, and there assail him with a temptation of this nature. Among these chanced to be a foster-brother of Amleth, who had not ceased to have regard to their common nurture; and who esteemed his present orders less than the memory of their past fellowship. He attended Amleth among his appointed train, being anxious not to entrap, but to warn him; and was persuaded that he would suffer the worst if he showed the slightest glimpse of sound reason, and above all if he did the act of love openly. This was also plain enough to Amleth himself. For when he was bidden mount his horse, he deliberately set himself in such a fashion that he turned his back to the neck and faced about, fronting the tail; which he proceeded to encompass with the reins, just as if on that side he would check the horse in its furious pace. By this cunning thought he eluded the trick, and overcame the treachery of his uncle. The reinless steed galloping on, with rider directing its tail, was ludicrous enough to behold.

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

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

So, when he had returned home, they all jeeringly asked him whether he had given way to love, and he avowed that he had ravished the maid. When he was next asked where he did it,

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

Thus all were worsted, and none could open the secret lock of the young man's wisdom. But a friend of Feng, gifted more with assurance than judgment, declared that the unfathomable cunning of such a mind could not be detected by any vulgar plot, for the man's obstinacy was so great that it ought not to be assailed with any mild measures; there were many sides to his wiliness, and it ought not to be entrapped by any one method. Accordingly, said he, his own profounder acuteness had hit on a more delicate way, which was well fitted to be put in practice, and would effectually discover what they desired to know. Feng was purposely to absent himself, pretending affairs of great import. Amleth should be closeted alone with his mother in her chamber; but a man should first be commissioned to place himself in a concealed part of the room and listen heedfully to what they talked about. For if the son had any wits at all he would not hesitate to speak out in the hearing of his mother, or fear to trust himself to the fidelity of her who bore him. The speaker, loth to seem readier to devise than to carry out the plot, zealously proffered himself as the agent of the eavesdropping. Feng rejoiced at the scheme, and departed on pretence of a long journey. Now he who had given this counsel repaired privily to the room where Amleth was shut up with his mother, and lay down skulking in the straw. But Amleth had his antidote for the treachery. Afraid of being overheard by some eavesdropper, he at first resorted to his usual imbecile ways, and crowed like a noisy cock, beating his arms together to mimic the flapping of wings. Then he mounted the straw and began to swing his body and jump again and again, wishing to try if aught lurked there in hiding. Feeling a lump beneath his feet, he drove his sword into the spot, and impaled him who lay hid. Then he dragged him from his concealment and slew him. Then, cutting his body into morsels, he seethed it in boiling water, and flung it through the mouth of an open sewer for the swine to eat, bestrewing the stinking mire with his hapless limbs. Having in this wise eluded the snare, he went back to the room. Then his mother set up a great wailing, and began to lament her son's folly to his face; but he said: "Most infamous of women; dost thou seek with such lying lamentations to hide thy most heavy guilt? Wantoning like a harlot, thou hast entered a wicked and abominable state of wedlock, embracing with incestuous bosom thy husband's slayer, and wheedling with filthy lures of blandishment him who had slain the father of thy son. This, forsooth, is the way that the mares couple with the vanquishers of their mates; for brute beasts are naturally incited to pair indiscriminately; and it would seem that thou, like them, hast clean forgot thy first husband. As for me, not idly do I wear the mask of folly; for I doubt not that he who destroyed his brother will riot as ruthlessly in the blood of his kindred. Therefore it is better to choose the garb of dulness than that of sense, and to borrow some protection from a show of utter frenzy. Yet the passion to avenge my father still burns in my

heart; but I am watching the chances, I await the fitting hour. There is a place for all things; against so merciless and dark spirit must be used the deeper devices of the mind. And thou, who hadst been better employed in lamenting thine own disgrace, know it is superfluity to bewail my witlessness; thou shouldst weep for the blemish in thine own mind, not for that in another's. On the rest see thou keep silence." With such reproaches he rent the heart of his mother and redeemed her to walk in the ways of virtue; teaching her to set the fires of the past above the seductions of the present.

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

Feng now suspected that his stepson was certainly full of guile, and desired to make away with him, but durst not do the deed for fear of the displeasure, not only of Amleth's grandsire Rorik, but also of his own wife. So he thought that the King of Britain should be employed to slay him, so that another could do the deed, and he be able to feign innocence. Thus, desirous to hide his cruelty, he chose rather to besmirch his friend than to bring disgrace on his own head. Amleth, on departing, gave secret orders to his mother to hang the hall with woven knots, and to perform pretended obsequies for him a year thence; promising that he would then return. Two retainers of Feng then accompanied him, bearing a letter graven on wood - a kind of writing material frequent in old times; this letter enjoined the king of the Britons to put to death the youth who was sent over to him. While they were reposing, Amleth searched their coffers, found the letter, and read the instructions therein. Whereupon he erased all the writing on the surface, substituted fresh characters, and so, changing the purport of the instructions, shifted his own doom upon his companions. Nor was he satisfied with removing from himself the sentence of death and passing the peril on to others, but added an entreaty that the King of Britain would grant his daughter in marriage to a youth of great judgment whom he was sending to him. Under this was falsely marked the signature of Feng.

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

wits, began to flout him with many saucy jeers, because he blamed and cavilled at seemly and worthy things, and because he attacked thus ignobly an illustrious king and a lady of so refined a behaviour, bespattering with the shamefullest abuse those who merited all praise.

All this the king heard from his retainer; and declared that he who could say such things had either more than mortal wisdom or more than mortal folly; in these few words fathoming the full depth of Amleth's penetration. Then he summoned his steward and asked him whence he had procured the bread. The steward declared that it had been made by the king's own baker. The king asked where the corn had grown of which it was made, and whether any sign was to be found there of human carnage? The other answered, that not far off was a field, covered with the ancient bones of slaughtered men, and still bearing plainly all the signs of ancient carnage; and that he had himself planted this field with grain in springtide, thinking it more fruitful than the rest, and hoping for plenteous abundance; and so, for aught he knew, the bread had caught some evil savour from this bloodshed. The king, on hearing this, surmised that Amleth had spoken truly, and took the pains to learn also what had been the source of the lard. The other declared that his hogs had, through negligence, strayed from keeping, and batted on the rotten carcase of a robber, and that perchance their pork had thus come to have something of a corrupt smack. The king, finding that Amleth's judgment was right in this thing also, asked of what liquor the steward had mixed the drink? Hearing that it had been brewed of water and meal, he had the spot of the spring pointed out to him, and set to digging deep down; and there he found, rusted away, several swords, the tang whereof it was thought had tainted the waters. Others relate that Amleth blamed the drink because, while quaffing it, he had detected some bees that had fed in the paunch of a dead man; and that the taint, which had formerly been imparted to the combs, had reappeared in the taste. The king, seeing that Amleth had rightly given the causes of the taste he had found so faulty, and learning that the ignoble eyes wherewith Amleth had reproached him concerned some stain upon his birth, had a secret interview with his mother, and asked her who his father had really been. She said she had submitted to no man but the king. But when he threatened that he would have the truth out of her by a trial, he was told that he was the offspring of a slave. By the evidence of the avowal thus extorted he understood the whole mystery of the reproach upon his origin. Abashed as he was with shame for his low estate, he was so ravished with the young man's cleverness, that he asked him why he had aspersed the queen with the reproach that she had demeaned herself like a slave? But while resenting that the courtliness of his wife had been accused in the midnight gossip of a guest, he found that her mother had been a bondmaid. For Amleth said he had noted in her three blemishes showing the demeanor of a slave; first, she had muffled her head in her mantle as handmaids do; next, that she had gathered up her gown for walking; and thirdly, that she had first picked out with a splinter, and then chewed up, the remnant of food that stuck in the crevices between her teeth. Further, he mentioned that the king's mother had been brought into slavery from captivity, lest she should seem servile only in her habits, yet not in her birth.

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

When he had passed a whole year with the king he obtained leave to make a journey, and

returned to his own land, carrying away of all his princely wealth and state only the sticks which held the gold. On reaching Jutland, he exchanged his present attire for his ancient demeanour, which he had adopted for righteous ends, purposely assuming an aspect of absurdity. Covered with filth, he entered the banquet-room where his own obsequies were being held, and struck all men utterly aghast, rumour having falsely noised abroad his death. At last terror melted into mirth, and the guests jeered and taunted one another, that he whose last rites they were celebrating as though he were dead, should appear in the flesh. When he was asked concerning his comrades, he pointed to the sticks he was carrying, and said, "Here is both the one and the other." This he observed with equal truth and pleasantry; for his speech, though most thought it idle, yet departed not from the truth; for it pointed at the weregild of the slain as though it were themselves. Thereon, wishing to bring the company into a gayer mood, he jollied the cupbearers, and diligently did the office of plying the drink. Then, to prevent his loose dress hampering his walk, he girdled his sword upon his side, and purposely drawing it several times, pricked his fingers with its point. The bystanders accordingly had both sword and scabbard riveted across with an iron nail. Then, to smooth the way more safely to his plot, he went to the lords and plied them heavily with draught upon draught, and drenched them all so deep in wine, that their feet were made feeble with drunkenness, and they turned to rest within the palace, making their bed where they had revelled. Then he saw they were in a fit state for his plots, and thought that here was a chance offered to do his purpose. So he took out of his bosom the stakes he has long ago prepared, and went into the building, where the ground lay covered with the bodies of the nobles wheezing off their sleep and their debauch. Then, cutting away its support, he brought down the hanging his mother had knitted, which covered the inner as well as the outer walls of the hall. This he flung upon the snorers, and then applying the crooked stakes, he knotted and bound them up in such insoluble intricacy, that not one of the men beneath, however hard he might struggle, could contrive to rise. After this he set fire to the palace. The flames spread, scattering the conflagration far and wide. It enveloped the whole dwelling, destroyed the palace, and burnt them all while they were either buried in deep sleep or vainly striving to arise. Then he went to the chamber of Feng, who had before this been conducted by his train into his pavilion; plucked up a sword that chanced to be hanging to the bed, and planted his own in its place. Then, awakening his uncle, he told him that his nobles were perishing in the flames, and that Amleth was here, armed with his crooks to help him, and thirsting to exact the vengeance, now long overdue, for his father's murder. Feng, on hearing this, leapt from his couch, but was cut down while deprived of his own sword, and as he strove in vain to draw the strange one. O valiant Amleth, and worthy of immortal fame, who being shrewdly armed with a feint of folly, covered a wisdom too high for human wit under a marvellous disguise of silliness! And not only found in his subtlety means to protect his own safety, but also by its guidance found opportunity to avenge his father. By this skilful defence of himself, and strenuous revenge for his parent, he has left it doubtful whether we are to think more of his wit or his bravery.

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The Hystorie of Hamblet, Prince of Denmark

A translation from François de Belleforest's 1576 work, Les Histoires Tragiques, based on the Amleth story in Saxo's Gesta Danorum which had been published in Paris in 1514.

This anonymous English translation was published in London in 1608:

"Imprinted by Richard Bradocke, for Thomas Pauier, and are to be sold at his shop in Corne- hill, neere to the Royal Exchange."

Spelling modernised

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 Ditmarsse) 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 marsse 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 witnesss 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 witnesss 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 aflirm, 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 thereof, 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 repentance

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 Geruthe 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 esteeme 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 fertile 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 displeased 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 pleased 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 arrived in the country, entered into the palace of his uncle the same day that they were celebrating his funerals, and going into the hall, procured 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 carcase (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, disdainning 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 superfluties 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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