

CHAPTER XI

Jarl Afflicted With The Lockjaw

If ever again I launch whale-boat from sheer-plank of ship at sea, I shall take good heed, that my comrade be a sprightly fellow, with a rattle-box head. Be he never so silly, his very silliness, so long as he be lively at it, shall be its own excuse.

Upon occasion, who likes not a lively loon, one of your giggling, gamesome oafs, whose mouth is a grin? Are not such, well-ordered dispensations of Providence? filling up vacuums, in intervals of social stagnation relieving the tedium of existing? besides keeping up, here and there, in very many quarters indeed, sundry people's good opinion of themselves? What, if at times their speech is insipid as water after wine? What, if to ungenial and irascible souls, their very "mug" is an exasperation to behold, their clack an inducement to suicide? Let us not be hard upon them for this; but let them live on for the good they may do.

But Jarl, dear, dumb Jarl, thou wert none of these. Thou didst carry a phiz like an excommunicated deacon's. And no matter what happened, it was ever the same. Quietly, in thyself, thou didst revolve upon thine own sober axis, like a wheel in a machine which forever goes round, whether you look at it or no. Ay, Jarl! wast thou not forever intent upon minding that which so many neglect--thine own especial

business? Wast thou not forever at it, too, with no likelihood of ever winding up thy moody affairs, and striking a balance sheet?

But at times how wearisome to me these everlasting reveries in my one solitary companion. I longed for something enlivening; a burst of words; human vivacity of one kind or other. After in vain essaying to get something of this sort out of Jarl, I tried it all by myself; playing upon my body as upon an instrument; singing, halloing, and making empty gestures, till my Viking stared hard; and I myself paused to consider whether I had run crazy or no.

But how account for the Skyeman's gravity? Surely, it was based upon no philosophic taciturnity; he was nothing of an idealist; an aerial architect; a constructor of flying buttresses. It was inconceivable, that his reveries were Manfred-like and exalted, reminiscent of unutterable deeds, too mysterious even to be indicated by the remotest of hints. Suppositions all out of the question.

His ruminations were a riddle. I asked him anxiously, whether, in any part of the world, Savannah, Surat, or Archangel, he had ever a wife to think of; or children, that he carried so lengthy a phiz. Nowhere neither. Therefore, as by his own confession he had nothing to think of but himself, and there was little but honesty in him (having which, by the way, he may be thought full to the brim), what could I fall back upon but my original theory: namely, that in repose, his intellects stepped out, and left his body to itself.