CHAPTER IV.

AT STOCKHOLM.

Doctor Schwaryencrona lived in a magnificent house in Stockholm. It was in the oldest and most aristocratic quarter of the charming capital, which is one of the most pleasant and agreeable in Europe. Strangers would visit it much more frequently if it were better known and more fashionable. But tourists, unfortunately for themselves, plan their journeys much upon the same principle as they purchase their hats. Situated between Lake Melar and the Baltic, it is built upon eight small islands, connected by innumerable bridges, and bordered by splendid quays, enlivened by numerous steam-boats, which fulfill the duties of omnibuses. The population are hardworking, gay, and contented. They are the most hospitable, the most polite, and the best educated of any nation in Europe. Stockholm, with its libraries, its museums, its scientific establishments, is in fact the Athens of the North, as well as a very important commercial center.

Erik, however, had not recovered from the sadness incident upon parting from Vanda, who had left them at the first relay. Their parting had been more sorrowful than would have been expected at their age, but they had not been able to conceal their emotion.

When the carriage stopped before a large brick house, whose double

windows shone resplendently with gaslight, Erik was fairly dazzled. The copper knocker of the door appeared to him to be of fine gold. The vestibule, paved with marble and ornamented with statues, bronze torches, and large Chinese-vases, completed his amazement.

A footman in livery removed his master's furs, and inquired after his health with the affectionate cordiality which is habitual with Swedish servants. Erik looked around him with amazement.

The sound of voices attracted his attention toward the broad oaken staircase, covered with heavy carpet. He turned, and saw two persons whose costumes appeared to him the height of elegance.

One was a lady with gray hair, and of medium height, who wore a dress of black cloth, short enough to show her red stockings with yellow clock-work, and her buckled shoes. An enormous bunch of keys attached to a steel chain hung at her side. She carried her head high, and looked about her with piercing eyes. This was "Fru," or Madame Greta--Maria, the lady in charge of the doctor's house, and who was the undisputed autocrat of the mansion in everything that pertained to the culinary or domestic affairs. Behind her came a little girl, eleven or twelve years old, who appeared to Erik like a fairy princess. Instead of the national costume, the only one which he had ever seen worn by a child of that age, she had on a dress of deep blue velvet, over which her yellow hair was allowed to fall loosely. She wore black stockings and satin shoes; a knot of cherry-colored ribbon was poised in her hair like a butterfly,

and gave a little color to her pale cheeks, while her large eyes shone with a phosphorescent light.

"How delightful, uncle, to have you back again! Have you had a pleasant journey?" she cried, clasping the doctor around the neck. She hardly deigned to cast a glance at Erik, who stood modestly aside.

The doctor returned her caresses, and shook hands with his housekeeper, then he made a sign for Erik to advance.

"Kajsa, and Dame Greta, I ask your friendship for Erik Hersebom, whom I have brought from Norway with me!" he said, "and you, my boy, do not be afraid," he said kindly. "Dame Greta is not as severe as she looks, and you and my niece Kajsa, will soon be the best of friends, is it not so, little girl?" he added, pinching gently the cheek of the little fairy.

Kajsa only responded by making a disdainful face.

As for the housekeeper, she did not appear very enthusiastic over the new recruit thus presented to her notice.

"If you please, doctor," she said, with a severe air, as they ascended the staircase, "may I ask who this child is?"

"Certainly, Dame Greta; I will tell you all about it before long. Do not be afraid; but now, if you please, give us something to eat."

In the "matsal," or dining-room, the table was beautifully laid with damask and crystal, and the "snorgas" was ready.

Poor Erik had never seen a table covered with a white cloth, for they are unknown to the peasants of Norway, who hardly use plates, as they have only recently been introduced, and many of them still eat their fish on rounds of black bread, and find it very good. Therefore the doctor had to repeat his invitation several times before the boy took his seat at the table, and the awkwardness of his movements caused "Froken," or Miss Kajsa, to cast upon him more than one ironical glance during the repast. However, his journey had sharpened his appetite, and this was of great assistance to him.

The "snorgas" was followed by a dinner that would have frightened a Frenchman by its massive solidity, and would have sufficed to appease the appetites of a battalion of infantry after a long march. Soup, fish, home-made bread, goose stuffed with chestnuts, boiled beef, flanked with a mountain of vegetables, a pyramid of potatoes, hard-boiled eggs by the dozen, and a raisin pudding; all these were gallantly attacked and dismantled.

This plentiful repast being ended, almost without a word having been spoken, they passed into the parlor, a large wainscoted room, with six windows draped with heavy curtains, large enough to have sufficed a Parisian artist with hangings for the whole apartment. The doctor seated

himself in a corner by the fire, in a large leather arm-chair, Kajsa took her place at his feet upon a footstool, whilst Erik, intimidated and ill at ease, approached one of the windows, and would have gladly hidden himself in its deep embrasure.

But the doctor did not leave him alone long.

"Come and warm yourself, my boy!" he said, in his sonorous voice; "and tell us what you think of Stockholm."

"The streets are very black and very narrow, and the houses are very high," said Erik.

"Yes, a little higher than they are in Norway," answered the doctor, laughing.

"They prevent one from seeing the stars!" said the young boy.

"Because we are in the quarter where the nobility live," said Kajsa, piqued by his criticisms. "When you pass the bridges the streets are broader."

"I saw that as we rode along; but the best of them are not as wide as that which borders the fiord of Noroe," answered Erik.

"Ah, ah!" said the doctor, "are you home-sick already?"

"No," answered Erik, resolutely. "I am too much obliged to you, dear doctor, for having brought me. But you asked me what I thought of Stockholm, and I had to answer."

"Noroe must be a frightful little hole," said Kajsa.

"A frightful little hole!" repeated Erik, indignantly. "Those who say that must be without eyes. If you could only see our rocks of granite, our mountains, our glaciers, and our forests of pine, looking so black against the pale sky! And besides all this, the great sea; sometimes tumultuous and terrible, and sometimes so calm as scarcely to rock one; and then the flight of the sea-gulls, which are lost in infinitude, and then return, to fan you with their wings. Oh, it is beautiful! Yes, far more beautiful than a town."

"I was not speaking of the country but of the houses," said Kajsa, "they are only peasants' cabins--are they not, uncle?"

"In these peasants' cabins, your father and grandfather as well as myself were born, my child," answered the doctor, gravely.

Kajsa blushed and remained silent.

"They are only wooden houses, but they answer as well as any," said Erik.

"Often in the evening while my father mends his nets, and my mother is busy with her spinning-wheel, we three sit on a little bench, Otto, Vanda, and I, and we repeat together the old sagas, while we watch the shadows that play upon the ceiling; and when the wind blows outside, and all the fishermen are safe at home, it does one good to gather around the blazing fire. We are just as happy as if we were in a beautiful room like this."

"This is not the best room," said Kajsa proudly. "I must show you the grand drawing-room, it is worth seeing!"

"But there are so many books in this one," said Erik, "are there as many in the drawing-room?"

"Books--who cares for them? There are velvet armchairs, and sofas, lace curtains, a splendid French clock, and carpets from Turkey!"

Erik did not appear to be fascinated by this description, but cast envious glances toward the large oaken bookcase, which filled one side of the parlor!

"You can go and examine the books, and take any you like," said the doctor. Erik did not wait for him to repeat this permission. He chose a volume at once, and seating himself in a corner where there was a good light, he was soon completely absorbed in his reading. He hardly noticed

the successive entrance of two old gentlemen, who were intimate friends of Dr. Schwaryencrona, and who came almost every evening to play a game of whist with him.

The first who arrived was Professor Hochstedt, a large man with cold and stately manners, who expressed in polished terms the pleasure which he felt at the doctor's safe return. He was scarcely seated in the arm-chair which had long borne the name of the "professor's seat," when a sharp ring was heard.

"It is Bredejord," exclaimed the two friends simultaneously.

The door soon opened to admit a thin sprightly little man, who entered like a gust of wind, seized both the doctor's hands, kissed Kajsa on the forehead affectionately, greeted the professor, and cast a glance as keen as that of a mouse around the room.

It was the Advocate Bredejord, one of the most illustrious lawyers of Stockholm.

"Ha! Who is this?" said he, suddenly, as he beheld Erik.

The doctor tried to explain in as few words as possible.

"What--a young fisherman, or rather a boy from Bergen--and who reads Gibbon in English?" he asked. For he saw at a glance what the book was

which so absorbed the little peasant.

"Does that interest you, my boy?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, it is a work that I have wanted to read for a long time, the first volume of the 'Fall of the Roman Empire,'" answered Erik, simply.

"Upon my word," exclaimed the lawyer, "it appears that the peasants of Bergen are fond of serious reading. But are you from Bergen?" he asked.

"I am from Noroe, which is not far from there," answered Erik.

"Ah, have they usually eyes and hair as brown as yours at Noroe?"

"No, sir; my brother and sister, and all the others, are blondes like Miss Kajsa. But they are not dressed like her," he added, laughing; "therefore they do not look much like her."

"No; I have no doubt of it," said Mr. Bredejord. "Miss Kajsa is a product of civilization. And what are you going to do at Stockholm, my boy, if I am not too curious?"

"The doctor has been kind enough to offer to send me to school," said Erik.

"Ah, ah!" said Mr. Bredejord, tapping his snuff-box with the ends of his

fingers.

His glance seemed to question the doctor about this living problem; but the latter made a sign to him, which was almost imperceptible, not to pursue his investigations, and he changed the conversation. They then talked about court affairs, the city news, and all that had taken place since the departure of the doctor. Then Dame Greta came, and opened the card-table, and laid out the cards. Soon silence reigned, while the three friends were absorbed in the mysteries of whist.

The doctor made pretension to being a great player, and had no mercy for the mistakes of his partners. He exulted loudly when their errors caused him to win, and scolded when they made him lose. After every rubber he took pleasure in showing the delinquent where he had erred; what card he should have led, and which he should have held back. It is generally the habit of whist-players, but it is not always conducive to amiability, particularly when the victims are the same every evening.

Happily for him, the doctor's two friends never lost their temper. The professor was habitually cool, and the lawyer severely skeptical.

"You are right," the first would say gravely, in answer to the most severe reproaches.

"My dear Schwaryencrona, you know very well you are only losing your time lecturing me," Mr. Bredejord would say, laughing. "All my life I

have made the greatest blunders whenever I play whist, and the worst of it is, I do not improve." What could any one do with two such hardened sinners?

The doctor was compelled to discontinue his criticisms, but it was only to renew them a quarter of an hour later, for he was incorrigible.

It happened, however, that this evening he lost every game, and his consequent ill-humor made his criticisms very severe upon his two companions, and even upon the "dummy."

But the professor coolly acknowledged his faults, and the lawyer answered his most bitter reproaches by jokes.

"Why should I alter my play, when I win by playing badly, and you lose by following your correct rules?" he said to the doctor.

They played until ten o'clock. Then Kajsa made the tea in a magnificent "samovar," and served it with pretty gracefulness; then she discreetly disappeared. Soon Dame Greta appeared, and, calling Erik, she conducted him to the apartment which had been prepared for him. It was a pretty little room, clean and well furnished, on the second floor.

The three friends were now left alone.

"Now, at last, you can tell us who this young fisherman from Noroe is,

who reads Gibbon in the original text?" said Mr. Bredejord, as he put some sugar into his second cup of tea. "Or is it a forbidden subject, which it is indiscreet for me to mention?"

"There is nothing mysterious about the matter, and I will willingly tell you Erik's history, for I know that I can rely upon your discretion," answered Dr. Schwaryencrona.

"Ah! I knew that he had a history," said the lawyer, seating himself comfortably in his arm-chair. "We will listen, dear doctor. I assure you that your confidence will not be misplaced. I confess this youth arouses my curiosity like a problem."

"He is, indeed, a living problem," answered the doctor, flattered by the curiosity of his friend. "A problem which I hope to be able to solve. But I must tell you all about it, and see if you think as I do."

The doctor settled himself comfortably, and began by telling them that he had been struck by Erik's appearance in the school at Noroe, and by his unusual intelligence. He had made inquiries about him, and he related all that Mr. Malarius and Mr. Hersebom had told. He omitted none of the details. He spoke of the buoy, of the name of "Cynthia," of the little garments which Dame Katrina had shown him, of the coral ornament, of the device upon it, and of the character of the letters.

"You are now in possession of all the facts as far as I have been able

to learn them," he said. "And you must bear in mind that the extraordinary ability of the child is only a secondary phenomenon, and largely due to the interest with which Mr. Malarius has always regarded him, and of which he has made the best use. It was his unusual acquirements which first drew my attention to him and led me to make inquiries about him. But in reality this has little connection with the questions which now occupy me, which are: where did this child come from, and what course would it be best for me to take in order to discover his family? We have only two facts to guide us in this search. First: The physical indications of the race to which the child belongs. Second: The name 'Cynthia,' which was engraved on the buoy.

"As to the first fact, there can be no doubt; the child belongs to the Celtic race. He presents the type of a Celt in all its beauty and purity.

"Let us pass to the second fact:

"'Cynthia' is certainly the name of the vessel to which the buoy belonged. This name might have belonged to a German vessel, as well as to an English one; but it was written in the Roman characters. Therefore, the vessel was an English one--or we will say Anglo-Saxon to be more precise. Besides, everything confirms the hypothesis, for more than one English vessel going and coming from Inverness, or the Orkneys, have been driven on the coast of Norway by a tempest; and you must not forget that the little living waif could not have been floating for a

long while, since he had resisted hunger, and all the dangers of his perilous journey. Well, now you know all, and what is your conclusion my dear friends?"

Neither the professor nor the lawyer thought it prudent to utter a word.

"You have not been able to arrive at any conclusion," said the doctor, in a tone which betrayed a secret triumph. "Perhaps you even think there is a contradiction between the two facts--a child of the Celtic race--an English Vessel. But this is simply because you have failed to bear in mind the existence on the coast of Great Britain of a people of the Celtic race, on her sister island, Ireland. I did not think of it at first myself, and it prevented me from solving the problem. But when it occurred to me, I said to myself: the child is Irish. Is this your opinion, Hochstedt?"

If there was anything in the world the professor disliked, it was to give a positive opinion upon any subject. It must also be confessed that to give such an opinion in this case would have been premature. He therefore contented himself with nodding his head, and saying:

"It is an incontestable fact that the Irish belong to the Celtic branch of the Arian race."

This was a sufficiently safe aphorism, but Doctor Schwaryencrona asked nothing more, and only saw in it the entire confirmation of his theory.

"You think so, yourself," he said eagerly. "The Irish were Celts, and the child has all the characteristics of the race. The 'Cynthia' having been an English vessel, it appears to me that we are in possession of the necessary links, in order to find the family of the poor child. It is in Great Britain that we must look for them. Some advertisements in the 'Times' will probably be sufficient to put us on their tracks."

The doctor continued to enlarge upon his plan of proceeding, when he remarked the obstinate silence of the lawyer and the slightly ironical expression with which he listened to his conclusions.

"If you are not of my opinion, Bredejord, I wish you would say so. You know that I do not fear to discuss the matter," he said, stopping short.

"I have nothing to say," answered Mr. Bredejord. "Hochstedt can bear witness that I have said nothing."

"No. But I see very well that you do not share my opinion; and I am curious to know why," said the doctor.

"Is Cynthia an English name?" he asked, with vehemence. "Yes! it was written in Roman characters--it could not have been German. You have heard our eminent friend, Hochstedt, affirm that the Irish are Celts. Has the child all the characteristics of the Celtic race? You can judge for yourself. You were struck by his appearance before I opened my mouth

about the subject. I conclude, therefore, that it is a want of friendship for you to refuse to agree with me, and recognize the fact that the boy belongs to an Irish family."

"Want of friendship is a strong charge," answered Mr. Bredejord, "if you apply it to me. I can only say that I have not, as yet, expressed the slightest opinion."

"No; but I see that you do not spare mine."

"Have I not a right?"

"But give some facts to support your theory."

"I have not said that I have formed any."

"Then it is a systematic opposition, just for the sake of contradicting me, as you do in whist."

"Nothing is further from my thoughts, I assure you. Your reasoning appeared to me to be too peremptory, that is all."

"In what way, if you please, I am curious to know?"

"It would take too long to tell you. Eleven o'clock is striking. I will content myself with offering you a bet. Your copy of Pliny against my

Quintilian, that you have not judged rightly, and that the child is not Irish."

"You know that I do not like to bet," said the doctor, softened by his unconquerable good humor. "But I shall take so much pleasure in your discomfiture that I accept your offer."

"Well, then it is a settled affair. How much time do you expect to take for your researches?"

"A few months will suffice, I hope, but I have said two years to Hersebom, in order to be sure that no efforts were wanting."

"Ah! well--I give you two years. Hochstedt shall be our witness; and there is no ill-feeling, I hope?"

"Assuredly not, but I see your Quintilian in great danger of coming to keep company with my Pliny," answered the doctor.

Then, after shaking hands with his two friends, he accompanied them to the door.