

## CHAPTER VII.

### VANDA'S OPINION.

In the beginning, Erik burning with zeal at the sacrifice which he had made, devoted all his energies to a fisherman's life, and tried to forget that he had ever known any other. He was always the first to rise and prepare the boat for his adopted father, who found every morning all the arrangements completed, and he had only to step on board. If the wind failed, then Erik took the heavy oars, and rowed with all his strength, seeming to choose the hardest and most fatiguing duties. Nothing discouraged him, neither the long waiting for the fish to seize the bait, nor the various preparations to which the captive was subjected--first, the removal of the tongue, which is a most delicate morsel; then the head, then the bones, before placing them in the reservoir, where they receive their first salting. Whatever their work was, Erik did his part not only conscientiously, but eagerly. He astonished the placid Otto by his extreme application to the smallest details of their business.

"How you must have suffered, when you were shut up in the town," said the lad to him, naively. "You only seem to be in your element when you are on the borders of the fiord or on the open sea."

When their conversation took this turn, Erik always remained silent.

Sometimes, however, he would revert to the subject himself, and try to prove to Otto, or rather to himself, that there was no better state of existence than their own.

"It is what I have always heard," the other would answer with his calm smile.

And poor Erik would turn away and stifle a sigh.

The truth is that he suffered cruelly after renouncing his studies and seeing himself condemned to a life of manual labor. When these thoughts came to him he fought against them with all his might. He did not wish any one to suspect that he felt in this way, and in hiding them within his own breast he suffered all the more.

A catastrophe which occurred at the beginning of the spring, only served to increase his discouragement.

One day, as there was a great deal of work to do at home in piling together the salted fish, Mr. Hersebom had intrusted it to Erik and to Otto, and had gone out to fish alone. The weather was stormy, and the sky very cloudy for the time of the year. The two young men, although they worked actively, could not help noticing that it was exceptionally dull, and they felt the atmosphere very heavy.

"It is singular!" said Erik, "but I feel a roaring in my ears as if I

were some distance above the earth in a balloon."

Almost immediately his nose began to bleed. Otto had a similar sensation, although not quite so severe.

"I think the barometer must be very low," said Erik. "If I had time I would run to Mr. Malarius' and see."

"You have plenty of time," said Otto. "Our work is nearly done, and even if you were delayed I could easily finish it alone."

"Then I will go," replied Erik. "I do not know why the state of the atmosphere should trouble me so much. I wish father was home."

As he walked toward the school, he met Mr. Malarius on the road.

"Is it you, Erik?" said the teacher. "I am glad to see you, and make sure that you are not on the sea. I was just going to inquire. The barometer has fallen with such rapidity during the last half hour. I have never seen anything like it. We are surely going to have a change of weather."

Mr. Malarius had hardly finished speaking, when a distant grumbling, followed by a lugubrious roaring, fell upon their ears. The sky became covered with a cloud as black as ink, which spread rapidly in all directions, and obscured every object with great swiftness. Then

suddenly, after an interval of complete silence, the leaves of the trees, the bits of straw, the sand, and even the stones, were swept away by a sudden gust of wind.

The hurricane had begun.

It raged with unheard-of violence. The chimneys, the window shutters, and in some places even the roofs of the houses were blown down; and the boat-houses without exception were carried away and destroyed by the wind. In the fiord, which was usually as calm as a well in a court-yard, the most terrible tempest raged; the waves were enormous and came and went, breaking against the shore with a deafening noise.

The cyclone raged for an hour, then arrested in its course by the heights of Norway, it moved toward the south, and swept over continental Europe. It is noted in meteorological annals as one of the most extraordinary and disastrous that ever was known upon the Atlantic coast. These great changes of the atmosphere are now generally announced beforehand by the telegraph. Most of the European sea-ports forewarned of the danger have time to warn vessels and seamen of the threatened tempest, and they seek a safe anchorage. By this means many disasters are averted.

But on the distant and less frequented coasts, in the fishing-hamlets, the number of shipwrecks was beyond computation.

In one office, that of "Veritas" in France, there were registered not less than 730.

The first thought of all the members of the Hersebom family, as well as of all the other families of fishermen, was naturally for those who were on the sea on this disastrous day. Mr. Hersebom went most often to the western coast of a large island which was about two miles distant, beyond the entrance to the fiord. It was the spot where he had first seen Erik. They hoped that during the tempest he had been able to find shelter by running his boat upon the low and sandy shore. But Erik and Otto felt so anxious that they could not wait until evening to see if this hope was well founded.

The fiord had hardly resumed its ordinary placidity, after the passage of the hurricane, when they borrowed a boat of one of their neighbors, in order to go in search of him. Mr. Malarius insisted upon accompanying the young men upon their expedition, and they all three set out, anxiously watched by Katrina and her daughter.

On the fiord the wind had nearly gone down, but it blew from the west, and to reach the entrance to the harbor they were obliged to use their oars. This took them more than an hour.

When they reached the entrance an unexpected obstacle presented itself. The tempest was still raging on the ocean, and the waves dashed against the island which, formed the entrance to the fiord of Noroe, forming two

currents, which came and went with such violence in the narrow pass that it was impossible to gain the open sea. A steamboat could not have ventured through it, and a weak boat could not have resisted it for a moment.

The only thing they could do, therefore, was to return to Noroe, and wait as patiently as they could.

The hour when he habitually came home passed without bringing Mr. Hersebom, but none of the other fishermen returned; so they hoped that they were all detained by the impassable state of the entrance to the fiord, and would not believe that he had personally met with any disaster. That evening was a very sad one at all the firesides where a member was missing. As the night passed without any of the absent men making their appearance, the anxieties of their families increased. In Mr. Hersebom's house nobody went to bed. They passed the long hours of waiting seated in a circle around the fire, silent and anxious.

Dawn is late in these high latitudes in March, but when at last it grew light it was bright and clear. The wind was calm, and they hoped they would be able to get through the pass. A regular fleet of boats, composed of every one who could get away from Noroe, was ready to go in search of the absent men. Just at this moment several vessels hove in sight, and soon reached the village. They were the fishermen who had gone out the day before, not expecting such a cyclone; but Mr. Hersebom was not among them.

Nobody could give any account of him, and the fact of his not returning with the others increased their anxiety as all the men had been in great peril. Some had been surprised by the cyclone and dashed upon the shore, others had time to shelter themselves in a secure place of anchorage. A few had reached the land just in time to save themselves.

It was decided that the flotilla should go in search of those who were missing. Mr. Malarius who still wished to take part in the expedition accompanied Erik and Otto. A large yellow dog begged so earnestly to go with them, that at length they yielded. It was Kaas, the Greenland dog that Mr. Hersebom had brought back with him, after a voyage to Cape Farewell.

After issuing from the pass the boats separated, some going to the right, and others to the left, to explore the shores of the innumerable islands which lie scattered near the entrance to the fiord of Noroe, as well as all along the coast of Norway.

When they met at midday at a given point, which had been agreed upon before separating, no trace of Mr. Hersebom had been discovered. As the search had apparently been well conducted, everyone was of the opinion that they had nothing more to do but to go home.

But Erik was not willing to own himself defeated, and give up all hope so easily. He declared that having visited all the islands which lay

toward the south, he now wished to explore those which were in the north. Mr. Malarius and Otto supported him; and seeing this they granted his desire.

This persistence deserved some recompense. Toward two o'clock as they approached a large island, Kaas began suddenly to bark furiously; then before they could prevent him he threw himself into the water, and swam to the shore.

Erik and Otto rowed with all their strength in the same direction. Soon they saw the dog reach the island, and bound, while he uttered loud howls, toward what appeared to be a human form lying extended upon the sand. They made all possible haste, and soon saw beyond a doubt that it was a man who was lying there, and this man was Mr. Hersebom; bloody, pale, cold, inanimate--dead, perhaps. Kaas was licking his hands, and uttering mournful cries.

Erik's first action was to drop on his knees beside the cold body, and apply his ear to his heart.

"He is alive, I feel it beat," he cried.

Mr. Malarias had taken one of Mr. Hersebom's hand's, and was feeling his pulse and he shook his head, sadly and doubtfully; but he would not neglect any of the means which are usually tried in such cases. After taking off a large woolen girdle which he wore around his waist, he tore



it in three pieces, and giving one to each of the young men, they rubbed vigorously the body, the arms, and the legs of the fisherman.

It was soon manifest that this simple treatment had produced the effect of restoring the circulation. The beating of the heart grew stronger, the chest rose, and a feeble respiration escaped through the lips. In a little while Mr. Hersebom was partially restored to consciousness, for he distinctly moaned.

Mr. Malarias, and the two young men lifted him from the ground, and carried him to the boat, where they hastily arranged a bed for him of sails. As they laid him in the bottom of the boat he opened his eyes.

"A drink!" he said in a weak voice.

Erik held a flask of brandy to his lips. He swallowed a mouthful and appeared to be conscious of their arrival, for he tried to give them an affectionate and grateful smile. But fatigue overcame him almost immediately, and he fell into a heavy sleep which resembled a complete lethargy. Thinking justly that the best thing they could do was to get him home as speedily as possible, they took their oars and rowed vigorously; and in a very short time they reached Noroe.

Mr. Hersebom was carried to his bed, and his wounds were dressed with arnica. He was fed with broth, and given a glass of beer, and in a short time he recovered consciousness. His injuries were not of a very grave

nature. One of his arms was fractured, and his body was covered with wound and bruises. But Mr. Malarius insisted that he should remain quiet and rest, and not fatigue himself by attempting to talk. He was soon sleeping peacefully.

It was not until the next day that they permitted him to speak and explain in a few words what had happened to him.

He had been overtaken by the cyclone just as he had hoisted his sail to return to Noroe. He had been dashed against the rocks of the island and his boat had been broken into a thousand pieces and carried away by the waves. He had thrown himself into the sea to escape the frightful shock, when she struck, but in spite of all his efforts, he had been dashed by the waves upon the rocks and terribly wounded; he had only been able to drag himself beyond the reach of the waves.

Exhausted by fatigue, one arm broken, and his whole body covered with wounds, he had lain in an unconscious state, unable to move. He could give no account of the manner in which he had passed the twenty hours; doubtless he had either been delirious or unconscious.

Now that he was saved, he began to lament for the loss of his boat, and because of his broken arm, which was now in splints. What would become of him, even admitting that he might be able to use his arm again after eight or ten weeks? The boat was the only capital possessed by the family, and the boat had been broken to pieces by the wind.

It would be very hard for a man of his age to be compelled to work for others. Besides, could he find work? It was very doubtful, for nobody in Noroe employed any assistant, and the factory even had lately reduced its hands.

Such were the bitter reflections of Mr. Hersebom, while he lay upon his bed of pain; and he felt still worse when he was able to get up, and occupy his accustomed seat in his arm-chair.

While waiting for his complete recovery, the family lived upon such provisions as they had in the house, and by the sale of the salt cod-fish which still remained. But the future looked very dark, and nobody could see how it was to be lightened.

This imminent distress had given a new turn to Erik's thoughts. For two or three days he reflected that it was by his good fortune that Mr. Hersebom had been discovered. How could he help feeling proud, when he saw Dame Katrina and Vanda look at him with intense gratitude, as they said: "Dear Erik, our father saved you from the waves, and now, in your turn, you have snatched him from death."

Certainly it was the highest recompense that he could desire for the self-abnegation of which he had given such a noble proof, in condemning himself to a fisherman's life. To feel that he had been able to render his adopted family such an inestimable benefit was to him a thought full

of sweetness and strength. This family, who had so generously shared with him all that they possessed, were now in trouble, and in want of food. But, could he remain to be a burden to them? Was it not rather his duty to try and do something to assist them?

Erik did not doubt his obligation to do this. He only hesitated as to the best way for him to do it. Should he go to Bergen and become a sailor? or was there some better occupation open to him, where he could be immediately useful to them. He resolved to consult Mr. Malarius, who listened to his reasons, and approved of them, but did not think well of his project of becoming a sailor.

"I understood, but I deplored your decision when you were resigned to remain here and share the life of your adopted parents; but I can not understand why you should condemn yourself to the life of a sailor, which would take you far away from them, when Doctor Schwaryencrona offers you every advantage to pursue a more congenial career," said Mr. Malarius. "Reflect, my dear child, before you make such a decision."

Mr. Malarius did not tell him that he had already written to Stockholm to inform the doctor of the sad state of their affairs, and the change which the cyclone of the 3d of March had made in the circumstances of Erik's family. He was not surprised, when three days after his conversation with Erik, he received the following letter, which he lost no time in carrying to the house of Mr. Hersebom.

The letter read as follows:

"STOCKHOLM, March 17th.

"MY DEAR MR. MALARIUS,--I thank you cordially for informing me of the disastrous consequences of the cyclone of the 3d of March to the worthy Mr. Hersebom. I am proud and happy to learn that Erik acted in these circumstances, as always before, like a brave boy and a devoted son. You will find a check in this letter for 500 kroners; and I beg you to give them to him from me. Tell him if it is not enough to buy at Bergen a first-class boat, he must let me know without delay. He must name this boat 'Cynthia,' and then present it to Mr. Hersebom as a souvenir of filial love. That done, if Erik wishes to please me he will return to Stockholm and resume his studies. His place is always ready for him at my fireside, and if he needs a motive to assist in this decision, I add that I have at length obtained some information, and hope yet to be able to solve the mystery enshrouding his birth.

"Believe me, my dear Malarius, your sincere and devoted friend,

"R.W. SCHWARYENCRONA, M.D."

You may imagine with what joy this letter was received. The doctor, by sending this gift to Erik, showed that he understood the character of the old fisherman. If he had offered it directly to him, it is hardly

probable that Mr. Hersebom would have accepted it. But he could not refuse the boat from Erik's hand, and bearing the name of "Cynthia," which recalled how Erik had become a member of the family. Their only grief now, which already began to sadden all their countenances, was the thought that he must soon leave them again. Nobody dared to speak about it, although it was constantly in their thoughts. Erik himself, with his head bowed, was divided between the desire of satisfying the doctor, and realizing the secret wishes of his own heart, and the no less natural wish of giving no offense to his adopted parents.

It was Vanda who first broke the reserve, and spoke upon the subject.

"Erik," she said, in her sweet grave voice, "you can not say 'No' to the doctor after receiving such a letter. You can not do it, because it would be treating him most ungratefully, and sinning against yourself. Your place is among scholars, and not among fishermen. I have thought so for a long time. Nobody has dared to tell you, therefore I tell you."

"Vanda is right," said Mr. Malarius, with a smile.

"Vanda is right," repeated Dame Katrina, drying her eyes.

And in this manner, for the second time, Erik's departure was decided.