

herdsmen, here and there a solitary little cowherd, and tailors in smart clothes, who keep far away from the rest. There are young men straighter and better built than any that the island produces, and poor old men more worn with toil and want than they ever become here. There are also faces among them that bear an expression of malice, others sparkling with energy, and others disfigured with great scars.

Most of them are in working-clothes and only possess what they stand in. Here and there is a man with some tool upon his shoulder—a shovel or a crowbar. Those that have any luggage, get it turned inside out by the custom-house officers: woven goods are so cheap in Sweden. Now and then some girl with an inclination to plumpness has to put up with the officers' coarse witticisms. There, for instance, is Handsome Sara from Cimrishamn, whom everybody knows. Every autumn she goes home, and comes again every spring with a figure that at once makes her the butt of their wit; but Sara, who generally has a quick temper and a ready tongue, to-day drops her eyes in modest confusion: she has fourteen yards of cloth wrapped round her under her dress.

The farmers are wide awake now. Those who dare, leave their horses and go among the crowd; the others choose their labourers with their eyes, and call them up. Each one takes his man's measure—width of chest, modest manner, wretchedness; but they are afraid of the scarred and malicious faces, and leave them to the bailiffs on the large farms. Offers are made and conditions fixed, and every minute one or two Swedes climb up into the hay in the back of some cart, and are driven off.

A little on one side stood an elderly, bent little man with a sack upon his back, holding a boy of eight or nine by the hand; beside them lay a green chest. They eagerly

watched the proceedings, and each time a cart drove off with some of their countrymen, the boy pulled impatiently at the hand of the old man, who answered by a reassuring word. The old man examined the farmers one by one with an anxious air, moving his lips as he did so: he was thinking. His red, lashless eyes kept watering with the prolonged staring, and he wiped them with the mouth of the coarse dirty sack.

"Do you see that one there?" he suddenly asked the boy, pointing to a fat little farmer with apple-cheeks. "I should think he'd be kind to children. Shall we try him, laddie?"

The boy nodded gravely, and they made straight for the farmer. But when he had heard that they were to go together, he would not take them; the boy was far too little to earn his keep. And it was the same thing every time.

It was Lasse Karlsson from Tommelilla in the Ystad district, and his son Pelle.

It was not altogether strange to Lasse, for he had been on the island once before, about ten years ago; but he had been younger then, in full vigour it might be said, and had no little boy by the hand, from whom he would not be separated for all the world; that was the difference. It was the year that the cow had been drowned in the marl-pit, and Bengta was preparing for her confinement. Things looked bad, but Lasse staked his all on one cast, and used the couple of kronas he got for the hide of the cow to go to Bornholm. When he came back in the autumn, there were three mouths to fill; but then he had a hundred kronas to meet the winter with.

At that time Lasse had been equal to the situation, and he would still straighten his bowed shoulders whenever he thought of that exploit. Afterwards, whenever there

were short commons, he would talk of selling the whole affair and going to Bornholm for good. But Bengta's health failed after her late child-bearing, and nothing came of it, until she died after eight years of suffering, this very spring. Then Lasse sold their bit of furniture, and made nearly a hundred kronas on it; it went in paying the expenses of the long illness, and the house and land belonged to the landlord. A green chest, that had been part of Bengta's wedding outfit, was the only thing he kept. In it he packed their belongings and a few little things of Bengta's, and sent it on in advance to the port with a horse-dealer who was driving there. Some of the rubbish for which no one would bid, he stuffed into a sack, and with it on his back and the boy's hand clasped in his, he set out to walk to Ystad, where the steamer for Rönne lay. The few coins he had would just pay their passage.

He had been so sure of himself on the way, and had talked in loud tones to Pelle about the country where the wages were so incomprehensibly high, and where in some places you got meat or cheese to eat with your bread, and always beer, so that the water-cart in the autumn did not come round for the labourers, but only for the cattle. And—why, if you liked you could drink gin like water, it was so cheap; but it was so strong that it knocked you down at the third pull. They made it from real grain, and not from diseased potatoes; and they drank it at every meal. And laddie would never feel cold there, for they wore wool next their skin, and not this poor linen that the wind blew right through; and a labourer who kept himself could easily make his two kronas a day. That was something different from their master's miserable eighty öres and finding themselves in everything.

Pelle had heard the same thing often before—from his father, from Ole and Anders, from Karna and a hundred

others who had been there. In the winter, when the air was thick with frost and snow and the needs of the poor, there was nothing else talked about in the little villages at home; and in the minds of those who had not been on the island themselves, but had only heard the tales about it, the ideas produced were as fantastic as the frost-tracery upon the window-panes. Pelle was perfectly well aware that even the poorest boys there always wore their best clothes, and ate bread-and-dripping with sugar on it as often as they liked. There money lay like dirt by the roadside, and the Bornholmers did not even take the trouble to stoop and pick it up; but Pelle meant to pick it up, so that Father Lasse would have to empty the odds and ends out of the sack and clear out the locked compartment in the green chest to make room for it; and even that would be hardly enough. If only they could begin! He shook his father's hand impatiently.

"Yes, yes," said Lasse, almost in tears. "You mustn't be impatient." He looked about him irresolutely. Here he was in the midst of all this splendour, and could not even find a humble situation for himself and the boy. He could not understand it. Had the whole world changed since his time? He trembled to his very finger-tips when the last cart drove off. For a few minutes he stood staring helplessly after it, and then he and the boy together carried the green chest up to a wall, and trudged hand in hand up towards the town.

Lasse's lips moved as he walked; he was thinking. In an ordinary way he thought best when he talked out loud to himself, but to-day all his faculties were alert, and it was enough only to move his lips.

As he trudged along, his mental excuses became audible. "Confound it!" he exclaimed, as he jerked the sack higher up his back. "It doesn't do to take the first thing that

comes. Lasse's responsible for two, and he knows what he wants—so there! It isn't the first time he's been abroad! And the best always comes last, you know, laddie."

Pelle was not paying much attention. He was already consoled, and his father's words about the best being in store for them, was to him only a feeble expression for a great truth, namely, that the whole world would become theirs, with all that it contained in the way of wonders. He was already engaged in taking possession of it, open-mouthed.

He looked as if he would like to swallow the harbour with all its ships and boats, and the great stacks of timber, where it looked as if there would be holes. This would be a fine place to play in, but there were no boys! He wondered whether the boys were like those at home; he had seen none yet. Perhaps they had quite a different way of fighting, but he would manage all right if only they would come one at a time. There was a big ship right up on land, and they were skinning it. So ships have ribs, just like cows!

At the wooden shed in the middle of the harbour square, Lasse put down the sack, and giving the boy a piece of bread and telling him to stay and mind the sack, he went farther up and disappeared. Pelle was very hungry, and holding the bread with both hands he munched at it greedily.

When he had picked the last crumbs off his jacket, he set himself to examine his surroundings. That black stuff in that big pot was tar. He knew it quite well, but had never seen so much at once. My word! If you fell into that while it was boiling, it would be worse even than the brimstone pit in hell. And there lay some enormous fish-hooks, just like those that were hanging on thick iron

chains from the ships' nostrils. He wondered whether there still lived giants who could fish with such hooks. Strong John couldn't manage them!

He satisfied himself with his own eyes that the stacks of boards were really hollow, and that he could easily get down to the bottom of them, if only he had not had the sack to drag about. His father had said he was to mind the sack, and he never let it out of his hands for a moment; as it was too heavy to carry, he had to drag it after him from place to place.

He discovered a little ship, only just big enough for a man to lie down in, and full of holes bored in the bottom and sides. He investigated the ship-builders' big grindstone, which was nearly as tall as a man. There were bent planks lying there, with nails in them as big as the parish constable's new tether-peg at home. And the thing that ship was tethered to—wasn't it a real cannon that they had planted?

Pelle saw everything, and examined every single object in the appropriate manner, now only spitting appraisingly upon it, now kicking it or scratching it with his penknife. If he came across some strange wonder or other, that he could not get into his little brain in any other way, he set himself astride on it.

This was a new world altogether, and Pelle was engaged in making it his own. Not a shred of it would he leave. If he had had his playfellows from Tommelilla here, he would have explained it all to them. My word, how they would stare! But when he went home to Sweden again, he would tell them about it, and then he hoped they would call him a liar.

He was sitting astride an enormous mast that lay along the timber-yard upon some oak trestles. He kicked his feet together under the mast, as he had heard of knights

doing in olden days under their horses, and imagined himself seizing hold of a ring and lifting himself, horse and all. He sat on horseback in the midst of his newly-discovered world, glowing with the pride of conquest, struck the horse's loins with the flat of his hand, and dug his heels into its sides, while he shouted a song at the top of his voice. He had been obliged to let go the sack to get up.

"Far away in Smaaland the little imps were dancing  
With ready-loaded pistol and rifle-barrelled gun;  
All the little devils they played upon the fiddle,  
But for the grand piano Old Harry was the one."

In the middle of his noisy joy, he looked up, and immediately burst into a roar of terror and dropped down on to the wood-shavings. On the top of the shed at the place where his father had left him, stood a black man and two black, open-mouthed hell-hounds; the man leaned half out over the ridge of the roof in a menacing attitude. It was an old figure-head, but Pelle thought it was Old Harry himself, come to punish him for his bold song, and he set off at a run up the hill. A little way up he remembered the sack and stopped. He didn't care about the sack; and he wouldn't get a thrashing if he did leave it behind, for Father Lasse never beat him. And that horrid devil would eat him up at the very least, if he ventured down there again; he could distinctly see how red the nostrils shone, both the devil's and the dogs'.

But Pelle still hesitated. His father was so careful of that sack, that he would be sure to be sorry if he lost it—he might even cry as he did when he lost Mother Bengta. For perhaps the first time, the boy was being subjected to one of life's serious tests, and stood—as so many had stood before him—with the choice between sacrificing himself and sacrificing others. His love for his father, boyish

pride, the sense of duty that is the social dower of the poor—the one thing with the other—determined his choice. He stood the test, but not bravely; he howled loudly the whole time, while, with his eyes fixed immovably upon the Evil One and his hell-hounds, he crept back for the sack and then dragged it after him at a quick run up the street.

No one is perhaps a hero until the danger is over. But even then Pelle had no opportunity of shuddering at his own courage; for no sooner was he out of the reach of the black man, than his terror took a new form. What had become of his father? He had said he would be back again directly! Supposing he never came back at all! Perhaps he had gone away so as to get rid of his little boy, who was only a trouble and made it difficult for him to get a situation.

Pelle felt despairingly convinced that it must be so, as, crying, he went off with the sack. The same thing had happened to other children with whom he was well acquainted; but they came to the pancake cottage and were quite happy, and Pelle himself would be sure to—perhaps find the king and be taken in there and have the little princes for his playmates, and his own little palace to live in. But Father Lasse shouldn't have a thing, for now Pelle was angry and vindictive, although he was crying just as unrestrainedly. He would let him stand and knock at the door and beg to come in for three days, and only when he began to cry—no, he would have to let him in at once, for to see Father Lasse cry hurt him more than anything else in the world. But he shouldn't have a single one of the nails Pelle had filled his pockets with down in the timber-yard; and when the king's wife brought them coffee in the morning before they were up—

But here both his tears and his happy imaginings ceased, for out of a tavern at the top of the street came Father Lasse's own living self. He looked in excellent spirits and held a bottle in his hand.

"Danish brandy, laddie!" he cried, waving the bottle. "Hats off to the Danish brandy! But what have you been crying for? Oh, you were afraid? And why were you afraid? Isn't your father's name Lasse—Lasse Karlsson from Kungstorp? And he's not one to quarrel with; he hits hard, he does, when he's provoked. To come and frighten good little boys! They'd better look out! Even if the whole wide world were full of flaming devils, Lasse's here and you needn't be afraid!"

During all this fierce talk he was tenderly wiping the boy's tear-stained cheeks and nose with his rough hand, and taking the sack upon his back again. There was something touchingly feeble about his stooping figure, as, boasting and comforting, he trudged down again to the harbour holding the boy by the hand. He tottered along in his big waterproof boots, the tabs of which stuck out at the side and bore an astonishing resemblance to Pelle's ears; out of the gaping pockets of his old winter coat protruded on one side his red pocket-handkerchief, on the other the bottle. He had become a little looser in his knee-joints now, and the sack threatened momentarily to get the upper hand of him, pushing him forwards and forcing him to go at a trot down the hill. He looked decrepit, and perhaps his boastful words helped to produce this effect; but his eyes beamed confidently, and he smiled down at the boy, who ran along beside him.

They drew near to the shed, and Pelle turned cold with fear, for the black man was still standing there. He went round to the other side of his father, and tried to pull him

out in a wide curve over the harbour square. "There he is again," he whimpered.

"So that's what was after you, is it?" said Lasse, laughing heartily; "and he's made of wood too! Well, you really are the bravest laddie I ever knew! I should almost think you might be sent out to fight a trussed chicken, if you had a stick in your hand!" Lasse went on laughing, and shook the boy good-naturedly. But Pelle was ready to sink into the ground with shame.

Down by the custom-house they met a bailiff who had come too late for the steamer and had engaged no labourers. He stopped his cart and asked Lasse if he was looking for a place.

"Yes, we both want one," answered Lasse, briskly. "We want to be at the same farm—as the fox said to the goose."

The bailiff was a big, strong man, and Pelle shuddered in admiration of his father who could dare to speak to him so boldly.

But the great man laughed good-humouredly. "Then I suppose he's to be foreman?" he said, flicking at Pelle with his whip.

"Yes, he certainly will be some day," said Lasse, with conviction.

"He'll probably eat a few bushels of salt first. Well, I'm in want of a herdsman, and will give you a hundred kroners for a year—although it'll be confounded hard for you to earn them from what I can see. There'll always be a crust of bread for the boy, but of course he'll have to do what little he can. You're his grandfather, I suppose?"

"I'm his father—in the sight of God and man," answered Lasse, proudly.

"Oh, indeed! Then you must still be fit for something,

if you've come by him honestly. But climb up, if you know what's for your own good, for I haven't time to stand here. You won't get such an offer every day."

Pelle thought a hundred kronas was a fearful amount of money; Lasse, on the contrary, as the older and more sensible, had a feeling that it was far too little. But, though he was not aware of it yet, the experiences of the morning had considerably dimmed the brightness of his outlook on life. On the other hand, the dram had made him reckless and generously-minded. "All right then," he said with a wave of the hand. "But the master must understand that we won't have salt herring and porridge three times a day. We must have a proper bedroom too—and be free on Sundays." He lifted the sack and the boy up into the cart, and then climbed up himself.

The bailiff laughed. "I see you've been here before, old man. But I think we shall be able to manage all that. You shall have roast pork stuffed with raisins and rhubarb jelly with pepper on it, just as often as you like to open your mouth."

They drove down to the quay for the chest, and then out towards the country again. Lasse, who recognised one thing and another, explained it all in full to the boy, taking a pull at the bottle between whiles; but the bailiff must not see this. Pelle was cold and burrowed into the straw, where he crept close up to his father.

"You take a mouthful," whispered Lasse, passing the bottle to him cautiously. "But take care that he doesn't see, for he's a sly one. He's a Jute."

Pelle would not have a dram. "What's a Jute?" he asked in a whisper.

"A Jute? Good gracious me, laddie, don't you know that? It was the Jutes that crucified Christ. That's why they have to wander all over the world now, and sell

flannel and needles, and such-like; and they always cheat wherever they go. Don't you remember the one that cheated Mother Bengta of her beautiful hair? Ah, no, that was before your time. That was a Jute too. He came one day when I wasn't at home, and unpacked all his fine wares—combs and pins with blue glass heads, and the finest head-kerchiefs. Women can't resist such trash; they're like what we others are when some one holds a brandy-bottle to our nose. Mother Bengta had no money, but that sly devil said he would give her the finest handkerchief if she would let him cut off just the end of her plait. And then he went and cut it off close up to her head. My goodness, but she was like flint and steel when she was angry! She chased him out of the house with a rake. But he took the plait with him, and the handkerchief was rubbish, as might have been expected. For the Jutes are cunning devils, who crucified——" Lasse began at the beginning again.

Pelle did not pay much attention to his father's soft murmuring. It was something about Mother Bengta, but she was dead now and lay in the black earth; she no longer buttoned his under-vest down the back, or warmed his hands when they were cold. So they put raisins into roast pork in this country, did they? Money must be as common as dirt! There was none lying about in the road, and the houses and farms were not so very fine either. But the strangest thing was that the earth here was of the same colour as that at home, although it was a foreign country. He had seen a map in Tommelilla, in which each country had a different colour. So that was a lie!

Lasse had long since talked himself out, and slept with his head upon the boy's back. He had forgotten to hide the bottle.

Pelle was just going to push it down into the straw

when the bailiff—who as a matter of fact was not a Jute, but a Zeelander—happened to turn round and caught sight of it. He told the boy to throw it into the ditch.

By midday they reached their destination. Lasse awoke as they drove on to the stone paving of the large yard, and groped mechanically in the straw. But suddenly he recollected where he was, and was sober in an instant. So this was their new home, the only place they had to stay in and expect anything of on this earth! And as he looked out over the big yard, where the dinner-bell was just sounding and calling servants and day-labourers out of all the doors, all his self-confidence vanished. A despairing feeling of helplessness overwhelmed him, and made his face tremble with impotent concern for his son.

His hands shook as he clambered down from the waggon; he stood irresolute and at the mercy of all the inquiring glances from the steps down to the basement of the big house. They were talking about him and the boy, and laughing already. In his confusion he determined to make as favourable a first impression as possible, and began to take off his cap to each one separately; and the boy stood beside him and did the same. They were rather like the clowns at a fair, and the men round the basement steps laughed aloud and bowed in imitation, and then began to call to them; but the bailiff came out again to the cart, and they quickly disappeared down the steps. From the house itself there came a far-off, monotonous sound that never left off, and insensibly added to their feeling of depression.

“Don’t stand there playing the fool!” said the bailiff sharply. Be off down to the others and get something to eat! You’ll have plenty of time to show off your monkey-tricks to them afterwards.”

At these encouraging words, the old man took the boy’s hand and went across to the basement steps with despair in his heart, mourning inwardly for Tommelilla and Kungstorp. Pelle clung close to him in fear. The unknown had suddenly become an evil monster in the imagination of both of them.

Down in the basement passage the strange, persistent sound was louder, and they both knew that it was that of a woman weeping.