

## VI

PELLE had a quick pulse and much energy, and there was always something that he was attempting to overtake in his restless onward rush—if nothing else, then time itself. Now the rye was all in, now the last stack disappeared from the field, the shadows grew longer every day. But one evening the darkness surprised him before his bedtime, and this made him serious. He no longer hastened on the time, but tried to hold it back by many small sun-signs.

One day the men's midday rest was taken off. They harnessed the horses again as soon as they had eaten their dinner, and the chaff-cutting was put off until the evening. The horse-way lay on the outer side of the stable, and none of the men cared to tramp round out there in the dark, driving for the chaff-cutter, so Pelle had to do it. Lasse protested and threatened to go to the farmer, but it was of no use; every evening Pelle had to be out there for a couple of hours. They were his nicest hours that they took from him, the hours when he and Father Lasse potted about in the stable, and talked themselves happily through all the day's troubles into a common bright future; and Pelle cried. When the moon chased the clouds away and he could see everything round him distinctly, he allowed his tears to run freely; but on dark evenings he was quiet and held his breath. Sometimes when it rained it was so dark that the farm and everything disappeared; and then he saw hundreds of beings that at other times the light hid. They appeared out of the darkness, terribly

## PELLE THE CONQUEROR

big, or came sliding up to him upon their bellies. He grew rigid as he gazed, and could not take his eyes from them. He sought shelter under the wall, and encouraged the horse from there; and one evening he ran in. They chased him out again, and he submitted to be chased, for when it came to the point he was more afraid of the men inside than of the beings outside. But one pitch-dark evening he was in an unusually bad way, and when he discovered that the horse, his only comfort, was also afraid, he dropped everything and ran in for the second time. Threats were powerless to make him go out again, and blows equally so, and one of the men took him up and carried him out; but then Pelle forgot everything, and screamed till the house shook.

While they were struggling with him, the farmer came out. He was very angry when he heard what was the matter, and blew the foreman up sky high. Then he took Pelle by the hand, and went down with him to the cow-stable. "A man like you to be afraid of a little dark!" he said jokingly. "You must try to get the better of that. But if the men harm you, just you come to me."

The plough went up and down the fields all day long, and made the earth dark in colour, the foliage became variegated, and there was often sleet. The coats of the cattle grew thicker, their hair grew long and stood up on their backs. Pelle had much to put up with, and existence as a whole became a shade more serious. His clothing did not become thicker and warmer with the cold weather like that of the cattle; but he could crack his whip so that it sounded, in the most successful attempts, like little shots; he could thrash Rud when there was no unfairness, and jump across the stream at its narrowest part. All that brought warmth to the body.

The flock now grazed all over the farm-lands, wherever

the cows had been tethered; the dairy-cows being now indoors; or they went inland on the fens, where all the farms had each a piece of grass-land. Here Pelle made acquaintance with herd-boys from the other farms, and looked into quite another world that was not ruled by bailiff and farm-pupil and thrashings, but where all ate at the same table, and the mistress herself sat and spun wool for the herd-boys' stockings. But he could never get in there, for they did not take Swedes at the small farms, nor would the people of the island take service together with them. He was sorry for this.

As soon as the autumn ploughing was started up on the fields, the boys, according to old custom, took down the boundary-fences and let all the animals graze together. The first few days it gave them more to do, for the animals fought until they got to know one another. They were never wholly mingled; they always grazed in patches, each farm's flock by itself. The dinner-baskets were also put together, and one boy was appointed in turn to mind the whole herd. The other boys played at robbers up among the rocks, or ran about in the woods or on the shore. When it was really cold they lighted bonfires, or built fire-places of flat stones, where they roasted apples and eggs which they stole from the farms.

It was a glorious life, and Pelle was happy. It was true he was the smallest of them all, and his being a Swede was a drawback to him. In the midst of their play, the others would sometimes begin to mimic his way of talking, and when he grew angry asked why he did not draw his knife. But on the other hand he was from the biggest farm, and was the only one that had bullocks in his herd; he was not behind them in physical accomplishments, and none of them could carve as he could. And it was his intention, when he grew big, to thrash them all.

In the mean time he had to accommodate himself to circumstances, ingratiate himself with the big ones, wherever he discovered there was a flaw in their relations to one another, and be obliging. He had to take his turn oftener than the others, and came off badly at mealtimes. He submitted to it as something unavoidable, and directed all his efforts towards getting the best that it was possible to get out of the circumstances; but he promised himself, as has been said, the fullest reparation when he grew big.

Once or twice it became too hot for him, and he left the community and kept by himself; but he soon returned to the others again. His little body was bursting with courage to live the life, and would not let him shirk it; he must take his chance—eat his way through.

One day there came two new boys, who herded cattle from two farms on the other side of the stone-quarry. They were twins, and their names were Alfred and Albinus. They were tall, thin lads, who looked as if they might have been half-starved when they were little; their skin had a bluish tinge, and stood the cold badly. They were quick and active, they could overtake the quickest calf, they could walk on their hands and smoke at the same time, and not only vault but really jump obstacles. They were not much good at fighting; they were lacking in courage, and their agility forsook them in an emergency.

There was something comical about the two brothers. "Here are the twins, the twelvins!" cried the whole flock in greeting, the first morning they appeared. "Well, how many times have you had a baby in your house since last year?" They belonged to a family of twelve, and among these there had twice been twins, and this of itself was an inexhaustible source of raillery; and moreover they were half Swedish. They shared the disadvantage with Pelle.

But nothing seemed to have any effect upon them;

they grinned at everything, and gave themselves away still more. From all he saw and heard, Pelle could understand that there was something ridiculous about their home in the eyes of the parish; but they did not mind that. It was the fecundity of their parents that was the special subject of derision, and the two boys quite happily exposed them to ridicule, and would tell all about the most private home matters. One day when the flock had been most persistent in calling "Twelvins!" they said, grinning, that their mother would soon be having a thirteenth. They were incapable of being wounded.

Every time they exposed their parents to ridicule, it hurt Pelle, for his own feelings on this point were the most sacred that he had. Try as he would, he could not understand them; he had to go to his father with the matter one evening.

"So they mock and make fun of their own parents?" said Lasse. "Then they'll never prosper in this world, for you're to honour your father and mother. Good parents who have brought them into the world with pain, and must toil hard, perhaps hunger and put up with much themselves, to get food and clothing for them! Oh, it's a shame! And you say their surname is Karlsson like ours, and that they live on the heath behind the stone-quarry? Then they must be brother Kalle's sons! Why, bless my soul if I don't believe that's it! You ask them to-morrow if their father hasn't a notch in his right ear! I did it myself with a piece of a horse-shoe when we were little boys—one day I was in a rage with him because he made fun of me before the others. He was just the same as those two, but he didn't mean anything by it, there was nothing ill-natured about him."

The boys' father *had* a notch in his right ear. Pelle and they were thus cousins; and the way that both they

and their parents were made fun of was a matter for both laughter and tears. In a way, Father Lasse too came in for a share of the ridicule, and that thought was hardly to be endured.

The other boys quickly discovered Pelle's vulnerable point, and used it for their own advantage; and Pelle had to give way and put up with things in order to keep his father out of their conversation. He did not always succeed, however. When they were in the mood, they said quite absurd things about one another's homes. They were not intended to be taken for more than they were worth, but Pelle did not understand jokes on that head. One day one of the biggest boys said to him: "Do you know, your father was the cause of his own mother's having a child!" Pelle did not understand the play of words in this coarse joke, but he heard the laughter of the others, and becoming blind with rage, he flew at the big boy, and kicked him so hard in the stomach, that he had to keep his bed for several days.

During those days, Pelle went about in fear and trembling. He dared not tell his father what had happened, for then he would be obliged to repeat the boy's ugly accusation too; so he went about in dread of the fatal consequences. The other boys had withdrawn themselves from him, so as not to share the blame if anything came of it; the boy was a farmer's son—the only one in the company—and they had visions of the magistrate at the back of the affair, and perhaps a caning at the town-hall. So Pelle went by himself with his cattle, and had plenty of time to think about the event, which, by the force of his lively imagination, grew larger and larger in its consequences, until at last it almost suffocated him with terror. Every cart he saw driving along the high-road sent a thrill through him; and if it turned up towards

Stone Farm, he could distinctly see the policemen—three of them—with large handcuffs, just as they had come to fetch Erik Erikson for ill-treating his wife. He hardly dared drive the cattle home in the evening.

One morning the boy came herding over there with his cattle, and there was a grown-up man with him, whom, from his clothes and everything else about him, Pelle judged to be a farmer—was it the boy's father? They stood over there for a little while, talking to the herd-boys, and then came across towards him, with the whole pack at their heels, the father holding his son by the hand.

The perspiration started from every pore of Pelle's body; his fear prompted him to run away, but he stood his ground. Together the father and son made a movement with their hand, and Pelle raised both elbows to ward off a double box-on-the-ears.

But they only extended their hands. "I beg your pardon," said the boy, taking one of Pelle's hands; "I beg your pardon," repeated the father, clasping his other hand in his. Pelle stood in bewilderment, looking from one to the other. At first he thought that the man was the same as the one sent by God; but it was only his eyes—those strange eyes. Then he suddenly burst into tears and forgot all else in the relief they brought from the terrible anxiety. The two spoke a few kind words to him, and quietly went away to let him be alone.

After this Pelle and Peter Kure became friends, and when Pelle learnt to know him better, he discovered that sometimes the boy had a little of the same look in his eyes as his father, and the young fisherman, and the man that was sent by God. The remarkable course that the event had taken occupied his mind for a long time. One day a chance comparison of his experiences brought him to the discovery of the connection between this mysterious

expression in their eyes and their remarkable actions; the people who had looked at him with those eyes had all three done unexpected things. And another day it dawned upon him that these people were *religious*; the boys had quarrelled with Peter Kure that day, and had used the word as a term of abuse against his parents.

There was one thing that was apparent, and outweighed everything, even his victory. He had entered the lists with a boy who was bigger and stronger than he, and had held his own, because for the first time in his life he had struck out recklessly. If you wanted to fight, you had to kick wherever it hurt most. If you only did that, and had justice on your side, you might fight anybody, even a farmer's son. These were two satisfactory discoveries, which for the present nothing could disturb.

Then he had defended his father; that was something quite new and important in his life. He required more space now.

At Michaelmas, the cattle were taken in, and the last of the day-labourers left. During the summer, several changes had been made among the regular servants at the farm, but now, at term-day, none were changed; it was not the habit of Stone Farm to change servants at the regular term-times.

So Pelle again helped his father with the foddering indoors. By rights he should have begun to go to school, and a mild representation of this fact was made to the farmer by the school authorities; but the boy was very useful at home, as the care of the cattle was too much for one man; and nothing more was heard about the matter. Pelle was glad it was put off. He had thought much about school in the course of the summer, and had invested it with so much that was unfamiliar and great, that he was now quite afraid of it.