

X

AFTER all Per Olsen was not the sort of man they had thought him. Now that he had been set free in that way, the thing would have been for him to have given a helping hand to that poor fellow, Long Ole; for after all it was for his sake that Ole's misfortune had come upon him. But did he do it? No, he began to amuse himself. It was drinking and dissipation and petticoats all the summer through; and now at Martinmas he left and took work at the quarry, so as to be more his own master. There was not sufficient liberty for him at Stone Farm. What good there was left in him would find something to do up there.

Long Ole could not, of course, remain at Stone Farm, crippled as he was. Through kindness on the part of the farmer, he was paid his half-wage; that was more than he had any claim to, and enough at any rate to take him home and let him try something or other. There were many kinds of work that at a pinch could be performed with one hand; and now while he had the money he ought to have got an iron hook; it could be strapped to the wrist, and was not bad to hold tools with.

But Ole had grown weak and had great difficulty in making up his mind. He continued to hang about the farm, notwithstanding all that the bailiff did to get him away. At last they had to put his things out, to the west of the farm; and there they lay most of the summer,

while he himself slept among the stacks, and begged food of the workers in the fields. But this could not go on when the cold set in.

But then one day in the autumn, his things were gone. Johanna Pihl—commonly called the Sow—had taken him in. She felt the cold, too, in spite of her fat, and as the proverb says: It's easier for two to keep warm than one; but whatever was her reason for doing it, Long Ole might thank his Maker for her. There was always bacon hanging in her chimney.

Lasse and Pelle looked forward to term-day with anxiety. What changes would it bring this time for people? So much depended on that. Besides the head man, they were to have new second and third men and some new maids. They were always changing at Stone Farm when they could. Karna, poor soul, was bound to stay, as she had set her mind upon youth, and would absolutely be where Gustav was! Gustav stayed because Bodil stayed, so unnaturally fond was he of that girl, although she was not worth it. And Bodil herself knew well enough what she was doing! There must be more in it than met the eye when a girl dressed, as she did, in expensive, town-bought clothes.

Lasse and Pelle *remained*, simply because there was no other place in the world for them to go to. All through the year they made plans for making a change, but when the time for giving notice approached, Lasse became quiet and let it go past.

Of late he had given no little thought to the subject of marrying again. There was something God-forsaken about this solitary existence for a man of his age; you became old and worn-out before your time, when you hadn't a wife and a house. On the heath near Brother Kalle's, there was a house that he could have without

paying anything down. He often discussed it with Pelle, and the boy was ready for anything new.

It should be a wife who could look after everything and make the house comfortable; and above all she must be a hard-working woman. It would not come amiss either if she had a little of her own, but let that be as it might, if only she was good-natured. Karna would have suited in all respects, both Lasse and Pelle having always had a liking for her ever since the day she freed Pelle from the pupil's clutches; but it was nothing to offer her as long as she was so set upon Gustav. They must bide their time; perhaps she would come to her senses, or something else might turn up.

"Then there'd be coffee in bed on Sunday mornings!" said Pelle, with rapture.

"Yes, and perhaps we'd get a little horse, and invite Brother Kalle for a drive now and then," added Lasse, solemnly.

At last it was really to be! In the evening Lasse and Pelle had been to the shop and bought a slate and pencil, and Pelle was now standing at the stable-door with a beating heart and the slate under his arm. It was a frosty October morning, but the boy was quite hot after his wash. He had on his best jacket, and his hair had been combed with water.

Lasse hovered about him, brushing him here and there with his sleeve, and was even more nervous than the boy. Pelle had been born to poor circumstances, had been christened, and had had to earn his bread from the time he was a little boy—all exactly as he had done himself. So far there was no difference to be seen; it might very well have been Lasse himself over again, from the big ears and the "cow's-lick" on the forehead, to the way

the boy walked and wore out the bottoms of his trouser-legs. But this was something strikingly new. Neither Lasse nor any of his family had ever gone to school; it was something new that had come within the reach of his family, a blessing from Heaven that had fallen upon the boy and himself. It felt like a push upwards; the impossible was within reach; what might not happen to a person who had book-learning! You might become master of a workshop, a clerk, perhaps even a schoolmaster.

"Now do take care of the slate, and see that you don't break it!" he said, admonishingly. "And keep out of the way of the big boys until you can hold your own with them. But if any of them simply won't let you alone, mind you manage to hit first! That takes the inclination out of most of them, especially if you hit hard; he who hits first hits twice, as the old proverb says. And then you must listen well, and keep in mind all that your teacher says; and if any one tries to entice you into playing and larking behind his back, don't do it. And remember that you've got a pocket-handkerchief, and don't use your fingers, for that isn't polite. If there's no one to see you, you can save the handkerchief, of course, and then it'll last all the longer. And take care of your nice jacket. And if the teacher's lady invites you in to coffee, you mustn't take more than one piece of cake, mind." Lasse's hands trembled while he talked.

"She's sure not to do that," said Pelle, with a superior air.

"Well, well, now go, so that you don't get there too late—the very first day too. And if there's some tool or other wanting, you must say we'll get it at once, for we aren't altogether paupers!" And Lasse slapped his pocket; but it did not make much noise, and Pelle knew quite well that they had no money; they had got the slate and pencil on credit.

Lasse stood looking after the boy as long as he was in sight, and then went to his work of crushing oilcakes. He put them into a vessel to soak, and poured water on them, all the while talking softly to himself.

There was a knock at the outside stable-door, and Lasse went to open it. It was Brother Kalle.

"Good day, brother!" he said, with his cheerful smile. "Here comes his Majesty from the quarries!" He waddled in upon his bow legs, and the two exchanged hearty greetings. Lasse was delighted at the visit.

"What a pleasant time we had with you the other evening!" said Lasse, taking his brother by the hand.

"That's a long time ago now. But you must look in again one evening soon. Grandmother looks upon both of you with a favourable eye!" Kalle's eyes twinkled mischievously.

"How is she, poor body? Has she at all got over the hurt to her eye? Pelle came home the other day and told me that the children had been so unfortunate as to put a stick into her eye. It quite upset me. You had to have the doctor too!"

"Well, it wasn't quite like that," said Kalle. "I had moved grandmother's spinning-wheel myself one morning when I was putting her room to rights, and then I forgot to put it back in its place. Then when she was going to stoop down to pick up something from the floor, the spindle went into her eye; of course she's used to have everything stand exactly in its place. So really the honour's due to me." He smiled all over his face.

Lasse shook his head sympathetically. "And she got over it fairly well?" he asked.

"No, it went altogether wrong, and she lost the sight of that eye."

Lasse looked at him with disapproval.

Kalle caught himself up, apparently very much horrified. "Eh, what nonsense I'm talking! She lost the *blindness* of that eye, I ought to have said. *Isn't* that all wrong too? You put somebody's eye out, and she begins to see! Upon my word I think I'll set up as an eye-doctor after this, for there's not much difficulty in it."

"What do you say? She's begun to—? Now you're too merry! You oughtn't to joke about everything."

"Well, well, joking apart, as the prophet said when his wife scratched him—she can really see with that eye now."

Lasse looked suspiciously at him for a little while before he yielded. "Why, it's quite a miracle!" he then said.

"Yes, that's what the doctor said. The point of the spindle had acted as a kind of operation. But it might just as easily have taken the other direction. Yes, we had the doctor to her three times; it was no use being niggardly." Kalle stood and tried to look important; he had stuck his thumbs into his waistcoat pockets.

"It cost a lot of money, I suppose?"

"That's what I thought too, and I wasn't very happy when I asked the doctor how much it would be. Twenty-five kronas, he said, and it didn't sound anything more than when any of us ask for a piece of bread-and-dripping. 'Will the doctor be so kind as to wait a few days so that I can get the cow properly sold,' I asked. 'What!' he says, and glares at me over his spectacles. 'You don't mean to sell the cow so as to pay me? You mustn't do that on any account; I'll wait till times are better.' 'We come off easily, even if we get rid of the cow,' I said. 'How so?' he asks, as we go out to the carriage—it was the farmer of Kaase Farm that was driving for me. So

I told him that Maria and I had been thinking of selling everything so that grandmother might go over and be operated. He said nothing to that, but climbed up into the carriage; but while I was standing like this, buttoning up his foot-bag, he seizes me by the collar and says: 'Do you know, you little bow-legged creature!' (Kalle imitated the doctor's town speech), 'You're the best man I've ever met, and you don't owe me a brass farthing! For that matter, it was you yourself that performed the operation.' 'Then I ought almost to have had the money,' I said. Then he laughed and gave me a box on the ears with his fur cap. He's a fine man, that doctor, and fearfully clever; they say that he has one kind of mixture that he cures all kinds of illness with."

They were sitting in the herdsman's room upon the green chest, and Lasse had brought out a little gin. "Drink, brother!" he said again and again. "It takes something to keep out this October drizzle."

"Many thanks, but you must drink! But I was going to say, you should see grandmother! She goes round peeping at everything with her one eye; if it's only a button she keeps on staring at it. So that's what that looks like, and that! She's forgotten what the things look like, and when she sees a thing, she goes to it to feel it afterwards—to find out what it is, she actually says. She would have nothing to do with us the first few days; when she didn't hear us talk or walk, she thought we were strangers, even though she saw us there before her eyes."

"And the little ones?" asked Lasse.

"Thank you, Anna's is fat and well, but our own seems to have come to a standstill. After all it's the young pigs you ought to breed with. By the bye"—Kalle took out his purse—"while we're at it, don't let me forget the ten kronas I got from you for the christenings."

Lasse pushed it away. "Never mind that," he said. "You may have a lot to go through yet. How many mouths are there now? Fourteen or fifteen, I suppose?"

"Yes, but two take their mother's milk, like the parson's wife's chickens; so that's all saved. And if things became difficult, one's surely man enough to wring a few pence out of one's nose?" He seized his nose and gave it a rapid twist, and held out his hand. A folded ten-krona note lay in it.

Lasse laughed at the trick, but would not hear of taking the money; and for a time it passed backwards and forwards between them. "Well, well!" said Kalle at last, keeping the note; "thank you very much then! And good-bye, brother! I must be going." Lasse went out with him, and sent many greetings.

"We shall come and look you up very soon," he called out after his brother.

When after a little while he returned to his room the note lay upon the bed. Kalle must have seen his opportunity to put it there, conjurer that he was. Lasse put it aside to give to Kalle's wife, when an occasion presented itself.

Long before the time, Lasse was on the look-out for Pelle. He found the solitude wearisome, now that he was used to having the boy about him from morning till night. At last he came, out of breath with running, for he had longed to get home too.

Nothing either terrible or remarkable had happened at school. Pelle had to give a circumstantial account, point by point. "Well, what can you do?" the master had asked, taking him by the ear—quite kindly, of course. "I can pull the mad bull to the water without Father Lasse helping at all," Pelle had answered, and then the whole class had laughed.

"Yes, yes, but can you read?"

No, Pelle could not do that—"or else I shouldn't have come here," he was on the point of adding. "It was a good thing you didn't answer that," said Lasse; "but what more then?" Well, then Pelle was put upon the lowest bench, and the boy next him was set to teach him his letters.

"Do you know them, then?"

No, Pelle did not know them that day, but when a couple of weeks had passed, he knew most of them, and wrote them with chalk on the posts. He had not learned to write, but his hand could imitate anything he had seen, and he drew the letters just as they stood in print in the spelling-book.

Lasse went and looked at them during his work, and had them repeated to him endlessly; but they would not stick properly. "What's that one there?" he was perpetually asking.

Pelle answered with a superior air: "That? Have you forgotten it already? I knew that after I'd only seen it once! That's M."

"Yes, of course it is! I can't think where my head is to-day. M, yes—of course it's M! Now what can that be used for, eh?"

"It's the first letter in the word 'empty,' of course!" said Pelle, consequentially.

"Yes, of course! But you didn't find that out for yourself; the master told you."

"No, I found it out by myself."

"Did you, now? Well, you've become clever—if only you don't become as clever as seven fools."

Lasse was out of spirits; but very soon he gave in, and fell into whole-hearted admiration of his son. And the instruction was continued while they worked. It was

fortunate for Pelle that his father was so slow, for he did not get on very fast himself, when once he had mastered all that was capable of being picked up spontaneously by a quick intelligence. The boy who had to teach him—Sloppy he was called—was the dunce of the class and had always been bottom until now Pelle had come and taken his place.

Two weeks of school had greatly changed Pelle's ideas on this subject. On the first few days he arrived in a state of anxious expectation, and all his courage forsook him as he crossed the threshold of the school. For the first time in his life he felt that he was good for nothing. Trembling with awe, he opened his perceptions to this new and unfamiliar thing that was to unveil for him all the mysteries of the world, if only he kept his ears open; and he did so. But there was no awe-inspiring man, who looked at them affectionately through gold-rimmed spectacles while he told them about the sun and the moon and all the wonders of the world. Up and down the middle passage walked a man in a dirty linen coat and with grey bristles projecting from his nostrils. As he walked he swung the cane and smoked his pipe; or he sat at the desk and read the newspaper. The children were noisy and restless, and when the noise broke out into open conflict, the man dashed down from his desk, and hit out indiscriminately with his cane. And Pelle himself, well he was coupled—for good, it appeared—to a dirty boy, covered with scrofulous sores, who pinched his arm every time he read his b-a—ba, b-e—be wrong. The only variation was an hour's daily examination in the tedious observations in the class-book, and the Saturday's uncouth hymn-repeating.

For a time Pelle swallowed everything whole, and passed it on faithfully to his father; but at last he tired of it. It was not his nature to remain long passive to his

surroundings, and one fine day he had thrown aside all injunctions and intentions, and dived into the midst of the fun.

After this he had less information to impart, but on the other hand there were the thousands of knavish tricks to tell about. And Father Lasse shook his head and comprehended nothing ; but he could not help laughing.

XI

"A safe stronghold our God is still,
A trusty shield and wea—pon ;
He'll help us clear from all the ill
That hath us now o'erta—ken.
The ancient prince of hell
Hath risen with purpose fell ;
Strong mail of craft and power
He weareth in this hour ;
On earth is not his fel—low."

THE whole school sat swaying backwards and forwards in time to the rhythm, grinding out hymns in endless succession. Fris, the master, was walking up and down the middle passage, smoking his pipe ; he was taking exercise after an hour's reading of the paper. He was using the cane to beat time with, now and then letting it descend upon the back of an offender, but always only at the end of a line—as a kind of note of admiration. Fris could not bear to have the rhythm broken. The children who did not know the hymn were carried along by the crowd, some of them contenting themselves with moving their lips, while others made up words of their own. When the latter were too dreadful, their neighbours laughed, and then the cane descended.

When one verse came to an end, Fris quickly started the next ; for the mill was hard to set in motion again